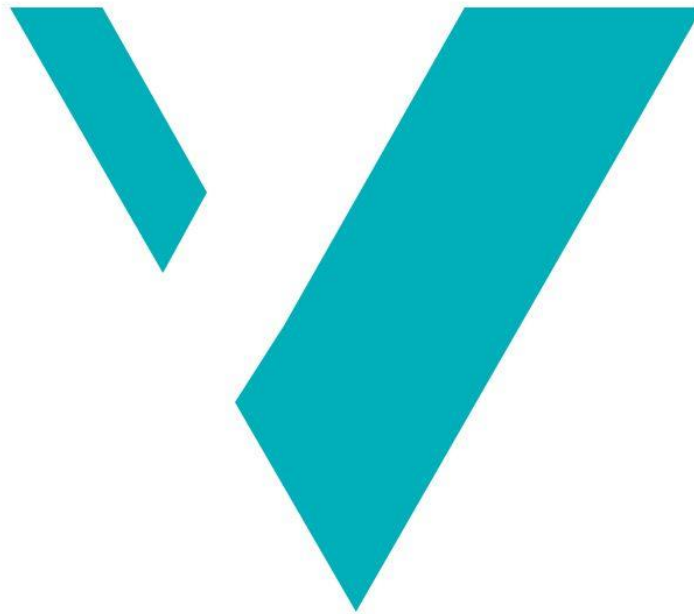# Towards Green Trust: An Interpretation of Nordic Choice Hotels' Environmental Sustainability Performance based on Customer Feedback Data

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Master Thesis in Climate Change Management

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Sogndal
[June 2021]

I confirm that the work is self-prepared and that references/source references to all sources used in the work are provided, cf. Regulation relating to academic studies and examinations at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL), § 10.

Western Norway University of Applied Sciences

Towards Green Trust: An Interpretation of Nordic Choice Hotels' Environmental Sustainability Performance based on Customer Feedback Data

Master thesis in Climate Change Management

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Thesis submitted: Spring 2021	Open thesis

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Keywords: Hospitality industry, environmental sustainability performance, greenwashing, green trust, Behavioural Economics, nudging, Rational Choice Theory, customer feedback data	Number of pages: 113 + Appendix: 11 Sogndal, 10.06.2021 Place/Date/year

This thesis is a part of the master's programme in Climate Change Management (Planlegging for klimaendringer) at the Department of Environmental Sciences, Faculty of Engineering and Science at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences. The author(s) is responsible for the methods used, the results that are presented and the conclusions in the thesis.

Preface

知者不惑，仁者不优，勇者不惧

"Education breeds confidence. Confidence breeds hope. Hope breeds peace."

孔子, Confucius, Chinese philosopher and teacher

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the teachers and fellow students at the Department of Environmental Sciences, Faculty of Engineering and Science that have guided and assisted me throughout this masters' course and in writing this thesis.

My deepest gratitude to my two supervisors for valuable guidance and great amount of effort and time in supervising my work. To Carlo Aall for offering crucial advice and keeping me on track. To Zacharias Andreadakis for memorable and indispensable discussions and reflections, and I will always remember: *No Mud, No Lotus*! Furthermore, I would like to specifically thank Bente Johnsen Rygg for helping me navigate Nvivo.

A special thanks to Erik Killie, Sustainability Manager in Nordic Choice Hotels, who has guided and provided me with essential material and advice during this thesis.

Finally, to my loving and supporting family and the love of my life, thank you for giving me confidence and believing in me!

Abstract

This study examines how customers perceive the environmental sustainability performance (ESP) of Nordic Choice Hotels (NCH) from a new and under-researched lens, namely semi-longitudinal customer feedback data. Drawing from the literature on environmental sustainability, green trust, greenwashing, and nudging, the research objective is addressed through three research questions: 1) How do customers react to Nordic Choice Hotels' environmental sustainability performance and choice environment? 2) Do customers find the environmental sustainability performance of Nordic Choice Hotels trustworthy? 3) Do customers perceive that the choice environment enabled by Nordic Choice Hotels motivates them to change their behaviour toward a more environmentally friendly orientation? To explore these questions, this study applies a mixed methods and triangulation design of secondary data collection. First, by reviewing how NCH manages and reports its performance through document analysis. Second, by examining how customers perceive the performance by using text mining to systematise a cloud of unsorted open-text customer feedback from a customer survey.

The results and discussion indicate that most customers express concerns about NCH's ESP and leave constructive feedback that offers solutions on how to improve the performance. Elements of perceived greenwashing, absence of facilitation and infrastructure, and lack of information and deliberation transparency were identified as barriers to strong green trust and subsequent strong ESP. In conclusion to the research questions, in response to the environment customers perceive the choice environment to be ambiguous, leading to the understanding that customers welcome improvements in environmental facilitation and intervention, and that NCH should therefore improve green trust and further promote its ESP. As the situation stands now, customers perceive moderate to weak green trust in NCH and as a result do not perceive sufficient motivation towards a more environmentally friendly behaviour. Without deliberation transparency, improved facilitation of infrastructure, navigation in a complex choice environment, and salience of mutual accountability measures, strong green trust and ultimately strong ESP shall remain elusive for NCH.

Sammendrag

Denne studien undersøker hvordan kunder oppfatter den miljømessige bærekraftsprestasjonen (ESP) til Nordic Choice Hotels (NCH) fra en ny og uutforsket linse, nemlig semi-langsiktige data over kundetilbakemeldinger. Gjennom litteratur om miljømessig bærekraft, grønn tillit, grønnvasking og nudging, blir forskningsmålet adressert gjennom tre forskningsspørsmål: 1) Hvordan reagerer kundene på Nordic Choice Hotels miljømessige bærekraftsprestasjon og valgarkitektur? 2) Finner kundene at den miljømessige bærekraftsprestasjonen til Nordic Choice Hotels er pålitelig? 3) Oppfatter kundene at valgarkitekturen muliggjort av Nordic Choice Hotels motiverer dem til å endre atferden i en miljøvennlig retning? For å utforske disse spørsmålene, bruker denne studien kombinerte metoder og trianguleringsdesign for sekundær datainnsamling. Først ved å gjennomgå hvordan NCH administrerer og rapporterer prestasjonen gjennom dokumentanalyse. For det andre ved å undersøke hvordan kunder oppfatter prestasjonen ved å bruke tekstanalyse for å systematisere usorterte kundetilbakemeldinger.

Resultatene og diskusjonen indikerer at de fleste kunder uttrykker bekymring for NCH's ESP og gir konstruktive tilbakemeldinger som tilbyr løsninger på hvordan NCH kan forbedre prestasjonen. Elementer av opplevd grønnvasking, fravær av tilrettelegging og infrastruktur, og mangel på informasjon og åpenhet ble identifisert som barrierer for sterk grønn tillit og påfølgende sterk ESP. Konklusjonene av forskningsspørsmålene viser at kundene oppfatter valgarkitekturen som forvirrende, noe som fører til en forståelse av at kundene ønsker forbedringer i miljøtilrettelegging og intervensjon, og at NCH derfor bør forbedre grønn tillit og ytterligere fremme sin ESP. Slik situasjonen er nå, opplever kundene moderat til svak grønn tillit til NCH og opplever som et resultat av dette ikke tilstrekkelig motivasjon mot en mer miljøvennlig oppførsel. Uten åpenhet, bedre tilrettelegging for bærekraftig infrastruktur, navigering i en kompleks valgarkitektur, og fremtredende gjensidige tiltak, vil sterk grønn tillit og til slutt sterk ESP forbli flyktig for NCH.

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Abbreviations

NCH	Nordic Choice Hotels
ESP	Environmental Sustainability Performance
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
MICE	Meetings, Incentives, Conferencing, Exhibitions
RCT	Rational Choice Theory
BE	Behavioural Economics
PCF	Positive Customer Feedback
NCF	Negative Customer Feedback
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative
WOM	Word of Mouth

1. Introduction

This study aims to empirically analyse the concept of customers' *green trust* in the environmental sustainability performance of Nordic Choice Hotels through a novel and under-researched lens, namely semi-longitudinal customer feedback data. Drawing on the literature on environmental sustainability, green trust, greenwashing, Behavioural Economics, and Rational Choice Theory, this thesis analyses how customers perceive and react to Nordic Choice Hotels' environmental sustainability performance and nudging interventions, and whether they perceive this performance as trustworthy and competent. Using a methodological design of mixed methods and triangulation, I first use document analysis to examine how Nordic Choice Hotels manages and communicates its environmental sustainability performance. Second, I systematically analyse a cloud of unsorted and unstructured customer feedback data, giving it form to gain a deeper understanding of customer perceptions, awareness, and behaviour. Through this work, I aim to highlight the issues and challenges associated with the discrepancy between customer perceptions and communicated performance, and to subsequently argue that understanding this discrepancy is important for building strong green trust that can further strengthen the overall environmental sustainability performance for Nordic Choice Hotels.

1.1. The research problem

The lack of intellectual clarity surrounding environmental sustainability performance (henceforth ESP) has garnered a lot of scholarly attention in recent years (Dietz & Neumayer, 2006; Prud'homme & Raymond, 2016; Sachs, 2015; Stoknes, 2020). In the wake of this wide host of environmental sustainability debates, the hospitality industry has come repeatedly under scholarly scrutiny (Chen, Bernard, & Rahman, 2019; Jones, Hillier, & Comfort, 2014; Khatter, McGrath, Pyke, White, & Lockstone-Binney, 2019; Kim et al., 2019; Melissen & Sauer, 2019). Much of the existing action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and environmental impacts in the hospitality industry has focused on developing technical solutions and environmental management through self-regulation and third-party certifications (Khatter et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2019; Melissen & Sauer, 2019). Despite increased efforts, reporting, and investments in sustainability, carbon emissions continue to rise, leading to accelerated environmental degradation (Lenzen et al., 2018; Pucker, 2021). While most solutions implemented by management address reducing impacts on the production side of the equation, managerial practises occasionally ignore the other side of the equation: consumption (Dubois et al., 2019). Recently, however, there has been a growing awareness that supply-side strategies need to be supplemented by demand-side strategies to help consumers make more

sustainable choices (Bruns, Kantorowicz-Reznichenko, Klement, Luistro Jonsson, & Rahali, 2018; Lehner, Mont, & Heiskanen, 2016; Mont, Lehner, & Heiskanen, 2014; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009).

Understanding human behaviour and decision-making is an ongoing challenge in the social sciences. Behavioural science seeks to understand how people form judgments, make decisions, and navigate uncertainty in complex choice environments (Hertwig, Pleskac, & Pachur, 2019; Kahneman, 2011; Schmidt, 2019; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). There are many different approaches, psychological, philosophical, and sociological, to understanding consumer behaviour and perception (Hall, 2013). The point is that environments shape us, and we make choices based on how we perceive and react to the environments that surround us. However, in order to understand and govern consumer behaviour, both context (the environment) and cognition (the mind) must be considered (Hertwig et al., 2019; Simon, 1955, 1990). This line of research thusly postulates that a hotel intervenes in and shapes the choice environment and can potentially impact the choices we make. Typical interventions in a hotels' choice environment can include environmental technology, environmental certifications, labels, and a more novel approach that this thesis will explore, *nudging*[1] (Chang, Huh, & Lee, 2015; Kallbekken & Sælen, 2013; Lee, Lee, & Gunarathne, 2019; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). However, the success and trustworthiness of this interference lies in the customers' perceptions and expectations and whether they perceive that the hotel easily facilitates environmentally friendly choices that motivate behaviour change.

In light of these recent interdisciplinary developments in the sustainability debate, one of the most difficult issues in the hospitality industry is how to manage (i.e., interpret and operationalise) customer perceptions on the issue of ESP (Chaudary, Zahid, Shahid, Khan, & Azar, 2016; Gao, Mattila, & Lee, 2016; Lee, Hsu, Han, & Kim, 2010). Recent scholarly findings increasingly evince that more knowledgeable and experienced customers are more likely to gravitate toward hotel service providers that adopt practices that are less harmful to the environment (Cherian & Jacob, 2012; Martínez, Herrero, & Gómez-López, 2019; Prud'homme & Raymond, 2016). Given the increased environmental awareness of customers, ESP and communications must take a more informed approach when spending revenue on environmental initiatives and not ride a green wave without understanding what customers want (Berezan, Millar, & Raab, 2014; Purnama Alamsyah, Aryanto, Dwija Utama, Sari Marita, & Akmaliah Othman, 2020). Building customer-company relationships and trust has become even more paramount in a constantly changing, globalised, and competitive marketplace (Bachnik & Nowacki, 2018; Fukey & Issac, 2014; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014; Kim & Kim, 2016).

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[1] Nudging or a nudge can be defined as: "*A nudge as we will use the term, is any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behaviour in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives. To count as a mere nudge, the interventions must be easy and cheap to avoid.*" (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009, p. 6).

The problem of meaningful interpretation of customer perceptions of ESP currently escapes consensus. The reasons for this are mainly twofold. First, the problem is theoretically fraught and divided, with concepts and schools of thought entangled in deeply rooted ambiguity (Dolnicar, 2020; Jones et al., 2014; Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010; O'Neill, 2002; Pucker, 2021). This ambiguity is rooted in elusive concepts of sustainability, trust, greenwashing, and transparency, which are often viewed as barriers for hotel management in their quest to develop meaningful strategy, communication, and performance (Berezan et al., 2014; Castaldo, Premazzi, & Zerbini, 2010; Chan, Okumus, & Chan, 2019; Chen et al., 2019; Chen & Chang, 2013; O'Neill, 2002). The second reason is that empirical data evaluating the problem have been scarce and opaque. Some researchers have looked at customer perceptions of ESP and examined the image of environmentally certified hotels and the relationship between behavioural intentions such as intention to revisit, paying a premium, and spreading positive word of mouth (WOM) (Gao et al., 2016; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014; Lee et al., 2010; Martínez Garcíade Leaniz, Herrero Crespo, & Gómez López, 2018), but also to understand customer perceptions of what is considered greenwashing in the hospitality industry (Chen et al., 2019; Rahman, Park, & Chi, 2015). Despite these efforts, access to real-life examples that would illustrate the dimensions and responses to the problem have been missing.

In response to this fragmentation, this study seeks to contribute to the academic discourse of sustainability by adding a meaningful interpretation of customer perceptions of ESP and communication in the context of the hospitality industry. The study of empirical, semi-longitudinal and open-ended customer responses can hopefully provide a deeper understanding of customer perceptions. Specifically, by taking its vantage point from Rational Choice Theory (henceforth RCT) and Behavioural Economics (henceforth BE), it seeks to investigate customer perception and reaction to the choice environment conferred by NCH and whether this environment is something they perceive as trustworthy. To the author's knowledge, no studies have examined empirical open-ended text responses from surveys conducted after a hotel stay for the purpose of understanding perceptions, as well as examining a company-specific context in-depth.

1.2. Introducing the topic for my analysis: Nordic Choice Hotels

Choice Hotels International is an American hotel chain founded in 1968 (Store Norske Leksikon, 2020a). This company operates 7000 hotels internationally, with approximately 568 000 rooms in 41 countries through franchising (licencing agreements). The franchise rights in the Nordic countries are held by Nordic Choice Hotels (NCH), which is owned by the businessman and investor Petter Stordalen through his investment company Strawberry Group (Brekke, 2020; Store Norske Leksikon, 2020a). It was formerly named Choice Hotels Scandinavia, and was founded in Norway in 1990 (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019e; Store Norske Leksikon, 2020a). A total of 17000 employees from 170 countries operate around

37100 rooms divided on 205 hotels, with a revenue of NOK 12,1 billion in 2019 (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019f, 2021d; Store Norske Leksikon, 2020a). The total number of guest nights (rooms occupied) in the whole NCH was 11 661 089 in 2019, while it had decreased to 6 619 840 in 2020 (Killie, E., personal communication, 23. March 2021).

