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University of Stavanger
Norwegian School of Hotel Management,
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How do major ski resorts in the Alps position themselves through their websites.

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NORWEGIAN SCHOOL OF HOTEL MANAGEMENT**

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Signature administration:

i) **Abstract**

The aim of this text is to study how major Ski-resorts in the Alps positioning themselves through their websites. The observations are done in accordance with the three factors content, usability and design, suggested by Theodor S. Kviknes in his Master's Thesis: *A survey of consumer behavior on sites for members of historic hotels in Norway located in rural areas: Web site factors that may affect web revenue (2013) for further investigation*. The text is determined to find traits of different positioning-strategies of ski resorts, and explain how the positioning-strategies are communicated. The seven ski resort-websites picket out for evaluation is based on the public image given to each of them, reflected in internet-articles, newspapers and other sources of information (Reich, 1999, p. 4; Schmitt, Simonson, & Marcus, 1995). This public images is based on associations to seven segments of the market-population. My research-question will then explore wether the positioning-strategy identified in the websites also are the ones identified with the public image. This is what I want to discuss with my findings, as well as the issues that relates to. What characterizes the websites found typical in attracting certain segments?. And which relationship is there between ski-resorts known for these characteristics?.

SkiWelt.....(Mass strategy)

Laax.....(Parks)

Les 4 Vallees.....(Free-riding/Offpiste)

Madrisa.....(Families/Beginners)

St Anton am Arlberg.....(Afterski)

Livigno.....(Pricedifferentiation: Low)

St Moritz (Corviglia)... .(Pricedifferentiation: High)

ii) Foreword

This master-thesis marks the end of two years of studying at the master-program of International Hospitality Management at the Norwegian Hotel School in Stavanger.

The program has prepared me to write this thesis. My original learning outcome has evolved and changed during the research process. In addition to the master-program, the process of writing this thesis has been an learning experience as well. I am thankful for the inspiration given to me by the teachers. The thesis was meant to be directed towards an area I found interesting.

However, writing the thesis has led to long hours of work, and I want to thank my advisor Dag Osmundsen for helping me through this project and for giving me valuable advice, perspectives, and inspiration.

Stavanger 31.06.2018

Anders Harstad

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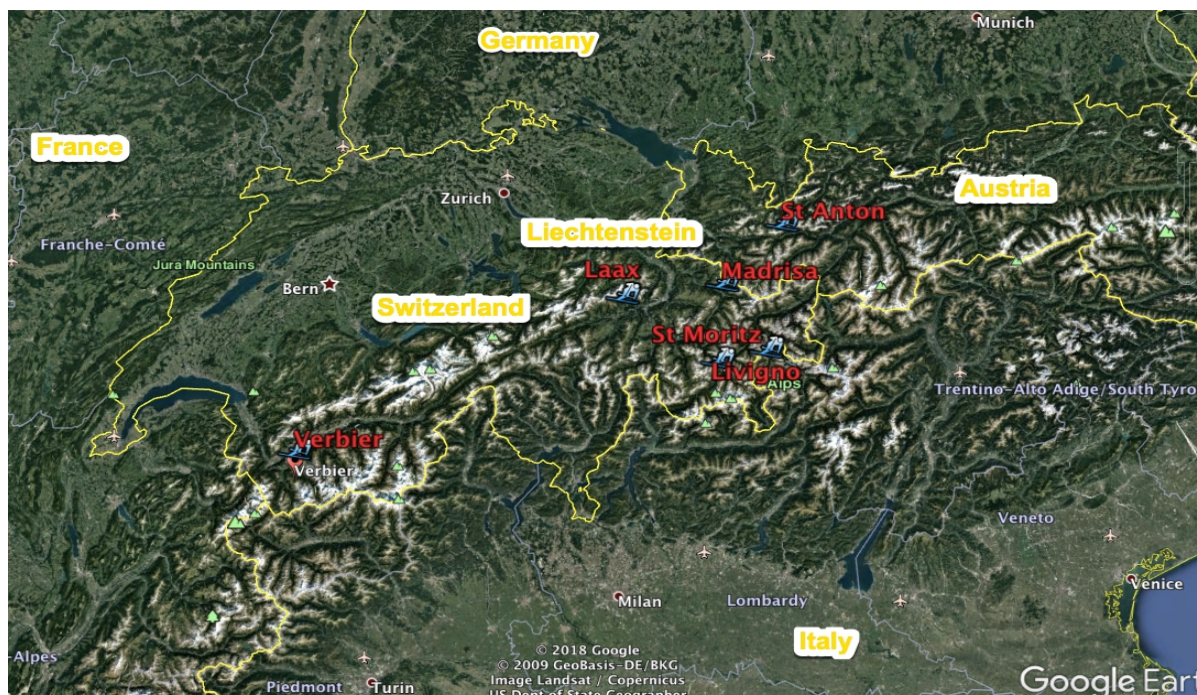
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1. Introduction

This paper will explore how major ski resorts in the Alps are positioning themselves through their websites. The thesis is a qualitative study and the research method is done by a explorative approach. My theoretical part was conducted to understand the different subjects in order to to my research and is related to areas of: strategy, marketing, positioning, segmentation, differentiation, and branding. The the perception of my findings and the interpretations of these have been made in conjunction with the theoretical basis that has been taken into account.

The theoretical part can be divided into three parts. The first part evaluate literature in the fields of strategy and marketing.



(Google Earth, 2018)

2. Literature review

2.1 Positioning

Positioning is applied as a strategic approach, where my findings will be pointed towards how the positioning is reflected in the marketing and branding and how it is reflected in the websites of the ski resorts. One of the earliest terms we have for strategy comes from Greece, who used the term strategos for it as early as 500 B.C.E. Already 500 BC the Greeks used the term strategos (Roos, Krogh, & Roos, 2005, p.16). Johnson, Whittington and Scholes (2011 p. 4), defined strategy as:

"Strategy is an organization's long-term directional choice and discourse that creates an advantageous position in interchangeable environments through the composition of resources and competencies that meet the needs of the markets and stakeholders' expectations."

Positioning is a noun that is defined by Kotler as *"the image customers has in relation to different competitors"* (Assael, 1985) And *"the set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person holds of an object,"* Kotler (1991). Which means, that the perception of the positioning is defined individually by each customer. However, the image is an intangible term that is formed by a large number of factors of incidence (Bramwell & Rawding, 1996). A key factor in marketing is shaping this image of the customer (Anderson, 1983; Wyer & Srull, 1989). Businesses can be effectively implement a strategic marketing plan in order to optimize their customer base.

Optimizing the customer base is what this paper will be focusing on. By understanding how to

make customer segments is important in order to optimize market position within a certain customer group. Strategic marketing is done in three steps. The first two steps are necessary in order to implement a positions-strategy.

Figure: 1



(Ahmed, 2014)

Market segmentation is the act of mapping out the different characteristics within the customer group. By mapping out different traits of the customer the marketers can more easily identify characteristics of the group. This will help them understand the typical preferences.

(Cravens D.W 1982). Marketers also have the option of attracting the population as a whole, rather than direct themselves towards certain groups/segments. But in many cases it is more effective for a company to find segments that are identified by their common preferences.

Whether ski resorts choose one strategy over another it will be used as a way of evaluation through the thesis. A company that enters a large market might not be able to serve all customers in their target market. Instead of compete with other resorts, the company must discover the parts of the market that can function effectively. This form of positioning gives gives a pretext of implementing a mass-strategy, which will be evaluated later in the text. (Kotler ,1991; Blom, 1992, p. 259)

Understanding principles of segmentation and positioning gives a insights to the field and helps to identify how the different ski resorts are positioning themselves in the market.

By doing this as an explorative study I don't assume every ski resort has a clear positioning-strategy, or whether if they direct their marketing-efforts at certain segments at all.

But my literature review of these ideas will help me understand and evaluate my findings.

It has been mentioned in earlier literature that the consideration for understanding segmentation has been underestimated as an important marketing-factor and should be given more attention for ski resorts in optimizing their profits (Gilbert, 1990).

2.2 Segmentation – A tool for the positioning-strategy?

The positioning-efforts have become more appropriate and are based on a constantly changing and growing market for skiing. The growing ski-market has also made the market an increasingly fragmentary and demanding environment with more specialized facilities and services.

A growing number of older customers and a growth in families, more diverse forms of recreation in the slopes and a higher demanding customer base has made the ski resorts more vulnerable of positioning themselves towards certain customer groups (Hudson, 2000, p. 161). Even if we define segmentation as a group of people characterized by common similarities it can still be difficult to point out the different segments in each market.

However, the segmentation-process should be based on the similar characteristics that is relevant in a marketing-context. Mill and Morrison (1985 p. 361) suggested that marked segmentation should be based on four different assumptions about the customer.

- 1. The market is made up of particular segments, the members of which have distinctive needs and preferences*
- 2. These potential tourists can be grouped into segments, the members of which each have similar identifiable characteristics*
- 3. A single product offering, such as scuba diving, will appeal to some segments of the market more than others*
- 4. Destinations and tourism businesses can improve their overall marketing effort by developing specific product offerings to reach specific segments of the market.*

Kotler, P., & F.A. Fox (1985) also point out principles in how to map the different segments.

- 1. Consumer (tourist) wants, preferences, and usage rates are often highly associated with demographic variables*
- 2. Demographic variables are easier to define and measure than most other segmentation variables,*
- 3. Even when the target market is described in terms of other non-demographic characteristics of the target market that influence what media they use.*

In order to understand the segments, it can also be necessary to understand the typical traits of the recreational sport tourists or the ski-tourists. There have been a lot of studies related to how to segment the sports tourist, but no consistent segmentation pattern is suggested. Some believe that segmentation of sports tourists is a broad concept as sports tourism can encompass a wide range of demographics (Ritchie & Aldair, 2004, p. 39).

Delphy (1998) has made a profile of the sports tourist who is characterized by being physically active, having high education, higher salary level and between 18 and 44 years of age.

However (Delphy, 1998)s, assumptions is too general and risks failing to express the deeper complexity of the segments of the sports tourist.

To understand segments among skiers and snowboarders it can also be necessary to understand the profile of the typical skiers/snowboarders. The profile of a typical skiers vary from the population in

general, and also to different types of sports tourists.

Joppe, Elliot & Durand (2013) Described the typical skier as a day-explorer rather than one who travels to a destination and overnight at the ski resort. Furthermore, they describe a segmentation profile that applies to the ski tourist. Men account for 55% and the average age and is 36,6 years. Generally, the skier has high education, where 44% have university education. Skiers also tend to be overrepresented among young single people, young couples and families with teenagers. As such, this does not only apply to skiers, but to people who use ski resorts, where snowboarding is also a widespread recreation. (Heino, 2000). Smith (1956) introduced market segmentation as a means to classify consumers into subgroups. His intention was to offer businesses a tool for understanding subgroups' needs and wants and to develop tailored products and services. However different authors have made other segments of ski resort visitors based on different criteria. Matzler, Pechlaner, and Hattenberger (2004) who made divided segments made by lifestyle, and categorized them into as:

- *pleasure seekers*
- *work oriented*
- *couch potato*
- *family oriented*
- *committed helper*
- *inconspicuous*
- *culture interest*

Another author Tsiotsou (2006) made segments based on the criteria of the frequency of visiting the resort, He divided each segment based on if visitors visited the resort weekly or

monthly. Tsiotsou (2006) argued this way of segmenting was grounded in the level of income, skiing-ability, and satisfaction. The segmentation of a population is a complex procedure and the goal to categorize people into groups of common similarities may have different purposes. In a research conducted by (Konu, Laukkanen, and Komppula (2011) were aimed at understanding how different segments chose different skiing-destinations based on the attributes given each of the groups. They created segments based on traits they saw in the market. The study determined that they could correlate each segment with a certain destination in Finland.

- *passive tourists*
- *cross-country skiers*
- *want-it- all*
- *all-but-downhill skiing*
- *sports seekers*
- *relaxation seekers.*

The process of grouping people into segments is also called segment-targeting. This form of segmentation can also be created by making questionnaires. Conducting a cluster-analysis can be a helpful tool when grouping people into categories and is helpful when trying to understand the market and the segments it's consisted of. Such an effort was made by (Alexandris, 2009) in his effort to segment recreational skiers. He divided his results into four different segments based on:

- Novice
- Multiple-interest
- Naturalist

- *Enthusiast*

Different sources of literature suggest several ways of segment-targeting ski- markets. According to Kotler, Bowen, and Makens (2010) the most frequent way of doing so is by the following characteristics:

- Geographic
- Demographic
- Psychographic
- Behavioral

The profile of the skiers and snowboarders are identified by having certain characteristics, but variations exist within this market. Several marketing books recommend targeting specific market segments in order to optimize operation and profitability (Kotler, 1991; Blom, 1992, p. 242) as preferences may vary to a greater extent. There is also a greater basis for segmenting the different groups and positioning towards the customer group that the ski resort marketers thinks has the greatest potential.

Different words are used to explain the variations in the market and the positioning efforts made.

2.3 Differentiation-strategy: A way of optimizing the Positioning efforts?

(Bordas, 1994) Argues that there are three different options for ski resorts to position themselves to have a competitive advantage.

- Low Cost
- Differentiation
- Specialization

"By differentiation, the company tries to become outstanding in its industry based on some criteria they know the customers to a large extent appreciate (Porter 1992, p 32). They select one or more attributes and align themselves so that they are alone in meeting those needs. The durability of the differentiation depends on two things; that, for a long time, customers also perceive it as valuable and that it is not imitated by competitors" (Porter 1992, p 183). A differentiation strategy is especially appropriate in a heterogenous market. The heterogenous market is characterized by widespread preferences among the customers, in opposition to homogeneous market where the customer have more similar preferences.

According to (Kotler, 1991; Blom, 1992, p. 243) to understand the tourist, it is necessary to understand its heterogeneity, and should given more attention as a valuable marketing effort. (Bieger and Laesser ,2002). Hudson (2000, p. 161) has described the skiing market as being characterized by being a fragmentary market, in other words described as being heterogenous. Heterogenous market is also the most appropriate market for segment-targeting the market-population as the preferences are characterized by its large differences, and therefore a market

where differentiation-strategies are advantageous for profit maximization_(Hudson, 2000, p. 161)

The undifferentiated market has the largest basis for segmentation. Once the segments has been mapped, the company can create a segmentation profile. A profile of what characterizes the typical buyer (Kotler, 1991; Blom, 1992, p. 243). The differentiation-strategies that is found appropriate in the heterogenous skiing-market are after all reaffirming the necessity for ski resorts to follow the three steps model suggested by (Heath & Wall, 1992, p. 19) and makes the basis for evaluating ski resorts and their positioning strategies. As such the concepts of differentiation-strategy and positioning-strategy are related concepts. If a company goes for a differentiation or undifferentiated strategy it is still somehow a way of explaining how the company is positioning itself in the market. This means that the positioning-strategy is applied for a broader construct as it applies to both differentiated strategy, and undifferentiated strategy (Reich, 1999, p. 74). In this text I also want to analyze ski resorts that goes for both of these types of strategies and the concept of positioning-strategy is a more accurate construct for my research. In contrary to the the differentiation-approach a ski resort may also go for an undifferentiated strategy. By then, the ski resort is also positioning itself based on the assumption that the market is homogeneous. Homogeneous preferences apply to *a market where* consumers have fairly similar preferences for a product or a service. And it may be assumed that a positioning against these preferential criteria has the greatest background for serving the largest market share in this market. A company can try to position itself in the middle and make sure it attracts the largest share of the market (Kotler, 1991; Blom, 1992, p. 243).

2.4 Mass-strategy - the other alternative

Mass-strategy focuses their positioning-efforts towards a homogenous market. This is a market strategy based on having an undifferentiated strategy.

This form of strategy is called a mass-strategy because its purpose is to catch the largest portion of the market by not specializing in specific areas. But because the market is also characterized by being fragmentary, a mass strategy is well applied by trying to serve all the customer-groups. (Kotler, 1991; Blom, 1992, p. 242) & (Hudson, 2000, p. 161) The capital and resources of a company is a highly determining factor in how they position themselves. This also also applied to ski resorts that have more resources and are able to invest in facilities that can satisfy a larger portion of customers. *The economist (1998)*.

The mass-strategy approach is therefore also more relevant for the ski resorts characterized by high resources. In contrary to the less resourceful resorts which may find it more applicable to go for a differentiation-strategy. Later in my text I will further explain some of the characteristics of ski resorts applying for mass-strategies, a process which has been nicknamed disneyfication by (The economist, 1998).

