Promise Management throughout the Extended Consumption Process

A Hotel Industry Case Study at Holiday Inn Helsinki West – Ruoholahti

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**Abstract:**

The recent financial crisis has caused business travel to decrease significantly in the Helsinki area. While transactional marketing might suggest lowering prices to attract new customers, a service-dominant view on marketing instead urges to focus on superior service to retain old- and gain new customers. Promise management shifts the company’s focus to the customer by placing marketing at the centre of the customer’s value creation process.

The problem is that no model exists in current theory that takes into account promise management as a holistic process. This paper is thus concerned with creating a model on Promise Management in the Extended Consumption Process through a theoretical review. Furthermore, it is of interest how customers understand the making, enabling and keeping of promises throughout the extended consumption process through a qualitative case study.

The fundamental ideology of this study is constructed by reviewing the development of marketing theory from transactional marketing to promise management and the value-in-use notion. A model is then constructed for Promise Management in the Extended Consumption Process by combining levels of interaction, the extended consumption process, and promise management. The qualitative study puts this model under scrutiny through a case study of 12 guests from the case company Holiday Inn Helsinki West – Ruoholahti.

Through abstraction in content analysis categories and constructs are assembled that represent resources for promise management at the case company. The analysis also confirms the making-, enabling-, and keeping of promises throughout the extended consumption process. Promises occur sporadically and intermittently in actions and are characterized by collective and overlapping effects on episodes, sequences, and relationships; in customer, company and company employee interactions.

Finally, by reviewing the theoretical model based on the case study and analysis, a concluding model on Promise Management in the Extended Consumption Process is reached, which provides any company finding itself in a situation of service competition with the customer-centric view that is needed to maximize customer’s value creation.

**Keywords:**

Promise Management, Extended Consumption Process, Value-in-Use, Hotel Industry
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1 Introduction

During recent decades marketing’s focus on retaining the customer and keeping up the customer relationship has been shadowed by the remnants of transactional marketing (Harker & Egan 2006). The recent financial crisis has undeniably affected every portion of our society including the hotel industry, and required companies to react. As society cuts down on spending, the expected increase in new hotel guests has ceased and competition for existing guests has consequently increased. Business slowing down has specifically been felt by those hotels catering to business travellers. (Kauppalehti 2009) Prices in the hotel industry have as an effect drastically gone down (Sahiluoma 2009), lowering the margins and therefore lowering profits. This effect is due to supply remaining relatively stagnant and demand decreasing (Kauppalehti 2009b), and with the exception of larger events creating peaks in demand, hotels have had to adapt. In order to make up for the lost customers business hotels have had to instead start pursuing leisure travellers with cut down prices at the same time as high margin corporate contracts are being cut (Sahiluoma 2010). The fear of these business travellers moving elsewhere is very real.

One way to minimize the damage from (if not completely steer clear of) these price wars is to truly focus on ensuring existing guest’s satisfaction. Through excellent service, and therefore customer experienced value, the customer is tied to the service. Satisfied customers bring forth more customers. In order to achieve these goals, the marketing discipline and the fairly recent concept of promise management are the answer.

The promise concept has in its part led to a revolution in marketing theory over the past few decades. Establishing customer centric thinking as the dominant logic for marketing over the traditional, product centric view is in no way an easy task. In fact, although service marketing is growing in popularity among academics, for many companies a transactional view on marketing is still the dominant one if not throughout the organization, at least for the most part. (Harker & Egan 2006) Moreover, even when customer centricity is claimed as the driver behind company values, it is in no way guaranteed that this is in fact the case. In some companies marketing is losing its ground (Grönroos 2006b: 396) and perhaps more worrying is the detachment between marketing and customer management (Brown 2005: 3). Though this is the unfortunate reality still
today, it is obvious that a change of the theoretical paradigm that has been built for years does not happen overnight.

1.1 Establishing the Research Problem

Promise management, building on the promise concept, “places marketing at the centre of customer’s value creation process” (Grönroos 2009: 356); integrating marketing with consumption and usage to ensure customer satisfaction. Research on the different components of promises management exists for all three parts: external marketing, internal marketing and interactive marketing. However, in viewing existing literature it becomes clear making-, enabling- and keeping promises is assumed to take place without taking a clear stand to where in the customer’s extended consumption process this occurs. In fact, as is show in through this study, all three take place simultaneously and sporadically throughout the extended consumption process.

The extended consumption process is one of the theoretical topics of discussion where a model created from a transactional marketing point of view has thereafter been further developed to better suit service marketing. The extended consumption process is comprehensively covered in services literature by for example Lovelock, Vandermerwe & Lewis (1999). However, existing theory focuses on separating the pre-, during-, and post-consumption stages to distinguish characteristics common to each stage; although “the nature of service consumption is such that they should not be considered as independent...stages” (Gabbott & Hogg 1998: 30). A model that takes into account the entire service process as a holistic view is therefore missing in existing theory. The extended consumption process includes the entire service process including pre-, during-, and post consumption stages.

According to Grönroos (2009: 351-2) “the management of promises has been included in relationship marketing and also in service marketing, but the underpinning logic and scope of it has not been developed further”. The customer-company relationship has been addressed on a general, theoretical level of promise management, but actual research on the topic is still rare, partly due to the freshness of the notion. Therefore, a gap exists in current research concerning how customers perceive the efforts of a company that in its

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1 Includes pre-, during- and post-consumption.
essence embraces customer centricity; and realizes the potential of promise management in aligning the making and keeping of promises through enabling promises.

The focus of this paper is therefore the extended consumption process from a promise management perspective to gain insight into how customers relate their value creation process to their consumption. Value creation is deemed a necessary component in the discussion as this can be used to determine whether something creates satisfaction and therefore is a desired result for a company. (Grönroos 2007: 56) Essentially, this involves applying promises management to the extended consumption process. The aim is to develop and test a model which takes into account the tiniest of details from each stage of the extended consumption process, on every level of interaction (Holmlund 2004), yet holding true to the simultaneous purchase, consumption and evaluation of services. With a clearer understanding of how promises are made, enabled and kept through different levels of interactions in the extended consumption process from a customer’s point of view, it is likely companies can achieve more of an influence on the customer’s value creation process.

1.1.1 The Purpose of this Paper

Accordingly, this study is thus concerned with creating a model of the extended consumption process taking into account promise management. Through an extensive examination of literature, a model for promise management in the extended consumption process is reached in the theoretical framework. Through an empirical study the model is put to use and revised.

Furthermore, it is of interest how customers understand the making, enabling and keeping of promises throughout the extended consumption process at the case company. In the empirical part of this paper, the above mentioned model is put under scrutiny when a study is conducted to examine what comprises promise management at the case company Holiday Inn Helsinki West – Ruoholahti.

1.1.2 Delimitations

The case study limits the ability to generalize from the conclusions in this study, but the insight gained from this case should be applicable as an ideology to other companies as
well. Nevertheless, the purpose of this study highlights two delimitations according to two aspects: the extended consumption process in its entirety and the case study.

The extended consumption process is analyzed from the customer’s perspective to determine at which stages promises are made, enabled and kept. Identifying the stages of the extended consumption process with significant effect on customer perceived value is of essence. Observing which levels of interaction have the greatest effect in regards to the making, enabling and keeping of promises is the goal of the analysis. In a sense this delimitation is more complex in its inclusion of all parts of the extended consumption process than it would be if restricted to just one stage of the process. This allows for the inclusion of the entire process instead of delimiting the study to only one part. Conclusions are on the level of an underlying ideology instead of specific tools to treat a specific service process situation. Focus is on promise management; taking into account making-, enabling-, and keeping of promises throughout the extended consumption process.

In this paper the hotel industry is analyzed through a case study of the hotel Holiday Inn Helsinki West – Ruoholahti. The secondary purpose is concerned with the case study of this hotel and in determining major areas of interest in the customer’s understanding of the promises made, enabled and kept throughout the extended consumption process. The customers in this study are return customers of the case company. It is a goal to discover any implications that these discrepancies could possibly hold for the future practices of the company at hand. Therefore the specific conclusions attained from this empirical study pertain mainly to the case company, although the underlying ideology could be applicable to other companies as well.

Furthermore, this paper takes a customer point of view towards the consumption process and promise management, in accordance with the promise management ideology. This might cause some confusion for those whose mindset is still rooted in accordance to the thoughts of transactional marketing.

1.2 Definitions

Service competition –

“Every firm faces what can be labelled service competition. Service competition can be defined as a competitive situation where the firm’s core solution – the core
of the offering, a service or a physical product – is a prerequisite only for a sustainable competitive advantage, but where the firm competes with a total service offering including a number of various types of services that support the core solution.” (Grönroos 2007: VII)

This paper is based on the belief that most companies in fact find themselves in a situation of service competition. Therefore, the belief is that conclusions attained in this study are applicable to other companies on an ideological level, regardless of whether the end offering is a product or service.

The extended consumption process – is in reference to the entire service process including pre-consumption stage, consumption stage, and post-consumption stage decisions. When discussing the extended consumption process, the focus is on the entire process and not on one of its stages. This distinction also helps avoid confusion between the (during) consumption stage (also referred to as the service encounter), which is only one stage of the extended consumption process.

1.3 Structure of this Paper

This paper is divided into five main parts: the introduction, theoretical framework, methodology, empirical analysis, and finally conclusions and managerial implications.

The introduction in chapter one briefly presents the structure- and establishes the foundation this paper is based upon: promise management and the extended consumption process. Before introducing the purpose and showing how this is answered throughout this paper the questions are motivated by briefly discussing them in the context of modern marketing theory. Central definitions, delimitations and the structure of the paper are also included in the introduction. Most importantly, the introduction includes the scope; leading to the research purpose this paper is constructed to answer.

The theoretical framework is culminates in chapter three; discussing promise management and the extended consumption process. However, first developments in marketing theory are discussed in chapter two to elaborate on the ideology behind this paper as promise management is a relatively recent notion. The importance of value creation, the promise concept and the process nature of consumption are all discussed as a foundation for merging promise management and the extended consumption process. Levels of
interaction are also included in the theory to allow for a different approach from dividing the extended consumption process into stages. A model is then constructed to take into account promise management, different levels of interaction, and the extended consumption process from a customer’s perspective.

Chapter four discusses the motivation for methods in data collection and analysis, while chapter five presents and analyzes collected data. Discussion on methodology covers motives for research approach and method, sampling, data collection, the case study (Holiday Inn Helsinki West – Ruoholahti), data collection design and procedure, data analysis, trustworthiness, validity and reliability. Data analysis focuses on integrating the constructs discovered in data presentation and empirically testing the model reached in the theoretical framework.

The analysis of collected data is done in stages of which only the latter are included in chapter five. Early stages of the analysis are shown in Appendix 3. The analysis focuses on constructs discovered in the case study; promise management in the extended consumption process and at different levels of interaction. The end goal of value creation is constantly referred to as this is the ultimate goal of promise management.

Chapter six brings forth conclusions and managerial implications. This final chapter distinguishes between the conclusions that are reached regarding the suggested model from the theoretical framework and those implications that the study holds for the case company. Theoretical and managerial contributions are also discussed, but most importantly the final model on Promise Management in the Extended Consumption Process is presented and integrated into existing theory on promise management.
2 Recent Developments in Marketing Theory

The following two chapters include the theoretical framework, arriving at a model which is then used in the empirical study of this paper. A vital aspect to this study is the promise concept and the steps that have led to the rise of promise management. Following the development of marketing through transactional marketing, services marketing, and relationship marketing to reach a service-dominant logic; the ideology behind this study is illustrated through comparison. Following this ideology promise management is presented and discussed in accordance to the process nature of consumption where the ultimate goal is maximizing value creation for the customer. While the ideology behind this study and the ultimate goal of value creation are discussed in chapter two, chapter three aims at fulfilling the first part of this paper’s purpose: combining promise management with the extended consumption process according to different levels of interaction.

![Diagram]

Figure 1: Structure of Theory

2.1 From Transactional Marketing to a Service-Dominant Logic

The fundamentals of promise management did not form out of nowhere, but are based on existing marketing theory, and on phases from its development. From transactional- to services- and relationship marketing, and from there towards promise management, the impact of different phases on the customer-company relationship are obvious.
Transactional marketing by definition is tied to the exchange concept where exchange of value between the buyer and seller is the focus. The role of the customer is in this case the buyer or selector (Sheth & Uslay 2007: 303), which naturally causes marketing to focus on attracting new buyers. Value is believed to be transferred in the exchange between the buyer and seller ignoring any value that arises from the consumption of the offering. Similarly, as Grönroos (2006b: 398-9) puts it: “delivering value to customers implies that value is embedded in the product which is delivered to customers for their use. This is the notion for value-in-exchange.” Furthermore, consumers are seen as passive, homogeneous and numerous, which are the main grounds for profitability. In a sense this results in a vicious cycle leading to mass marketing being the only viable option. (Harker & Egan 2006; Sheth & Uslay 2007) Naturally this mindset, especially in relation to the concept of value, limits the possibilities of the marketing function simply to the moment of exchange, which is the fundamental error of transactional marketing.

“Transactional marketing remains the dominant marketing paradigm of the 20th century” (Harker & Egan 2006: 215) and much of relationship marketing is based on responding to the deficiencies of transactional marketing. Basically it is thought that the exponential increase in the consumption of services; the realization that keeping and maintaining the customer is important; and the deficiencies of the marketing mix model are responsible for the birth of relationship marketing. More often than not relationship marketing has meant taking a stand on issues that need further development or are completely lacking in transactional marketing theory. Transactional marketing’s popularity until the early 1980s (and from there onwards) is largely due to its simplicity – for example the product, price, place and promotion of the marketing mix suited the mass production trend of post World War II very well. (Harker & Egan 2006) In this mindset the company is the only creator of value, exchanging the value embedded in the product for payment by the customer.

Services marketing proposes a process nature of consumption (Grönroos 2006: 319) in which the consumer is a co-creator of value. It is widely accepted that marketing has seen a recent shift from a goods-dominant view to a service-dominant view (Vargo & Lusch 2004: 2; Harker & Egan 2006). Grönroos (2006: 317) more than agrees with this statement, asserting that service-dominant logic has been implicitly written about for more than three decades: as services marketing and relationship marketing. Although famous in their profound differences such as who really is the creator of value in the customer-company
relationship, the Nordic- and American schools of thought on marketing are unified in that the service-dominant view does not exclude goods in any way (Vargo & Lusch 2004:2; Grönroos 2006: 325).

The main point is that a company does not provide a ready-made package of value which is then transferred to the consumer at the point of purchase, but instead acts as a facilitator in the customer’s consumption process. In this way, the offering a company provides can be a good or service because it is only one element of the consumption process. The company at hand needs to take into account all different elements of the consumption process “such as service interactions, repair and maintenance, logistics, call centres, service recovery and complaints handling” (Grönroos 2006b: 403). In many ways companies, which have been traditionally seen as goods providers now need to become more service-like (Grönroos 2006: 325). The simplest way of clarifying this is through the concept of value-in-use which holds that the customer creates value and a company can only support this value creation with its resources, processes and interactions (Grönroos 2006b: 408).

It is the value-in-use perspective which is central to relationship marketing. According to this perspective marketing is responsible for managing the relationships between the company and its customers. Relationship marketing accordingly by definition takes into account the ‘other elements’ mentioned in the previous paragraph, essentially stating that it is the entire experience of dealing with the provider company that leads to value for the customer. (Grönroos 2007: 42) Therefore, marketing as customer centricity cannot be justifiably considered only a separate organizational function, but the customer needs to be a shared responsibility of the entire organization (Brown 2005: 3).

Wind (2008: 24) suggests a need to move from customer relationship management towards customer managed relationships. Essentially the relationship aspect in managing customers remains; only shifting the focus towards the company being the co-creator of value in the customer’s value creation process, instead of the other way around. Consumers today are much more demanding and relationships are formed only if customers want them. Companies can ensure that they remain the other partner in a relationship only by handing the majority of control over to the customer (Wind 2008: 24). However, only in recent years has it been blatantly stated that the customer is not always right and not all consumers are wanted in a company’s pool of customers (Berry & Seiders 2008). The
termination of relationships is even a part of the relationship marketing definition (Grönroos 1999: 328). The task then becomes attracting the right customers for relationships that are increasingly customer driven. Furthermore, retaining the most profitable customers naturally stays a top priority.

Implementing a service-dominant logic as the principal guidance for any organization towards a value co-creation enabling mindset has proven to be difficult as is the case with implementing any strategy (Brown 2005: 2). The main reason behind this remains the product centric mindset still practiced in most organizations. Gummesson (1991: 60) notes that in reality companies of both customer centric and output centric views exist, as well as everything in between. Services are sometimes considered to be similar enough to goods to be chosen, experienced and evaluated in the same way. However, because production and consumption are simultaneous in most services there are major differences to goods. (Zeithaml 2006: 51-2) ‘The way that business has always been done’ is a major hindrance for change; even when an organization realizes the need for change. In certain companies this mindset will not disappear before it is sifted out of the organizations through new generations. However, if presented in the right way and accepted into the organization, promise management as a framework can guide any company in the direction of customer focus.

The promise management view on marketing was originally developed throughout the 1980s by Henrik Calonius (Calonius 2006: 419). However, the notion of promises is discussed even before this by Levitt (1981) for example. It is easy to imagine that managing promises have implicitly been a way of selling or even marketing for as long as business has been done. However, within marketing literature promise management has been implicitly developed throughout service- and relationship marketing (Grönroos 2009: 351) with explicit inputs by among others Bitner (1995), Berry (1995), and Grönroos (2006; 2006b; 2007; 2009). Implicit development denotes discussion based on the underlying principles of promise management, while explicit development is in reference

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to developing the concept of promise management. Hereafter promise management is discussed in relation to value creation and within the context of the process nature of consumption.

### 2.2 The Promise (Management) Concept

Calonius (2006) originally developed the promise concept while concentrating on a general framework for market behaviour analysis (see Figure 2). This framework was developed to address the deficiency of existing frameworks in analyzing the decision process of both consumers and producers simultaneously (Calonius 2006: 420). The promise concept first surfaces in this framework, which “introduces the notion that the most crucial thing in marketing is the exchange of promises between the parties concerned” (Calonius 2006: 426).

![Figure 2: General Framework for Market Behaviour Analysis, modelled from Calonius (2006: 421)](image)

Essentially, among its many specifications, the general framework for market behaviour analysis identifies three important aspects that are valid to this day. Firstly, at least two parties are involved; *making a promise based on their available resources*. Whether these resources are financial (as is probable in the case of the customer making a payment) or an offering (as is probable in the case of the company providing a good or service) a promise is made stating what the other party will receive in the exchange of these resources. These promises are obviously interpreted by all parties involved; resulting in the formation of
expectations. Second, the fulfilment of these promises is assessed based on each party’s own expectations as well as the assessment of fulfilling their own part. If one party fails to deliver according to what is promised, that is fails at fulfilling their promise, then both parties expectations are most likely affected. Third, when this transaction comes to an end it has an effect on the formation of future promises, their interpretations, as well as the formation of new expectations for all parties involved. (Calonius 2006: 420)

Primarily the promise concept assumes that “each party promises to deliver certain benefits in the future provided that set conditions are met” (Calonius 2006: 422). Promises are made and the promise maker is expected to fulfil the implied promise. Expectations, however, depend greatly on the individual and their personal interpretation of the promise as well as of how that promise is fulfilled. There are often several stages to the fulfilment of the made promise, each of which has the potential to affect expectations through interpretation of the current- and future promise(s). This implies that keeping promises is not a matter of exchange, but one of a process, during which the perception can change at any stage. At first making a promise is based purely on resources, but interpretation throughout the process change current and future expectations so that the perception on promise fulfilment in the end is based on the entire process as a whole. (Calonius 2006)

The principal contribution of Calonius’ framework lies in its take on the fulfilment of promises (Berry 1995: 239; Bitner 1995: 246; Grönroos 2007: 277; 2009: 351). As can be concluded from the previous paragraph: “the degree to which a promise is fulfilled is assumed to determine the parties’ assessments of their experiences” (Calonius 2006: 425). The end experience based on the interpretations of made promises and how they are kept is what creates the base for making future promises and therefore forming future expectations. Grönroos (2007: 277) further points out that future promises must be made and fulfilled based on previous interactions in order to maintain and enhance this process. From a relationship marketing perspective, the only way of attracting, maintaining and enhancing customer relationships is through keeping promises (Berry 1995: 239), and in order to do so promises must be made and the keeping of promises enabled.

2.3 Managing Promises as the Goal for the Organization
To best understand the comprehensive nature of promises in the customer-company relationship, the entire framework for managing promises is summarized in Figure 3. The
promise management framework takes into account the elements of the customer-company-resources triad in what is originally known as the service marketing triangle. The company makes promises to customers through external marketing. Then by managing its resources through internal communication the company is enabling promises. Finally promises are kept in the interactions between company resources and customers. (Bitner 1995: 246-7; Grönroos 2007: 62-3) The significance of this framework is best articulated by a promise management definition of marketing by Grönroos (2006b: 407):

“Marketing is a customer focus that permeates organizational functions and processes and is geared towards making promises through value proposition, enabling the fulfillment of individual expectations created by such promises and fulfilling such expectations through assistance to customers’ value-generating processes, thereby supporting value creation in the firm’s as well as its customers’ and other stakeholders’ processes.”

![Figure 3: Promise Management Framework, modelled from Bitner (1995: 247) and Grönroos (2007: 62; 454)](image)

The foundation for this definition is that keeping promises is mutually beneficial for all parties, but requires making realistic promises and enabling the keeping of these promises (Bitner 1995: 246). External marketing includes traditional marketing activities, interactions and communication between involved parties, the facilities and their characteristics, and the service process in itself. All of these external marketing tools are involved in making promises. Employees and service systems require skills, abilities, tools, and motivation to enable promises to be kept, and through internal marketing these are provided. Interactive marketing aims at keeping these promises in the interactions that occur between customers and company employees and technology. Keeping promises is
essential as this is where relationships are either built or ended. (Bitner 1995: 246-8; Grönroos 2007: 62-3)

Although the focus is in fulfilment of expectations, that is keeping promises according to those that have been made, without the enablement of promises through internal support this would not be possible. Furthermore, keeping promises is based on fulfilling the unique expectations of individual customers who interpret promises in different ways. Leaving marketing to one organizational function is not possible as customer’s expectations and fulfilment of expectations is affected throughout the consumption process. (Grönroos 2006b: 408-9) Instead marketing through not only making, but enabling and keeping promises should be supported by everyone in the organization regardless of which department they represent (Bitner 1995: 250).

### 2.4 The Process Nature of Consumption and its Relation to Value Creation

As shown already by Calonius’ (2006: 421) framework there are many stages at which all parties interpret the made promise and the fulfilment of explicit and implicit promises (see Figure 2). Therefore, what is referred to as an “exchange transaction” (Calonius 2006: 420) is in fact a process of making and keeping promises in consumption. In fact, services and goods are both characterized by a process nature in service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch 2004: 282). Grönroos (2006: 324) maintains that goods are resources in the process just as employees, customers, or credit cards. In the end it is the customer who is responsible for assessing the entire experience and it is very likely that the entire process has included other elements as well. Actually while “goods... are value-supporting resources, services are value-supporting processes” (Grönroos 2006: 324). However, it is not a question of goods versus services when the focus is on the consumption process, but on how the company enables the customer to realize maximum value from this process (Grönroos 2006: 325; 330). Therefore services, just like goods, can be considered resources in the consumption process.

The making of promises, which is anchored in resources, is based on the offering regardless of what it is. Levitt (1981: 96-7) notes that promises of offerings are rarely portrayals of reality. In spite of that, customers base their preliminary expectation on the promise made by the company. Thereafter interpretations within the consumption process
can change those expectations or terminate the process on the basis that expectations have not been met. Regardless of the point in the consumption process, it is the customer who makes this judgment. To which extent the company is present in the consumption process determines its possibility to influence the customer’s perception of the offering and therefore maximize the value attained by the customer (Grönroos 2009: 353).

Grönroos (2009: 353-4) discusses the role of the customer and company in the consumption process from a value-in-use perspective (see Figure 4), which stipulates that customers create their own value on the basis of the resources they are provided with. Accordingly, the company is stripped from its position as the sole creator of value, which transactional marketing assigned to it (Vargo & Lusch 2004: 5). At the most basic level the company takes the role of value facilitator in providing the customer with offerings that the customer can use in their value creation. The interactive nature of the consumption process allows for the company to assist in the customer’s consumption process. The customer still decides to which extent it allows the company to be involved in this process. In fact, the customer can remain the sole creator of value in which case the company can only provide the customer with value propositions without assisting them in their consumption (Grönroos 2009: 352; Vargo & Lusch 2004: 11). However, the customer can also choose to co-create value with the company in which case the company’s task is assisting the customer in using the product or service, enhancing value for the customer. In essence the company becomes part of the customer’s consumption process; a co-producer of value. (Grönroos 2009: 353-4)

![Figure 4: Value Creation from a Value-in-Use Perspective (Grönroos 2009: 354)](image)

Similarly, Gummesson (2008: 324) points out that it is not the input of the offering that counts, but the value that the customer attains. Within the consumption process the
ultimate goal for the company is therefore assisting the customer in the consumption of the offering in order to maximize the value attained from the offering. To some extent value is dependent on elements pre-produced by the various divisions of the company (Grönroos 2007: 455). However, as argued above, the consumption process is the main source of value, not the company’s production process (Gummesson 2008: 324). Value propositions or promises of what the consumer is to expect from the offering and its resources are only part of the equation. More importantly, what Gummesson (2008: 324) refers to as the actualization of value, is dependent on the customer actions. However, through interactions the company can affect the fulfilment of promises as a co-creator of value and therefore companies should strive for an active role in the consumption process instead of only acting as producers of resources for the customer’s own value creation process.

Accordingly the company not only has the possibility of making promises based on its resources; or affecting the fulfilment of these promises during the consumption process; but can make promises internally in order to support the fulfilment of promises. In order to best do so the entire organization must adopt a service-oriented, customer centric mindset (Grönroos 2009: 355). Gummesson (2008: 317) notes that implementing such an ideology is lacking in most companies despite the vast, recent academic support for such a mindset (Vargo & Lusch 2004; Grönroos 2006; Harker & Egan 2006) and suggests this might be because it is unrealistic to focus exclusively on the customer above everything else. Instead Gummesson (2008: 328-9) recommends a balanced centricity where all stakeholders – “customers, employees, suppliers, intermediaries, the media, governments, and more” (Gummesson 2008: 328) are taken into account. While such logic would indeed be optimal in its breadth, it is doubtful its implementation would be possible because of its extensiveness. Instead, it is suggested that promise management is the framework which takes into account the necessary aspects of customer, company and resources for a holistic view to guide marketing, as well as the entire organization with its customer centric focus (Grönroos 2009: 357).

2.5 Summary of the Underlying Ideology

Promise management is the end result of a long process starting from transactional marketing. A progressive realization that the company only provides the products and/or services while the customer decides how to use these (Grönroos 2006b: 408) meant that exchange of value between customer and company should no longer be the focus (Vargo &
Lusch 2004: 2). Through services marketing, and more specifically relationship marketing, a customer centric approach has been reached where maximizing the co-creation of value is the end goal (Gummesson 2008: 324). Companies aim at supporting customer’s value creation with their resources, processes and interactions based on the value-in-use notion of a service-dominant logic. (Grönroos 2006b: 408-9). More importantly, focus on the customer’s value creation needs to be the focus of the entire organization (Brown 2005: 3)

Promise management is a holistic view on marketing that “integrates marketing with consumption and usage” (Grönroos 2009: 357). The basic premise is that no matter what the offering is, the company gains a competitive advantage through enhancing the value creation process of the customer. The (during) consumption process in which the core offering is produced and consumed simultaneously (Zeithaml 2006: 52) is only a part of this value creation process and therefore enhancing the customer’s value creation does not have to be restricted to the service encounter. This is the greatest opportunity for the company to affect the value creation process where through interactions the company can directly involve itself in the customer’s value creation process (Grönroos 2008: 302).