Today, NCH it is one of the largest hotel chains in the Nordic, consisting of three hotel chains, Comfort, Quality and Clarion, and 38 independent hotels amounting to approximately 205 hotels operating in the countries of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Latvia and Lithuania (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019e; Store Norske Leksikon, 2020a). Figure 1 provides an overview of the three major hotel chains, as well as an overview of the geographical location of all NCH in the Nordic.

Figure 1: *Representation of NCH three major concept hotels and overview of the hotels operating within NCH (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2021b).*

The three hotel chains each cater to different market segments of business travellers, leisure travellers, and meetings, incentives, conferencing, and exhibitions (MICE) customers (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2021h). Clarion Hotel focuses on near-town location and easily accessible facilities, with a fusion of both business and pleasure (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019c). Comfort Hotel focuses on simpler accommodation solutions, where one can get a room at a good price in urban and accessible locations (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2021c). Quality Hotel mainly targets the business and MICE market segments,

and focuses on offering meeting and conference facilities (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019b). The independent hotels, Nordic Hotels & Resorts Hotels, focus on offering tailored products, such as spa and ski resorts, for luxury, group bookings, and leisure (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019d). In this study, all the different concepts and chains are not differentiated, and referred to under the same entity, namely NCH.

The ownership of the hotels in NCH depends on who owns the operating company (AS) that runs the hotel, and this differs between franchise and operating hotels. The operating hotels are owned by the operating company Choice Hotels & Resort AS and Nordic Hotels & Resorts AS, which in turn is owned by Petter Stordalen and his real-estate company Strawberry Properties (Strawberry, 2021). The franchised hotels are owned by private operating companies (AS) that pay an annual franchise fee and commit to follow the chain's concepts (Proff.no, 2021; Killie, E., personal communication, 10. May 2021)[2]. The premise of the three chains is that they must adhere to a strict concept tailored to their brand. For instance, the general idea of the hotels operating under the Quality brand is that they must offer customers similar experiences and products in the form of conference facilities and profiling materials (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019b; Killie, E., personal communication, 10. May 2021). Nordic Hotels & Resorts Hotels are not bound by the strict chain branding concepts, they are freer to develop their own products and services (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019d).

1.2.1. Introduction to the Nordic Choice Hotels sustainability agenda

What all the hotels must commit to as a part of NCH, regardless of chain concept or ownership, are collective sustainability strategies and ISO 14001 certification (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2021a). The sustainability agenda is therefore a core element across NCH. The vision of NCH is: *With Energy, Courage and Enthusiasm, we create a better world! WeCare![3]* (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2021h). NCH writes that they are "inspired" by the UN 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[4] and follow the Triple Bottom Line philosophy: People, Planet and Profit (Elkington, 1998; Nordic Choice Hotels, 2021a, 2021i). This commitment is summarised as their WeCare strategy for sustainable hotel management, with 6 focus areas that include social, environmental and economic sustainability: sweet dreams, sustainable hotel operations, the food revolution, diversity, local social responsibility and ethical trade

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[2] An example of a franchise hotel within the NCH is Quality Hotel Sogndal which is managed under the operating company Sogndal Hotel Drift AS that is privately owned.

[3] Translated from Norwegian: *Med Energi, Mot og Begeistring skaper vi en bedre verden. WeCare!* (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2021h)

[4] The UN 17 SDGs are as follows: goal 1: no poverty, goal 2: zero hunger, goal 3: good health and well-being, goal 4: quality education, goal 5: gender equality, goal 6: clean water and sanitation, goal 7: affordable and clean energy, goal 8: decent work and economic growth, goal 9: industry, innovation and infrastructure, goal 10: reduced inequalities, goal 11: sustainable cities and communicates, goal 12: responsible consumption and production, goal 13: climate action, goal 14: life below water, goal 15: life on land, goal 16: peace, justice and strong institutions, and goal 17: partnerships for the goals (United Nations, 2015).

(Nordic Choice Hotels, 2021i). Keeping within the scope of the study, environmental sustainability, the relevant priority areas for analysis are sustainable hotel operations, food revolution and ethical trade.

Sustainable hotel operations in NCH targets five focus areas with the aim of reducing operational emissions and environmental impacts, namely water, energy, chemicals, waste, and transportation (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2021a). The food revolution is a slogan that aims to not only provide customers with unique food experiences, but also to serve healthy, sustainable, and ethically produced food (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2021g). Commitments include serving a range of ecological products and phasing out unsustainable and rainforest-damaging palm oil. Ethical trade targets the supply chain and the selection of products purchased, creating good relationships, and moving towards a sustainable supply chain where products can be easily traced back to its cradle and have a low environmental impact (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2021e). For example, all coffee is Fairtrade certified.

In 2019, and for the seventh year in a row, NCH was recognised as the best company in sustainability in the hospitality industry by the Sustainable Brand Index[5], with an overall ranking of 6th among all sustainable brands in Norway (TINE dairy was ranked 1st) (Bjørshol, 2019). This ranking is based on Norwegian customers' perception of NCH as a sustainable brand. According to Sustainable Brand Index's latest report on Norwegian consumers, NCH has fallen to 25th place, but is still the leading sustainability brand within the hospitality industry (Sustainable Brand Index, 2021).

1.2.2. Why choosing Nordic Choice Hotels: Comparison with other hotel chains

Two of the main competitors operating in Nordic Countries are Scandic and Thon Hotels (Sustainable Brand Index, 2021). Scandic is a Swedish hotel chain founded in 1963 (Store Norske Leksikon, 2020b). It consists of around 280 hotels with a capacity of 60 000 rooms, and operates in countries such as Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Germany and the UK, making it the largest hotel chain in the Nordic countries (Scandic, 2021; Store Norske Leksikon, 2020b). The majority of their revenues, 70%, comes from business travel, with the remaining 30% from leisure travel (Scandic, 2021). They are Nordic Swan Eco Label and EU ecolabel certified. Now in 2021, Scandic ranks as number 27th in the Sustainability Brand Index (Sustainable Brand Index, 2021). Thon Hotels was established in 1989 under the name Rainbow Hotels, and now includes over 70 hotels in Norway, Brussels and Rotterdam (Thon Hotels, 2021a). All their hotels are Miljøfyrtårn certified (Thon Hotels, 2021b), and they rank 35th in the Sustainable Brand Index in 2021 (Sustainable Brand Index, 2021).

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[5] Sustainable Brand Index conducts Europe's largest independent brand survey relating to sustainability (Bjørshol, 2019).

1.3. Scope and motivation of the study

The main focus and principal object of inquiry in this thesis is the customers and how they perceive, evaluate, and react to the ESP signals, or communication, given by NCH. The aim is to interpret how customers perceive NCH's ESP and adjudicate customer perceptions on a scale from weak to strong green trust, based on customers cognitive attributes such as perception, awareness, concern, expectations and how they make decisions. The methodological approach chosen to investigate this research objective is to analyse a semi-longitudinal (3-year) dataset of customer feedback from across NCH.

The first motivating factor for this thesis is related to the choice of NCH as it is one of the major players in the hospitality industry in the Nordic. As a major player in the hospitality industry in the Nordic, NCH has a resource capacity, high revenue, development growth, in addition to a large number of hotel concepts ranging from MICE to spa resorts and other small franchises. The vast diversity of hotels operating within the chain can potentially account for many different performances and receive different customer responses that are interesting to investigate.

A second motivating factor is that the concept of ESP has become a virtually universal trend for companies, and they spend large resources to maintain the image of offering sustainable products and services (Stoknes, 2020). With no exception, NCH has followed this trend (Bjørshol, 2019; Nordic Choice Hotels, 2021a, 2021i) and invests a large number of resources and capital in sustainable operations and environmental certifications every year. In addition, NCH has experimented with and implemented some nudging tools as part of their ESP, providing a unique opportunity to interpret customers' perceptions of ESP and nudges together in the scope of green trust.

Despite these investments and efforts, it is ambiguous how this environmental commitment is perceived by customers. After a personal field inquiry, this environmental commitment was something that caught my attention and was observed to be vague. Inspired by this ambiguity, an idea to look deeper into open-ended text responses of customers staying at NCH was formed.

1.4. Research questions

Fundamentally, the objective of this study is to investigate an overarching concern, namely the relationship between the communicated performance of NCH and the perceived performance by customers based on customer feedback data. Therefore, the fundamental examination in this study is how customers perceive NCH's ESP, using customer feedback data. My research questions arising from this concern are:

1) How do customers react to Nordic Choice Hotels' environmental sustainability performance and choice environment?

2) Do customers find the environmental sustainability performance of Nordic Choice Hotels trustworthy?

3) Do customers perceive that the choice environment enabled by Nordic Choice Hotels motivates them to change their behaviour toward a more environmentally friendly orientation?

The first research question emanates directly from the empirical investigation of customer perceptions of ESP and explores the empirical and theoretical assumptions underlying this debate. Specifically, I seek to understand the position of customer feedback along the continuum of two contrasting theoretical frameworks, namely RCT, which posits that customers are likely to oppose interventions, and BE, which argues that interventions are critical to making the right decisions. The next two research questions are encapsulated in the first. They empirically aim to investigate how customers perceive the performance in the context of green trust and what causes the relationship or discrepancy between communicated performance (of NCH) and perceived performance (of customers). This line of research aims to gain a deeper understanding of whether customers feel that NCH is providing a moral and competent performance that can influence and potentially change their consumption behaviour towards a more environmentally friendly orientation.

1.5. Research contribution

This thesis contributes to a growing body of hospitality research, by providing new insights and empirical rigour into customer perceptions, reactions, and expectations of ESP in hotels. It aims to add to the academic discourse on customer-company relationships and the call for a better understanding of moral issues and implications of choice architecture in the private sector (Schmidt & Engelen, 2020). Based on two theoretical perspectives that govern how humans make decisions and how they perceive and evaluate their environment, this thesis seeks to provide insight into how customers react to the ESP communicated by NCH. This insight will hopefully provide additional understanding of customer behaviour and environmental awareness in relation to transactions that take place at NCH and whether customers perceive NCH as trustworthy and competent to promote an environmentally friendly choice environment for their customers. Furthermore, it aims to answer a call for further research on greenwashing and customer trust in the hospitality industry (Chen et al., 2019; Rahman et al., 2015).

The novelty of this study is that it looks in-depth at a specific company and uses customer responses as the main source of data for a mixture of quantitative and qualitative interpretation. Moreover, the

methodological and analytical choices made were chosen as the most similar equivalents for examining large volumes of unstructured, open-ended text responses from a real-time semi-longitudinal dataset that allows us to observe behaviour related to environmental practises in a hotel setting. More importantly, this study makes an empirical contribution, not only with a new methodology, but also with a new and unexamined dataset. For both hotel management and broader academic purposes, this contribution can provide a complex identification of customer feedback as well as an opportunity to strengthen the total ESP, according to customer evaluation of current performance.

1.6. General thesis structure

This thesis is divided into 6 main chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction with the problem statement and research questions. Chapter 2 reviews the theory and literature that provides the framework for this study. Chapter 3 establishes the methodological design, data collection and data analysis chosen to explore firstly how NCH perceives and evaluates its performance based on document analysis, and secondly how customers perceive and evaluate NCH performance based on customer feedback data. Chapter 4 presents the results of the document analysis, thematic keyword frequency analysis and manual systematisation of the open-ended text responses. Chapter 5 brings together all the material collected for a comprehensive discussion. The thesis ends with Chapter 6, with the conclusion, recommendations for the management of NCH, limitations, and future research.

2. Theory and literature overview

Since this study examines customer perception of Nordic Choice Hotels' environmental sustainability performance, four major areas of literature relate to the focus of the study. First, broadly introduce the concept of sustainability in hospitality discourse. Second, present the literature on how the hospitality industry manages and communicates a particular epiphenomenon of sustainability, namely ESP, both through traditional approaches and a new approach. Third, and a major component of this chapter, a review of the literature related to how customers perceive ESP based on green trust and transparency, and how it can lead to greenwashing if perceived negatively. Ending with an overview of two theoretical frameworks, RCT and BE, which aims to provide a deeper understanding of how customers react to interventions in the choice environment, as well as the assumptions underlying customers' reactions to NCH's ESP.

Sustainability in the hospitality industry

Sustainability is a concept that originated in the 1987 Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987). The tension originally proposed in this report was: how to balance the aspirations of the world's population for a better life with limited natural resources and the dangers of environmental degradation? The proposed answer was, and still is, *sustainable development*, which can be explained as "*development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*" (WCED, 1987). One of the most important developments in the concept of sustainability is the interpretation of the three dimensions of sustainability that must be seen in harmony, namely the economic, social and environmental dimensions (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). These three dimensions, often referred to as the three pillars of sustainability or the Triple Bottom Line (Elkington, 1998), attempt to reconcile two concerns, namely socio-economic concerns and environmental concerns (Giddings, Hopwood, & O'brien, 2002).

Following a growing concern about the social, economic, and environmental impacts on tourism destinations, the concept of sustainable tourism became a common theme in tourism research as well as for tourism businesses (Aall & Koens, 2019). In 1993, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) presented its perspective on sustainable tourism, stating that sustainable tourism is: "*tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.*" (UNWTO/UNEP, 2005, p. 12). With the adoption of the Triple Bottom Line of social, economic, and environmental sustainable development by UNWTO, both the tourism industry and tourism policy actors have embraced this concept of sustainable development (UNWTO/UNEP, 2005). In Norway, this concept has also been incorporated into national tourism strategies (Skaug, 2020). However, the

concept of sustainability and sustainable development has undergone a great deal of development and criticism (Aall & Koens, 2019; Giddings et al., 2002; Sachs, 2015). Critics argue that the understanding of sustainability through the three dimensions is too broad and involves an anthropogenic view, that it is ultimately about human well-being and survival (Jamieson, 1998; Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010; Postma, Cavagnaro, & Spruyt, 2017).

In defining a sustainable hotel, it can be understood as an accommodation business that maintains its activities in a way that takes into account environmental impacts (e.g., saving water, energy, reducing emissions and waste production), economic impacts (e.g., influencing suppliers, generating significant employment), and social impacts (e.g., local initiatives, alleviating poverty) (Kim et al., 2019; UNWTO/UNEP, 2005). As with the general sustainability critics debate (Giddings et al., 2002; Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010; Pucker, 2021), the challenge of reconciling economic growth and environmental protection is an ongoing struggle in the hospitality industry (Melissen, 2013). The global hospitality industry's commitment to sustainability has developed within existing capitalist business models that focus on economic growth and overconsumption of resources, rather than degrowth and reduced consumption (Hall, 2009; Jones et al., 2014; Parrique et al., 2019). Others attribute the lack of environmental commitment to the absence of effective environmental policies, subsidies, and regulations by public policy makers that prevent real action (Aall & Hille, 2010; Holden, 2009), and emphasises barriers faced by many hotel companies, such as limited resources, both economic capital and human capital, and limited knowledge about sustainable development (Chan, 2021; Chan, Okumus, & Chan, 2018; Chan et al., 2019).

In recent years, the hospitality industry has acknowledged the growing concern for the environment and the impacts to which industry contributes (Berezan et al., 2014; Chen & Tung, 2014; Lee et al., 2010; Martínez et al., 2019). Due to the limited empirical scope, this study mainly focuses on the environmental dimension of sustainability. In pursuit of a greener agenda, recent efforts in the hospitality industry have been mainly through self-regulatory measures of adopting environmental technology, sustainability reporting, increasing efficiency, and investing in third-party environmental certifications (Chan et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2019; Melissen, 2013).

