Storytelling
A Study of Marketing Communication in the Hospitality Industry

Master’s thesis within Business Administration

Author: Maria Ågren
       Martina Ölund

Tutor: Susanne Hertz

Jönköping June 2007
Acknowledgements

We would like to show our gratitude to everyone that has been part of the development of this thesis. The advice, support, and constructive criticism given by our supervisor and our fellow students have been valuable in order to accomplish this thesis. We also appreciate that all respondents took their time and provided us with interesting and useful information.

**Academic Advisor**
Susanne Hertz

*Professor in Business Administration*
*Jönköping International Business School*

**Company Representatives**

*Stora Hotellet* - Catrin Karlsson

*Slottsvillan* - Eva Grudemark-Ågren

*Toftaholms Herrgård* - Torbjörn Colfach

*Designhotellet* - Kåre Johansson

*Sästaholm* - Camilla Dahlman

*Gripsholms Värdshus* - Pernilla Rehnberg

*Albert Hotell* - Rickard Halleröd

*Icehotel* - Dan Björk

*Villa Fridhem* - Isabel Johnsson

*Jönköping, June 2007*

Maria Ågren            Martina Ölund
Master's Thesis in Business Administration
Title: Storytelling- A Study of Marketing Communication in the Hospitality Industry
Author: Maria Ågren and Martina Ölund
Tutor: Susanne Hertz
Date: June 4, 2007
Subject terms: Storytelling, Marketing Communications, Integrated Marketing Communications, Word of Mouth, Hospitality, Hotels

Abstract

Introduction: There is an information surplus in the marketplace today and finding marketing resources that are both effective and affordable is difficult. As quantity and price has lost its competitive power and quality and symbolic meaning has become increasingly important, storytelling as a marketing mean can be one concept to apply, especially in the service sector.

Problem: The hospitality industry is one of the largest service sectors, facing fierce competition. Many hotels have a story to share and storytelling is today a buzzword in the industry, but it has not received much attention in the academic world. Therefore, little is known about storytelling from a business administration perspective, more specifically marketing communication, which is our field of interest in this thesis.

Purpose: The purpose of this thesis is to study and analyze storytelling and how it is used as marketing communication in the Swedish hospitality industry.

Method: To fulfill our purpose, a qualitative study with an inductive approach was chosen as suitable. Primary data was gathered through interviews with managers from nine different hotels, which all work actively with storytelling. Theories regarding service marketing, marketing communications, and storytelling helped us to collect appropriate empirical data and also to structure the analysis.

Conclusion: Storytelling in the hospitality industry is an identity or an image, and the purpose of using storytelling is to be remembered and to mediate a feeling. As a concept, it requires attributes and a certain level of truth is important to remain trustworthy. Furthermore, storytelling facilitates the communication process between the hotels and their customers and it often strengthens customers’ attitudes towards the hotel. Both private and business customers are attracted by stories, but it is easier to communicate the story to large groups during a conference. It is however difficult to mediate the whole concept through marketing communication tools as it is too compound. Storytelling facilitates an integrated marketing communication as it becomes an image and word of mouth is increased due to that people talk about the unexpected.
# Table of Contents

1 **Introduction** .......................................................................... 1  
   1.1 Background ........................................................................... 1  
   1.2 Problem Discussion .......................................................... 2  
   1.3 Purpose .................................................................................. 3  
   1.4 Delimitation .......................................................................... 3  

2 **Frame of Reference** .............................................................. 4  
   2.1 Service Marketing ............................................................... 4  
   2.2 Marketing Communications ............................................... 5  
      2.2.1 Communication Process ............................................. 6  
      2.2.2 Marketing Communication Models ............................... 7  
      2.2.3 Marketing Communication Tools ................................ 8  
      2.2.4 Consumer and Business Markets ................................ 9  
      2.2.5 Integrated Marketing Communications ...................... 10  
      2.2.6 Word of Mouth ............................................................ 13  
   2.3 Storytelling ........................................................................... 14  
      2.3.1 Explore Storytelling ................................................... 14  
      2.3.2 Develop Storytelling .................................................. 15  
      2.3.3 Implement Storytelling ............................................... 16  
      2.3.4 Problems with Storytelling ........................................ 17  
   2.4 Summary of Theories .......................................................... 18  

3 **Method** .................................................................................. 20  
   3.1 Scientific Approach ............................................................. 20  
   3.2 Qualitative Research Method ............................................. 21  
   3.3 Induction and Deduction .................................................... 21  
   3.4 Data Collection ..................................................................... 22  
      3.4.1 Sample Choice .......................................................... 23  
      3.4.2 Interviews .................................................................... 24  
      3.4.3 Conducting the Interviews .......................................... 25  
   3.5 Data Analysis ........................................................................ 26  
   3.6 Quality of the Research ........................................................ 26  

4 **Empirical Findings** ................................................................ 29  
   4.1 Stora Hotellet ....................................................................... 29  
   4.2 Slottsvillan .......................................................................... 31  
   4.3 Toftaholms Herrgård ........................................................... 33  
   4.4 Designhotellet ....................................................................... 35  
   4.5 Såstaholm Konferens ............................................................ 37  
   4.6 Gripsholms Värdsus ............................................................. 39  
   4.7 Albert Hotell ......................................................................... 41  
   4.8 Icehotel ................................................................................ 43  
   4.9 Villa Fridhem ......................................................................... 45  

5 **Analysis** .................................................................................. 47  
   5.1 Services in the Hospitality Industry .................................... 47  
   5.2 Storytelling in the Hospitality Industry .............................. 47  
      5.2.1 Storytelling and the Servicescape ............................... 47  
      5.2.2 The Development of Storytelling ............................... 48
5.2.3 The Implementation of Storytelling ........................................ 49
5.2.4 The Delivery of the Story ................................................... 49
5.2.5 Storytelling – Truth or Fiction? ......................................... 50
5.2.6 Possible Problems with Storytelling .................................. 51

5.3 Storytelling and Marketing Communications .......................... 52
5.3.1 Storytelling in the Communication Process ....................... 52
5.3.2 Storytelling and Marketing Communication Models ........ 54
5.3.3 Storytelling and Marketing Communication Tools ............ 54
5.3.4 Storytelling towards different Customer Segments .......... 55
5.3.5 Storytelling and Integrated Marketing
Communications.......................................................................... 56
5.3.6 Storytelling and Word of Mouth ....................................... 58

5.4 Future .................................................................................. 59

6 Conclusions ............................................................................. 60

7 Final Discussion ........................................................................ 62
7.1 Reflections ............................................................................ 62
7.2 Further Research .................................................................... 62

References .................................................................................. 64
Figures

Figure 1 Outline of Frame of Reference................................. 4
Figure 2 Basic communications model.................................................. 6
Figure 3 Model of communication including field of perception........ 6
Figure 4 AIDA model and ATR model................................................. 8
Figure 5 The integrated marketing communications triangle............... 12
Figure 6 The communication cycle...................................................... 13
Figure 7 Deduction vs. Induction.......................................................... 22
Figure 8 Basic communications model................................................. 52
Figure 9 The communication process between hotels and their customers 53
Figure 10 Storytelling and Integrated Marketing Communications triangle .. 58

Tables

Table 1 Characteristics of marketing communication management........... 10
Table 2 Interview schedule.................................................................... 24

Appendices

1. Interview guide.................................................................................. 68
2. Interview Guide ................................................................................ 69
3. Photo Gallery .................................................................................... 70
Introduction

1 Introduction

This chapter intends to introduce the reader to the subject of this thesis. It starts by stressing the need of finding alternative marketing methods, and storytelling can be one concept to apply. The background directs the problem discussion, which deals with today’s marketing difficulties, more specific within the hospitality industry. With regards to that, the purpose of this study is formulated.

Prologue

I asked a student, ‘How do you get from this room into that room?’
He answered, ‘First you stand up. Then you take a step…’
I stopped him and said, ‘Name all the possible ways you can get from this room into that room. ’He said, ‘you can go by running, by walking; you can go by jumping; you can go by hopping, by somersaulting. You can go out that door, go outside the house, and come in another door and into the room. Or you could climb out a window if you want to…’

I said, ‘If I want to get into that room from this room, I would go out that door, take a taxi to the airport, buy a ticket to Chicago, New York, London, Rome, Athens, Hong Kong, Honolulu, San Francisco, Chicago, Dallas, Phoenix, come back by limousine and go in the back yard and then through the back gate into the back door and into that room. And you thought only of forward movement! You didn’t think of going backwards, did you?’
(Parkin, 2004, p.56).

Look back into your own history; it might become valuable in unpredictable ways. Do not limit your creative thinking.

1.1 Background

Kirby and Marsden (2006) argue that marketing methods of today are shifting. Traditional marketing campaigns that are based on mass marketing are not as successful as they were. Grönroos (2000) also claims that there has been a paradigm shift in the marketing arena. It has moved away from transaction marketing, which is based on the exchange of ready-made value for money, to an increased focus on relationship marketing, which is founded on cooperation in order to facilitate a mutual creation of value.

Wherever a person goes s/he is exposed to marketing messages that need to be sorted out. According to advertising experts, a customer is each day exposed to more than fifteen hundred marketing messages. Companies can barely distinguish from each other on the market since there is an information surplus out there (Rosen, 2000). Saul-Wurman (cited in Rosen, 2000, p.14) exemplifies that:

“A weekday edition of the New York Times contains more information than the average person was likely to come across in a lifetime in seventeenth-century England”.

In today’s increasingly crowded marketplace, where most people experience an information overload, the ability to cut through the clutter is what distinguishes successful companies from unsuccessful ones (Mossberg & Nissen-Johansen, 2006). Jay (1996) argues that a problem many companies face today is how to find marketing resources that are both affordable and effective. Gummesson (2004) claims that the expression saying a good product or service sells itself is no longer valid. That products and services hold a high
quality level is nowadays expected, consequently there must be additional values added. There is a need to identify resources that can strengthen and keep relationships with customers, and also find means of marketing that are difficult for competitors to copy.

Otter (2003) claims that the increased service sector requires direct relationships between companies and customers. These relationships often take time to develop. It can be a danger of trying to replace these human contacts with technological devices that are popular today, such as the Internet and telephone. Rijkenberg (2001) further explains that the behavior and expectations of today's customers have changed. Quantity and price has lost its competitive power whereas quality and symbolic meaning are becoming increasingly important. Mossberg and Nissen-Johansen (2006) highlight the importance of using feelings, esthetic symbols, design, and stories in marketing. Gummesson (2004) agrees and says that storytelling has become an important tool in today's marketing and that customers purchase different stories in order to fulfill different needs. Gabriel (2000) continues and says that stories have always inspired and fascinated people all around the world. Today it is realized that stories can be utilized as an effective tool to communicate ideas, to create brands, and form fellowship both inside and outside the organization. Gabriel (2000, p.1) explains that:

“Good stories are valuable; they can hardly be mass produced.”

People can easier tie themselves to stories. One example is ICA's advertising movie that is delivered as a real life story and that has gained large success. Mossberg and Nissen-Johansen (2006) argue that storytelling has become a utilized concept, especially in the field of service marketing. Grönroos (2000) explains that the intangibility, unpredictability, and often rather significant nature of services motivate most consumers to seek out advice from people in their acquaintance area before choosing a specific service provider. Mossberg and Nissen-Johansen (2006) claim that storytelling in that sense can act as an effective tool for organizations in order to generate positive word of mouth. People are affected by a good story, and hence it is remembered.

1.2 Problem Discussion

Hospitality is one of the large service sectors that has experienced extensive information surplus in the marketplace together with increased competition (Sveriges Hotell- och Restaurangföretagare, 2005). Effective marketing is at the same time of greatest importance due to its perishability, an unsold room one day is a forever-lost income (Mawson, 2000). Hospitality in this sense is described by Kotler, Bowen, and Makens (1996, p. 13) as:

“those businesses that do one more of the following; provide accommodation for the traveler, prepare food and beverage service, and entertainment for the traveler.”

Mossberg and Nissen-Johansen (2006) argue that many hotels have a story to share, but most often only a room with breakfast is offered. This might be enough for a number of customers, although it might not be sufficient for hotels from a marketing perspective. The buzz around the concept of storytelling has made more and more hotels aware of their own story and thus implemented it in their service offering. Stories can be a helpful tool in order to communicate a company’s values clearly to everyone. The story becomes a verbal and visual metaphor that illustrates the organization’s offering.

Storytelling has been utilized in immemorial times, both to entertain and to mediate feelings and values. Today, the conception of storytelling has regained attention among
companies and has become a buzzword (Heijbel, 2005a). However, how companies use storytelling is a relatively little investigated area of study in academic research (Mossberg & Nissen-Johansen 2006). As it is rather popular in the hospitality industry but still unexplored in the academic field, we found it interesting to combine academic research with a popular topic. The broad issue that we have chosen to focus on is storytelling as marketing communication and therefore we are interested in investigating what storytelling is and how it is implemented in the hospitality industry, how storytelling affects an organization’s external as well internal communications, and if and how storytelling is imbued in all communication activities. This leads to the purpose of the thesis.

1.3 Purpose
The purpose of this thesis is to study and analyze storytelling and how it is used as marketing communication in the Swedish hospitality industry.

1.4 Delimitation
Due to lack of time, delimitation is needed. This study is based on the hotels’ perspective on storytelling, and we will not consider customers’ or stakeholders’ views.
2 Frame of Reference

This part of the thesis provides the theoretical framework. We present theories concerning marketing communications and storytelling, which will constitute the foundation for the empirical research.

Figure 1 Outline of Frame of Reference

The frame of reference has been divided into five main parts (see figure 1). We will start the chapter by introducing the reader to the broad subject of interest, service marketing (2.1). The general introduction of service characteristics is provided to give an overall informative perception of the field of study. It is important to understand the development of marketing in the service sector before we can continue to the field of marketing communications (2.2). A broad view of communication is introducing the reader to the section and it is narrowed down to marketing communication models (2.2.2) and marketing communication tools (2.2.3). Marketing communications is thereafter viewed from both a consumer and a business perspective (2.2.4). Theories of integrated marketing communications (2.2.5) will follow which deals with everything a company does and says. The second part of the theoretical framework is concluded with theories regarding word of mouth (2.2.6); what others say about the company. Storytelling (2.3) is the last section and it is closely connected to word of mouth as stories are often shared between people. The section deals with the development, the implementation, and possible problems that may arise when using storytelling as a concept.

2.1 Service Marketing

Grönroos (1993) states that during the 1960s, the marketing mix with the 4 P’s dominated the marketing arena both from a theoretical and a practical perspective. According to Webster (1992), marketing has both a decision-making and a problem solving practice, and it is today implemented as an individual business function in larger corporations. Product or service planning and development as well as pricing, promotion, and distribution are used as basis for merging a business’ capabilities with the needs of the market. As the intention of the marketing mix was to facilitate marketing for manufacturing firms, many researchers, according to Mossberg and Nissen-Johansen (2006), have discussed if the marketing mix is relevant for service firms.

Grönroos, (2000, p.46) describes a service as a “process consisting of a series of more or less intangible activities that normally, but not necessarily always, take place in interactions between the customer and service employees and/or physical resources or goods and/or systems of the service provider, which are provided as solutions to customer problems.”
For most services, three basic characteristics can be identified (Grönroos, 2000):

1. Services are processes consisting of activities or a series of activities rather than things
2. Services are at least to some extent produced and consumed simultaneously
3. The customer participates in the service production process at least to some extent.

Grönroos (2000) argues that the 4P’s model is a never thoroughly tested belief from the world of consumer-packaged goods of the 1950s and 1960s. Therefore, he finds it almost unbelievable how the model is still today considered to be the most widely used in marketing. Mossberg and Nissen-Johansen (2006) state that there has been many attempts to develop a new marketing mix which take into consideration the features of service firms. Two parts of the service offering are then discussed; the core-service and the augmented service. In the discussion of the two concepts in the hospitality sector, offering a hotel room is the core-service and the restaurant, reception, and room service are the augmented services offered. Grönroos (1990) argues that only looking into the packaging of services is too simplified, since a service is more complicated than only categorizing it into the core and the augmented service. For example, customers’ perception of good quality has to be taken into consideration. Before, it has been more about what the customer is offered rather than how the service is offered.

According to Bitner (1992), the physical environment that surrounds the service offering, the servicescape, affects customers’ total experience. The servicescape includes the physical surrounding, where the service is produced, delivered, and consumed. The servicescape has the ability to facilitate success of organizational as well as marketing goals. Bitner (1992) also mentions that both organizational and marketing objectives can potentially be targeted through careful design of the servicescape. It influences behaviors and creates an image, and it is predominantly evident for service businesses as a service is produced and consumed simultaneously. Also, satisfaction of the employees might be affected in a positive direction, in terms of increased productivity and motivation. Mossberg and Nissen-Johansen (2006) consequently claim that servicescape relates to the customers’ interaction with other customers, and employees within the physical surroundings, where the experience is present.

Bitner (1992) claims that in order to develop an effective design of the servicescape the organization has to identify desirable customer and/or employee behaviors and what the company aims to deliver through its physical facility. The servicescape can create approach behavior, which implies positive experiences such as a desire to stay longer, explore more, increase engagement, and affiliate. However it can also create avoidance behavior, which implies opposite feelings. Thus, it is important to remember that each individual visiting the service company have a goal or purpose that may be assisted or hindered by the setting. In services where both customers and employees are present and perform actions, the design of the environment is affected. The level of participation from employees and customers decides whose needs should be consulted in order to develop the servicescape.

### 2.2 Marketing Communications

Varey (2001) describes the foundation of marketing communications as no different to other communications between humans. All interactions, whether it is between individuals, an individual and a business or businesses alone, send a message. Pickton and Broderick (2001) break the myth that marketing communications is only advertising and suggest that a wide concept of promotions, incorporating more than only a mean to trigger sales, is a better description. Further they say that marketing communications is one component of
marketing just as advertising is one of marketing communications. Marketing communications are activities that focus on making products or services visible in the marketplace. It involves communicating the right message to the right people through specific channels.

### 2.2.1 Communication Process

To understand marketing communications it is important to keep in mind the communication process, which involves a sender and a receiver, and a message leaving from one to the other. The basic communication model includes these three components, see figure 2 (Schramm, 1955, cited in Smith, Berry, & Pulford, 1997).

The classic model is limited as once the message is sent, the sender loses control of it and do not know if the message is received or understood correctly. The component missing is thus feedback. For a business it is not possible to monitor each customer’s feedback, but instead it may be done through changes in sales or market research. However, a message may still be misinterpreted and several components are necessary to reduce the risk (Smith et al., 1997).