However, the sooner the company enters the value creation process before the consumption process begins, the easier it becomes to fulfil the expectations of the customer. This is because the more the company can influence the creation of expectations; the easier it becomes to fulfil them. Furthermore, the making of promises is not restricted to what is traditionally considered external marketing, but the company should strive for an interactive development of promises together with the consumer. Likewise, after the consumption process ends value creation does not necessarily cease. Instead the customer often reaps the benefits of the offering for a long time through for example memories of the experience. Hopefully by including itself in the customer’s value creation process prior to and after the service encounter the company can use this as a way of making promises; creating further expectations with that specific customer and moreover as a source for external marketing to new customers. (Grönroos 2007: 58)

This understanding of value creation through promise management is the basis for this study and for the next chapter; where a model is created that aims at guiding a company in incorporating itself into the customer’s value creation process.
3 Promise Management in the Extended Consumption Process

After establishing the ideology that promise management represents in the previous chapter, this chapter aims at combining promise management with the extended consumption process according to different levels of interaction (see Figure 1). First, levels of interaction (Holmlund 2004) and the extended consumption process (Lovelock, Vandermerwe & Lewis 1999; Ryttig 2006) are introduced. Thereafter promise management is discussed in detail in the extended consumption process. As a result a model for showing the extended consumption process from a customer’s point of view, which takes into account the promise management concept, is finally constructed. Furthermore, this is done in the context of the hotel industry in accordance with the empirical part of this paper.

3.1 Promise Management at Different Levels of Interaction

The five aggregation levels of interactions: action, episode, sequence, relationship, and partner base, provide a framework for analyzing the consumption process. Staying at a hotel is referred to as a multiple encounter service, as the service process is comprised of several different interactions (Gabbott & Hogg: 66). According to Holmlund (1996: 50) actions are the most detailed level of interaction accounting for any kind of contact initiated by the company. Actions are often interrelated forming groups of actions, which constitute episodes: the next level of interaction. Episodes are classed as minor natural entities, or easily specified parts of the interaction. Together several interrelated episodes form a sequence, “which may be defined in terms of a time period, a product, a campaign or a project, or a combination of these” (Holmlund 2004: 282). As a relationship is built from one or many sequences, it is affected by the episodes and more specifically the individual actions within episodes. The final level of interaction is the partner base which is formed by all the different relationships. (Holmlund 1996: 49-51) The different levels of interaction according to Holmlund (1996; 2004) are shown in Figure 5.
The consumption stage is trimmed down to different levels of interaction by Holmlund (2004) and can be alternatively expanded as the customer’s extended consumption process, based on Ryttig’s (2006: 47-9) coverage of the consumer’s purchase- and consumption processes for services. This foundation is expanded through discussions on the three identifiable stages: pre-purchase, service encounter, and post-purchase stage (Lovelock et al. 1999: 131-5). It must be mentioned that although the main framework referred to by Lovelock et al. (1999: 132) discusses this as the purchase process, Ryttig (2006: 47) dubs this the consumption process in unison with Gabbott & Hogg (1998), while Hoffman & Bateson (1997) and Zeithaml et al. (2006) discuss the consumer’s choice/decision process. Interestingly Sheth & Uslay (2007: 303) propose that in transactional marketing the focus was solely on the buyer and sellers relationships, while in services marketing the buyer’s role can be elaborated to include the selector, payer, and user. To place focus on customers who fulfil all three characteristics, here the framework will be discussed as the extended consumption process instead of the purchase process. Accordingly, the stages of the extended consumption process are referred to as the pre-consumption stage, during consumption stage, and post-consumption stage (see Figure 6).
Lovelock et al. (1999: 131) note that after customers notice an unfilled need a process begins which can for clarity reasons be classified under three stages: pre-consumption (or pre-purchase) stage, during consumption (or service encounter) stage, and post-consumption (or post-purchase) stage. It is implied that the customer is the same at each of the stages, but as mentioned above it is possible that the subject in each of the stages is different. Accordingly – and at the same time regardless of – whether the customer remains the same throughout the process it is obvious that the model in Figure 6 is a general one that applies to the consumption process in its broadest terms. It is highly likely that consumption processes depending on the individual customer vary greatly in whether they fully follow all stages or even one of the stages in the suggested manner.

Similarly, the five aggregation levels of interaction model (Figure 5) is only showing part of the truth. Although Holmlund’s (1996) levels of interactions are from a firm’s point of view and modelled with business to business markets in mind, the same ideology can be applied from a customer point of view. Starting from the highest level, or partner base, it is obvious that customers possibly have relationships with many different companies at once although not necessarily all in an active phase. For example a customer might occasionally stay with a different hotel chain than the one they regularly use. Each of these relationships comprises of sequences that may even naturally overlap (Holmlund 1996: 50) in that the customer may be using more than one offering from the company at one time. The customer could use the hotel restaurant or conference services, while staying at the hotel.
Episodes such as checking-in, watching television in the room, sleeping, and checking out, form these sequences. Episodes can overlap within sequences, the probability of this happening possibly being higher than for sequences overlapping within relationships. While having breakfast the customer could be booking their next stay at the hotel on a computer. An episode such as booking the room may include actions such as a phone call and receiving an e-mail confirmation. A specific action such as a phone call may in fact affect many different episodes. The customer may be requesting information on how to get to the hotel and making a booking at the same time thus having an effect on both the booking and arriving episodes. (Holmlund 1996; 2004)

Overlapping is not only possible at the level of sequences, but also on the levels of episodes and actions. Furthermore, the collective effect of actions on episodes, episodes on sequences, and sequences on relationships is pointed out in Figure 5. Holmlund (2004: 284) discusses the absorption of lower levels of interaction into the higher levels. A specific action may have an effect on the perception of the episode, but this same action affects the perception of the sequence and the entire relationship as well (see Figure 5). Many actions together form an overall perception of the episode, and many episodes form the perception of the sequence. (Holmlund 2004)

Furthermore, introducing a framework for observing the promise concept from a service-dominant view where the customer is the focus introduced by Bitner (1995: 247) and developed further by Grönroos (2007: 64; 454) complicates things further. This framework considers the making-, enabling- and keeping of promises in regards to the customer, the company, and the resources of the company (see Figure 3). The core of the consumption process is seen as keeping promises, only one part of the framework – culminating from how well making promises and enabling promises correspond to each other according to the customer experience (Grönroos 2007: 453-7).

To summarize, it is important to remember that making attractive promises is not enough, but keeping promises must be done effectively, assisted by the enablement of promises (Bitner 1995: 246). In reality promises do not follow a pattern of making-, enabling-, and keeping promises, nor do they occur exclusively within one or another of the pre-, during-, and post consumption stages. Instead all aspects occur intermittently and sporadically throughout the various actions, episodes and sequences of interactions.
Similarly, interaction levels are not straightforward. The classification of actions and episodes is not limited only to the service encounter during consumption, but is evident in the pre-consumption and post-consumption stage interactions as well. Actions and episodes occur in pre-consumption and post-consumption as well. Furthermore, not all actions from the customer side need to be in interactions with the company; other consumers, the internet, etc. may be counterparts to the customer in their interactions. Actions such as viewing the website of a hotel, or making a phone call to find out more about the hotel are a part of the information seeking process of the pre-consumption stage. Writing a complaint on the other hand is possibly as much a part of the post-consumption stage as it is part of an episode during consumption. Ultimately the perception of the relationship has an effect on the formation of the customer’s partner base, or more specifically in the position of the specific relationship one company holds among the other choices of the consumer.

3.1.1 Pre-consumption Promise Management

Zeithaml et al. (2006: 53) maintain that the purchase process begins with need recognition, followed by information search and the evaluation of alternatives. The decision to consume an offering begins from the consumer and can be organized according to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. The hierarchy consists of physiological-, safety and security-, social-, ego-, and self-actualization needs. Additionally Hoffman & Bateson (1997: 79) distinguish and elaborate between several outside stimuli that are dependent on commercial-, social- and physical cues. These company based actions do not necessarily lead to an interaction. Rather, by noticing a need consumers become impressionable causing them to consider different alternatives. It is even possible that consumers completely skip the information search phase and realize their need based on the something caused by outside stimuli. Another reason for skipping the information search phase as well as possibly ignoring separate alternatives is repeat consumption of the same service. (Gabbott & Hogg 1998: 19; Lovelock et al. 1999: 131-2)

Making promises is what transactional marketing considers the scope of marketing in its entirety; the external marketing of the company, done by the full time marketers (Grönroos 2006b: 406). Traditionally this has been taken care of by one (marketing) department in the company (Grönroos 2009: 354) while in fact promises are made through actions by the
company or the consumer, and possibly altered throughout the consumption process (Calonius 2006). In making promises the main point is trying to develop and make value propositions (Grönroos 2009: 356) based on the resources of the company in advertising, sales, promotions, pricing strategies, internet communication, direct mail, etc. (Bitner 1995: 247; Grönroos 2007: 455). However, often most of these company based actions will not even get a response from consumers due to the sheer multitude of marketing communication in today’s society.

The importance of making promises is rooted in their effect on the expectations that consumers have. In the case of external marketing communication, customers must be enticed by company actions into being interested in the company’s offering. At the same time the goal must be to set realistic expectations (Bitner 1995: 247) so customers are not disappointed if the experience does not meet their expectations. Expectations are unique and therefore it is not the promise that must be kept, “but the individual expectations created by these promises.” (Grönroos 2006b: 407). This fundamentally complicates the process and is most likely partly the reason behind consumer’s immunity towards the all too good sounding promises of traditional marketing.

However, in most cases there is at least a subconscious information search and evaluation of alternatives. These are actions initiated by the consumer, which eventually, once in the consumption stage, lead to episodes and sequences in interactions between customer and company. In both stages it is likely that the consumer’s economic- and time related resources, as well as information processing capability have an effect on which alternative is chosen. In addition to external, personally targeted and non-specific information; personal, experience based information (Zeithaml et al. 2006: 55-6) is often used in determining which alternative best suits the fulfilment of a need. (Gabbott & Hogg 1998; 34-40) Comparison of the alternatives is a natural progression, although as mentioned, the consciousness of this decision varies. It is probably the goal of any company to attain a strong enough relationship with customers that other alternatives in their partner base are not even considered.

Lovelock et al. (1999: 133), Zeithaml et al. (2006: 56), and Hoffman & Bateson (1997: 83-5) discuss the need for risk reduction in deciding which offering to consume. Perception of risk is also a factor in determining whether to consume an offering at all. Essentially what
consumers attempt to do is make the offering as tangible as possible to make their assessment easier. The information of peers, reputation, guarantees or warranties, trials, asking employees, or using the web are among the tools used to minimize risk. All of these are actions or episodes initiated by the consumer that may lead to interactions with the company. It is important to realize that these are actions and episodes even before interacting with the company. A certain financial risk is also accepted when the offering only (possibly) includes certain standardized elements and the quality of interaction varies from case to case. (Hoffman & Bateson 1997: 83-5; Lovelock et al. 1999: 133; Zeithaml et al. 2006: 56)

Naturally, previous experiences also play an important role in the formation of expectations (Grönroos 2006b: 406). An existing relationship of the customer obviously has an effect on the actions taken in the pre-consumption stage. Expectations are therefore dependent on external marketing communication by the company and experiences of each individual. The previous actions, episodes and sequences affect how promises are interpreted by the customer. Ojasalo (2001: 205-6) identifies six different kinds of expectations that need to be understood. Fuzzy expectations refer to uncertainty of what should be delivered, which need to be focused to achieve precise expectations. Implicit expectations suggest unconscious, obvious elements which do not necessarily need clarification. These need to be revealed to form explicit expectations and to avoid confusion as to what is really part of the offering and what is not. Closely intact are unrealistic expectations which must be calibrated into realistic expectations, as to avoid disappointment when not met. (Ojasalo 2001: 205-6) External marketing must take into account the different aspects of the expectations that it creates, and focus, reveal and calibrate these accordingly. More importantly, promises made are not solely dependent on those explicitly made through external marketing, but are largely dependent on actions, episodes and sequences of interaction, which become evident at various stages throughout the extended consumption process.

Interestingly Zeithaml et al. (2006: 57) are the only ones to explicitly include the purchase of the offering in the pre-consumption stage. Ultimately the decision to purchase an offering must be made prior to consumption as entering the consumption stage of an offering usually enters the consumer into a customer with an agreement to purchase with the provider.
3.1.2 During Consumption Promise Management

Keeping promises is the most volatile part of the equation as it depends on how well expectations, which are interpreted from making promises, are met in the interactions between the company and its customers, based on the company’s ability to enable promises (Grönroos 2009: 355). Keeping promises has as much to do with how promises are made and enabled as it does with the ‘moment of truth’ (Grönroos 2007: 453): when the customer interacts with the organization (Bitner 1995: 248). Because customers do not automatically receive all necessary information on a service during the pre-consumption stage they need to be educated during the consumption stage; which is therefore as much about making promises as it is about enabling and keeping them.

According to Hoffman & Bateson (1997: 89) the consumption stage for products includes the purchase, use and disposal of the offering, but for services these are intertwined and difficult to separate because in the interaction between company and customer they constitute a single, prolonged process. Gabbott & Hogg (1998: 91) note that the purchase of the offering is only a miniscule part of the consumption process, while what truly matters are the several interactions between the company and customer (Gabbott & Hogg 1998: 68; 76). Lovelock et al. (1999: 134) emphasize the importance of service personnel in their face to face interactions with the customer. The actions and episodes in interactions and their relative effect on the sequence and relationship needs to be duly noted (Holmlund 2004). Furthermore, support services (i.e. the backstage processes) have a great affect on how the offering is experienced. Similarly employees who support front-line staff are critical in their actions (Gabbott & Hogg 1998: 76). Other customers are also included as they possibly take part in the consumption process of any one specific customer, especially in the case of services. The service context (Gabbott & Hogg 1998: 79) naturally has an effect on the consumption process as well, being the tangible environment in which- and with which the customer interacts. (Lovelock et al. 1999: 134; Zeithaml 2006: 63)

The consumption process is vital to the company as this is the stage where the company can best influence the customer’s value creation process (Grönroos 2009: 353-4). Accordingly, Zeithaml et al. (2006: 58) refer to this stage as the consumer experience. The experience, service encounter, or consumption process in many cases has the biggest
influence on determining the total satisfaction of the customer as opposed to pre- and post-consumption stages.

Enabling promises is an integral part of making and fulfilling promises (Grönroos 2006b: 406) as this is the company’s interpretation of what is necessary to best enhance the consumption process. These are actions and episodes mostly hidden from the customer, not necessarily requiring a direct interaction, but definitely having an indirect effect on the different levels of interaction. Through internal marketing the company’s employees can develop the skills, abilities, tools and motivation to deliver on promises according to the expectations created by making promises (Bitner 1995: 247). This applies to resources other than the labour force as well, including the tuning of support systems and technology towards enablement of promises (Grönroos 2007: 456). In order for employees to best support the customer’s value creation process they must be provided with the necessary tools such as customer information databases. Company internal information must be easily accessible and applicable so that the vast amount of information available to employees in our technologically advanced society can be fuelled towards making and keeping promises accurately. Moreover, technology that customers use for themselves must work in a value enhancing way. Furthermore, appropriate leadership is required to enable promises through rewarding the desired behaviour in those employees who show it and transferring this knowledge to those who do not. (Grönroos 2009: 356; Holmlund 2004)

Berry (1995: 241) discusses the importance of internal marketing suggesting that enabling promises is not only concerned with educating existing employees. Obviously, with their offering being entirely dependent on the interactions between employees providing a service and the customer receiving it, service companies find it vital to attain the right employees (Berry 1995: 241). As the gap between pure service and pure goods companies is being bridged (Grönroos 2006: 325) it is evident that companies should have employees in all positions with the aim of enhancing the customer’s consumption process; leading to more value for the customer.

Through the understanding that services are processes including many moments of truth (Gabbott & Hogg 1998: 61; Grönroos 2007: 453-5) in the various interactions between company and customer, the many roles for customers within the process arise. Other
customers have a major effect on the experience of any one customer. The behaviour of one customer depends on their personal emotions and moods but when many are present at the same time, customers also have an effect on each other. (Zeithaml et al. 2006: 58-67) Accordingly, in the pre- and post-consumption stages the opinions and behaviour of other consumers have an effect on any one customer’s experience and perception.

The degree to which the customer involves themselves in the service ranges from passive to active (Gabbott & Hogg 1998: 70-1). Some offerings require an active role from the customer such as education and personal training, while for example getting your tires changed does not. The aspect of training or educating the customer therefore becomes an important one, when the customer is needed as a co-producer in the consumption stage (Zeithaml 2006: 65). Gabbott & Hogg (1998: 72) also note that different levels of engagement with the company are necessary dependent on the offering. In many cases it might be preferable for some customers to self-service; that is deal with technology instead of interacting with a person especially in routine interactions such as checking-in for a flight. In these cases, the enablement of promises depends on the part-time marketer’s ability to provide the customer with adequate support systems to do so. However, most references made to part time marketers are in regards to those employees concerned with serving the customers in the various moments of truth (Bitner 1995: 248).

The important role of part time marketers is easily observed based on the assumption that full time marketers are most of the time only found in the traditional marketing department where the major concern is traditionally making promises (Grönroos 2006b: 406). However, Gummesson (1991) discusses the important role of the part time marketer; in tune to the adaptation of a customer centric view. If all employees are tuned towards keeping the customer’s value creation process as their focal point then, through superior service, the process is marketing itself. Positively perceived actions lead to positively perceived episodes, which lead to positively perceived sequences, etc. The need for employees to be part time marketers is obvious regardless of the employee’s position in the organization, even when they are not directly connected to the customer. (Gummesson 1991: 72-3) The major effect of part time marketers emerges in regards to keeping promises in the employees who are in contact with customers (Berry 1995: 241) throughout the various levels of interaction. In successfully completing a sequence, that is keeping a promise, the company is essentially making another promise; stating the
customer should expect similar service during the next interaction as well. Enabling promises requires preparing those employees in contact with the customer as part time marketers with a customer centric view (Grönroos 2009: 357). Basically “enabling promises becomes an integral part of the process of making and keeping promises.” (Grönroos 2009: 355)

All parts of the environment (including other customers), employees, and supporting networks are evaluated throughout the consumption process. The duration of the interaction between company and customer offers “opportunities for developing, recovering, cross selling, up/selling and maintaining customers” (Gabbott & Hogg 1998: 90). In building relationships the time aspect becomes even more important as the company must align actions, episodes and sequences consistently and in a value creating way. (Gabbott & Hogg 1998: 90; Hoffman & Bateson 1997: 89-90)

It is important not to forget that promises are made and altered throughout the during consumption stage (Calonius 2006: 425). Actions of employees in the consumption stage may make promises which were not even considered by the customer during the pre-consumption stage. It is likely that such promises are value enhancing ones: for example telling a hotel guest that they can have dry cleaning done or book restaurants or flights through reception employees. Altering promises on the other hand can have both a positive or negative effect, depending on the state of the expectations when entering the consumption process. For example, later being told that dry cleaning is unavailable during the weekends would have a negative effect on the episode.

Keeping promises, also referred to as interactive marketing, is critical from the customer’s point of view. In the interactions between a company’s technological support systems and employees on one side and the customer’s consumption process on the other, a company must do its best to fulfil the made promise. (Bitner 1995: 247-8; Grönroos 2007: 456) Better yet, the integration of the extended consumption process and the customer’s value creation process is the goal for the company. By assisting the customer in their consumption process the company can enhance the customer’s value creation. It is here where the part time marketer’s task is most crucial, as they are the ones with the best opportunity to affect the during consumption process throughout the multitude of interactions that comprise an offering (Gummesson 1991: 73).
3.1.3 Post-consumption Promise Management

One of the most crucial characteristics of the post-consumption stage is in regards to the evaluation of the offering. Evaluations are completed throughout the various episodes of the service encounter, (Gabbott & Hogg 1998: 97; Hoffman & Bateson 1997: 89; Lovelock et al. 1999: 134) however, the evaluation of the offering often culminates in the post-consumption stage as this is when the entire consumption process as a whole can be evaluated. Gabbott & Hogg (1998: 109-10) refer to this as evaluating the process (action and episode levels) and evaluating the outcome (sequence and relationship levels). Parts of the consumption stage are probably perceived positively while other parts might unfortunately be negative leading to an overall perception of satisfaction or value from the process. Therefore the post-consumption stage possibly includes other characteristics as well depending on the final level of satisfaction that is achieved (Lovelock et al. 1999: 134-5). In essence promises made are evaluated on whether they are kept, in regards to the customer’s perception. It is the results of evaluations during and after consumption (in their effect on the current and future actions of the customer) that are vital in the post-consumption stage.

The expectations of the customer are matched with what is experienced to determine whether the offering leads to satisfaction (Hoffman & Bateson 1997: 90). It is the perception of the offering that is important, not what is actually delivered, because expectations are unique. Furthermore, expectations are not always articulated regardless of their importance (Ojasalo 1991: 210). By comparing what is promised and whether this is kept, throughout the levels of interaction of the extended consumption process, the customer perceives a level of quality (Lovelock et al. 1999: 135). Grönroos (2007: 76-7) elaborates that delivering technical and functional quality are not enough as total perceived quality “...is the gap between expected and perceived quality” (Grönroos 2007: 76).

Another aspect that is highlighted as crucial is the degree of control that customers experience during the extended consumption process. Naturally the company as the expert of the offering has to maintain control over the extended consumption process, but at the same time it is imperative that the customer perceives themselves as in control. (Hoffman & Bateson 1997: 91)
Zeithaml et al. (2006: 64) discuss the roles of customers and personnel according to a ‘script’ that determines the actions of both parties. “*People are considered to be social actors who learn and adopt behaviours appropriate to the positions they occupy in society.*” (Gabbott & Hogg 1998: 84) For example, certain steps are assumed to be completed by customers of a hotel such as the booking of a hotel room beforehand, finding their way to the hotel or checking-in. Likewise the company needs to record the booking that is made, check-in the guest, etc. It is necessary for the customer and the employees to act according to what is expected of them. Naturally, a role is communicated for both the customer and the company in regards to their actions during the extended consumption process. (Hoffman & Bateson 1997: 92-3) However, these roles are also left to interpretation and therefore communicating procedure subtly, but as detailed as possible to both customers and employees is crucial to achieve the desired roles and consequently the desired actions.

Depending on the overall evaluation of the interaction, the post-consumption stage can lead to positive or negative word of mouth, various degrees of loyalty and relationship commitment (Lovelock et al. 1999: 135-6), sometimes emotional engagement (Zeithaml et al. 2006: 67), or even to the need for complaint handling or service recovery (Gabbott & Hogg 1998: 116-7). Crucially the customer forms an opinion on whether or not to use the service in the future and therefore the company should support the customer’s value creation even in the post-consumption stage.

**3.2 Conclusions from Theoretical Review: A Focus on Customer’s Value Creation**

In essence this subchapter concludes the discussion which has been raised by the theoretical review in chapters two and three. In reviewing existing literature with close ties to services and relationship marketing, it becomes clear that existing models do work closely together. However, a model that takes a holistic view on marketing (through promise management) involving the entire organization and the entire service process at all levels of interactions, does not exist. A holistic model as described above is needed for a promise management view on marketing to enable the co-creation of value. In this subchapter such a model is constructed.
The promise management view “places marketing at the centre of customer’s value creation process” (Grönroos 2009: 356), is based on marketing as a process, and integrates marketing with consumption and usage (Grönroos 2009: 356-7). The extended consumption model, although taking a process view on customer and company interactions does not explicitly take promise management into account.

In the existing promise management framework, presented in Figure 3; making-, enabling- and keeping promises is assumed to occur, without taking a clear stand at which stages of the consumption process these occur (Bitner 1995; Grönroos 2007). The complexity of making-, enabling-, and keeping promises becomes clear in dissecting the extended consumption process and realizing that all three take place simultaneously and sporadically throughout the process. However, from a customer point of view some distinct features can be attributed as to in which stages of the consumption process- and at which levels of interaction different parts of promises management are easiest applied to.

However, it is likely that the characteristics of the extended consumption process for services do not necessarily follow the order implied in Figure 6 by Lovelock et al. (1999: 32). For example, the evaluation of services not only characterizes the post-consumption stage, but is evident throughout the consumption stage, and sometimes initiated in the pre-consumption stage. Likewise, employees, support services and the service environment affect other stages than the consumption stage. For example, evaluation of the service process is of such significance in determining value perception throughout the service process, that this model should be corrected although the framework is of general nature and it is understood that in reality there might be differences. Another possibility is to steer away from following such a clear-cut division of stages.

The purpose is not to completely disregard the pre-, during- and post-consumption stages as such, but to make it obvious that there are other things that are more important. Because it is likely that promise management flows freely throughout the extended consumption process, these stages should at least be blurred to place the focus on this free movement. Instead, to better organize promises management, Holmlund’s (2004) levels of interaction are key. When making, keeping and enabling promises are observed as interconnected actions, episodes, sequences which affect the overall relationship, a company can better match their place as co-creator of value with the customer.
All of this is done with the customer’s value creation process constantly in mind. The customer is the one who decides to which extent the company is allowed to be a part of the value creation process through their interactions. Value and satisfaction are the end goal in the extended consumption process and therefore it must be the goal of the company to align the extended consumption process with the value creation process of the customer. Ultimately, instead of only understanding promise management as a customer centric view on marketing, the goal here is to view the management of promises from a customer’s perspective in order to get nearer to the customer’s value creation process.

3.2.1 A Model for the Extended Consumption Process Adapted to Promise Management

These concluding remarks, building up to a model of the extended consumption process according to promise management is constructed based on the literature review and the author’s working experience. When dissecting the extended consumption process according to different levels of interaction, it becomes expected that actions, episodes, and even sequences and relationships are intertwined across the stages. As pre-consumption, consumption and post-consumption have a specific order the impressions the customer gets from one stage flows into the next. A similar order for making-, enabling-, and keeping promises does not exist in promise management, although some patterns can be assumed.

Making promises is the underlying function of the pre-consumption stage. However, there is an obvious overlapping of the pre-consumption stage and during consumption stage in making promises as the actions of employees during consumption have an effect on the expectations of the customer. Promises are altered and made throughout the consumption process. Likewise, the making of promises also happens in the post-consumption stage; considerably in regards to future sequences, that is future extended consumption processes.

Enabling promises is done pre-consumption, during consumption and post-consumption. Naturally support systems must be in place and functioning throughout the extended consumption process and during consumption customer contact employees must function

3 This model uses the general ideology of promise management (Grönroos 2006b) and the idea of the extended consumption process in its entirety (Gabbott & Hogg 1998). Furthermore, levels of interaction (Holmlund 2004) are used repeatedly. When using the terms such as making-, enabling-, and keeping promises or actions, episodes, and sequences these authors are not explicitly referred to every time.
as part time marketers for the company. Therefore, it is imperative that the customer-contact employees receive the assistance they need from backstage employees during interactions.

In keeping promises the company fulfils the expectations according to the customer’s perception of the promise that was initially made. Keeping promises is therefore not only dependent on the consumption stage, but also on pre-consumption and post-consumption stages.

In the model presented in Figure 7 the extended consumption process according to promise management is seen from a customer’s point of view, taking into account the various levels of interaction. Actions form episodes, which in turn form sequences, and finally relationships. Actions have an effect across episodes; and the experiences gathered on all levels of interaction affect future expectations; that is future promises. Within and throughout actions, episodes and sequences promises are made, enabled and kept. Although the pre-, during, and post- consumption stages help in the arrangement of the extended consumption process; a decided number of actions and episodes do not exist to dictate exactly what comprises a sequence. Similarly, the two relationships shown in the model are not a set number of the customer’s partner base. (Holmlund 2004)

Figure 7: Promise Management in the Extended Consumption Process from the Customer’s Point of View
The ultimate goal is integrating the customer’s value creation process to as large an extent as possible with the extended consumption process through the making, enabling and keeping of promises. By analyzing the customer’s consumption process based on this model a company learns in which of its actions, episodes and sequences it can affect customer perceived value. Similarly, which promises in the extended consumption process need the most improvement can be identified and managed accordingly.