2.1. Managing and communicating environmental sustainability performance

2.1.1. Traditional environmental management

ESP can be understood as processes and practices that a company employs to reduce, eliminate and ideally prevent negative environmental impacts (Hu, Wang, & Xie, 2018; Lee et al., 2010). Important focus areas in measuring and reporting ESP in the hospitality industry include water management, water conservation, energy efficiency, waste management, food and beverage, building materials and

equipment, and renewable energy systems (Khatter et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2019; Melissen & Sauer, 2019).

The traditional approach to environmental management focuses on systematic certificates that can help managers monitor ESP, as well as self-regulation and voluntary efforts that promote environmental sustainability (Hu et al., 2018; Martínez et al., 2019). The main drivers for the investment and implementation of environmental certifications and labels are constraints from continuous external factors such as government policy regulations, competitive and market pressures to "following the herd" to create better tourism experiences, and increased customer expectations and knowledge about the environment (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Ditlev-Simonsen & Midttun, 2011; Lee et al., 2019; Martínez et al., 2019). There are numerous certifications, schemes, labels, and checklists that hotels can use for guidance and inspiration[6], and to signal to their customers that they are helping to reduce their negative impact on the environment in this way (Lee et al., 2019; Melissen & Sauer, 2019). In particular, third-party certificates are considered more credible and of higher quality, such as the ISO 14001, which is the international standard for sustainable environmental management (Braungart & McDonought, 2008; Lee et al., 2010; Martínez et al., 2019). Another popular and commonly used scheme is the towel reuse programme (Chen et al., 2019; Goldstein, Cialdini, & Griskevicius, 2008).

Despite these environmental measures, as Pucker (2021) argues, measuring and reporting ESP is not a proxy for progress, and although many companies are committed to ESP management and reporting, carbon emissions have continued to rise. Furthermore, the use of environmental certifications and environmental management systems has been criticised by many academics, questioning their actual effect and whether it is a superficial commercial implementation by companies to appear environmentally friendly (Boiral & Henri, 2012; Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2020; King, Lenox, & Terlaak, 2005). Despite the fact that third-party certifications can ensure the measurement and management of ESP for hotels, they often neglect the important interaction with their customers, the demand-side (Aall & Hille, 2010; Chathoth, Altinay, Harrington, Okumus, & Chan, 2013; Lehner et al., 2016; Mont et al., 2014).

During a hotel stay, the customer uses the facilities and consumes the different services offered by the hotel, such as showers, air conditioning, heating, food and beverage, and swimming pools (Dolnicar, 2020). Investments in environmental technologies, certifications, and efficient energy systems can only reduce the impact to a certain extent without taking into account customers and their consumption

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[6] In addition to ISO 14001, popular third-party environmental certifications and labels in the Nordic can include Miløfyrtårn, Debio, Svanen, KRAV, GreenKey, etc. For more information of some of these certifications popular for tourism businesses, see Innovation Norway's overview: https://business.visitnorway.com/no/barekraftig-reiseliv/miljosertifiseringer-i-norge/

(Chan et al., 2018; Dubois et al., 2019). The totality of all hotels' ESP requires and therefore depends on customer participation and engagement (Chen et al., 2019; Font, English, Gkritzali, & Tian, 2021; Ritzer, 2015). This concept in turn postulates that reducing the environmental impact and resource consumption of hotels also depends on influencing customers to make more environmentally friendly choices while staying at a hotel (Goldstein et al., 2008; Kallbekken & Sælen, 2013).

As many argue that the current state of environmentally sustainable management in the hospitality industry is insufficient and that demand-side strategies need to match supply-side strategies (Holden, 2009; Jones, Hillier, & Comfort, 2016; Lehner et al., 2016; Melissen & Sauer, 2019), new, innovative approaches are arguably needed to bridge this gap (Dolnicar, 2020; Kallbekken & Sælen, 2013).

2.1.2. Towards a holistic approach of integrating consumer behaviour in environmental management

One such approach that seeks to influence customer consumption and has gained popularity in recent years is *nudging* (Dimant, van Kleef, & Shalvi, 2020; Dolnicar, 2020; Hertwig et al., 2019; Lehner et al., 2016). The concept was introduced in the award-winning book "Nudge" by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein (2009) and has since achieved recognition in politics and business. Nudging or a nudge can be understood as non-monetary, non-regulatory interventions in the choice environment that navigate people in a direction that is considered good for them, while preserving their freedom of choice (Halpern, 2015; Hertwig et al., 2019; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). It describes a diverse set of tools that use behavioural science to influence individual behaviour without limiting options or significantly altering economic incentives (Bruns et al., 2018). These tools, or interventions, can include social cues, norm signalling, defaults, information design, and the physical environment design (Bicchieri & Dimant, 2019; Farrow, Grolleau, & Ibanez, 2017; Lehner et al., 2016). Nudging, nudges, a nudge, will be used interchangeably in this study.

In light of the concept of nudging all hotels and its akin management can become so-called *choice architects.* A choice architect, in simple terms, is responsible for organising or designing the environment in which people make their decisions (Johnson et al., 2012; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). In practise, implementing nudging tools means that hotels can reduce their environmental impact by nudging customers to make better choices, which can be both an economic win for hotels and benefit the customer (e.g., eating healthier food) (Sunstein, 2019). In the hospitality industry, research efforts have been made to understand how nudging interventions can influence customers to make more environmentally friendly choices during their stay, thus reducing the overall environmental impact of the hotel with the help of customers. Some of these studies address reducing food consumption at dinner buffets using salience and informative nudging interventions (Kallbekken & Sælen, 2013),

healthier eating habits through smart placement of fruits and vegetables (Guthrie, Mancino, & Lin, 2015), reducing energy consumption, for example in hotels through social comparison with neighbours and informative nudges (Chang et al., 2015), and the use of social cues and norm signalling in the towel reuse programme (Bicchieri & Dimant, 2019; Goldstein et al., 2008)[7]. In this study, nudging is understood and referred to as an integral part of NCH's ESP, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, as NCH actively uses nudging tools to influence their customers (Kallbekken & Sælen, 2013; Nordic Choice Hotels, 2021g).

Academic critics of nudges argue that they are manipulative and threaten people's autonomy (Hansen & Jespersen, 2013; White, 2013). Because planners are forced to make some design choices, nudges cannot promise to preserve complete freedom of choice (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009; White, 2013). One argument is that when we are nudged we are no longer the authors of our choices, and consequently do not reflect our autonomous desires (Hausman & Welch, 2010). Another concern is that nudges are manipulative and opaque, and risk undermining institutional transparency (Hansen & Jespersen, 2013; Noggle, 2018). Nudges in the form of informative reminders and educational opportunities are often perceived as more acceptable (Bruns et al., 2018; Jung & Mellers, 2016). However, nudging has come under criticism as it is questioned whether it is effective in the long-term and whether it influences individuals' behaviour (Dimant et al., 2020; Hertwig et al., 2019; Mols, Haslam, Jetten, & Steffens, 2015). Moreover, there are concerns about who engages in nudging, their competence, credentials, and trustworthiness (Evers, Marchiori, Junghans, Cremers, & De Ridder, 2018; Schmidt & Engelen, 2020; Selinger & Whyte, 2010).

Through environmental certifications, labels, information, and nudging interventions, hotels can communicate to their customers about their ESP and what actions they are taking to help protect the environment (Goldstein et al., 2008; Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2020; Kallbekken & Sælen, 2013; Lee et al., 2019). Understanding how customers, as key stakeholders, perceive communication and interventions (i.e., signs, labels, certifications, water-saving showers, vegetarian options in buffets, energy efficiency, automatic lighting, and heating) is arguably important in creating a relationship of trust and mutual respect between the two, which in turn can strengthen the overall ESP (Khatter et al., 2019; Mele, Gomez, & Garay, 2019).

2.2. Establishing green trust with customers

In the wake of numerous scholarly works, there is a growing consensus that customer perception, concern, and awareness of environmental issues have increased in recent years (Berezan et al., 2014;

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[7] Nudging has been seen as a golden mean between regulations and subsidies, but it is important to add that nudging does not intend to replace policies of regulations and subsidies but is an additional tool and contrasting tool to legislation or enforcement that can add to an improved overall performance and still achieve compliance (Science and Technology Selected Committee, 2010).

Chen, Lin, & Weng, 2015; Gao et al., 2016; Purnama Alamsyah et al., 2020; Tierney, Hunt, & Latkova, 2011). Perception can be understood as a individuals' subjective understanding rather than objective reality (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015). Customer perception is, in other words, the individual process of selecting and organising the stimuli we are exposed to in order to create a coherent sense of our reality and generate meaning. The tension that arises is how customers perceive the ESP, activities and information used by NCH (i.e., the communications and interventions) and whether they feel that the hotel facilitates and nudges them to make best environmentally friendly choices, or whether they perceive that the hotel prevents them from making these choices. In light of this tension, this study aims to adjudicate how customers perceive NCH's ESP, based on the concepts of green trust and greenwashing.

2.2.1. Green trust

With a plethora of environmental sustainability promises from the hospitality industry, the end game of investing and communicating ESP is arguably to build a relationship of trust with customers (Chaudary et al., 2016; Chen & Chang, 2013; Chen, 2010; Lee et al., 2019). Trust has become a significant factor in the relationship between consumers and companies (Bachnik & Nowacki, 2018; Mostovicz, Kakabadse, & Kakabadse, 2011). Since customers rely heavily on corporate signals to make decisions, the perception of communicated ESP through environmental activities, environmental reports, websites, environmental certifications, and other information sources becomes important when customers make decisions (Bowen & Aragon-Correa, 2014; Chen et al., 2019). Thus, we need willingness, trust, and confidence in the environmentally friendly practices to rely on another party, and trust can be based on the integrity, competence, and reliability of the party (Castaldo, Premazzi, & Zerbini, 2010; Chen, 2010).

In this study, this trust is understood as customers' *green trust*. Green trust can be defined as: "*a willingness to depend on a product, service or a brand based on their belief or expectation resulting from its credibility, benevolence, and ability about its environmental performance.*" (Chen, 2010, p. 309). Green trust can be based on components such as customers' feeling that a hotels' environmental commitments, performances, arguments, and concerns are perceived as dependable, trustworthy, meeting expectations, and are compliant (Chen, 2010). More specifically, it is about talking and acting in consensus, and that this consensus is perceived by customers as trustworthy and credible, not just a symbolic act. When combining this green trust with the approach of using nudges to signal environmentally friendly consumption, green trust in NCH ability, reliability, integrity, and competence becomes crucial to making nudges work and have an impact on environmentally sustainable consumption (Bruns et al., 2018; Castaldo et al., 2010; Dimant et al., 2020; Mols et al., 2015). Furthermore, and as argued by Evers et al. (2018) and Selinger and Whyte (2010), questioning the

competence and trustworthiness of a choice architect can negatively influence the customers' perception and evaluation of environmental signals. Green trust and the trustworthiness of a choice architect are therefore closely linked.

In the academic discourse on customer perception of ESP in the hospitality industry, some studies indicate a positive correlation between customer perception of hotels ESP and green trust (see e.g., Ko et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2010; Martínez García de Leaniz et al., 2018). Most studies point to the benefits hotels can derive from positive customer perceptions related to important customer behavioural intentions, such as willingness to pay a premium, intention to revisit, customer satisfaction, and spreading positive word-of-mouth (WOM) (Lee et al., 2019; Martínez Garcíade Leaniz et al., 2018; Martínez, 2015). For example, when investigating customer perceptions of eco-certification among tour operators Esparon, Gyuris, and Stoeckl (2014) found that environmental-certified tour operators were favoured over non-environmental-certified companies. The potential economic and loyalty investment returns of establishing green trust in ESP for hotels can therefore be significant (Gao et al., 2016; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014; Lee et al., 2010; Martínez, 2015).

To ensure green trust is built, one needs information and the ability to evaluate that information (O'Neill, 2002). A buzzword that represents the notion of accuracy, disclosures, deliberations, and truth of relevant information is *transparency* (Cicala, Bush, Sherrell, & Deitz, 2014; Eggert & Helm, 2003; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014; O'Neill, 2002; Sunstein, 2017). Transparency is considered one of the basic requirements for creating a positive relationship between customers and companies (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014; Mostovicz et al., 2011). Eggert & Helm (2003) found that transparency is associated with the relationship between an individual's subjective perception of information about the relevant activities and characteristics of the other player in the interaction. In other words, perceived transparency depends on how accessible and relevant information is discerned and valued by individuals (Cicala et al., 2014). Indeed, the consensus view is that transparency is desirable with several studies indicating that transparency has a significant impact on customer trust (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014; Kim & Kim, 2016; Sunstein, 2017). Relevant studies examine how transparency of information can impact and improve the trust relationship between customers and companies in relation to corporate social responsibility (CSR)[8] (Cicala et al., 2014; Kim & Kim, 2016).

However, when this green trust and transparency are not present, there is a risk of imbalance between customer perception and the hotels' ESP where only the hotel knows the quality or intention of its ESP (Chen et al., 2019). If customers do not feel green trust, they are likely to be suspicious of the hotels'

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[8]CSR can be understood as a management concept where companies integrate environmental and social concerns in their business activities and in cooperation with stakeholders (Chaudary et al., 2016; Olsen & Syse, 2020). CSR is voluntary acts for companies and the financial benefit from integrating CSR is disputed (Hussain, Rigoni, & Orij, 2018).

intention and motivation, and its subsequent role in nudging them towards the right choices. When or if this happens, the hotel risks customers perceiving its ESP as *greenwashing*.

2.2.2. Greenwashing

Greenwashing is a growing concern in the hospitality industry (Chen et al., 2019; Chen & Chang, 2013; Rahman et al., 2015). Greenwashing, as we will use the term, is defined as: *"Tactics that deceive consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or a service."* (Parguel, Benoît-Moreau, & Larceneux, 2011, p. 15). It is about the importance of what we say and what we do (Bowen & Aragon-Correa, 2014; TerraChoice, 2009), and that the perception of greenwashing can damage a customers' attitude towards a hotels' ESP (Parguel et al., 2011). In other words, perceptions and suspicions of greenwashing negatively affect green trust (Chen et al., 2019; Chen & Chang, 2013), and consequently, mistrust arises in a hotel as a choice architect and designer of environmentally friendly behaviour (Castaldo et al., 2010; Selinger & Whyte, 2010).

The perception of greenwashing can occur on many levels. For example, practises by hoteliers that are perceived to be environmentally friendly (e.g., towel reuse programme) may be viewed by customers as greenwashing because of the apparent financial ulterior motive of saving labour and water costs (Rahman et al., 2015). This greenwashing perception can also be attributed to mistrust of top management (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Hotels often focus on few communicated environmental activities, and for customers these environmental activities are often seen as an integrated part of the hotel product rather than an additional environmental attribute (Chen et al., 2019; Robinot & Giannelloni, 2010). Robinot & Giannelloni (2010) found that hotel service activities such as information about linen and towel reuse programmes were perceived as "basic" services rather than "plus" environmental activities. They also found that unfavourable perceptions can reduce customer satisfaction and green trust. Maintaining a high level of performance of these activities is therefore critical (Chen et al., 2019; Rahman et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the discrepancy between communicated environmental initiatives and actual hotel compliance can be a contributing factor to customers' perceptions of greenwashing (Nyilasy, Gangadharbatla, & Paladino, 2014). Specifically, if customers experience that the hotel does not *walk the walk and talk the talk*, it may be perceived as greenwashing (Olsen & Syse, 2020; TerraChoice, 2009). This perception can be related to the fact that consumers view corporate CSR efforts along a continuum of self-centred or other-centred motives (Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006). Findings from previous studies suggest that consumer responses to CSR efforts are viewed positively when they are perceived as value-driven and negatively to efforts that are perceived as egoistic-driven (Ellen et al., 2006; Nyilasy et al., 2014).