Smith et al. (1997) further explain that the field of perception is an individual’s gained experience of language, culture, values, and self-image, gathered throughout life. The fields of perception of both the sender and the receiver must overlap each other in order for a clear understanding to take place. This means that the sender must encode the message and make it understandable to whom it is addressed through the use of language and visuals and the combinations of these. The receiver on his or her part needs to decode the message and figure out its meaning (see figure 3). Schramm (1971, cited in Kitchen 1999) further develops the last model and adds two factors;

- the message is sometimes sent through a channel, the media, and
- there might be obstacles along the way from sender to receiver that create noise.
According to Kitchen (1999), the communication process can further explain how communication is exchanged when an organization is communicating with potential customers, also called marketing communications. In marketing communications, the sender is an organization trying to communicate or promote its product or service. The promotional message is encoded and adjusted to the target customers, and then sent through any kind of medium, such as a website or magazine. The receiver, the potential customer, needs to decode the message and hopefully create an interest in the product or service. The feedback or response to the organization can be expressed in purchases or the absence of it. The factor ‘noise’ is further developed. Hughes and Fill (2006) bring up as example the vast amount of information consumers face everyday. When people need to sort out information, much of the message sent from an organization never reaches possible customers. Duncan and Moriarty (1998) further say that competitors and their products or services also cause noise in the market. If competitors reach further and faster with their message it is difficult to influence customers.

2.2.2 Marketing Communication Models

One of the most recognized and earliest models of marketing communications and its impact on the purchase decision of a customer is the AIDA model (figure 4), developed originally by Elmo Lewis in the 1920’s (Pickton & Broderick, 2001; Hughes & Fill, 2006). It assumes that communication affects the potential buyer in sequences and ends with consumption. The principle is that if communications should have any effect, awareness among viewers needs to be gained. If people are aware of a product or service, some kind of interest is likely to follow. The next stage is to create a desire and it often requires a ‘problem-solution’ approach, making the product or services an answer to an earlier identified problem. The final stage, action, deals with response from the targeted audience, and purchases are often promoted using forms of incentives. Many communications models have this sequential approach where there is a hierarchy of effects and where the first stage is the foundation and thus key to successful communication. According to Fill (2005), the AIDA model is associated with the strong theory of marketing communication, which suggests that people are passive. This means that marketing communication is, in isolation, the factor that persuades people to purchase and thereby increase sales.
The AIDA model and the strong theory, where buyers move sequentially towards purchase due to the marketing message, is according to Hughes & Fill (2006) outdated and gives an inaccurate picture of the role that marketing communications plays today. Ehrenberg’s ATR model, see figure 4, (1974, cited in Hughes & Fill, 2006), which is associated with the weak theory, reflects the role of marketing communication from a wider perspective. Fill (2005) describes that it assumes that customers’ purchasing behavior is driven by habit more than by marketing messages. Advertising and other means of marketing communications are tools to influence customers’ behavior. The ATR model follows a similar pattern as the AIDA model in the beginning, where awareness is necessary for purchase. However, it is then suggested that trial of a product or service may come from availability of the product or service as well as from advertising. Reinforcement is later used to maintain awareness and to influence customers’ behavior and repurchases. The ATR model and the weak theory incorporate people’s behavior and actions into the use of communications and aim to strengthen attitudes towards a product or service rather than create or drastically change them. Customers’ decision to purchase is influenced by marketing messages, but not necessarily driven by them.

2.2.3 Marketing Communication Tools

There are several tools for a business to reach objectives and communicate a message to the market, normally known as the marketing communications mix (Fill, 1995; Kitchen, 1999; Pickton & Broderick, 2001; Hughes & Fill, 2006). There are five major tools, which will be explained briefly.

Advertising includes any paid form of presentation and promotion of a product or service from an identified sponsor through suitable media channels (Smith and Taylor, 2002). Hughes and Fill (2006) state that disadvantages come with costs associated with advertising and possible difficulties for customers to decode the message correctly.

Sales Promotion concerns, according to Mårtenson (1994), incentives that hopefully encourage purchase of a product or a service and Hughes and Fill (2006) further say that it is often used as a complement to advertising. These incentives are mass distributed through discounts, samples, or loyalty bonuses. Smith and Taylor (2002) link the expansion of sales promotion in terms of loyalty programs to the movement towards more focus on relationship marketing.
Personal Selling requires face-to-face or other interpersonal activities between sellers and buyers and it is more about creating durable relationships than mere selling (Hughes & Fill, 2006). Mårtenson (1994) describes the advantage of using personal selling is its flexibility and adaptability towards receivers, but it is at the same time very costly.

Public Relations (PR) include relations an organization has with external public and it is used to create a company image in the market (Hughes & Fill, 2006). Smith and Taylor (2002) say that PR in terms of news or press releases published by someone other than the organization itself is often considered as free marketing since there is no cost. The message delivered is also often considered to be more credible than regular advertising. However, organizations lose control of the message as it is up to an editor to format and retell the message through own interpretations.

Direct Marketing is the delivery of information concerning a product or service directly aimed at a person or company or advertisements that allow direct response to the advertiser (Smith & Taylor, 2002). According to Hughes and Fill (2006), databases are created to store relevant information about customers in order to define profiles and target chosen groups at a later point in time. Relationships can be built, but it is costly and sometimes viewed as intrusive.

According to Hughes and Fill (2006), the combinations of these tools result in the communications mix. The tools can be used separately, but most often a combination of different tools is necessary to achieve objectives. All tools are appropriate for all types of goods and services; both in the consumer and the business-to-business market. The task is instead to make the correct mix of tools that best achieve the predetermined task. The major tools are in turn supported by other means of communication. These are exemplified as sponsorship, exhibitions, corporate identity, packaging, and point-of-sale promotions. For example, sponsorship is considered as a part of public relations and exhibitions are seen as personal selling. Internet and new media are channels that marketing communication passes through.

2.2.4 Consumer and Business Markets

Coviello and Brodie (2001) describe that the general theoretical view make a distinction between business-to-business (b2b) markets and consumer markets. Lilien (1987, cited in Coviello & Brodie, 2001) describes the unique characteristics of b2b markets as heterogeneous due to various number of firms and their size, long purchasing cycles, and a large number of individuals involved in purchasing decisions. He further argues that any similarities between b2b and consumer markets are merely superficial, and thus claims that using the same marketing strategies in the two markets will fail. Håkansson and Snehota (1995) further stress that b2b marketing is based on relationships and thus the buyer-seller interaction is more closely connected than firms are in a consumer market. Hughes and Fill (2006) add the complexity of the b2b market due to the involvement of several people during decision-making.

The result from the study made by Coviello and Brodie (2001) however shows more similarities than differences between the two markets and Varey (2001) describes that both the b2b and the consumer market involve people who purchase either a product or a service. The importance is to distinguish the needs of the people, whether they are buying for own use or on behalf of others, and match communication accordingly. Table 1 divide the typical characteristics of marketing communication between a consumer oriented and a b2b approach to communication.
Regarding marketing communication differences in the consumer and business market, Gilliland and Johnston (1997) further discuss how marketing communications is perceived. Personal interest is necessary for consumers as personal consumption is the goal. Communication tools are often effective when trying to reach and influence consumers since it is directed directly to the decision maker. However, business purchasers’ focus is on the interest of the organization, and often the product or service is for non-personal use. The product or service may be bought for another employee or department in another geographical location. Also, business purchasers’ decisions are supervised, making individual influences very limited. The fact that personal funds are not used reduces the attention on marketing communications. As price is not a major concern for the business purchaser, the scanning for best options is often shorter than for consumers.

Smith and Taylor (2002) argue that communication in the business market is more dependent on personal selling than in the consumer market. Relationships are often critical to create long-term purchase cycles in a b2b setting. However, it is further argued that sales promotions are functioning well in both markets as it is triggering the actual purchase.

### 2.2.5 Integrated Marketing Communications

Smith and Taylor (2002) stress that it is important that the combination of tools used and message delivered are integrated to increase the effectiveness, in order not to generate confusion. Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn (1993) are in turn questioning the often isolated view of marketing communication and say that it is not giving an accurate view on how it is functioning as a whole and how it should be managed today.

Schultz et al. (1993) describe communication as an activity that creates a culture, helping an organization to interact with society. The scope of communication is very broad since every contact a possible customer has with a product or service can be viewed as communication. It is much more than a plain marketing tool as it concerns the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program feature</th>
<th>Consumer relationship</th>
<th>B2B relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication context</td>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>Formal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of decision makers</td>
<td>One or few</td>
<td>Many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant tool</td>
<td>Advertising and sales promotion</td>
<td>Personal selling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Emotions and imagery</td>
<td>Rational, logical information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision period</td>
<td>Short</td>
<td>Long and involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope of impact of dissatisfaction</td>
<td>Limited to a few people</td>
<td>Several people / partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing approach</td>
<td>Targeting and segmentation</td>
<td>Limited targeting / segmentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget priority</td>
<td>Brand management</td>
<td>Sales management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation and measurement</td>
<td>Various techniques</td>
<td>Limited use of techniques</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Characteristics of marketing communication management (Varey, 2001, p.142).
organization as a whole. For an organization, it is impossible not to communicate and therefore it is important to manage the organization’s identity.

Smith et al. (1997) explain that the concept of integrated marketing communications (IMC) deals with the management of the overall message an organization delivers over time. Schultz et al. (1993) further make clear that all sources of information concerning a product or service must be managed in order to move customers toward purchase and maintain them as loyal customers.

IMC emerged as a mean to develop and manage a holistic view of communication messages (Grönroos, 2000). Duncan and Moriarty (1997) state three main differences between IMC and traditional marketing communications;

- a shift of focus from acquiring new customers to maintaining and developing them;
- using a two-way communication instead of only one-way; communicating with customers, rather than just to them, and;
- making marketing communications less of a function of the company and more like a philosophy of conducting business.

Schultz et al. (1993) base the concept of IMC on the fact that customers store information about a product or service from various sources. Information is retrieved from different media channels, but also from relatives and friends who have experienced the product or service. This information is collected over time. The message that is sent from an organization today must fit with the message stored in the customer’s mind from earlier experiences. This is why, according to Schultz et al. (1993), an integrated marketing communication approach is critical to apply. It also gives marketers more control of the message delivered if internal and external communications are consistent. Smith (1993) argues that internal communication is as important as external communication, the former dealing with flow of information and decision making within the organization and the latter is focused on creating and maintaining an efficient communication with stakeholders and customers. Further Smith et al. (1997) stress that it is important with a strong cohesion within an organization; or contradictory messages will follow. The identity communicated is very important as it influences the credibility of the message.

The evolution of IMC as a new strategy for managing marketing communications is crucial for survival in the marketplace. The integration of messages and tools is also necessary for overcoming the noise that is out there (Schultz et al., 1993). Smith et al. (1997) say that the benefit of using an integrated approach to marketing communications is the consistency of the communication process, since it facilitates the transfer of customers through the buying process; before, during, and after sales. If the business image and the unified message are clear, the barrier of ‘noise’ is easier to overcome. Coherent messages, both in terms of communication and business functions, will develop a greater awareness of a product and service in customers’ minds.

For service firms, the involvement of the customer can also facilitate integration of marketing communications. Beard (1996) discusses that customers should be viewed as participants during the service production instead of passive users. This will integrate both parts, make the communication more efficient, and reduce possible dissatisfaction. Customers feel involved in the service process and it can affect their perception of the service given in a positive way. Schultz et al. (1993) claim that it is IMC that create the use of relationship marketing, which in short means exchanges between buyers and sellers for
mutual benefit. Developing a relationship with the customer is the goal, and using IMC is how it is founded.

According to Beard (1996), IMC was initially looked upon as a buzzword, not given too much interest in the marketing communications industry. This has changed today, and it is now considered as necessary. However, Hutton (1996) is still critical toward the extensive interest of IMC as he claims that it is not something new within marketing. Few scholars or practitioners would suggest that nonintegrated marketing communications are appropriate. There are not many circumstances that would favor disconnected communications from one business, and Hutton (1996) argues that if marketing communications are not integrated it shows lack of cooperation rather than choice of keeping functions separate.

Measuring the effects of IMC requires a broad view of communications. According to Schultz et al. (1993), the traditional marketing communication measures focus on the message in isolation. Prior to the launch of a specific communication program, consumers' knowledge and awareness are scanned. Following that, a post measure is taken shortly after and the affect is then analyzed. The whole communication process, including the measurement, is thus following a linear path. This technique is however ignoring two important aspects when it comes to evaluating IMC. Schultz et al. (1993) argue that the real value of IMC is emerging over time and therefore the real effect is not visible at a single point in time shortly after the communication program is delivered. As communication programs are often continuous, several evaluations are needed over time. Also, the traditional view on communication focuses on one message through a single mode whereas IMC deals with multiple messages at the same time through various media or modes. This in turn requires a multidimensional measurement, including a separation between consumers' behavior and what is communicated. Consumer behavior include transactions made, relationships that provide feedback, and attitudes. The measurement is therefore circular, not linear as in traditional marketing communications. Attitudes are certainly affecting the behavior of a customer, but the experience is also affecting the attitudes. The measurement needs to be planned for in advance and be built into the communication process. The response from the customer is used to adapt coming communications. Both complaints and inquiries are important to understand in order to further develop IMC. In short, it is necessary to identify and understand all types of contacts made with customers as these contacts communicate a message.

Duncan and Moriarty (1997) describe three kinds of messages an organization delivers; planned messages, product or service messages, and unplanned messages. These messages are sent from the organization both intentionally and unintentionally, and it is important that they are coherent. Grönroos and Lindberg-Repo (1998, cited in Grönroos, 2000) illustrates this with figure 5, and it is explained further below.

![Figure 5 The integrated marketing communications triangle (Grönroos & Lindberg-Repo, 1998, cited in Grönroos, 2000, p. 267).](image-url)
**Planned messages** are those messages associated with regular promotional campaigns, sent through media channels such as TV, newspapers, and the Internet or through sales representatives. This is what the firm says to the external public. In general, these messages are perceived as the least trustworthy due to the fact that they are planned to persuade customers to purchase the product or service.

**Product or service messages** are related to the physical product or the service that is offered by the company, in other words what the firm does. The product message includes the design, the product quality, and how it functions. Service messages are the result of the service process, including attitude and behavior of employees and the surrounding environment. Any contact customers have with employees involves a message which in turn develops into a perception about the company as a whole.

**Unplanned messages** are viewed as the most trustworthy as they are not sent by the company itself as a mere incentive to purchase. Instead, other customers or people independent of the company provide their honest view of the company offerings through word of mouth, articles or over the Internet. Unplanned messages come from what others say and do.

Grönroos (2000) developed a communication circle to further explain the complexity of messages a company sends out and also the effect it has.

![Communication Cycle Diagram](image)

First, the potential customer develops expectations of the offer or the company as a whole. These expectations can originate from similar experiences, regular advertising, or other references. In the next step, the customer interacts with the company and consequently experiences the product or service offered. The experience is thereafter transferred to other potential customers and positive or negative word of mouth will spread, which in turn creates new expectations.

### 2.2.6 Word of Mouth

Kirby and Marsden (2006) describe word of mouth as a verbal, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator, concerning a brand, a product or a service. The receiver perceives the message as non-commercial. Silverman (2001) shortly describes the concept as communication between people regarding products and services, independent of any company.

Word of mouth communication is sometimes more important and influential within the service context than in strictly product oriented markets. This is dependent on the
intangibility and the associated risks with services (Bansal & Voyer, 2000). When people talk to each other about a specific product, service, or brand they also share their experience and thereby affect the purchase patterns of other customers (Silverman, 2001). As services in general are based on a long-term relationship between the service firm and the consumer, it is valuable to understand word of mouth as marketing communications (Grönroos, 2000). According to Kirby and Marsden (2006), the word of mouth concept is an academic truth, since consumers do talk about brands, products, marketing promotions, and advertisement campaigns.

It is acknowledged that from a consumer perspective, word of mouth communication is appealing and powerful since it defines the customers’ experienced processes (Lindberg-Repo, 1999). Successful experiences are those that the customers understand as unique, memorable, and that will last for a long time, and those that will be experienced again. These messages are most often spread by word of mouth (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Communication tools themselves can be utilized in order to generate word of mouth (Smith & Taylor, 2002). But consequently, if there is a conflict between word of mouth messages and for example an advertising campaign, advertising will lose (Grönroos, 2000). Silverman (2001, p. 6) states: “Getting people to talk often, favorably, to the right people in the right way about your product is far and away the most important thing that you can do as a marketer.”

However, Kirby and Marsden (2006) emphasize that word of mouth is not always viewed as a positive marketing contributor. It can also communicate negative issues. Hence, a company can never control what is said to the fullest, furthermore potential buyers scan for word of mouth when they believe the purchase is of a high-risk nature. Smith and Taylor (2002) stress that it is important to remember that dissatisfied customers talk about their bad experience to two or three times more people than satisfied customers talk about their good experiences.

### 2.3 Storytelling

Storytelling is related to word of mouth, since a good story can create positive word of mouth for the company. However, in order to create positive word of mouth it is important that the story is convincing. Also it is important that the characters are playing their part, otherwise it will be difficult for the organization to receive positive word of mouth from the story. When working with word of mouth it is beneficial if it is emphasized with a story. The story should be simple and easy to understand, and also be interesting, new, different, and unique (Silverman, 2001). Word of mouth created from stories can be utilized in the marketing strategy in order to spread the image and the values about the company (Mossberg & Nissen-Johansen, 2006).

#### 2.3.1 Explore Storytelling

People worship a good story, stories are the bond that has tied society together ever since immemorial times (Rosen, 2006). Stories such as myths and fables are powerful tools in human relationships. They have always been used as influential tools to overcome noise in the environment around us. These original storytellers provided an invaluable service by helping people make sense of complex issues (Parkin, 2004). Today, stories have the ability to touch people intellectually, physically, emotionally, and spiritually (Sole & Wilson, 1999). Storytelling can be explained as: “The foundation medium by which we speak, think, develop our self-image and understand each other.” (Mossberg & Nissen-Johansen, 2006, p. 7). Storytelling is also defined by Sole and Gray-Wilson (1999, p. 6) as: "Sharing of knowledge and experiences
through narrative and anecdotes in order to communicate lessons, complex ideas, concepts, and causal connections.”

Jensen (1999) on the other hand views stories as value statements. It implies that the content of the story differs among organizations. One might be about the universe and civilizations, and another can be based on everyday stories about who we are and who others are. Stories can be transmitted orally, in written form, through images, in plays or movies, or through products and services we purchase, or through a combination of these. Gabriel (2000) claims that stories can also have different functions for an organization; it can entertain, stimulate imagination, offer support, provide moral education, and justify and explain.

According to Jensen (1999), the motives why many organizations started to build their concept around a story is that it is no longer enough to simply offer a product or a service. There is a need for added value, and an increased interest for unique concepts is evident. From a marketing perspective, one can say that the customer wishes to create a feeling of affinity to the brand, the style, and the design. The customer chooses a company that matches his/her lifestyle. Mossberg and Nissen-Johansen (2006) further say that companies can succeed with incorporating different themes, however others can easily copy these themes. What makes a company unique is thus a unique story that is consequently difficult for others to copy. It is tough for companies to buy an image, the expression that “image is reality” is the truth. In the harsh competition on the market it is important for companies to place themselves in the “top of mind” among customers. The story must have its roots in the organization; it has to deliver messages that comply with how the organization wants to be perceived. It also has to be representative for the organization since the story building is very individual.