To summarize, the management of promises enables the fulfilment of individual expectations and the fulfilment of individual expectations is what gives customers value, leading to satisfaction. By enabling promises, making promises is aligned with keeping promises and when this is done in the context of the extended consumption process, companies can face their own and the customer’s value creation process in an interactive way that leads to satisfaction for both parties. (Grönroos 2006b: 407)
4 Research Methodology

In harmony with the theoretical framework constructed in the previous chapters – culminating in Figure 7 – the most reasonable approach for empirically testing this model and reaching trustworthy results is subsequently identified. The aim of this study is to analyze the extended consumption process from a promise management perspective. In order to take into account promise management to its full extent, a case study of Holiday Inn Helsinki West – Ruoholahti is conducted through qualitative interviews with its guests, based on the case company extended consumption process. More specifically the discussion on research methodology encompasses motives for choice of research approach, -research method, -sampling, -data collection, and the specific case study including a description of Holiday Inn Helsinki West – Ruoholahti. Furthermore, data collection design and procedure, and data analysis are described, followed by an assessment of data trustworthiness, validity and reliability.

4.1 Research Approach and Method

The rules for designing a study are flexible and “no single, ideal standard” (Patton 2002: 12) exists. Instead this choice is more a question of context and audience. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009: 482) argumentation for both quantitative- and qualitative research approaches is extensive. Quantitative analysis predominantly provides numerical data (Saunders et al. 2009: 151), which best supports research where the purpose is to prove something with the statistical significance of hard numbers (Patton 2002: 573). Obtaining quantitative data is often based on questionnaires or statistics which relies on an existing set of choices for the respondent. Meanwhile, qualitative analysis provides us with data collection methods, which due to their open form in comparison to quantitative methods, provides a greater possibility of unanticipated information as well as greater depth (Silverman 2006: 56). (Patton 2002: 16-7)

In regards to services Gummesson (2000: 35) argues that in their most basic form quantitative methods are best used to complement qualitative studies, which on their own “provide the best opportunities for the study of processes”. Furthermore, although reasoning exists for both approaches (Patton 2002; Gummesson 2000; Saunders et al. 2009) in this case the decision for a qualitative approach is well founded; as described subsequently. As the purpose of this paper is to study promise management within the
various stages of the extended consumption process (with a focus on the customer’s point of view during a service) a quantitative approach would not suffice.

Simply put qualitative data describe (Patton 2002: 46-7). Saunders et al. (2009: 127) concur: qualitative data aims at describing and understanding. However, using a limited number of cases as is often associated with qualitative data does not necessarily restrict the generalizations derived from it as everything is dependent on the specific circumstances of the particular study (Gummesson 2000: 88). The central understandings, whether recurring themes or even single but to the customer significant occurrences, in their richness are what give value to qualitative research (Patton 2002: 244), further supporting the choice of qualitative methods. In its frequent form quantitative data is derived from partially predetermined ‘choices’, which the researcher presents to their subjects of study, limiting the possibilities of answers to those that are predetermined (Silverman 2006: 303). Furthermore, the choices presented in a quantitative survey for example, must have been derived at some point through qualitative methods (Silverman 2006: 39). Conversely, qualitative data is ideally reached without these restrictions through open-ended methods such as interviews, observations, analysis of text, or audio and video recordings (Silverman 2006: 18) where the subject leads the research based on their actions or words (Patton 2002: 56).

Nonetheless, even with a focus on openness, qualitative data requires a design: a structure which to follow in order to obtain reliable data. As such, the choice between mono method and multiple methods (Saunders et al. 2009: 151) becomes relevant. From the many possibilities such as interviews, observations through pictures or video, use of secondary data from existing databases, etc. (Patton 2002: 47) it could be assumed more is better. This reasoning depends on the respective data collection techniques complementing each other until ‘the whole picture’ is reached (Gummesson 2000: 3). Silverman (2006: 51) contradicts this by pointing out that combining many techniques can become overwhelming, complicating the process and possibly diluting the focus of the study. As the customer’s consumption process is subjective especially for services (Gabbott & Hogg 1998: 6) it becomes obvious that hearing the experience in the customer’s own words assists in providing the necessary data. Through the use of interviews the aim is to discover details in depth from the company’s most important source of information: its customers. Naturally, this raises the question of sample size; that is how many subjective views are
required to create an objective overlook of the service experience. The interview method and sample size are discussed in detail in later subchapters.

The basis for not only the choice in research approach, but the choice of research question for the entire paper, is also greatly dependent on preunderstanding. Preunderstanding is based on personal experience and knowledge as well as the experience of others in the form of literary sources, lectures, work experience, etc. Together these two sources of preunderstanding form the subjective opinion of the researcher, stressing the challenge of remaining objective throughout the process. However, in making this subjectivity explicit it becomes possible to tackle the research project in an objective manner, because being aware of your own subjectivity causes you to focus designing data collection in a manner that ideally respects and takes into account data objectively. (Gummesson 2000: 58; 67-9; Patton 2002: 574-8) “Those who are able to balance on the razor’s edge use their preunderstanding but are not its slave” (Gummesson 2000: 65). The danger with preunderstanding lies in the possible incapability of remaining objective during research through blocked preunderstanding. Without an objectivity and openness there is a danger that “reality becomes distorted rather than explained.” (Gummesson 2000: 62). Being aware of preunderstanding allows the researcher to remain objective as this is considered throughout the process of designing the study as well as collecting data.

As Gummesson (2000: 63-4) denotes preunderstanding is closely related to the choice of deductive, inductive or abductive research. Deductive research is explained as starting from existing theory, while inductive research begins from ‘testing’ reality, which theory is then derived from. Patton (2002: 453-4) similarly points out that in inductive research discoveries are made from collected data, while in deductive research an existing framework is used in the analysis of the data. The deductive approach is therefore associated with testing hard data and scientific research (quantitative research), while the inductive approach is often considered in forming an understanding of the process (qualitative research). (Gummesson 2000: 63-4; Patton 2002: 453-4; Saunders et al. 2009: 124-8)

Categorizing research approaches according to either extreme is perhaps a bit old-fashioned in refusing to combine the best qualities from both, as Silverman (2006: 58) suggests. Patton (2002: 56-7) agrees by stating that in one study some questions might be
predetermined while others are left open, combining the deductive and inductive approaches. The increasingly favoured term is the abductive research approach, which takes into account both induction and deduction; perhaps starting from theory, but creating all new theory thereafter. (Gummesson 2000: 64) The abductive approach suits best in this study as a model is reached through relating to theory on the basis of a preunderstanding (deductive); this model is tested in an empirical analysis where data from reality are presented (inductive), followed by a re-evaluation of the model (deductive). Furthermore, this is a general outline, while in reality reflection on data naturally occurs even during data collection. At the same time the aim is to learn from the specific case study and in this way create an understanding of how the customer behaves throughout the extended consumption process.

On a more personal level as Gummesson (2000: 34-5) points out; the iterative use of a method ensures that the researcher is familiar with its use and be capable of “forming a more balanced judgement” in doing so. From using qualitative analysis in interviews in my bachelor’s theses, to the numerous papers for different courses over the years studying at Hanken, as the author of this paper I believe this is the most confident approach for me. More importantly, seeing as qualitative data is reasoned to provide richer data and the purpose is to gain insight deductively and inductively into different stages of the extended consumption process, the qualitative case study approach is chosen for this study.

**4.2 Case Study**

In conducting case studies “access, preunderstanding and firsthand experience... to produce useful academic research” (Gummesson 2000: 83) is more than necessary. Data is collected by blurring “the boundaries between the phenomenon being studied and the context within which it is being studied” (Saunders et al. 2009: 146). Accordingly, case studies are sometimes criticized for not necessarily providing distinctions between what is specific to this case only and what is true for all similar cases (Saunders et al. 2009: 146-7). In other words the power of generalizing from case studies is sometimes questioned (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson 2008: 97). However, Gummesson (2000: 86-8) argues that a case study indeed can simultaneously provide generalizations at the same time as it provides a holistic view of a certain one case. The purpose in this study is to apply the model presented in the theoretical framework (Figure 7) in a real situation through a case study.
On the most basic level case studies are used to understand the dynamics behind one setting (Eisenhardt 1989: 534). Although only one case company is used in this study, several cases within this company are analyzed. Cases are units of analysis and in this study the unit of analysis is the hotel guest. The systematic gathering of rich data from one respondent after another result in the total sum of all cases together: the case study. (Patton 2002: 447) Case studies can be used to provide description, test theory, or generate theory (Eisenhardt 1989: 535). In this paper the case study is specifically on the extended consumption process within Holiday Inn Helsinki West – Ruoholahti. Accordingly, through analyzing the different cases within the case study the aim is to attain conclusions and results to this specific case, as well as implications regarding the model reached in the theoretical framework.

The growing recognition of case study research (Gummesson 2000: 87) along with the case company meeting the requirements of access, preunderstanding and first-hand experience outlined above, provide arguments for the choice of method.

**4.2.1 Holiday Inn Helsinki West – Ruoholahti**

Holiday Inn Helsinki West – Ruoholahti is a high quality business hotel located in the business district of Ruoholahti near the centre of Helsinki. The 256 room hotel is designed according to international standards and serves both business and leisure travellers alike. With 32 executive rooms those requiring a bit of luxury are also catered to, the focus nonetheless remaining on business travellers. Guests are served in multiple languages including Finnish, Swedish, English, German and Spanish, by a staff willing to try their best to understand any guest of any origin. While the lobby bar, sauna, and gym help relax or blow off steam after a long day, the hotel also provides a possibility to continue work in the business centre, boardroom or sauna cabinet. Each guest is provided with free wireless or cable internet as well as the possibility to check out during breakfast from Tuesday to Friday (Holiday Inn 2010c). The attached restaurant Fokka provides an international breakfast with seasonal specials and a world class lunch and dinner. (Holiday Inn 2010a)

The case company is one of the seven Holiday Inn hotels in Finland run by Restel Oy. Along with Crowne Plaza Helsinki the Holiday Inn hotels ensure business travellers excellent accommodation, while other hotel chains run by Restel such as Cumulus and
Rantasiipi are more focused on leisure travellers. (Restel 2010) Although run and operated by Restel, the Holiday Inn brand is controlled by InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) Plc. Holiday Inn’s significant position as a worldwide brand stems from 1952, since when service, comfort and value have been of utter importance. Equally important to the long history of growth and expansion is the recent worldwide rebranding of Holiday Inn. (Holiday Inn 2010b) The re-launch was completed based on extensive customer research, encompassing:

“...a strong, modern new identity, a new exterior and signature reception appearance, a signature scent and music, modern blankets and a signature pillow menu complete with ribbons in a signature bed, and the new ‘Stay Real’ service training.” (Holiday Inn 2010c)

Ensuring guests have a true Holiday Inn experience is not only dependent on the physical attributes of the hotel, but naturally on the level of service in the hotel. Anticipation of the guest’s wishes and treating each guest as an individual are both highlighted at Holiday Inn. (Holiday Inn 2010c)

The Priority Club (IHG) and Hotel Bonus Club (Restel) loyalty programs have distinct member benefits. Whether loyalty program members or other guests, obliging to the standards of Restel and IHG comes as a given at the case company. Along with the newcomer of the year award of 2005, the Quality Excellence award of 2006, Holiday Inn Helsinki West – Ruoholahti recently received the 2009 Quality Excellence award for customer service. Chosen from over 600 IHG hotels, those receiving the Quality Excellence award must place in the top 10% of hotels in their region in customer feedback on the IHG scale measuring customer satisfaction. At the case company guest satisfaction through excellent service is clearly of great importance. (Holiday Inn 2009)

### 4.3 Data Collection Method

In this study interviews are the choice of method to collect data in customers own words involving pre-, during- and post-consumption experiences at the case company. Interviewing is a complex method requiring vast amounts of time and effort, at the same time as it “is often claimed to be ‘the best’ method of gathering information” (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008: 143). The type of interview used is a combination of the structured interview and the open-ended interview (Saunders et al. 2009: 320-1). As Patton (2002: 347) concludes when comparing the informal conversation interview, the interview guide
and the open-ended interview: “these contrasting interview strategies are by no means mutually exclusive.” The structured interview is closely bound to the positivist approach, where specific guidelines and rules are often present in order to link findings in a factual manner. Open-ended interviews are a tool of emotionalists in finding and expressing the subjective experiences of the respondents. Emotionalism therefore highlights the importance of tailoring each situation to the specific needs of the respondents, while positivism emphasizes the benefits of standardizing questions and neutralizing stimuli in the environment. (Silverman 2006: 117-28) Regardless of the chosen approach the aim of qualitative interviews is to get a perspective on the respondent’s feelings and thoughts that could not be reached through other methods (Patton 2002: 341).

In the above discussion on positivism and emotionalism it becomes clear that both have their benefits and drawbacks. Strictly following standardized questions to obtain positivist favoured ‘facts’ might keep the interview focused according to the researcher, but questions are still subjectively interpreted by respondents. (Silverman 2006: 122-3) On the other hand the humanistic feel of the emotionalist approach, really recognizing the human to human interaction, could risk losing focus and cause the obtained information to be irrelevant (Silverman 2006: 125-7). Along similar lines, Patton (2002: 341) notes the vital role interview design plays in obtaining information rich data from respondents.

The method of choice in this study is best described as being placed somewhere on a continuum between structured and open-ended as opposed to solely utilizing either ‘extreme’. Easterby-Smith et al. (2008: 143-4) refer to this as the semi-structured interview, where questions and probes are used to guide the interview and explore the respondents beliefs. Set questions are the basis in ensuring similarities, while probes allow for the needed freedom. This conscious choice is done to ensure flexibility of the interview process in adapting to each respondent and address their personal ability to cope with the interview situation. People respond to questions with different levels of enthusiasm due to differences in personality. In order to ensure that respondent express their interpretations to each question in detail the interviewer’s level of involvement differs and should reflect each interview situation. (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008: 142; Patton 2002: 341-8) Therefore in some cases it might be sufficient to follow the structured interview, while in other cases a more probing input is needed from the interviewer. Probing and follow up questions will be used in the interview to clarify questions to the respondent as well as to get more insight
into the response. The intention of the conversational probes is to keep the interview situation as natural as possible. (Patton 2002: 372-4; Saunders et al 2009: 324)

To summarize, in this study the method is referred to as a semi-structured interview because its parts are characterized as structured but includes open-ended elements, creating an entirety that combines both approaches in an organized manner. The structured elements are used when necessary, while the main goal is to allow for the respondent to talk as freely as possible. (Easterby-Smith 2008: 143-4) As highlighted in subchapter 4.3.4 the interview guide’s first, second and sixth parts are structured while the remaining parts are open. The interview guide is used as support, if people speak freely about some topic this will not be asked about again. Instead, the respective questions are crossed off from the interview guide as this topic has already been discussed.

4.3.1 Motivation for Choice of Respondents

The significance of preunderstanding leads to the choice of purposeful sampling for this study. As my preunderstanding is to an extent dependent on the knowledge I have gained through 3 years of working within the hotel industry, it becomes fitting to choose the scenario where this preunderstanding has been built. (Gummesson 2000) Furthermore, purposeful sampling is best suited for studies where the intention is a focus on specific cases. (Patton 2002: 230)

Patton (2002: 230-42) distinguishes between several different strategies of purposeful sampling, of which the ones used for this study are discussed here and summarized in Table 1. To a certain degree the chosen sample undeniably has to do with convenience as gaining access in a familiar establishment makes it that much more comfortable to approach possible respondents. For example offering possible respondents assistance while reception is busy provides a window of opportunity to engage these in conversation hopefully leading to an interview. Homogeneous sampling is used to ensure that the respondents taking part in this study are all customers of the case company and that they have the necessary experience to answer questions pertaining to each of the three phases of the extended consumption process. Thus, respondents who answer ‘no’ to question 4 “Have you ever stayed at this hotel before?” (Appendix 1) are not included in the study.
The questions are available in English and Finnish and therefore respondents must be able to communicate in one of these two languages\(^4\). However, no other similarities are necessary for the respondents in order to qualify. Purposeful random sampling increases the credibility of the results as respondents are not discriminated against in other than the decided ways. In this way any customer of the case company is a possible respondent, the choice of whom is only dependent on whether the researcher and respondents paths meet and the respondent agrees to be interviewed. (Patton 2002: 230-42)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Purposeful Sampling</th>
<th>Reason for use in this study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Random Sampling             | To be able to approach each customer.  
                              | To raise credibility by random sampling.  |
| Homogeneous Sampling        | To ensure ability to answer questions related to each stage in the extended consumption process.  |
| Convenience Sampling        | To allow for access and an educated preunderstanding of the case company.  |

The combination of the above mentioned purposeful sampling techniques might seem contradictory to an extent, especially when considering the terms ‘purposeful’ and ‘convenience’. However, the suitability of this combination it is dependent on the extent of which each of these techniques is applied. The sample is purposefully random in order to allow each customer to be a potential respondent and homogeneous in their ability to answer the questions in this study. Convenience is only in reference to the case company, within which the study is conducted. It is necessary to once again mention that the richness of information within each case is what is vital (Patton 2002: 244).

Gummesson (2000: 96) suggests the number of interviews required for a complete study depends on when saturation occurs – “when the marginal utility of an additional case approaches zero” there is no need to conduct another interview. Basically, when respondents overwhelmingly begin repeating what the previous respondent has already said, it is reasonable to assume that the ‘right’ amount of interviews has been conducted. Patton (2002: 246) does suggest that a minimum sample size is decided on with consideration of the “expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study and stakeholder interests.” Accordingly 10 interviews are set as the minimum,

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\(^4\) Questions were originally also provided in Swedish. Since no respondents were interviewed in Swedish, the Swedish version of the interview guide is excluded from the final thesis.
based on a review of previous theses in Marketing at the Swedish School of Economics library, but naturally this number is to be raised if necessary, depending on saturation.

The most important question is presented by Patton (2002: 245): “Does the sampling strategy support the study’s purpose?” For this study the purpose is to view the extended consumption process in the case of Holiday Inn Helsinki West – Ruoholahti. Therefore, access to customers who are capable of answering questions pertaining to each stage of the extended consumption process are the most important criterion. Thereafter the point of interest is in the richness, trustworthiness and credibility of the data and the sampling criterion utilized in this study take this into account.

4.3.2 The Interview Process

Naturally, in order to interview overt access is necessary – the respondent’s agreement is required to proceed (Silverman 2006: 81-2). An introduction including the researcher’s ties to the case company and academic purpose is also necessary to make the objective of the interview clear. To ensure appropriateness of appearance and strengthen credibility of the study the interviewer’s physical appearance and manner must be professional (Saunders et al. 2009: 330). To ease agreement to be interviewed respondents are offered a drink of their choice at a chosen time at the hotel bar upon completion of the interview. Confidentiality is also guaranteed to the respondent (Patton 2002: 408). While staying at a hotel it is probable that guests follow a busy schedule, and therefore it becomes increasingly important that the interview is conducted professionally and in a timely manner (Saunders et al. 2009: 325). Likewise it is essential questions are worded in such a manner that respondents provide as much significant information as possible (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008: 149). Unclear questions can also confuse the respondent or make them feel uncomfortable (Patton 2002: 360-1). Interviews are conducted in English, Finnish, or Swedish according to the respondent’s wishes. A quiet place without distractions in one of the hotel’s meeting spaces is used to guarantee minimum disturbance during the interview. Naturally the interview is recorded so that data is in the actual words of the respondent. Interviews are immediately reviewed and if necessary elaborated on in notes. (Patton 2002: 380-4) These general interview issues are summarized in Table 2 according to the particular concerns of this study. (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008: 147-9; Saunders et al. 2009: 328-35)
Table 2: General Issues of the Interview Process, adapted from Easterby-Smith et al. (2008: 147-50)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>How to handle the issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gaining access</td>
<td>Permission to conduct interviews from case company and from the respondent. Drink offered to respondent for access (courtesy of the case company).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining trust</td>
<td>Honest introduction as hotel employee and student of Hanken. Being frank about research intentions. Confidentiality is guaranteed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social interaction</td>
<td>Suit is worn and behaviour is polite and respectful. Interviews conducted in a professional manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate language</td>
<td>Interview language is the respondent’s choice. Professional manner in discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice of location</td>
<td>Separate room in hotel meeting space: either the boardroom or sauna cabinet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recording interviews</td>
<td>Interviews are recorded, transcribed and reviewed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Naturally reaching the final interview guide was a long process involving thorough consideration of questions and several drafts before arriving at the final version. The interview is pretested on 2 respondents outside the sample just to get a feel for timeliness and whether the questions are comprehensible. Based on the run-throughs of these two interviews a final draft is reached. However, in the first real interview situation with respondent 1, it became clear that this interview guide should truly be used as a check-list instead of a step by step interview guide. Therefore, even though the interview guide and its contents did not change, the emphasis is definitely on the interview processes being as much of a discussion as possible. During interviews a free discussion is encouraged and the interview-guide is used as a check-list. Once a topic is covered the question is ticked off the list. If any of the parts are not covered then this is returned to by the interviewer by asking questions related to the topic in the interview guide.

4.3.3 Data Collection Design

Throughout the interview an interview guide is used as an outline by the interviewer. The interview guide can be viewed in its entirety in Appendix 1. As mentioned, the main function of the interview guide is to list the questions that need to be addressed throughout the interview. (Patton 2002: 343-4) Probing and follow up questions will be used in the interview to clarify questions to the respondent as well as to get more insight into the response. The intention of the conversational probes is also to keep the interview situation as natural as possible and therefore probes can be altered according to the specific needs of each respondent. (Patton 2002: 372-4; Saunders et al 2009: 324) Questions are also worded in a specific manner in the interview guide, but adapted personally according to each respondent. The interview guide also includes possible comments by the interviewer, in
order to guide respondents through the interview process and prepare them for each set of questions.

In the interview guide the following symbols and rules (as outlined in Table 3) are memorized and used by the interviewer to facilitate-, standardize-, and avoid confusion during the interview process. Comments and questions are numbered to facilitate the interview process and referencing during analysis.

Table 3: Symbols and Rules Used in the Interview Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Comment: read to the respondent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>Question: asked from the respondent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FQ</td>
<td>Follow up question to gain more information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*P</td>
<td>Probing: to be used if the respondent does not understand the question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ text ]</td>
<td>Text is not mentioned to the respondent. This text is included to help the interviewer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.4 Linking the Interview Guide to the Theoretical Framework

In this part the interview guide is deconstructed to describe how each question on its own links to the theoretical framework and aims at answering the research question (see Figure 8). The first, second and sixth parts of the interview guide are based on a positivist approach in its standardized form; asking the same information from each respondent. These parts can also be characterized as the pitch, background information, and concluding questions. The third, fourth and fifth parts take an emotionalist approach through the more open-ended questions; aimed at gathering the ‘actual findings’ of the study. The extent of discussion based on follow up questions and probes depends on each specific interview situation. (Silverman 2006: 117-28)

Because the model for promise management in the extended consumption process (Figure 7) takes into account both pre- and post-consumption stages as well as the during consumption stage, the wording and design of the interview guide questions is a daunting task. Although it is likely for some to suggest discussing questions in parts two, three and four on separate occasions would be preferable, doing so in practice would be nearly impossible. Instead, respondents have been chosen so that they are capable of responding to all questions from their personal experience. As Patton (2002: 351) suggests, questions
are asked according to different time frames instead. The six different parts of the interview guide all have their specific purpose in regards to the aim of the study, but the analysis that follows is mainly based on questions in parts 3, 4 and 5. The interview guide’s different parts, as summarized in Figure 8, are discussed next.

**PART 1: PITCH**

**PART 2: BACKGROUND QUESTIONS**

**PART 3: PRE-CONSUMPTION QUESTIONS**

**PART 4: DURING CONSUMPTION QUESTIONS**

**PART 5: POST-CONSUMPTION QUESTIONS**

**PART 6: FINAL COMMENTS**

*Figure 8: Interview Guide Structure*

The introductory first part is used to approach potential respondents in an open manner in the lobby area of the hotel. This is also referred to as the pitch, where the idea of being a respondent is sold to the guest. The idea is to raise interest and make the respondent feel important at the same time as being truthful to the intentions of the interview. Each situation is therefore customized according to what is deemed necessary by the interviewer in that specific interview situation.

The second part (questions 1 – 5) asks questions of a general nature which determine the type of hotel guest that is being interviewed and their background. The answers expected here are short and concise. More importantly, in this part it is determined whether the respondent can be included in the study depending on the answer to question 4. In order to be able to answer part 4 questions the guest must have stayed at the hotel before.
The third part (questions 6 – 7) is concerned with the pre-consumption stage of the extended consumption process. These are questions pertaining to before the guest has arrived at the hotel. Questions here are in the past tense.

The fourth part’s questions (questions 8 – 11) are all regarding the during consumption stage: when the guest is checked-in at the hotel. Questions here are both in the past- and present tense.

The questions of the fifth part (questions 12 – 14) refer to the time after check-out. These questions are shaped in a way that takes into consideration previous stays as well as future wishes.

The final question (question 15) in part six is an important conclusion which allows the respondent to have the final word. Not only does this ensure that details do not get left out because of an abrupt ending, but creates an opportunity to discover something the researcher has not even thought of. (Patton 2002: 379)

4.3.5 Interview and Respondent Information

Interviews were conducted on five separate days between the 23\textsuperscript{rd} of March and 6\textsuperscript{th} of April 2010. Out of the 37 approaches, a total of 12 people agreed to be interviewed resulting in a response rate of roughly 32 \%. The 25 people who declined generally cited prior engagements as the reason, although one person declined without even listening to the pitch. Approaching possible respondents with the pitch (part 1 of the interview guide) and interviewing together came to a total of 12 hours and 15 minutes over 5 days. Day two was the longest day with four hours for approaches and interviews, while during the other four days approximately two hours was spent at the hotel per day. The amount of people approached varied from day to day, ranging from a minimum of four approaches on day two to a maximum of 12 on the third day. Interview proceedings are summarized in Table 4 and can be viewed in full in Appendix 2.
Table 4: Summary of Interview Proceedings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Approaches</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Time Spent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All approaches followed the pitch as described in the interview guide and were done in the hotel lobby. However, some respondents agreed to being interviewed after less persuasion than others (R2; R3; R8; R11). In a couple of cases it was enough to understand that a student was conducting a study and the respondent already agreed to be interviewed (R3). For others it helped to hear the promise of a free drink after the interview (10). Either way, all aspects of the pitch were included either before or after consent was given to make sure all respondents had the same background information regarding the study. All interviews were conducted in the Sauna Cabinet, one of the hotels meeting spaces. During the first interview it became obvious that asking questions exactly like stated in the interview guide was difficult and disturbed the intended natural responses. Therefore, interviews were conducted as discussions, using the interview guide as a check-list where topics were ‘checked off” the list after being discussed.

Six of the respondents were interviewed in Finnish and the other six in English, even though the second half included two Swedish respondents. In these two cases the discussion started in English and respecting the respondents wishes the language was not changed. Six of the respondents are Finnish and two are Swedish. The Netherlands, United States, England, and Brazil are represented by one respondent each. The shortest interview lasted only 7 minutes (R10), where the respondent unfortunately did not have much to say. In comparison the longest interview took 22 minutes (R1) during which the same topics were covered. All respondents were return guests, ranging from one respondent that had only visited the hotel once before (R4) to others that regularly stayed three times a week (R8; R11). In Table 5 information on respondents is summarized.
### Table 5: Summary of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent code</th>
<th>Travel reason</th>
<th>Nights/ year at case company</th>
<th>Priority member</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Language of interview</th>
<th>Interview duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R1</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>22 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>8 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>14 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R4</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>12 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R5</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>18 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R6</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R7</td>
<td>Bus/Leis</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>16 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R8</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>8 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R9</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R10</td>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>7 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R11</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>11 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R12</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>9 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For a full list of respondent information as well as all interview proceedings including approaches and respondents please see Appendix 2. To ensure flow in data presentation and analysis quotes have been fitted, naturally keeping in mind the original message of the respondent. This has been necessary mostly in the case of translating Finnish quotes to English where the exact word order could sometimes not be preserved.