This negative perception in turn relates to absence of transparency, where failure to promote relevant, accurate and credible information can lead to mistrust and perceived weak transparency (Cicala et al., 2014; O'Neill, 2002). A question that can be asked here is whether a pitfall of environmental certifications and environmental labels is that they can be perceived as greenwashing if customers perceive the hotel as non-compliant with their certification? Although certification schemes objectively confirm that a company complies with standards, its activities are evaluated by customers (Bachnik & Nowacki, 2018). While Lee et al., (2019) and Esparon et al., (2014) found a positive correlation between customer perceptions and environmental certification, on the other hand, it postulates that a disadvantage in communicating environmental certification to customers if compliance is not perceived, behavioural intentions may be negative (Chen et al., 2019). Studies investigating the relationship between negative perception of environmental certifications and behavioural intentions remains elusive. Most critique of certifications point out that it may not be as effective as suggested, and that the effect on ESP remains unimproved or inconclusive (Boiral & Henri, 2012; Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2020; Qi, Zeng, Li, & Tam, 2012).

Due to the additional abundance of factoids, labels, sustainability reports, certifications, and information, misinformation, uncertainty and scepticism towards environmental communication can occur (Morton, 2018; Nuttavuthisit & Thøgersen, 2017; O'Neill, 2002; Pucker, 2021). As suggested by O'Neill (2002), increasing transparency to improve trust is not necessarily a recipe of success, as increased transparency can create an overload of unsorted information and potential misinformation that can lead to confusion and uncertainty rather than trust. She further argues that transparency can encourage people to be less honest and increase deception. More is not necessarily better, and well-placed trust develops from dynamic inquiry rather than blind acceptance (O'Neill, 2002). This concern has been highlighted by Sunstein (2017) who suggests that for outputs (e.g., information about performance), transparency is exceedingly important. In other words, NCH can sit on information that its customers can use to make life more navigable, and the disclosure of this information can spur better performance. Furthermore, process mapping, which allows business processes to be mapped and analysed in relation to ESP, can increase transparency (Klotz, Horman, Bi, & Bechtel, 2008).

2.3. Reacting to environmental sustainability interventions: Two theoretical frameworks

Underneath all the epiphenomena of ESP lies a deep and thorny question: is green trust really necessary? The answer is far from unanimous, with variants of questions forming the theoretical backdrop to this debate. Is the pursuit of ESP futile, a lost cause? How can green trust be useful to the hospitality industry? With the increasing investment and effort in ESP these are important concerns

that need to be confronted. To address these concerns, this study discusses customers' reactions to environmental communications and interventions in their choice environment, whether they oppose or agree upon these interventions, and consequently interpret if NCH should invest in green trust, based on two theoretical frameworks, namely RCT and BE.

2.3.1. Rational Choice Theory

RCT is based on the notion of: "*possessive individualists seeking to achieve their own purposes in competition with one another*" (Weale, 1992, p. 46). It derives from neoclassical economics and the mathematical axioms of game theory, which involves modelling competitive behaviour in which individuals seek to maximise their self-interest and utility (satisfaction) (Toke, 2000). RCT, the rational agent, and homo economicus are all interrelated concepts that describe and propose the economic approach to human behaviour (Buchanan, 1991; Levitt & List, 2008; Stigler & Becker, 1977; Zafirovski, 2018)[9]. Theoretically, RCT postulates that rational agents are in possession of what can be defined as the utility-maximisation, self-interest, stable preferences, freedom from temptation and self-control problems, and complete information (Andreadakis, 2019; Buchanan, 1991; Thaler, 2000; Zafirovski, 2018). In other words, the behavioural principles of utility-maximisation (Thaler, 2000). The basic premise of RCT is that aggregate social behaviour results from the behaviour of individual actors, each of whom makes their individual decisions based on their preferences and the set of choices they face (Zafirovski, 2018).

In light of this approach, NCH and their akin management apparatus presuppose customers as rational decision-makers who can adjudicate the environmental quality of hotel services based on Bayesian statistical rationality[10] and iterative decision-making, which can establish the optimal balance between the experienced utility (subjective pleasure derived from a hotel visit) and the environmental utility (the minimum environmental footprint). Deriving from this idea, the weight of environmental utility falls on the customer, as claimed by RCT (Buchanan, 1991), who can decide individually and optimise their environmental choices without the need for regulation and governance. This autonomy suggests that NCH should not be concerned about creating green trust and communicating its ESP to its customers and keeping these interventions to a minimum.

Furthermore, resistance to interventions is likely and making environmentally friendly choices in the hotel is a matter of personal preference and self-interest. According to RCT, it can be argued that environmental issues are of relatively low importance because environmental concerns are unlikely to

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[9] Other important contemporary scholars and economists that have written about the RCT and economic approach to human behaviour include Becker (1993), Coleman (1990) and Kiser and Hechter (1990). For a recent overview, see (Zafirovski, 2018).

[10] Bayesian statistics is an approach to data analysis that assumes that available knowledge about parameters in a statistical model is updated with the information in observed data (van de Schoot et al., 2021). In other words, it assumes that all information is available and the individual can make the preferred choices based on this knowledge (Zafirovski, 2018).

be as important in the calculus of economic well-being, which directly interferes with perceptions of personal well-being (Weale, 1992). If the personal costs of an action are greater than the personal benefits derived from their personal contribution to the solution, they will not contribute to the solution (Toke, 2000). In other words, even if a person acknowledges that there are environmental problems and that the hotel is trying to do something about them and encourages their customers to do the same, because the cost (pain) is greater than the benefit (pleasure), they will not participate (Dolnicar, Crouch, & Long, 2008; Toke, 2000).

When acting in self-interest and with utility-maximisation in mind, it may be particularly easy to abandon environmental consciousness during a hotel stay (Aall, 2014; Dolnicar et al., 2008). Some customers are likely to oppose ESP and encouragement of participation in environmental practises at the hotel (Dolnicar & Grün, 2009). The absence of daily luxuries and restrictions on environmental products and services (e.g., towel reuse programme, daily room cleaning, water conservation in the shower, and turned-down air conditioning) may harm customer satisfaction (Berezan et al., 2014; Chan et al., 2018; Dolnicar & Grün, 2009). Therefore, some customers are unwilling to compromise and accept these "pains" as it hinders their utility-maximisation and expected pleasure during their hotel stay (Dolnicar et al., 2008; Sen, 1977). With the RCT idiom in mind, one would therefore expect environmental issues and activities displayed in a hotel to be of low prominence to such customers, as they do not directly impinge perceptions of personal well-being in the same way that economic well-being and maximisation of satisfaction and self-interest do (Toke, 2000; Weale, 1992). How these customers react to the ESP and signalling of NCH may therefore be important for management to motivate customer participation and value (Berezan et al., 2014).

2.3.2. Behavioural Economics

The second theoretical approach borrows primarily (though not exclusively) from the interdisciplinary intellectual arsenal of cognitive sciences and BE and, opposite to RCT, assumes that human decision-making is often irrational, flawed, incomplete, and subject to cognitive biases (Ariely, 2008; Kahneman, 2011). BE seeks to understand the mechanisms that drive human decisions and is primarily concerned with the limits to the rationality of economic agents (Hertwig et al., 2019). It challenges RCT that uncertainty is not taken into account in decision-making and that individuals' rationality is limited by available time and other cognitive constraints (Kahneman, 2011) as well as emotions (Thaler, 2000). It is assumed that customers are not always right, lack self-control, and face uncertainty, therefore need to be navigated. Hence, understanding the complexity of human behaviour requires an understanding of the environment and cognition (Lockton, 2012; Simon, 1955, 1990).

As proposed by BE, one of the answers to tame uncertainty and cognitive biases without completely disrupting autonomy is nudging (Sunstein, 2019). The key reason for this assumption is that nudges aim to navigate people to make the right decisions in complex environments (Lehner et al., 2016; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). Proponents argue that cognitive and motivational deficits (such as inertia, loss aversion, lack of self-control) that would normally lead individuals to make choices that are bad for their economy, health, and happiness, can be harnessed to nudge individuals to behave in ways that are consistent with their preferences (Hertwig et al., 2019; Sunstein, 2019; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). Consequently, this nudging may lead to better outcomes that would otherwise have been overridden by cognitive biases.

In contrast to RCT, BE postulates that NCH should invest in environmental sustainability and build green trust with its customers. In the absence of self-control, interventions in the choice environment help customers make good choices. Personal feelings are involved when they engage in environmental activities in the hotel, these feelings can relate to a moral obligation to recycle waste, conserve water, and eat less meat (Han & Hyun, 2018). Customers who exhibit these personal characteristics are likely to participate in these activities (Gao et al., 2016), and in conjunction with nudging and BE, they are likely to accept the need to be navigated and disciplined by nudges (Jung & Mellers, 2016). With the performance and communication now employed by NCH (which will be presented in more detail in the document analysis), they assume that customers are riddled with cognitive biases and rely on signals from NCH to make the best decisions. These signals include signs encouraging towel reuse, showerheads that conserve water, automatic heating, food placement, and information that can influence customers to make certain choices.

To test these concepts and theories that encompass customer behaviour, awareness, and perceptions, the first step relates to the subject of my analysis under scrutiny, namely NCH. By reviewing company documents, this step seeks to understand how they themselves perceive and describe their ESP and its impact, as a basis for further interpretation of customers' green trust in performance. The second step empirically investigates semi-longitudinal customer feedback data that aims to determine how customers perceive the NCH's ESP in line with the research questions. Ultimately, the analysis of the data and the findings from the methodological process will enable an understanding of the complex and dynamic customer-company relationship, what constitutes strong green trust and, ultimately, strong ESP. The following chapter will provide the methodological foundation upon which this study is based.

3. Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological design, data collection and the process of data analysis. The scope of the study is to investigate customer perception and evaluation of Nordic Choice Hotels' environmental sustainability performance. Based on this scope, there are two elements to consider for the methodological approach. Firstly, how does NCH perceive its own ESP, and secondly, how do customers perceive ESP. By distinguishing the two actors, separate methodological approaches are required, but the overall methodological design of this study is mixed methods and triangulation that aims to bring all the data together for comparison and comprehensive interpretation. It is important to emphasise that the main narrative is the interpretation of customer feedback and how they perceive performance, but without the understanding of NCH's own perception ESP the comparison and closer examination arguably remains evasive. To review NCH, I will use a document analysis of NCH's self-reported ESP goals and results. To interpret customer feedback data, I will use a mix of approaches including aggregate statistical data, text mining, and a qualitative selection of open-ended text responses.

3.1. Methodological design

3.1.1. Mixed methods design and triangulation

Combining methods in social science research has gained prominence through a research approach called the mixed methods design, mixed methods approach, or mixed methods research (Timans, Wouters, & Heilbron, 2019). In this study, these terms are used interchangeably. As the name implies, the mixed methods design can be understood as a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data to illustrate a more complete understanding of the phenomena under study (Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012; Timans et al., 2019). By examining information collected through different methods, the researcher can compare and confirm findings across different datasets, potentially reducing the bias that can occur in a study using only one method (Bowen, 2009). Similarly, triangulation is the process of examining a problem using multiple methods to obtain a more complete picture (O'Cathain, Murphy, & Nicholl, 2010). Due to this similarity, this study treats these research designs as one orientation (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, Dicenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014; Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012). Denny and Weckesser (2018) and Hauserman, Ivankova, and Stick (2013) are examples of studies adopting mixed methods design of quantitative surveys and open-ended text responses, and triangulation of results to interpret findings. The mixed methods design and triangulation in this study aim to explore the data through complementarity (Carter et al., 2014; Munk, 2019). Complementarity can be described as a division of labour in which quantitative and qualitative analysis unfold undisturbed by each other, with the latter taking on the task of interpreting, triangulating, and

situating the findings obtained from the former in the interpretive phase of the study (Carter et al., 2014; Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012).

The rationale and reasoning for using a mixed methods design and triangulation in this thesis stems from the nature and quantity of the data and how it will be processed and interpreted. In mixed methods research, there are several methods of integration, such as theory integration, method integration, data integration, and design integration (Frederiksen, Gundelach, & Nielsen, 2014). This study will use data integration, which refers to the relationship between datasets and how data is directly and indirectly connected (Frederiksen et al., 2014). Arguably, the advantage of mixed methods and triangulation is that they allow for a broader understanding of research findings and clarification of different results by bringing them into dialogue with each other (Bowen, 2009; Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012; O'Cathain et al., 2010). Here, the aim is to attack the secondary data from different perspectives, and the subsequent summary dialogue enables a deeper understanding of the research findings. The conceptual model of data analysis for this study is visualised in Figure 2.
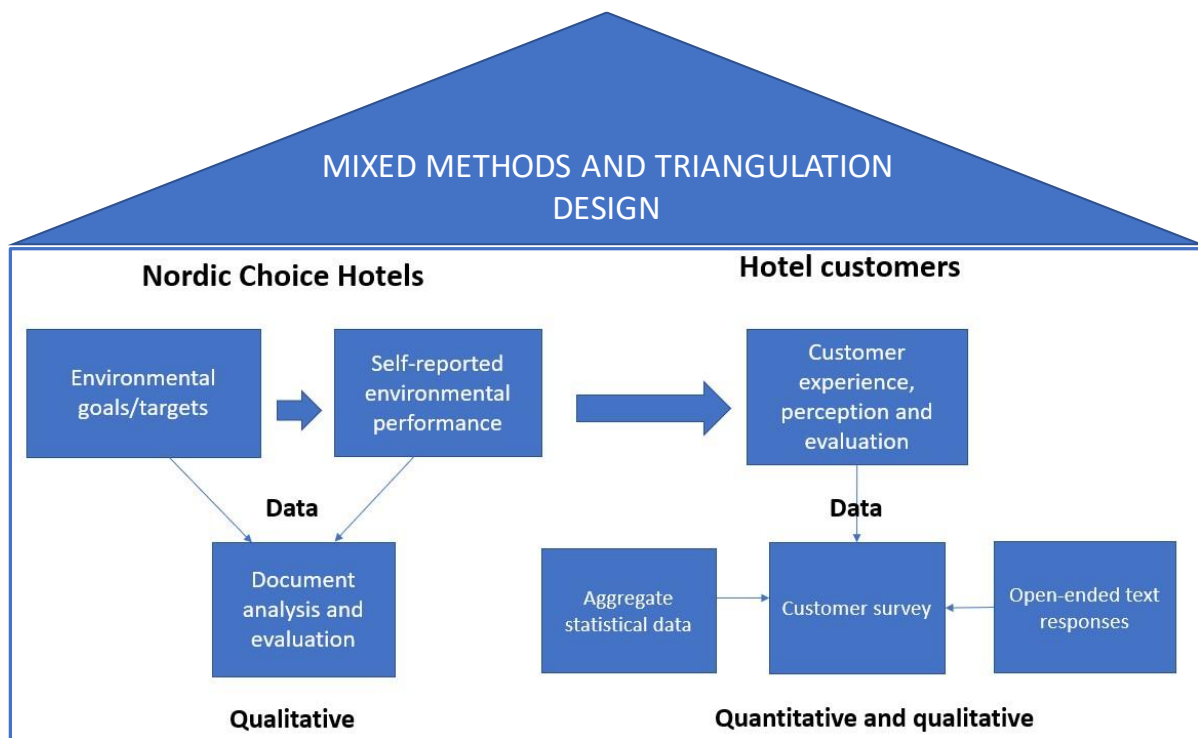
Figure 2: Working model of the methodological analysis of the two parties in this study.