2.3.2 Develop Storytelling

The foundation of a story is, according to Salzer-Mörling and Strannegård (2003), based on a beginning, a middle theme, and an ending. The story also demands an arena, actors, intrigues, and events. According to Mossberg and Nissen-Johansen (2006), a good story can be retold repeatedly with different themes, and different stories can be combined to one or several by the organization.

The storytelling concept can provide a powerful device for stating and sharing a company’s vision and purpose (Rosen, 2006). Mossberg and Nissen-Johansen (2006) further argue that through marketing communication solutions a story can be converted into something meaningful for a company. This since the story can gain existence and denotation. Storytelling is a powerful communication solution since people like stories and tends to remember them. Consequently, storytelling can significantly improve a company’s public relations and in an inexpensive way also improve its external and internal communication. Stories facilitate companies’ attempts of capturing people’s attention and it also assists when sending the messages. Stories can furthermore build credibility and corporate perspective, which can bring organizational teams closer together.

Mclellan (2006) argues that in order to get employees to understand and also deliver the vision the company holds, the organization has to certify that all employees understand the story. Also, they have to recognize how it ought to be delivered to the external environment. According to Boje (1995, cited in Smith & Keyton, 2001), stories within the organization provide a symbolic function for all people involved. Stories can reduce uncertainty by providing information concerning the organization through outlining events
of organizational values and expectations. It can also identify why an organization and its members are unique. McLellan (2006) further argues that storytelling can get into the minds of individuals; it enables employees in an organization to see themselves and also the organization in a different light. Hence, this makes employees take decisions and make changes in their behavior in accordance with new perceptions, insights, and identities concluded through stories.

There are, according to McLellan (2006), many ways to communicate the image a company wishes to hold through stories. Communication of a story can be facilitated through people, advertisements, product/service, and symbols and artifacts. The most common way for companies to communicate their stories are through advertisements. When communicating a message through a story it is important to build it up around a character and give it an identity. Jensen (1999) claims that stories can help the company to inform customers and prospective customers what the company is about and what can be expected to find. One example of a powerful marketing strategy created through stories is to tell a story of how the company started; an identity story. The story can facilitate the sharing of what the company is all about. There are also customer stories that express what the customer thinks about the product or service, and product stories where the uniqueness of the product or service is communicated. If a company succeeds with embedding a story into its products and services, it will enhance its visibility in the marketplace. Gummesson (2004) argues that the story can be delivered by the organization to both consumers and business clients; it is still people who take the purchase decision.

According to Sole and Gray-Wilson (1999), storytelling can be of great help in different situations. Firstly, storytelling often works well if an organization wants to develop new ideas, projects, attitudes, or behaviors since a story can get people involved and makes them act in the same direction. Secondly, storytelling also helps people in a group to feel involved since the story delivers culture and norms that are connected to the organization’s views. A third situation when storytelling is helpful is when an organization strives to rebuild relations and increase its trustworthiness. The fourth situation is when an organization wishes to share wisdom in an effective way, since stories make know-how memorable. However, Rosen (2006) argues that the challenge for companies is to develop the “right” story for the brand. Thus, it is also important to remember that there exist situations when storytelling should be avoided by the organization. For instance when regular knowledge should be delivered or when a crisis exists.

2.3.3 Implement Storytelling

According to Jensen (1999), the easiest way for organizations to begin utilizing storytelling is to purchase a readymade concept through for example an advertising agency. Another alternative involves that the company organizes special events, which can create an adventurous story. A third option for companies are to sell the story concept imbedded with their customers, who will in turn become co-storytellers. This implies that customers will tell stories to new potential customers. A fourth way of implementing the story is letting the customer invent the story and become the founder.

Polkinghorne (1998) argues that when integrating stories into the organization, it is important to consider the ethical aspect of the story concept and whether or not the story needs to tell the truth. Companies should consider choosing stories concerning the organization’s past in order to illustrate desirable features. In every attempt to create a story, the company will have to make choices concerning what messages the story will deliver and whether it will tell the truth or not. Jensen (1999) argues that people want to
believe that the organization’s story is the truth. He claims however that it does not matter if the story is built on fiction or reality. The important aspect in this context is that the story feels real through the whole service offering; that it gives a whole perspective of what is offered. Salzer-Mörling and Strannegård (2004) continues and claims that whether a person will be fascinated by a story or not is not dependent on if the story is true or false, it more concerns if the story is trustworthy. They further explain that an organization’s story competes against other organizational stories for attention. The story that will win attention of the customers in the long run is not dependent on the level of truth or correctness; it is more about its total attractiveness.

Heijbel (2005b) on the other hand argues that the whole concept around a company’s storytelling should be built upon the company’s experienced reality. He claims that it is enough with what reality offers. Snowden (1999) further states that it is significant that any story communicated by a company is delivered with truth and fact, otherwise it can bring serious damage to the organization’s corporate reputation and image. Mossberg and Nissen-Johansen (2006) also discuss the subject and consider four aspects that are of importance in the creation of the storytelling concept.

- **Mutual understanding** - it is important that everyone involved are aware of whether a story is built on truth or fiction. It creates a mutual understanding among the parts involved in the story.
- **Area of utilization** - the context in which the story is utilized affects the level of truth.
- **Promise** - it is important to inform the audience whether the story provided is built on truth or fiction in order to avoid disappointments.
- **Target Group** - the target group and the purpose of the story affect the degree of truth.

In this scenario the company needs to consider how much truth needs to be delivered. Also, if a story is claimed to be build on reality and later on shows to be built on fiction, it can lose much of its credibility. According to Mossberg and Nissen-Johansen (2006), companies often mix old with new, and imagination with reality, in order to create as much reliability and coherence as possible. This way of working with stories is known as the concept “Funky History”.

### 2.3.4 Problems with Storytelling

Sole and Gray-Wilson (1999) argue that despite the power of storytelling, it is not always fulfilling the aims and objectives of the organization. A company does not want any story to get out to the audience; it wants the right story to get out. Stories can be insufficient or improper depending on its form and/or communication form. Sole and Gray-Wilson (1999) discuss three possible threats.

- Seductiveness
- Single Point of view
- Static stories

Some stories can be too seductive, attractive, and alive. This makes people absorb the story instead of critically evaluate it. This can imply that the listener might be distracted from the real purpose of the story. The second trap is that the story is often told from the perspective of one individual. This single point of view can create limitations and exclude
other people’s imaginations and interpretation of the story. Instead, a multiple perspective should be utilized when creating stories. The last point describes the level of staticness the story has. The impact of the story is likely to vary depending on its delivery; whether it is shared through an individual teller, orally, or in written form. Snowden (1999) argues that gradual failures often teach people more than successes. This is also generally true in organizations. It is evident that a negative story of someone else’s failure spreads more quickly than one of success.

It is argued that customers’ buying decision in the future will be strongly affected by invisible factors, such as the delivery of stories about an organization (Mossberg & Nissen-Johansen, 2006). Jensen (1999) discusses this further by stating that a research at the Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies has showed that the main growth in consumption in the future will be of a nonmaterial character. Clearly, it will always be a certain demand for the practical value of products. Customers will still need toasters and refrigerators to toast and refrigerate, although the story side of the product will become an even more important part of the decision to make a specific purchase. Jensen (1999) continues to argue that functionality of the product or service is not as important as it was before, consumers of today purchase a lifestyle. They value stories about the brands, and this will subsequently create added value for them. Elliot and Wattanasuwan (1998) also support the previous discussion and claim that customers consume products and services in order to develop their identity. Also, Gummesson (2004) argues that storytelling has become an important tool in today’s marketing and that the customer purchase different stories in order to fulfill different needs.

### 2.4 Summary of Theories

To give the reader an overall picture of the frame of reference, we have summarized the five main parts of theory.

**Service Marketing:** Theory discusses that the marketing mix with the 4 P's has dominated the marketing arena both from a theoretical and a practical perspective since 1960's. However today there are questions whether it is suitable for service firms. Three basic attributes describes services; processes consisting of activities, produced and consumed simultaneously, and the customer participates. The servicescape is a part of the total service offering, and it includes the physical surrounding, where the service is produced, delivered, and consumed.

**Marketing Communications:** Theory regarding the marketing communication process has developed from looking at communication as a linear process to a two way interaction between the organization and its customers. Through two recognized models, the power of a marketing communication message is discussed. One sees customers’ purchase decision as driven by the marketing message whereas the other claims that the message aims to strengthen customers’ attitudes towards a product or service. To reach the external market with the messages, tools are needed. These five major tools are discussed as the marketing communications mix. Generally, theory makes a distinction between business and consumer markets regarding how marketing communication should be used. Differences regarding characteristics of communication in the two markets are brought up and it is important for organizations to adapt messages according to the level of personal interest and purchase cycle.

**Integrated Marketing Communications:** Marketing communication theory has often looked at the messages in isolation. However, a company communicates through
everything it says, does, and what others say about it. Therefore, the development of theory regarding integrated marketing communications deals with the overall message a company sends to customers and stakeholders.

**Word of Mouth:** Word of mouth is what others, independently, say about a company. It can be both positive and negative. Word of mouth is closely connected to storytelling, as a good story can create positive word of mouth for the company.

**Storytelling:** People have since immemorial time worshiped a good story. However, the storytelling concepts today can function in marketing as an organization can differentiate itself. Companies can use identity stories, customer stories, and product stories. An organization can start utilizing stories by purchasing a readymade story concept, organizing special events, or develop stories together with customers. The ethical aspects when creating stories are of significant meaning. However, theory holds different views whether the story should be built on truth or fiction. Problems related to storytelling are also discussed; seductiveness, single point of view, and static stories. According to theory, the future of storytelling is promising as consumption in the future will be of a nonmaterial character.
3 Method

In this chapter we will discuss and motivate our choice of research methods. Scientific and research approaches are explained followed by detailed descriptions of how we chose the sample of hotels, and also how we practically collected and analyzed data. The chapter ends with critical reflections of the trustworthiness of our study.

On August 10 1628, one of the largest warships of its time, the ‘Vasa’, left Stockholm harbor on its maiden voyage. The voyage unfortunately ended abruptly after only 20 minutes as the ship suddenly got preponderance and sank. The immediate investigation showed a lack of ballast which caused instability. Further it was found that the different components of Vasa were not compatible since parts of them had been scaled up on King Gustav Vasa’s request without adjusting the overall design accordingly (Wahl, 2004).

The story of the ship Vasa shows that an inconsistent plan where elements do not fit together leads to failure. The lesson learned from this historic happening is the important role a coherent design plays. This can be related to the role that the method plays for a well-performed research, and Maxwell (1996) stresses that a design needs to be made explicit where both strengths and weaknesses are understood. We will visualize our design and present all components that have been interacting in order to reach our purpose.

Before writing this thesis we scrutinized possible research topics and came across the marketing field of ‘word of mouth’ which was described as the most powerful marketing tool (Silverman, 2001). Although academic research in the field is narrow and it would have been interesting to investigate, we found the concept of ‘word of mouth’ very abstract and difficult to classify and measure. The related and more concrete marketing tool, storytelling, has received much attention outside the academic world and we found it interesting to view it from an academic perspective. The delimitation was made to only examine storytelling within the Swedish hospitality sector, with companies dealing with both consumer and business clients. This choice was based on the attention storytelling has received in the hospitality industry, and the critical aspect of finding enough empirical sources.

3.1 Scientific Approach

The view of scientific research is broadly divided into positivism and hermeneutics (interpretivism). These viewpoints are opposites, concerning which method is used and how results are looked upon (Patel & Davidson, 2003).

Positivism has its roots in natural sciences and distinguishes between the external reality and how people interpret it. Positivists claim that the external factors are out there and are thus beyond our influence (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Patel and Davidson (2003) further explain that studies based on positivist methods should be conducted without personal values which in turn mean that a study would yield the same results even if the researcher was replaced. In other words, the study should be objective and produce theories that explain all empirical findings.

The opposite view is hermeneutics, which is focused on a deeper interpretative understanding of the social sciences (Bryman & Bell, 2003). It is more subjective in its nature as the researcher’s values and decisions influence the results. The researcher’s aim is to provide a fundamental description of a process or the forces at work in social life (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Although no comprehensive laws or theories are reached,
hermeneutics embrace the uniqueness in each interpretation that in turn contributes with multiple explanations in each field (Patel & Davidson, 2003).

In general, positivism is associated with the quantitative research using a deductive approach where hypotheses are tested (Patel & Davidson, 2003). Hermeneutics, on the other hand, stands for the qualitative study where more of an inductive method is used to explain complex human processes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This research orientation is the foundation for the two following sections and we will return to our choice of scientific approach after they are explained.

3.2 Qualitative Research Method

Conducting research is mainly divided into a quantitative or a qualitative method. According to Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005), the difference lies in how data is collected and used. A quantitative technique includes many respondents and numbers are often used to explain findings. By using this method, an objective view of the data can verify or reject hypotheses and generalizations of a whole population can be made. The qualitative method on the other hand puts emphasis on understanding and interpreting findings. Fewer respondents provide data, which are presented using descriptive words and a subjective, but more in depth view is given due to the involvement of the researchers.

Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005) explain that it is often stated that the quantitative method is better than the qualitative as it is structured and scientific. However, they argue that quality is not what differentiates the methods, it is only the procedures. Trost (1993) further argues that the most suitable method depends on the purpose of the research. Our purpose, to study and analyze storytelling and how it is used as marketing communication in the Swedish hospitality industry, indicates that the aim was to develop an understanding and explain the use of storytelling. To fulfill the objective, the procedure had to be flexible and unstructured, which resulted in in-depth interviews with open questions. Naturally, a qualitative method was chosen, supported by literature which suggests that it is suitable when this aim and procedure of collecting data are as presented.

3.3 Induction and Deduction

Researchers can decide upon what is true and what is false and draw conclusions by using either a deductive or an inductive approach. Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005) say that using deduction means reaching conclusions through logical reasoning. Hypotheses are used, based on existing theory, which are then accepted or rejected by testing the empirical findings. The conclusions drawn do not necessarily have to be true in reality, instead logic justifies the reasoning. The quantitative research is often deductive. A qualitative study, on the other hand, is often associated with induction, and using induction means that theory will be the outcome of the research and conclusions are thus drawn from empirical observations. As inductive conclusions are only based on empirical findings, one cannot be completely confident that the conclusions represent the truth. More or less likely results can be achieved, but even conclusions based on many observations can be wrong. In short, induction leads to theories or hypotheses and deduction accept or reject them. The relationship between the two opposites is visualized in figure 7.
Method

As we previously explained our qualitative approach in this research, an inductive study was chosen as suitable. We do not aim to test the accuracy of theories or base our research on any predetermined hypothesis. Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005) further state that deduction and induction are not completely separated and both may be used in some studies. We used existing theories to better explain and structure our empirical findings and therefore a deductive influence is present as well.

Summarizing our chosen method this far shows our hermeneutical view of the results we have collected. We are interpreting qualitative data through our own lenses, which will lead to a subjective understanding of the interplay between stories and marketing communications.

3.4 Data Collection

Eriksson and Wiedersheim-Paul (1999) say that the next step, after the research approach is determined, is to decide how the appropriate information should be collected. Merriam (1998) argues that there are several ways of collecting data; how it is conducted depends on how the researchers prefer their study and how the sample for investigation is selected. The purpose of the data collection is to obtain as much useful information as possible in order to find the answers to what is researched.

The research for our thesis started by a comprehensive literature study of theories in our field of interest; we started broad and then narrowed it down to detail. This was done in order to give us a deeper knowledge and understanding regarding marketing communications and the concept of storytelling, and what research areas exist within the subjects. In this thesis, the process of gathering data was broadly divided into two parts. The first part included studying secondary data; existing literature such as books, articles, theses, and dissertations, and the second part consisted of gathering primary data through interviews.

Secondary data is, according to Lekvall and Wahlbin (2001), data that already exist and that has been collected for another purpose. The secondary data in this thesis has been used for creating an understanding for the subject, develop the frame of reference, and it worked as a guide when collecting the primary data. Relevant secondary data was found at Jönköping University Library through the search engine Julia, and databases such as Ebrary, Emerald Fulltext, ABI/Inform Global, J-Store, and SAGE Journals. In addition, search engines such as Google and Google Scholar have been applied. To find what we were looking for, we used keywords both in Swedish and English, and these were variations of storytelling, hospitality industry, marketing communications, and integrated marketing communications.

Lekvall and Wahlbin (2001) explain primary data as information collected particularly for the problem examined by the researchers. This kind of data collection is very expensive.
and time consuming; however it is a necessity in order to analyze the problems. Kinnear and Taylor (1996) argue that primary data can be gathered through observing the respondent, face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, and through e-mail. Due to the nature of our purpose, we chose to conduct several interviews in order to collect the data needed. This process is described in the following three sections.

3.4.1 Sample Choice

Miles and Huberman (1994) consider sampling as crucial in order to manage the analysis of a study. They claim that as much as the researchers might want to, it is not possible to study everyone, everywhere, doing everything. According to Bryman and Bell (2003), it is important to provide a representative sample of a population in order to be able to generalize the findings. Bryman (1995) further says that when performing a qualitative study it is vital that the sample chosen is in accordance with the purpose of the study. Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that qualitative samples tend to be purposive rather than randomly selected. Bryman and Bell (2003) mean that a purposeful sampling method is utilized to select information-rich respondents for in-depth studies. From these, one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research and therefore it can explain the name purposeful sampling. These thoughts are in accordance with Miles and Huberman (1994), who mean that the researchers may look for particular types of respondents who have certain experiences that will be suitable for the chosen standpoint of the purpose.

For our thesis, a purposeful sampling method was used in order to locate respondents that would best give us empirical findings that could be used to answer our purpose. In order for us to reach our aim with the thesis, we set up the following criteria when choosing our sample;

1. Hotel and/or conference facility
2. Located in Sweden
3. Actively working with storytelling
4. Both business and consumer clients

By scrutinizing company websites we found a vast amount of possible candidates to be selected. We also looked for articles and books that had written about hotels and storytelling. We chose to contact fifteen different hotels and the initial contact was taken by e-mail and/or by phone. The intention was to present our ideas, see if the hotel was suitable for our chosen purpose, and if so ask if it was possible to conduct an interview. Not all hotels matched our profile since they did not consider themselves to be actively working with storytelling as a concept, and were therefore not possible to interview. An important issue we had in mind when choosing companies was the necessity that the hotel managers or other responsible employees possessed knowledge and had ability to talk about their experiences of using storytelling.

Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that there are no rules for the sample size in a qualitative study. The sample size instead depends on what the researcher want to know, and the purpose of the interview; what is useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) state that a research sample should be kept small, especially in a qualitative study since the information consists of many features and details. A small sample will give the researchers control of the study and facilitate efficient interpretation. It is however important that the researchers question if
they have covered the whole perspective or if additional respondents would make the thesis more trustworthy and new insight could be gained.

Due to the fact that interviews are time consuming and contains comprehensive information (Andersson, 1985), we had to limit the number of respondents. The final choice was based on the predetermined criteria, available time for both the respondents and us, and we also wanted a geographical spread among the respondents. The last factor was considered since we wanted to allow all kinds of themes and historical backgrounds. In total, we interviewed nine hotel managers or other responsible employees at different hotels. We are satisfied with the amount since it gave us enough data to create an interesting analysis and conclusion. If there had been a too large sample size, the data would simply been too hard to handle. Table 2 gives a detailed overview of all interviews conducted.