2.5 Promotional image vs actual product offering

Whatever the strategy a ski resort may choose, the marketing-efforts has to take the customers image into consideration. Positioning efforts can be categorized into two things, the promotional effort, and the actual product offering. Positioning by product offering is described by (Reich, 1999, p.4) as an *image based on either first- hand experience or the experience of a friend or acquaintance*. The promotional image on the other hand is described by (Reich, 1999, p. 4) as: The overall message that has been communicated through personal (individuals) and non-personal (mass media). However the actual product offering, and the promotional image will influence the public view

As mentioned earlier the position is defined as the *image customers has in relation to different competitors* (Assael, 1985).

Rather than understanding the position as a formal organizational policy, the perception is based on the objective perception of each individual.

Because an image is influenced by numerous factors, it's also difficult to control the image.

Marketing-principles try to influence the image of organizations to their favor with the goal of maximizing profits (Hu and Ritchie, 1993).

For a ski resort, it can be assumed that marketing has an influence on the image, but it can be assumed that the image of customer in relation to the certain ski resorts is highly determined by external factors. These factors can include, media, events, reviews on internet, news reports, magazines, films, documentaries, friends and relatives. These sources all play key roles in how image is shaped in a customer's mind (Gunn, C. ,1988).

There may be a vast difference between what customers think of the destinations promotional efforts and what the ski resorts are trying to communicate (Reich, 1999, p. 4). This opens up an additional area for further analysis when looking at the websites. Because of these numerous sources of information markets may find it difficult to influence these views. Rather than trying to picture a false image through their marketing, the marketing should portray the ski resort in line with what they are offering. Both the website and marketing efforts should be used as a tool to provide information and content. It's important that this information should be correct (Gunn, C., 1988). Studies conducted, confirms a positive interrelationship if the tourist's performance of the destination is met. The tourist's satisfaction will then cause the tourist to return (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007. (Kotler, 1991; Blom, 1992 p.282) emphasizes that positioning itself as number one in a particular market is one of the most effective marketing tools. This, however, applies only if the marketing does what it promises. Unless marketing is in line with what is actually offered, it will again ruin marketing in the long run as the product or service does not meet the expectations that are set.

2.6 Websites – Positioning by building the brand-image

I have chosen to focus my task on how ski resorts promote themselves through their web pages. I want to look at what characterizes the information provided. What images and the quality of those images that are produced, and how to interpret this in relation to how the ski resorts are perceived. I also want to look at how to interpret this in relation to the positioning-efforts. I will do this by researching and understanding how the websites are determined by certain factors. It also gives a deeper understanding on how to evaluate how effectively the resorts are communicating their information, and portraying their image.

Most major ski resorts are making efforts by marketing their resorts via many different information-

channels. Communication tools are important to reach the market, and websites are a powerful tool to share information. They are also other marketing communication channels on the internet. This includes market- targeting towards certain segments based on life cycle (Stynes, Mahoney and Spotts, 1980), participation constraints (Williams and Basford, 1992), and spending levels (Mills, Courturier, and Snepenger, 1986)

2.6.1 Internets role in todays marketing

By analyzing the website pages, there are several factors that contribute to determining how each website is perceived. More and more consumers across the world use the internet to find information, shop and service support (Epstein & Yuthas, 2007). Research shows that the internet is used as the most frequent source of information for tourists (Hyde, 2008, as cited in Duman & Tanrisevdi, 2011). The smartphone's intake has made internet usage even more comprehensive and convenient for the user who can now retrieve information at any time and at any place. There is also no reason to believe that the use of smartphone will slow down with the years to come. Thus, the ski resorts website is still more accessible to the crowds (Roberts & Zahay, 2013).

2.6.2 Factors determining good web-pages

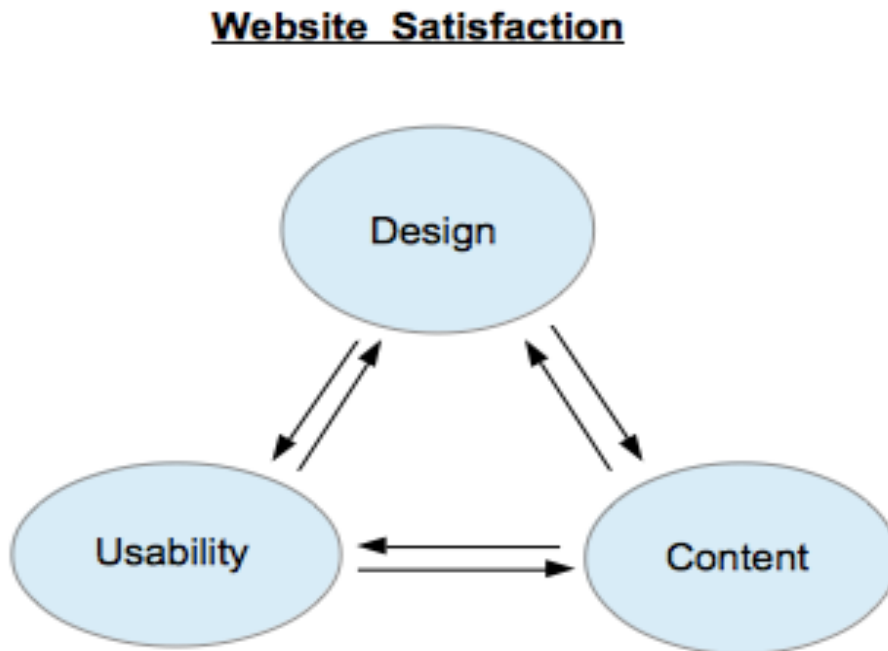
The New York Times newspaper has a prize called "The Internet's Highest Honor" (The Webby Awards, 2013). This is an award that wishes to add to the best executed websites worldwide. At the award, the jury attaches importance to performing the following factors: content, structure and navigation, visual design, functionality, interactivity and general experience. Perdue (2001) also evaluated sites for resorts. He also mentions many of the same issues, but uses

different ways to express the factors he found important.

Perdue pointed out four important factors that led to a good website for resorts, namely: Website characteristics, speed and accessibility, ease of navigation, visual attractiveness of the site, and quality of information. The quality of the information is related to content, simple navigation can relate to functionality, and visual design can relate to visual attractiveness.

Perdue (2001) continued the study by testing these factors with fifty business students at an American university. The test results showed that especially three of the factors that were important, namely Navigation, Visual Admittance and Information Content were highly important factors. These factors were pointed out as important factors in the conclusion of Theodor S. Kviknes Master's Thesis: *A survey of consumer behavior on sites for members of historic hotels in Norway located in rural areas: Web site factors that may affect web revenue (2013) for further investigation.* (Kvikne, 2013, p. 115) also suggests in his master thesis that these three factors are important in determining what is a good website: design, usability and content.

Figure: 2



(Kviknes, 2013, p. 45)

2.6.3 Website Design

Website design is defined by *Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2012, p. 405)* as: "creating an appropriate layout of page elements to meet the goals of find-ability and usability"

Design is mentioned as an important factor for the website to be satisfactory for the web site user, and seen as a critical factor for a website's success.

Roberts and Zahay (2013) state that Internet marketers believe that most visitors skim the text instead of reading. "The study indicates that website visitors are not only looking for informational content, but they are also expecting a visually interesting experience." (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2012).

In my analysis of the ski resorts, I want to evaluate how different websites produce themselves, with a main focus on content, that is, the information the websites communicate to the customer. I also want to look at how the information is perceived in the context of how you perceive that the ski resorts are positioned in the market.

Websites in the skiing industry today consist of image and text. Text is, of course, considered to be content related. A website communicates strongly through image usage, and you can interpret some positioning strategy basics by analyzing the images as well as the text usage in a website.

2.6.4 Website Usability

The American students mentioned earlier saw usability as an important factor when determining what is a good website. The usability factor, can also be seen as the factor of Ease of Navigation. The necessity of usability is important so that communication of content and image are communicated in a smooth way (Perdue, 2001). *"The quality of the information, and the ease of which the customer can navigate the site to find that information, the effectiveness of how it is presented will have an impact on whether the customer is able to achieve his/her goal"* (Polites, 2012) Usability by such has a strong impact on how the customers are influenced by the overall view of the website.

2.6.5 Website Content

Aggarwal and Venkatesh (2002) research results showed that of all the factors that contribute to a good website that content and usability were the most important ones for users. Many different studies indicate that multiple factors determine the importance of good web pages, but content is always mentioned and often associated with ease-of-use and design factors. The content factor is an important tool for understanding how websites are trying to communicate with their market segments by using information, content and images (design). Content may also consist of keywords that make the website user friendly (Clifton, 2012). This is also related to the importance of the landing page, that is, the first page to come onto a website. The correct use of content and images will be critical factors for the customer during the decision-making process (Clifton, 2012). Ideally, by doing so the marketing efforts will influence the image they want to communicate by using the correct use of content, design and usability towards the target-segment they want to attract.

3. Worldwide skiing and snowboarding

3.1 A global phenomenon

Skiing is a growing worldwide phenomenon. It's believed that some of the first skiing vacationers were a group of people from United Kingdom who were invited to a hotelier in St. Moritz in Switzerland in 1866 (Cockerell, 1988). However, ski resorts did not start to build uphill transportation until the 30s. In 1936 unions pacific developed the first tourist oriented ski resort in Sun Valley, Idaho and this became the prototype for world class ski areas in North America (Hudson, 2000, p. 10). After World War II the skiing-market expanded with higher rate of car ownership and a more affluent middle-class. In 1994 it was estimated that there were 65-70 million skiers worldwide of whom 55 million downhill skiers, and the rest mostly cross-country skiers Cockerell, N. (1994). The statistics from 1994 do not take into account snowboarders, as snowboarding had not developed as a major winter-sport at that time. But this recreation has seen an incredible growth the last decades and have become an important recreation in winter-sport resorts. By 2015 there were 120 million snowboarders and downhill skiers indicating a trend of growth (Vanat, 2015).

Europe accounted for 30% of this market according to (Hudson and Hudson, 2015). The rest of the markets were mostly placed in North America (Rocky mountains) and Asia-Pacific, mostly in Japan and Australia (Hudson and Hudson, 2015). The number of ski resort worldwide is difficult to measure as different sources of information give different numbers. Hudson and Hudson (2015) were indicating around 2,000 ski resorts globally. The website Ski resort.info estimates that there

are much more than that. They believe that there are 5.498 ski resorts, many of these are of minimum importance in contrast to the large major ski resorts which owns the main share of the market (Skiresort Service International, 2018a)

3.2 Using Skiresort.info as a methodological tool

Skiresort.info is a website I have found useful when researching the worldwide insight within the field where I am conducting my research. Skiresort.info also publicize test-results for the company Ski Service International. Skiresort Service International describe themselves as a leading publication and distribution company for ski resort information and data. (Skiresort Service International, 2018q) Their webpage gives detailed information about every each of the 5,498 ski resorts worldwide and also gives feedbacks on each resort based on different ways of measurement. Skiresort.info has been particularly useful as it points out both the good and bad aspects of the resort according to different aspects of the resort. A score-system is provided with stars ranging from bottom 1 (negative) to 5 stars (positive). The stars are awarded depending on what facilities and services the ski resorts provide to their guests. This point system makes it easier for me as a researcher to map out resorts depending on the characteristics that ski resort.info has given to each resort. This is helpful when understanding each resorts positioning efforts. The ski resort.info also gives each resort an overall score that is calculated by finding the average of total stars given towards each aspect. Ski resort.info has been useful when researching the overall scope of ski resorts, but at the same time the ability to categorize the resorts based on given criterias. Below i present the results of ski resorts that are categorized in accordance to their geographical location.

The number of ski resorts in the following three mountain-ranges were

Scandinavian mountains: 164

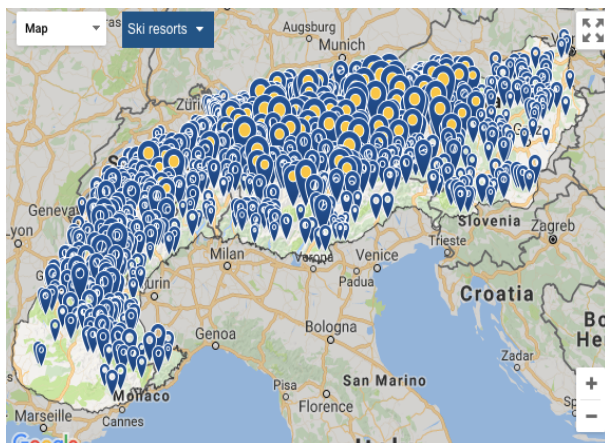
the Alps : 1127

the Rocky Mountains : 141

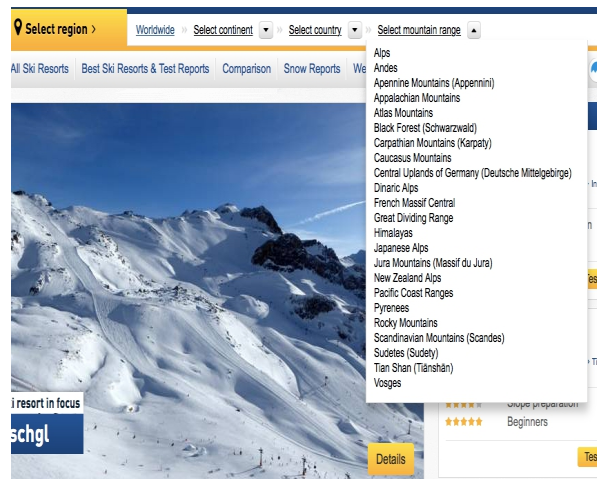
(Ski resort Service International, 2018r)

Pictures from skiresort.info

Screenshot 1



Screenshot 2



Screenshot 3

Test 4 Vallées – Verbier

Further evaluation criteria

- ★★★★★ Access, on-site parking >
- ★★★★★ Orientation (trail map, information boards, sign-postings) >
- ★★★★★ Cleanliness and hygiene >
- ★★★★★ Environmentally friendly ski operation >
- ★★★★★ Friendliness of staff >
- ★★★★★ Mountain restaurants, ski huts, gastronomy >
- ★★★★★ Après-ski >
- ★★★★★ Accommodation offering directly at the slopes and lifts >

Evaluation criteria for special interests

- ★★★★★ Families and children >
- ★★★★★ Beginners >
- ★★★★★ Advanced skiers, freeriders >
- ★★★★★ Snow parks >
- ★★★★★ Cross-country skiing and trails >

Screenshot 4

Alps: most inexpensive 5-star ski resorts

1. SkiWelt Wilder Kaiser-Brixental ★★★★★

Europe > Austria > Tyrol (Tirol) > Tiroler Unterland > Wilder Kaiser
Europe > Austria > Tyrol (Tirol) > Tiroler Unterland > Kitzbüheler Alpen > Brixental
Europe > Austria > Tyrol (Tirol) > Tiroler Unterland > Kitzbüheler Alpen > Holiday Region
Hohe Salve

Lift ticket € 51,- (Day ticket main season)

Test result ★★★★★
4.7 out of 5 stars

Price-performance € 10.85 per star

Elevation info 620 m - 1957 m (Difference 1337m)

Slopes 284 km **122 km** **129 km** **33 km**

Ski lifts 90

[Details](#)

2. Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis ★★★★★

Europe > Austria > Tyrol (Tirol) > Tiroler Oberland (region) > Landeck > Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis

Lift ticket € 51,- (Day ticket main season)

Test result ★★★★★
4.6 out of 5 stars

Price-performance € 11.09 per star

Elevation info 1200 m - 2820 m (Difference 1620m)

Slopes 198 km **47 km** **123 km** **28 km**

Ski lifts 39

[Details](#)

3. Kaltenbach – Hochzillertal/Hochfügen [SKI-optimal] ★★★★★

Screenshot 5

Best ski resorts Alps ↗

Newest test reports ↗

Test reports:

Ski resort size >	Orientation >	Accommodation offering >
Slope offering >	Cleanliness >	
Ski lifts >	Environmental	Families/children >
Snow reliability >	friendliness >	Beginners >
Slope grooming >	Friendliness >	Advanced skiers, freeriders >
Accessibility, parking >	Gastronomy >	freeriders >
	Après-ski >	Snow parks >
		Cross-country skiing, trails >

Select another region

[Change region >](#)

Above are screen shots from skiresort.info. The process of selecting a ski resort is easier when you use a systematic order that organizes the resorts by different criteria.