### 4.4 Data Analysis Method

To begin with all the interview material is transcribed to facilitate analysis of the data. Qualitative analysis involves reducing massive amounts of data into a comprehensive, but at the same time compact structure (Patton 2002: 432). After transcribing the interviews from their recordings the data is thereafter analyzed in several stages; by coding the data through content analysis and processing these categories through single case analysis and cross-case analysis. Data analysis is conducted with a focus on Spiggle’s (1994) coding, categorisation, comparison, abstraction, dimensionalisation, integration, iteration and refutation. After discussing the methods of analysis, the analysis’ structure is described separately in subchapter 4.4.2 as the extensiveness of such rich material requires a painstaking analysis procedure to obtain accurate and trustworthy results.

#### 4.4.1 Content Analysis

Patton (2002: 453) describes the ability to draw conclusions from qualitative data as follows:

“...content analysis is used to refer to any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings.”
Basically the transcripts from interviews are analyzed for patterns and recurring themes. More specifically, patterns are managed by classifying or coding the information obtained in the interviews to bring forth significant patterns of information from the data. Only through careful analysis of the interview data can these patterns be discovered and coded. Coding involves categorizing data according to some more general or underlying theme. Categorizing and grouping data, and recognizing convergences and divergences, as outlined by Patton (2002: 463-6) are preparation for cross-case analysis. Spiggle (1994: 493) continues that through abstraction these categories are given meaning according to common features. Naturally, in coding data, some parts may remain unlabeled as they lack meaningful data. (Spiggle 1994: 493)

Eisenhardt (1989: 539-41) recognizes the need for both within-case data analysis and cross-case pattern analysis. Within-case analysis focuses on each case as a separate descriptive entity. The point is to bring forth unique episodes of each case before reaching conclusions or generalizations. Within-case analysis is even considered a preparation for cross-case comparison, in providing a deep knowledge of each case beforehand. Similarly, Patton (2002: 449) comments that a case record is to be kept, in which the significant information from the raw data is collected and organized, in preparation for further analysis. Searching for cross-case patterns involves looking at the data in many different ways. (Eisenhardt 1989: 539-41)

Furthermore, through dimensionalisation; categories and their conceptual constructs are further classified in exploring their dimensions. By exploring variations within constructs across cases, categories and cases are given alternative dimensions and in this way more depth. By integrating these categories a theoretical framework is constructed. Accordingly cross-case analysis allows researchers to test and go beyond the impressions caused by individual cases and find the deeper trends and meanings behind these cases. (Eisenhardt 1989: 539-41; Spiggle 1994: 493-6)

Spiggle (1994: 495-6) also mentions the importance of iteration and refutation. Iteration involves collecting data and reflecting on this frequently. By repeating the process, data collection is improved and allows freer reflection on data. Refutation is based on scrutinizing collected data, by for example distinguishing cases that negate emerging constructs. Iteration and refutation are partly carried out before, or simultaneously to data
collection. (Spiggle 1994: 495-6) Similarly, convergences in data help build a holistic picture of the process, showing clear and significant patterns hopefully emphasized by a majority of respondents. Meanwhile divergences between cases assist in discovering notable irregularities, but also help shape the groups of data according to popular and unpopular recognitions. (Patton 2002: 453; 463-6)

Patton (2002: 432-3) highlights the absence of a formula for analyzing data, however noting that guidelines and suggestions exist in abundance. In determining the substantive significance the researcher analyzing data is in the leading role. Here more than ever the preunderstanding of the researcher is vital not only in categorizing the data but through making arguments for the presented findings and conclusions. (Patton 2002: 467) The momentous part of this paper becomes evident in analysis, where the model in Figure 7 (for promise management in the extended consumption process from the customer’s point of view) is verified and integration of this suggested development in theory becomes reality (Spiggle 1994: 494).

4.4.2 Structure of Analysis

The careful and disciplined analysis of the collected data is the cornerstone of this empirical study and therefore the stages in which the analysis is completed are discussed here. This is a description of how the analysis stage by stage developed to what is presented as results in the next chapter of this empirical study. The basis for a great analysis depends on the accuracy of raw data (Patton 2002). Recording the interviews and taking notes of notable factors and gestures that cannot be recorded through audio during these interviews is therefore essential. Transcribing interviews is a necessity, but including notes in the transcriptions and transcribing while the interview situation is still fresh in mind is also beneficial. With raw data available as transcribed versions the analysis can begin.

Reviewing the transcribed versions of the interviews lets the researcher get further acquainted with the raw data. At this stage there are patterns which start evolving on a single case level as well as a cross-case level, but the urge to draw conclusions is resisted. In order to distinguish patterns in the 50+ pages of transcriptions, a printed version of the interviews is then marked by colour coding for pre-, during-, and post-consumption
behaviour, as well as making, enabling and keeping promises. The appropriate level of interaction is also written next to each occurrence for later reference.

The next step is categorizing this raw data according to different categories and to determine the stages in which promise management occurs. Pre-, during- and post-consumption stages are kept separate at this point of the analysis. The opinions and insights from the 12 interviews are categorized during this data presentation. Between these categories specific attention is paid to identifiable actions, episodes and sequences and sequential themes are suggested through abstraction. As a result the categories which are presented in Appendix 3 (subchapters of 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 in Appendix 3) are reached (such as Direct marketing, Image and Brand, Price, etc). Examples of each category are given in quotes from respondents.

Next, constructs descriptive of these categories are assembled and refined in each different stage of the extended consumption process. Furthermore, through careful analysis of the raw data, constructs and specifically their respective categories are aligned according to promise management: making, enabling and keeping promises. These constructs are also presented in Appendix 3 (subchapter 1.4 in Appendix 3).

The presentation of data in Appendix 3 follows the pre-, during- and post-consumption stages of the extended consumption process; under the same headings as data was collected in the interview guide. However, analysis of this material is thereafter conducted according to Gabbett & Hogg’s (1989: 30) suggestion that the extended consumption process is not considered as separate stages, but as one process. The stages of the extended consumption process are therefore no longer used as headings to divide the text in chapter five.

After preliminary analysis of data, analysis is shifted to the true focus of this paper: how promise management is evident throughout the extended consumption process on different levels of interaction. Subsequently, the different constructs of the extended consumption process are analyzed according to promise management by comparison and dimensionalisation across cases, without the restrictions of separate stages of the extended consumption process. Promise management is also analyzed on different levels of interaction, concentrating on connections between and among levels of interaction. Finally, value creation at the case company is also discussed on the basis of the analysis.
To summarize, the analysis begins from familiarizing with the transcribed material expertly. Thereafter categories and constructs are formed first according to the pre-, during-, and post-consumption stages. This material is included in Appendix 3. By reworking through the material time after time and shifting the focus from the stages of the extended consumption process to promise management and levels of interaction, the model in Figure 7 is tested and applied to the service process and value creation at the case company. The main analysis and results are based on promise management and the levels of interaction in the extended consumption process at the case company, which are presented in chapter five and used to refine the model on Promise Management in the Extended Consumption Process in chapter six.

4.5 Data Quality Assessment

It is impossible to follow step by step how several hours of interview tapes lead to the obtained conclusions because of the enormity of this information (Eisenhardt 1989: 539). “The credibility of qualitative methods, therefore, hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing fieldwork” (Patton 2002: 14). Traditional methods often associated with quantitative research, such as objectivity and validity, cannot be applied in the same way to qualitative research because these are normally met through large numbers of cases. Instead, the focus ought to be on credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability in order to establish trustworthiness. (Sinkovics, Penz and Pervez 2008: 691) Assessing both validity and reliability of qualitative research is concerned with the quality of the data at the same time as being largely dependent on the context at hand (Patton 2002: 542). That which in quantitative analysis can be confirmed through following distinct guidelines of statistical programs, depends solely on the skills and analytical intellect of the researcher (Patton 2002: 433). Gummesson (2000: 189) maintains that qualitative data should not be assessed according to formulas designed for quantitative data assessment. Belk & Wallendorf (1989) propose that focus should instead be on the trustworthiness of the data through evaluating credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and integrity. The trustworthiness of this study is assessed after a discussion on validity and reliability.
4.5.1 Validity and Reliability of Data

Validity is concerned with the truthfulness of each respondent. Data gathered through qualitative research is high in internal validity almost by definition. Because questions are clarified and answers probed when necessary during interviews this allows for greater depth in the respondents knowledge and experience. (Saunders et al. 2009: 327) Especially for case studies the external validity, the power to generalize, is often questioned due to the relatively ‘small’ sample size in comparison to quantitative studies. By including several respondents the representativeness of the complete case study is increased although the main intent is not simplification of a complex process. (Saunders et al. 2009: 335; Silverman 2006: 304-6) In regards to the sample size validity of qualitative data is more concerned with the richness of data (Patton 2002: 245). Internal validity is therefore of greater concern, shifting the focus to the reliability of the data through reliable, repetitive methods.

Reliability is concerned with the extent to which a study can be replicated by others so that similar conclusions are reached and therefore relies on the standardization of the study. This is closely tied to the positivist mindset and the necessity of proving reliability in qualitative studies is therefore sometimes questioned. (Silverman 2006: 46-7) It is even claimed that replication of non-standardized interviews would undermine the strength and richness of the data obtained in this way (Saunders et al. 2009: 328) However, establishing reliability is advantageous as it proves professional competence (Patton 2002: 570). Therefore, through detailed description of research methodology and carefully following the chosen plan not only is reliability established, but more importantly, credibility and trustworthiness of the study is proven.

4.5.2 Trustworthiness of Data

As mentioned previously Belk & Wallendorf (1989) propose that trustworthiness of qualitative data is dependent on credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and integrity. These topics are addressed in assessing qualitative data to compensate for problems with defining reliability and validity issues which are more common for quantitative data. This is necessary as assumptions concerning reliability and validity do not necessarily fit qualitative data. These suggestions are used as a guideline and when not followed word by word, the underlying ideology of this post-positivist approach is still
present. (Belk & Wallendorf 1989) Here the different topics are discussed in relation to this study and summarized in Table 6.

Credibility is dependent on data collection procedure and steps taken during data collection. In this study credibility is achieved through the use of an interview guide with standardized topics for discussion and a procedure which follows the same pattern in all interview cases. Through a minimum case number of 10 and conducting interviews until information saturation; a sufficient engagement is also ensured. Triangulation across respondents is used, as well as triangulation between notes from interviews and interview transcriptions. Reality is constructed from the views of many respondents as well as the interpretation of the interviewer. Furthermore, in arriving at the theoretical model, which is used as the basis for the interview, literary sources are triangulated. (Belk & Wallendorf 1989)

Transferability is closely linked to external validity in considering the ability to use the results in other contexts. Greater transferability implies greater explanatory power, but can only be proven by testing transferability; that is testing in another context. Transferability in itself is not the purpose of this study, but it is hoped that the conclusions reached here result in reflection on the extended consumption process in different contexts. However, the methods behind the study are described in detail for readers to evaluate. (Belk & Wallendorf 1989)

Dependability is difficult but not impossible to establish in qualitative data as people and context change continuously. Interpretation is supposed to be solely dependent on the instability of the social phenomenon instead of being allowed to be falsified by wrong data. For example through transcriptions of interviews the dependability of comments given by respondents can be assured. Dependability is also reached through confirming opinions during interviews and being assured that the interviewer has understood respondents and vice versa. (Belk & Wallendorf 1989)

Confirmability is concerned with authenticating respondent’s opinions as objective with respect to their own subjectivity, instead of reflecting the researcher’s views and opinions. Taking into account preunderstandings and being conscious of the fact that complete neutrality or objectivity is not possible is part of confirmability. As is the case with
dependability, confirmability is strengthened through transcriptions of interviews, leaving the possibility to the reader of forming their own (subjective) opinions based on raw data. (Belk & Wallendorf 1989)

Problems with integrity in regards to possible fabrication of data are minimized through transcribing and clarifying for the interview process in as much detail as possible. The integrity of respondents on the other hand is a more difficult matter. Through an interview guide based discussion the respondent is encouraged to tell their own story. Hopefully, together with the notion that their responses will help develop how guests are treated at the hotel in the future, and guarantees of confidentiality, sufficient reason is given for respondents to be honest. Also, as the information is not of a sensitive nature, there is no exaggerated reason to question respondent’s integrity. (Belk & Wallendorf 1989)

Table 6: Assessment of Trustworthiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of Trustworthiness</th>
<th>How to handle the issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>Following an interview guide as discussed in the methodology. Using interview transcriptions, interview notes, and several respondents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferability</td>
<td>By supplying a step by step procedure of the interview process, including the interview guide this can be evaluated by the reader. As this is a case study, it is accepted that results are mainly relevant to the case company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependability</td>
<td>Making sure that respondents understand questions and the interviewer has understood the respondent correctly. Also transcription of interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmability</td>
<td>Being aware of preunderstanding and also using the understanding of respondent’s subjectivity in their claimed objectivity during interpretation. Strengthened through transcription of interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Transcription with triangulation of interview notes. Guarantees of confidentiality and that answers will help improve the level of service.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be summarized from Table 6 it is obvious that through a step by step presentation of how methods are reached and results are obtained and presented; the reader is allowed to form their own opinion on the data and analysis. Trustworthiness is established by allowing the reader to be included in the process behind the study to the extent they wish to be involved through an elaborate and specific methodology and analysis.
5 Analysis of Collected Data

To best demonstrate the several topics discussed throughout this paper, the stages of the extended consumption process have been used to separate between those phenomena, which are generally considered occurring within one specific stage – up until this point. This has been done to easier distinguish the details of the massive process that encompasses an enormity of information and interactions. However, as Gabbott & Hogg (1998: 30) suggest service consumption should not be considered in different stages as services are simultaneously and sporadically evaluated, purchased and consumed. To free the resulting framework from the confinements of the stages in the extended consumption process, the pillars of promise management materialize as the guidelines for this discussion.

Following the presentation of data and the preliminary analysis (Appendix 3), this chapter focuses on discussing promise management in detail. Customers most definitely assess their stay after departure on a general level. “Things work fine here... basic things. I don’t really expect much else... any miracles. Mostly a place to sleep and I want to keep it that way.” (R5) Viewed as a lone comment like this one, the possible effects of interactions on the value creation process do not necessarily seem noteworthy. But when analyzing the stay based on the customer’s own words beyond this statement it becomes quite obvious that there is more to the equation than is first claimed by this customer.

The objective of this analysis is to:

- present core constructs discovered in the case study and discuss their use as resources for promise management and value creation
- confirm the free flow of promise management in the extended consumption process and discuss its relation to value creation
- discuss the existence- and sporadic nature of promises at different levels of interaction: actions, episodes, sequences, relationships
- summarize what causes satisfaction in the extended consumption process at Holiday Inn Helsinki West – Ruoholahti

In order to reach these goals, data categories and constructs are further analyzed according
to making-, enabling-, and keeping promises through Spiggle’s (1994) tools for analysis: comparison and dimensionalisation; finally integrating the obtained results with existing theory on promise management.

5.1 Constructs Based on the Case Study

Following the preliminary analysis (see Appendix 3) five major constructs are found to be representative of the twenty five categories and through abstraction these constructs receive general themes. These categories and constructs arise from this specific case study. The resulting framework of constructs at the case company is displayed in Figure 9. The significance of these constructs is that these are all areas of focus for promise management. Essentially, all three players of the promise management framework are represented in each construct: customer, company and resource (Bitner 1995; Grönroos 2007). In this case study the customer is collectively represented by 12 return customers, the company remains constant and the resources constantly change. By observing the dimensions of these constructs, that is which resources affect the balance of making-, enabling- and keeping of promises, the company can learn to have a greater effect on the customer’s value creation process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Making Promises</th>
<th>Enabling Promises</th>
<th>Keeping Promises</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Customer side uncontrollable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Employer's Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer behaviour specific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Loyalty Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opinions of Others</td>
<td></td>
<td>Convenience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer and hotel interaction specific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Disinterest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Previous Stays</td>
<td>Online Sources</td>
<td>Procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Image and Brand</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel characteristics specific</td>
<td>Direct marketing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Price</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Location</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel staff specific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff Efficiency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Automatic Recognition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personalization</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guidance and Directions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff Friendliness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trainees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special Cases</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General Assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 9: Constructs According to Promise Management*
5.1.1 Customer Side Uncontrollable Construct

The first construct reflects when the customer deems the choice of accommodation as uncontrollable, that is someone else makes the choice of accommodation for them. It could easily be construed that either the guest’s employer makes the choice or the guest does, but the truth often lies somewhere in between. “it’s one of our preferred selections...out of the Helsinki hotels...this is my favorite one out of those three.” (R8) Some still feel that this is a conscious choice, while other even choose not to make a choice even if they could: “The company I work for is right next door and it’s taken care of so that I just get a note that it’s this [hotel] and is this okay?” (R4) It is also likely that although the company does direct their employees choices in the short run, if the guest’s perceived the service as terrible these guests would probably find another hotel in the long run.

When the guest does feel that choice of accommodation is out of their control it does not mean that their overall experience and satisfaction cannot be controlled. Thus, keeping promises becomes of essence between the company and customer when considering promise management. If it truly is the employer’s choice, making and enabling promises is not important in the choice of accommodation. However, making and enabling promises becomes relevant in other categories even for these guests.

5.1.2 Customer Behaviour Specific Construct

The second construct is characterized by categories which specifically represent customer made choices in their behaviour and includes loyalty programs, opinions of others, convenience and disinterest. To begin with, loyalty programs are a choice between belonging to a loyalty program or not. The two major loyalty programs (Priority Club and Hotel Bonus Club) have their own benefits and promises made are interpreted based on the guest’s knowledge of these. Some guests pay more attention than others to the collection of loyalty points and the benefits included: “I am...a ‘loyalty card holder’ but I don’t pay much attention to any of that.” (R2) The systems behind the loyalty programs help in making promises, but also in enabling these promises to be kept and should be made simple to use in order to allow guests and company employees to get the greatest benefit out of ‘loyalty’. One respondent (R1) for example had a problem with registering a promotion which gave double Priority Club points and the hotel could not do anything about this afterwards because the rules stipulated that registration must be done by the
guest. The unfortunate result is that the hotel staff was not enabled to keep the promise, leading to a dissatisfied customer.

The opinions of others definitely assist in forming promises for the guest. Someone else’s experience is of much more value than that presented by the marketing department of the hotel. Alternatively the guest claims not to care about other people’s opinions. One guest specifically pointed out that pictures by other guests help form their opinion as this gives a more realistic state of the hotel’s facilities as well as providing more specific information the hotel does not necessarily deem relevant in their attempt to briefly squeeze in as much information as possible (R7).

Convenience and disinterest are categories that become relevant in keeping promises, similarly to the employer’s choice category. When the customer makes their choice based on convenience or simply shows minimal interest in choice of accommodation keeping promises is of utter importance as these are customers the hotel wants to transform into guests who want to return over and over again. For a customer who says “well I don’t book this one, it was booked by my employer” (R9) it should be noted that keeping promises is vital, as it is likely switching to another hotel is not a difficult choice. It is necessary to point out that a focus on convenience does not mean that a guest is automatically disinterested in their accommodation.

In the customer behaviour specific construct through promise management the company can simplify benefits and procedures of loyalty programs to maximize loyalty card holders. Similarly the simplification of programs would enable hotel staff to keep those promises that are made for loyalty card holders. The opinions of others prove a challenge for the company and only through consistent great service and high quality facilities do satisfied guests express their satisfied opinions to other guests. Customers showing disinterest and convenience traits not only need promises to be kept, but promises need to be explicitly made to these customers who do not necessarily seek promises themselves. For example, the possibility of checking out while eating breakfast should be told about as otherwise the guest might have no idea that such a possibility exists.
5.1.3 Customer and Hotel Interaction Specific Construct

The customer and hotel interaction specific construct holds those categories which are formed by an input from both customer and hotel; an interaction or relationship at some level. Like opinions of others in the previous construct, previous stays, online sources, and image and brand help make promises to the guest. What differentiates these categories from the opinions of others category in the previous construct is that the hotel is not in control of other’s opinions, while previous stays, online sources, and image and brand are controlled by the hotel to some extent. The customer still adds their own interpretation to the equation depending on their subjective evaluations of each of these sources. Similarly, procedure is dependent on choices by the customer and hotel staff.

Previous stays have a significant effect for most guests in making promises for current and future stays. “Previous experience is obviously also a determinant and what has happened [previously] and not just now.” (R4) When deriving from what the guest is used to based on previous stays, promises of what to expect are partly rewritten, but the overall satisfaction is slowly formed over the relationship. By keeping the level of service at the same (high) level for customers, promises made by previous stays will be met by promises kept during future stays.

Online sources include those on hotel- and travel agent websites, as well as any other site where the hotel is discussed. “Usually when I travel I look for references online and I like when the hotel sites have pictures of the rooms and...of the facilities.” (R7) Because customers use online sources to book rooms and search for alternatives, promises are made by what is presented here. These sources should therefore reflect reality as closely as possible so expectations are met and satisfaction ensues. Similarly image and brand make promises and should also reflect reality. “Some names tempt you obviously and...you choose where you stay accordingly. In that way the brand affects [your choice].” (R5) Uniformity of the brand across a chain of hotels as is the case for Holiday Inn is crucial as the brand and image are a major source for promises.

Following or refraining from dictated procedure depends very much on the staff member, guest, and situation. Making a booking, checking-in or checking-out all follow certain steps and promises are made, enabled and kept accordingly. Guests differ in their needs
and wants, and for some skipping procedure in fact creates more value as this saves time for them. However, if procedure is followed promises reflect what is deemed necessary and relevant information by the hotel to be explained to guests. In this way promise management is supported by procedure.

Regarding customer and hotel interaction specific categories several problems persist. Customer input is becoming more and more relevant in online sources and opinions of other guests are therefore becoming more important in shaping promises. Also with middlemen like travel agencies trying to make a sale, promises they make might in fact not reflect reality at the hotel. The image and brand is also much more dependent on interactions between the hotel, guests, and other consumers. When all of this is spread out over multiple media (especially in the online world) it becomes more difficult to control, so the company should encourage discussion on sources they control such as their own website.

### 5.1.4 Hotel Characteristic Specific Construct

The hotel characteristic specific construct includes direct marketing, price, location, services and facilities. How these characteristics are portrayed to the customer is largely dependent on the hotel and its staff, but still each category is interpreted by each individual customer in a subjective way. All categories represent promises to the guest, but only services and facilities help enable promises to be kept and also keep promises to guests.

Direct marketing is obviously linked to image and brand issues from the previous construct, in making those promises that are fed to consumers through different media. The effect of these promises expressed in different media is mostly to lure new guests, as returning guests are often quite set in their routines. R10 for example only visits the case company 3 times a year, and admits “*usually some good offer and the fact that we are here near the centre*” is what lures this guest in. For business guests price does not necessarily play an important role, as business hotels are generally priced similarly, and payment is taken care of by the employer. Still price does have a factor in forming an overall opinion of the stay: “*Well I think this hotel offers great rooms at a good price.*” (R8) Consumers associate a certain price with a level of quality, but how this changes in regards to what promise is made, especially with an international range of guests, is very subjective. Corporate rates are controlled through sales teams to best suit each company’s needs.
Location is another category, which perhaps signifies an unconscious promise more than it
does an explicit one: location is tied to the surroundings. On the case study level location is
not something that can be tampered with to better suit more guests, but promises relating to
the location can be made to attract guests.

The hotel makes promises of services which it provides that are often based on or around
the facilities of the hotel. Facilities, including a room with a bed in its simplicity, are what
some guests are after. For others, the hotel represents a “home away from home” (R8) and
therefore facilities and services must enable and keep promises that guests interpret as
representative of their home away from home. It is not enough for facilities and services to
be available, but a guest should be engaged to take maximum benefit of what is available.
Therefore services, such as checking-out at breakfast must be advertised to guests and
using provided services and facilities needs to be easy to do.

Direct marketing, price and location only make promises to guests based on the
characteristics and resources of the hotel. Most of these are factors that the hotel does not
tailor to suit different guests, but a segment of customers is chosen and price, location and
marketing is done accordingly. For example the choice might be to target business
travellers, but still the occasional tourist uses the hotel. Facilities and services are naturally
planned for the same audience, but do not necessarily exclude guests with other travel
purposes. In fact, facilities and services not only make-, but enable- and keep promises as
well. Furthermore, while the facilities, direct marketing, price and location stay the same,
through tailoring services to better suit different kinds of guests when necessary the group
of potential customers is expanded.

5.1.5 Hotel Staff Specific Construct

The hotel staff specific construct is the most extensive one, which naturally is a
consequence of services being largely dependent on how customers are treated by
employees. The single biggest resource of the hotel in ensuring the satisfaction of guests is
its employees. Alongside facilities and services from the previous construct, employees are
the greatest differentiator from the competition in aligning keeping promises with making
promises through enabling promises. In fact, most of the hotel staff specific categories are
relevant in making-, enabling- and keeping- promises, because hotel staff is involved
throughout the extended consumption process. Guests can be very different in their needs
and wishes, where some require minimum interactions “when I arrive I don’t need to fill in anything in detail. Everything is ready and they say ‘hi and welcome’ and I get the key and go up to my room.” (R5) as opposed to others who enjoy more extensive discussions: “even if you meet them in town...in a store somewhere they’ll say hi. May even exchange a few words...discuss something else than just the normal ‘welcome’” (R11) It is the hotels employees who work each situation to maximize individual guest’s satisfaction and therefore their experienced value.

The importance of staff efficiency and staff friendliness is understandably high in making-, enabling-, and keeping promises, because hotel and guest interactions happen through employees. Some claim that friendliness is key: “I mean in general, people [staff] are extremely friendly...they are genuinely trying to make you feel good during your stay.” (R1) More practical customers focus on the importance of efficiency: “you ask them and they do it. That’s how it’s supposed to be.” (R2) Efficiency is characterized by speed and smoothness, which is enabled by knowing the profession well as one guest stated (R4). More likely for promise management it is the combination of efficiency in a friendly manner that creates most value: “I think the standards are generally high here...Good service...Nice staff. So expectations are high here, but so far they have been met every time.” (R11) Essentially staff is more approachable if they are friendly and serving customers efficiently is necessary to conform to the large number of customers.

A balance is needed between preparation and flexibility that reflects the differing needs of individual guests. Shortening procedures is possible by preparing for guests according to information in their profiles, thus enabling for more efficient and personalized service. For example room and pillow preferences, registration card information, payment type, etc. can all be prepared for, to the point where all the guest needs to do is sign their name. Return guests also expect this: “when I get here I expect things to be prepared when I come in.” (R1) Enabling this promise requires a database of guest profiles and keeping this promise requires employees to be able to use it. Not only do guest expect preparation, but preparation also allows for flexibility. Similarly, flexibility is shown by staff not only in preparation, but in handling unexpected situations. For example, “Because they changed my travel schedules and everything else...so when I got here...I didn’t have a voucher, but that was no problem.” (R7) Flexibility is a major enabler of keeping promises of excellent service, however a balance is needed. When assumptions are made, for example that all
return guests want to be rushed through check-in, details might be left out: “They didn’t ask me if I was okay with the room that [they chose]...So when I came up I saw it was close to the elevator.” (R9) Instead personalized service is often required.