### Table 2  Interview schedule.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hotel</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Interview date &amp; Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stora Hotellet</td>
<td>Catrin Karlsson</td>
<td>Sales and Marketing Manger</td>
<td>Fjällbacka</td>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
<td>April 15, 2007 11.00-12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slottsvillan</td>
<td>Eva Grudemark Ågren</td>
<td>Owner, Manager</td>
<td>Huskvarna</td>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
<td>April 16, 2007 10.30-11.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toftholms Herrgård</td>
<td>Torbjörn Colfach</td>
<td>Owner, Manager</td>
<td>Lagan</td>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
<td>April 16, 2007 15.30-16.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designhotellet</td>
<td>Kåre Johansson</td>
<td>Owner, Manager</td>
<td>Värnamo</td>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
<td>April 17, 2007 13.30-14.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Såstaholm</td>
<td>Camilla Dahlman</td>
<td>Sales Manager</td>
<td>Täby</td>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
<td>April 20, 2007 10.00-11.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gripsholms Värdshus</td>
<td>Pernilla Rehnberg</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Mariefred</td>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
<td>April 24, 2007 10.00-11.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albert Hotell</td>
<td>Rickard Halleröd</td>
<td>Owner, Manager</td>
<td>Trollhättan</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>April 27, 2007 08.30-09.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icehotel</td>
<td>Dan Björk</td>
<td>Marketing Manager</td>
<td>Jukkasjärvi</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>April 27, 2007 16.00-16.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villa Fridhem</td>
<td>Isabelle Johnsson</td>
<td>Sales and Marketing Manager</td>
<td>Norrköping</td>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
<td>April 30, 2007 10.00-11.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4.2 Interviews

Interviewing is one of the most commonly utilized methods of gathering primary data, according to Riley, Wood, Clark, Wilkie, and Szivas (2000). Ritchie and Lewis (2003) argue that qualitative interviews are more or less always conducted face-to-face, since it would be extremely difficult to conduct detailed in-depth interviewing over the telephone. The empirical study of this thesis was completed through both face-to-face and telephone interviews. To be able to experience the environment and see for ourselves how the stories are expressed, we found it very important to visit as many respondents and hotels as possible. However, two of our interviews had to be conducted by telephone due to the physical distance to the respondent and lack of time for both the respondent and us.
During these telephone interviews we therefore asked more detailed questions regarding the surroundings and the interior of the hotels as we could not see it for ourselves. Holme and Solvang (1997) argue that one of the strengths of conducting a qualitative interview is its similarity to a normal conversation, which makes the respondent feel relaxed in explaining its own point of view. Kvale (1997) claims that the purpose of a qualitative interview is to describe and interpret the respondent’s natural environment and the researchers control the situation in the least possible way. Holme and Solvang (1997) argue that the respondent preferably directs the conversation, however at the same time it is important for the researchers to receive the answers wanted. This atmosphere is easiest to achieve by conducting interviews and it is not possible to reach when using a survey.

Andersson (1985) explains that structure is often mentioned when talking about interviews. The degree of structure is about whether the questions and the situations are the same for all respondents. An unstructured interview, where the interviewer does not have a planned sequence of questions, makes the respondent able to answer freely and the possibility for variations increases. It is more of an open and unpredictable discussion that let the conversation move on its own. A structured interview on the other hand means that an interview follows a pre-determined plan.

Andersson (1985) argues that the most common approach when utilizing interviews is the semi-structured approach. This since many interviews cannot be categorized as either structured or unstructured; instead a combination of both is utilized. In a semi-structured interview, the interviewers have in advanced decided which topics to discuss and what information is needed to be collected. These questions function as the base of the interview. However, during the interview follow-up questions often arise when further clarifications are needed. Holme and Solvang (1997) discuss the importance of being flexible when conducting a qualitative research. During our interviews, we found it necessary to be able to make changes in the structure in order to make the content more fluent and appropriate. Answers were often overlapping several questions, and adjustments often had to be made to suit the different situations. By conducting semi-structured interviews both in person and over the telephone, we were able to be flexible, and also it enabled us to ask detailed and specific questions about the unique storytelling concept at every hotel.

### 3.4.3 Conducting the Interviews

The structure of the interview questions for the thesis was founded upon the purpose and theories studied beforehand. An interview guide (see appendix 1) with the main areas to be discussed in the interview was sent to all respondents through email in advance. The respondents were then able to prepare before the interview and we could benefit from comprehensive answers. The interviews were about an hour long and this gave us time to investigate the studied topics thoroughly. Also, at all face-to-face interviews we were given tours of the hotels and the surroundings where the story was further told. Both of us were present at almost all interviews and this reduced the possibility of misinterpretations and risk of missing out on important information. Due to personal reasons, we had to conduct one interview each alone. However, these interviews were done at the end of the interview period when we both had experience and knew exactly what information needed to be collected. Furthermore, we recorded these interviews, and both of us listened to them afterwards to reduce the risk of misinterpretations. Also, the other face-to-face interviews and the telephone interviews were recorded and only key notes were taken in order to facilitate the arrangement of the empirical data. This made us more focused and active in the role as interviewers. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), it is highly advantageous to
audio-record the interview and for the researcher to take few if any notes during the interview. This allows the researcher to devote his or her full attention to listening to the interviewee, and also be more active to make follow up questions. After the interviews were conducted, the information was transcribed and quotes were extracted. The information was then organized and the relevant information was put together in the empirical part of the thesis. As all interviews were conducted in Swedish and we had to translate all empirical findings into English, we may have lost nuances in the quotations stated. However, we managed this and reduced the risk of other misinterpretations and misleading information by sending each part of the empirical chapter to the respective respondent for control and approval.

3.5 Data Analysis

Since qualitative data typically takes the form of a large quantity of unstructured textual material it is not straightforward to analyze (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Marshall and Rossman (1999) argue that the analysis of the collected empirical data from interviews is mainly a process where data is collected, structured, and analyzed. According to Holme and Solvang (1997), the information received from qualitative interviews can be difficult to analyze as information has to be structured and organized before being interpreted. There are no routines, procedures, or techniques to organize qualitative data in comparison to a survey where the data has a well-defined structure. Holme and Solvang (1997) continue to state that there is neither a specific way nor any restrictions on how to interpret and draw conclusions out of empirical material. However, it is essential to categorize and structure the empirical findings in order to facilitate a good base for future research (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

In this thesis, interpretation of the data collected was done simultaneously as the information was gained, and the structure as well as reduction of data was continuously performed during the period of data collection. Our analysis has therefore been an ongoing process. According to Ryen (2004), this way of conducting the thesis is also in line of the arguments of the qualitative approach, where collection, reduction, and analysis are processed simultaneously. This is also the largest difference compared to a quantitative study, where the analysis starts first when all data is collected (Ryen, 2004).

Using semi-structured interviews to collect empirical data can result in that the data collected can have large differences. This can become a problem when organizing and analyzing the data. In order avoid this, the authors need to organize the collected data and create a system that is consistent over the whole data set (Bryman & Bell, 2003). We categorized the data in chronological order according to when the interviews were conducted. Each interview was then presented by first introducing the storytelling concept, followed by the role of storytelling in marketing communications. The analysis chapter was developed using theory but followed the same broad structure as the empirical findings in order to create coherence. Our empirical findings were linked to the theories, and our analysis was developed. We found it necessary to discuss and define storytelling in the hospitality industry first in order to analyze it from a marketing communication perspective. Tendencies were revealed and from that, conclusions could be drawn.

3.6 Quality of the Research

According to Maxwell (1996), there is no method that guarantees a correct interpretation of the real world that has been studied and Ritchie and Lewis (2003) further state that doing everything right is an aim almost impossible to achieve. We feel confident that the chosen
Method

As stated earlier, our choice of doing a qualitative study was based on the nature of our purpose. However, even if the method is appropriate it might still be drawbacks. Bryman (2001) states that the use of a qualitative method in research has been criticized as being too subjective due to the involvement of researchers, problematic when trying to generalize the findings, and lacking enough transparency of the data collection and analysis. Generally, two main concepts are used when measuring the trustworthiness of this type of study; reliability and validity.

Reliability is explained by Miles and Huberman (1994) as a quality control of methods used, data collected, and available time. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) refer it to sustainability and consistency during the whole research process. It also concerns if other researchers by using the same method would come to the same results at another point in time; if the study is possible to replicate. As we have performed individual semi-structured interviews and interpreted the overall concept of storytelling it is very difficult for others to get the same results if the interviews are conducted again. Nevertheless, we have presented each part of the research process in detail and motivated our decisions taken and thereby facilitated a potential replication of this study.

The validity of a study can be considered as the credibility and the transferability of the findings, according to Maxwell (1996). It is often explained in two aspects; internal and external validity. Arksey and Knight (1999) see internal validity as a question of whether the researchers are investigating what was claimed and Miles and Huberman (1994) include the logic of the study, if it makes sense and if the findings are credible. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) further suggest that researchers should reflect if the studied phenomenon is portrayed accurately, meaning if the ones that are being studied perceive it in the same way.

Our knowledge regarding storytelling has been gained from various sources, both secondary and primary, and with regards to that we feel that we can describe the concept and portray the hotels’ specific stories accurately. However, a valid critique to our research is that we interpreted our findings from the interviews and restated them at a later point in time. It is possible that a few distortions have influenced the research. To minimize these problems, we have continuously questioned ourselves, both concerning choice of theories used and our own influence on the data presented. The fact that all respondents have confirmed the empirical findings minimizes the risk of too subjective interpretations and increases the internal validity.

The time constraint limited us to some extent since we were only able to visit each hotel once. Furthermore, we only interviewed one respondent at each hotel, which could be a drawback as personal opinions may be shared that do not comply with the hotel’s. Also, negative aspects concerning storytelling may have been left out as the managers want to market their hotels and make a good impression. This is nothing that we can control, but by asking questions from various angles we think that this problem was minimized as much as possible. If more time would have been available, it would have been interesting to interview employees that interact with customers frequently and get their view of storytelling. However, as storytelling is mainly used for marketing and the hotels did not have a whole marketing department, often only one person could answer our questions regarding storytelling as marketing communication. We are satisfied with the information
we received from the interviews and the respondents were all well familiarized with our research topic.

As we did not have the opportunity to experience the hotels’ storytelling concepts as guests, we could only refer to how storytelling is used from the perspective of the hotels. Also, we found it difficult to mediate the atmosphere of the hotels to the readers. We probably have a more complete impression of the hotels’ storytelling concepts than what has been able to transcribe in text. This may have affected conclusions drawn as we may have emphasized attributes that are not visible or tangible.

Miles and Huberman (1994) continue to explain external validity to be concerned with the generalization of conclusions; if it is applicable to others. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) add that in a qualitative study, external validity is also referred to as transferability of findings. The generalization problem is present in our thesis as it is in many qualitative studies. It may be questioned how it is possible to generalize findings when the number of hotels studied are limited to nine. However, our findings show many similarities among the studied hotels and although we cannot argue that our conclusions are true for the whole hospitality industry, we can still see tendencies that most likely reflect how storytelling is used by hotels. Furthermore, if we look at the transferability of our findings, we believe that our study can help other hotels that are about to implement storytelling as a concept.
Empirical Findings

This chapter will present the nine chosen hotels and the empirical findings gathered during the interviews. Each hotel will be described separately, starting with a short anecdote that gives an introduction to the story communicated.

The empirical findings were gathered through interviews with representatives from nine different hotels and a detailed description of each respondent is found in table 2 in chapter 3. In the text, the respondent’s position at the hotel is used instead of their name. We have chosen to present the interviews in chronological order, according to when they were conducted. As all interviews were held in Swedish, quotes have been translated into English.

We have chosen not to use any sub-headings to structure the findings from each hotel since the information is interconnected and concerns storytelling from different aspects. However, we have tried to structure all sections in the same way in order to facilitate for the reader. The storytelling concept introduces the hotel, followed by the hotels’ customers, marketing communications, integrated marketing communications, and word of mouth. The stories that are introducing each hotel are based on information we have gathered during the interviews, and own experiences when visiting the hotels. To further give the reader a visual understanding, pictures of each hotel can be found in appendix 3.

4.1 Stora Hotellet

Around the world in 23 rooms - Join Captain Klassen on his journey and explore his favorite ports, women, and the explorers he admired.

In the beginning of the 20th century, Captain Klassen returned to his beloved Fjällbacka, a small fishing village located on the west coast of Sweden. He was a skipper of class and after having sailed the seven seas he had become a wealthy man with a lot of stories to share. He built a hotel and decorated it with souvenirs from all over the world. Through letters outside all rooms, written by the Captain to his brother, we are offered to read and take part in his journey.

Employees: 4-5, low season, up to 35, high season (summer).
Owner: Lars-Erik Persson
Rooms: 23
Conference rooms: 4

During 1996-97, the concept of this story was created. The typical marine theme with fishnets and barrels was not desired, and with assistance from a marketing agency the history of the hotel was brought to life. Several captains have owned the hotel over the years and Captain Klassen was once living in Fjällbacka. The base of the story is thus true, but to give a coherent story, fictitious anecdotes support it. The storytelling concept is still very strong and the purpose of using storytelling is to be remembered and to mediate a feeling of what the hotel stands for. The Sales and Marketing Manger explains that:

“The concept of the story is what makes us unique.”

Often, customers that have visited Stora Hotellet during a conference return as customers for leisure purposes during peak season, or the other way around. The Sales and Marketing Manger says that it is very important to be aware of that:
Empirical Findings

“all guests during summer are potential group and conference guests.”

The difference between business and private customers is small when it comes to the interest in the story and how it is mediated. However, it is easier to tell the story to a larger group than to single customers due to time constraints. All groups that come to Stora Hotellet are told the story, but it is not an organized event. Customers do not get involved much in the actual storytelling, but can be partakers through reading all the letters. The marketing budget is small and storytelling is the driving force behind most of the external communication. No traditional advertising campaigns are used; instead fairs and booking agencies are used to attract new customers, and existing customers are often approached by telephone. Storytelling is mostly used when approaching new customers in order to get them interested in the hotel. Existing customers already know the story and the concept and the story therefore plays a smaller role. The Sales and Marketing Manager states:

“All hotel facilities have a history that people are interested in, however not many have such a unique story and concept as Stora Hotellet.”

Also, through the use of storytelling, a lot of independent publicity has been generated. At Stora Hotellet, everything is imbued by the story; food is based on what the sea has to offer, activities include fishing, and the interior tells the story itself. It has since the hotel started with the story been important to have a red thread throughout the service offering. Of course, Fjällbacka’s location next to the sea influences as well. Every room is unique in its interior design, and outside every door there is a letter from Captain Klassen which describes the place he visited or the person he met. On the bottom floor, each room represents a port, the second floor is devoted to the women he met, and the suites are dedicated to renowned explorers such as Columbus and Marco Polo. The Sales and Marketing Manager clarifies that:

“the story gives an extra value to the customers; they understand why the rooms and the interior are decorated as they are.”

All employees are well aware of the story and can tell it to interested customers. During summer, when the amount of employees is increasing, a kick off for new employees is used to mediate the story. The story functions as the hotel’s backbone and employees feel proud to be a part of it and to share the story. However, the story is not present in the internal communication. There are no plans on restructuring the concept of the story, although it has been the same for the last ten years.

It takes time to build and create word of mouth, which is of most importance in the industry, and for Stora Hotellet. All employees are very keen to analyze customers’ attitudes and be sales oriented. It has not been recognized that the story have contributed to any negative word of mouth or publicity. Often, customers are surprised positively by the story, as the outside of the hotel does not show what is revealed inside. The use of storytelling increases the response from customers as comments or questions often arise. Returning customers often request either the same room or the wish to try different rooms every time. In a near future, Stora Hotellet might start with having an organized event when the story is told, since it sometimes is difficult to reach all customers, especially during peak season. The Sales and Marketing Manger thinks that it is:

“ideal to develop a hotel based on a story and then adjust everything to that concept.”

In a unique building or environment, the story comes by itself. It is not however advisable to create a fictitious character or story anywhere without any real background.
4.2 Slottsvillan

Take a step back in time, to the end of 19th century and meet the director of the Huskvarna factory, Wilhelm Tham. He invites you to his and his family’s house, a classic castle with towers and pinnacles, located on a hill in Huskvarna. Wilhelm Tham was a far-sighted typical Swedish industrial man who worked hard both for the factory and the town’s development. However, he suffered great losses in his life as both of his children died. It is said that his youngest son is still watching over his small room on the middle floor.

Employees: 4
Owner: Eva Grudmark Ågren
Rooms: 23
Conference rooms: 4

The storytelling around Slottsvillan has a long history. The castle was built in 1896, and Wilhelm and Elisabeth Tham was the first family living there. The history has always functioned as a storytelling concept for the hotel and it is utilized in order to communicate the uniqueness of the hotel. The castle, with its exclusive and well-preserved interior and exterior environment is unique today and it is aimed to represent a unique and preserved environment from the turn of the century. Each room has its own identity and the castle itself should be an experience. The Manager claims:

“In order to create a feeling for the hotel people must visit it, it is hard to verbally explain the emotions of being part of the story in the real environment.”

Most of the storytelling provided at Slottsvillan tells the truth; however since it is a castle inquires often arise about ghost stories. Occasionally, guests are therefore provided with made-up ghost stories. As a result, both truth and fiction is combined in order arrange the story, and sometimes it is exaggerated in order to make the story more exciting. Employees at the hotel do not often take own initiatives to tell the story, instead guests are interested in the history of the castle and ask questions. In order to form the story, a lot of research has been completed and the annual open house for the public also brings in new facts and stories, which have contributed a great deal to the present historical picture. Hence, during the years the hotel has developed the story. It has been expanded and filled with additional details and facts and it can be viewed as an ongoing project. Slottsvillan has not evaluated the effects of the provided story more than noticing customers’ interest and that it is remembered. The hotel is mainly focused on conference and business customers, but also hosts weddings and other big private occasions. Future segments are considered to be foreign tourists that come for an experience but that is not a focus at present time.

Customers are not included in any kind of storytelling act, but are involved through activities and through own interest. Activities connected to the story have the purpose of getting the customers familiar with the atmosphere and make them form a feeling for the house. The storytelling concept is an ingredient in the small part of traditional marketing that Slottsvillan utilizes. Much more emphasis is put on attracting booking agencies and company visits. In order to promote the hotel towards agencies, Slottsvillan utilizes invitations trips. The purpose of the trips is for the agencies to get to know the hotel, the employees, the atmosphere, and also experience activities that are connected to the story. In these events, Slottsvillan always pushes extra on the story in order to create a feeling for
Empirical Findings

Slottsvillan. The agencies get a better image of the hotel and can sell it to prospective customers. The Manager explains:

“Customers need to see and experience the environment and the story around it in order to understand why it is so unique.”