3.1.2. General methodological design

The methodological design of this study is based on four steps: Step 1, document analysis to assess NCH reported performance (dataset 1). Step 2, presentation of the obtained aggregate statistical data from NCH. This statistical data is already generated data and is not part of the results but will be used for interpretation in Chapter 5 (dataset 2). Step 3a, thematic systematisation of the open-ended text

responses through keyword frequency analysis (dataset 3). Step 3b, quantitative, manual systematisation of the open-ended text responses into categories of implication and constructiveness (dataset 3). Step 4, qualitative investigation and selection of responses (dataset 3).

3.2. Data collection

This study uses secondary data collection. Secondary data analysis involves the use of existing data by researchers who were not involved in the original data collection (Greenhoot & Dowsett, 2012). There are many advantages to using existing data, the obvious one being that the data has already been collected, which frees the researcher from spending a lot of time on it (Johnston, 2014). In addition, the data often has large samples, longitudinal design and gives the researcher more information to study. However, there are some challenges and weaknesses in collecting secondary data which will be discussed in section 3.4.

3.2.1. Dataset 1: Hotel documents for analysis

The documents collected (dataset 1) for the analysis are a mixture of open-source and closed, internal documents obtained from the contact person at NCH. The open-source documents are the Annual Report Nordic Choice Hotels 2019 (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019f) and the WeCare Annual Report 2019 parts 1 and 2 (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g, 2019a). These reports are the most recent published by the company. The closed, internal document obtained from the contact person is an internal company Nudging Manual for management and restaurant staff (Killie, E., personal communication, 5. February 2021). Lastly, the website will be used to supplement the findings in the reports (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2021a).

Hotel survey data collection

The nature of the customer feedback data comes from a survey conducted by NCH and appears in two different forms. First, aggregate statistical data (dataset 2), and second, open-ended text responses (dataset 3). We co-examine these two customer feedback datasets because the aggregate statistical data only provides a simplified view of customers' perceptions of NCH's ESP. As explained in further detail in the next sub chapter, the aggregate statistical data obtained contains only one survey question and was not formulated to answer a hypothesis, nor can it be compared and validated with other statistical data (e.g., gender, age, nationality). The interpretation and validity of this isolated dataset is therefore limited. However, in addition to this survey question, there is a subsequent follow-up question where the customer can provide an open-ended text response.

NCH uses a customer feedback portal called Loopon, a data portal that provides hotels with a holistic approach to designing and analysing digital guest communications (Loopon AB, 2020). NCH uses this

portal for post-stay services, guest survey design and reputation management. This survey is sent out each week to customers who stayed at a NCH the previous week, and responses are collected in the Loopon portal of the affiliated hotel. Appendix A provides a copy of the survey that is sent to customers.

Data collection for this study was done by obtaining external customer feedback survey data from the entire NCH chain (Killie & Johansson, personal communication 15. February 2021). Data was obtained in three separate sets of Excel files, over a semi-longitudinal time frame of three years, 2018-2020. The documents each contain two sheets, one with aggregate statistical data on survey responses to the sustainability question: "*I feel that this hotel contributes to taking care of the environment, people, and community*", and the second sheet contains open-ended text responses to the follow-up question: "*How can we improve our work to take care of the environment, people and community?*". Due to the nature of the data, the documents were split into two datasets, with dataset 2 consisting of aggregate statistical results and dataset 3 consisting of the open-ended text responses from 2018-2020.

3.2.2. Dataset 2: Statistical survey data

The NCH customer survey is sent to all overnight customers who stayed at a NCH and provided their email address at the time of booking or upon arrival (Killie, E., personal communication, 11 February 2021). It includes all types of customers, with no distinction made between markets (e.g., leisure, business), nationality, booking process (walk-in, web, telephone, e-mail, etc.), etc. Table 1 provides an overview of the relationships between the total number of occupied beds, the total number of surveys sent out, the total number of actual responses to the entire survey, and the number of responses to the sustainability question.

Table 1: Tabular overview comparing total number of occupied beds, the number of surveys sent out, number of actual replies to the survey, and the number of responses to the sustainability question. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number (Data source: Killie, E., personal communication, 15 February 2021. Author's visualisation).

	2018	**2019**	**2020**	**Total**
Total number of beds occupied	10 823 679	11 661 089	6 619 840	29 104 608
Number of total surveys sent out	2 124 255	2 305 120	1 489 092	5 918 467
Percent	20%	20%	22%	20%
Number of actual replies to the whole survey	334 009	330 134	221 787	885 930

Percent	16%	14%	15%	15%
Number of replies to the sustainability question	259 349	142 203	127 263	528 815
Percent	12%	6%	9%	9%

Dataset 3 was obtained through contacts at NCH (Killie, E. & Johansson, J., personal communication, 11. February 2021), and consists of aggregate statistical results from the survey question relating to sustainability: "*I feel that this hotel contributes to taking care of the environment, people, and community".* The statistical result from this question is the only one collected for the scope of this study, other questions from the survey are excluded (see the entire customer survey in Appendix A). Customers can answer this question on a scale of:

I totally agree	I somewhat agree	I do not agree	I strongly disagree	Unable to answer

An overview of the results of the responses to this statement is presented in Table 2, with a corresponding statistical visualisation of the average responses, see Figure 3.

Table 2: Tabular overview of dataset 2. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number (Data source: Killie, E., personal communication, 11 February 2021. Author's visualisation).

Scale	2018		2019		2020		Average	
I totally agree	50%	130 088	48%	68 113	46%	58 255	85 485	48,5%
I somewhat agree	24%	62 438	25%	35 190	24%	30 429	42 686	24%
I do not agree	3%	8666	3%	4971	4%	4829	6155	3,5%
I strongly disagree	1%	2286	1%	1219	1%	1517	1674	0,9%
Unable to answer	22%	55 871	23%	32 710	25%	32233	40 271	23%
TOTAL	100%	259 349	100%	142 203	100%	127 263	176 272	100%

I feel that this hotel contributes to taking care of the environment, people and community

- I totally agree: 48,5%
- I somewhat agree: 21%
- I do not agree: 3,5%
- I strongly disagree: 0,1%
- Unable to answer: 23%
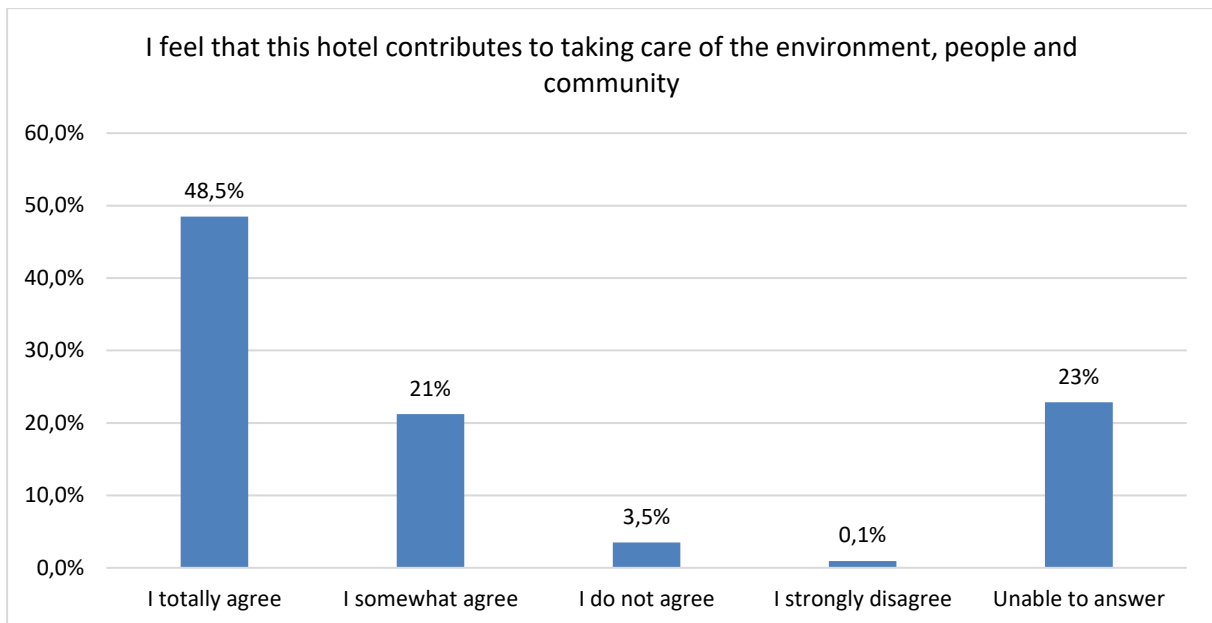
Figure 3: Statistical overview of aggregate data (Data source: Killie, E., personal communication, 11 February 2021. Author's visualisation).

It is important to note that these are not my results, I did not calculate or collect them. However, I will interpret these given results along with the results from the analysis of dataset 3 in Chapter 5.

3.2.3.   Dataset 3: Open-ended text responses

Dataset 3 consists of customer feedback in the form of open-ended text responses. These open-ended text responses are the main object of analysis and can hopefully provide a deeper understanding of what lies behind the statistical data. The reactivity of customers makes the analysis interesting, but at the same time this type of data is difficult to interpret as its reliability hinges on self-reported utterances (Fowler, 2014). Although the nature of the data is qualitative, here the open-ended text responses are converted into quantifiable categories using data integration and analyse them using quantitative techniques (Frederiksen et al., 2014).

Customer feedback can be defined as customer communication regarding a product or service (Nasr, Burton, Gruber, & Kitshoff, 2014). It can be categorised as solicited or unsolicited feedback, where solicited feedback is encouraged by the company, e.g., through surveys, while unsolicited feedback is based on customers own desire to share their experiences, e.g., through third-party websites such as Tripadvisor (Nasr et al., 2014). The data collected in this study is solicited. Collecting and analysing customer feedback is important because it allows companies to continuously learn and adapt their products and services to customer preferences (Ordenes, Theodoulidis, Burton, Gruber, & Zaki, 2014). As summarised by Mulder & Ellinger (2013), the effects of feedback can be positive on competitiveness, organisational effectiveness, and various employee behavioural aspects, such as improvements in job performance and job motivation.

In the same manner as dataset 2, dataset 3 was received by contacts at NCH (Killie, E. & Johansson, J., personal communication, 15 February 2021). The format was an Excel sheet consisting of 9612 cells of open-ended text responses. What is important to emphasise about these responses, is that after responding to the scale question (dataset 2), the option to leave an open-ended text response appears for the customer *only* if they cheque the alternatives "I do not agree" and "I strongly disagree". When these alternatives are answered, a follow-up question appears: "*How can we improve our work to take care of the environment, people and community?*". The number of customers who left an open-ended response after answering either of the two alternatives relating to the sustainability question, is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Tabular overview of dataset 3. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number (Data source: Killie, E., personal communication, 11 February 2021. Author's visualisation).

	2018	2019	2020	Total
Number of replies to the sustainability question	259 349	142 203	127 263	528 815
No. of open-ended text responses to how they can improve	4502	2599	2511	9612
Percent	1,7%	1,8%	1,2%	1,8%

Dataset two consists of many different elements. First, there are multiple languages detected, such as English, Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, German, and Danish. Second, the data comes from all hotels in NCH, which gives a versatile range of responses from people staying in different concept hotels. Third, the responses vary from two-word responses to long paragraphs, which presents the author with a painstaking challenge of systematisation and interpretation. Fourth, these responses do not identify or attach to variables such as gender, age, education, purpose of visit, and nationality. This absence of variables for comparison was because of limitations of personal data and data privacy concerns. Fifth, and most importantly, the dataset is likely to be negatively skewed, since only customers who check the alternatives "I do not agree" and "I strongly disagree" can leave an open-ended text response. This negative bias constitutes a major limitation that is discussed further in subsection 3.4.

3.3. Data analysis

The data analysis first consists of a document analysis that aims to look at how NCH reports and evaluates its ESP. Second, it describes the data analysis process of the customer feedback data using statistical and text mining analysis that aims to interpret how customers perceive and evaluate NCH's performance. The reasoning behind conducting separate analysis is to get an overview of the two

different actors and then bring them together in the discussion for comparison to interpret connections or disconnections in performance perception.

3.3.1. Dataset 1: Document analysis of hotel documents

Bowen (2009, p. 27) writes: "*Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents.*" It is qualitative research aimed at examining and interpreting data to gain meaning and understanding, and to develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009; Pershing, 2002). Documents can be examined to verify findings, or refute evidence from other sources (Bowen, 2009). Evaluation research can be a useful method for improving, monitoring and revising documents (Jong & Schellens, 2000). One of the traditional evaluation approaches is ex-ante and ex-post evaluation, an approach that aims to assess an organisation's goals and targets (ex-ante) and what has been achieved (ex-post) (Samset & Christensen, 2013). Using the ex-ante and ex-post evaluation approach in this study allows us to review and revise a selection of documents to verify what NCH intends to do (goals and targets) and what they have achieved (results and outcomes) (Bowen, 2009; Frederiksen et al., 2014). The results are presented by extracting and citing various goals and results that NCH has made in its environmental sustainability agenda. This presentation constitutes an overview of how NCH reports and communicates their performance, which is used in Chapter 5 to compare with customers' perceptions of the performance.

The main reason for choosing document analysis in this study is to compare how NCH perceives its ESP to how customers perceive this performance. The aim is not to conduct a detailed analysis, but to provide an overview of the core elements of NCH's ESP. The process of document analysis is conducted as content analysis. Content analysis is the process of organising information into categories that relate to the central question of the research (Bowen, 2009), here in this study by reviewing and presenting the goals and targets of NCH (ex-ante) and the results of what they have achieved (ex-post) in relation to environmental sustainability. The results are presented through the numerical and descriptive representation of NCH self-reported ESP.

The choice rationale of the selected documents is that they showcase NCH overall sustainability performance and capture the whole picture of the company's sustainability work. It allows for a deeper examination of goals and results related to the scope of this study, which is environmental sustainability. These documents represent the most recent and up-to-date sustainability goals and results published by NCH and are open-source documents that are transparent and available to customers on their website. Not only do they present the goals and results from 2019, but they also illustrate the goals and results from previous years that give an indication of the development of NCH's ESP, further demonstrating the representativeness of the documents. In addition to the open-

source documents, the company's internal Nudging Manual showcases the sophistication of the methods NCH uses to reduce its environmental impacts relating to the food domain. With a mixture of these documents, it displays a representative overview over the recent years goals and results of NCH's ESP, in addition to a deeper insight into methods used to reduce their environmental impact.

3.3.2. Dataset 2: Statistical survey data

As mentioned under data collection, the obtained statistical data from NCH are not part of my data analysis or results. They are predetermined results from NCH and are only used for interpretation in the discussion.

3.3.3. Dataset 3: Open-ended text responses

While the nature of dataset 3 is qualitative, the process of analysis and systematisation is conducted using qualitative techniques of text mining. Text mining is an automated process that uses language processing to extract valuable insights from unstructured text (Feldman, 1997; MonkeyLearn, 2020). This technique can transform incoherent data into coherent data that can be used in the analysis of large datasets. Text mining intends to solve the problem of automatic analysis of raw text data using various techniques, and it provides both a quantitative result of frequency and qualitative result that identifies relevant information within a text (MonkeyLearn, 2020). One of the applications of text mining is the analysis of open-ended text responses in surveys (Agrawal & Batra, 2013). Open-ended questions allow respondents to answer a question in their own words, and this option has two implications. On the one hand, such types of unstructured responses provide richer and more valuable information than close-ended questions because they can generate information that was not expected. On the other hand, despite their added value, researchers tend to avoid these open-ended questions in surveys because coding responses is laborious and time-consuming (Agrawal & Batra, 2013; Johnston, 2014). By choosing to analyse open-ended text responses, this study contributes to scholarly discourse. The approach to analysing the open-ended text responses is first by conducting a thematic keyword frequency analysis and second by conducting a systematic, manual categorisation.