Unlike databases with guest information, hotel employees are able to be flexible and give special recognition to guests that they know. The distinction between recognition and automatic recognition comes from guests who are recognized once they give their name to staff, based on their profile in the database, and those guests staff recognize automatically because they are regular guests. Basically recognition means that each guest is noticed as an individual: “They greet you immediately and get down to business right away...They don’t like leave the customer waiting for no apparent reason.” (R10) Naturally the benefits of a database with guest profiles is a great tool for giving personal service, but the benefit of automatic recognition is even greater as service is even more personal then: “they recognize me so when it’s someone you know then you don’t have to go through the whole litany of guaranteeing, and how, and why, and so on.” (R5) Not surprisingly, personalization goes hand in hand with recognition: “The fact that they recognize me from my name...Let’s call it personal service...that you recognize the guy and that’s obviously nice.” (R5) Personalization does not require that the customer is known personally, each specific guest can be given personalized service because of the database of guest profiles, and thus promises can be made, enabled, and kept on a personal level.

Not all interactions need to be between hotel employees and guests, and because this would require a huge amount of employees this is not even a valid option. “if there’s a big line they don’t have time to ask you many questions but if there’s not, then I think they should...talk to you a bit about the facilities of the hotel.” (R9) Instead, guidance and directions are provided to make promises and enable promises to be kept by the guests themselves. Information on facilities and services can be provided to the guests in the room, elevators, or common areas, but the option of getting information straight from reception staff should always be provided, and if possible suggested to guests.

While other categories presented in the hotel staff specific construct are examples of resources for promise management, trainees are the future employees of a company and resources under construction. “These trainees can usually cause the level of service to be a bit worse...But you do understand that.” (R5) For a company working by promise
management the obvious move should be to let trainees observe and practice under supervision, but instead the reality is that trainees are often relied on to do the jobs of fully trained employees. Value creation is therefore even hindered by mistakes and second-rate service as the making-, enabling-, and keeping of promises cannot necessarily be done by trainees.

Special cases, and general assessment categories are both very relevant for making-, enabling- and keeping promises. The general assessment of a hotel visit, that is the actions and episodes that form the sequence of the extended consumption process, has an end result: “you learn to expect certain behaviour after a few times [at the hotel].” (R4) Eventually these assessments will become the previous stays that make promises for future stays. Special cases are a major determinant in relation to promise management’s power for value creation. Generally, these are make or break situations where guests are either extremely disappointed or very satisfied, depending on the outcome. “So this is the little conveniences that they provide to you after you’ve left the hotel are really nice. I mean because if you’re staying at the hotel you’re travelling and if you’re travelling you’re being inconvenienced anyways.” (R7) In fact, no matter how small the gesture, the meaning of keeping this promise might be enormous to the guest and this is where promise management is truly benefitted from; the constant keeping of made promises through enabling these to be kept.

With the end result of maximizing the customer’s value creation in mind, it is truly the hotel staff specific construct, where the greatest differentiation can be made. The other four constructs and their categories are all affected by promise management that falls under the categories of this final construct to some extent, because essentially it is hotel staff that make-, enable-, and keep promises. Either way, all five constructs require- and present new opportunities for promise management as is discussed in detail in the following subchapter.

5.2 Promise Management for Value Creation

Throughout the extended consumption process promises are made-, enabled-, and kept. According to Grönroos (2007) and Bitner (1995) promises are made through external marketing, enabled through internal marketing, and kept through interactive marketing (see Figure 3). All three aspects of promise management are required for a company to best support customer’s value creation. Although the focus is inevitably on making- and
keeping promises as this is where the company and customer interact, the less visible enabling of promises is crucial in the equation.

5.2.1 Making Promises

According to Bitner (1995) and Grönroos (2007) promises are made through external marketing; from the company to its customers. External marketing through traditional marketing activities, interactions and communication between involved parties, the facilities and their characteristics, and the service process itself is supported by the case study. These groupings all fall under the constructs derived from the case study. In addition to these groupings, results from the case study suggest that certain aspects of these constructs demonstrate greater influence on making promises. The only construct not involved in making promises is the customer side uncontrollable construct. Customer behaviour specific, customer and hotel interaction specific, hotel characteristic specific, and hotel staff specific constructs are all involved in making promises.

Making promises is obvious throughout the extended consumption process. Promises are made explicitly and in other cases promises are only implied. In this sense, ‘making’ promises is perhaps misleading in that promises do not need to be explicitly made. For example concerning the hotel staff specific construct: “from the start you are expecting friendliness from the staff. You know, small things like a smile and (...) greeting... To make you feel welcome” (R3) Here the promise of a friendly staff is expected without the promise being explicitly stated anywhere. Promises of certain behaviour can be claimed to be dependent of human nature, but certainly can be assumed to be characteristic of a company in the service industry: customers expect polite and friendly service.

Promises are made from the hotel staff specific construct through for example recognition, automatic recognition and personalization. “...When I arrive I don’t need to fill in anything in detail. Everything is ready...” (R5) Through being recognized guests interpret a promise of much greater freedom and in fact are told this often explicitly by staff with complimentary late check-outs and other benefits. “Usually I go straight to the office and come back during lunch, well...after lunch...and check-out then.” (R5) On the other hand a guest who is obviously not known, experienced a rather upsetting situation: “So I’ve had problems in other places before, about check-out time and being late fifteen minutes and...they charge me full rate again.” (R7) Here reception staff has followed procedure, to
the dismay of the customer who surely felt being fifteen minutes late would be acceptable because previously staff had been flexible in this sense. The inability of staff to show flexibility or to see this as a special case with potential for making a promise of great, customer oriented service for future visits is detrimental to the satisfaction of the customer.

Regardless of whether promises are explicit or implicit, a promise made according to the customer is something that is used in evaluating satisfaction and has an effect on value creation. Ojasalo’s (2001) discussion on fuzzy-, implicit-, and unrealistic expectations is therefore also relevant in this discussion on making promises. Promises are often fuzzy, implicit, and unrealistic and these need to be turned precise, explicit and realistic to the hotel and its staff’s best ability. For example, one guest noted taking care of a larger group was made possible: “last time, we changed things around a little bit and so I’ve called many times on the way and everything has been taken care of fine, so I have no complaints.” (R6) Although group bookings should be prepared days in advance, minor changes are sometimes needed, but since groups are taken care of by the booking department the staff needed to make these changes is not always present. The customer, however has a fuzzy expectation that check-in will work without a problem, regardless of any extra, last-minute work changes, simply because they have a booking for several people. A simple promise of a booking makes more promises; regarding how changes can be made, what kind of rooms can be upgraded to, what extra services the hotel staff can provide, etc.

Certain promises are however made explicitly, but it is important to remember that different customers still interpret these promises in a subjective way. Specifically the hotel characteristics specific construct including price, location, services, and facilities are all explicitly stated, that is a promise is made to the customer on all of these categories. Still, the idea of price and what promises it stands for may differ completely when asking two (or more) guests. “Well I think this hotel offers great rooms at a good price.” (R8) compared to “If the service is good...If the price is good.” (R9) While the first guest is likely to evaluate the facilities, the second is probably going to evaluate reception staff. Certainly regarding value creation, these guests have different needs in their value creation processes. Yet it is likely that neither guest will base their evaluation entirely on one aspect.
More importantly, promises are interpreted subjectively according to the particulars of each situation. Promises also change throughout the process, as new information is digested. As such, promise management is not only about making promises but the changes in existing promises. The customer and hotel interaction specific construct similarly to the customer behaviour specific construct include categories that are very subjective in the promises they make. Opinions of others, previous stays, online sources, and procedure for example can create very fuzzy and unrealistic promises, because they are greatly dependent on individual guest’s interpretations. “Usually when I travel I look for references online and I like when the hotel sites have pictures of the rooms and then they have pictures of the facilities.” (R7) Brand and image promises do not necessarily have to be made on the level of specific hotels: “most places I visit are Holiday Inns.” (R3), which implies that the guest interprets promises on the brand level. Especially during interactions with reception staff, guests play a great part in choosing the level to which reception staff is allowed to be involved, increasing or decreasing the window of opportunity for hotel staff to make (and keep) promises.

Making promises on the basis of customer and hotel interaction specific, hotel staff specific, and hotel characteristic specific constructs is how a company can truly stand out in comparison to the competition. This does not mean that customer behaviour specific and customer and hotel interaction specific constructs should be ignored, but that these constructs require more work as they are not directly influenced by the company. Therefore, in order to make precise, explicit, and realistic promises the company must focus on making promises that enable value creation with the customer. For return customers this means promise making should be done together by the company and customer. By striving for personalizing each promise according to individual guest’s needs gives the company a possibility to enter the customer’s value creation process at the earliest stage possible. Simply put, if one stay has been exceptionally good, the guest expects the next stay to be of similar quality, thus previous stays have a definite effect on making promises for future stays.

5.2.2 Enabling Promises

Enabling promises is done through internal marketing; promise management where the company must first sell their idea to the company’s own employees. To enable promises employees need skills, abilities, tools, and motivation, which are provided through internal
marketing (Bitner 1995; Grönroos 2007). Enabling promises happens between the company and the employees of the company as the model presented in Figure 3 shows (from a company perspective). Conversely the empirical part of this paper rests on 12 guests of the case company and understanding the enablement of promises is therefore done through an intermediary. Thus the comprehensive coverage of enabling promises at the case company can be questioned and to better understand the enablement of promises, the company perspective should be pursued in a different study. However, through the constructs discovered in the case study from the customer’s point of view as suggested by Figure 7, the enablement of promises is seen in practice and to a certain extent enabling promises can be derived from staff and customer interactions to see where value is created.

An example can be given that depends partly on customer and hotel interaction specific- and hotel staff specific constructs in that it requires following booking procedure as well as preparation in a functioning booking system. “The room was reserved so they was expecting me...the hotel was paid for before I came here so that process was taken through quite...smoothly” (R3). When the customer has paid in advance, it means that because payment is sorted by the hotel and the payer before the guest arrives, check-in and check-out procedures can be completed much faster. The possibility for advance payments enables promises of a certain room and smooth and efficient check-in to be kept. For some customers value creation is largely dependent on efficiency: “They are just very efficient...Standard rooms and standard greetings....Things work in a business hotel.” (R2) Also with the magnitude of bookings, not all can be entered by the reception staff present at the hotel. Instead, many different types of booking systems are heavily relied on.

Enabling promises is not always directly dependent on staff actions or failures in computerized systems. A guest who knew of a double-points promotion did not make his booking himself: “somebody in my office is making my reservations and I’m not telling them every time can you please add this promotional code to it.” (R1) This is an example from the customer behaviour specific construct, because enablement of keeping the double-points promise would have required whoever made the booking to enter the promotional code. A promise was made to the customer through external marketing, but because of reason out of the hotels control the promise was not kept. The problem persisted because reception staff could not add award the points afterwards as the loyalty program database is not controlled by reception staff. Naturally if staff would have pursued the
issue with IHG to enable the promise to be kept, the guest would likely have been satisfied, through the hotel staff specific construct.

The hotel staff specific construct signifies one crucial element in the enabling of promises throughout the construct. Hotel staff needs skills, abilities, and motivation so that promises can be made and kept. What this calls for is a balance in training that teaches staff the skills and abilities necessary for the job at the same time as motivating them with challenging work tasks. Hotel staff needs to enjoy their work so that efficiency and friendliness shine through “when the receptionist...doesn’t just follow the clock...‘if only the minutes just went by and I could go home.’” (R4) Notably, even with skills, abilities, and motivation; flexibility, recognition, efficiency, personalization, and friendliness would not be possible without up-to-date tools (booking systems, databases, etc.) that function properly. Unfortunately as one guest pointed out “people book through the internet and...the booking can disappear somewhere in cyberspace.” (R6) Even (or especially, depending on who is asked) computerized systems make mistakes, the error of which should be minimized to maximize value creation.

Comparable to the importance of a friendly and efficient staff, services and facilities must hold up to the promise that is made or keeping promises is not possible. “There’s such a small garage and it’s always like, is there space?...and they can’t tell you if there’s space” (R4) To maximize value creation, facilities and services must satisfy the subjective interpretations of ‘gym’, ‘sauna’, and ‘garage’ of different guests. The hotel characteristics specific construct is met by the hotel staff specific construct in the need for clear guidance and directions for the use of services and facilities. “So I put on all my gym clothes and it’s [the directions for the gym] there in the elevator.” (R7) Similar to the gym, guests need to be told about the sauna, smoking room, room service, breakfast check-out, etc.

Enabling promises is crucial in bridging making promises with keeping promises so that value can be created. When enabling promises is done, the simplest tasks work: “ordering a taxi is fine. It always goes quickly. They know if you ask for a specific type of restaurant they know where to send you.” (R1) However, when such tasks need to be repeated efficiently for hundreds of guests this requires enabling promises through skills, abilities, tools, and motivation. Ultimately only by enabling promises throughout the extended
consumption process results are achieved in keeping promises: “The staff here is willing to serve and always prepared. There isn’t much the staff here couldn’t do.” (R5)

5.2.3 Keeping Promises
Interactive marketing is where expectations are fulfilled; that is promises are kept. The end goal of interactions between customers and company employees and technology is to maximize the customer’s value creation process. Unlike Grönroos (2007) claims, keeping promises is done through other parts than just the ‘moments of truth’ of during consumption. The main possibilities to effect the customer’s value creation process comes from the hotel characteristic specific- and hotel staff specific constructs. Procedure from the customer and hotel interaction specific construct also affects keeping promises. Convenience and disinterest in the customer behaviour specific construct and employer’s choice in the customer side uncontrollable construct on the other hand are areas that a company can try to affect in the long run by keeping promises.

In the hotel characteristic specific construct facilities and services help keep promises. The availability of rooms, executive rooms, international newspapers, a business centre, free internet, a gym, sauna, and a possibility for breakfast check-out are all facilities and services that keep promises for guests. Subjectively each guest considers whether they need any, some, or all of these parts for their value creation. The promise might not be necessary if the guest never uses the service or facility. Comments like: “They have a storage room...Because sometimes I check-out at noon but...I don’t want to be walking around with my luggage” (R7) or “It’s been too bad...when the internet doesn’t work.” (R5) respectively signify promises being kept and not being kept. When a promise is kept the guest is satisfied, but when internet fails this is alarming to the guests of a business hotel. Value creation depends on the facilities and services being able to keep promises.

It is largely up to the hotel staff to keep promises as suggested by the hotel staff specific construct; for example flexibility, recognition, personalization, and friendliness all help in keeping promises. For example: “They greet you immediately and...get down to business right away and that is an important thing.” (R10) The specific promise at hand, like checking-in the person when kept in a timely and friendly manner, not only keeps this promise on the action level, but also keeps the promise on the sequence level by ensuring
an overall satisfying stay. The key word in staff behaviour is definitely consistency in order to ensure maximum value creation.

Another example from the hotel staff specific construct shows how a special case is turned to satisfaction, thus ensuring value creation, through automatic recognition and flexibility.

“Well actually it once happened to me that... I had already made it to the airport and had been there for a while already when I realized that ‘oh my god’ (hah) I had taken a chocolate bar from the minibar and I forgot to say this. So I called immediately....But they took it really well over here... ‘Don’t worry, thank you for calling and it’s fine like this.’” (R11 translated from Finnish)

The check-out procedure has all of a sudden received another chapter, and through staying customer oriented instead of keeping the promise of following procedure, satisfaction ensues. Procedure from the customer and hotel interaction specific construct therefore does not always need to be kept. Normal procedure would have required charging the chocolate from the customer’s credit card, but instead the making of- and enablement of promises take a significant role in making a new promise. Promise management is not always about keeping promises that are made explicitly, but about long term customer orientation.

Through keeping promises the hotel can hopefully persuade guests to change disinterest into interest and convenience to mean guests always choose this specific hotel. Thus the customer behaviour specific construct provides an opportunity to change the customer’s habits. Similarly, in the customer side uncontrollable construct, if satisfaction is high enough, it is likely that the employer’s choice will be affected by those wanting to return to this hotel. This is necessary because many choose by lowest price in the general area for example: “usually some good offer and the fact that we are here near the centre.” (R10)

By enticing seemingly heedless guests through promise management, these difficult to control customers may in fact be willing to allow the company to be more involved in their value creation process in the future.

The customer’s value creation process needs to be the focus of any company pursuing promise management. This does not necessarily mean giving out free chocolate, but playing the situation at hand with the promise management trinity (customer, company, and employee) relationship in mind. In the above situation had reception staff charged the € 1.50 chocolate, this would have taken much time from both parties as it would have been
done over the phone. Instead, knowing that this would give value to the customer, a returning customer, the hotel forfeited the € 1.50 for future profits from numerous stays.

5.2.4 Argumentation for a Focus on Promise Management

The purpose of this discussion on promise management has been to confirm the free flow of promise management in the extended consumption process. What this means is that the stages of the extended consumption process function only as indicators of what should happen pre-, during-, and post-consumption. In reality actions, episodes and sequences do not necessarily occur as suggested by these stages as individuals differ greatly. Promises are made, enabled, and kept through these actions, episodes, and sequences. Therefore a company’s focus should be on promise management in order to tackle specific promises, whether explicitly made or implicitly interpreted, to observe how these promises are made, enabled, and kept in order to fine tune value creation.

The extended consumption process’ stages become partly irrelevant in promise management, because promises are often made simultaneously to consumption. Thus dividing up making-, enabling-, and keeping promises according to different stages does not necessarily make sense. Each guest evaluates subjectively which promises they want to have made to them, based on the available services and facilities. Zeithaml et al. (2006), Gabbott & Hogg (1998), and Hoffman & Bateson (1997) all similarly argue for risk reduction through subjective evaluation of alternatives. Essentially this means making and keeping promises on the basis of peer’s opinions, image and brand, hotel staff, online sources, etc as supported by the case study.

Although services and facilities hold promises on their own, the promise of a certain service or facility is made real only when the guest needs them to be made. For example, one guest might want to try out the breakfast check-out. “In my opinion this works better now again that you can check-out while eating...breakfast.” (R11) When a guest chooses to check-out during breakfast for example, a promise is made that this is possible, enabled through the breakfast check-out option, and then kept during the check-out procedure. If the guest does not want to check-out during breakfast, but instead the night before: “in other chains I can check-out in the evening...and I don’t have to stand in line.” (R1) the potential promise of breakfast check-out is irrelevant to them.
Making promises does sometimes follow certain patterns; similarly to the stages outlined by Lovelock et al. (1999) in their Purchase Process for Services model (see Figure 6). For example, need recognition is naturally done pre-consumption, but sometimes needs are noticed during consumption or even post-consumption. As discovered in the case study return guests bypass the information search and exploring alternatives stages: “...it’s difficult to imagine going somewhere else. Here I’m recognized and I know the people here.” (R5). Some promises are made pre-consumption, others during consumption, and some even in the post-consumption stage as shown by the chocolate example (R11). As suggested by Calonius (2006) and confirmed in the case study; promises are made and possibly altered throughout the extended consumption process. The uniqueness of expectations as suggested by Ojasalo (2001), Zeithaml et al. (2006), and Gabbott & Hogg (1989) is also confirmed in the need to personalize the making of promises.

Promises need to be enabled throughout the extended consumption process. Therefore employees’ abilities, skills, tools, and motivation need to be constantly tuned to enable promises (Bitner 1995). The case study implies an understanding for the need and resulting benefits of collecting such information, but also means expectations are high because of living in an information society: “They are just very efficient...Things work in a business hotel.” (R2) Employees supporting reception staff by for example taking payment in advance are critical in enabling promise management as proposed by Gabbott & Hogg (1998). As suggested by Grönroos (2009): databases on customer information, company internal information, and sufficient technology are needed to enable promises. There is no need to separate according to different stages of the extended consumption process, instead the focus should be on specific actions, episodes, or sequences and how promises are enabled in these specific interactions.

Promises are kept mostly during consumption, when guests are staying at the hotel, although keeping promises is not only restricted to this stage. The case study confirms what Grönroos (2007) suggests: keeping promises has as much to do with making and enabling promises as it does with keeping them. Subjective interpretations of made promises has a significant impact on how the customer evaluates whether the promise is kept. Once more confirming that the stages of the extended consumption process are not necessarily relevant to promise management, the case study shows evaluating the process
(actions and episodes) and evaluating the outcome (sequences and relationships) happens randomly throughout the extended consumption process (Gabbott Hogg 1998).

The customer chooses how much it involves the company in its value creation process as suggested by Gabbott & Hogg (1998). As Gummesson (1991) further suggests, the level of involvement can be affected by a staff that is customer oriented in its actions. Thus especially the hotel staff specific construct is vital in ensuring the management of promises. Essentially, the service markets itself through the integration of customer and company processes.

As is shown throughout this extensive discussion on promise management at the case company an important implication is summarized as follows. Ultimately a guest may simplify and claim that their satisfaction is dependent on one specific thing such as a world class gym. “Maybe a bigger gym. Yeah...It sometimes gets a bit crowded.” (R8) Others may think on a broader scale and claim on more general terms that facilities are all that matter. “The staff is only the condiment. Other things, concrete things are more important.” (R4). However, the reality is that the way each specific action, episode, and sequence of the extended consumption process is dealt with in the long run is what truly creates a relationship between company and customer. The relative weight of each interaction is subjectively measured, hopefully leading to a positive evaluation based on expectations of the individual customer. Through promise management the company aims at co-creating value with the customer by assisting the customer in using the service or creating the tools for the customer’s sole creation of value (Grönroos 2009).

5.3 Promise Management on Different Levels of Interaction

It is clear that promises are made, enabled and kept on different levels of interaction, but essentially it is on the action level that promises are made, enabled, and kept. To manage promises more efficiently a company should identify, which levels of interaction are decisive in the relationship. Because actions form episodes, episodes form sequences, and sequences form relationships; the simplest action has an effect on the relationship level as discussed by Holmlund (2004). This collective and overlapping effect of interactions is also characterized by sporadic and intermittent promise management in these actions, episodes, sequences and relationships. Most comments related to the action or episode levels of interactions and were evident in the hotel staff specific construct. Respondents
also discussed interactions in hotel characteristic specific- or customer and hotel interaction specific constructs, implying an effect on customer behaviour specific- or customer side uncontrollable constructs.

For example: “Every time you have those...marketing campaigns that you sign up for...2000 points I never get those...Somebody in my office is making my reservations and I’m not telling them every time can you please add this promotional code to it.” (R1). Here the hotel has promised extra points for a loyalty program that the customer has chosen to have. But the customer does not fulfil their part of the deal by registering these points. The customer is not enabling the promise to be made by neglecting the action of registering the points. This has a profound effect on the customer’s satisfaction throughout the sequences of their stay because this is always in the back of their minds. As the customer later suggests, there is no need for the hotel not to perform this action on the behalf of the customer: “I would expect that to be done automatically.” (R1) In fact it should be the hotel that performs the action of registering these points while a campaign is active, because when the promise is made and not kept (regardless of who fails at enabling the promise) the hotel gets the blame and the customer is left unsatisfied.

Most simple actions do have a significant impact on the satisfaction of the customer throughout subsequent actions, episodes, sequences and relationships. For example: “calling the customer by name.” (R9) and “the key thing is friendliness.” (R3) Such repetitive actions as using the customer’s name and in this way regularly personalizing the service are of essence. Furthermore a friendly nature throughout all actions is naturally valued. One specific action can significantly affect a number of episodes, especially when this is before arrival. “The guest information was faxed here and everything was ready.” (R6) This action affects the booking procedure episode, the check-in episode, and through ensuring that the guest is satisfied from the start it effects every interaction during the guest’s stay in a positive manner. Through a number of successful action level interactions such as phone calls that help in preparing the guests stay, satisfaction is guaranteed. ”Last time, we changed things around a little bit and so I’ve called many times on the way and everything has been taken care of fine.” (R6) If one of these phone calls were disappointing, this would most likely effect the episode, sequence and relationship in a negative way. The collective effect of separate actions and episodes should be seen as a
possibility to enhance the experience through excellent service throughout different interactions.

Specific actions naturally affect the specific episode, but also possibly have an effect on later actions and episodes. Some respondents specifically mentioned they appreciated “that you can pay the bill in advance” (R10). The action of paying the bill and whatever occurs during that interaction effects the customer’s satisfaction of the payment episode. However, this action also affects the check-out procedure the next day as the customer can forgo regular check-out procedure and “get out fast.” (R10) These episodes then form the overall evaluation of dealing with reception, hopefully leading to satisfaction. Specific actions, episodes and sequences also carry over to subsequent sequences: “previous experience is obviously also a determinant” (R4). One sequence (one stay) affects the next sequence (the next stay). The effect of one action therefore really should not be undermined as it has a collective effect and overlaps in several episodes.

Even the actions of other customers have an effect on one specific customer’s interactions. “Often you have to wait for foreigners and they have their own dilemmas and finally they ask where Tivoli is (hah).” (R12) Primarily the staff helping one customer delays the interaction between others, but as most of the actions are visible and audible to other guests it is likely that one customer judges their experience based on how others are treated as well. Guests even feel that “if there’s a big line they don’t have time to ask you many questions.” (R9) signifying that without sufficient numbers of staff, interactions between provider and customer are restricted, that is promises are not enabled. Rushing customers and staff has a detrimental effect on actions and subsequently on episodes, sequences and relationships. In a worst case scenario the customer feels “they treat you like cattle when you come in.” (R9)

Through these examples the collective, overlapping, and subsequent effects between different actions, episodes, and sequences in a relationship is established. Making, enabling and keeping of promises is necessary through all levels of interaction, as the specific situation calls for. This making, enabling and keeping of promises occurs sporadically and intermittently without prior warning as the service process is dynamic and promise management needs to be able to respond accordingly.
For example, promise management extends to beyond the workspace, as one customer noted the importance of staff actions in the following way: “even if you meet them in town...in a store somewhere they’ll say hi. May even exchange a few words...discuss something else than just the normal ‘welcome’” (R11). In the end actions, episodes, sequences and relationships need to reflect the specific customer and their needs and wants. As another customer said: “I love it when I don’t have to talk to anyone.” (R7) completely contradicting the previous respondent’s opinion.

One customer noted the partner base that most business travellers build over time through experiencing many different hotels and hotel chains: “so it’s one of our preferred selections (...) out of the Helsinki hotels. But this one is my favourite one out of those three.” (R8) Only by managing promises in a value creating way on the action level (and higher), and therefore having an overall satisfaction higher than that of the other relationships the customer has, does one provider rise above the others.

5.4 Value Creation at Holiday Inn Helsinki West – Ruoholahti through Promise Management

The purpose of this subchapter is to summarize the extensive data analysis and on the basis of this summary discuss what causes guest satisfaction at the case company. Chapter five begins with presenting core constructs from the case study and their use as resources for promise management and value creation is discussed. Next, the free flow of promise management in the extended consumption process is confirmed and its relation to value creation is discussed. Then the existence of promises, and the intermittent and sporadic nature of promises at different levels of interaction: actions, episodes, sequences, relationships is discussed. Finally on the basis of the discussion on constructs, promise management, and levels of interactions; what causes satisfaction at Holiday Inn Helsinki West – Ruoholahti can be summarized.

Essentially, promise management in a company that is in an industry characterized by service competition, requires a balance between staff actions in keeping promises in alignment to the magnitude of promises that are made. Made promises need to be able to be kept. For example, advertising laundry service for a guest on a Friday during check-in and later telling them it is not available on Sundays likely has a huge negative effect on satisfaction. Similarly, providing free internet does not give an excuse for internet
connections not to work when the hotel is near full capacity. Because business guests also need to work at the hotel, internet being a basic tool for business travellers needs to be working constantly.