Marketing communications through Internet and catalogues also provide customers with information about the hotel and the story. Existing customers are often approached through newsletters, which remind them about Slottsvillan. When advertising in catalogues, Slottsvillan always provide potential customers with the story connected to the castle. However, the Manager states that it is difficult to tell the whole story in advertisements since the space is limited. Not all functions in the hotel are imbued by the story, but the ambition is to increase the presence of the story. In addition to this, it is emphasized that all employees should be aware of the story and be prepared to tell the story on request. However, the story does not serve a purpose in the internal communication. The interior is also completely connected to the story since every room reflects different time periods of the castle’s history. It is important to reinforce the story with details in the interior. Drawings or a piece of furniture provide the customers with a larger understanding of the interior.

One of the most important marketing communication means is the creation of positive word of mouth as the hotel attracts new customers mainly through recommendations. One way for the hotel to create positive word of mouth and to expand the transfer of the story among guests could be to start having events where potential guests are invited to participate. Also, positive word of mouth is hopefully created every time a customer is leaving the hotel satisfied. The hotel always emphasizes its particular environment that lies as the foundation of its storytelling concept in its creation of word of mouth. The employees are viewed as the best marketers to the outside market. It has been recognized that the story have contributed to negative word of mouth, this since people are different and some people do not appreciate ghost stories.

The storytelling within Slottsvillan can be developed further in the future as it can be utilized in different ways. The Manager believes that the value of storytelling in the future will grow even more, especially for hotels that have a genuine story to deliver. At the same time, she is doubtful that hotels will succeed to build a concept around fictions. It should feel right and be built on truth; otherwise you will easy get revealed.
4.3 Toftaholms Herrgård

Get a taste of the manor-house life at the time when the Count and Marshal of the Realm, Gustav Olsson-Stenbock, owned Toftaholm. He was Gustav Vasa’s brother-in-law, but later became his father-in-law when the King married his daughter Katarina. Toftaholm is found in a peaceful and sober, contemporary setting. The mansion offers romance and mystery, and provides guests with a beautiful scenery and gastronomy of highest quality. Experience the unique Toftaholm Herrgård, which hosted the romantic wedding between Knight Fike Gustavsson and the Count’s daughter Anna Stenbock in 1474 or encounter Squire Mats, the ghost legend, who had unhappy love and fate.

| Employees: 15 fulltime (20 part-time) |
| Owner: Torbjörn Colfach            |
| Rooms: 45                          |
| Conference rooms: 5                |

Toftaholm aims with its story to illustrate how a mansion looked liked in the middle of the 19th century. Details from that time are preserved and continuous improvements of the house are made to make it adjusted to the first quartile of the century. A visit to Toftaholm should create a feeling of something unique. When delivering the story it is thus central that it is not too abstract, otherwise the story will not be taken for real. At Toftaholm, the story is embedded in the walls and the guests should be able to feel the old atmosphere and environment. Storytelling is viewed as a communication mean that allows the hotel to interact with guests more. It has been noticed that the story generates a marked improvement in the guests’ interest for Toftaholm and its service offering.

The purpose of using storytelling is to connect with customers and build close relationships with them. The saying used at Toftaholm is: “Come as a guest and leave as a friend.” This is reinforced by the storytelling concept. Toftaholm have both conference guests and private guests, and is now mainly focusing on increasing the number of private guests. The hotel works hard to create a complete service offering that suits well with the younger generation; being viewed as trendy but with historical elements. Storytelling becomes an important tool in order to achieve that. Towards the business market, the hotel uses a full-time seller in order to create business relationships, which is seen as very important. However, the message that the story delivers is the same to both customer segments. It is most powerful to tell the story in person when guests are present at the hotel, since the surroundings accentuate the story and questions can be answered. It is also easier to mediate the story to a whole group, preferably during a conference, but the Manager tries to integrate with all guests. The story is often very much appreciated among all guests who visit Toftaholm.

Marketing communication is very important and something that is spent both time and money on. However, no help from marketing agencies are used, since it is viewed as too expensive in reference to the size of the hotel. Booking agencies and the Internet are of most importance when trying to reach customers and mediate the story, whereas traditional advertising is used from time to time. The hotel always tries to be mentioned in journalistic articles to tell their story since this kind of written material is for free and it also provides the hotel with trustworthy information. The Manager most often tells the story himself in order to interact with customers. The story is further exposed on the home page and in all
Empirical Findings

printed marketing material. The focus of the marketing communication is mainly to influence returning guests. It is emphasized that a guest can come to Toftaholm for different occasions; to play golf, dinner with relatives, or with work. The Manager highlights that it is important to know that:

“every guest carries several wallets; it is important to send the right message – we offer something for everyone.”

Storytelling is integrated in the whole concept of the hotel and as it is the foundation of the service offering, it is always present. Marketing messages have always been influenced by the history of the hotel and emphasized by the unique surroundings. Furthermore, all employees are required to be able to deliver the story if requested. There are no organized events around telling the story, but often employees act as storytellers when guests have an interest in the history and are curious to know more. The story can however be reflected in some of the activities performed by the hotel, since many activities have historical elements. The interior is to some extent connected to the story; it emphasizes the new and modern but at the same time tries to preserve the old. However, the story is not present in the internal communication.

The Manager at Toftaholm usually takes part in activities provided for the guests. He is then able to create a familiar atmosphere and it enhances the creation of positive word of mouth. It further helps him to observe the guests and modify the service offering according to customers’ demands. The Manager explains that:

“the story makes it easier to create word of mouth, you leave a special impression that customers tell others about.”

Generally at Toftaholm, all employees work actively to create positive word of mouth, which is necessary in the harsh competition in the marketplace today. However, it is a difficult task to find employees that are able to feel and understand customers’ expressions and opinions.
4.4 **Designhotellet**

Welcome to a modern and trendy environment, welcome to Designhotellet in Värnamo. The hotel dates back 146 years, but the original wooden building burned down in 1952, and in its place a new building was replaced in 1955. The Danish Modernist Bent Jørgen Jørgensen, who found inspiration from America, designed the hotel. During the opening ceremony, he said: “I am not building for Today, but for 50 years from now.” The hotel became during this period of time a sensation of innovation, with both its unique interior decoration and construction. The hotel was recognized far beyond the Swedish borders, and it received a lot of attention from the press. It was called the most modern hotel in Europe. Customers from all over the world came to enjoy all the new supplies, like elevators and TVs in all rooms. The 1950’s and 1960’s were the glory days of the hotel, and Frank Sinatra and the Cartwright brothers stayed here during their world tour. Today, famous furniture and design companies from Småland; Bruno Mathsson, Källemo and Svenssons i Lammhult, have furnished the hotel.

| Employees: 21 |
| Owner: Lillian and Kåre Johansson |
| Rooms: 120 |
| Conference rooms: 7 |

The storytelling concept was developed 10 years ago when Johansson family took over the ownership. The story has been around from the foundation of the hotel but not been utilized in the marketing communication. The storytelling is based on the old modern hotel, but it has turned into a new modern design hotel thanks to the cooperation with the furnishing and design companies originating from Småland. The unique interior, preserved from the 1950s, is communicated through the story. Assistance was taken from a marketing agency in the creation of the story, but the hotel itself has created the typical design theme. The story around the hotel illustrates different eras in the past; it has the purpose to function as a mirror from different moments in time. It shows both history and future, new-modern design in an old building with old ancestries. The function of the story is to arouse curiosity and to create interest in the hotel. The story should be utilized as a tool that facilitates marketing and also demonstrates what kind of service is offered. Designhotellet views storytelling as holding high penetration as it is easier for a customer to believe facts delivered verbally rather than when reading it. Designhotellet’s image is its story.

The hotel divide its customers into four segments; business travelers (70 percent), conference (10 percent), leisure (10 percent), and groups (10 percent). The hotel tries to expand the conference segment, since more profit can be gained. The content of the story is not utilized differently in the four groups; it is the marketing communication techniques that are different. For example, in the business segment a personal-seller is employed and more emphasis is put on the effectiveness of the hotel’s different offerings. Consequently, the storytelling concept is not utilized as much in the hotel’s marketing towards business travelers as it is towards other groups, due to the fact that this segment appreciates other attributes more.

Storytelling as a marketing communication mean is important for Designhotellet, since stories have a large impact on people. Humans have a demand of telling stories to each
other; to tell others about experiences they have been part of. The story is mediated through Designhotellet’s homepage, but it can also be found in all rooms. In the rooms the story is written down in a welcome letter and provided to all guests, and in the lobby it takes the form of an information letter. One of the most actively used marketing communication tools in the hotel’s marketing is the use of search engines, which lead potential customers to the hotel’s homepage. It creates an easy and flexible way of working with marketing. Traditional marketing is dead, according to the Manger, and therefore only small resources are allocated for that. Storytelling is mainly utilized to attract new customers but also to strengthen the hotel’s brand. In Designhotellet’s marketing communication it is emphasized on what was said by the founder of the hotel:

“I am not building for Today, but for 50 years from now.”

This statement has been seen a lot in printed media, and it shows that the founder really succeeded in his creation of a design hotel. Designhotellet actively seeks to create editorial marketing text, as it is invaluable to be seen in that context.

The story is integrated in almost all activities and functions the hotel has and it facilitates the creation of curiosity for the hotel. It can however be difficult to get all employees engaged in the storytelling as one might want. One demand is however that all employees are able to tell the story if requested. However, the story is not often reflected in the internal communication.

One of the hotel’s activities that incorporate the story is the organized visit to the exhibitions of the designers’ showrooms. The interior is of course embedded in the story as the rooms are furnished and sponsored by the different designers. This helps the hotel to afford expensive Swedish design in each of its 120 rooms. Word of mouth is actively managed by inviting other companies and schools to Designhotellet in order to communicate the story and thereby create word of mouth. The manger states that:

“everyone can sell a hotel room and a beef, but what is important is to find the uniqueness of it, which makes people talk about it.”

A story can be built on fiction, but it is not best way to delivering a storytelling concept, since it can create mistrust among customer when it is discovered that is not based on true facts. The fictive story can impoverish the initial purpose of the concept. There is no need of a spectacular story in order for customers to start talking about it; the main thing is that it is delivering something unique. Designhotellet has been able to create a good reputation in the region of Småland, since it preserves the regional design heritage. Positive word of mouth is also generated through good relationships with the regional furniture manufactures.
4.5 Såstaholm Konferens

Visit Såstaholm and become a star for one night. Step almost 100 years back in time and experience the Swedish theatre area. The property of Såsta was purchased in 1918 by the foundation Höstsol. The foundation provided retired actors, who at that time were poor, somewhere to live during their last years. Various artists came to Höstsol; singers, dancers, musicians, and stage managers, but mainly actors from theatre, variety, and film. All had long careers behind them. At Höstsol, the retired actors were spoiled with linen cloths, snaps and port, as well as visits to matinées and the opera. Today, Höstsol only remains as a legend at Såstaholm, but the guests are treated as stars at this theatre inspired hotel.

| Employees: 40 |
| Owner: Winn Hotels |
| Rooms: 93 |
| Conference rooms: 22 |

The story around Såstaholm and Höstsol is built on a true story. The hotel was formerly known as "Höstsol", an abode for retired actors. All rooms and to some degree the conference areas have been inspired by the theatre concept. For more than 60 years, Höstsol served not only as a refuge for retired artists, but also as a link between the old and the young theater generation where memories and knowledge were shared. In 1981, Sästa Gård was sold and Såstaholm Konferens was founded. The storytelling concept began in 2003, after the renovation of the 93 rooms that were named after actors who once lived at Höstsol. In this new transformation, Såstaholm received help from the marketing agency Stylt Trampoli and still cooperate with them. Together they wrote a script on how to go further with the theater inspired storytelling concept. Såstaholm is still in the development phase of the concept, and the Sales Manager explains the aim with storytelling:

“Our aim is to go from being a theater inspired hotel to be a theater hotel.”

Many people are familiar with the history of Höstsol, and this is one of the hotel’s keystones in the creation of its storytelling concept. The uniqueness with Såstaholm is the location and the story around Höstsol. The development of the storytelling concept includes creating a script with a lot of humor. The true story may be complimented with fictitious stories in order to strengthen the concept and make it more coherent. The Sales Manager thinks that:

“things that can be told with joy is easier to convey further.”

There will also be a created personality included in the storytelling concept; Albertine Hedqvist. Guests should feel that they are visiting her home, and stories will be told from her perspective. Her clothes and belongings will be found throughout the hotel, for example with her own clothes hook in the bathrooms. Remembering Såstaholm as only a regular conference center is not enough, people need to experience something more in order to start gossiping. The story can be developed even further; it must be built into the whole image of the hotel.

Såstaholm’s clientele consists of 80 percent conference guests, 10 percent business travelers, and 10 percent private travelers. The story is delivered to all customer groups during their stay if there is an interest. Most people are interested in hearing more, and many groups have it as part of their conference program. The Sales Manager argues that:
Empirical Findings

“Overall, communication is one of the most difficult things to handle.”

Såstaholm is a large organization and works with almost all kinds of marketing communication means. In order to connect marketing communication to the storytelling concept, Såstaholm works with black and white photos with theater lines in its advertising. Traditional marketing communication tools are however decreasing and instead the Internet becomes more important, especially in order to target private customers. The conference segment is more often reached through traditional marketing and a personal seller. Its own homepage is decisive when trying to influence customers’ final decision. The Sales Manager describes the situation in the marketplace:

“Today, when the information flow is massive and people become less susceptible to traditional marketing; I believe storytelling is becoming more important. When talking about storytelling, one also talks about mediating a feeling and that is important in order to make an impression and for the story to spread. This will be an even more important element in marketing communications in the future.”

The history of Höstsol is always communicated. However, the extensive use of storytelling as a concept where attributes are used and where former actors are portrayed is mostly communicated externally through trade fairs, as it is easy to apply there. At Såstaholm, it is important with a completely integrated storytelling concept. However, at present time not all employees are aware of and can deliver the story, but that is improving. The hotel is increasing the number of activities connected to the story; there are both golf competitions with old actors taking part and games such as theater sport. All guests can further find the story written down in the rooms. Each room is dedicated to an actor or actress, and the room is decorated with photos and scripts from that specific person. The interior is further theater inspired through dressing room mirrors and movie clips photographs. The Sales Manager exemplifies that the hotel wants to deliver the following message:

“Visit Såstaholm and become a star for one night.”

Also, dinner and coffee served is connected to the storytelling concept; lunch and dinner are called matinée and soirée respectively, and the afternoon coffee is called “Höstsol coffee”. There is also a plan of purchasing costumes to each employee in order to create even more connection to the theater scene. The internal communication is influenced by the story, but not used as a medium of communication. The hotel manager often delivers the story orally at meetings; however not all employees have a genuine interest in the history. There are plans to demand that all employees should have knowledge of the story, however no one should be forced to present it in front of a group. Såstaholm has worked actively with controlling word of mouth that spreads about the organization. Any negative word of mouth is taken seriously. It is important to constantly keep up-to-date and follow Internet chats and blogs in order to catch up with any potential negative word of mouth. The Sales Manager says that:

“messages are communicated everywhere and by everyone, which makes it difficult to control.”

The Sales Manager further believes that storytelling can contribute to increased positive word of mouth, and says:

“Storytelling is of most importance in order for people to remember us and to be noticed.”

The feeling and the atmosphere that is experienced at Såstaholm, together with the unique story, is something that hopefully will be told and spread beyond existing customers.
4.6 Gripsholms Värdshus

Welcome to a royal inn, anno 1609. Calm down and let history guide you. Jochim Smock, the first to receive privileges to keep an inn in Sweden, is your host and he will take care of you during your stay. The founder of the Cartusian monastery, Brother Bruno, is the hotel’s patron saint and he creates the spiritual environment and nourishes all relations. The Gryphon, a fable animal which is a mixture of a lion and an eagle, is a symbol for energy and development concerning technology and security. Together the three symbols create the values and the atmosphere of Gripsholm.

Employees: 20, but more during summer  
Owner: Hjelm family and foundation (Winn Hotels)  
Rooms: 45  
Conference rooms: 7

Gripsholms Värdshus is a historical heritage from the 17th century, but during a total renovation in 1987-89, a ruin from a Carthusian monastery was found. These monks lived there during the 15th century but were forced to leave when King Gustav Vasa came to power. The atmosphere and the interior show the historical heritage and two wells found from the monastery are preserved in the hotel. The storytelling of Gripsholm includes both the historical heritage of the hotel as well as the three symbols. The specific storytelling concept, with the three symbols, is about to be implemented. The story is based on true facts as both Jochim Smock and Brother Bruno belong to the factual history of Gripsholm. The Gryphon is only a symbol but has for a long time been implemented as the hotel’s logotype. However, the story will probably be accentuated with fictive anecdotes as it develops. The use of storytelling is new to the hotel and consultants together with the hotel chain have decided to implement storytelling based on a strategic decision. The Manager exemplifies how the storytelling will be practically implemented:

“Jochim shall protect the environment and ask all guests, through notes in each room, to please use the towels more than once. It is then Jochim who appeal, not me as a manager. Further, Brother Bruno can give a familiar quotation each day, and the Gryphon is the symbol in the conference rooms that will ask guests for improvement suggestions.”

At Gripsholm, there are no limits when it comes to what can be done with storytelling, and competitive advantage can be gained if the story is communicated well. The story with the three symbols might also create the charm of novelty. Throughout the year, the hotel has mostly conference guests during weekdays and private guests and groups on weekends. The message delivered to the different types of guests is the same. The Manager explains:

“A guest who visits for leisure works somewhere and a conference guest is also a private customer.”

However, there might be differences when it comes to how the story is practically communicated during the hotel stay. Conference guests are always given the possibility of listening to the history of Gripsholm and the story of the symbols. Most groups are interested, but not all have the time. On Saturdays, the storytelling is organized around the presentation of the menu, but most often the story is communicated whenever interest is showed from guests. All types of marketing communication tools are used, and the Internet is especially increasing in importance. As the storytelling concept is still
developing, it is not clear exactly how it will be used in the external marketing communication. The Manager explains that:

“It is important for us not to appear old fashioned when we develop our history, it is important to package our story in a way that still feels new and innovative.”

Storytelling is used both to attract new customers and keep existing ones. Innovativeness is important to reach new potential customers, and there is a possibility that regular customers in the future will be incorporated into the story which contributes to make it more alive. The three symbols represent key values of the hotel’s activities. They should guide all employees when it comes to customer service as well as when taking decisions. The symbols are thus present during both internal and external communication. The Manager explains the philosophy as follows:

“Have the three symbols on your shoulders, and they will guide you in your work and your decisions.”

There are both internal and external purposes of using the storytelling concept. Internally it is foremost to develop a coherent guidance for the employees. They can relate to the symbols and thereby get advice. The Manager stresses that the personalities can become like mentors and she exemplifies that employees may use the symbols during their work:

“Jochim Smock would not have been satisfied with this or what would Brother Bruno have said?”