Pre-processing of the dataset was done in several steps to "clean" the data. The open-ended text responses in the original Excel file were converted to CSV (comma delimited), see Appendix B for the step-by-step process.

Thematic keyword frequency analysis using PostgreSQL

The first step in the analysis of dataset 3 (step 3a), was to systematically search for the frequency of selected keywords. The purpose of this step is twofold. First, it will provide an overview of which sustainability areas in NCH customers leave the most feedback on, perhaps indicating a higher level of

awareness. Second, random keyword search will narrow down and sample the dataset for further text analysis and categorisation.

Keyword analysis is one of the main tasks of text mining (MonkeyLearn, 2020). Keywords are the most relevant terms within a text and can be used to summarise its content. It is suitable when studying the development of a knowledge domain with extensive scholarly outputs over a short period of time (Qian, Law, & Wei, 2019), as it enables the systematic review of trends, networks, relationships, and keyword knowledge (Chiang, 2020), as well as the creation of a conceptual network or visualisation of keywords (Bach, Schatten, & Maruši´c, 2013).

The keyword selection in this study was based on a keyword frequency search from the WeCare Annual Report 2019 Part 1 (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g) conducted in Nvivo (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2020), in addition to random author selected keywords based on an initial review of open-ended text responses. A visualisation of the word cloud demonstrating the frequency of keywords that inspired the selected keywords can be found in Appendix C. The selection and categorisation of keywords gleaned from the focus areas of environmental sustainability at NCH, as briefly introduced in subsection 1.2.

Focus area 1: Sustainable operations

Category 1. Water

Two keywords were included for the initial search. The keyword "water" is generic and thus likely to result in hits across multiple contexts. "Towel" was added as a random keyword (one could also have selected bathtub, shower, toilet etc.) as an initial review of the feedback indicated that "towel" was a frequently mentioned keyword among customers. Further support for "towel" as a keyword comes from several studies conducted on environmental activities in the hospitality industry (see e.g., Chen et al., 2019).

Category 2. Chemicals

This category closely relates to the first category, and it may be interesting to see if customers reacted to chemicals used for cleaning. In addition, "pool" was included as a random keyword because one of the most chemical-intense activities in hotels is pool maintenance (Dolnicar, 2020).

Category 3. Energy

This category includes various elements of a hotel that have an impact on the environment, such as "air condition", "heating", and "ventilation", which are all energy-intensive activities (Dolnicar, 2020).

More generic keywords such as "light", "electric" and "energy" were also chosen to broaden the search.

Category 4. Waste

For this category, several keywords were selected to encompass both generic and specific keywords, such as "waste", "garbage", "sorting", "packaging", and "plastic".

Category 3. Transport

In this category, customers are likely to be most concerned with whether the hotel facilitates good parking and charging possibilities. The selected keywords in this category were "electric car", "parking", and "fee" (as in parking fee, but to avoid duplicate hits of "parking" in English, only "fee" and not "parking fee" was searched).

Focus area 2: The Food Revolution

The keywords chosen in this category aimed at embracing important areas of sustainable food production and consumption. General keywords included are "raw material" and "biodiversity", while more focused keywords from production include "organic" or "ecological". Other keywords of interest included "vegetarian" and "vegan", as the demand for vegetarian and vegan options is increasing and therefore it may be interesting to see if NCH is meeting this demand (Rivera & Shani, 2013). Since NCH is Debio (Norway) and KRAV (Sweden) certified, it may be intriguing to see if customers report seeing evidence of these certifications, or if they ask for them (customer awareness). Therefore, the specific keywords "Debio" and "KRAV" were added to this category[11].

Focus area 3: Ethical trading

This category is linked to suppliers. The general keywords selected were "ethic", "trade" and "supplier", as well as the randomly selected specific keyword "Fairtrade".

General

The keywords in this category do not fit directly into the above categories but were important keywords for analysis and helped to narrow down the sample.

Category 1. Environment

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[11] Sidenote: food waste is an important focus area for reducing environmental impact at the hotel, but as the keyword "waste" is already included under the waste category of sustainable operations, it will not be included here as well. All mentions of "food waste" will be found by the data program.

This category includes keywords related to climate change and the environment, such as "sustainable", "climate, "emission", "CO_2", and "footprint". In addition, "green" was selected as a keyword. There are two main reasons for this. First, "green" is a word used to describe various environment-related areas, such as "green economy", "green growth", "green energy", "green awareness", etc. (Purnama Alamsyah et al., 2020; Stoknes, 2020). Secondly, the word "green" can also be used for the term "greenwashing".

Category 2. Economy

This category includes keywords related to the profit area of NCH, such as expenses and profit. The general keywords were, "economy", "profit", "material", "reuse", "value", "consumption", and "furbish".

Category 3. Inconspicuous

This category includes randomly selected words noted down for a keyword search during an initial review of the data material and that did not fit any of the category descriptions. These included keywords such as, "product", "wasting", "reduce", "quality", "local", "resource", "knowledge", "information", and "luxury".

Appendix D provides an overview of the 55 keywords searched in the selected languages of English, Norwegian and Swedish. The result of the keyword frequency analysis is visualised using an open-source word cloud tool called WordArt (WordArt, 2021).

For data analysis, the 9210 open-ended text responses in the formatted CSV file were imported into PostgreSQL (The PostgreSQL Global Development Group, 2021) for keyword searching. Standard search functions were used, with "%" as the set wildcard. Wildcards in PostgreSQL are used to find matching row values from tables and return all rows that match the search within the %xxx%. The purpose of this analysis is for PostgreSQL to identify the responses that contain the selected keywords. For example, searching for the keyword '%water%' found all rows containing that keyword and added a Boolean colon set to 'true' if the keyword was found and to 'false' if the keyword did not occur. The wildcard includes all customer feedback from delimiter to delimiter where the keyword is found, thus including all customer feedback rather than just the isolated keyword. This was done so that the entire cell could be exported to Nvivo (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2020) for the quantitative manual systematisation and analysis. The table in PostgreSQL resemble the visualisation in Table 4:

Table 4: *Excerpt visualisation of keyword analysis in PostgreSQL, where Boolean is set as true/false depending on whether the keyword is identified (Data source: The PostgreSQL Global Development Group,(2021). Author's visualisation).*

ID	Answer	Year	Water	Towel	Chemical	Pool	Energy	Light
1	Text	2018	False	False	True	True	True	False
2	Text	2019	True	False	False	True	False	False
3	Text	2020	False	False	False	False	True	True

The command for the keyword search which is methodological relevant for my query was the following (using the keyword water as an illustration, and the name of the file is "feedback_all"):

UPDATE feedback_all

SET water = 'true'

WHERE answer LIKE '%vann%' OR answer LIKE '%water%' OR answer LIKE '%vatten%' ;

UPDATE feedback_all

SET water = 'false'

WHERE water IS NULL;

It is important to note that the keywords were searched in three languages Norwegian, English, and Swedish. After the keyword search, the IDs that had 'false' hits on all columns were deleted using a standard PostgreSQL command, since none of the keywords occurred in these rows. The new file was exported as a semicolon-separated CSV file (as semicolon was set as the delimiter in PostgreSQL and imported into Nvivo (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2020) for further analysis.

Manual systematisation of open-ended text responses

Step 3b of the general methodological structure is the analysis of dataset 3 by means of manual systematisation of the open-ended text responses, based on two categories, implication and constructiveness. In the keyword analysis, the study only looked at the responses per keyword category, but this isolated keyword search does not allow for a more comprehensive and additional understanding of the data. To do this more in-depth, a closer look at customer feedback as a whole is necessary, as it can generate information that was not expected, making it an important source of valuable insight (Agrawal & Batra, 2013). Here, the focus is on how customers perceive NCH's ESP, and whether they find the performance trustworthy and facilitating environmentally friendly choices.

Where the survey question: "*I feel that this hotel contributes to taking care of the environment, people and community*" is answered on a scale with categories, the follow-up question: "*How can we improve our work to take care of the environment, people and community?*" is answered as an open-ended text response. For further systematisation of dataset 3 two categories were selected, namely implication

and constructiveness (Kolhatkar & Taboada, 2017; Nasr et al., 2014). The results of this systematisation are presented as descriptive statistics, as the aim is not to provide predictive numerical values, but to provide an overview of how customer feedback relates to each other, and which categories are prominent. Another important note is that the customer responses presented in this thesis have been translated directly by the author and a document containing all responses used in this thesis in its original language and format is provided in Supplementary document 1.

Implication

Here, *implication* can be understood as the impact that positive or negative customer feedback can have on the company (Faed & Forbes, 2010; Nasr et al., 2014). Based on the literature on impact and implications, the customer feedback from NCH will be categorised as positive compliments, negative complaints, or concerns (Kipfelsberger, Herhausen, & Bruch, 2016; Kraft & Martin, 2001; Mulder & Ellinger, 2013; Nasr et al., 2014).

Positive customer feedback (PCF) can be defined as a compliment in the form of expression of gratitude or an acknowledgement (Kraft & Martin, 2001; Nasr et al., 2014). There is no unified definition for the word "compliment" due to the subjective nature of the term. Here, based on Kraft and Martin's (2001) definition, a compliment is understood as a customer expressing a feeling of gratitude, praise, or satisfaction towards NCH service and products. PCF can contribute to well-being, job satisfaction and happiness, a positive feedback loop of customer loyalty, company learning, and recognition (Mulder & Ellinger, 2013; Nasr et al., 2014).

Concern can be explained as a customer describing a concern that is not a complaint but has the potential of to become a problem if not addressed (Nasr et al., 2014). In this study, customers who express a concern are also coded into the concern variable. These have a neutral tone, neither a complaint nor a compliment, but they illustrate a level of concern and can potentially become a problem for NCH, especially if many demonstrate the same concerns.

Negative customer feedback (NCF) can be understood as complaints that express dissatisfaction about a company's product or service (Faed & Forbes, 2010). NCF can affect the company's image and the credibility of the message it is trying to convey. Furthermore, because customer retention and loyalty are important to companies, NCF can provide insight into what customers perceive as poor practises or service, providing learning experiences for the organisation (Kipfelsberger et al., 2016). Phrases that express complaint, disappointment, or dissatisfaction with NCH environmental contribution and comments that appear to be accusations and perceptions of non-contribution and greenwashing are categorised as NCF. Furthermore, customer responses who say they do not see a contribution or do

not understand what NCH is doing to protect the environment are coded as NCF. Table 5 provides an overview of these three variables.

Table 5: Overview of customer feedback implication categorisation (Faed & Forbes, 2010; Kraft & Martin, 2001; Mulder & Ellinger, 2013; Nasr et al., 2014).

Variable	Definition	Implication for NCH
Positive customer feedback (PCF)	Compliments. Satisfied with service. Feel that NCH does a good job.	Employee well-being, job satisfaction, company learning, societal interaction, happiness, customer loyalty, acknowledgment, positive WOM.
Concerns	When a customer outlines an issue that is not a clear complaint on the service but has the potential of becoming a problem if not addressed. The customer expresses concern, or curiosity about the activities at NCH.	Improvement of services and strategies, education of employees, customer retention.
Negative customer feedback (NCF)	Complaints Unsatisfied, disappointed Not certain whether NCH contributes, or perceives that NCH does not contribute.	Customer loyalty retention, negative WOM, unsatisfaction, greenwashing, false image, company learning, communication and information to customers.

Constructiveness

Due to the extensive amount of information that can come from open-ended questions, I argue that it is not sufficient to identify only the implications of the comments, but also the *constructiveness* of their feedback. From a managerial research perspective, identifying constructive comments is a core element of improvement-oriented communication and plays an important role in feedback systems (Loobuyck, 2020). Specifically, how can hotel managers harness these comments for future improvement? Both positive compliments and negative complaints can be accompanied by constructive comments on how improvements can be made or comments on what the hotel should not do. Not only can these be coded as positive or negative, but they must also be coded according to the degree of constructiveness. Constructive comments can be defined as a respectful exchange of ideas, opinions, and or information that seek to contribute new information or perspectives on the topic at hand (Napoles, Tetreault, Rosato, Provenzale, & Pappu, 2017). They aim to create a civil comment or dialogue without the intention of merely provoking an emotional response (Kolhatkar &

Taboada, 2017). They are typically focused on specific points and supported by relevant evidence. Non-constructive comments can be associated with attributes such as derogatory language, personal attacks, sarcasm, meanness, and incivility (Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014; Kolhatkar & Taboada, 2017). It is important to emphasise that even if a comment is classified as non-constructive, it does not mean that it cannot provide useful insights. Table 6 provides an overview of the classification of constructive and non-constructive and their attributes as used in this study.

Table 6: *Overview of customer feedback constructiveness categorisation (Coe et al., 2014; Kolhatkar & Taboada, 2017; Kolhatkar, Thain, Sorensen, Dixon, & Taboada, 2020; Napoles et al., 2017). (White table body constructive, blue table body non-constructive variables).*

Category	Variable	Definition
Constructive	Solution	Provides a solution to a specific problem/activity/area.
	Specific points	States specific points to how the hotel can improve but does not come with a concrete example of improvement, or if there is a need for more/less of something.
	Personal experience	Provides a personal story or experience from when he/she stayed at the hotel. Can also be responses based on lack of observation of elements.
	Evidence	Can be based on facts, or customer knowledge that he/she has as a profession.
Non-constructive	No respect	Does not respect the views and beliefs of others, self-centred, derogatory language.
	Provocative	Feedback that targets emotion, personal, harsh critique and/or accusation, derogatory language.
	Wrong evidence	The comment is based on unsubstantiated and/or wrongful evidence.
	Non-informative	It can be a positive compliment or negative complaint, but no constructive specifications of hotel activities or improvement. Generic and reductive.

The sorting and coding of individual customer feedback from the narrowed down dataset is done interactively, meaning that a customer feedback is coded both in an implication category and a constructiveness category. Specifically, it means that feedback is categorised into multiple variables based on its content. Most studies consider these elements in isolation and either conduct an implication analysis (Nasr et al., 2014), sentiment analysis (Alaei, Becken, & Stantic, 2019), or attempt

to classify constructiveness (Kolhatkar & Taboada, 2017). An integrated approach can contribute to a better understanding of how to identify and extract information from unstructured, large-scale, open-ended text responses from customers.

Qualitative investigation and the selection of responses

The final step (step 4) in the methodological design is the qualitative selection of open-ended text responses that provide a deeper understanding of the customer feedback data. As with interviews, identifying recurring trends and themes within the qualitative data can provide an expanded understanding of opinions and experiences related to a particular study context (Denny & Weckesser, 2018; Dowling, Lloyd, & Suchet-Pearson, 2016). While systematic coding into the selected variables allows the researcher to systematise the obscure data, the additional coding of interesting patterns and trends in customer feedback can allow for deeper interpretation and use of the comments in the discussion. The results of this methodological approach are therefore presented in the discussion. In this study, comments that stood out for a variety of reasons, such as language, topic, or wordiness, were randomly sampled. During the process, some trends may emerge that form new sampling categories that meet the research questions.