Table 1

List of countries with more than 100 skiresorts

<u>Country</u>	<u>Number of Ski resorts</u>
Germany	713
Japan	598
USA	522
Austria	434
Switzerland	334
Czech Republic	300
Italy	294
Canada	290
Poland	254
France	253
China	133
Slovakia	126
Sweden	119
Norway	111

(Skiresort Service International, 2018h)

Monitoring the amount of ski resorts per country gives an indication of where the largest ski-markets are located, however, this does not give the full picture as some countries have a lot of smaller resorts that are not considered in this count.

Countries with large resorts are located mostly in the Alps, especially in France and Switzerland and to a certain degree in Italy and Austria as well.

As the larger resorts are taking a larger customer-base it can be assumed that the numbers are disproportional in accordance to the number of ski resorts.

Not even a single one of the top 100 worldwide ski resorts were located in Germany which tops the list of this table. This also applies to Czech Republic, China and Slovakia.

On the other hand, especially France and to some degree Austria which has 29 and 21 of the top 100

resorts respectively, can be viewed as underestimated based on these statistics. To better understand where the larger resorts is placed I collected data on where the 50 largest ski- resorts based on number of skilifts are in each country.

(Ski resort Service International, 2018g)

Table: 2

Location of top 100 worldwide ski resorts measured after number of lifts

<u>Country</u>	<u>1 ----50</u>	<u>50-100</u>	<u>1--100</u>
France	17	12	29
Austria	14	7	21
Italy	8	5	13
Switzerland	5	5	10
USA	1	6	7
Japan	2	4	6
Sweden	2	1	3
Andorra	1	1	2
Spain	0	2	2
Finland	0	2	2
Argentina	1	0	1
Australia	1	0	1
Norway	0	1	1
Poland	0	1	1
Serbia	0	1	1
Russia	0	1	1
Canada	0	1	1

- Note: The first fifty includes 52 countries totally as 2 of the ski resorts stretches over two countries.
- Les Portes du Soleil: Switzerland & France
- Matterhorn Ski resort: Italy and Switzerland

(Ski resort Service International, 2018g)

Table 3

Top 10 Ski resorts by number of skilifts

<u>Name</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Skilifts</u>	
Les Portes du Soleil	Morzine	Switzerland & France	171	
Les 3 Vallees	Val Thorens	France	141	
Paradiski	La Plagne	France	91	
SkiWelt	Brixental	Austria	90	<i>- Highlighted in red. As this resort is a part of my research</i>
Ski Arlberg	St. Anton	Austria	88	<i>- Highlighted in red. As this resort is a part of my research</i>
Tignes	Val d'Isere	France	82	
Val Gardena	Val Gardena	Italy	81	
St Gervais	Megeve	France	80	
Espace Diamant	Bonneville	France	79	
Skicircus	Saalfelden Leogang	Austria	70	

(Ski resort Service International, 2018g)

Table 4

Top 10 Ski resorts by total Slope length

<u>Name</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Country</u>	Kilometers of slopes
Les 3 Vallees	Val Thorens	France	600 km
Les Portes du Soleil	Morzine	Switzerland/France	580 km
4 Vallees	Verbier	Switzerland	412 km
Via Lattea	Sestriere	France	400 km
Matterhorn	Zermatt	Switzerland	322 km
Les Sybelles	Le Corbier	France	310 km
Ski Arlberg	St Anton	Austria	305 km
Tignes	Val d`Isere	France	300 km
SkiWelt	Brixental	Austria	284 km
SkiCircus	Saalfelden Leogang	Austria	270 Km

(Ski resort Service International, 2018f)

3.3 The Alps – The Dominating Skiers Market

Most of the world's largest ski resorts are located in the Alps, including the 10 largest ski resorts measured after the number of ski lifts. This is also shown when looking at largest ski resort measured after slopelength. Initially I wanted to include the Rocky Mountains and Scandinavian mountains in my research. In the beginning, I wanted to analyze each geographical area into by how the resorts were marketing themselves based on geographical areas. However, I shelved this plan after a while, as I thought the research was too comprehensive.

3.4 Destination tourism: Ski resorts marketing efforts as all-inclusive destinations

During my research I realized that marketing of ski resorts so often goes hand in hand with the marketing of destinations.

The marketing of tourism-destinations became important to include in my text as ski resorts are often marketing themselves as destinations, rather than only the ski resort itself.

It is important to look at ski resorts as destinations as the position strategy that focuses on the masses often position themselves as a destination and not just a ski resort. The word destination might also use the word cluster in describing the phenomenon as cluster is defined by Bordas (1994) "*as a group of tourist attractions, infrastructure, equipment, services and organization concentrated in a delimited geographical area*".

3.5 Mass-Strategy: The Disneyfication of the winter-destinations

The concept of mass-strategy has already been defined as a way to understand how it differs from the other strategies. Earlier in the text we have seen that mass-strategy is characterized by focusing on attracting a mass audience and not on a specialized population. The mass-strategy is also characterized by having an undifferentiated approach in opposition to other segments that are going to be evaluated in the text, which is characterized by differentiation. We have also seen that mass-strategy is often correlated with ski resorts that are marketing themselves as destinations. But the goal of this thesis is to evaluate ski resorts that are characterized by the mass-strategy approach as a way of positioning itself through their websites. A basis for evaluating ski resorts implementing a mass strategy as destinations is also partly based in on the assumption that the tourists visiting the

destination can be described as winter-vacationer, as their preferences includes activities outside the slopes(Spring, 1995b). Ski resorts that implement mass-strategies have the competitive advantage of being able to afford the range of facilities required to fulfill the plan. By implementing the best technology, warm and capacious lifts, guaranteed snow, and other activities outside the slopes these ski resort are able to cover a large range of activities. These resorts also tend to be among the larger ski resorts. (The economist, 1998; Skiresort Service International, 2018b)

By applying to different activities, and different levels of performances, it is especially attractive to families by fulfilling the expectations of the various skiers of all ages. As the mass-strategy resorts are attractive to the other segments mentioned as they are trying to cover all segments (The economist, 1998). Falk (2009) compared conglomerate ski resorts with independent ones. Many independent resorts are transformed into conglomerates via mergers and acquisitions to become more competitive. Also (Bordas, 1994) pointed out that in North America, many of the biggest ski features feature a wide range of activities alongside the ski slopes. This applies to a variety of activities such as ice skating, dog sledging, snowmobiling, tubing. The idea is to make the ski resort to a destination like a kind of winter theme parks, and the goal is to attract more families and beginners to the slopes. As mentioned earlier, the expression "disneyfication" has been used as a metaphor of trying to explain such resorts. The idea of making the ski resort to a winter theme park, is identified as an unstoppable trend within North American winter sport tourism (The economist, 1998). But even if the mass-strategy approach have competitive advantages it may also meet competitive challenges . Many of the larger ski resorts is often located geographically close to eachether making the competition even tougher. Fore-example 6 out of 10 largest European ski resorts were located in in the small French department of Haute Savoie. . Also 3 out of 10 largest ski resorts were located in the Austrian state of Tyrol, meaning that 9 out of 10 largest ski resorts in

Europe were located in only 2 regional subdivisions (Ski resort Service International, 2018).

Bordas (1994) states that there is no established competitiveness between countries, but within clusters of tourism business. On the other hand, studies conducted by Falk (2009) is however arguing that factors affecting ski resorts attractiveness are both influenced by domestic and foreign income. Falk (2009) also pointed out that private ski resorts in the French Alps are trying to attract foreign visitors from many countries such as Belgium, England and Russia. However new competitors in eastern Europe attract a cheaper market for the same quality, which attracts the international skiers market. Undermining Bordas (1994) assumptions that international competition does not exist. Skiresort.info has been my source in my research for finding resorts/destinations characterized by implementing a mass strategy. As this site also have an overall rating based on each of the categories, it also makes it easier to map out which one of the ski resorts that fulfill high scores on every factor. The hypothesis laid ahead by The economist (1998) earlier mentioned earlier that resourceful, large resorts with high capital that are more likely to implement mass-strategy, and makes the background for evaluating whether this statements correlates with my findings. The following resorts have 5 stars on every of the measures, and as seen tends to be the larger resorts.

5 Resorts that have the highest score

1. KitzSki
2. SkiWelt
3. St Anton (Ski Arlberg)
4. Schladming
5. Whistler Blackcomb

(Ski resort Service International, 2018b)

3.6 Price-differentiation

As in every competitive markets pricing is a way of optimizing the companies profits by their price policies. On the basis of the microeconomic price theory in which market segmentation helps an organization maximize its profit (Chamberlin, 1933 cited in Hunt & Arnett, 2004), it is considered a key concept of marketing (Wyner, 2002). The competitiveness in the service-industry is adjusted in accordance to the goods and services that cater to tourists needs.

(Dwyer 2000a,b). Dwyer (2000) points out however that the perception of value is an important factor. The perception of value created in the customers organic image can adjust prices for the factor of the ski resort. This image may also be related to brand-image (Hu and Ritchie, 1993). As a consequence, building the brand-image of a ski resort may give results that are in favor for the ski resort. As seen earlier in the text as Bordas (1994) differ between three options for ski-resorts to position themselves. The first one mentioned by Bordas (1994) is the low cost approach of positioning. However, also high cost approaches has been identified (Skiresort Service International, 2018o). And it can be assumed that both approaches of pricing is grounded in the brand-image that has been communicated towards the customers. Pricing is determined in simple terms by what the buyer and seller agree. Thus, the price level of a product will vary according to the customer's preferences, and will increase in the context of quality as the customer aspires (Kotler, 1991; Blom, 1992, p. 444). Price policy must evolve in a way that reflects the strategic approach that one wishes to use in the marketing strategy (Heath & Wall, 1992, p. 140). Prices can have significant psychological effects, and this consideration comes in addition to economic considerations when a price is to be determined. By positioning itself within a quality area, the company will also position itself in relation to its positioning strategy, which in some cases will be appropriate to the quality-conscious segment, while in other cases it will target a more price-

sensitive segment. (Kotler, 1991; Blom, 1992, p. 462). Pricing also applies to seasonal variations. This typically applies to a ski lift where prices are scaled up during the high season and are lower in low season. Price will also typically vary according to age, such as children - adolescent or adults-tickets. Such price adjustments can also help make the offer attractive for one specific age group, or people in a special life phase (Kotler, 1991; Blom, 1992, p. 462). It is also argued that the customer can face skepticism if the tourist destination adds to a price level that has a significantly lower price than comparable ski resorts. In such cases, despite the lower price, the customer can choose to travel to the ski resort that has a higher price, to be guaranteed to get the quality desired (Heath & Wall, 1992, p. 142). Price levels often have complicated input factors that affect price levels, and are not just related to quality. If there is a big deal for a place, the price could also be scaled up by the tourist service, which is typical for high season. Other factors such as high competition, however, will stimulate the price level to be lowered in order for the tourism-destinations to attract as many customers as possible. Heath & Wall, 1992, p. 145) As pricing have several determinant factors influencing it. It is not only managed by the ski-resorts, but it is influenced by these factors. Some costs are driven by larger socioeconomic and global forces, others by government actions (for example taxes), while others can be managed within limits (Dwyer 2000a,b). This is also seen in differences in the most expensive ski resorts in the Alps, as well as on the global skiers market. The tables given beneath is illustrating the most expensive resorts on three major skiing areas of the world. As seen, the North American skiers market have resorts that are considerably more expensive than in the Alps and the Scandinavian Mountains.

Table 5

Most expensive resorts in the Scandinavian mountains. Adult day ticket during main-season

Ski resort	Region/State etc.	Country	Price in Euro
Trysil	Hedmark	Norway	49 Euro
Kvitfjell	Oppland	Norway	46 Euro
Åre	Jämtland	Sweden	45 Euro

Hafjell	Oppland	Norway	45 Euro
Hemsedal	Buskerud	Norway	45 Euro

(Ski resort Service International, 2018n)

Table 6

Most expensive resorts in the Rocky Mountains. Adult day-ticket during main-season.

Ski resort	Region/State etc.	Country	Price
Beaver Creek	Colorado	USA	144 Euro
Aspen Mountains	Colorado	USA	128 Euro
Buttermilk mountain	Colorado	USA	128 Euro
Aspen Highlands	Colorado	USA	128 Euro
Snowmass	Colorado	USA	128 Euro

Ski resort Service International, 2018s)

Table 7

Most expensive ski resorts in the Alps. Adult day ticket during main-season

Ski resort	Region/State etc.	Country	Price
Zermatt	Wallis	Switzerland	77 Euro
Laax	Graubünden	Switzerland	66 Euro
Corvatch (St Moritz)	Graubünden	Switzerland	66 Euro
Corviglia (St Moritz)	Graubünden	Switzerland	66 Euro
Grands Montents	Haute Savoie	France	63,50 Euro

(Ski resort Service International, 2018t)

3.7 High Pricing Differentiation

As indicated earlier, for some people the status and prestige factor is an influencing factor in choosing certain ski resort, and are communicating a lifestyle by doing so (Kotler, 1991; Blom, 1992, p. 259). Thus, both (Delphy 1998) and (Booth and Loy, 1999) points out socioeconomic differences form the basis for forming segments based on price flexibility among different customer groups. This may be applied to ski resorts that want to offer different facilities and service in different cost categories for the customer. Why some resorts and destination have a higher perception as a place for "upper class" may be difficult to explain. In some cases it may be rooted in old historical perceptions, as with St. Moritz, developing as a destination for the British upper class after a hotel owner invited some of his English friends to stay at his place in St Moritz during the winter of 1866. (Cockerell, N. ,1988).

3.8 Branding Afterski

The segment of after-ski is somehow more related to the ski resort as a destination as it is many of the related activities that provides services related to after-ski. For this reason the branding is done in cooperation with all activities at the destination, providing the range of activities that cater to the tourists needs. Destinations depicted as afterski-destinations may focus on its restaurants and nightlife offers. The afterski-destinations is sucessfully partially because of the organic image the customers possess about the respective destination (Hu and Ritchie, 1993). Several studies have shown that there is a direct link between how a consumer views different destinations images and where the consumer decides to go (Erfurt & Johnsen, 2003).

My efforts in general did not went successful in allocating theory that relates to the after-ski

segment, and literature around marketing towards the after ski segments seems to be scarce. However understanding marketing toward customers attracted by after-ski can be done by understanding principles of brand-image and translating brand-image into how destinations can give an indication of how the branding is done. In the case of destinations trying to reach for these customers it can be appropriate to do the market efforts towards the principles of building a brand personality. Consumers prefer brands that they feel reflect their self-identity (Kaplan, Yurt, Guneri, & Kurtulus, 2010). Brand-personality is the image and brand associated with certain characteristics, often associated with a lifestyle and habits. The main difference between products and places when it comes to brand personality is that places usually generate a larger number of associations (Kaplan, Yurt, Guneri, & Kurtulus, 2010).

3.9 Families and Beginners

The family oriented market has been spotted as an important segment within the ski-industry. Statistics from A.C Nielsen indicate that the number of families skiing accounts from 25,1% of the total ski-package market (A.C Nielsen, 1998). An aging population indicates that there will be more and more families entering the market. As the demographic structure of the population is changing, the structure of the family-segment is changing as well, consisting of single parents, blended families and multi-generational families (Visa, 2013). Factors that attracted families were identified by (Visa, 2013) as:

- *Relaxation*
- *Novelty*
- *Outdoor activities*
- *Arts/heritage sites*

These factors are indicating great variety of preferences including activities outside the slopes which makes the segment affective toward multiple recreations. The varied preferences that will satisfy big and small also make this market fragmented (Visa, 2013). Earlier in the text we saw that studies conducted in North America by (Bordas, 1994) were implementing a variety of activities such as ice skating, dog sledging, snowmobiling, tubing with the goal of attracting more families and beginners to the slopes. As we have seen earlier, this is also something that can link to the idea of a mass strategy, and it may be possible to find correlated characteristics between the ski resorts who prefers these positioning-strategies.

3.10 Off-piste-segment:

The segments of free-riders, Off-piste skiers and Off-piste

Snowboarders

All-tough free-riding does not have any clear definition it is often mentioned as *skiing and boarding outside groomed ski slopes* (Berntsen, 2008). However according to Odden (2002) and Mårtensson (2013) free-riders are divided into elevator-based and top-trip practitioners (mountain-based). As my thesis is the research is directed toward resorts, it is the elevator-based free-riders that are the relevant segment in this text. Sometimes expression used in park-segment also applies to free-riders such "Jibbers" (Telseth 2005). The profile of free-riders has been mapped in a Swedish research toward Swedish free-riders. Men accounted for 86% of the participators most of them were relatively young, 21 – 30 years of age (Mårtensson, 2013). Free riders are also characterized by a greater inclination of risk-taking (Breivik, 2004). The risk-factor is explained by the quest for experiencing euphoria, exhilaration and delight - connotations of positive emotions (McCammon, 2004). Further Breivik (2004) described these emotions as linked to opportunities

and freedom, rather than negativity, and to get immediate positive response from the environment. For free-riders the snow is an essential part in search for powder, associated with the term powder-fever or powder-seekers. This is seen in Chamonix where free riders are competing over being the first to ski in powder after snowfall (McCammon, 2002).