The interior is not based particularly on the storytelling concept, and will most likely not be changed. However, the long history with royal connections that Gripsholm has is present in all rooms. It therefore matches with the present concept as well, although it was not intentional from the beginning. During the implementation of the concept, all employees will take active parts in forming the story and the symbols. All employees will also be able to tell the story and this makes it less static and more personal. By adding own interpretations and ideas, the story becomes more interesting. However, the Manager thinks that a good story must be based on truth. There might be collaborations with Gripsholm Castle later on and also activities for conference guests that connect with the story. The responses of the storytelling concept so far has been positive and guests are often amazed when the monastery inspired wine cellar, with the authentic wells, is opened and used for wine tasting. Storytelling is much more common today than only two or three years ago, the conception is popular. However, at Gripsholm there is a genuine story to be told which make it interesting and sincere. The Manager is positive that:

“The story becomes like a security in the enormous information society we live in; going back to the old and the genuine.”

It is popular with historical things at the moment, and it unites old and young people; the young are fascinated and the elderly can share knowledge. The story is for Gripsholm about creating values for both employees and customers, and this will in turn hopefully create positive word of mouth. At the same time, it is important to still be innovative in order to avoid negative word of mouth. Monitoring and managing what is spread about Gripsholm is of great importance, and one of the most basic ways to increase word of mouth is to exceed expectations.
4.7 Albert Hotell

Edward Ludwig Albert, a wealthy engineer, and his wife Maria bought the property of today’s Albert Hotell in 1880. They fell in love with the surroundings and planned for a happy future together. Unfortunately, Maria died tragically in childbirth on the second floor in the house, and Edward remarried with Käthe. It is said that the ghost of Maria from time to time appears walking around on the second floor. She is sad that she was unable to live with her lovely husband and their children. When she visits, she is dejected but astonishingly beautiful and spreads a feeling of comfort in the room. You might be the next person who will receive the great honor to spend a moment with Maria.

| Employees: 15 |
| Owner: Three families; Halleröd, Florén, and Tengblad |
| Rooms: 28 |
| Conference rooms: 3 |

Edward and Maria’s old house is situated on the clime overlooking Trollhättan’s waterfall, embedded in luxuriant green, and with a wonderful view of the landscape below. Albert and his family had a major influence on the prospective town of Trollhättan. The building has an old history and was built in 1856 and functioned as a private house until 1924. After that it functioned as a tourist information center and hostel. In the 1990’s, the municipality took over and in the last years it has been in private possession.

The historical value of Albert Hotell makes it a powerful story to deliver to customers. The purpose of utilizing the storytelling concept is to create added values and to market the hotel towards both old and potential customers. The story also has the purpose of creating a special feeling among customers that hopefully makes them remember the hotel. The hotel has not evaluated the effects of utilizing storytelling in its marketing, but it wishes to do so when time will be available.

The hotel is focused on business travelers, private guests, as well as on conference groups. Business travelers consist of 60 percent of the total amount of customers and the private segment only 40 percent. There is no difference in how the story is utilized among the different customer segments; however in someway the storytelling is a bit more organized when delivered to the business segment, as it is larger groups of people. Albert Hotell has received positive response thanks to the use of storytelling, especially from the conference segment. It is judged that the storytelling concept is an important tool in order to give added value for the whole conference package. Often conference groups schedule a break to hear and experience the story.

The ghost story about Maria is also frequently utilized in the hotel’s marketing communication. There are always visiting guests who state that they have seen Maria walking around. This myth is used when creating the storytelling concept. Albert Hotell tries to emphasize the true story about the Albert family, however sometimes the story is spiced in order to make it more exiting. The hotel also utilizes and gains benefits from the modern story about Trollhättan as a movie town. Many famous actors have continuously visited the hotel. This kind of marketing has a strong storytelling value and attraction that makes other guests very interested. The hotel has, for example, a wall that is decorated with greeting cards sent from famous actors, which further strengthen the storytelling. Today’s celebrities are mixed with past ones.
Empirical Findings

Albert Hotell manages its external communication mainly through its homepage, where the story around Albert also can be found. A short presentation of the story can also be found in the welcome letter that all guests receive when arriving to the hotel. Most of story is however delivered through the employees. Each guest should be welcomed in a unique way, where the story is orally delivered to each customer. In the traditional marketing communications, such as advertisements, the storytelling is not used, but it may be in the future. This has not been considered before, but it is believed to be an effective way to be noticed. Within the internal communication, storytelling is used to some extent. It works as a tool to set values for the company and the employees, who are guided and feel connected to each other through the story. However, it is not used as a tool to communicate internally. Employees that have worked within the company for a while are able to communicate the story to customers and each individual has the freedom to do it with a personal touch. All new employees also have to learn the story and should be aware of the foundation of the story. It is very important who is delivering the story; it has to be someone who can give the story a life and incorporate feelings. The storyteller must also be able to change the story according to who is listening, in order to adjust the story to suit the listener.

At Albert Hotell, the interior is imbued by the story; the main building has its origin from the 19th century and the dining room is filled with photos from Albert's time. The photos are often described and showed when providing the guests with the story in order to visualize the story even more. The story is often told in the lounge where King Oskar II had dinner one time, this since the Manager believes that:

“it might be cool to tell the story in an environment that has it origins from that time the story took place, it creates genuine feelings.”

In the new building, the story is not embedded as a more modern design and interior was wanted. The activities offered to conference guests are often not connected to the story, but during special occasions, an expert functioning as a storyteller delivers the story about Albert. However, as the hotel is Albert's old home, the story is very personal and is often best delivered by the employees who work daily in the environment. The story is thus partly imbedded in the total marketing communication; however there are parts that can be integrated even further with the story. Today, the hotel does not have any ambition or time to enhance the use of it. The Manager believes that:

“Everyone has a need to be seen, there is so much noise out there, and everyone wants to sell. Storytelling can be a good way to be seen, to be more personal and to create a value around your own story.”

Word of mouth is very important for the hotel, and the philosophy of working actively towards the local market is present. The use of ambassadors who function as channels to the regional market and particular companies creates word of mouth. Furthermore, the use of storytelling contribute to increased word of mouth, partly due to the value the story gives which makes people tell others about the hotel, and also since the environment and the food is unique. The Manager explains that:

“it gives added value, it creates a larger experience and we work within the experience industry. It is about giving the customer enhanced dimensions in order for everyone to feel that it was worth the visit.”

The storytelling has not generated any negative word of mouth, at least not what is known. Most people think it is exiting and fun, however it is important to take it for what it is and not take it too serious.
4.8 Icehotel

Step into a hotel made of frozen water from the Torne River. In the far north of Sweden, above the Arctic Circle, one of Sweden’s most recognized brands are rebuilt every year. The Icehotel is a true fairy tale of an amazing creation.

"If it is possible to build a hotel of ice in a small village 200km inside the Arctic Circle, which strikes the whole world with amazement, then anything is possible" (Icehotel, 2006).

The dark and cold winters in Lapland had never been seen as a unique asset for developing a world-renowned business. However, in 1990 an ice artist opened an exhibition in an igloo located on the frozen Torne River, which attracted many visitors. But it was not until foreign tourists discovered the sensational feeling of sleeping in the igloo that the concept of the Icehotel was brought to life. The crystal clear water of the Torne River has run through Lapland for thousands of years and is now viewed as the invaluable source of the Icehotel.

---

**Employee Information**

| Employees: 205 during peak season (50 during low season) |
| Owner: Yngve Bergqvist |
| Rooms: 85 warm and 85 cold |
| Conference rooms: 3 own + 7 through collaborations |

The story presented above is the true story about Icehotel, created in the small village of Jukkasjärvi. The company Jukkas, which today is renamed Icehotel, has been functioning as a tourist operator in the region since the 1970’s and was before profiting from the summer season activities and the midnight sun. As the focus changed, Icehotel has become world famous for the unique story and concept. The story has its roots in the natural resources that develop into something extraordinaire. The creator of the Icehotel saga is Yngve Bergqvist, a role model for entrepreneurial spirit and an icon for the experience industry. This year, 2006/2007, the 17th Icehotel was built. The hotel is completely built of ice from Torne River, and varies in size and style from year to year since artists are invited to design rooms and art work. Icehotel also collaborates with Absolut and has created several Absolut Icebars worldwide, and more are coming. Icehotel tries to sell the genuine, the real thing, and the Marketing Manager states that it is important to not build the story on fiction:

“Storytelling is something that must be very authentic and very genuine; it must be real and be based on a clear and exciting history.”

The purpose with the story is to distinguish itself from others; this since attracting new customers is of most importance for Icehotel. The Marketing Manager states that:

“Icehotel is a once in a lifetime experience.”

A customer who has visited Icehotel once will in general not visit again, not because the experience was not appreciated, but because if you have done it once there is no urge to do it again. Consequently, the storytelling concept’s main purpose is always to attract new customers. The Marketing Manager states:

“For us, the storytelling concept is not a trend; we will always work with it.”
Empirical Findings

Around 60 percent of the guests are private and the rest consists of conference guests, many from abroad. The story of Icehotel is exotic for many tourists and therefore attracts foreign visitors. The storytelling around the entrepreneurial spirit of Icehotel is very important among conference guests. Icehotel grew from nothing to become one of Sweden’s most famous brands, and this story interests all business guests. The story can thus be incorporated in the conference package. The focus of the story shifts for private guests since this group is more interested in the beautiful and the artistic side of the story. The scenic story of Icehotel is mediated through the design and the uniqueness of a hotel made of ice. The origin of the story is however the same for the two segments, but focus lies on different chapters of the story.

The overall objectives with marketing communications are to expand the hotel’s business, and generate sales. In order to do so, it is important to create and maintain awareness of Icehotel. The message that Icehotel wants to deliver to its external market consists of four key attributes; sensuality, cleanliness, genuineness, and exclusiveness. These can further be described as to experience, with all four senses, the clean nature in a unique setting that creates a special feeling.

Icehotel’s opening of Absolut Icebars around the world has enabled the development of the storytelling concept. These bars can be viewed as ambassadors or sales offices for Icehotel as the unique story of Icehotel is spread. The most important communication tool is the Internet as it reaches people all over the world twenty-four hours a day. A magazine is also printed each year, distributed to more than 350,000 guests in the Absolut Icebars, and the CEO of Icehotel, Yngve Bergqvist, holds lectures and meetings where the creation story is communicated. Traditional marketing communication tools are not preferred due to the high cost and the difficulty of targeting individuals worldwide. Generally, the story is always included in the marketing communications, but it is not always the story that is in focus. Often, the present innovativeness and future plans are communicated.

All activities at the hotel are imbued by the story, but not all functions in the organization. Employees are well aware of the story as it is a part of their training, and everyone should be able to deliver the story when requested. It does not matter if you work at Icehotel in Jukkasjärvi or if you are a bartender at the Absolut Icebar in Tokyo. In the internal communication, the story is always embedded. The value of the story is present in the organization on a daily basis; it creates a pride among the employees, they have something in common, and they are working towards the same goals. The pride builds trust and credibility to the external market, and consequently much time is spent on educating employees in the storytelling concept. Word of mouth is an important part of the marketing communication, but it is nothing worked actively with due to the hotel’s size on the market. Nevertheless, awareness of the power of word of mouth is always present. The service provided and how employees are communicating with guests are important aspects to consider when keeping word of mouth positive. Negative word of mouth is not connected to the storytelling, but if it would occur in the future it would be handled directly. The responses of the storytelling concept among guests have instead been much appreciated.
4.9 **Villa Fridhem**

_Come and visit the summer residence of Prince Carl, son of King Oskar II. Ferdinand Boberg, a famous architect during the 19th century, received commission to design the royal dwelling. The result was much appreciated and became a magnificent building in a typical national romantic style._

Prince Carl was married to Danish princess Ingeborg, and they had four children together. Princess Ingeborg wanted Villa Fridhem to resemble the home of her childhood, Charlottenburg, and she got her wish. Prince Carl and his family lived in the summer residence, Villa Fridhem, during 45 summers. It is a place where you can gather strength and live close to the bewitching forest of Kolmården, and foremost you can enjoy the royal atmosphere.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employees: 18</th>
<th>Owner: Lars Dahlin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rooms: 51</td>
<td>Conference rooms: 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Villa Fridhem has preserved the same environment that was present during prince Carl’s time. The royal family let the guest rooms be decorated in different colors; the pink room, the yellow room, and the gray room, and today the lounges are reflecting this. Villa Fridhem has also kept a painting of Carl’s three daughters that he received on his 60th birthday. The painting is the only original interior detail preserved at Villa Fridhem. Villa Fridhem was sold in 1953 to the county council of Östergötland, and from 1987 it has functioned as a conference hotel.

The importance of the story is not only the content, but also how it is delivered. At Villa Fridhem, almost 95 percent of all customers are conference guests. There is however a need to expand the private segment in order to stay competitive in the marketplace. At the moment, private customers are increasing its presence at Villa Fridhem, but the shift of focus is still in its start-up-phase. Generally, conference guests are more interested in the story of Villa Fridhem as it becomes an association for the whole group if the story is told during coffee. However, it is difficult to see any clear differences since there are so few private guests. The way the hotel is delivering the story towards the two customer segments does not differ.

The story is an important part of the hotel’s marketing communications, and it is always told when new guests are arriving. The story has always been present in the external marketing communications. The Sales and Marketing Manager says that the core of the story is:

_“Experience Prince Carl’s old summer-residence.”_

In the creation of the storytelling concept, no assistance from a marketing agency has been used. A few of the regular customers initiated the idea of developing Villa Fridhem’s story to include more than the actual building, and thus create a marketing concept. The whole story tells the truth, but the Sales and Marketing Manager thinks that a storytelling concept can totally be built on fiction, for example ghost stories. Traditional marketing tools are only a small part of Villa Fridhem’s overall marketing. The story is mainly communicated through the home page but also through all advertising the hotel publishes. Concise historic facts are used and one of the slogans state; “live as a prince”. The storytelling
concept is implemented more and more and it has the main purpose of making Villa Fridhem remembered. At Villa Fridhem, it is always emphasized that:

“When you are visiting Villa Fridhem you can always feel as a prince or princess.”

Storytelling is not the reason why people book a conference at Villa Fridhem, but of course it gives something extra to the staying. Many people spontaneously wonder and are curious about Villa Fridhem’s history. The Sales and Marketing Manager states that:

“it creates a feeling of you being present in the story.”

The story gives all employees something common to share, but it is not further influencing the internal communication. Still, everyone can mediate the story to customers, and that is put as a demand. However, it is not necessary that everyone have to tell it to the guests, since not all appreciate talking in front of people. It is important that the story is presented well; otherwise it may create confusion among guests. The story is always delivered if the customer asks for it, but often guests have little time to spare. However the Sales and Marketing Manager says that when employees for example are showing a guest to the conference room, they explain:

“you are going to sit in Prince Carl’s old home.”

In all rooms there is a small card, written by the author Anna Sparre. She was best friend with one of Prince Carl’s daughters, princess Astrid. On this card, guests can find information about the history, and it can also be brought home. The interior is to a certain extent connected to the story; the common areas have almost the same function as they had on Prince Carl’s time. The hotel rooms are on the other hand renovated in a modern style. The hotel has one activity that is connected to the story; a walking quiz. The story is first told and then the guests walk around and answer questions. It is important not to push too much on only the story, it is also important for the customer to get the information about the hotel’s capacity and other facts such as food and services. The ambition is thus not to increase the integration of the story much more than today.

Word of mouth is nothing Villa Fridhem works actively with, but the effects are noticed. Often when conference guests are booking their conference at Villa Fridhem they have heard about the hotel through other customers. The willingness to give that little extra to the service offering is the main contributor to create good word of mouth. The storytelling concept probably helps to create word of mouth. The historic feeling is breathing in the walls and adds something extra to the stay; again the slogan “you live as a king” is used.
5 Analysis

In this chapter, the analysis regarding the use of storytelling in the hospitality industry will be presented. Relating our empirical findings with the theoretical framework facilitates this discussion. We will through this analysis reach our purpose.

Our purpose, to study and analyze storytelling and how it is used as marketing communication in the Swedish hospitality industry, is two folded and therefore the analysis is divided into two main parts. In the first part, we will discuss storytelling as a concept in the hospitality industry and in the second part we will look at it from a marketing communication perspective. To give an introduction, we first briefly discuss the hospitality industry in general.

5.1 Services in the Hospitality Industry

In the frame of reference, a general introduction of services’ characteristics was provided. It fulfills the purpose of being informative for the reader and gives an overall introduction to the rest of the theories. Grönroos (2000) explains that services are processes consisting of activities rather than things and what the customer receives are of an intangible nature. The service is also produced and consumed simultaneously, making the customer involved in the production. The hotels’ offering is a typical service and it is not different from other services in the marketplace. The customer is not able to bring any visible proof of the experience during the hotel stay. It is therefore important that the hotel delivers something unique and exclusive that customers can remember and pass on to others. The need of sticking out is recognized among all respondents. In the hotels’ expanded service offering, the interaction between employees and customers can be found and communication is facilitated by the presence of a story.

5.2 Storytelling in the Hospitality Industry

The analysis will now deal with the concept of storytelling within the hospitality industry; the different phases and features of storytelling will be discussed.

5.2.1 Storytelling and the Servicescape

The hotels’ surrounding environment is an imperative factor that reinforces the overall impression of the service offering. The surrounding, or the servicescape as Bitner (1992) calls it, is important for all kinds of hotels, although we find it extremely important for hotels that hold a storytelling concept since their focus is to leave impressions and feelings to customers. The servicescape can accentuate the uniqueness of the storytelling concept and this is supported by Bitner (1992) who argues that impressions from the servicescape affect customers’ total experience. The majority of respondents try to imbue as much as possible of the story into the servicescape and thereby let the interior and the surroundings tell parts of the story. The Manager at Stora Hotellet describes the connection between storytelling and the servicescape:

"The story gives an extra value to the customers; they understand why the rooms and the interior are decorated as they are."

Our empirical findings further show that the interior can be viewed as a decisive factor in order to accomplish the storytelling concept. The unique feeling that the hotels want to convey with their storytelling is often difficult to verbally deliver, and the servicescape can thus facilitate it. The Manger at Slottsvillan claims that in order to appreciate and create a
feeling for the hotel people must visit it, since words are not enough to explain the emotions of being part of the story in its real setting. The specific interior and exterior design reinforce the power of storytelling and attracts both potential and existing customers. The use of the story creates approach behavior, as Bitner (1992) calls it. The Sales and Marketing Manager at Stora Hotellet exemplifies this:

“The story gives an extra value to the customers; they understand why the rooms and the interior are decorated as they are.”

The uniqueness concerning the interior design among the interviewed hotels differs to some extent. At some hotels, each room is designed to hold its own identity, whereas at others the rooms are exclusive but similar to each other. The interior provided at all hotels is not what you imagine as ordinary and it is evident that the interior can be viewed upon as a vital cornerstone that helps to construct and strengthen the whole story delivering.