3.4. Critique of the methodology and data limitation

3.4.1. Critique of methodological design and data collection

Critics warn of the weakness of mixed methods and triangulation for the purpose of validity convergence, i.e., comparing results from different methods to see if they agree, as the interpretation of agreement or disagreement is not without problems (Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012). To avoid this validity convergence problem, it is recommended that the quantitative and qualitative data are brought into dialogue with each other. Another criticism is that mixed methods and triangulation support a methodological hierarchy in which quantitative methods dominate over qualitative methods. This issue leads to the argument that researchers should prioritise the use of qualitative research in order to engage more deeply with the research findings (Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012). This thought is adopted in this study, as the quantitative data is limited.

There are several limitations with secondary data collection. When data collection is secondary and provided by a company, it limits the researcher's role in the process. Hence, there is a risk that the data will not be valuable to the scope of the research (Greenhoot & Dowsett, 2012). Although the specifically selected survey question is directly related to environment and sustainability there is an extensive amount of data that does not relate to the context of the question. With open-ended feedback, there is likely a lot of content that is not relevant to the research objective, making the process of elimination painstaking. However, the reasoning behind the decision to conduct an initial

keyword search and an additional systematic categorisation, was precisely to exclude some irrelevant feedback and narrow down the sample. However, it cannot be ruled out that the data obtained may not provide valuable insights and answers to the research objective of this study.

Another pitfall to avoid with secondary data is the time required to familiarise with the data (Greenhoot & Dowsett, 2012). This limitation was the reason to narrow down the initial 9210 open-ended feedback responses with keyword searching, as the time allotted for this study did not allow for in-depth coding of all 9210 responses. Nevertheless, it is common to use secondary data for example when companies collect customer feedback across different platforms and ask researchers to conduct an analysis (Ordenes et al., 2014). Another example of secondary data analysis is Smith (2008), who provides insight into how secondary data can be used in educational and social research using aggregate data. With technological advances, access to extensive amounts of external data has made it impossible to ignore the value of secondary data (Agrawal & Batra, 2013; Johnston, 2014).

3.4.2. Data limitations

A general limitation with all the data received from the contact at NCH is that both the internal and external validity suffers due to the small sample of customer feedback responses compared to total number of guest night, and there is an absence of decent quantitative data on measurable variables such as age, gender, education, purpose of travel (business, leisure), nationality etc. that could be of interest for comparing and finding trends in customer perceptions of ESP. However, due to data privacy concerns, these quantitative data could not be obtained and thus constitute a major limitation of verification of the sample. In addition, the study cannot separate the different hotels referred to in the customer feedback, more specifically whether they stayed in independent hotels or chain hotels and whether the ownership form is franchise or operating hotel. This limitation prevents an interpretation of the variation in customer perceptions and if there are trends associated with the different concept hotels. However, as independent hotels only make up a small percentage (38 out of 205, accounting for 18% (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019f)), this is likely not as important.

Dataset 1: Document analysis

First, there is an inherent limitation in the number of hotel documents selected for analysis. Specifically due to availability, I used a convenience sample of such documents given the scope and time constraints. Secondly, there is a limitation on the authenticity, representativeness, and accuracy of the documents as they were produced by NCH itself with no third-party involvement. This limitation calls into question the accuracy of each document considering the purpose of the documents, the context in which they were created, and the intended audience (Bowen, 2009). However, this study does not rely exclusively on document analysis. On the contrary, document

analysis is intended as a complementary support for the main objective of this study, which is to interpret customer perceptions. Hence, self-reported goals and results can give interesting insights into how NCH perceive its performance for comparison with how the customers perceive the performance.

Dataset 2: Statistical survey data

Several limitations are associated with surveys, such as sampling, coverage, non-response and measurement (Grandcolas, Rettie, & Marusenko, 2003). Here, there is a measurement bias, as a close examination of dataset 2 reveals that the scale is likely biased. The scale in the current survey uses alternatives that are not evenly distributed, and it lacks a break-even point or a neither/nor alternative to the statement. Because of these contrasting alternatives, it indicates a bias toward positive responses than if the scale had been numerical or the alternatives had been complementary, with neither/nor as the break-even point. Other common errors in surveys relate to respondents, with often low response rate being a recurring issue, and respondents finding the statements and questions asked difficult to understand, which can result in failure to collect all responses, compromising the validity of the sample (Fowler, 2014; Grandcolas et al., 2003). Limited language skills, misinterpretation of the question, and biasing responses to look good are also errors associated with respondents in surveys (Fowler, 2014).

Dataset 3: Open-ended text responses

Dataset 3 contains two major issues, one, the sample is small, and two, the dataset is negatively skewed. Both the issue of a small sample and negative skew is because only customers who responded, "I do not agree" and "I strongly disagree" to the statement: "*I feel that this hotel contributes to taking care of the environment, people and community*" could leave a comment. This postulates a negative premise in the responses that form the open-ended text responses for my analysis. Specifically, I am analysing strongly negative data, as well as a small sample compared to the rest of the alternatives in the statistical survey, which combined makes it hard to justify that the results in this study can be generalisable (Denny & Weckesser, 2018; Onwuegbuzie & Daniel, 2003). These limitations encompass a significant restriction with dataset 3. However, triangulation can help overcome these biases by bringing the data into dialogue with each other (Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012).

Furthermore, the formatting process from the Excel workbook to the CSV file may have resulted in some merging of cells and deletion of cells due to various compatibility issues. This formatting was done as a process of trial and error, with several attempts to get rid of various symbols, specific letters, and other language settings to have as clean a document as possible that PostgreSQL would accept for import. However, since this formatting was done through several systematic steps, as described in

Appendix B, the number of cells in the CSV eventually equalled an equal number of cells as in the original Excel document after formatting, namely 9210. It is therefore assumed that no responses were lost during formatting and conversion, but it is still important to mention it as a possible limitation.

Limitations with keyword frequency analysis

There are several limitations associated with keyword searches. One obvious justification is that a keyword search implies that several potentially relevant keywords are excluded. In this study, a total of 55 keywords were selected, covering a wide range from specific to broad keywords, based on a mixture of randomly selected keywords and keywords frequented in the WeCare Annual Report 2019 part 1. The selection of keywords in this study is therefore limited to this specific report and the researcher's knowledge in selecting the keywords. Other potential sources of keywords are excluded.

In addition, multiple languages such as Norwegian, English, German, Finnish, Swedish, and Danish were detected in the customer feedback. The scope of the study does not allow for research in all languages, so based on author resources and frequency of language, feedback was collected in the following languages, Norwegian, Swedish, and English. This is a limitation as it excludes valuable feedback from other language groups.

A further linguistic limitation is that the chosen code used in PostgreSQL (The PostgreSQL Global Development Group, 2021) does not recognise when a keyword is misspelled. There are codes that can detect a misspelled word, but the programme would then need to know every single misspelled variant of each keyword in all three languages. The wildcard used in the coding in this study only added anything before and/or after the chosen keyword, so if the keyword were misspelled, the Boolean value would not be 'true', but 'false'. This error could have potentially reduced the dataset exported for further analysis.

Limitations of manual systematisation of open-ended text responses

The choice of implication and constructiveness categories over other analysis techniques, such as sentiment analysis, leads to a different categorisation process and consequently different results (Alaei et al., 2019). The choice to categorise implication into only three different variables, positive, negative, and concern, can be seen as incomplete for argumentative purposes, as one may lose other classifications such as comments (e.g., a customer describing how they use a product) or counsel (e.g., suggestions for improvement) (Nasr et al., 2014). Furthermore, particularly with the data in this study, it was sometimes difficult to separate whether a comment was a complaint or a concern. These may have been mixed in the analysis, resulting in a biased result. However, adding constructiveness as a second category likely reduced the limitations of the implication category. Identifying whether a

response was constructive or not also proved challenging, but coding the responses interactively using multiple categories and variables likely helped overcome biases of mix-ups and other difficulties.

Another commonly used analysis technique for customer feedback is sentiment analysis (Alaei et al., 2019; Liu, 2020). Sentiment analysis is a computerised study of people's opinions, emotions, moods, attitudes, and sentiments expressed in texts (Liu, 2020). It is often categorised in a binary fashion, as either positive or negative sentiment (Alaei et al., 2019). Initial review of the data revealed that it would be difficult to apply a sentiment categorisation to the feedback. Much of the feedback was simply two-worded or in similarly short fashion, as well as not conveying specific sentiments, making it difficult to use a sentiment category for systematisation.

On a final note, a challenge that arose more or less unexpectedly during the manual systematisation in Nvivo (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2020) was that a large portion of the responses were written in a disjointed manner, without commas or full stops, as well as spelling mistakes. These challenges could be attributed to both the customers writing the responses, but also the data cleaning and formatting conducted before the PostgreSQL search. This challenge with inconsistent and disjointed customer feedback emphasises the issue of never underestimating the time it takes to get to know the dataset when dealing with secondary data (Greenhoot & Dowsett, 2012).

Limitations of qualitative investigation and the selection of responses

There are also limitations associated with qualitative research and response selection. Author-bias and tunnel vision are two limitations that can lead to the exclusion or misinterpretation of several valuable responses. Common errors and limitations of qualitative interpretive research include failure to provide evidence to assess reliability and validity of findings, generalisation of findings beyond the sample, and failure to interpret and estimate effect sizes (Onwuegbuzie & Daniel, 2003). Despite the limitations of qualitative inquiry, identifying trends and patterns can provide a deeper interpretation of the data. Similar to interview analysis patterns or themes are sought throughout the dataset to understand interpretations and experiences of real-life situations (Dowling et al., 2016). Therefore, risk mitigation was undertaken by creating multiple thematic categories in Nvivo (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2020) in addition to the implication and constructiveness categories.

This chapter has described the broad methodological design and methods that comprise this study. By incorporating multiple datasets from the same source (NCH), they form the comprehensive interpretation of NCH's ESP. Chapter 4 presents the results of the analyses of the various datasets, with Chapter 5 forming the discussion.

4. Results

This chapter will present the findings from the data analysis. First, I will present some general findings of how Nordic Choice Hotels perceives its environmental sustainability performance, based on document analyses. Second, I will present the results of the thematic keyword frequency analysis. Finally, I will present the findings from the manual systematisation of customer feedback. The original format and language of the quotes appearing in this study are presented in Supplementary document 1.

4.1. Findings from the document analysis

The two main documents analysed in this thesis are the open-source reports Annual Report Nordic Choice Hotels 2019 and the WeCare Annual Report 2019 parts 1 and 2 (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g, 2019a). They are accessible on the company's website and represent the latest sustainability reporting of NCH. In addition, the 2019 sustainability reports encapsulate previous years statistics, goals and targets, and showcase the trends in its sustainability performance. These attributes make these documents representative for the entire number of available documents. When evaluating and comparing these two documents, they differ in their content, visualisation, language, and statistical presentation.

The Annual Report Nordic Choice Hotels 2019 is the official annual report of the overall sustainability performance of NCH. On the home page, this report is first in the overview of all available reports. Descriptive text is kept to a minimum and the language used is informal, with pictures and large figures making up the bulk of the report. The report focuses on the Triple Bottom Line concept of social, environmental, and economic sustainable development. The metrics range from employee diversity, turnover, revenue, gender balance in management to simple representations of CO_2 emissions, energy, water, chemicals, and food waste consumption. In other words, NCH manages and reports the sustainability dimensions equally, but this study focuses on reviewing the environmental dimension of sustainability.

What is notable about this report is that it focuses on presenting performance in a positive manner without disclosing information around the graphs. For example, when presenting a figure on water consumption per guest (litres), the description reads as follows: "*Higher expectations for comfort combined with ambitious environmental goals, requires more of us in terms of creativity, innovation and investment in order to reduce our environmental footprint. Our environmental work is never finished.*" (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g, p. 24). The description in the text has a positive and optimistic tone without disclosing what the goals were, how they were targeted, and how the results compare

to the goal. Under some of the graphs there is a reference to the WeCare Annual Report 2019 for more details.

The WeCare Annual Report 2019 consists of two separate documents. Part 1 describes how they work with sustainability, ensure compliance, and present the social, environmental, and economic sustainability agenda descriptively and numerically (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g). The language is formal, and visualisation elements (e.g., pictures and figures) are kept to a minimum. The report begins by introducing foundations and certifications for their sustainability work, key points for ensuring compliance, and an overview of the company's overall sustainability policy and focus areas. For each focus area of sustainability and the resulting goals, there is a descriptive and numerical tabular overview. For example, under the focus area Sustainable Operations (environmental sustainability dimension), the goal is described as: *"All our hotels to be environmentally certified in accordance with ISO 14001"* (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g, p. 16)*,* followed by a description of why this goal is important, what they do, and what they have achieved. This structure is the same for all focus areas. The report focuses on the written elaboration of goals and targets and refers to Part 2 of the document for the numerical overview of goals and results.

Part 2 consists of a numerical (and partly descriptive) tabular overview of the sustainability performance goals and results matrix (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019a). The goals and results are from 2017 and onwards. Therefore, WeCare Annual Report 2019 Part 1 and 2 can be described as more detailed self-reports disclosing goals and results related to the overall sustainability performance compared to Annual Report Nordic Choice Hotels 2019.

Henceforth, to get a broader sense of how NCH ensures compliance, manages, and presents its ESP, I will first give a brief introduction to ISO 14001 certification. Second, I will present the self-reported results related to NCH emissions and consumption goals (ex-ante) and results (ex-post) reported in both Annual Report Nordic Choice Hotels 2019 and WeCare Annual Report 2019 Parts 1 and 2. Third, I will present NCH Nudging Manual as a method to achieve their food related targets.

4.1.1. ISO 14001 and other employed environmental certifications

According to WeCare Annual Report 2019, 100% of all hotels in Nordic Choice Hotels are certified according to the environmental standard ISO 14001, more specifically the ISO 14001:2015 (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g). Based on this ISO 14001:2015 standard, NCH has developed its own Environmental Management System, called NewPenguin, in which all hotels can annually review and report their environmental impact, ensure regulatory compliance, and develop new improvement strategies (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g). For a visualisation of the ISO 14001 framework used by NCH, see Appendix E. The certification should be visibly displayed to customers, see Figure 4.

As the ISO 14001 framework is not freely available, it cannot be used in this study to validate the information from the documents used in the analysis. It is therefore important to emphasise that the documents and information evaluated are self-reported cumulative figures, but reported according to ISO 14001:2015 and comply with Global Reporting Initiative standards (GRI)[12] (GSSB, 2016; Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g).

Figure 4: Visualisation of ISO 14001 certification used by NCH. This image was taken from NCH website (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2021a).

In addition to the ISO 14001 certification, NCH uses KRAV (Sweden) and Debio (Norway) certifications for ecological and organic food, among others. See Figure 5 for the visualisation and description of these certifications. The overarching goal with these certifications is: "*We shall offer a good selection of certified products.*" (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g, p. 23), achieving a minimum of 15 organic products in the breakfast buffet in Norway and 22 in Sweden.

Figure 5: Overview of the sustainable food certifications employed by NCH (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g, p. 29).

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[12] GRI is an international standards organisation established in 1997 that aims to aid governments, companies and organisations communicate and comprehend their impacts on climate change, corruption and human rights (GRI, 2021).

Another interesting finding from the document analysis of the WeCare Annual report 2019 Part 1 under the focus area of environmental sustainability, is that each hotel within NCH has assigned an environmental coordinator who is responsible for initiating, documenting, and coordinating environmental data and ensuring the implementation of the ISO 14001 certification standards and sustainability measures in their workplace.

4.1.2. Nordic Choice Hotels quantifiable environmental sustainability performance: Self-reported goals and results

NCH environmental commitment is summarised in an overall policy: "*We will conduct our business towards a positive impact on our ecosystems and biodiversity. We strive to be: A climate neutral company. A business that do not emit pollutants. A company with a sustainable and efficient use of resources* policy" (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g, p. 12). The environmental policy encompasses the following focus areas: sustainable operations, sustainable food, and sustainable trade, with stated goals and results for each focus area. The numbers are on an aggregate level, with the "unit per guest night" as the most common measure.