Promises also need to be kept according to what is implied by general standards, not just by what is explicitly stated on the hotel website. Many guests believe a world class hotel should have a swimming pool. Because this cannot be added to the facilities of the hotel, a partnership with a nearby health-club to provide guests with free access to the pool could be a possibility. Likewise, services such as checking-out the night before, breakfast check-out, pillow menus should be simplified and standardized in order to avoid the following situation: “I always order...pillow four...but the pillow four is not the pillow four in each Holiday Inn. So you have (hah) different definitions for pillow four at different hotels. And to be honest (...) This time for the first time I brought my own pillow. In my suitcase.” (R1)

For the case company many resources exist in the form of categories of five major constructs (see Figure 9) for integrating the customer’s value creation process with the extended consumption process. The customer side uncontrollable construct can hopefully be affected by keeping promises so that guests try to influence their employer’s choice of accommodation. In the customer behaviour specific construct convenience and disinterest are similarly attempted to be changed by keeping promises. Opinions of others also signify the making of promises, as do loyalty programs, which also enable and keep promises. In the customer and hotel interaction specific construct previous stays, online sources, image and brand, and procedure all make promises, but through following dictated procedure according to guests subjective needs, promises are also enabled and kept in this last category. In the hotel characteristics specific construct services and facilities similarly to procedure make-, enable-, and keep promises. Direct marketing, price, and location on the other hand only help in making promises. Promise management is most effective in the hotel staff specific construct where making-, keeping-, and enabling promises are relevant throughout nearly all separate categories; staff efficiency, flexibility, recognition, personalization, staff friendliness, trainees, special cases and general assessment. Preparation only enables promises to be made and kept, while automatic recognition and guidance and directions make- and enable promises.
Throughout the extended consumption process at the case company a free flow of promise management is evident. Based on the categories and constructs discovered in the case study, promises do not follow a pattern of making-, enabling-, and keeping promises. Promises are not made only in the pre-consumption stage or during consumption, but also post-consumption. Therefore, it can be said that promises are made throughout the extended consumption process. Similarly, enabling promises needs to provide the skills, abilities, tools, and motivation throughout the extended consumption process. Keeping promises is done in interactions between the guests, employees, technology, facilities, and services, again throughout the extended consumption process. A specific pattern to when promises are made, enabled, and kept does not exist, each guest experiences promises made and kept according to their own subjective interpretation. The company at hand must enable this to happen when the guest so requires.

Relationships comprise of sequences, based on episodes, based on actions. The collective, overlapping, and subsequent effects between these different interactions is evident the case study. Actions are the smallest measurement of an interaction and each action should be tackled with the resources available and visible in the constructs from the case study. These actions or promises occur sporadically and intermittently. Even one extremely positive or negative action can respectively salvage or be detrimental to the relationship.

Based on the discussion above and according to the categories and constructs discovered in the case study at Holiday Inn Helsinki West – Ruoholahti, certain traits can be said to representative of the promise management at the case company as discussed above. Regarding return guests, making promises relies heavily on previous sequences in the relationship. These experiences are collective from not just stays at this specific hotel, but stays at other hotels as well. Promises do not necessarily need to be made explicitly; customers still interpret certain things from facilities and services.

In the end it is the customer side uncontrollable-, customer behaviour specific-, and customer and hotel interaction specific constructs that the company wants to effect. However, because these constructs are not directly controlled by the company, influence must be attempted through the hotel characteristic specific- and (majorly) hotel staff specific constructs. The categories of the latter two constructs are what give the resources for companies to effect the value creation process of the customer directly.
6 Key Findings and Concluding Remarks

The primary purpose of this study is creating a model of the extended consumption process that takes into account promise management. By reviewing existing literature on services marketing, the service process, and the promise concept; a model for Promise Management in the Extended Consumption Process from the Customer’s Point of View (Figure 7) is constructed. The second purpose of this paper is to understand the making-, enabling-, and keeping of promises in practice through a case study. An empirical case study of the service process at Holiday Inn Helsinki West – Ruoholahti is based on qualitative interviews with 12 respondents. Results are attained regarding the case company and theoretical model. Thus, the model created in the theoretical review is reworked through the empirical study.

The findings of the theoretical review and empirical study are summarized in these concluding remarks. First, the main findings of the empirical study are summarized once more. Second, the theoretical model constructed in this study is revised, including a discussion of delimitation’s influence and meaning in this lengthy procedure. Third, and finally, theoretical and managerial contributions are discussed along with suggestions for future research. While the findings of the empirical study are naturally representative of the specific settings surrounding the case company, the general ideology based on the model on Promise Management in the Extended Consumption Process (Figure 10) is applicable to any company facing service competition.

6.1 Conclusions Regarding the Empirical Study

The case study includes 12 return guests of Holiday Inn Helsinki West – Ruoholahti. Based on semi-structured interviews with these 12 respondents conclusions were attained as to what resources the case company have to affect the value creation of its guests in the form of five constructs for promise management. The free flow of promise management is also confirmed – verifying that promises are made, enabled, and kept throughout the extended consumption process. Furthermore, promise management is done on the action level of interactions, but affects the episode, sequence, relationship, and partner base.

The five constructs; customer side uncontrollable, customer behavior specific, customer and hotel interaction specific, hotel characteristic specific, and hotel staff specific; with
their respective categories provide resources for promise management. Hotel characteristic specific- and hotel staff specific constructs are likely the easiest to affect, but rewards from promise management also become evident through the other constructs. If the company finds a way to affect all categories of customer and hotel interaction specific-, customer behavior specific-, and customer side uncontrollable constructs in a value creating way it is likely that guests’ satisfaction will also rise. Although these constructs are case specific; some categories are likely to be true for other hotels and even other services. Managerial implications for the case company are discussed further in subchapter 6.3.2.

When promise management is free from pre-, during-, and post-consumption stages, the focus is shifted towards specific promises; and accordingly towards supporting the customer in using the service and becoming a co-creator of value. Making promises is done through external marketing: traditional marketing, facilities, services, and naturally in interactions and communication between company, employees, and customers. Making promises is as much about the intended promise as it is about the subjective interpretation of the customer. Specifically staff is key in making precise, explicit, and realistic promises as well as shaping promises that have already been made. Enabling promises requires skills, abilities, tools, and motivation from staff and company, but the customer should also behave in a promise enabling way. The task of internal marketing is bridging made promises with keeping promises; with this in mind promises should be made to reflect what promises can be enabled and kept. Keeping promises through interactive marketing means expectations are fulfilled. Promises are kept throughout the extended consumption process and again staff has a crucial role in doing so according to what promises are made or implied. Thus the goal of promise management is the alignment of making and keeping of detailed promises through enabling promises, maximizing the customer’s value creation.

Promises are on their most basic level made, enabled, and kept through actions. Aligning kept promises with made promises is on the episode level, and eventually these episodes form sequences. A promise made in one episode may have an overlapping effect into other episodes. Certainly promises made or kept have a collective effect on the sequence and relationship levels. More importantly, however, promises are made, enabled, and kept sporadically and intermittently throughout the extended consumption process and staff must be prepared and motivated to keep promises when the customer so requires. Promise
management, on the action, episode, and sequence levels of interaction, affect the relationship and therefore the position of a specific company in the partner base.

The case study at Holiday Inn Helsinki West – Ruoholahti not only provided managerial implications for the case company, but (more importantly) through analysis of the material based on a theoretical framework, put the model constructed in this paper’s theoretical review under scrutiny.

6.2 Revision of the Theoretical Model

The model for Promise Management in the Extended Consumption Process (see Figure 10) is the end result of this extensive theoretical review and empirical study. This model encompasses the entirety of the service process, also including pre-consumption and post-consumption promise management. This process is dubbed the extended consumption process. An extended consumption process is seen as a sequence, built up from episodes, which in turn comprise of actions. One or more sequences form a relationship between the customer and company. Value creation on the relationship level occurs throughout the extended consumption process through the successful promise management in each action and subsequently; in each episode and sequence.

Making-, enabling-, and keeping promises between customers, resources, and company is the backbone of this model. Promises are made through external marketing, enabled through internal marketing, and kept in interactive marketing. The effect of promise
management is not restricted by the significant numbers of actions in one sequence. Conversely understanding the significance of one action on the episode, sequence, and relationship level allows for promise management to imply the need for an all around customer-centric mindset throughout the company. By having the customer as the focus, company, customer, and company resources are all geared towards smoothening out the extended consumption process. When promise management is the goal of the company, it can interlock the service process with the customer’s value creation process.

There are three major changes to the theoretical model (see Figure 7 for original) after conducting the empirical study. First, the addition of value creation explicitly into the model is a necessity, replacing the stages of the extended consumption process. Second, the extended consumption process is explicitly stated as one process, instead of three separate stages, further elaborating that one sequence is representative of an entire service process. Furthermore this also implies the collective, overlapping, and subsequent effects between promises on different levels of interaction, not an order based on stages. Third, is the eradication of the customer’s point of view from the model’s heading, but not from the core ideology of the model. While the first two changes are obvious from the natural progression of this study, the third change required a lot of consideration. In the end, the focus of this model is on customer centricity and this is not explicitly stated in the title of the model. However, more importantly because customer centricity is the goal of promise management and promise management is emphasized, the model does not discriminate. The model now shows an understanding of the collaborative effect and importance of both company and customer in promise management without highlighting either one.

The point of the action, episode, sequence, relationship levels of interaction is not that companies should dissect each service process as the practicality of doing so would likely require far too much work. Instead the significance comes from exemplifying the importance of one action in changing the entire episode, and subsequently sequence and even relationship. For example problem areas or excellent service situations in a service process could be analysed. Similarly, resources contributing to the value creation between customer and company can be broken down to further optimize the existing collaboration. The main point is that actions, episodes, or sequences can be analyzed for making-, enabling-, and keeping of promises. Thus, any company can research through promise management how it contributes to the customer’s value creation.
Although academics and companies have called for specific guidelines to tackle services marketing, and more specifically for measuring the success of marketing, this presents a fundamental problem. As marketing is “anything that supports value formation in customers’ processes” (Grönroos 2006b: 409) providing specific guidelines or sets of variables to cover marketing is nearly impossible. Because nearly anything can be constituted as marketing; making-, enabling-, or keeping promises, it is nearly impossible to have tools capable of measuring the exact return from marketing, and without specific figures on achieved results, marketing is losing its significance in some companies. Furthermore, companies may be focusing finances on those marketing measures that can easily be quantified, such as traditional marketing (i.e. 300 minutes of television advertising a month with a total of 1 million views). Research on specific measurements of marketing results should not be abandoned, but instead the focus should be on customer centricity, that is working together with the customer to create value for the customer. Through promise management this goal is achievable, turning marketing into an underlying logic of customer-centricity throughout the company.

6.2.1 The Extended Consumption Process’ Influence

The stages of the extended consumption process are both a helpful divider of the enormous process, as well as a barrier to the effective management of promises throughout the service process. The extended consumption process delimits this study in that it does not limit the study in any way. Instead, the extended consumption process includes the entire service process from need recognition to post-consumption evaluation. Because of the huge process this is, the level of detail may be compromised to give the holistic view this study is after.

The use of the pre-, during-, and post-consumption stages in the theoretical review and early stages of analysis divides the enormous process into stages, but this has only been done in compliance with existing theory. These stages are followed for clarity. From the early writing days spent on this paper it has been the intention to free the final model on promise management from the restrictions of these stages according to the wishes of Gabbott & Hogg (1998). The purpose has been to allow for a free flow of promises in the interactions between customer and company, and focusing on the sporadic occurrences of promises.
The model created to conclude the theoretical review in the early chapters of this paper; examined through analysis of the case study and refined in this conclusive discussion; is a combination of many existing frameworks. Undoubtedly problems persist because of the enormity of the challenge, but the main conclusions and implications are not weakened by the extensiveness of the model. The model can and should be used as a company-wide view on marketing through promise management, based on the extended consumption process.

6.2.2 The Meaning of the Case Study

The use of a case study to conduct the empirical part of this paper has its implications for the entire study. As thoroughly discussed in the methodology chapter of this paper it is sometimes difficult to distinguish what is representative of only the case company and what can be said to be true for the industry or descriptive of a phenomenon with a theoretical significance. Because the case study comprises of many guests (or cases) at minimum results can be assumed to be partly representative of business hotels in the Helsinki area. However, generalization from the case study is not the goal of this paper, but confirming the applicability of the model for Promise Management in the Extended Consumption Process (see Figure 10).

The case study is conducted from the customer point of view with the respondents own words. Naturally to fully understand how promises are enabled, promise management should be tackled from the company side, not the customer side. However, the task of this empirical study is to view promise management in the extended consumption process from the customer’s point of view. Therefore, the discussion on enabling promises remains partly superficial. The reason enabling promises is not simply left out, however is because this would compromise the comprehensiveness this model aims to give in its holistic view.

The case study is aimed at giving an understanding of major areas of interest customers have that could be tackled through promise management. Furthermore, implications for the case company are a main focus of the analysis in finding those aspects of promise management that guests specific to this hotel deem noteworthy and can therefore be used to assist customer’s value creation at the case company.
6.3 Contributions of this Study

This paper is rich in both its theoretical and practical contributions. The primary intention of this paper is on furthering the discussion of promise management as an underlying ideology for any company finding itself in service competition. After developing a model with this goal in mind, the model is tested and reworked through an empirical case study of qualitative nature. Although the focus is on the model presented in Figure 10, implications for the case company are also reached in this study. Both theoretical contributions and managerial implications are discussed below.

6.3.1 Theoretical Contribution

The discussion on promise management started from the promise concept, which is concerned with the fulfilment of promises, originally developed by Calonius (2006). Contributions by among others Bitner (1995), Berry (1995) and Grönroos (2007) have signified an interest in promise management. Even though promise management’s parts; external-, internal-, and interactive marketing have been discussed exhaustively; promise management as a whole has not received as much attention. The end goal of value creation has also been greatly advanced by Grönroos (2009), giving a goal for promise management.

The extended consumption process and observing the stages of the service process are also popular topics in recent marketing theory. Gabbott & Hogg (1998) however suggest that these stages should not be understood as separate, but instead as a complete process. Starting from Lovelock et al.’s (1999) and Ryttig’s (2006) stages of the purchase- and consumption processes; the use of Holmlund’s (2004) levels of interaction are instead argued for to gain a deeper and richer look into the extended consumption process. In the theoretical review, ties to service and relationship marketing are obvious, and these models work closely together. A model that takes a holistic view on marketing (promise management) involving the entire organization and the entire service process at all levels of interactions, did not exist.

This study concludes in a model (see Figure 10), which takes into account the process nature of services, from a promise management, customer-centric point of view. The model does not give step by step instructions on how services work. Because services are heterogeneous and consumer’s interpretations are ultimately subjective it is nearly
impossible to give guidelines on exactly how to act in a certain situation. Instead, the
general ideology of promise management is crucial as well as understanding the
importance of the extended consumption process in its entirety. Furthermore, levels of
interaction are used as guidelines instead of stages of the extended consumption process to
bring the company closer to the customer’s value creation process. This model presents
promise management as the underlying ideology that is needed for any company finding
itself in service competition, in order to keep focus on the customer and their value
creation process throughout the organization.

6.3.2 Managerial Implications at Holiday Inn Helsinki West – Ruoholahti

Although promises are made, enabled and kept in most categories of the presented
constructs (see Figure 9) it is clear that the main implications for the case company are in
the hotel staff specific construct. As discussed previously, affecting customer side
uncontrollable- and customer behaviour specific constructs are goals through promise
management, but this cannot necessarily be done directly. Instead the resources for
promise management for the case company are found in the hotel staff specific construct as
well as some categories of the hotel characteristic specific- and customer and hotel
interaction specific constructs.

Within each construct, specific categories are major resources for promise management.
The major strengths in making and keeping promises of the hotel staff specific construct
are efficiency, flexibility, recognition, personalization, friendliness, special cases and
general assessments. Guidance and directions is a major promise enabler in this construct
as is preparation. Basically, in their actions reception staff is responsible for ensuring
satisfaction and a sufficient number of staff during peak hours is required for staff to
behave in a value co-creating way. In the hotel characteristics specific construct services
and facilities make and keep promises. More is not necessarily better; instead services and
facilities need to reflect the needs of return guests. In the customer and hotel interaction
specific construct following procedure or refraining from it according to the specific
guest’s wishes shows flexibility and allows for value creation according to the guests
needs. In the customer behaviour specific construct loyalty programs both provide
opportunities and challenges for value creation. Complexity of member benefits makes
promise management more difficult, but more detail creates benefits better tailored to more
diverse needs. The other categories discussed throughout the analysis, are not specifically
mentioned here, but are also resources for promise management. As the analysis shows these are not directly connected with enabling promises, and therefore their evaluation in value creation is more dependent on actions in other categories.

These resources should be used in actions, to affect episodes, sequences, relationships and finally the partner base of the customer. By focusing on promise management on the action level throughout the extended consumption process, value creation according to the customer’s wishes is likely between company and customer. Moreover, through ensuring value creation with customers the company can put itself in an advantage in comparison to competition, that is affect its position in the partner base. Promise management ties the customer to the service provider through excellent service.

6.3.3 Suggestions for Future Research

This paper discusses promise management in the extended consumption process from a customer’s point of view. Although the promise concept has been in the works over the past two decades, coverage of this topic is fairly limited as the theoretical review shows. Promise management in accordance with value-in-use signifies providing the customer with the resources they need for value creation (Grönroos 2009). This paper has focused on creating a model for Promise Management in the Extended Consumption Process with this value-in-use notion in mind. Here, two possible areas of interest for future research are presented.

Firstly, this study focused on the customer point of view for promise management in the extended consumption process. A future study should focus on bringing forth a company perspective or focus on the differences between customer and company points of view. Furthermore, doing so with a wide-range of employees from different positions would give the most comprehensive understanding of promise management possible. The extensiveness of such a task might seem daunting, but could produce conclusive results on the outlook of promise management.

Secondly, constructs reached through analysis are true for the case company in this study. It might be of interest to study other hotels in the Helsinki area to gain a broader and more solid perspective on promise management in the hotel industry. On an even larger scale, hotels in Scandinavia or even world-wide could be studied. Furthermore, the use of this
model is not restricted to the hotel industry, but as stated multiple times; can be used by any company in service competition. It is an educated opinion of this author that the use of this model would prove successful regardless of the company using it.

In the end the customer’s value creation is the main goal of the company and therefore the analysis of the extended consumption process through promise management should be the starting point in reviewing any company’s processes.
Swedish Summary of Thesis (Svensk Sammanfattning)

1 Inledning

För det senaste två årtionden har marknadsföring som ämne fokuserat på relationsmarknadsföring, samtidigt som transaktionsmarknadsföring kvarlever i företag fortfarande (Harker & Egan 2006). Då konsumenter i samhället minskat på sina inköp på grund av finanskrisen, har företag samtidigt minskat på resandet för sina anställda och därför har efterfråga på hotellrum sjunkit betydligt (Kauppalehti 2009). Då det transaktionsbaserade tankesättet fortsätter att övertyga flera hotell företag att börja med priskrig, är alternativet att erbjuda en överlägsen nivå av betjäning. Det är promise management\(^5\) som ger möjligheten att öka på kunders upplevda värde istället för att sänka på priset och på detta sätt binda kunden till tjänsten eller produkten.

Till en viss grad har ett kundcentriskt tankesätt redan etablerats i vissa företag, men transaktionsmarknadsföring fortsätter som det dominerande tankesättet och därför håller marknadsföring på att tappa något av sin betydelse i företag (Grönroos 2006b). Ännu mer bekymrande är skiljandet av marknadsförings från beslut beträffande kunden (Brown 2005). Det är självklart att ett paradigmskifte inte händer över natten, men delvis beror det också på att ett holistiskt synsätt saknas som skulle rikta företagets fokus direkt på kunden.

1.1 Problemformulering, syfte och avgränsningar


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\(^5\) Fritt översatt handlar promise management begreppet om att styra löften. Att utveckla en svensk översättning till begreppet hör inte till mitt arbetes syfte och därför används det ursprungliga, engelskspråkiga namnet här.

Naturligt begränsas generaliseringar från resultatet till en viss grad på grund av avgränsningen till en fallstudie, men den grundläggande kundcentriska ideologin kan lära ett företag mycket. Den andra betydande "avgränsningen" gäller inneslutande av alla skeden av den utvidgade konsumtionsprocessen; före-, under-, och efter konsumtion; alltså tjänsteprocessen i sin helhet. I stället för att avgränsa studien till en del av processen vill jag ge en helhetsbild av promise management i den utvidgade konsumtionsprocessen.

### 1.2 Avhandlingens struktur


### 2 Promise management i den utvidgade konsumtionsprocessen

Transaktionsmarknadsföringens rötter är djuprotade i företag efter att det produktinriktade tankesättet passade massproduktions tenden som började efter andra världskriget och har fortsatt tills 1980-talet och även därefter. Transaktionsmarknadsföringens popularitet beror på enkelheten av modeller som t.ex. marknadsföringsmixen, men problemet är att konsumenter ses som passiva, homogena, och talrika. (Harker & Egan 2006) Fast verktygen är enkla att använda är de inte det som behövs för att locka in dagens kund, som behöver allt mer komplex och personligt anpassad marknadsföring av tjänster och produkter.


tolkning är också kopplat till parternas evaluering av hur de upplevt tjänsten. (Calonius 2006)


som en helhetlig process i stället för olika skeden. Ännu i detta kapitel används dock före-, under-, och efter konsumtion stegen enligt den existerande teorin för att bättre definiera mängden information till en lättläst helhet.


2.1 En ny modell

Efter att ha granskat existerande litteratur inom tjänste- och relationsmarknadsföring är det klart att existerande modeller och teorier fungerar i nära samband med varann. En modell med en holistisk översikt av den utvidgade konsumtionsprocessen genom promise management finns inte och konstrueras därför här som Figur 1.

Figur 1: Promise management i den utvidgade konsumtionsprocessen ur kundens perspektiv

Löften skapas, möjliggörs och hålls i handlingar, episoder, sekvenser och relationer. Promise management sammanfogar på detta sätt tjänsteprocessen med kundens värdeskapande process så långt som kunden låter det göras.
3 Metodologi

Enligt Patton (2002) finns det inte någon enskild regel för hur en studie skall se ut, utan forskarens egna mål styr studiens uppsättning. Det finns flera orsaker till valet att göra en kvalitativ undersökning genom djupintervjuer i ett fallföretag, bland annat: kvalitativa undersökningar är bäst för att undersöka processer (Gummesson 2000) och kvalitativt data gör det möjligt att beskriva processen med kundens egna ord (Patton 2002). För att på bästa sätt bearbeta och förbättra teorin gällande promise management används ett abduktivt forskningssätt; dvs. att börja från en förförståelse och komma fram till en modell (deduktiv); pröva denna modell genom en empirisk analys (induktiv); och omarbeta modellen utgående från de empiriska resultaten (deduktiv). Förförståelsens viktighet måste poängteras i att bara genom att förstå sin egen och andras subjektivitet kan man vara objektiv i sin forskning (Gummesson 2002).


Respondenterna väljs slumpmässigt, men måste ha bott på fallhotellet tidigare för att kunna svara på frågor gällande efter konsumtion. Dessutom måste respondenterna kunna finska, svenska, eller engelska för att kunna delta i studien. (Patton 2002) Respondenter intervjuas...
tills mättnad uppnås, dvs. tills en respondent till inte tycks ge någon ny information (Gummesson 2000). Ändå ställs ett minimum krav på 10 intervjuer, baserad på en genomgång av tidigare avhandlingar i marknadsföring på Hanken, för att nå en tillräcklig bild av agerandet på fallföretaget. (Patton 2002)


4 Analys

Målet med denna analys är fyrfaldig: att presentera fallstudiets huvudkategorier; bekräfta promise management som element i den utvidgade konsumtionsprocessen; diskutera löften på olika interaktionsnivåer; och sammanfatta vad som leder till tillfredsställelse i fallföretaget. Analysens första steg utförs i Bilaga/Appendix 3 och framkommer inte skilt i den här sammanfattningen.

Från den preliminära analysen av data framkom det olika kategorier vilka kan ses som resurser för fallföretaget att påverka kundens värdeskapande process. I detta, andra steg av analysen grupperas dessa kategorier i huvudkategorier enligt genomgående teman. Sammanlagt uppstår det fem olika huvudkategorier: kundens okontrollerbara, kundens beteende specifika, interaktioner mellan kunden och hotellet specifika, hotell karakteristik specifika och hotell personal specifika. Dessa huvudkategorier innehåller sammanlagt 25 mera detaljerade kategorier vilka tillåter företaget att närmare sig kundens värdeskapande process. Huvudkategorierna, deras kategorier, samt kategoriernas betydelse i promise management framställs i Figur 2 nedan.
Figur 2: Huvudkategorier enligt promise management

hotellet specifika, hotell karakteristiker specifika, och hotell personal specifika kategorier. (Bitner 1995; Grönroos 2007)

För att löften görs i handlingar, episoder, och sekvenser är det viktigt att fokusera på promise management fritt i den utvidgade konsumtionsprocessen i stället för att följa stegen före-, under- och efter konsumtion. Löften skapas, möjliggörs, och hålls då kunden bestämmer att det är rätt tid för det, inte nödvändigtvis då företaget tycker att det borde ske. Samtidigt kan vissa löften vara irrelevanta för kunden om de inte behöver någon aspekt av tjänsten. Promise management tillåter företaget att hjälpa kunden i dens värdeskapande processen till den nivå kunden behöver (Grönroos 2009).


Slutligen är det kundens okontrollerbara, kundens beteende specifika, interaktioner mellan kunden och hotellet specifika huvudkategorier som företaget vill påverka. Beroende på att företaget inte kan direkt kontrollera alla kategorier av dessa huvudkategorier gäller det att försöka påverka genom de två andra huvudkategorier. Speciellt hotell personal specifika men också hotell karakteristiker specifika kategorier ger företaget de resurser som behövs för att påverka kundens utvidgade konsumtions process på ett värdeskapande sätt.

5 Avslutande diskussion

Syftet med denna studie är att konstruera en modell av den utvidgade konsumtionsprocessen med hänsyn till promise management vilket har gjorts genom en granskning av tjänste och relationsmarknadsförings teori. För att uppfatta hur kunder upplever skapande-, möjliggörande-, och hållande av löften genom den utvidgade konsumtionsprocessen har en empirisk undersökning planerats och utförts genom
fallstudiet med 12 av Holiday Inn Helsinki West – Ruoholahtis returgäster. I den avslutande diskussionen sammanfattas resultat, den teoretiska modellen omarbetas, och studiens bidrag till existerande teori- och till fallföretaget diskuteras.


Den slutliga modellen för *promise management i den utvidgade konsumtionsprocessen* (se Figur 3) är resultatet av den betydande studien; från granskning av existerande teori till den empiriska undersökningen. Modellen innehåller hela utvidgade konsumtionsprocessen, vilket kan ses som en sekvens av en relation mellan kund och företag. En sekvens består av episoder och handlingar. Värdeskapande för kunden sker genom den utvidgade konsumtionsprocessen genom promise management på olika interaktionsnivåer.

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**Figur 3: Promise management i den utvidgade konsumtionsprocessen**

Genom den empiriska undersökningen framkommer tre större ändringar till modellen som presenterades i Figur 1. För det första beskrivs värdeskapande i modellen nu explicit. Andra ändringen är att den utvidgade konsumtionsprocessen nu är en process istället för tre

Denna studie bidrar till den existerande teorin om promise management. Dessutom innehåller studien en hel del praktiska implikationer för fallföretaget. Modellen för promise management i den utvidgade konsumtionsprocessen kan användas för att få en helhetsbild av promise management vilket leder till en ökning i kundens värdeskapande process. För fallföretaget har det poängterats vilka resurser (dvs. kategorier) är viktigast för att öka på kundens värdeskapande process. Ändå kan slutsatser som nåtts här förbättras genom fortsatt forskning. För att förstärka modellen kunde den testas i andra sammanhang, som andra hotell i Helsingfors eller till och med inom någon annan industri. För fallföretaget borde man koncentrera sig också på företagssidan för att få en bättre helhetsbild av promise management i fallföretaget.
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* Posthumous republication of his 1986 work


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Appendix 1a: Interview Guide (English)

[ Part 1: Pitch ]

[ Key ideas and phrases: ]
- Researcher introduction
  - Name
  - Place of study and program
  - Work at this hotel
- Research project
  - Concerning promise management and how it is visible at this hotel
  - Opportunity to be part of the study
  - Confidential interview
  - Interview takes about 20 minutes
  - Interview is recorded
- Your opinions are extremely valuable for the study and to the hotel
  - Customers are the ones who truly know what is important
  - Help the hotel improve its service
  - Free drink of choice at the bar after the interview is done ]

[ Part 2: Background information ]

C 1: I am studying the service process at this hotel from the customer’s perspective including every thought and interaction before arrival, during the stay, and after departure.