### 5.2.2 The Development of Storytelling

All hotels’ storytelling is built on their unique history, and has therefore always been a part of their existence. However, the story has not been involved as an influential factor in the hotels’ marketing. Consequently, storytelling is viewed as a rather new marketing concept among the hotels. Jensen (1999) argues that a company can deliver *identity stories, customer stories,* and *product stories.* In our findings we have identified that the majority of the hotels deliver their story as an identity story. This can be viewed as the most natural and easiest way to create a story since it is based on the history of how everything began once upon a time. Furthermore, it can be delivered with both pride and knowledge as the employees are a part of the hotel’s identity. Parkin (2004) claims that stories have always been a powerful tool to develop human relationships. As identity stories are always present at the hotels, it is shared with all guests and relationships can be built. Customer stories are not given as much attention as the previous, however what customers comment on attributes such as the interior, food, and environment are sometimes integrated in the story. Furthermore, as the stories become incorporated in the service offering, the service itself becomes unique and special. It can be seen as an extended part of the storytelling. As a compliment to the identity story, many of the hotels have therefore developed a product story.

When Mossberg and Nissen-Johansen (2006) talk about storytelling, they see it as the basic medium to communicate and develop a self-image. Sole and Gray-Wilson (1999) emphasize other attributes in their definition; sharing knowledge and communicate ideas and concepts. We can from our findings discover that the majority of the respondents consider stories as powerful tools since they facilitate close interactions. The two definitions of storytelling are thus present. We also see that storytelling has the major purpose of acting as an aid to be remembered and to mediate a feeling. This is in line with what Mossberg and Nissen-Johansen (2006) say about the service market today; that the competition is harsh and it is no longer only about producing and selling a product, something more must be offered. The Manager at Designhotellet makes it clear:

“Everyone can sell a hotel room and a beef, but what is important is to find the uniqueness of it, which makes people talk about it.”

The Manager at Gripsholm discusses that there are no limits when it comes to what can be done with storytelling, and she says that competitive advantage can be gained if the story is communicated well. For Icehotel, storytelling provides an opportunity to differentiate from others.
5.2.3 The Implementation of Storytelling

According to Jensen (1999), the easiest way for organizations to start utilizing storytelling is to purchase a readymade concept through, for example, an advertising agency. We can see tendencies that the hotels with most integrated storytelling concepts, Stora Hotellet, Sästaholm, and Gripsholm, have more or less utilized guidance from a marketing agency specialized in storytelling. However, the use of agencies is not the reality for most of the hotels we have studied. The main reason for not taking assistance in the development of a storytelling concept is that it is too expensive and it is not viewed as necessary when the history is already present. The storytelling concept is instead most often created by the hotel itself and built on; as earlier mentioned, the genuine history of the house or who have lived or worked there. One respondent exemplifies that in order to succeed with story creation around the own history, a thorough investigation of the specific areas of interest is necessary.

Jensen (1999) also claims that special events can be utilized in order to create a story, but the respondents do not emphasize that to a large extent. Another way is to develop a story on the basis of a customer, however almost none of the respondents have done this. Villa Fridhem is an exception. The hotel established its storytelling based on customers’ ideas of developing Villa Fridhem’s story to include more than the actual building, and thus create a marketing concept. Existing customers who have experienced the environment thereby function as co-storytellers (Jensen, 1999), both consciously and unconsciously. Good experiences can thus lead to the creation of stories.

The storytelling concepts that the studied hotels have created is well implemented in their total image, some more than others. Designhotellet for example, views its image as its story. Others wish to expand their image around their story. One example is Sästaholm that wants to build the whole image of the hotel around the theater inspired theme. Mossberg and Nissen-Johansen (2006) also support this since they view it as significant to reflect the message the company wants to deliver in the storytelling.

5.2.4 The Delivery of the Story

Storytelling is, according to McLellan (2006), delivered effectively through people, symbols, and artifacts. Jensen (1999) further argues that it can be transmitted orally, in written form, through images, in plays or movies, through products and services we purchase, or through a combination of these. A variety of these arrangements are found at the hotels. One example is the made-up personality, the actress Albertina Hedqvist, at Sästaholm. Other examples of symbols and artifacts are the Gryphon symbol at Gripsholm, and the painting of Prince Carl’s daughters at Villa Fridhem. McLellan (2006) further states it as important to give the story an identity, which can be exemplified by Captain Klassen and the accompanied interior. The hotels apply a variety of means to deliver the story, but it has appeared evident that it is preferable to tell the story orally. This will be discussed further when we analyze storytelling and marketing communication.

Today, there is a large variety of hotels offering unique concepts. We presume that a unique concept facilitates the differentiation among hotels by placing them in a market niche through their image, design, and approach. The customers can subsequently choose a hotel concept according to their preferences, or the lifestyle they wish to be associated with. The story concept might not attract everyone and that also seem to be the purpose with it. It is evident that stories provided by the hotels have different focus and themes in order to attract a targeted market. Jensen (1999) supports this by arguing that stories are
built on value statements, and that customers today purchase a lifestyle. Mossberg & Nissen-Johansen (2006) further state that several different stories can be combined by an organization. Gabriel (2000) supports this and says that stories can have different functions for an organization; some stories are present to entertain while others are more informative. This is confirmed by our empirical findings as several hotels have combined several themes, which serve different purposes and preferences. Albert Hotell is one example of this as it communicates three different themes; one focusing on the history around Albert, one on the ghost story, and another on the modern theme around famous actors who have visited the town. At Gripsholm, the three symbols also serve a combined theme. In this specific case, more life and larger attraction can be gained since a larger audience can find different attributes of interest. Slogans are often utilized to enhance the experiences and the impressions gained. Two examples that make potential customers more curious and one example in what way the story can guide employees in their daily work are provided:

“Visit Såstaholm and become a star for one night.”
(Marketing Manager, Såstaholm)

“When you are visiting Villa Fridhem you can always feel as a prince or princess.”
(Sales and Marketing Manager, Villa Fridhem)

“Have the three symbols on your shoulders, and they will guide you in your work and your decisions.”
(Manager, Gripsholm)

The slogans provided demonstrate that the hotels are seeking to fulfill people’s dreams and the story can contribute to a creation of a made-up world, and it can also build a stronger tie among employees. This is in accordance with Mossberg and Nissen-Johansen’s (2006) and Sole and Gray-Wilson’s (1999) general ideas that a story facilitates companies’ attempts of capturing people’s attention and assists in the delivery of the messages each company want to communicate. Elliot and Wattanasuwan (1998) and Gummesson (2004) also support the previous discussion by claiming that customers consume products and services in order to develop their identity. Storytelling appears to facilitate the understanding of what is offered by the hotel. Jensen (1999) also discusses that stories can facilitate the sending process of messages to customers of what the hotel is about.

5.2.5 Storytelling – Truth or Fiction?

All hotels build the foundation of their storytelling on the truth. However, there are split meanings both in theory and in our findings concerning whether a storytelling concept communicated by an organization has to deliver the truth or not. One of the largest advocates for delivering the truth in a story is Heijbel (2005b), who argues that companies’ experienced reality is enough. This is supported by Icehotel, and the Marketing Manager argues that:

“Storytelling is something that must be very authentic and very genuine; it must be real and be based on a clear and exciting history.”

Although all hotels base their storytelling on true facts, many of the respondents admitted that the stories are accentuated with fiction in order to give it more life and/or coherence. Jensen (1999) argues that it does not matter if the story is built on fiction or reality if it is still experienced as real by the customers (supported by Salzer-Mörling & Strannegård, 2004). If the story catches the interest of customers, it does not matter if what is communicated has actually happened or not. According to Mossberg and Nissen-Johansen
(2006), a company can mix old with new, and imagination with reality, and create a “Funky History”. This is evident in the majority of the hotels, where old history is combined with new and fictitious anecdotes are used.

The Manager at Designhotellet holds the same view as Snowden (1999) who claims that a story communicated can be built on fiction. However, they both argue that it is not the best way of delivering a storytelling concept, since it can create mistrust among customers when it is discovered that it is not based on true facts. The fictive story can impoverish the initial purpose of the concept. Based on our empirical findings we see that holding an ethical point of view is important. Mistrust can be avoided if the hotels are open with what is built on truth and what is not.

Mossberg and Nissen-Johansen (2006) also discuss the subject regarding truth and fiction, and consider four aspects that are of importance in the creation of the storytelling concept. Our empirical findings are discussed in relation to these aspects.

- **Mutual understanding**: The empirical findings show that a mutual understanding between the hotels and their customers regarding the story is wanted. However, most hotels do not clearly state which parts of the story are true or fictitious, it is often up to the customer to ask about it. Although, the respondents claim that customers most often understand which parts of the story that are exaggerated.

- **Area of utilization**: Whether the story delivered should emphasize truth or fiction is dependent on the area of utilization and in which context the story is provided. We cannot from our findings find evidence that any of the interviewed hotels try to convey any controversial subjects, which would require only true facts. Instead, their stories are present to entertain or inform, and therefore customers have more understanding concerning that small parts can be built on fiction.

- **Promise**: All hotels deliver a story based on true facts in order to remain trustworthy. This view is for instance shared by the Manager of Designhotellet who claims that stories based on fiction can create mistrust among customers when it is revealed to not be based on true facts.

- **Target group**: Our findings do not completely support theory which discusses that the target group is influencing the degree of truth when the story is delivered. Instead, most of the hotels deliver the same story independent of the audience.

### 5.2.6 Possible Problems with Storytelling

Sole and Gray-Wilson (1999) argue that there can be problems related to storytelling. The three major problems recognized in theory are related to our findings.

- **Seductiveness**: The hotels’ stories are more or less delivered to entertain and several respondents stress the importance of keeping it appealing. However, we have not yet seen any tendencies that the stories are over emphasized or too seductive.

- **Single point of view**: Since the majority of the hotels have not utilized any external help in the creation of the story, it might emphasize a single point of view. Also, the fact that the majority of the hotels have not evaluated the effects of the storytelling concept contributes to a lack of information concerning this possible problem. However, at most hotels all employees are involved in the storytelling, which gives a multiple perspective.

- **Static stories**: Our findings show that the stories are delivered both orally and in written form. Although, the majority prefers to deliver it orally since more details can be incorporated and the story becomes more alive. This is discussed by the Manager at
5.3 Storytelling and Marketing Communications

In our frame of reference, the reader was given an overview of the development of marketing communication theories; from isolated marketing messages through communication tools to integrated marketing communications.

In the analysis of how storytelling is used as marketing communication, we will start with identifying the overall communication process and then see how storytelling is influencing the traditional communication tools. We will thereafter see if storytelling is used differently in the two customer segments, private- and business customers. The analysis will end with analyzing if and how storytelling facilitates Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) and word of mouth.

5.3.1 Storytelling in the Communication Process

To identify the communication process that occurs between the hotels and their customers, we first have to look at the basic communication model developed originally by Schramm (1955, cited in Smith, Berry, and Pulford, 1997). The hotels are the senders, the message in this study is the story, and the receivers are the potential and existing customers as well as internal and external stakeholders (see figure 8).

![Basic communications model](image)

Figure 8 Basic communications model (modified from Schramm, 1955, cited in Smith, Berry, & Pulford, 1997, p. 30).

If we develop the communication process further and include the field of perception, encoding, decoding, and feedback (Smith et al. 1997), the communication process becomes more complex (see figure 9). This is of course better explaining how the hotels communicate as communication is not often simple and linear.

The fields of perception of the customers are difficult to monitor for the hotels. One respondent, Gripsholm, expresses a concern for appearing old fashioned when focusing on historical events whereas others discuss the fact that some customers are not interested in the story and that it then becomes a barrier. The field of perception may be a barrier for communicating the story, however often it works as a bridge to bring the customer closer and involved as the story leads to more interactions.

Encoding stories to make them understandable is necessary in order to mediate the desired purpose. A story is encoded in several ways, and the hotels use images, printed texts, oral communication, interior, activities, and the surrounding environment to deliver their unique story to customers. Many respondents express the difficulty of mediating the story through for example advertising in a newspaper since the story is more compound than what can be included in a few lines. Moreover, facts of prices, special offers, and location are necessary to include and leave little room for the story. The encoding needs to be clear and if the story is only partly included it might create confusion. If discussing the hotels’
marketing communication to customers when they are visiting the hotel, the story is much more present and important than it is through the communication tools alone. The whole concept can be communicated which in turn facilitates the encoding. It is easier to control and the concept can be delivered as a whole. As discussed before, storytelling can be viewed as sending an informative message concerning something unique for the specific hotel. The message thus makes customers interested and makes them remember the hotel and what it stands for.

The decoding, carried out by the potential and existing guests, is heavily dependent on if interest in the story is present. Without interest it is most likely that the story will pass without fulfilling its purpose and go by almost unnoticed. Several respondents emphasize that authenticity and truth is important to avoid decoding problems. If customers feel fooled by the story, the story might have negative effects towards the hotel during the decoding. When present at the hotel, customers can pose questions to the employees, and most of the respondents state that the employees are an important source for communicating the story, to both groups and individuals. This facilitates the decoding for the customers.

Figure 9  The communication process between hotels and their customers (modified from Smith, Berry & Pulford, 1997, p. 38).

Smith et al. (1997) say that feedback from marketing communication tools are often expressed in change in sales. The ones that have used storytelling in their marketing communication for some time are not convinced that the story is leading to increased sales. There are many factors that need to be present. Thus, to collect feedback on the story through marketing communication tools is difficult. However, when customers are visiting the hotel, feedback is easier to obtain. Our empirical findings show that feedback includes questions and interest in the story told. The story is often a mean to bring customers and the hotel’s employees together, which in turn leads to more familiar interactions. Through more interactions, where the story is the center, customers’ suggestions and opinions can be collected and the service offering can be adjusted accordingly.

According to Kitchen (1999), the communication process is disturbed by surrounding factors, known as noise. The story, when it is communicated through tools is often affected by noise in form of communication difficulties since the whole concept of the story is often too large to include. Hughes and Fill (2006) further discuss that noise can include the massive amount of information that is out there today. In this case, our empirical findings show that a story is often remembered and can thus, to some extent, overcome the information surplus. Parkin (2004) supports these findings and the Manager at Albert Hotell state concretely;
“Everyone has a need to be seen, there is so much noise out there, and everyone wants to sell. Storytelling can be a good way to be seen, to be more personal and to create a value around your own story.”

The use of a unique story that gains attention is sticking out compared to regular promotional messages. Sästaholm uses black and white photographs of actors together with a humorous line in order to catch people’s attention. It then gives people a hint of what to expect when visiting the theater hotel. Duncan and Moriarty (1998) further bring up competitors as noise or barriers to successful communication. Although storytelling is increasing in popularity and it is a buzzword, most hotels have not stated this as a major problem. As all hotels base their storytelling on unique true stories, competitors’ stories are not directly affecting them negatively as noise, at least not yet. When customers are presented to the story at the hotels, noise often involves time constraints or lack of interest. There is limited time for both the customers and the hotel employees.

5.3.2 Storytelling and Marketing Communication Models

The goal of the communication process is to market a product or service, and one of the most recognized models of how marketing communications function is the AIDA model. Through the hierarchy of effects, customers are moved towards consumption due to marketing messages (Pickton & Broderick; Hughes & Fill, 2006). If we look at how storytelling is fulfilling the function of marketing communication for the hotels, the story is often used to create awareness and interest. A message in form of a story is easy for customers to remember and they often get interested and want to know more. In the following steps, desire and action, almost no respondent claim that the story is the tipping point that leads to purchase. Service, price, and location are still the decisive factors in the hospitality industry. However, the unique story of Icehotel is an exception as the story is the creation and that is creating a desire to visit and the regular factors for action are not as important. People are willing to pay more and travel longer to experience the unique Icehotel.

The story as a marketing message can thus, generally, not alone persuade customers to purchase, as the AIDA model and the strong theory discusses (Fill, 2005). Instead, storytelling strengthens customers’ attitudes towards the hotel. This statement is in accordance with the weak theory and the ATR model (Hughes & Fill, 2006; Fill, 2005). Marketing communication is viewed as a mean to influence customers’ behavior and to strengthen their attitudes toward a product or service. It is habit and availability that foremost leads to purchase and marketing messages are seen as influencers.

5.3.3 Storytelling and Marketing Communication Tools

We have now identified the role of storytelling in the communication process, and will continue with analyzing how it is used in the marketing communication tools. The marketing communication mix with various types of tools is discussed by, among others, Hughes and Fill (2006) and they say that all tools are appropriate for all types of products and services. The hospitality industry is no different. However, we have seen differences in the use of tools among the interviewed hotels. This seems to be related to the size of the hotel and the resources available as it is only the larger hotels that use all the traditional tools.

The most common way to communicate the story is, according to McLellan (2006), through advertisements, but this is not supported by our findings. Apart from the cost, the problem lies in the difficulty of mediating the story through tools that are separated from the actual hotel environment. The compound story with feelings and abstract messages are
closely connected to the hotel. Also, there is often limited space in, for example, advertisements. One respondent claims that traditional marketing is dead, and this appears to be a typical characteristic in the whole industry. Many hotels are decreasing their use of traditional marketing communication tools and are all agreeing on the importance of communicating through the Internet today. Through the Internet, the storytelling concept can be told more in depth, especially through the home pages. All hotels are putting a lot of effort into their home pages and the story is always displayed for customers to read.

At other hotels, booking agencies are important communication tools, and it is possible to influence the agencies’ perception of the hotel through invitation trips where the story is told and experienced. The booking agencies then work as links to potential conference guests, and can mediate what they have experienced when visiting the hotels. The story thus indirectly influences the marketing communication through booking agencies in a positive way.

Mossberg and Nissen-Johansen (2006) discuss that storytelling can improve public relations, and this is evident in our findings as well. Almost half of the hotels claim that the storytelling concept has generated independent publicity in newspapers and on TV. The story is what adds the little extra and make the hotel stick out from the crowd, which interests journalists. This kind of marketing communication is, according to Smith and Taylor (2002), considered to be more credible than promotional messages paid by the hotel itself. Designhotellet has been able to create a good reputation and relations in the region of Småland, since it preserves the regional design heritage. Consequently, the story can build a bridge to other local companies and make the whole region attractive. For the hotel, publicity is viewed as invaluable.

Word of mouth is to all respondents one of the most important means of marketing communications and can be seen as a tool. However, with regards to the strong connection between storytelling and word of mouth, we will discuss it in an own section later on.

### 5.3.4 Storytelling towards different Customer Segments

Lilien (cited in Coviello & Brodie, 2001) clearly states a distinction between the private and the business customer segments and that marketing efforts need to be adjusted accordingly. In the hospitality industry, when comparing private and conference guests, the difference in the use of storytelling as a mean to communicate is not too obvious between the two groups. Gummesson (2004) supports this and say that an organization’s story can be delivered to both customer groups. It is the same people that take the purchase decision; it does not matter whether it concerns private or business customers.

The special nature of the hospitality industry implies that private customers are more randomly visiting a hotel whereas business customers, through conferences, are often returning on a regular basis. Håkansson and Snehota (1995) and Smith and Taylor (2001) explain that marketing communications with business customers is generally more focused on relationships. To create and develop these relationships it is of course important with communication. Here, storytelling can work as an instrument to mediate the hotel’s values and “that something extra”. If the values match with those of a business, a strong relationship can be built. However, as discussed earlier, the story needs to be accompanied by suitable factors such as service, price, and location.