3.11 Park-segment: Snowboarders and "Jibbers"

As skiing as an established sport, actually existed for centuries the recreation of snowboarding is a newer sport that has entered the ski resort market. It was estimated that the American market consisted of 9,67 million participants by whom snowboarding were consisting of 33 – 50% of the market, making this recreation a truly important segment in attracting visitors. (Bladin C. 2004) Due to these facts, the importance of facilitating attraction that attracts snowboarders will probably give an competitive advantage for the ski resort. Snowboarders are often attracted to parks, as well as freestyle skiers which combined makes a large portion of the market (Davidson, 1996). Number of parks in ski resorts has seen a dramatic growth, as in the early 1990s there were only 10 ski-parks in French ski resorts this number had increased to 50 in 2010. (Curtet, 2011; Feuillie, 2011; Curtet, 2007). The skier segments mapped as freestylers using skis adapted for their purpose such as twin-tip has been differentiated from other skiers with characteristics often more associated with snowboarding. And the freestylers and snowboarders can be seen as one segment in the ski resort market as they seek many common experiences. (Rinehart and Sydnor, 2003).

The parks in ski resorts are mostly attended by young people. Initial studies on freestylers conducted by Reynier (2014) reveal that they are essentially young men (80 to 90%) averaging 20 years old. Snowboarders and freestylers are often described as belonging to a subculture identified in distinctive style of clothing, language and way of life, and is also seen as a counterculture to the downhill skiers (Coates, 2010; Heino, 2000; Humphreys, 1997). Also negative associations has been pointed at these subcultures with drug-use and high alcohol-consumption (Thorpe, 2012). Risk-seeking behavior is a feature often associated with this segment. It is argued that the motivation for it is created in the quest for sensations, hedonism and creativity (Rinehart and Sydnor, 2003). Although relations between snowboarders and skiers were characterized by conflict for many years (Donnelly, 2006), the free-styling community today brings together practitioners of the two sports (Donnelly, 2006; Humphreys, 1997; Wheaton and Beal, 2003). With the use of internet, videos, and social media has made part in commercializing the genre and its culture (Coates, 2010; Heino, 2000; Humphreys, 1997). Even if all kinds of recreations in the ski-slope to a certain degree involve risk, the downhill skiing in opposition to snowboarding were argued of being *rigid, restrictive and far removed from any form of creativity*. (Wheaton and Beal, 2003).

4. Methodology

The methodology-chapter is where the different methods of collecting data is described. The methodology also examines how my interpretations of the datas are done.

Another aim of the methodology chapter is to ensure that the answers collected are reliable and valid. The aim of the research is also reflected in which method that are being used, which in my case is the explorative design, done by observations.

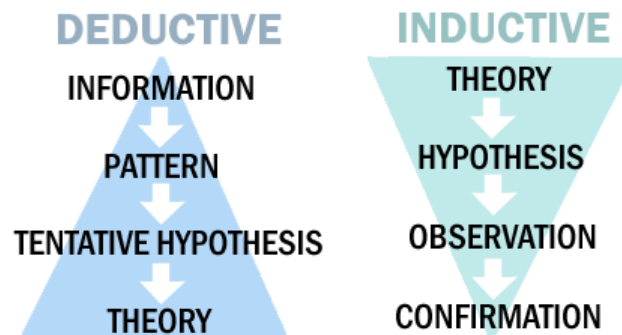
Further in this chapter, I want do explain the aspects of my research-approach, research-design, and research-method. At the end of this chapter I want to discuss wether my findings are valid and reliable based on weaknesses and strengths during my research process. Two ways to distinguish the approach to the research are by categorizing these into the deductive and inductive method (Johannesen, Tufte, & Christoffersen, 2016). These principles are based on ancient Socrates, which explained the difference between analytical and synthetic approaches (Tranøy, 2014).

The method of collecting data and the following empirical findings can also be characterized as being a explorative, descriptive or explanatory, or by whether the data collection is qualitative or quantitative (Thagaard, 2013; Saunders, Lewis og Thornhill 2009). Inductive method is when drawing conclusion from general assumptions reaching for an concrete answer. While deductive method can be explained as drawing conclusions from the concrete in order to make a general answer. Inductive methodology is based on using the empiri to make new theory, while deductive methodology base their theory in order to explain the findings.

My research are first based on theory to explain phenomenas (The findings) and has a deductive approach. Making conclusions based on general knowledge.

(Antonsen 2011, p. 41)

Figure 3



(Yeung, 2018)

4.1 Research-design

The research design is conducted early in the process of the research and indicates what issues that are going to be investigated Johannesen, Tufto og Christoffersen (2016). The three ways of constructing a research design is mentioned by (Saunders, Lewis og Thornhill 2009). Which is explorative, descriptive and explanatory. However, a research may change their aims over time. By conducting pre-tests will give the research valuable presumptions towards the respective subjects. Also during explorative studies, new questions and hypothesis may occur as the knowledge and new issues are widened during the research process (Robson, 2002, p. 59) cited by (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009, p. 139). This is especially true for the explorative studies as they opt for more flexibility. If it is suitable to change directions the willingness to do so are maybe the most appropriate solution. For me this flexibility were helpful in order for me to direct the thesis in an appropriate manner, as when my research started it was unclear how my results were going to end.

4.2 Case-design

My research aims at describing phenomenas at seven different resorts limited to a defined geographical area. My research is as a multiple case study, as it is evaluating seven cases of incidences with the aim of mapping out their characteristics, and wether the website are reflecting a public image given on the internet of the segments chosen for evaluation.

The case study approach is described by (*John Gerring (2007, p 1)*). as "*One might study the construction of many houses – perhaps a large subdivision or even hundreds of thousands of houses. Or one might study the construction of a particular house*".

Table 8

	Simple Casedesign	Mulitple Casedesign
One Analysis Unit	The researcher collects information about a limited device within a confined context	The researcher collects information about a limited device in several contexts
Multiple Analysis Units	The researcher collects information about multiple devices within a confined context	The researcher collects information about multiple devices in several contexts

(Johannes, Tufte, & Christoffersen, 2016, p. 207)

Based on the table above, I will identify my research as a multiple case design by using Multiple analysis units. The different ski resorts, segments and the relationships between these units

of analysis makes the research-approach complex, but gives also room for evaluations of correlations and relationships between the units.

4.3 Research-approach

When the research-approach are determined and research question formulated the method of how I am going to collect my data is the new issue I have take into consideration.

A wide range of different methods of collecting data are suggested in literature such as in-depth-interviews, observations, or surveys.

The methodology of the research is often differentiated by to different approaches, quantitative and qualitative (Johannesen, Tufte & Christoffersen, 2016).

In opposition to qualitative research, the quantitative approach is characterized by the use of statistics in their datas. The numbers provided gives background for further interpretations. While interpretations from qualitative research are interpreted by non-numerical datas, it may also give more room for flexibly in the interpretations. In my research I found the qualitative approach most appropriate, by using the observation approach. Wether this is a good or bad for the research may depends, but my interpretations based on the qualitative data may also opens up for new interpretations for further investigations. Early in the process I realized that my task was a qualitative task as my observations of websites are best explained on a qualitative method. During the writing process there were ideas for performing quantitative testing under consideration. Quantitative testing could have been carried out through surveys that chart the preferences of the different segments and found numerical results that could also substantiate correlations between the different segments preferences. At the same time, I could also discover new clusters that were characterized by customers' preferences that I have not included in the this text. As well as many other possibilities for analysis could have been suggested, but my plans for quantitative testing were

put aside as I thought it would make my task too extensive and I found my observations sufficient to substantiate and refine my task of applying the website to the ski slopes and their characteristics.

4.4 Validity and Reliability

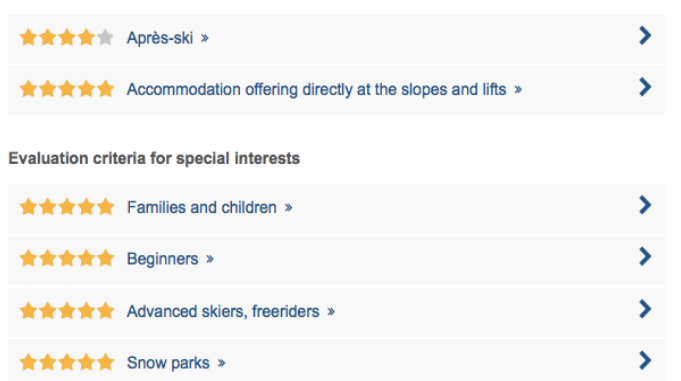
The validity is the evaluation of whether the research corresponds accurately to the real world. The aim of validating the research is to argue for whether the conclusions made can be claimed as true or false (Lee & Lings, 2008). To evaluate the validity of my own research, I have to review it with a neutral standpoint, and be self-critical to identify weaknesses in the investigation. As well as the validity, the research must also be evaluated whether it can be claimed reliable or not. The reliability is about the correctness of the results, and whether this is reflected in other tests showing similar results towards the same research-question (Lee & Lings, 2008). The reliability is an important aspect so the research may be put forward for further investigations.

4.5 Selection and Sample

How the ski resorts are positioning themselves through its websites was a research-question I discovered before the writing process.. To find out more about this, I had to find the theoretical basis for analyzing my observations. My interest in skiing and snowboarding was my driving force behind going deeper into this subject. In advance, I knew that certain ski runs specifically appealed to special groups of people driven by specific interests. These views were made through various communication channels such as youtube movies, travel reviews and reviews of resorts on different internet-sites. In other words, my view were influenced by the public view. My interest in finding out how the ski resorts want to position themselves through their websites fell as a natural issue for

me. Selection of segments that were for analysis was also something that was discovered along the way in the process. Earlier in my theory section, a number of authors suggest different segmentation categories both in general and within the ski market. The seven segments are not based on a theoretical model, but were partly chosen based on the skiresort.info`s way of categorizing the resorts after the customers preferences.

Figure: 4



As seen on this picture taken from skiresort.info, four of my segments are based on the score-system. The mass-strategy were chosen as some of the resorts fulfill high score on every measure and I felt the need of categorizing mass-strategy into a positioning-strategy that applied to many segments. The mass-strategy were also widely described in my theoretical research. The to positioning-strategies of low-pricing and high-pricing strategies were also interesting positioning-strategies I wanted to include in my thesis as my research went by. The segments I have chosen goes hand in hand with the positioning-strategy, in which I intend to analyze. After choosing to evaluate the seven segments, I also found a sufficient theoretical basis to substantiate facts linked to what characterizes them. While the segmentation division model is based on my empirical findings and what I interpret as reasonable segments to evaluate, my research is still based on Theodor Kviknes model in his master's thesis: design, usability and content (Kviknes, 2013, p.

115). The process of selecting ski resorts for evaluation were a part of a larger research effort looking at 5-6 internet sites at each segment. After skimming through the internet it was possible for me to point out certain characteristics that were typical for each positioning strategy. As such the selection choice is not a random pick, but are based on these considerations. These next models showed below will illustrate the selection-process I have made.

Figure: 5



4.6 Geographical Area

My research question is: *How do major ski resorts in the Alps position themselves through their websites.* Which means that the thesis limited to a geographically defined area. When I started evaluating ski resorts and websites it was not clear for me that I wanted to limit my research to this specific area. However during my findings I found this area of specific interest. As explained earlier the Alps are of special importance as it is by most measures, are the most comprehensive ski-area in the world. 4 out of the 7 resorts are located in Switzerland, as well as 2 in Austria and 1 in Italy. The country were the resorts are located are random, as country of location were not taken into consideration in the selection process. It may be seen as a weakness that I do not cover ski-resorts in France, that by many measures have some of the most comprehensive skiers market. It may also be seen as a weakness that Swiss ski resorts are overrepresented in the selection. The alps are per definition stretching over 7 countries. France, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Germany, Austria and Slovenia. But only 3 out of these 7 countries are represented in my conduct.

(Askheim, 2018)

4.7 Evaluation of the Validity and Reliability

The main focus of the research were to evaluate the seven cases (seven website) toward wether they were reflecting my pre-assumed perceptions (Public image). The validity of my research do have many weaknesses. One of the weaknesses is that my empirical findings are based on my objective perception. If the same construct and research-question were to be applied by another author. The results may had differed as the perceptions are influenced by objective

anticipations of how the websites are portrayed. The construct is based on my theoretical findings leading to the seven segments chosen. The sample choice is also made as examples, based on my pre-assumptions from the public view. The websites of the resorts are picked out based on the construct consisting of seven segments. If another author would use the same segments, but choose his own websites of resorts as examples – the sample choice would probably differ from mine. The use of only one sample, per segments is probably a weakness of the research, and leading to observations that are biased from the reality. The one segment is however based on a evaluation of analyzing 5 or 6 other websites. But also the process of picking out the one resort that reflects all resorts would also may differ between authors. Within some segments analyzing 5-6 websites in accordance to a specific segment. I also find fragmentary variations of how the websites are portrayed. Foreexample, the case when analyzing the six ski resorts that are associated with high prices, the websites differ a lot. In this case using a example of describing this cluster is not an accurate description, and other authors may had evaluated things differently. This may also be the case with the reliability, as different results and interpretations most likely will occur. However within my construct consisting of the segments chosen, the ski resorts evaluated and the chose of ski resorts as case-example, I assume the interpretations will have similar interpretations and other authors will conclude with the same findings as I have. Based on this I think there is a validity and reliably of the research.

5. Findings

1. *Mass strategy:* **SkiWelt** *(Austria)*
2. *Families/Beginners:* **Madrisa** *(Switzerland)*
3. *Parks:* **Laax** *(Switzerland)*
4. *Offpiste:* **Les 4 Vallees** *(Switzerland)*
5. *Afterski-destination:* **St Anton** *(Austria)*
6. *Low Pricing* **Livigno** *(Italy)*
7. *High Pricing* **St Moritz** *(Switzerland)*

FACTS ABOUT THE SKI RESORT USED AS EXAMPLES AS ACCORDING TO POSITIONING-STRATEGIES TOWARD THE SEGMENTS

Table 9

	<u>SkiWelt</u>	<u>Madrisa</u>	<u>Laax</u>	<u>Verbier</u>	<u>St Anton</u>	<u>Livigno</u>	<u>St Moritz</u> <u>(Corviglia)</u>
Location	Brixental, Tyrol	Davos, Graubunden	Laax, Graubunden	Verbier, Valais	St Anton am Arlberg, Tyrol	Livigno, Lombardy	St Moritz, Graubunden
Country	Austria	Switzerland	Switzerland	Switzerland	Austria	Italy	Switzerland
Km of Slopes	284 km	47,5 Km	188 Km	412 km	305 km	115 km	155 km
Km Easy	43.00%	12.00%	47.00%	26.00%	44.00%	26.00%	27.00%
Km	45.00%	50.00%	43.00%	49.00%	40.00%	57.00%	51.00%

Intermedi ate							
Km	12.00%	38.00%	10.00%	25.00%	16.00%	17.00%	22.00%
Difficult							
Adult Ticket	51 Euro	49 Euro	65 Euro	65 Euro	54,50 Euro	43 Euro	66 Euro
Youth Ticket	38,50 Euro	35 Euro	45 Euro	55 Euro	49,50 Euro	34 Euro	45 Euro
Children Ticket	25,50 Euro	25 Euro	26 Euro	33 Euro	32,50 Euro	34 Euro	23 Euro
Season	Early December – Late March	Mid December – Early April	Late October – Late April	Mid November – Late April	Early December – Late April	Late November – Early May	Late November – Mid April
Open hours	08:30 – 16:00	08:15 – 16:00	08:30 – 16:30	08:45 – 16:45	08:45 – 16:30	08:30 – 17:00	07:45 – 17:00
Elevation difference	1337 Meters	1469 Meters	1918 Meters	2509 Meters	1541 Meters	982 Meters	1337 meters
Number of lifts	90	7	28	67	88	31	24

(Skiresort Service International, 2018a)

5.1 Mass Strategy

The process of evaluating ski resort were based on a group of ski resorts that I found typical of implementing a mass-strategy. The websites were also identified as having many common similarities, offering a wide range of activities to the customer.