C 2: If you do not wish to answer any of these questions, you do not need to do so.

C 3: These first few questions are general and aimed at gathering some basic background information about the respondent.

Q 1: Which country are you from?
Q 2: How many nights do you spend at hotels each year?
Q 3: What is normally the purpose of your stay?
Q 4: Have you stayed at this hotel before?
   FQ 4a: How many nights do you spend at this hotel each year?
Q 5: Do you normally have a preference for any particular hotel or chain of hotels?
   FQ 5a: How do previous stays at hotels affect your choice of accommodation?
   FQ 5b: How do loyalty programs affect your choice of accommodation?
   FQ 5c: Are there any other factors affecting your choice of accommodation?

[ Part 3: Pre-consumption ]

C 4: The following discussion is aimed at gathering information regarding your feelings and actions prior to your arrival at this hotel – from the moment you start thinking about the need for a hotel room.

Q 6: How does the hotel and its staff take your wishes and needs into account before arrival?
   FQ 6a: Is anything promised to you at this stage?
*P: For example regarding your reservation, checking-in, staying at the hotel or even departing.*

FQ 6b: Who or what makes this promise to you?

*P: For example staff, management, Holiday Inn as a company, or something else.*

FQ 6c: Who or what permits this promise to be kept?

*P: For example staff, management, Holiday Inn as a company, or something else.*

FQ 6d: Who or what keeps this promise or is supposed to keep this promise?

*P: For example staff, management, Holiday Inn as a company, or something else.*

Q 7: How would you appreciate the hotel and its staff to act before your arrival?

FQ 7a: What kind of promises would you like to hear or experience before arrival?

[ Part 4: During consumption ]

C 5: The following discussion is aimed at gathering information regarding your feelings and actions during your stay from the moment of arrival to your departure.

Q 8: How does the hotel and its staff take you into account during arrival and at check-in?

FQ 8a: Is anything promised to you at this stage?

*P: Regarding your reservation, checking-in, staying at the hotel or even departing.*

FQ 8b: Who or what makes this promise to you?

*P: For example staff, management, Holiday Inn as a company, or something else.*

FQ 8c: Who or what permits this promise to be kept?

*P: For example staff, management, Holiday Inn as a company, or something else.*

FQ 8d: Who or what keeps this promise or is supposed to keep this promise?

*P: For example staff, management, Holiday Inn as a company, or something else.*

Q 9: How does the hotel and its staff take you into account during different episodes of your stay?

*P: When eating at the restaurant, using the facilities, or when interacting with reception.*

FQ 9a: Is anything promised to you at this stage?

*P: Regarding your reservation, checking-in, your stay, or even departure.*

FQ 9b: Who or what makes this promise to you?

*P: For example staff, management, Holiday Inn as a company, or something else.*

FQ 9c: Who or what permits this promise to be kept?

*P: For example staff, management, Holiday Inn as a company, or something else.*

FQ 9d: Who or what keeps this promise or is supposed to keep this promise?

*P: For example staff, management, Holiday Inn as a company, or something else.*

Q 10: How does the hotel and its staff take you into account during check-out and departure?

FQ 10a: Is anything promised to you at this stage?

*P: Regarding your reservation, checking-in, your stay, or even departure.*

FQ 10b: Who or what makes this promise to you?

*P: For example staff, management, Holiday Inn as a company, or something else.*

FQ 10c: Who or what permits this promise to be kept?

*P: For example staff, management, Holiday Inn as a company, or something else.*

FQ 10d: Who or what keeps this promise or is supposed to keep this promise?
Q 11: What are some of the things you consider most important for the hotel and its staff to consider during your stay?
   *P. What kind of promises would you like to hear or experience during your stay?*

[ Part 5: Post-consumption ]

C 6: The following discussion is aimed at gathering information regarding your likely feelings and actions after checking out from this hotel based on previous stays.

Q 12: How does the hotel and its staff take you into account after check-out?
   FQ 12a: Is anything promised to you at this stage?
   *P: Regarding your reservation, checking-in, your stay, or even departure.*
   FQ 12b: Who or what makes this promise to you?
   *P: For example staff, management, Holiday Inn as a company, or something else.*
   FQ 12c: Who or what permits this promise to be kept?
   *P: For example staff, management, Holiday Inn as a company, or something else.*
   FQ 12d: Who or what keeps this promise or is supposed to keep this promise?
   *P: For example staff, management, Holiday Inn as a company, or something else.*

Q 13: How would you appreciate the hotel and its staff to act after your departure?
   *P: Are there any promises that should be made or kept after departure?*

Q 14: What are some of the things you consider most important for the hotel and its staff to consider after your stay has ended?

[ Part 6: Final comments ]

C 7: Thank you very much for your time. That was all of my questions for you.

Q 15: Is there anything you would like to add before we finish the interview?
Appendix 1b: Interview Guide (Finnish)

[ Part 1: Pitch ]
[ Key ideas and phrases: ]
- Tutkijan tidot
- Nimi
- Opiskelupaikka ja ohjelma
- Töissä hotellissa
- Tutkimustyö
- Promise management käsite ja miten se näkyy tämän hotellin palveluprosessissa
- Mahdollisuus osallistua tutkimukseen
- Luottamuksellinen haastattelu
- Haastattelu kestää noin 20 minuuttia
- Haastattelu nauhoitetaan
- Sinun mielipiteet ovat todella arvokkaita sekä tutkimukselle että hotellille
- Asiakkaat tietävät mikä on oikeasti tärkeää
- Auttaa hotellia parantamaan palveluaan
- Ilmainen juoma oman valinnan mukaan hotellin baarissa haastattelun jälkeen ]

[ Part 2: Background information ]
C 1: Tutkimukseni koskee tämän hotellin palveluprosessia asiakkaan näkökulmasta, mukaan lukien kaikkia ajatuksia ja kanssakäymisiä ennen hotellille saapumista, hotellissa asumisen aikana, sekä hotellista lähdön jälkeen.
C 2: Jos et halua vastata johonkin kysymykseen sinun ei tarvitse tehdä niin.
C 3: Nämä ensimmäiset kysymykset ovat yleisluontoisia ja niiden tarkoitus on kerätä taustatietoja vastaajasta.
Q 1: Mistä maasta olet kotoisin?
Q 2: Kuinka monta vuorokautta yövät hotelleissa vuosittain?
Q 3: Mikä on tavallisesti yöpyys syy?
Q 4: Oletko yöpynyt tässä hotellissa aikaisemmin?
   FQ 4a: Kuinka monta vuorokautta yövät tässä hotelleissa vuosittain?
Q 5: Onko sinulla mieltymystä mihinkään tiettyyn hotelliin tai hotelliketjuun?
   FQ 5a: Miten aikaisemmat yöpymiset vaikuttavat sinun hotellivalintaa?
   FQ 5b: Miten kanta-asias ohjelmat vaikuttavat sinun hotellivalintaa?
   FQ 5c: Onko muita asioita jotka vaikuttavat sinun hotellivalintaa?

[ Part 3: Pre-consumption ]
C 4: Seuraavan keskustelun tarkoitus on kerätä tietoa sinun ajatuksia ja kanssakäymisiä koskien, ennen hotellille saapumista – alkaen siitä hetkestä alkaen kun huomasit tarvitsevasti hotellihuoneen.
Q 6: Miten hotelli ja sen henkilökunta huomioi sinun toiveesi ja tarpeesi ennen hotellille saapumista?
   FQ 6a: Luvataanko sinulle jotain tässä vaiheessa?
Q 7: Miten toivoisit hotellin ja sen henkilökunnan toimivan ennen saapumistasi hotellille?
 *P: Minkälaisia lupauksia haluaisit kuulla tai kokea ennen saapumistasi hotellille?*

[ Part 4: During consumption ]

C 5: Seuraavan keskustelun tarkoitus on kerätä tietoa sinun ajatuksia ja kanssakäymisiä koskien, asuussasi hotellissa – siitä hetkestä kun saavut hotellille siitä hetkeen kun poistut hotellista.

Q 8: Miten hotelli ja sen henkilökunta huomioi sinun saapumisen ja sisäänkirjautumisen aikana?

FQ 8a: Luvataanko sinulle jotain tässä vaiheessa?
 *P: Varausta, sisään kirjoittautumista, hotellissa asumista, tai jopa lähtöä koskien.*

FQ 8b: Kuka tai mikä antaa sinulle tämän lupauksen?
 *P: Esimerkiksi, henkilökunta, hotellin johto, Holiday Inn yrityksenä, tai jokin muu.*

FQ 8c: Kuka tai mikä mahdollistaa tämän lupauksen pitämisen?
 *P: Esimerkiksi, henkilökunta, hotellin johto, Holiday Inn yrityksenä, tai jokin muu.*

FQ 8d: Kuka tai mikä pitää tämän lupauksen tai kuuluisi pitää tämän lupauksen?
 *P: Esimerkiksi, henkilökunta, hotellin johto, Holiday Inn yrityksenä, tai jokin muu.*

Q 9: Miten hotelli ja sen henkilökunta huomioi sinun eri episodien tai tapahtumien aikana asuussasi hotellissa?

FQ 9a: Luvataanko sinulle jotain tässä vaiheessa?
 *P: Varausta, sisään kirjoittautumista, hotellissa asumista, tai jopa lähtöä koskien.*

FQ 9b: Kuka tai mikä antaa sinulle tämän lupauksen?
 *P: Esimerkiksi, henkilökunta, hotellin johto, Holiday Inn yrityksenä, tai jokin muu.*

FQ 9c: Kuka tai mikä mahdollistaa tämän lupauksen pitämisen?
 *P: Esimerkiksi, henkilökunta, hotellin johto, Holiday Inn yrityksenä, tai jokin muu.*

FQ 9d: Kuka tai mikä pitää tämän lupauksen tai kuuluisi pitää tämän lupauksen?
 *P: Esimerkiksi, henkilökunta, hotellin johto, Holiday Inn yrityksenä, tai jokin muu.*

Q 10: Miten hotelli ja sen henkilökunta huomioi sinut uloskirjautumisen ja lähdön aikana?

FQ 10a: Luvataanko sinulle jotain tässä vaiheessa?
 *P: Varausta, sisään kirjoittautumista, hotellissa asumista, tai jopa lähtöä koskien.*

FQ 10b: Kuka tai mikä antaa sinulle tämän lupauksen?
 *P: Esimerkiksi, henkilökunta, hotellin johto, Holiday Inn yrityksenä, tai jokin muu.*

FQ 10c: Kuka tai mikä mahdollistaa tämän lupauksen pitämisen?
 *P: Esimerkiksi, henkilökunta, hotellin johto, Holiday Inn yrityksenä, tai jokin muu.*
Q 10d: Kuka tai mikä pitää tämän lupauksen tai kuuluisi pitää tämän lupauksen?
  *P: Esimerkiksi, henkilökunta, hotellin johto, Holiday Inn yrityksenä, tai jokin muu.*

Q 11: Mikä on tärkeintä hotellin ja sen henkilökunnan huomioi ksuessaasi hotellissa?
  *P: Minkälaisia lupauksia haluaisit kuulla tai kokea asuussasi hotellissa?*

[ Part 5: Post-consumption ]

C 6: Seuraavan keskustelun tarkoitus on kerätä tiedoja sinun todennäköisiä ajatuksia ja kanssakäymisiä koskien, poistuttua hotellista aikaisempien yöpymisen perusteella.

Q 12: Miten hotelli ja sen henkilökunta huomioi sinun uloskirjautumisen jälkeen?
  
  FQ 12a: Luvataanko sinulle jotain tässä vaiheessa?
  *P: Varausta, sisään kirjoittautumista, hotellissa asumista, tai jopa lähtöä koskien.*

  FQ 12b: Kuka tai mikä antaa sinulle tämän lupauksen?
  *P: Esimerkiksi, henkilökunta, hotellin johto, Holiday Inn yrityksenä, tai jokin muu.*

  FQ 12c: Kuka tai mikä mahdollistaa tämän lupauksen pitämisen?
  *P: Esimerkiksi, henkilökunta, hotellin johto, Holiday Inn yrityksenä, tai jokin muu.*

  FQ 12d: Kuka tai mikä pitää tämän lupauksen tai kuuluisi pitää tämän lupauksen?
  *P: Esimerkiksi, henkilökunta, hotellin johto, Holiday Inn yrityksenä, tai jokin muu.*

Q 13: Miten toivoisit hotellin ja sen henkilökunnan toimivan hotellista lähtösi jälkeen?
  *P: Minkälaisia lupauksia hotellin ja sen henkilökunnan kuuluisi tehäti pitää lähtösi jälkeen?*

Q 14: Mikä on tärkeintä hotellin ja henkilökunnan huomioi sinun asemusien päättymä?

[ Part 6: Final comments ]

C 7: Kiitos todella ajastasi. Siinä olivat kaikki kysymykseni sinulle.

Q 15: Onko mitään mitä haluaisit lisätä ennen kuin päättämme haastattelun?
## Appendix 2: Interview Timetable and Summary

<table>
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Respondent #</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Accept/Decline</th>
<th>Reason to decline</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Duration (mins.)</th>
<th>Location for interview</th>
<th>Reason for Travel</th>
<th>Nights at hotels</th>
<th>Days at HHW</th>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>15:45</td>
<td>Decline</td>
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<td>Business</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16:58</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>Interested, but taxi waiting</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>17:05</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>Going to dinner</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>17:08</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>Now not good, later maybe</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 2, Friday, 26 March 2010</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14:45</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>Maybe later</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15:35</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15:48</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>Too busy</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3, Tuesday, 30 March 2010</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14:30</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>Maybe after sleeping</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14:40</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>After meeting around 5pm</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14:45</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>Maybe after 5 pm</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14:46</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>Need to go to work</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14:58</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2 M US</td>
<td>15:18</td>
<td>Accept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sauna cabinet</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3 M England</td>
<td>15:58</td>
<td>Accept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sauna cabinet</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16:22</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>Too busy</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16:30</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>Conference call, 5:45 return</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R4 M Finland</td>
<td>16:49</td>
<td>Accept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Sauna cabinet</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R5 M Finland</td>
<td>17:09</td>
<td>Accept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Sauna cabinet</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>17:33</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>Going to dinner</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 4, Wednesday, 31 March 2010</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15:29</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>&quot;No, you may not disturb&quot;</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R6 M Finland</td>
<td>15:35</td>
<td>Accept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Sauna cabinet</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15:57</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>15 minutes is too long</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15:57</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>Too tired</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16:24</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>Going to dinner in 5 min</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 5, Tuesday, 6 April 2010</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>17:09</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>Maybe later</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R7 F Brazil</td>
<td>17:18</td>
<td>Accept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Sauna cabinet</td>
<td>Bus,Leis.</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R8 F Sweden</td>
<td>17:35</td>
<td>Accept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sauna cabinet</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R9 M Sweden</td>
<td>17:46</td>
<td>Accept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Sauna cabinet</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18:10</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>First time here</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18:08</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>&quot;No!&quot;</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R10 M Finland</td>
<td>18:13</td>
<td>Accept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sauna cabinet</td>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18:31</td>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>No time, dinner plans</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R11 F Finland</td>
<td>18:36</td>
<td>Accept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Sauna cabinet</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R12 M Finland</td>
<td>19:00</td>
<td>Accept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sauna cabinet</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3: Presentation and Preliminary Analysis of Data

Before analysis the raw data is first categorized in a comprehensive presentation covering all relevant information from interviews. Interviews were conducted in the same order as the extended consumption process. In presenting the collected data this same pattern is followed through the pre-, during-, and post-consumption stages. The making-, keeping-, and enabling of promises is discussed here on the appropriate level of interaction (action, episode, sequence) on a within-case level; that is presenting interesting categories by examining each case individually as value creating resources. Following categorisation a deeper meaning of resulting constructs is captured through abstraction and dimensionalisation when the major constructs of the different stages of the extended consumption process are summarized in the analysis of collected data.

This first round of analysis involves recognizing different categories in the raw data (interview transcriptions) case by case. Together these categories are then organized according to the stages of the extended consumption process in a cross-case analysis where the collective categories presented by respondents are organized into constructs.

1.1 Pre-Consumption Stage

The following categories and their general themes emerged mostly from answers to questions based on the pre-consumption stage. However, some respondents did discuss similar themes without being separately prompted about the pre-consumption stage and if these were deemed as belonging here, they were naturally also included.

1.1.1 Direct Marketing

First and foremost it is interesting to note that only one of the respondents explicitly noted the direct effect of external marketing. For this customer who visits the case company more casually (3 times a year) the reason for returning was: “usually some good offer and the fact that we are here near the centre.” (R10 translated from Finnish) Although valued by this respondent, all others considered themselves business travellers and therefore were affected more by other factors such as employer’s choice of accommodation.

1.1.2 Image and Brand

When discussing what affects choice of accommodation one respondent said: “Some names tempt you obviously and...you choose where you stay accordingly. In that way the
brand affects [your choice].” (R5 translated from Finnish) This entails customer’s reactions to brand specific messages and signifies the importance of uniformity between reality and image. Based on the brand, customers believe they are promised a certain standard. Customers reflect on “the image and standard on arrival at the hotel and how this is met by reality. This is a high-standard place... Expectations are according to that.” (R4 translated from Finnish) Satisfaction is dependent on the relative standings between expectations and the experience, and is subjective to each customer.

1.1.3 Price

The promise regarding quality is naturally tied to the price, which remains subjective even in the customers comment: “Well I think this hotel offers great rooms at a good price.” (R8). Price is a factor in determining where to stay, but for business travellers who do not pay for accommodation themselves price is not mentioned more than a few times. Also, price is usually linked with another attribute, not mentioned as the sole determinant of value. “If the service is good... If the price is good.” (R9)

1.1.4 Employer’s Opinion

Most respondents noted that the choice of accommodation was effected, if not decided for, by their employers. One respondent for example (R8) noted that out of the three options predetermined by the employer the case company was the choice. Business customers do not necessarily have the willingness or need to put forth an effort to choose accommodation: “The company I work for is right next door and it’s taken care of so that I just get a note that it’s this [hotel] and is this okay?” (R4 translated from Finnish)

1.1.5 Location

Here the advantage of the case company’s location in the business district of Ruoholahti becomes clear. Other customer’s also noted the importance of location in determining value by simply stating: “Location is obviously important” (R12 translated from Finnish) and “Location, price” (R9) when asked what effects choice of accommodation. For one respondent the importance of location in choosing accommodation was obvious in: “Location is foremost the thing I look for.” (R3) It is however, undoubtedly a combination of several factors as one customer noted: “Based on the service. Price... (eek) Location too. Based on the business.” (R2)
1.1.6 Previous Stays

Especially for return customers, the history plays a vital role: “Previous experience is obviously also a determinant and what has happened [previously] and not just now.” (R4 translated from Finnish) Customers feel they are promised interactions of similar or higher satisfaction as last time. These promises are not only based on a certain standard of stay in a specific hotel, but the comparison of different alternatives and the promises they hold. “There’s a few hotels from this area. And within this location the choice is based for example on a good restaurant, the level of service, the standard of the hotel and such things.” (R4 translated from Finnish)

1.1.7 Loyalty Programs

Opinions on loyalty programs were mixed in the group of respondents where only one respondent denied being part of any loyalty program. The degree to which loyalty programs work in their intended way varied depending on respondent. While one respondent suggested that “loyalty programs do lure you in...You try to...focus your [stays].” (R5 translated from Finnish), others countered this by saying: “I am what they call a ‘loyalty card holder’ but I don’t pay much attention to any of that.” (R2) Another customer when asked if loyalty programs affect his choice of accommodation said: “not really, because I’m a member of loyalty programs a bit here and there.” (R12 translated from Finnish) However, the general consensus was that loyalty programs do have some effect on choice of accommodation: “if I have two choices [of hotels] and...I belong to the loyalty program, then I’ll choose that one... Depending of course on if the benefits are good (hah).” (R11 translated from Finnish)

Added value from loyalty programs is not by default. Problems with loyalty card holders emerged between promised benefits and what promises are kept. In order to receive double points for their stay one respondent would need to register this while making the booking, however: “somebody in my office is making my reservations and I’m not telling them every time can you please add this promotional code to it. I would expect that to be done automatically.” (R1) The problem here is that even when the promise to pay double points is enabled partly on the hotels side, the extra effort is not taken by the customer. The enablement of this promise fails because the registration is not automatic on the customers side, but the blame falls on the hotel, and thus the promise of double points is not kept.
1.1.8 Online sources

The social media aspect where travellers share experiences and rely on each other is not especially valued by business travellers. “Usually when I travel I look for references online and I like when the hotel sites have pictures of the rooms and then they have pictures of the facilities.” (R7) When travelling for business less effort is put on comparing options, because for many it is only a place to sleep. One customer also pointed out that trust in these systems is not 100%: “people book through the internet and...the booking can disappear somewhere in cyberspace.” (R6 translated from Finnish)

1.1.9 Opinions of Others

The effect other customers have in shaping promises was only mentioned by two respondents. One customer discussed the importance of other guest’s opinions:

“They have pictures from the guests. And those pictures really tell you a lot about the place. A lot more than the official ones. Sometimes they are even better than the official ones, because sometimes the place... it’s very nice or they have an excellent view and the hotel is only worried about taking pictures of the bed... The guests provide better pictures... and have a better understanding of where the thing [the hotel] is in the city.... What are you going to see outside the window.... What’s the weather like... and how are the drains in... the bathrooms... Because these are the things that hotels never take pictures of but users, especially pissed off users do.” (R7)

The respondent made it clear that there is a high probability that the state the hotel wishes to present itself may lead to unrealistic expectations. The promises the hotel makes are based on a ‘glossy’ state probably when the hotel opened, which might not be reflective of the truth. Other customers effect the shaping of expectations through making promises and help in keeping these realistic. The power of peer’s opinions is summed up by another respondent: “I mean if you recommended a good hotel of course I would consider that.” (R9)

1.1.10 Staff Efficiency

Opinions of staff in the pre-consumption stage were fairly limited. In determining what causes choice of accommodation one customer said: “it’s not speed that’s the differentiating factor. It seems to be the same in all hotels.” (R4 translated from Finnish)

Dealing with customers before arrival in a professional manner is a prerequisite, but
because staff are in such a vital part in making, enabling and keeping promises it is important that they set the right standard from the start. Essentially customers seem to appreciate when “they are just very efficient.” (R2) One respondent mentioned making a booking over the phone: “it’s the smoothness that’s important... and it obviously helps that the person on the other end recognizes me.” (R5 translated from Finnish) This shows that in the pre-consumption stage not only is making promises important, but enabling promises through a functioning database of guest information is vital in eventually keeping promises during the stay.

1.1.11 Preparation

For most customers the reason for a quick check-in is in the preparation the hotel does beforehand in taking bookings, having prefilled check-in cards, keys waiting, etc. As one customer noted: “when I get here I expect things to be prepared when I come in.” (R1) pointing out how the promise of efficiency is supported by preparation. For return customers, in their mind this is a given and when problems occur the hotel rightfully gets the blame. Another customer said “we managed to check-in in no time... Everything was ready here. The guest information was faxed here and everything was ready. Just like it’s supposed to be.” (R6 translated from Finnish) pointing out that this is expected, and anything that slowed down this norm would be disappointing.

Most respondents seemed very aware of the storage of guest information as enabling the promise of a faster check-in. “I mean it happens once and then the rest of my life regardless of where I come in the world they know what my personal desire[s are]...” (R1) As satisfaction is dependent on a more efficient check-in storage of guest information creates value. Specifically some details in the level of service are allowed by the guest database and guests also recognize this. “It’s good that they have all the information beforehand so they don’t even need to look me up for very long. They knew what kind of room I had had last time. They know how long I was staying.” (R7) Once again, since this information is available, it is expected to be used.

1.1.12 Flexibility

For some the amount of preparation is not enough, especially since return customers are familiar with the procedure, smaller details become more obvious.
“Well usually it goes like I said. ‘First take that card, then that card, and show card you’re going to pay with, even if it’s a familiar customer. Instead it could be so that trust has gone so far that a name would suffice. Considering, since it’s known that there’s a company backing up the promise of payment.” (R12 translated from Finnish)

More flexibility is expected and value creation depends on flexibility. However, it is also probable that when flexibility is shown on the company’s side it is a true satisfier. As one customer commented: “well trained staff is the key thing...Because they changed my travel schedules and everything else...so when I got here they had already changed my reservation. I didn’t have a voucher, but that was no problem.” (R7) In the case of this customer when the staff did not go by the book the guest was very happy with the end result. Likewise, another guest agreed that when it’s a special case and the hotel is flexible, the result is good. “Almost always everything has been reserved, and then you don’t need to do anything special. But...last time, we changed things around a little bit and so I’ve called many times on the way and everything has been taken care of fine, so I have no complaints.” (R6 translated from Finnish)

1.1.13 Automatic Recognition

Flexibility seems to stem from being recognized, in other words ‘known’ by staff, one customer for example discussed arrival in the following way. “Well I want it to go pretty fast. (hah) Yeah, and then just get my key... And they always have everything prepared... And they recognize me now. So it goes pretty fast (hah).” (R8) The smoothness of the process depends on pre-consumption preparation by the hotel, but likewise if the customer is automatically recognized this also creates value.

Furthermore, customers stated that knowing the hotel and its staff helped in making the choice over accommodation. One customer for example said “obviously it’s easy to go somewhere familiar.” (R12 translated from Finnish) Similarly, another stated: “It’s nice to come back to a familiar place. Where I’m known and where I know people myself.” (R11 translated from Finnish)

Preferential treatment is assumed: “they recognize me so when it’s someone you know then you don’t have to go through the whole litany of guaranteeing, and how, and why, and so...” (R5 translated from Finnish) Another regular guest noted that the level of satisfaction
is dependent on one specific staff member. While the rest of the also provided good service a relationship with the ‘favorite receptionist’ guaranteed exceptional service and satisfaction. “I have a favorite receptionist. (hah) (hah)...Yeah and she’s the most nice one. She treats me well because I’m here a lot so... But I think everyone (...) is pretty much always here very nice. Welcoming and nice.” (R8)

1.1.14 Services

The preparation of services according to preferences prior to arrival affects the entire stay. Some services the hotel provides are prepared in advance, like the general location of the room (near or far from the elevator, facing the sea, etc.) or pillow menus. There is a definite benefit in utilizing the internal information as one customer noted who time after time had to ask for an extra pillow. “If they would at check-in said hey we have... here is your pillow four. I would have [felt]...I’m important to these guys!” (R1)

1.1.15 Facilities

One customer when asked about preferred hotels or hotel chains replied: “most places I visit are Holiday Inns.” (R3) When asked to elaborate continued: “Good facilities I would say.” (R3) Based on a previous stay, the guest associates a certain standard to the facilities and in the guest’s mind the hotel therefore promises this can be expected elsewhere as well. Facilities are therefore an important part value creation during the pre-consumption stage, when forming expectations.

The importance of facilities for return customers varies as for business travellers the place is sometimes a “home away from home...” (R8) and other times just a bed to sleep in. Others pay attention to the slightest details, sometimes due to personal interests. “I appreciate for example the whole lobby area. I can’t help paying attention to the architecture...And the solution that has been used. For an architect personally it’s just (eh) great! I just become happy... This place has... This place is something!” (R4 translated from Finnish)

1.1.16 Procedure

A general theme that resurfaced over and over again, as expected, was the importance of the booking. The booking not only needs to be prepared, but needs to be correct. In its
simplest form one customer stated “the room was reserved so they was expecting me” (R3) and without this booking the first episode at the hotel is likely to cause dissatisfaction.