Referring to Varey’s (2001) separation between private and business customer characteristics concerning marketing communication, a few of the characteristics are applicable to our analysis. Several respondents say that conference groups are often told
the story in more or less organized events, which could be referred to as a formal setting. The fact that it is a larger group makes it easier for the hotel to set up a storytelling event, and all of the studied hotels offer all groups to hear the story. Storytelling can furthermore be seen as an appreciated group activity among conference guests as it becomes a conversation topic which everyone can be involved in. Private customers are sometimes neglected due to time constraints for the employees. The setting can be defined as informal and often the story is told only on request.

Continuing with the content of the story, a difference of the message content between the two segments is most often not present. As all stories are based on the truth, the foundation is the same. However, Icehotel mentions its entrepreneurial spirit as most interesting for conference groups whereas private guests are more interested in the beauty and the fascinating creation that Icehotel is. This is in accordance with the statement by Varey (2001) saying that the message contents directed to business customers is more rational and logical than what it is towards private customers where the content involve emotions and images. Gilliland and Taylor (2002) discuss the difference in how marketing communication is perceived by the two customer groups. Varey (2001) further states that both types of customers purchase a service, and that it is the needs that have to be distinguished in order to match marketing messages. The hotels offer a service that can be purchased by both a private customer and a business, and the needs of the two groups are similar. Several respondents mention that it is important to remember the dual interests of all guests. The Sales and Marketing Manager at Stora Hotellet says:

“all guests during summer are potential group and conference guests.”

The Manager at Gripsholms Värdsus also states:

“a guest who visits for leisure works somewhere, and a conference guest is also a private customer.”

The perception of the story is thus not very different between the two groups, but as mentioned earlier it is easier for the hotel to mediate the story to larger groups. It is therefore a risk that private guests who do not request to be told the story leave without hearing it. However, as most hotels have the story printed or communicate it through the interior, the hotel's characteristics are often delivered anyway. It can be argued that storytelling as a communication mean, at least when customers are present at the hotel, is used by the hotels to affect a person in all roles.

5.3.5 Storytelling and Integrated Marketing Communications

Integrated marketing communications (IMC) has, according to Duncan and Moriarty (1997), three main differences compared to the traditional marketing communications, which see marketing messages in isolation separated from the actual product or service. The first one includes a shift from acquiring new customers to maintaining and developing them. Most of the hotels use storytelling to attract new customers since the story creates an interest in the hotel. However, once the guests are visiting the hotel, the complete story is mediated and further interacts with the customers. In this aspect, storytelling facilitates an integrated message as it is present and functions also after the customer has purchased the service. The second difference include the more extensive use of two-way communications rather than one-way, which can be exemplified as advertising. Storytelling can facilitate two-way communication as it often brings questions and interest which allow employees at the hotel to interact more with customers. It is nothing that is merely communicated to customers, it is rather reflected upon together. Beard (1996) also discusses that customers
should be involved in the service offering instead of passive users in order to develop integrated marketing communications. Many activities at the hotels are connected to the storytelling concept and thus further integrate everything communicated. Duncan and Moriarty (1997) lastly state that marketing communications should be seen as a philosophy of the organization rather than a single function. The use of storytelling as a philosophy is present at almost half on the studied hotels and several functions of the hotel cooperate through the story to create a coherent message. Wrapping the message into a story facilitates the communication of the meaning and image the company wishes to express externally. The second half of the hotel has however not incorporated the story to the same extent and the story is not setting the overall values for these hotels. However, the story is influencing many of the hotels’ functions and is well understood by employees.

Smith (1993) brings up the internal communication as a part of IMC and Smith et al. (1997) stress that a strong cohesion in the organization helps to deliver a consistent message. Here, the employees can be seen as the receivers of the message communicated. Almost half of the hotels are not utilizing the story in their internal communication, as it is not looked upon as filling a necessary function. However, the other half of the interviewed hotels say that the story influences the internal communication and Boje (1995, cited in Smith & Keyton, 2001) argues that stories can be utilized in order to reduce uncertainty for organizational members. Albert Hotell, Gripsholm, and Icehotel are all mentioning that the story sets their values and make all employees feel connected to something special and make them work towards the same goal. At most of the hotels, it is important that employees are proud to be a part of a unique story. The pride builds trust and credibility to the external market as well, and consequently much time is spent on educating employees in the storytelling. At Icehotel, for instance, it comes natural to utilize the story internally and as a result the story is always present externally as well. This can also be connected to the philosophy of IMC, as discussed earlier by Duncan and Moriarty (1997). Rosen (2006) also states that storytelling is viewed as a powerful device to build a vision within a company.

Hutton (1996) is however critical towards IMC and the attention it has received as an own field of marketing communications, since few practitioners would aim for nonintegrated marketing messages. By reviewing what the story implies for the hotels, it is visible that it most often brings together the hotel’s functions, and employees work toward a common goal. It is not said that other hotels, not using storytelling, have nonintegrated marketing communications, but probably it is difficult for customers to see a red thread clearly without a story. Measuring the effects of IMC is, according to Schultz et al. (1993), continuous and circular. It needs to be planned for in advance and adjustments to the messages communicated are performed continuously. As storytelling as a concept is fairly new to many of the hotels, no effects have been measured. Stora Hotellet on the other hand has successfully used storytelling for ten years, but has not measured the effects in any way. For them, as for all of the hotels, word of mouth is the most important marketing communication tool and it takes time to develop and evaluate.

Schultz et al. (1993) discuss the importance of a coherent message from an organization due to the fact that customers gather information over time. All new marketing messages must fit with what is already stored in the customer’s mind. As the story is incorporated in the organization as a concept, it functions as a backbone of the service offering.

To develop the discussion about IMC, we will base it on the three types of messages an organization delivers; the planned, the product and service, and the unplanned messages
Figure 10 visualize the different messages connected to our empirical findings, and all are described further below.

The **planned messages**, what the hotels say through external promotional campaigns, were discussed earlier in this analysis and we saw that the story was not always present and several respondents expressed the difficulty of mediating the whole story. The Internet was however an important and good channel to communicate the story through.

The **product and service messages** include everything a company does, and this is where the story functions best. In most of the hotels, the interior and many of the activities have a connection with the story, which makes these messages very consistent. Also, several respondents stress the importance of involving all employees in the storytelling and thus further develop the perception of a hotel built around a story. The time storytelling has been used as a concept differs between the interviewed hotels. Based on the empirical findings, it can be assumed that the integration of storytelling in the overall service message evolve over time.

The **unplanned messages** come from what others say about the hotel or what others do regarding the company. Here, publicity is an unplanned message that the hotel sends, and almost half of the respondents say that the story has generated independent publicity. Unplanned messages are also connected to word of mouth; what others say about the hotel. All hotels are highly dependent on word of mouth and think that storytelling is contributing to increased word of mouth.

5.3.6 **Storytelling and Word of Mouth**

Word of mouth is generated somehow and it can be explained by looking at the communications cycle that Grönroos developed in 2000. Advertising, publicity or any type of communication develop an expectation about the specific hotels, and often at least an influence of the story is present in these marketing messages. When the customer interacts and visits the hotel, the story becomes alive and is communicated and experienced with all senses. The experience concerning the story, according to all respondents, is often positive and the customer is likely to tell others about his or her good experience.

From our empirical findings we notice that the majority of the hotels use storytelling as an aid to make them unique and be remembered. Most of the hotels have a long and fascinating history and the story assists in communicating these facts. With exciting and fun components, the unplanned marketing messages are spreading more easily and word of mouth is generated. This is supported by Silverman (2001) who states that using
storytelling is beneficial when working with word of mouth. Mossberg and Nissen-Johansen (2006) further say that word of mouth created from stories can be utilized in marketing strategies in order to spread the image and values about a company. The Manager at Toftaholm explains that:

“the story makes it easier to create word of mouth, you leave a special impression that customers tell others about”

Smith and Taylor, (2002) state that communication tools can be utilized in order to generate word of mouth but consequently, if there is a conflict between word of mouth messages and for example an advertising campaign, advertising will lose. Among the respondents, there is a common view that word of mouth is one of the most vital communication attributes to work with. One respondent exemplifies that the hotel attracts new customers mainly through recommendations. Another respondent claims that all employees work actively to generate positive word of mouth, which is necessary in the harsh competition in the marketplace today. Bansal and Voyer, (2000) support these findings and say that word of mouth is highly influential in the service sector due to the intangibility. Pine and Gilmore (1999) say that marketing messages that are unique and memorable are often spread by word of mouth. Regarding this, and with the empirical findings on the matter, we see storytelling as the foremost creator of word of mouth for the hotels.

Kirby and Marsden (2006) bring up that word of mouth may not always be positive, since people tend to talk about dissatisfying experiences as well. Only one respondent, the Manager at Slottsvillan, has experienced negative word of mouth regarding the storytelling, due to the fact that the ghost stories were not appealing to all guests. However, none of the other hotels have witnessed any connection between the storytelling and negative word of mouth.

5.4 Future

It is argued that customers’ buying decision in the future will be strongly affected by invisible factors, such as the delivery of stories about an organization (Mossberg & Nissen-Johansen, 2006). This is supported by our findings, where the respondents view the future of storytelling as promising.

Our findings support that there exist wishes to develop the storytelling concept even further in order to include it in all marketing communications. The nonmaterial character seems to be a significant attribute in the future. Both theory and our findings support the idea that there will be an increased demand of symbolic meaning when purchasing services in the future. As the Marketing Manager at Sästaholm states:

“Today, when the information flow is massive and people become less susceptible to traditional marketing; I believe storytelling is becoming more important. When talking about storytelling one also talks about mediating a feeling and that is important in order make an impression and for the story to spread. This will be an even more important element in marketing communication in the future.”

The hotels’ stories have been around for a long time, but the development of the stories as marketing concepts is quite new for the majority of the respondents. Overall, there is a positive future for the utilization of storytelling.
6 Conclusions

This chapter will present our conclusions drawn from the analysis regarding storytelling and marketing communications in the hospitality industry.

The purpose of this thesis was to study and analyze storytelling and how it is used as marketing communication in the hospitality industry. Although our conclusions cannot be generalized for the whole hospitality industry, we have developed an understanding and we see tendencies that most likely reflect hotels’ perspective of storytelling. These tendencies constitute our conclusions.

To answer the first part of our purpose; to study and analyze storytelling in the hospitality industry, several broad conclusions can be given.

- Storytelling is an identity and/or an image

Our research shows that using an identity story is common and useful. The identity story is based on the background of the hotel. The identity story often develops complimentary stories based on customers’ ideas and the service offered. As the whole concept develops, the whole service offering is imbued by the story. The story thus develops an image for the hotel.

- The purpose of using storytelling is to be remembered and to mediate a feeling

- Storytelling requires attributes

The servicescape, in particular the interior of the hotel, is crucial for the storytelling concept to take form. The interior, as well as slogans, physical details, and personalities, facilitate the communication of image and what the company stands for.

- A certain level of truth is important

All studied hotels base their storytelling on truth, but fictitious anecdotes are often used. Storytelling is used to entertain and attract, and fiction accentuates reality. Mutual understanding between the hotels and their customers concerning the level of truth limits the possibility of mistrust. Different themes, and the combination of these, are used to attract different target markets. Storytelling is therefore easy to adjust to the chosen group of customers.

The second part of our purpose; to study and analyze how storytelling is used as marketing communication, is answered through six statements.

- Storytelling is used to facilitate the communication process

The story is the message that the hotel want to mediate to customers. It is encoded verbally, through printed facts, interior, and activities. Customers decode it by asking questions due to their interest. Storytelling increases feedback as customers interacts with employees. Furthermore, it can overcome noise in the marketplace, since a story is easily remembered. All stories are unique and therefore competitors are not creating noise, at least not now when storytelling is still rather uncommon. However, time is a constraint, both for customers and employees, and it limits the extensive use of storytelling.
Conclusions

• Storytelling is used to strengthens customers’ attitudes towards the hotel

The story is influencing, but it is not used as the tipping point that leads customers to purchase. Factors such as price, location, and service are still essential in the hospitality industry.

• Stories are difficult to mediate through communication tools

The use of tools is dependent on how much resources are available for the hotels. Our research show that it is difficult to mediate the compound story through tools, but it is often influencing. The story often creates independent publicity that can be viewed as a tool.

• Storytelling works well in both the private and the business market

However, at the hotels, the story is more frequently communicated towards business customers since it is more or less an organized conference event. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware of a person’s dual interest concerning the hotel service; a person can purchase the service both as a private and a business customer.

• Storytelling facilitates the delivery of an integrated marketing message

Storytelling as a marketing communication mean functions after sales since the message can be delivered post purchase. It also facilitates two-way communication between customers and employees, and often it becomes a philosophy of the whole hotel. In the internal communication, it is not evident that the story is present. However, we see that it, more or less unconsciously, creates pride and fellowship among employees.

The story is helpful when trying to deliver an integrated marketing message. It functions well in the service and the unplanned messages, but is more difficult to incorporate in the planned messages. Storytelling as a concept evolves over time, and thus becomes more integrated in the organization.

• Storytelling increases word of mouth

Word of mouth is one of the most important marketing communication means for hotels, and storytelling is an important contributor. Through the story, the hotels are remembered and they are unique. People talk about the unexpected.

Our overall conclusion regarding storytelling in the hospitality industry is that it is useful in marketing communications in order to be remembered in the increasingly crowded marketplace.
7 Final Discussion

In this part of the thesis, we will reflect on our research and it also gives us the opportunity to share our thoughts regarding storytelling and marketing communications.

7.1 Reflections

We have fulfilled our purpose since we have increased the understanding of storytelling in the hospitality industry. Our results point towards one direction of how storytelling is utilized in hotels’ marketing communication, and we could therefore provide certain conclusions. Moreover, we viewed the qualitative method as necessary in order for us to interpret feelings, situations, and experience the environment.

When reflecting on our research, there was limited academic research made in the field of storytelling. Consequently, we combined existing theories in different areas in order to form a framework that was applicable for this study. We feel that we have contributed with an academic perspective by relating storytelling to the academic field of marketing communications. Our study holds an empirical focus on how the hospitality industry understands and relates to storytelling, and is thus an interesting contribution to the industry. We believe that the study can be an inspiring element for hotels when they develop marketing communication strategies. In addition, the study can facilitate for hotels and other similar service organizations to critically evaluate their own situation and begin or improve a storytelling concept.

To end up the discussion, we find it interesting to present our own impressions of storytelling and how we have interpreted the phenomenon. During this research, we have become fascinated by the concept of storytelling. It is easy to use and do not have to be resource demanding. We believe the future of storytelling is promising, this since a story can bring together an organization and develop an integrated image of a company’s offers and values. However, if storytelling becomes too popular and common, it might lose its effect. The uniqueness will be lost and it will not be as interesting as we consider it today.

We have visited several unique hotels that all left a memorable impression. We have also when talking to friends and family about this project discovered the power of storytelling. The ones that had visited one of the interviewed hotels certainly remembered it and told us anecdotes from the stay; it was told to be more than ordinary.

7.2 Further Research

When writing a thesis and becoming more and more engaged in a subject, ideas for other research topics within the field arise. Storytelling is a buzzword today and it would be interesting to highlight it more as a marketing mean in the academic world. We will probably see the concept of storytelling develop and influence many industries in the near future.

Research topics that can be considered are therefore provided below.

- Study storytelling in other industries; storytelling related to other services and products.

This area can generate many perspectives of a study. It is possible to investigate how stories are tied to a product and how it can create an image both for the organization as well for the brand. It would also be interesting to conduct a comparable study between product and
service industries, and see if there exist any differences in the utilization of the storytelling concept.

- **Storytelling and organizational culture**

Storytelling can also be viewed together with several functions of a business. It would be interesting to study storytelling combined with organizational culture, more specific how the story can influence corporate identity and if/how storytelling can facilitate the internal communication.

- **Storytelling and branding**

It would be motivating to see how other parts of marketing can be combined with storytelling, such as branding. How organizations can increase their brand value by imbuing their story.

- **Storytelling as a case study that catch both the perspectives of customers and employees**

A case study where a deeper understanding of the concept storytelling can be gained could be of interest. It can be created by investigating the concept from the perspective of both customers and employees. For example, the frontline personnel handle the direct contact with guests, and therefore they might present a different view of the concept.

- **Storytelling year 2015**

It would also be interesting to look into the subject storytelling in the future. How is the concept perceived, has it become a nagging concept? How has the usage of the concept changed?
References


References


References


1. Intervjuguide

Områden och frågeställningar som ni kan tänka på innan vårt samtal

Övergripande information om hotellet
- Din position och bakgrund
- Fakta om hotellet
- Marknadskommunikation i hotellindustrin

Historien som förmedlas
- Er definition av begreppet storytelling
- Grunden till er historia, när, varför, hur?
- Sann eller fiktiv historia?
- Effekterna av storytelling
- Ambition med storytelling
- Konkurrenter och användandet av storytelling

Diskussioner kring begreppet word of mouth (mun-till-mun)
- Effekten av word of mouth
- Hantering och kontrollering av word of mouth
- Negativ word of mouth

Marknadskommunikation
- Hur kommunikeras historien?
- Kommunikationskanaler
- Kommunikationsredskap
- Integrerad marknadskommunikation, genomsyrar storyn all marknadsföring?
- Intern och extern kommunikation
- Image

Kundkrets
- Skillnader mellan privat- och företagskunder
- Skillnad i hur storytelling används
- Skillnader i användandet av kommunikationsredskap
- Respons från kunder
- Involverandet av kunder i er storytelling
2. Interview Guide

Main areas and questions at issue to think about before our conversation

Overall information about the hotel

- Your position and background
- Facts about the hotel
- Marketing communications in the hospitality industry

The mediated story

- Your definition of the concept of storytelling
- The foundation of your story; when, why, how?
- True or fictitious story?
- The effects of storytelling
- The ambition with storytelling
- Competitors and the utilization of storytelling

Discussion around the concept of word of mouth

- The effect of word of mouth
- Managing and controlling word of mouth
- Negative word of mouth

Marketing communications

- How is the story communicated?
- Communication channels
- Communication tools
- Integrated marketing communications; is the story imbued in all marketing?
- Internal and external communication
- Image

Clientele

- Differences between private- and business customers
- Difference in how storytelling is used
- Differences in the utilization of communication tools
- Response from customers
- The involvement of customers in the storytelling
3. Photo Gallery

Stora Hotellet

The room dedicated to Christoffer Columbus (http://www.storahotellet-fjallbacka.se)

The bathroom

Slottsvillan

The outside environment (http://www.slottsvillan.se)

The interior

Toftaholm

The outside environment (http://www.toftaholmherrgard.com)

The inside interior
Designhotellet

The Rooms provided (http://www.design-hotellet.se)

Albert Hotell

The outside environment (http://www2.alberthotel.se)

Såstaholm

The outside environment (http://www.sastaholm.se)

The Theater inspired theme
Appendices

Gripsholms Värdshus

The outside environment
(http://www.gripsholms-varshus.se)

One of the rooms provided

Icehotel

The outside environment
(http://www.icehotel.com)

Room made of ice

Villa Fridhem

The outside environment
(http://www.fridhemskursgard.se)

Oskar II