This also included off-slope activities, that were not served by the ski resort itself.

As such, the websites of mass-strategy ski resort were not marketing the ski resort but the destination as a whole. This does also include activities throughout the year.

I have used the website of SkiWelt as an example in illustrating the typical characteristics.

The resort of SkiWelt were described by skiresort.info as

"The SkiWelt Wilder Kaiser-Brixental is one of the largest ski resorts in Austria. It is distinguished by its impressive variety and Tyrolean charm. The winter sports resort in the Kitzbühel Alps is also very accessible. , attracts expert skiers in particular with sporty runs both on and off the pistes. Beginners, families and pleasure skiers are also ideally catered for in the SkiWelt Wilder Kaiser-Brixental. Several funparks and adventure slopes, floodlit toboggan runs and a large night-skiing area provide added variety. The ski resort of SkiWelt Wilder Kaiser-Brixental also impresses with its numerous children's areas and family-run mountain huts with scenic views and relaxed sun terraces"

(Skiresort Service International, 2018p)

5.2 Website of SkiWelt


Screenshot 6

SUMMER	WINTER
→ 6 theme parks	→ Ski area
→ Experience hiking	→ Events Winter
→ Breakfast on the mountain	→ SkiWelt Skimap
→ Events	→ Kids & families
→ Summerpanorama	→ SkiWelt Tour
→ Panoramic View	→ Fun parks
→ Mountain Biking	→ ALPENIGLU® - Igloo Village
→ E-Bike	→ Skimovie slopes
→ Paragliding	→ Speed measurement runs
→ Bonus partners	→ Training and race tracks
→ Regional hiking bus	→ Tobogganing
→ Barbecue on the mountain	→ Night skiing
→ Barrier free	→ Winterhiking
→ Best Summer Lifts	→ X-country
→ Sport shops	→ Paragliding
	→ Skischools
	→ Ski rental and sport shops
	→ Ski storage
	→ Skibus
	→ Did you know that?


Screenshot 7

NEWS | SUMMER | **WINTER** | HUTS | TARIFFS | SEMINARS | ACCOMMODATION

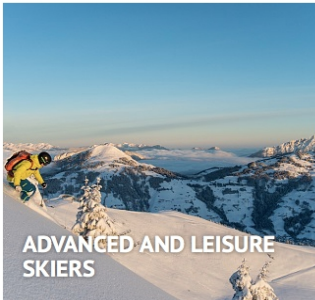
WHICH TYPE OF SKIER ARE YOU?




BEGINNERS



FAMILY



ADVANCED AND LEISURE SKIERS



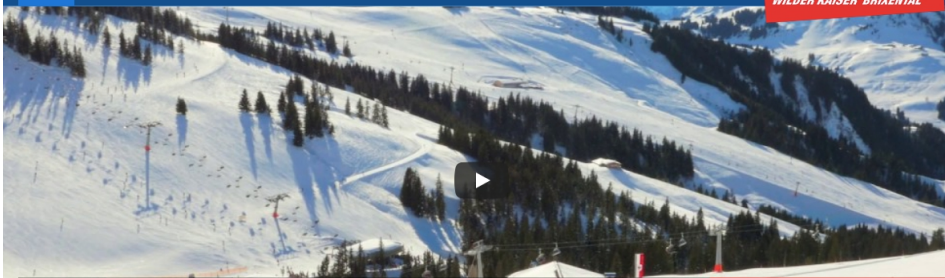
EXPERIENCES

Screenshot 8

ENGLISH | PRESS RELEASES | PRESS IMAGE ARCHIVE | PARTNER | Search for: →

NEWS | SUMMER | **WINTER** | HUTS | TARIFFS | SEMINARS | ACCOMMODATION | VILLAGES | INFO

SkiWelt
WILDER KAISER BRIXENTAL



WEBCAMS | WEATHER: 22 °C cloudy | CABLE CARS & LIFTS: 12 lifts in operation | KILOMETRES OF SLOPE: 0 km in operation | SLOPE SNOW: 0 cm mountains valley 0 cm

SHOP VOUCHER + TICKETS
BUY ONLINE NOW

You are here: News | SKILINE - SERVICE →

SKIWELT WILDER KAISER - BRIXENTAL
ONE OF THE LARGEST AND MOST MODERN SKI RESORTS IN THE WORLD

Like 37 | Share | SHARE | SHARE

THE SKIWELT IS OPENED UNTIL THE 08TH APRIL

SkiWelt was a ski resort I chose because I thought it fulfills some features characterized by a mass strategy. This is also something I could easily see on their website.

Their website is provided for in seven languages. Namely English, German, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Czech and Danish. This may also indicate that their strategy aims to bring international customers, including long distance-travellers.

The site has been evaluated as late as May 29th. Long after the end of the season, but what I've noticed with this site and also other websites that have a typical mass strategy is that they offer several different summer activities.

It may therefore appear that Ski-Welt Ski Resort does not market itself as a ski-run SkiWelt as a year-round destination, despite the ironic names SkiWelt that has stronger associations for the winter season. The site is rich in content factors that convey SkiWelt's wide range of activities aimed at the various segments.

For example, in the image section you can see where you appeal to the segment groups

- Beginners
- Family
- Advanced and
- Leisure Skiers experiences

(Ski resort Service International, 2018p)

5.3 Families/Beginners

The ski resort picked out for evaluation were based on a skimming the internet for various information were family and children friendly ski resorts were mentioned.

The ones picked out for evaluation were resorts that repeatedly were mentioned by several sources

The ski resorts evaluated had many similarities, and the website ski resort of Madrisa are to high degree reflecting the characteristics of the website of the other resorts.

The ski resort of Madrisa is described by skiresort.info as:

"The ski resort Madrisa (Davos Klosters) is located in Davos, (Switzerland, Graubünden).

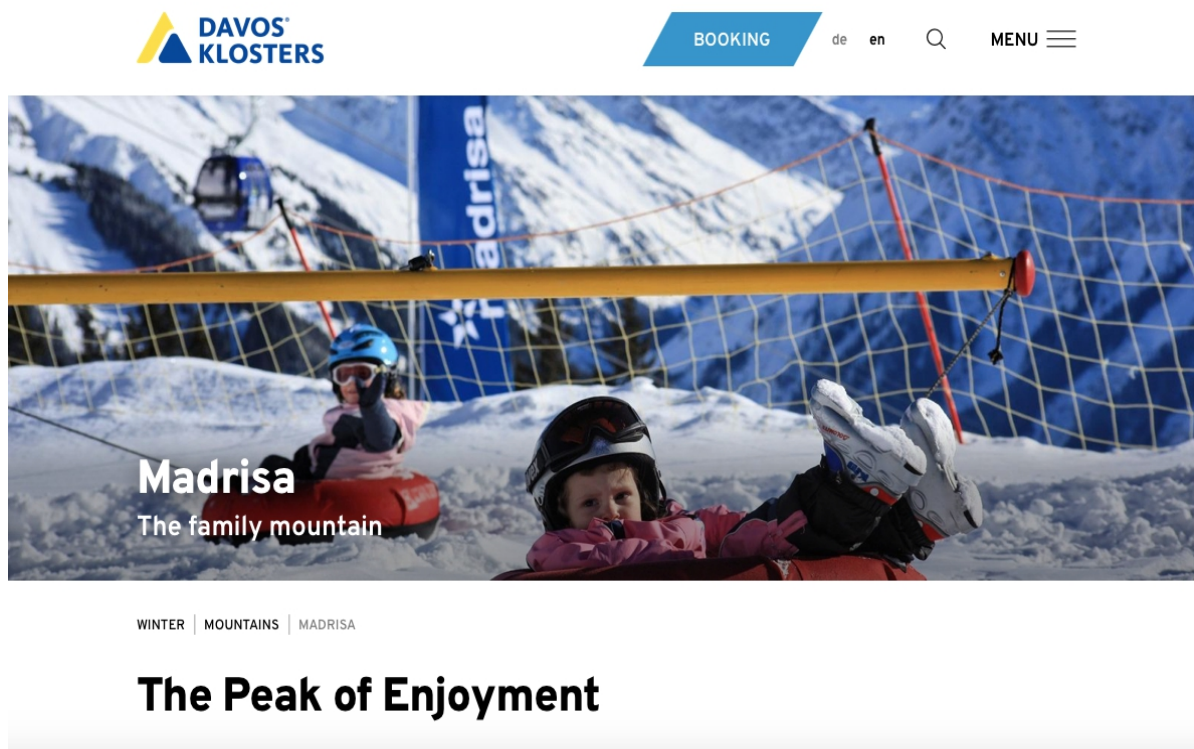
A gondola lift brings winter sports fans up to the Madrisa ski resort. The Madrisaland awaits at 1,887 on this family mountain. The little guests in the Davos Klosters region can snow tube, build snow huts or ski here.

The valley run to Klosters is also only for advanced skiers. The "Madrisahof" mountain restaurant and the newly built "Madrisa-Alp" self-service restaurant provide food and refreshments for visitors to the home mountain in Klosters."

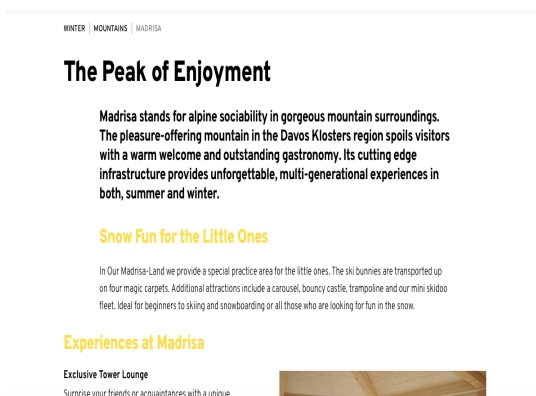
(Skiresort Service International, 2018c)

5.4 Website of Madrisa

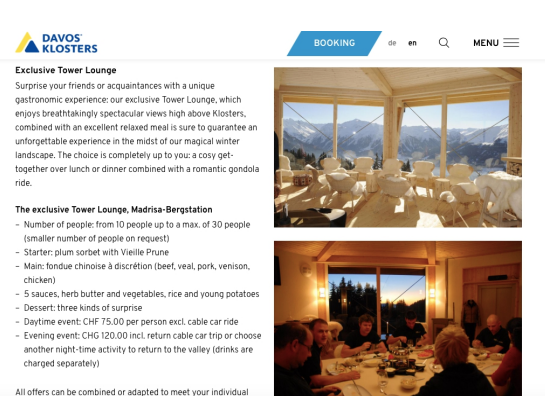
Screenshot 9



Screenshot 10



Screenshot 11



Photos of children, and with the expression family mountain, give Madrisa at first glance a fairly clear message through both content and image which segment they are targeting. The focus on targeting families with children is also taken into the summer season, where the ski slope offers an activity park: Madrisa Land. , I will conclude that the positioning strategy is clearly communicated through content and design.

Screenshot 12



(The Klosters Tourism Team, 2018)

5.5 Parks

An important pitfall for me to avoid in the process of finding outfits that have highly renowned terrain parks is to uncover those ski features that are characterized by high scores of all aspects. As these ski outlines are aimed at satisfying all segments, these ski slopes can not be considered to have the park segments as their specialty segment that targets marketing. Several web sites have repeatedly mentioned Saas Fe and Laax as top class ski resorts for snowboarding and parks. Other ski features such as KitzSki, Schladming and SkiWelt also score high on terrain park, but these are ski runs that also get high scores on all units of measurement.

In particular, Laax stands out as a ski feature that specially focuses on terrain parks, and is used in order to present the websites of the resorts that to a larger extent put emphasis in attracting snowboarders and "jibbers". Laax were in particular an interesting ski resort to evaluate based on a comprehensive public image toward the resort as a snowboard and park-friendly resort. Laax were described by the newspaper the telegraph as:

"The mountain has other powerful attractions too, including altitude, but the sunny orientation is a bit of a liability when competing in the premier league. Which may be why, some years back, the resort decided to appeal to different markets by investing heavily in terrain parks, half-pipes, indoor freestyle facilities and high-profile events – and by adopting a new brand." (Gill & Watts, 2018)

As you may see, different factors may be involved in the choice of a positioning strategy, in which case the sun's access to the ground applies. The ski area also offers a snowboard school aimed at people of all ages

(Laax Skiresort, 2018) Another website describe Laax as *"Laax is one of Switzerland's snowboard meccas and to stay high up in the popularity ranks, they made a serious investment in building some of Europe's best terrain parks and pro half-pipes such as the 200 metre Olympic Superpipe."* (Surfergalaxy, 2018)

As part of the campaign against park-drivers and the snowboard segment, there are also competitions in the ski resort as Laax Open (Redbull, 2018)

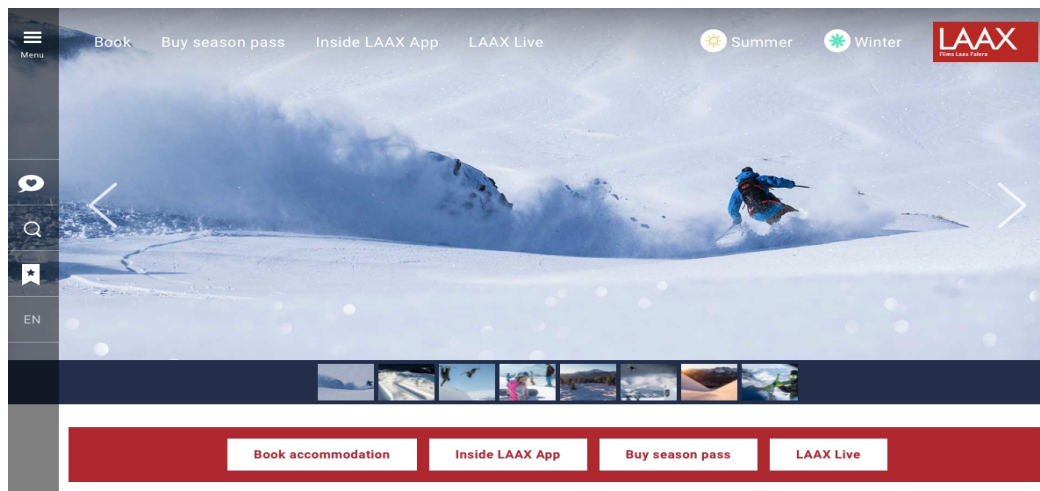
The ski resort of Laax is described by skiresort.info as:

"The ski resort Laax is located Laax (Switzerland, Graubünden).