Not all promises regarding the booking were expected from the hotels side. One respondent noted that “…the reservation process was quite smooth. And the hotel was paid for before I came here so that process was taken through quite, you know (...) smoothly.” (R3) The promise of an efficient check-in procedure is enabled by payment in advance. In this case the promise was made by the actions of the payer and hotel while the customer merely initiated the interaction. The payer and hotel also enabled this through their own systems and kept the promise as the customer was able to check in. The significance of the systems where customers did not book the hotel room for themselves was obvious in several other cases as well. When asked how staff take the customer into account before arrival one customer said “I can’t answer anything to that, because that is taken care of by our secretary... employer.” (R11 translated from Finnish) In the pre-consumption stage it is not only the hotel that enables promises to be kept, but other parties as well. For return customers who travel on business for example it is quite common that someone makes the booking for them.

1.1.17 Convenience

Return guests sometimes do not choose their own accommodation. For some it becomes a factor of convenience in not having to worry about the arrangements. “My company actually chooses the hotels and they are pretty much the same. So, I myself have no preferences.” (R7) Others might have more of a choice and in this case convenience plays a role, but other factors must play a role in this equation as well. “Obviously we have a company rate so it’s one of our preferred selections (...) out of the Helsinki hotels. But this one is my favourite one out of those three.” (R8)

Either way, convenience as caused by routines, is also enabled by automation. “Well we have a company electronic booking system so I just like do it through that, so (eh) we don’t have a travel agent or anything, we just do it on the internet.” (R8) Whether using the hotel’s, customer’s or a third party’s booking system this enables a more efficient way of booking and creates value for the customer. The ‘simplicity’ of these systems seems to suit those travelling on business: “I love it when I can book it online without having to talk to anyone...because it’s very easy thing to have it automatically online.” (R7)
1.1.18 Disinterest

It is impossible to deny that respondents in expressing what seemed convenient also in a way showed complete disinterest in the pre-consumption stage. Choosing accommodation is not necessarily possible, therefore there is no need to concern oneself with thinking about it. For business travellers the accommodation does not necessarily matter apart from the presence of a bed, but even this was not explicitly mentioned. For example: “Well I didn’t book this one, it was booked by my employer.” (R9) or “...when I’m travelling for business then it’s the employer who essentially decides where to go.” (R11 translated from Finnish) For those customers who are in a sense thrown into the service situation – into consuming the service, it is likely that promise management in the ‘during consumption’ stage is of essence in determining their satisfaction.

1.2 During Consumption Stage

Recurring themes were expected here as the assumption is that overlapping occurs between pre-consumption and during consumption promise management. However, as the data shows, most actions and episodes are shown in a completely different light in the during consumption stage. As a result the priorities during consumption are reflected in the themes of these categories.

1.2.1 Recognition

When staying at a hotel, customers generally appreciate the special recognition they receive regardless of when this happens. One respondent mentioned the importance of recognizing return customers. “Well I think here it’s just nice when you’re here... to be recognized, because this is like my home away from home.” (R8) It is likely that because of an interactive role between return customers and reception staff, these guests’ opinions cannot remain objective. “Because I’m here so often I probably don’t even notice some things someone else who is here less often might notice.” (R5 translated from Finnish)

Recognition is closely linked to the level of personalization customers experienced. Generally those staying more often reported receiving special benefits and explicitly expressed their satisfaction. One respondent especially pointed out the benefits: “...when I arrive I don’t need to fill in anything in detail. Everything is ready and they say ‘hi and welcome’ and I get the key and go up to my room (hah).” (R5 translated from Finnish)
1.2.2 Personalization

No customer wants service where “they treat you like cattle when you come in.” (R9), as one respondent mentioned is the case at many other hotels. How personal the service is depends obviously on the staff, but partly also on the customer. One customer who stays approximately three times a year pointed out how personal the service felt even without really knowing the staff. “They greet you immediately and (...) get down to business right away and that is an important thing. They don’t like leave the customer waiting for no apparent reason. And they always greet you.” (R10 translated from Finnish) This seemingly simple recognition causes the customer to experience a high level of satisfaction due to undivided attention and is an important part of value creation. Likewise a return customer mentioned how great it is “when you get a feeling that you are kind of (...) almost the only customer here and you feel very welcome.” (R11 translated from Finnish) Another return customer said “when you stay a lot and it’s more of the (...) personal welcoming and efficiency than anything else.” (R9)

One customer explicitly noted the importance of personalization in service. An important part of personalization is “calling the customer by name.” (R9) Similarly, another customer mentioned: “the fact that they recognize me from my name (hah) is obviously... It’s a part of this thing... Let’s call it personal service... that you recognize the guy and that’s obviously nice.” (R5 translated from Finnish) The level of personalized service for those known by the staff goes beyond ‘nice’:

“Usually I go straight to the office and come back during lunch, well... after lunch I might come back and check-out then. Otherwise there’s such a crazy line out there in the morning so I can’t be bothered to stand in it. So that’s why I check-out during the day and that might sometimes be after 12 and that doesn’t really matter. (hah)”

(R5 translated from Finnish)

Similarly, the guest reported being allowed to check-in hours before the official check-in time. “When I arrive quite early I’m allowed straight to the room...even if others might not be. This is again personal service.” (R5 translated from Finnish) This is flexibility based on recognition and ‘knowing’ the staff.

1.2.3 Flexibility

Similarly to the check-in and check-out flexibility described above (R5), even with relatively unknown customers flexibility leads to satisfaction and value creation with
customers. “So I’ve had problems in other places before, (um) about check-out time and being late fifteen minutes and...there is no tolerance or something like that and they charge me full rate again.” (R7) The dissatisfaction for this customer was immense in realizing this.

Another aspect to consider becomes quite clear in that flexibility with one customer can lead to others being inconvenienced. “Often you have to wait for foreigners and they have their own dilemmas and finally they ask where Tivoli is (hah)...So that takes quite some time.” (R12 translated from Finnish)

Flexibility from normal procedure also depends on the knowledge and experience of the guest on what can be done to circumvent undesired situations like long lines. One customer thanked the fact “that you can pay the bill in advance...When there’s usually quite a lot of traffic then you can just leave your key there. And then you get out fast.” (R10 translated from Finnish) In this example the guest is aware of a solution that deviates from regular procedure. This not only causes satisfaction for this guest but others too as the line the next day is reduced by one person.

**1.2.4 Procedure**

Similarly one guest suggested “an easier check-in procedure...and respectively an easier check-out. Maybe that’s something to improve when you have to show one card after another.” (R12 translated from Finnish) Following the procedure during check-in and check-out is hoped for from the staff, but (as shown with R5 for example) with known return guests this ‘red tape’ is sometimes bypassed.

Staff following procedure sometimes creates value and sometimes causes dissatisfaction, depending on the guest and their current need. Procedure is different in different hotels and guests have their subjective views of what reception is supposed to do during check-in for example. “They didn’t ask me if I was okay with the room that [they chose]...So when I came up I saw it was close to the elevator.” (R9) This customer has learned in another hotel that procedure includes being in detail where the room is located. Obviously the customer would have wished for a room in a quieter area, but because the receptionist was following procedure, a discussion on the location of the room was not initiated by the receptionist. Value creation is therefore dependent on the processes at other hotels as well.
1.2.5 Guidance and Directions

When staying at the hotel guests expect to be able to receive guidance and directions from reception. Directions for example can be something very simple like driving to the hotel. “Usually it goes like ‘are you arriving by car’ and you get directed to the parking space.” (R12 translated from Finnish) Naturally return customers do not emphasize this as they are familiar with the facilities and surroundings. “If you’ve been to hotels before they don’t have to show you where the minibar, or the shower is. You know that sort of stuff.” (R9)

Because respondents were mostly return customers with many stays behind them examples were not given in excess. But because there is always a first time directions need to be available when necessary. “So I put on all my gym clothes and it’s [the directions for the gym] there in the elevator (hah).” (R7) Also, it was mentioned that simply having facilities without proper guidance is not sufficient.

“I mean if there’s a big line they don’t have time to ask you many questions but if there’s not, then I think they should ask you...You know, talk to you a bit about the facilities in the hotel... So you know where the bar, the restaurant, sauna, maybe a fitness centre if there is one” (R9)

For guests to be able to make use of facilities the information on them must be readily available. Value creation from facilities is enabled by directions and guidance. This can also be done through providing information in other ways. One guest for example preferred to read “a little folder in the room where they explained everything.” (R7)

Obviously staff with their local knowledge need to be prepared to assist regulars with their requests whatever they may be. “The staff here is willing to serve and always prepared. There isn’t much the staff here couldn’t do... Although I don’t really require much from the staff (hah).” (R5 translated from Finnish)

1.2.6 Loyalty Programs

Being a member to either the Priority Club (with InterContinental Hotels Group) or Hotel Bonus Club (Restel) entitles the guest to certain benefits in comparison to other guests. Changes in loyalty programs, especially when this means the loss of a benefit, are not welcome. “I have found a little annoying that... I am part of the Priority Club, not the highest member, but Gold member. I used to get upgrade to the Executive Floor. Now they have stopped this.” (R1) As the type of room has an effect on the entire time the guest is
staying at the hotel, guests who previously received a temporary upgrade now are dissatisfied when this special recognition has been taken away.

Value creation is not tied to being a loyalty program member and not all the extras are appreciated. “Otherwise I don’t care about the [complimentary] minibar products, but because I drink a lot of water, I liked to get the waters for free.” (R1) Either way, when these extras are regularly provided they are expected. When there are peaks in the number of loyalty program members, the expected extras like newspapers sometimes run out. Whatever the reason is, however, guests tend to notice and are dissatisfied as a result: “It’s been too bad to notice how newspapers run out.” (R5 translated from Finnish) Another Hotel Bonus Club member also noted that lately “the evening tabloids have run out if you arrive late.” (R11 translated from Finnish) Although the guest jokingly says this “ruins the entire night” (R11 translated from Finnish) there is some truth to the dissatisfaction, as the newspaper is a benefit that belongs to the loyalty program membership the guest actually pays for (in the case of Hotel Bonus Club).

1.2.7 Facilities

Most respondents noted the importance of certain facilities in one way or another. For example, the availability of parking spaces is important to those arriving by car, generally Finnish customers. “There’s such a small garage and it’s always like, is there space?...and they can’t tell you if there’s space.” (R4 translated from Finnish) Similarly, one customer responsible for an entire group of guests noted: “the only bad thing here now is that parking spaces are inexistent around here. I mean you have your garage, but I’m by bus...where should I put that? That’s my problem.” (R6 translated from Finnish) But the problem is also the hotels, because facilities can be a very important part of value creation.

The importance of facilities is often debated against the skills of the staff. One respondent said “the staff is only the condiment. Other things, concrete things are more important.” (R4 translated from Finnish) The availability of facilities such as the gym, sauna, business centre, the room, bed, etc. determine value for customers. However, which facilities give value, if any, is subjective to each customer.

Most respondents mentioned the “gym and sauna” (R5 translated from Finnish) although the gym was definitely a favourite. “I prefer that they have a gym, but... It changes.” (R7)
The fact that the hotel has a gym in itself is not enough to ensure satisfaction, as one respondent noted that the gym does not always have capacity for enough guests. “Maybe a bigger gym. Yeah....It sometimes gets a bit crowded, but that depends on the time you are there (...)” (R8)

Some customers also mentioned things on a more personal level. “I appreciate for example the whole lobby area. I can’t help paying attention to the architecture...And the solution that has been used. For an architect personally it’s just (euh) great! I just become happy... This place has... This place is something!” (R4 translated from Finnish)

Nevertheless, the facilities such as the lobby area obviously have an implication to how guests are served. “Here this [reception desk] is not as big as elsewhere. (...) And there aren’t more than one or two receptionists.” (R4 translated from Finnish) The facilities either ease or limit the ability of reception staff to serve guests efficiently. “And everyone more often than not leaves at the same time. Then there’s a line there. And if there wasn’t that would be better.” (R4 translated from Finnish)

1.2.8 Reception Staff (Friendliness and Efficiency)

As mentioned the opinions regarding the relative importance of facilities versus staff is divided. On one end as one customer said: “standard rooms and standard greetings. (...) Things work in a business hotel.” (R2) It is likely that the sincerity behind these greetings is questioned by some, without undermining the necessity of these greetings. Another customer said that “even if you meet them in town...in a store somewhere they’ll say hi. May even exchange a few words...discuss something else than just the normal ‘welcome’ and they even bother with some small-talk” (R11 translated from Finnish) suggesting a greater need for a more personal relationship. The general consensus seems to be that staff politeness creates value and this was mentioned by most of the customers. “No matter how many good services the hotel offers if the staff... if the staff are not friendly then...the services doesn’t really matter.” (R3)

1.2.9 Staff Friendliness

It is obvious from customer comments that friendliness is anticipated if not expected. “For example now, and indeed not just this time, this girl in reception took me in (...) really...it
stuck in my mind since she was so polite.” (R4 translated from Finnish) Similarly, another customer expressed the same feelings:

“I mean in general, people [staff] are extremely friendly...they are genuinely trying to make you feel good during your stay...people always say ‘good morning’ or ‘good afternoon’ or ‘good evening’. So they really try and not let you by without having said something to you, so I like that.” (R1)

These comments show that even when this politeness and friendliness might be expected, it is still appreciated. It is only the level of value that is given to this friendliness that differs between customers; and as mentioned, the level of friendliness that is expected.

The position of staff relative to the guest is also debatable. For some respondents the staff is seen really as there to only serve the guests: “you ask them and they do it. That’s how it’s supposed to be.” (R2) Meanwhile others bond on a more personal level for whatever reason, affecting how they relate to staff. As one customer said: “maybe it’s because I stay here so often that I think the staff here is really nice.” (R11 translated from Finnish) Either way, reception staff is seen as being present to serve the guests. “It’s important that the staff is friendly and what is asked from them... gets done. If something is promised...and it doesn’t get done that’s annoying.” (R5 translated from Finnish) The dissatisfaction in a situation when promises are not kept is obvious, but the repercussions are not known.

One customer insists that “it’s the staff that...does the biggest part. I’m not the only one who thinks so.” (R11 translated from Finnish) That the staff is honest is also very important. “If there’s a mistake you say there’s a mistake and...don’t deny that this mistake has occurred.” (R12 translated from Finnish) Genuinely addressing each situation as it comes seems to be valued highly by most customers. As one guest mentions it is often enough: “as long as they try to... and understand your situation.” (R3) as it might not be possible for the staff to do anything about a problem. It is likely that the friendliness of reception staff makes them more approachable and thus makes it more likely that guest’s problems are solved. “I think the standards are generally high here... Good service... Nice staff. So expectations are high here, but so far they have been met every time.” (R11 translated from Finnish)

Customers definitely know what kind of behaviour they do not want to see from the reception staff. One respondent compared reception staff to staff at MacDonald’s: “When
you walk up to the counter they’re supposed to tell you something and they might do it if
the supervisor is close....But otherwise you can see that she’s just doing it to make a couple
of bucks. Which is okay for McDonalds but not okay for a Hotel.” (R9) Similarly, probably
reflecting on a negative experience, another customer said they appreciate: “when the
receptionist...doesn’t just follow the clock... ‘if only the minutes just went by and I could go
home.’” (R4 translated from Finnish) The point is that reception staff is expected to look
like they enjoy their job regardless of if they do or not.

When dissecting friendliness the smile was mentioned by overwhelmingly most of the
respondents. One guest mentioned that it was important to “look the customer in the eyes,
(eeh) smile a little bit... Not to force it, but show that you’re happy show that you enjoy
doing what you do.” (R9) Smiles are expected “from the start you are expecting
friendliness from the staff. You know, small things like a smile and (...) greeting... To make
you feel welcome.” (R3) The importance of simple things in satisfaction is highlighted in
one respondents reassurance that “you can get away with pretty much anything with a
smile.” (R12 translated from Finnish) and that “the key thing is friendliness.” (R3)

1.2.10 Staff Efficiency

Efficiency and smoothness are both appreciated especially by return customers. When
enquired about the most important thing then during check-out for example, one customer
mentioned “speed, smoothness, (...) predictability.” (R4 translated from Finnish) Another
customer mentioned that especially for business travellers “if you’re on business...it’s more
about efficiency (eeh) than anything else.” (R9) Speed, smoothness, and efficiency are
reflected based on staff and their skills and according to one guest, at reception “they are
very efficient.” (R2) Similarly another guest stated that “this girl has served me before and
she knows her profession very well” (R4 translated from Finnish) further highlighting the
meaning of the staff’s professional skill.

Only one respondent specifically mentioned how important it is that reception staff speak
English. “Like I said, I don’t choose the hotels, but I do like it when they have trained staff.
I love it when they speak English. Which is not the case sometimes...” (R7) Most likely the
general assumption is that reception staff speak English at most business hotels nowadays,
and hence this was not explicitly recognized by more customers.
1.2.11 Trainees

Some of the customers noted that “there’s quite a lot of trainees here... Even if they are usually labelled quite well (hah) and so on you still have quite a lot of them. It can sometimes be inconvenient...but they usually find a colleague who knows the thing.” (R5 translated from Finnish) It is indisputable that trainees for example are less efficient in comparison to other staff members and may even hinder value creation. Though there is an understanding regarding the learning curve of any job: “these trainees can usually cause the level of service to be a bit worse... But you do understand that.” (R5 translated from Finnish), especially return customers want to avoid dealing with trainees. Another respondent mentioned that something which impacts choice of accommodation among other things are “obviously these general practical arrangements like not having too many trainees on the job all the time.” (R12 translated from Finnish)

1.2.12 Services

Although one guest declared that “mostly the services have been (...) excellent” (R3) other guests had some suggestions for improvement. One customer for example pointed out that “in other chains I can check-out in the evening and during the night I get my bill under my room door and then I can check-out on the TV-set and I don’t have to stand in line.” (R1)

Generally however, customers are happy with how existing services work. “In my opinion in this hotel you have quite a basic global practice. I don’t feel like anything is particularly special or on average worse than somewhere else.” (R5 translated from Finnish) The services provided, like the pillow menu, booking taxi’s, newspapers, making bookings at hotels and restaurants, etc. are not very different from those at other hotels, but nonetheless help in creating value.

Reception services seemed sufficient, for example “ordering a taxi is fine. It always goes quickly. They know if you ask for a specific type of restaurant they know where to send you.” (R1) Making bookings and changes also works without problems. “Because I come and go... so you make the booking during the stay or when leaving.” (R5 translated from Finnish) No particular value is given to these actions. However, when a basic service the hotel provides fails for some reason this is noticed. “It’s been too bad...when the internet doesn’t work.” (R5 translated from Finnish) Problems with the internet for example restrict business traveller’s ability to work at the hotel.
Services only give satisfaction when they are utilized. The breakfast check-out service for example gives additional value to those who use it. “In my opinion this works better now again that you can check-out while eating ...breakfast.” (R11 translated from Finnish) For others insufficient information restricts the use of the service. “I think they have this like breakfast check out thing that you can do... But I never do...I want to go and brush my teeth after breakfast.” (R8) This guest for example incorrectly assumes that guests need to leave immediately after checking out during breakfast, when in reality the rooms is still available until the official check-out time at noon.

1.3 Post-Consumption Stage

Themes regarding categories in the post-consumption stage were unfortunately few. As was the case regarding overlap between the first two stages, in some cases the categories from the pre- and during consumption stages extend into the post-consumption stage. However, some themes emerge prominently in the post-consumption stage and are the focus here.

1.3.1 Staff Efficiency

For the most part customers do not have expectations of the hotel after check-out. When asked about having to deal with reception after check-out on customer said: “I haven’t really had any reasons...And I’m usually here every week so I’ll be back in a couple of days if I forget anything. But it hasn’t happened yet.” (R8)

1.3.2 Services

Customers still depend on hotel services and staff help once they have checked-out from the hotel. “Well sometimes you need a taxi or a booking for another night...Or you can ask for directions...How do you get to the subway...is there a taxi outside...You can’t really screw that up (...) in any way.” (R9) Another customer mentioned: “They have a storage room for...Because sometimes I check-out at noon but my...plane isn’t ‘till late at night. And I don’t want to be walking around with my luggage.” (R7) Once again, these are expected services and although not pointed out by many, their absence would most likely lead to dissatisfaction.

On a more general level, when asked about maybe forgetting something, one customer commented: “like, you have to be careful yourself....so you remember your own things.”
This comment suggests that after checking out the responsibility is moved from the hotel to the customer, not only of their possessions, but in general. However, in such a case that something is forgotten: “they’ve always understood when I’ve called after them and told them to mail it here.” (R12 translated in Finnish)

1.3.3 Special cases

While the above cases are fairly regular the satisfaction customers get when reception staff adapt to special scenarios is significant. One example is presented by a regular customer:

“Well actually it once happened to me that… I had already made it to the airport and had been there for a while already when I realized that ‘oh my god’ (hah) I had taken a chocolate bar from the minibar and I forgot to say this. So I called immediately….But they took it really well over here...’Don’t worry, thank you for calling and it’s fine like this.’” (R11 translated from Finnish)

The reaction of the staff made the customer realize their importance to the hotel. The flexibility of the staff in not taking payment afterwards saved both parties from a lot of hassle and leads to satisfaction. The customer continued quite correctly: “I think when you stay here as often as I do (...) then you are forgiven for small things like that quite easily!” (R11 translated from Finnish)

Another customer noted the value in the consideration reception staff show customers even after they officially no longer staying at the hotel. “So this is the little conveniences that they provide to you after you’ve left the hotel are really nice. I mean because if you’re staying at the hotel you’re traveling and if you’re traveling you’re being inconvenienced anyways, so… (hah)” (R7)

1.3.4 General Assessment

In simple terms one customer summarized: “I don’t have any issues here. So... I keep coming back for a reason... right? If I didn’t like it I wouldn’t stay here.” (R2) For some customers satisfaction is a result of evaluating whether their most elementary needs are satisfied. Others admit that subsequent stays effect how things are perceived later on: “you learn to expect certain behaviour after a few times [at the hotel].” (R4 translated from Finnish) The goal is through satisfaction to ensure that return guests concur with the following two guests: “on one hand it’s difficult to imagine going somewhere else. Here I’m recognized and I know the people here!” (R5 translated from Finnish) and “I feel
almost like I’m coming home and that I haven’t really been...in any other hotel as much as here...So it’s just like coming and going. And this feels like a really nice place.” (R11 translated from Finnish)

1.4 Summary of Constructs in Data Presentation

Following a presentation of the data in the previous sub-chapters an analysis of interview data is conducted through comparison and dimensionalisation of the discovered constructs according to the stages of the extended consumption process. Through cross-case analysis it becomes obvious that certain patterns and themes emerge as significant based on respondents thoughts and actions.

1.4.1 Pre-Consumption Constructs

Customers experience several different kinds of promises starting from the pre-consumption stage of the extended consumption process. It is duly noted that most of the pre-consumption stage is concerned with making promises and enabling the making of these promises. The sources and types of promises differ to a great extent depending on the customer and their history with the service provider.

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Figure 11: Constructs in the Pre-Consumption stage

The only identified customer side uncontrollable category was the employer choice. In the cases where employers determine that customers use the case company for accommodation
the promise is made on the customer's behalf. Therefore the customer and hotels interactions only become relevant in keeping promises.

Customer behaviour affected categories include loyalty programs, opinions of others, convenience and disinterest. Loyalty program members for example interpret promises according to standards true to specific loyalty programs. The tools and information provided by the programs to the hotel enable these promises to be held. The opinions of others effect promises pertaining to the stay already before arrival and experiencing what truly happens in the service process. Convenience and disinterest similarly to employer’s choice become relevant in keeping promises, because in these cases the customer generally are indifferent to where they are staying, promises only become relevant in keeping promises.

In interactions before arrival at the hotel between the hotel and customer, the making of promises is effected in four ways. Based on previous stays, online sources, the image and brand promises are made as to what the customer is to expect. It is important to note that not all customers use all three sources in forming their expectations. One customer might for example form their opinion entirely on the hotel website, while another reflects on good and bad memories from previous stays. Also, throughout the booking procedure the hotel enables promises to be made and makes promises to the customer pertaining to the booking and the future stay. Enablement of promises might occur through adding preferences to a profile according to a customer’s special wishes.

Direct marketing, price, location, known services and facilities help forming promises in the customers mind regarding what is to be expected during the stay. Information regarding these hotel characteristics is collected with these five categories in mind. What importance they hold to each customer is dependent on the individual. In this stage, because the customer is not yet present at the hotel they do not enable promises or keep promises to the customer. Their abstract existence is still important in this stage, but these categories take a more important role in the during consumption stage.

Hotel staff specific categories include efficiency, preparation, flexibility and automatic recognition. Promises here are made, enabled and kept based on reception staff behaviour. How the customer interprets the level of efficiency and flexibility help in shaping and
keeping promises already in the pre-consumption stage. By keeping the promise of efficiency and flexibility while taking a booking for example, customers experience this behaviour, and at the same time form the opinion that this behaviour can be experienced during the stay. In this way promises are also enabled. Also, by recognizing customers, the keeping of promises such as preferential treatment is enabled. Preparing to receive the customers is also done during the pre-consumption stage and helps enable keeping promises once the customer arrives at the hotel.

1.4.2 During Consumption Constructs

Generally, promises are made pertaining to the current stay in the pre-consumption and consumption stages. During the hotel service process characteristics are evaluated from a different angle. During consumption promises are made, enabled and kept simultaneously.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Making Promises</th>
<th>Enabling Promises</th>
<th>Keeping Promises</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Customer Behaviour Specific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Loyalty Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer and Hotel Interaction Specific</td>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td></td>
<td>Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel Characteristics Specific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel Staff Specific</td>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td></td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guidance and Directions</td>
<td>Staff Efficiency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff Friendliness</td>
<td></td>
<td>Trainees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 12: Constructs in the During Consumption Stage*

The only customer behaviour specific category during the consumption stage is loyalty programs. With their set benefits loyalty programs enable those promises that have been made in the pre-consumption stage. With adequate resources the hotel then keeps the promises set by the loyalty programs.

The customer and hotel specific interactions construct consists of the procedure category. This signifies the promises that are made, enabled and kept through either following procedure or diverting from it according to the needs of the specific customer.
Hotel characteristics specific categories include facilities and services. In regards to procedure, promises are mostly kept, but also made and enabled. Procedure can be followed accurately or loosely, creating different promises dependently. Facilities and services on the other hand act as enablers of promises and hopefully keep those promises that were made in regards to facilities and services in the pre-consumption stage.

Hotel staff specific categories are the most important determinant of satisfaction in the during consumption stage. Categories that depend on staff are recognition, personalization, flexibility, and guidance and directions. Recognition and flexibility were already mentioned in the pre-consumption stage and both help in making, keeping and enabling promises. Guidance and directions help in making and enabling promises when customers need assistance. Personalization is a benefit in making, enabling and keeping promises as this allows for greater satisfaction in personal service. Reception staff itself is evaluated on efficiency and friendliness, as well as the abilities of trainees. For some simply speed or efficiency is enough, while others value friendliness more. However, these two categories are not mutually exclusive. The trainee category is separately considered as the service these staff members provide is usually considered less valuable or even problematic.

### 1.4.3 Post Consumption Constructs

While only services in the hotel characteristics specific category remain in the post consumption dimension, hotel staff specific categories are the most important ones in determining what is valued during the post-consumption stage. Naturally pre-consumption and during consumption stage promises are still valid. Reception services are still used and promises made, enabled and kept.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Making Promises</th>
<th>Properties</th>
<th>Keeping Promises</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hotel staff specific</td>
<td></td>
<td>Staff Efficiency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Special Cases</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>General Assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel characteristics specific</td>
<td></td>
<td>Services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 13: Constructs in the Post-Consumption Stage*

Staff efficiency is not especially mentioned, and the importance of keeping promises according to previously made standards is more important than making or enabling new
ones. Significant are also those promises that might affect future stays. Special cases might need new promises to be made. More importantly staff need to be empowered to solve these situations, that is keep the promise. The satisfaction guests get from “the little conveniences that they provide you after you’ve left” (R7) is usually worth the trouble. Similarly, the general assessment guests make involves keeping the entire promise management process, as this truly is where the experience and expectations are matched up.