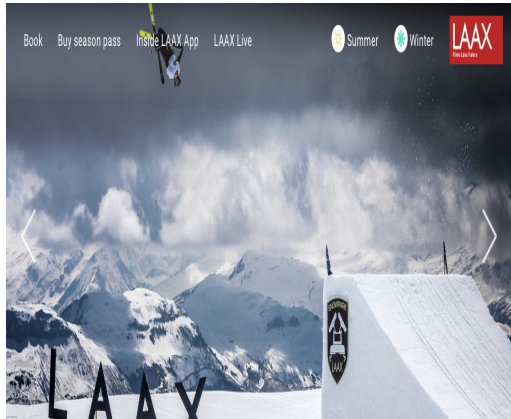
The expansive winter sports area provides all visitors with a varied winter holiday. Skiing and snowboarding are at the center of the enjoyment. The comprehensive slope offering includes slopes of all difficulty levels and is one of the largest in Graubünden. In addition to skiing, numerous highlights are featured. Multiple snow-parks, a super pipe and the Freestyle Academy offer ideal conditions for freestylers of all ability levels." (Ski resort Service International, 2018d)

5.6 Website of Laax

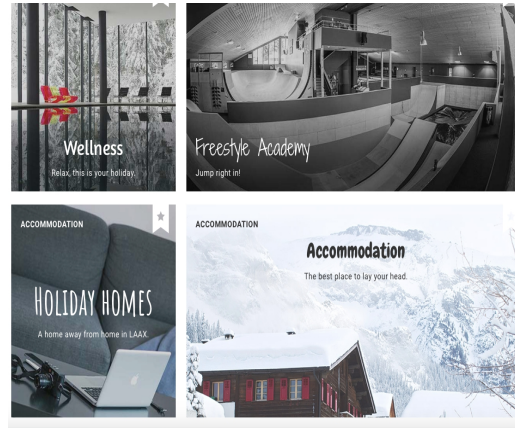
Screenshot 13



Screenshot 14

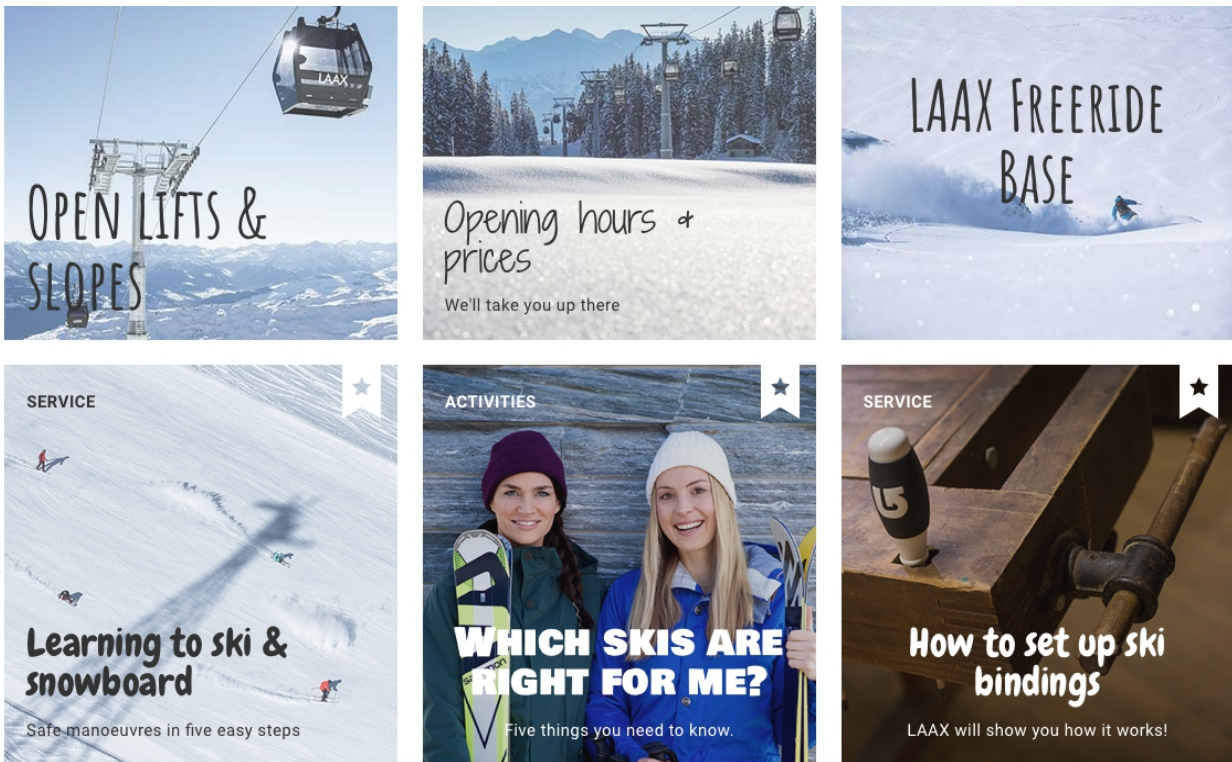


Screenshot 15



The design seems to be their main-focus of Laax-ski resorts website. The landing page of Laax is definitely communicating their positioning-strategy with their pictures. The image are provided in a slideshow-manner with snowboarding, halfpipes and images associated with exhilaration and youthfulness.

Screenshot 16



As seen the pictures are provides as menus, providing further information clicking at the respective images. Pictures of young people, and the wide offers towards snowboarding may attract larger number of snowboarders and "Jibber's".

(Laax skiresort, 2018)

5.7 Offpiste

As with the other resorts the process of identifying resorts associated with offpiste slopes by the public view, where conducted by just looking through numerous internet articles, newspapers and youtubevideos. Below I illustrate a sample of a few of the internet-sources i evaluated, and which ski resorts they were presenting as offpiste-friendly ski resorts.

Watts & Gill (2016) authors of the newspaper, the telegraph, mentioned the resorts of:

St Anton, Chamonix, Verbier, Whistler, Snowbird, Tignes, Warth Schröcken, Revelstoke, Val d'Anniviers, Fernie, Monterosa, La Grave, Montgenevre, Niseko, Big White

Another website, the Gemstock mentioned

Arlberg, Krippenstein, La Grave, Chamonix, Sainte Foy, Courmayeur, Monterosa, Andermatt, Engelberg, Disentis
(The Gemsstock, 2018)

The website of sno.com mentioned

Chamonix, Les 4 Vallees, St Anton, Val d'Iserre, Zermatt, Courmayeur, Davos, Tignes
(Sno Ltd., 2018)

And the website of snowplaza mentioned

Chamonix, Verbier, St Anton, La Grave, Fieberbrunn, Gressoney, Tignes, La Clusaz,
(Snowplaza, 2018)

The selection-process from there went to identify 5-6 website that were often mentioned by the various articles. The process led me to going deeper into evaluation the website of Val`d Iserre, Andermatt, Zermatt, Engelberg, Grands Montents and Courmayeur. The positioning-strategies portrayed by the these website differ to some extent as some of the resorts have a broader marketing-approach, while others puts stronger emphasis in marketing the ski resort by their offpiste-possibilites. However at last, I choose to use the ski resort of Les 4 Vallees in Verbier as a example as I found it typical to many of the of the other websites. Les 4 Vallees in Verbier is often mentioned as a top ski resort for people attracted by powder and off-slope skiing and snowboarding.

Les 4 Vallees is also a large ski resort, actually among the largest in the world, and are by so attracting different types of skiers and snowboarders.

The Les 4 Vallees ski resort were described by skiresort.info as:

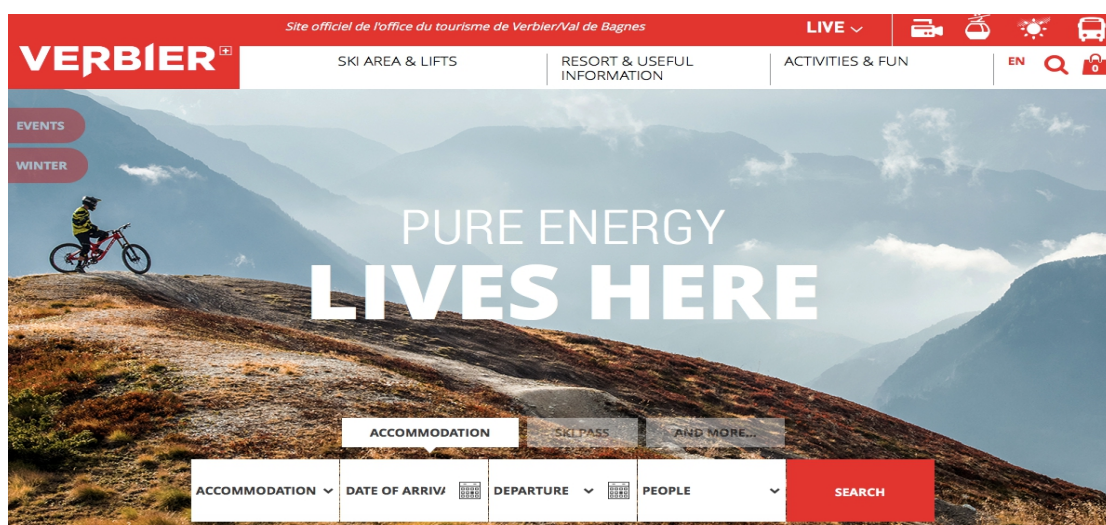
The ski resort 4 Vallées – Verbier located in Val d’Hérens(Switzerland, Valais (Wallis)).

"Les Quatre Vallées (4 valleys) with its connected villages is the largest ski resort in Switzerland. The ski resort is also very popular with free-riders and advanced skiers due to the ski resort's fabulous and steep powder snow slopes. In particular, the Freeride World Tour makes an annual stop in Verbier for their final round: Verbier Xtrême! Beginners and children also have their shares of easy slopes. Also, you can enjoy more than skiing in the region: lovers of snowshoeing, dog-sledging and winter wandering (among other things) will be thrilled to discover the possibilities".

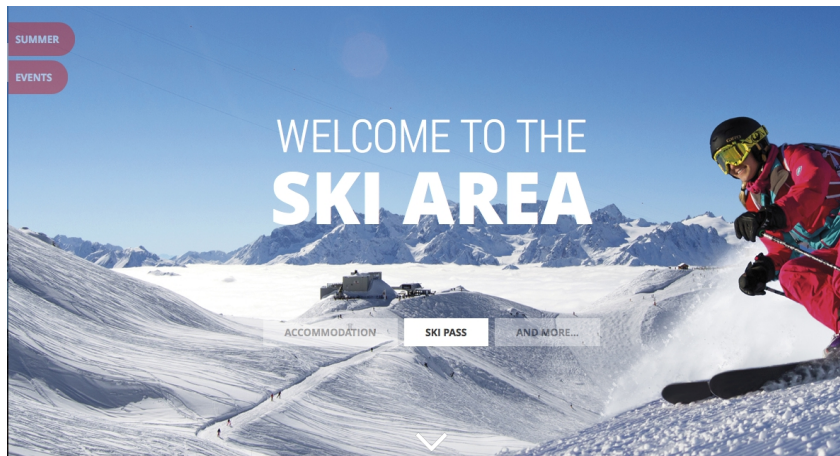
(Skiresort Service International, 2018e)

5.8 Website of Les 4 Vallees

Screenshot 17



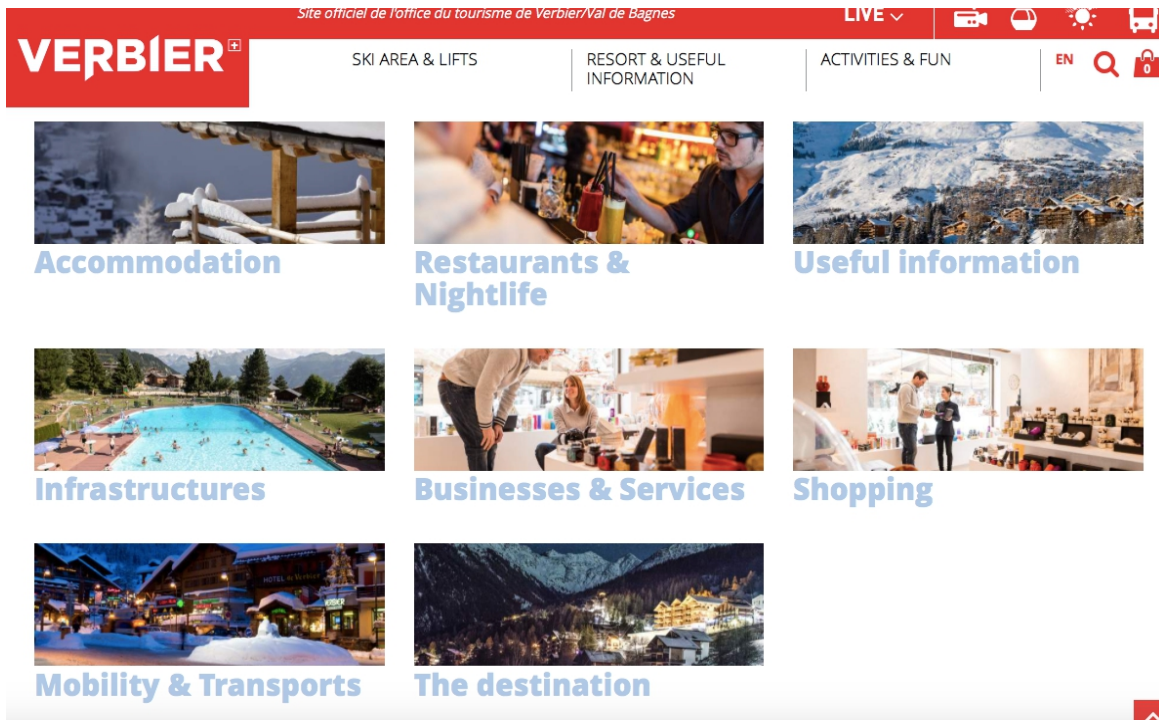
Screenshot 18



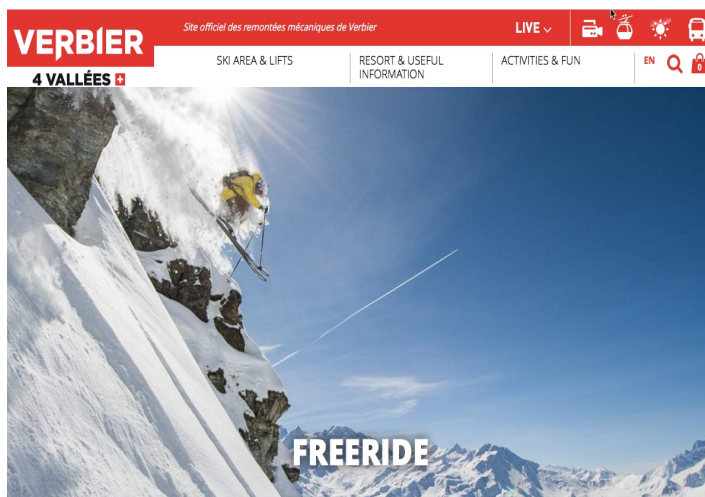
Screenshot 19

WINTER	SUMMER/FALL	CHILDREN & FAMILIES	ANIMATIONS & EVENTS
Ski & snowboard	Mountain Biking	Parks	Summer Animations
Ski Touring	Hiking	Kid's Activities	Top Events
Snowshoeing	Bike Park	Baby-sitters & Nurseries	Event calendar
Winter walking	Scooter Riding	Camps	
Freeriding and Heli-skiing	Golf		
Cross-country skiing	Paragliding & Skydiving		
Sledging	Road cycling		
Dog sledding	Climbing & Via Ferrata		
Paragliding & Skydiving	Aerial Walkway		
Squash	Tennis		
Swimming	Squash		
Climbing	Mountaineering		
Ice climbing	Fitness & Yoga		
Relaxation & Wellness	Relaxation & Wellness		
Fitness & Yoga	Rafting		
Horse-riding	Horse-riding		
CULTURE & FUN			
Museums			
Galleries			

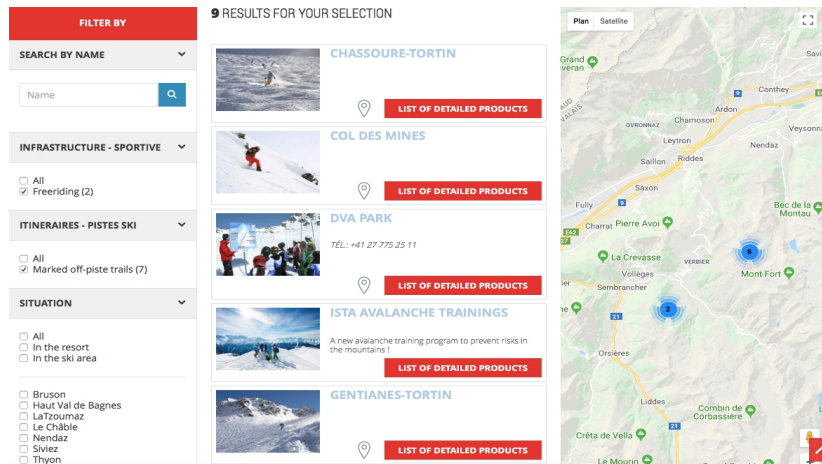
Screenshot 20



Screenshot 21



Screenshot 22



As with the Laax ski resort some aspects of the Les 4 Vallées ski resort resembles some aspects of exhilaration and youthfulness. It also offers a wide range of activities making them resemble as a typical mass-strategy ski resort.

But as explained earlier, my efforts in finding major ski resort that had their made focus toward powder-seekers were not very successful. As Les 4 Vallées in Verbier is often mentioned as a good place for off-slope skiers and snowboarders, it gives detailed information about it on their website – even though not on their landing page.

As a seen below the website have their own section giving information towards the best off-slope areas. The image given this part of the website, also clearly communicate exhilaration, often associated with recreationists attracted by such activities.

(Televier, 2018)

5.9 After-ski-destination

In the evaluation of afterski, one can form the evaluation of the certainty surrounding cultural trends, where several sources refer to afterski as a cultural phenomenon especially related to the alpine area. As also the newspaper Independent mentions in the following newspaper posts. *"There's just no getting around it – Europe wins every time. In particular, Austria wins every time. Americans have never quite got the hang of the noble art of après-ski (AKA) drinking heavily and partying your head off at 4pm in the afternoon, dancing on tables in your ski boots to a live Oompa band while drowning a shot of the most disgusting local liqueur". (Coffey, 2017)*

Similar descriptions are written by authors of different internet-sites: *"Ask anyone who has ever skied in Europe, they'll agree that there are many differences between American and European ski resorts", and further explains "One thing you may notice is the laid back attitude towards drinking. Some things are just culturally different, and this element has its pros and cons. Drinking and skiing isn't exactly uncommon in the US, so dealing with that should be nothing new."* (Autoeurope, 2018). Beneath I have illustrated which destinations that have a extensive after-ski-culture, according to a number of different internet-articles.

Sno.no mentioned *Pas de la Casa, Val Thorens, Whistler, Mayrhofen, and Aspen.*
(Snow Ltd., 2018)

The newspaper the Telegraph mentioned: *Courmayeur, Les Deux Alpes, Verbier, Meribel, St Anton, and Kitzhübel.* (Ruck, 2016)

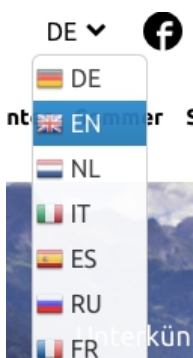
And the website of findskiholidays.com mentioned the resorts of:

Ischgl, St Anton, Meribel, Saalbach, Mayrhofen, Zermatt, and Livigno.
(Findskiholidays, 2018)

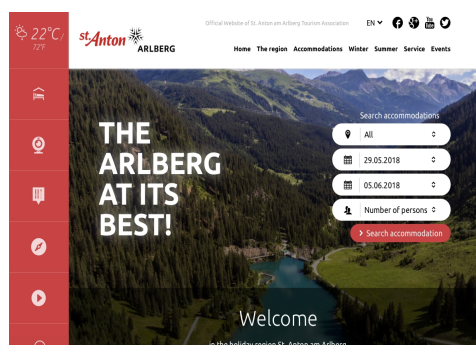
Afterskidestinations that are often mentioned includes Sölden, Verbier, Ischgl, Mayrhofen and Saalbach and St Anton am Arlberg. The ski destination St. Anton is described by the Norwegian website skiinfo.no as follows: *"The ski resort St. Anton am Arlberg is located in Tirol in Austria. St. Anton is snow proof and offers slopes of all levels of difficulty. The Valluga peak station is 2 811 meters above sea level, giving you access to 1 507 meters of fall height. St. Anton has both cross country skiing, terrain park, children's area, alpine and offpiste (Stuben). For families with children, the district of Nasserein is recommended. St. Anton is also famous for afterski with extremely high mood, where Krazy Kanguruh is recommended. If you want to shop, there is a short bus or car journey to Innsbruck. Of restaurants, Floriani and Funky Chicken are recommended."* (Skiinfo AS, 2018)

5.10 Website of St Anton am Arlberg

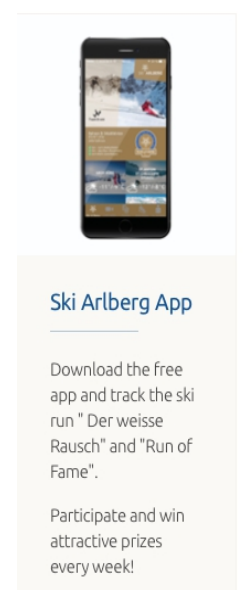
Screenshot 23



Screenshot 24



Screenshot 25



Screenshot 26

The screenshot shows the top section of the St. Anton am Arlberg website. On the left is a red sidebar with icons for home, search, calendar, chat, location, video, and magnifying glass. The main header includes the weather (22°C / 72°F), the logo 'st.Anton ARLBERG', and the text 'Official Website of St. Anton am Arlberg Tourism Association'. A navigation menu contains 'Home', 'The region', 'Accommodations', 'Winter', 'Summer', 'Service', and 'Events'. The main content area features a large image of three skiers on a snowy mountain slope. A search bar is overlaid on the image with the text 'Search accommodations' and a date selector set to '29.05.2018'. Below the image is a '< back' link and a section titled 'Winter' with a paragraph of text: 'St. Anton am Arlberg "Cradle of Alpine skiing" is a snowy paradise of the highest calibre. A modern holiday resort that has retained its traditional appeal. Hospitality and Tyrolean customs are as much a trademark of the village as its international, cosmopolitan character. And not only does it offer a colossal backdrop of peaks'. To the right of the text is a small video player thumbnail titled 'St. Anton am Arlberg - Mein ...'.

Screenshot 27

The screenshot shows a grid of activity and service categories on the St. Anton am Arlberg website. The header includes the logo 'st.Anton ARLBERG' and a navigation menu with 'Home', 'The region', 'Accommodations', 'Winter', and 'Summer'. The main content area is a light blue grid with the following categories and images: 'SKI AREA' (skier in green), 'SNOWBOARDING' (snowboarders), 'SKI MOUNTAINEERING' (climbers), 'More Activities' (text link), 'SAFETY TIPS' (skier on slope), 'LIFT TICKETS / PRICES' (cable car), 'EQUIPMENT RENTALS & RATES' (skier with poles), 'SKI & SNOWBOARD SCHOOLS' (skier in red), and 'ARLBERGER MOUNTAIN RAILWAYS' (mountain railway building).

These clips taken from their website do not illustrate a heavy communication towards after-ski and nightlife. To a larger extent, my perception of the website were that it were implementing a mass strategy providing a certain number of activities both for summer and winter.

St Antons marketing is in such case mainly marketing themselves not as the skiresort, but their website is provided for the little town and tourist-destination located in the Austrian Alps.

It seems like the destination also wants to attract an international specter of tourists offering their website in seven languages. German, English, French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch and Russian.

Many factors illustrated in this website may resemble the same factors given in the website of SkiWelt. A ski resort that I characterized as being a typical mass-strategy resort. However my aim at observe the website of St Anton were to find factors indicating marketing effort toward the after-ski segment but this mission went unsuccessful. As such I also were looking at other destinations-websites to find out whether there are destinations branding themselves mainly as after-ski destinations. Based on my observations, also these efforts understated that few skiresorts and ski-destinations are mainly branding themselves as after-ski destinations.

(Tourism Association St Anton am Arlberg, 2018)

5.11 Pricing-strategy: Low

The differences in pricing between countries is also also reflected in the results of pricing, as seen in this evaluation provided for by the telegraph (The Telegraph, 2017). The newspaper tested out the total amount if lift pass, equipment hire, lessons, food and drink where included in the price.

Cheapest ski resort according the telegraph were:

- 1) Bansko. 271 Pound - Bulgaria
- 2) Kranjska Gora 338 Pound - Slovenia
- 3) Sestriere 355 Pound - Italy

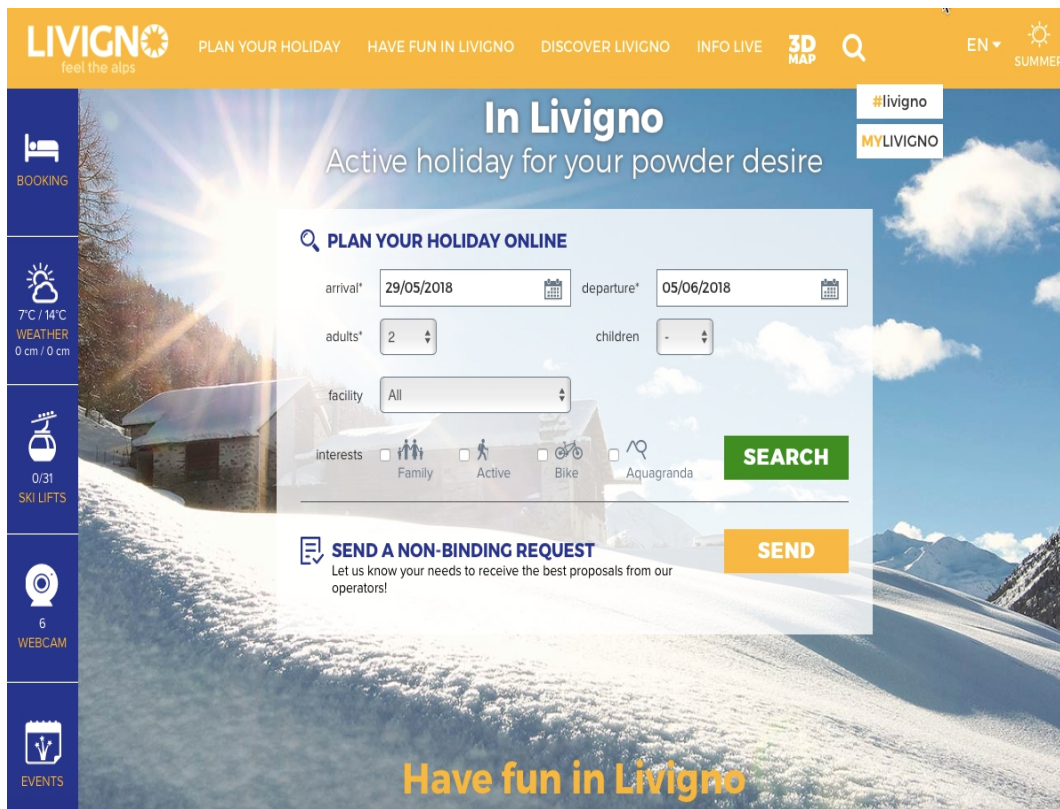
4) Livigno	364 Pound - Italy
5) Ellmau	403 Pound - Austria
6) Soldeu	442 Pound - Andorra
7) Ruka	444 Pound - Finland
8) Morzine	446 Pound - France
9) La Thuile	456 Pound – Italy
10) Selva	470 Pound – Italy

(The Telegraph, 2017)

However these resorts include many eastern european countries, and the prices are probably highly influenced level of cost spanning over multiple countries (Dwyer 2000a,b) The ski resort of Livigno is a ski resort that are often mentioned as a price-friendly skiresort. Travelsupermarket.com describes Living as: *"If you're in the market for a cheap, medium-sized resort with reliable snow and a decent après-ski scene, put Livigno on your hitlist... The posititiong of low prices may indicate an marketing toward younger segments of the population as mentioned."* (Males, 2017) *"The price of food and drink in and around the slopes is all very reasonable – meaning it's a place popular with the younger ski crowd who come to party."* The interesting phenomenon here is why people are willing to pay higher prices for skiing in St Moritz rather than Livigno. (Skiresort Service International 2018i) mentiones St Moritz (Corviglia) one of as the most expensive skiresort in Europe. As seen Switzerland has in general the most expensive resorts. But this is also probably influenced by income-level that differs between the countries. (Dwyer 2000a,b)

5.12 Website of Livigno

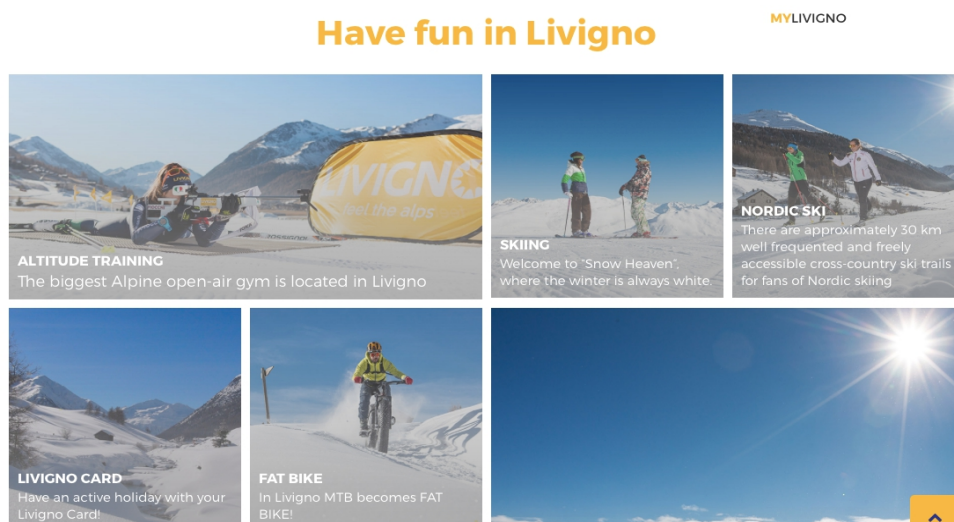
Screenshot 28



Screenshot 29



Screenshot 30



The ski resort of Livigno were by many sources considered as one of the major skiresorts in the Alps that gave most value for Money. Day-ticket for adults were 43 Euro in 2018 according skiresort.info (Skiresort Service International, 2018m).

However the Livigno is by far not the cheapest resort in the Alps. The cheapest skiresorts in the alps were according to skiresort.info, Roubion les Buisses with an adult ticket at 17 Euro, considerably lower than the price of Livigno (Skiresort Service International, 2018o).

However the cheaper resorts are of lesser importance, and are probably not correlated with the value for money. The public view gave the impression that Livigno is a price-friendly resort, but the internet however did not provided clear indications that it positioned itself with lower prices.

The landing page however gave indications that resort is position itself as a holiday destination rather than single-day destinations. By looking at the landing page, Factors communicated is may directed toward families and powder-seekers – Indicating a aim at marketing toward these segments addition to the price-sensitive segment. This is may caused by the issues related to geographical proximity and access of infrastructure. These factors are also hypothesized wether if they are correlated with pricing. As the ski resort of Livigno does not have the proximity to larger population centers, and lack off good infrastructure these are factors that pushes the prices down. (Livigno Skiresort, 2018)

5.13 Pricing-strategy: High

Ski resort.info was especially useful in the process of finding skitrails based on price levels, both low and high, all across the world

The most expensive resorts in the Scandinavian mountains, the Alps and the Rocky Mountains were Trystil (49 Euro), Zermatt (77Euro), and Beaver Creek(144Euro) respectively.

The findings of price-level indicates that American resorts in general are more expensive than in Europe (Ski resort Service International, 2018s,t).

However relatively the expensive resorts in Europe are distancing themselves as high-class ski-resorts in comparison to the other resorts in the area.

This is reflected in St Moritz (Corviglia) ski resort, as well as the tourism destination of St Moritz.

Prices not only include day tickets but costs in general. *"A meal in St Moritz was six times more expensive than one in Bansko"* The newspaper daily mail added in its article (Dailymail, 2012).

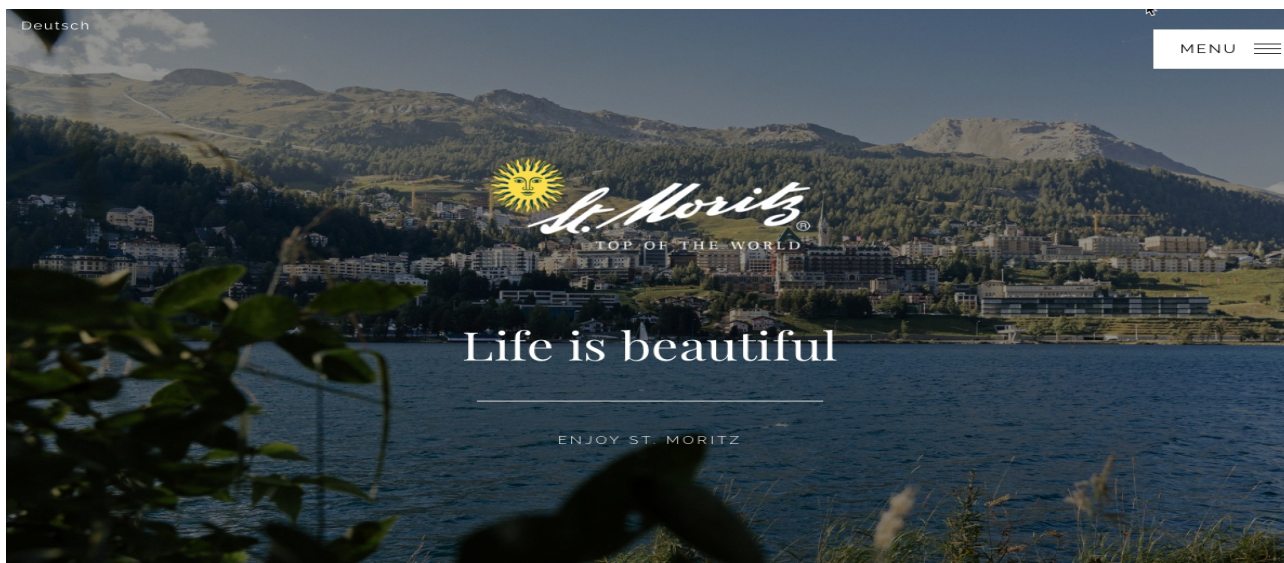
The three most expensive ski resorts in the alps were Zermatt, Corviglia and Corvatch. Two last mentioned are both located in St Moritz destination. Other expensive resorts include Zermatt, Grands Montants, Laax and Verbier. However the way of positioning differed between the ski-resorts. As Zermatt positioned itself more like a mass-strategy by putting emphasis on portraying their website with multiple choices directed towards the customer both during summer-season as well as winter-season, this is also the case for the Les 4 Vallees resort in Verbier. However both Zermatt and Les 4 Vallees is also known for its off-piste possibilities, which may indicate a relationship between offpiste-oriented resorts and high pricing. Also other expensive resorts (Aiguille du Midi and Grands Montants) put strong emphasis on the marketing themselves as off-piste oriented resorts which were communicated via content and design. In my efforts the aim at looking at high-pricing differentiation is not solely based on the actual high price, but identify the resorts that actually try to portray themselves as expensive through how they portray themselves.

That was the reason why it became more naturally for me to use the Corviglia-ski resort as an example in explaining how resorts communicating themselves with high pricing differentiation. Many of the same characteristics in the use of text and picture were used in the Corvatch as in addition to the Corviglia resort. Communicating a sense of upper-class brand image.

5.14 Website of St Moritz (Corviglia)

The website of St Moritz emphasizes exclusive approaches with the headline *"Style, elegance and class"*. Clearly communicating a differentiation approach, further explaining *"Today, St. Moritz is the number one alpine holiday destination. Its name is a registered trademark and stands for style, elegance and class"*. The internet site further explains the destination as having hosted Winter Olympics twice and having a UNESCO heritage site. This is information that can give the customer an early preferential image of the place as a destination. And may influencing a stronger brand image.

Screenshot 31



ST. MORITZ

Style, elegance and class

Some places on earth are simply unlike anywhere else. The mere mention of their name is strangely compelling and brings to mind all manner of stunning imagery. St. Moritz is one such place. Not just because this is the place where James Bond dashed down the ski slopes in «The Spy Who Loved Me». For it was here, 1,856 metres above sea level, in the heart of the spectacular Upper Engadin lakes district, that the notion of winter holidays was born and where Olympic Winter Games were held on two occasions. Today, St. Moritz is the number one alpine holiday destination. Its name is a registered trademark and stands for style, elegance and class.



READ MORE →

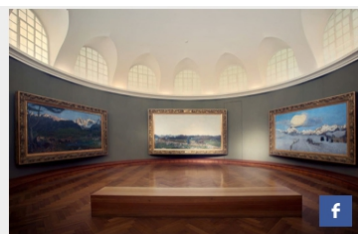
Screenshot 32



St. Moritz

27. Mar 2018, 08:49

Screenshot 33



St. Moritz

21 hours ago

Do you know our St. Moritz bucket list? If you plan on visiting St. Moritz, you should definitely check it out and pay the Segantini museum a visit, for example. <https://bit.ly/2LD5QUT>

Screenshot 34



News

Longines presents the «Conquest 1/100th St. Moritz»

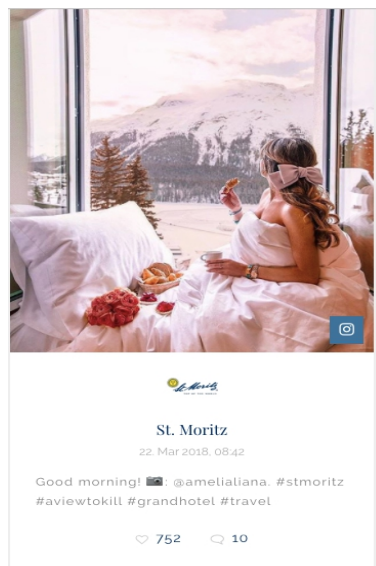
14. Dec 2017, 15:51

The website of St Moritz is not only directed at the resort, but toward the city of St Moritz as a tourist destination. The website may as such be interpreted as trying to perform a mass-strategy. The website is clearly an avid user of images. As illustrated in the pictures in this text many of the images are communicating with aspects associated with the upper-class clearly conveying an image also resembled in the public image.

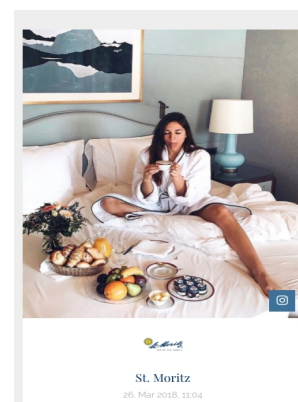
Screenshot 35



Screenshot 36



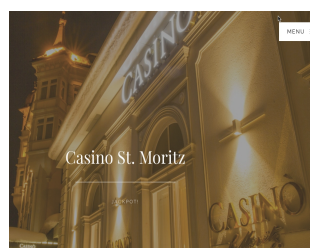
Screenshot 37



Screenshot 38



Screenshot 39



(St Moritz Tourismous, 2018)

6. Discussion

Table 10

	Mass- Strategy	Families/ Children/ Beginners	Parks/Sno wboardin g	After-ski	Pricing: Low	Pricing: High	
SkiWelt	5	5	5	2	3	3	
Madrisa	1	5	4	1	3	3	
Laax	4	2	5	2	2	4	
Verbier	5	3	4	2	2	4	
St Anton	5	3	3	2	3	3	
Livigno	4	3	3	1	4	2	
St Moritz (Corviglia)	5	4	4	2	1	5	

The background for my evaluations are based on looking at the factors of Content, Usability and Design. The websites of these 7 resorts and how they put emphasis towards the segments of Apres-ski, Families/Children, Beginners, Advanced/Freeriders and Parks. The table is showing how I perceived how the website were reflecting a communication towards these segments. As seen the table shows that the website of SkiWelt have high scores on all segments. High scores are not put on the resort of Madrisa, where communication towards the families and children segments has a significantly higher score. My further interpretations and findings will be dicussed in this chapter.

In the table beneath I have put scores based on how I perceived the quality of the three factors: content, usability and design were put forward on the evaluated websites. In addition to these three factors, I also put a fourth factor, public image. The public image is discussed earlier and my score is based on how I perceive that the websites overall are reflecting the same associations as the public image is communicating.

Content, Usability, Design and Content related to Public Image.

Scores from 1 - 5

Table 11

	Content	Usability	Design	Content related to Public Image
SkiWelt	5	3	3	5
Madrisa	4	4	4	5
Laax	5	5	5	5
Verbier	5	5	5	4
St Anton	5	4	4	1
Livigno	5	4	3	2
St Moritz (Corviglia)	5	5	5	5

My research question were aimed at finding out wether the resorts chosen for evaluation were communicating a clear positioning strategy. And wether they were communicating a positioning strategy that I assumed to reflect which segments I beforehand associated with the resorts. The results were mixed. Some of the resorts did clearly reflect the positioning strategy,

while other resorts did not. My observations were that the websites of St Moritz (Corviglia), Laax and Madrisa were the resorts that to largest degree were communicating toward certain segments. Les 4 Vallees were to certain degree communicating it. While St Anton and Livigno did not communicate a positioning strategy that were reflected in my pre-assumptions.

Table 12

The websites reflects a positioning-strategy that corresponds with my pre-assumptions

	Ski-Welt	Laax	Les 4 Vallees	Madrisa	St Anton	Livigno	St Moritz (Corviglia)
	5	5	3	5	1	1	5

My findings also were indicating a relationship with smaller resorts were to larger positioning themselves stronger with a certain segment. This was the case with the smallest resort in my cases, Madrisa – which clearly were communicating towards children and families. The characteristics identified in the website of Madrisa, were also found the other websites trying to attract children. In addition to Madrisa these resorts were also smaller resorts: Le Clusaz, Arosa, Sestriere, Obergurgl and Courchevel 1650. This was not only true for the children/beginners segment. But also small resorts were also identified with positioning towards other segments such as park-segment and offpiste-segment. Flauchauwinkl has a strong appeal towards snowboarders and Grands Montents had a strong appeal towards Offpiste skiers. This was shown both through pictures (design) and text (content). This finding also confirms my assumption that positioning-strategies are strongest enforced by smaller resorts, as the resourceful resorts has larger remittance in going for mass-strategy (The economist, 1998). In addition to small skiresorts also major ski-resorts are doing efforts in attracting children, as they have to be accompanied by parents or family-members that have other preferences. This is also stated by The economist's (1998) description of

mass-strategy resorts being in the process of disneyfication. Also the test-results provided by ski-resort.info points high scores on the typical mass-strategy-resorts, as shown in the illustrated picture below.

Figure 6



(Ski resort Service International 2018b)

A strong emphasis in attracting after-ski-segment were however not identified in the websites evaluated. The ski-destinations picked out for evaluation of afterski-destinations tends to be located around larger resorts accompanied by clusters of businesses. After-ski destinations as such is not solely provided for by the ski resort but by cluster of businesses surrounding the resort. This characteristics also goes in line with skiresorts that goes for mass-strategy. This may also be resulted in that after-ski is a result of larger masses of people gathering together, which is more suitable with mass-strategy-resorts attracting larger number of people. This is also seen in the website of the destination of St Anton am Arlberg, which clearly communicates a mass-strategy that

caters to the wide range of segments in the market. During my research the same characteristics were also seen in the other websites of after-ski-destinations of Saalbach, Mayrhofen, Ischgl, Verbier and Sölden. As such, my conclusion is that few skiresorts solely position themselves as afters-ski destination. But there is a significant relations between mass-strategy destinations and afterski. Another finding is that skiresorts characterized by the mass-strategy segment is often websites that portray themselves as destinations. This websites are not only marketing the ski resort but all the surrounding businesses. The websites of such destinations are also marketing themselves as summer-destinations

Screenshot 40



The menus on the landing page of the websites typically offers information both as summer and winter-destinations. Ski-destinations that were marketing themselves as summer-destinations were: Verbier (Les 4 Vallees), Ischgl, Laax, Sölden, Cortina d' Ampezzo, Zermatt, Madrisa as (MadrisaLand), and Davos. Showing that even smaller destinations and skiresorts provided tourism-experiences for the summer-season. In accordance to pricing, I were not able to identify any significant relations between the larger and smaller skiresorts. However I did identify relationship with skiresorts depending of which destinations they were located at. This is best exemplified with two of the most expensive skiresorts in the Alps. Both Corviglia and Corvatch are located in the destination of St Moritz. Corviglia and Corvatch is the second and third most expensive resort in the Alps after Zermatt. This is probably influenced by St Moritz as a upper-class destination that were also reflected in the website. While the ski resort of Corviglia is marketing themselves the website St.Moritz.Com (the website of St Moritz destination), the Corvatch has their own website.

However the website of Corvatch do have many of the same characteristics that are found on St. Moritz.com website, reflecting a high-pricing differentiation. The positioning strategy of high-pricing differentiation were however not communicated in similar manner in the expensive skiresorts identified. This is forexample seen in the ski resort of Grands Montents. Grands Montents is a ski resort that clearly were communicating a positioning strategy of attracting the offpiste-skiers segment. Also other ski resorts that are known for good offpiste-skiing were identified with having high prices. In addition to Grands Montents, also Les 4 Vallees in Verbier, and Zermatt are one of the most expensive resorts in the Alps, all of them known for their good accessibility of off-piste. Due to this findings I will assume that there is a tendency that people tend to pay more for skiing in resorts with better off-piste. However Zermatt and Les 4 Vallees were not clearly communicating a strong positioning strategy toward off-piste-skiing. Engelberg is another ski resort that also are described as having good off-piste possibilities. These three resorts (Engelberg, Zermatt, Les 4 Vallees) are one of the larger resorts in the Alps, and in addition to marketing their off-piste-possibilities on the websites are also communicating to various segments as well. On the other hand, as Courmayeur and Grands Montents did communicate themselves stronger as having off-piste-possibilities. This is may due to the fact that these are smaller resorts. And it also underscores the statement that smaller resorts tend to show stronger emphasize in attracting people belonging to certain segments. In opposition to resorts characterized by communicating elements reflecting a high-pricing differentiation it was more difficult to point out certain elements that were communicating a low-price positioning strategy. The evaluation of ski resort known for low pricing were to some degree smaller. This is may a natural cause, as smaller ski resorts are most likely offering less experiences for the skiers and snowboarders. In addition to this, also the accessibility is probably a force that are pushing the prices down. This is forexample the case of Livigno, known for its far distance from large population-centers. The nearest larger city is Milan, 241 km from Livigno (Google Maps, 2018). Apart from from this characteristics, also transnational economic

differences are impacting the price-level of ski resorts (Dwyer 2000a,b). This may also explain why 8 out of 10 most expensive ski resorts were located in Switzerland (Ski resort Service International, 2018o).

6.1 Limitations of the study

The way I have constructed my research-approach aims to give room for many findings, and limit the room for discussing my findings. I found it necessary for my literature review to include theoretical understanding of positioning, segmentation, and differentiation. In addition to this I also found I necessary to include a part to describe findings around website evaluations. This areas made the literature review part of my thesis. But theory where also used to analyze trends and knowledge around todays ski-industry, describing the segments I had chosen and describing the public image of ski resorts I had chosen for evaluation. All this information compromise a large share of the text in the thesis which also led the analysis part to be shorter. This is however also partially caused by the nature of the research which is emphasizing the effort in presenting observations. The discussion part discusses the most significant findings, but are not going into deeper evaluations. This is however also more difficult as my qualitative findings can be seen as statements based on generalizations. Another limitation is the objectivity of the interpretations of the findings. The interpretations of public image, images and content on websites, objective associations, the selection-process, and related issues are influenced by this objectivity and a limitation. As my research went by, it became more clear to me that the field has a broad area of research. This made me reach for general statements based on samples representing a large field. Still after limiting my research to a geographical area, the research and its findings is may still a little generalizing. Parts of these issues are also discussed in my part of evaluating the validity and reliability of the research.

My view as such is that how I did my research approach had the aim of giving the reader a more of a birds eye view, but it also had the consequence on limiting the areas mentioned.

7. Summary & Conclusions

My aim for this thesis was to explore how major ski resorts in the Alps position themselves through their websites. The website were evaluated by especially looking at three important factors named by (Kviknes, 2013 p, 115), Content, Usability and Design. My research-effort led me into categorizing the resorts into positioning-strategies. My discoveries achieved discovering some aspects of the research-question. However my research-question is a broad concept and I see my findings as aspects that are indicators of my research-question. Findings made by earlier authors towards the subjects were also some questions I wanted to reaffirm in my findings. My findings concluded that the larger resorts are to a higher degree not positioning themselves towards a certain segments, but rather focus on many segments, or goes for a mass strategy. During my research the ski resorts were picked out for evaluation based on a public view. In my findings I wanted to find the relationship between the public view of the ski resort and how they portrayed their websites. As described in the discussion-part the results were mixed in accordance to which segment/positioning-strategy I were analyzing. My research also wanted to look at the different segments and how they interrelate to each-other in different ways. In my discussion part I also made conclusion based on that. Forexample I could find phenomenas that fore example off-piste oriented ski resorts also are correlated with ski resorts with high pricing.

The research-question can be seen as quite generalizable, giving me flexibility to dig deeper into different fields related to the research-question. In my writings I have tried to describe my findings and the knowledge I have comprehended. The research discovers the general characteristics of the

research-question, and is supposed to give the reader a insight to the field.

However, throughout the text i have

8. Further Research

Still, I do not rule out that further studies can not be conducted with a quantitative approach to understanding the segments preferences, correlations between segments, geographical correlations and other statistical findings to support further studies. It may then be most appropriate to interpret data based on how websites are based on segments but how people are divided into segments. In the process of finding literature to substantiate my task, I found very little quantitative data around the ski market segments, which is why I propose that quantitative studies and tests in this area have great potential for analysis. As such, such a process will be a hypothesis testing based on such as previously mentioned in the task as directed against so-called Segment targeting. An area with large potential for further analysis and discussions. As mentioned as a part of the validity evaluation, the sample size in describing resorts reflecting a certain segment is scarce. Future studies may find it more appropriate to go for another design, concentrating on one segment, using multiple examples explaining the one segment. If that case, the research would have been directed at analyzing several websites that were to be assumed reflecting towards a certain segment. A larger sample size would better predict the trends of positioning toward the segment chosen for evaluation. Such solution would may also be appropriate in the sense that the research-question would be better able to dig deeper into a specific segment, rather than skimming the surface of many segments.

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