Focus Area: Sustainable operations

Goal 1: They shall reduce our GHG emissions.

According to WeCare Annual Report 2019 Part 1, NCH has developed a new carbon footprint calculation model where each hotel can report direct and indirect emissions that impact the climate (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g). GHG emissions are reported according to the GHG Protocol standard Scope emissions (Ranganathan et al., 2004)[13]. At NCH, Scope 1 represents direct emissions from activities that use diesel, gas, emissions from leased vehicles, and refrigerants in kitchens (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g, 2019f). Scope 2 includes indirect GHG emissions from electricity, heating, and cooling. Scope 3 emissions are indirect emissions from activities such as employee commuting, outsourced laundry, and business travel. Scope 3 emissions are still under development as the goal is to gather all emissions from external stakeholder activities. All these scope emissions will be measured in CO_2-emissions in kilos per guest night (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019f).

There was no set goal for CO_2 emissions per guest night (kg CO_2/guest night) in 2019, but the result was 3,0 kg CO_2/guest night (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019a). Compared to 2018, this result was a

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[13] Here, guidelines for effective and innovative GHG management are proposed, as effective operational boundaries that are comprehensive in terms of indirect and direct emissions are provided (Ranganathan et al., 2004). Direct emissions are emissions from sources owned or controlled by the company, while indirect emissions are emissions that are a consequence of the activities of the company but occur at sources owned or controlled by another company (Ranganathan et al., 2004, p. 25). Direct and indirect emissions are divided into Scope 1, Scope 2, and Scope 3 emissions. Scope 1 are direct GHG emissions that occur at sources owned or controlled by the company. Scope 2 includes indirect GHG emissions from the generation of purchased electricity consumed by the company. Scope 3 emissions is a category that allows for the reporting and treatment of all other indirect emissions.

reduction of 0,62 kg CO_2/guest night, but an increase since 2017, see Figure 6a (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019a). According to the WeCare Annual Report 2019 Part 1, it is likely that the numbers are not accurate, as a common measuring routine was not settled until 2019 (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g).

Goal 2: Waste sorting and facilitate recycling – the goal is to sort out 99% of the total waste.

This goal aims to improve waste sorting and waste resources. The goal for 2019 was set at 10% reduction from 2018, where the result was 0,683 kg/guest night (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019a). The 2019 results indicate that the average residual waste generation for all NCH had been reduced by 30%, or 0,480 kg/guest night, which exceeded the goal of 10% (see Figure 6b) (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g). Interestingly, as reported in the documents, this waste reduction target focuses on improved routines, staff training, and community waste collection efforts, with no mention of facilitating recycling for customers as a measure.

One of the most important 2019 projects for NCH, was to reduce all unnecessary single-use plastics across the chain (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g). Specifically, the goal was to end the use of single-use plastic during 2019, and the goal was achieved in June 2019, six months ahead of schedule (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019f, 2019g). This plastics project was communicated in the documents as a successful project in their environmental agenda. There are no quantifiable numbers to support this claim in either report.

Goal 3: Continuously reduce energy consumption per m^2.

The energy sector is responsible for a large share of global GHG emissions. The goal for 2019 was set at a 5% reduction compared to 2018, which was 207 kWh/m^2 (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019a, 2019g). The result in 2019 was a reduction of 3,4%, which equates to 200 kWh/m^2, meaning that this goal was not met. However, the reported trend is optimistic (see Figure 6c), and the purchase of renewable energy reached 80% coverage in 2019[14].

Goal 4: Minimize number of transports.

This goal refers to transport required to run the hotels (e.g., suppliers such as laundry services). The overall goal is to achieve an average of 1200 transports per year per hotel (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g). Mapping and monitoring transport is complex and different tools are being explored to measure transport emissions instead of the number of deliveries. The number of deliveries averaged

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[14] These are not instalments that the hotel has made, but intentional purchases of renewable energy from companies such as Ishavskraft and Fortum. The reason for why it is not 100% is because several hotels have electricity contracts through their house owners, which is out of the NCH chain's control domain (Killie, E., personal communication, 3. May 2021).

1323 transports per hotel in 2019. This result was an increase from 2018, where reported deliveries were 1295, not meeting the target (Figure 6d) (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019a).

Goal 5: Reduce the use of chemicals, especially those that are dangerous.

Many chemicals are hazardous to humans, animals, and the environment. Hotels use chemicals for room cleaning, kitchen cleaning, pools, and spa activities. The 2019 goal was set at 20 grammes/total guest night. The result from 2019 was an average of 30 grammes/total guest night (see Figure 6e) (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g). The goal was not met and was only a small reduction from 2018.

Goal 6: Reduce water consumption per guest night.

The goal for 2019 was a 5% reduction from the 206 litres/guest night identified in 2018. The 2019 results was an average of 204 litres/guest night (see Figure 6f) (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g), a reduction of 0,1%, but did not meet the 2019 goal (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019a).

Focus Area: Sustainable food

Goal 7: Reduce food waste.

The goal for 2019 was to reduce food waste in grammes/serving guest with 10% since 2017, when the number was 0,175 grammes/guest serving (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019a).The results for 2019 was a food waste generation of 184 grammes/serving guest, an increase from the previous year. As the numbers in figure 6g indicate, there have been some mixed results in recent years. In 2017, a new routine and data collection system was introduced to measure food waste per dining guest, which includes not only overnight customers but also conference, lunch, and dinner customers. The use of the new Key Performance Indicator (KPI), food waste per serving, resulted in the 2017-2019 numbers visualised in Figure 6g. According to WeCare Annual Report 2019 Part 1, this increase is likely due to improved routines and more accurate measurement of food waste (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g).

In addition to reducing food waste, NCH has several other goals related to sustainable and environmentally friendly food (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g). One goal is to serve less meat and increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g). One of the efforts to achieve this goal was to add a green vegetarian burger to all menus, and by the end of 2019 10% of all burgers were vegetarian. It is unclear if these are burgers sold or if 10% of all burgers on menus are vegetarian, likely the latter based on the formulation.
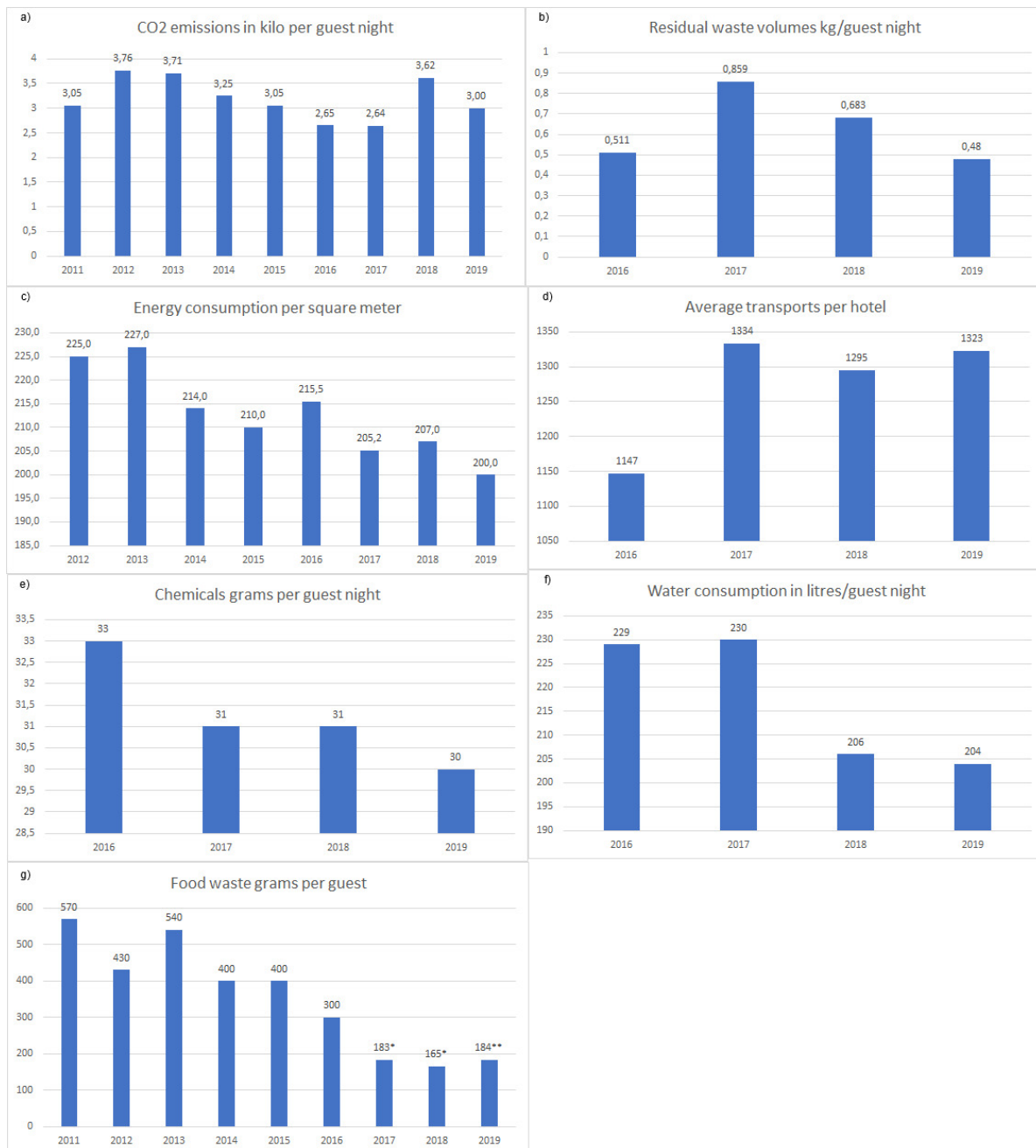
Figure 6: Overview of NCH quantifiable ESP: Self-reported goals and targets. a) CO_2 emissions in kilos per guest night (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019f, p. 26). Average residual waste volumes in kg/guest night at NCH (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g, p. 18). c) Energy consumption/m^2 (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019f, p. 24). d) Number of reported average transports/hotel (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g, p. 19). e) Chemicals measured in grams/guest night (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019f, p. 26). f) Measured water consumption litres/guest night (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g, p. 20). g) Reported food waste in grams/guest (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019f, p. 28) (Author's visualisation).

Focus Area: Sustainable trading

Goal: They impose environmental demands on their suppliers.

By implementing a set of ethical guidelines that includes environmental requirements, all suppliers are evaluated based on some level of environmental requirements. What these ethical guidelines entail is not disclosed in the documents analysed in this study, but they are available on NCH web site as a legal ethical guidelines document (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2021f).

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4.1.3. Nudging experiments and implementations by Nordic Choice Hotels

As a method of reducing their environmental impact, NCH have experimented with and implemented nudging interventions, particularly in the relation to the design of food choice environments. These methods are described in a manual for managers, the third document reviewed in this study (Killie, E., personal communication, 5. February 2021). This manual is not open-source access, but it gives an additional representativeness to the two sustainability documents, as it showcases some of the more sophisticated measures employed by NCH. The manual was produced in collaboration between NCH and the GreeNudge Foundation[15].

The main purpose of the manual is to provide hotel management with simple and cost-effective solutions for healthier eating and make environmentally friendly food choices. The rationale for using nudging tools is, then, that they are easy to implement, cost-effective, simple, and often well received by consumers (Guthrie et al., 2015; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). The manual is based on the behavioural science of food choices, and the research described is based on the books "Mindless Eating" and "Slim by Design" by Professor Brian Wansink[16]. The handbook presents seven nudges that can help customers make healthier choices. They are described as "small-steps" approaches, in which small and unnoticed changes influence eating behaviour. These nudges relate to the design of the choice environment and encompass the following five nudging techniques: Priming, Positioning, Proximity, Prompting, Portioning, and Price[17].

The nudges were tested in nine NCH restaurants in Norway and Sweden, and the results were encouraging (Killie, E., personal communication, 5. February 2021). For instance, when fish was first on the buffet, 2% more diners reached for fish than when meat was first. When the fish was accompanied by a "Eat Smart" sign, 9% more guests reached for the fish. When four cold salads were accompanied by a "Eat Smart" sign, portions increased by 25%. Freedom of choice is still intact, but smart and unnoticed changes to the choice environment led people to make more environmentally friendly and healthier choices. This experiment is also described on the NCH homepage, with a brief description of how they placed vegetables and fish first, accompanied by a sign, and the result was less meat consumption (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2021g). Another nudging experiment promoted in the manual, website, and sustainability report is reduction of plate size accompanied by a social cue, see

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[15] GreeNudge Foundation is a NGO that offers counselling and research on food, health and behavioural economics (Mathisen, Slapø, & Lekhal, 2020). Their main domains are knowledge mediation, research and analysis and evaluation.

[16] According to my contact person, there is no list of references attached to this manual. It is therefore assumed that the theoretical contributions to the handbook are based on the mentioned works of Brian Wansink (Killie, E., personal communication, 3. May 2021).

[17] Priming is the signalling of healthy choices when customers enter the restaurant. It takes place just before they decide what to eat and can take the form of signs and signals that stimulate them to look for the healthiest dishes. Positioning can be described in terms of where the main part of the buffet is placed in the room. Proximity can be described as where the healthy or environmentally friendly choices are placed so that it is easy or convenient to take them. Prompting is the use of signals and messages to grab the attention of customers and nudge them to make healthy and environmentally friendly choices. Portioning helps customers to eat the right amount of food and can also be described as a default nudge.

Figure 7, as a method to reduce food waste, with a documented effect of 20% reduction in food waste (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g, 2021g). Furthermore, this experiment was published as a research paper by Kallbekken and Sælen (2013).

Whether these nudging tools are actively used today in the various hotels under NCH, is somewhat unclear. The manual is available for all managers, so it is assumed that it is implemented in most hotels.

Figure 7: Eat Smart signs employed by NCH. The text reads: "We love full stomachs and empty plates! We try to become more environmentally friendly. Read more about our work to reduce food waste at www.choice.no." (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2021g)

4.2. Results from thematic keyword frequency analysis of open-ended text responses

The results of the keyword frequency analysis of dataset 3 reveals that the five keywords with the highest frequency were environment (1256), plastic (561), towel (437), water (346), and ecologic (300).

Looking at the keyword frequency according to the different focus area categorisations demonstrates that the area with the highest keyword frequency was waste, with plastic (561) receiving the most hits and garbage (157), waste (121), sorting (108) and packaging (18) following in numerical order. In second place, water, with the two keywords water (346) and towel (437). Third were energy keywords such as light (183), heating (169), energy (169), ventilation (48), electric (44) and air condition (20). In fourth place came the sustainable food focus area, with ecologic (300) as the dominant keyword, and with following keywords vegetarian (116), vegan (85), KRAV (41), commodity (9) organic (7), palm oil (4) and Debio (1). The keyword biodiversity received no hits. Fifth, the chemical category, with pool (81) and chemical (1). Six, transport with parking (58), parking fee (51) and electric vehicle (28). In last

place came the sustainable trade focus area keywords, with trade (22), Fairtrade (16), ethic (6) and supplier (5). In hindsight, Fairtrade and trade have been searched twice, with the Norwegian/Swedish word "handel" accounting for the remaining 6 keyword hits in this category. The results of the keyword frequency search based on the focus areas is presented in a word cloud, see Figure 8.

Figure 8: Word cloud of keyword frequency of NCH focus areas: water, chemicals, energy, waste, transport, and food. Visualisation using WordArt (WordArt, 2021).

Secondly, looking at the environment related keywords and the general keywords, findings reveal that the word with the highest frequency was environment (1256), with the following numerical order: product (228), information (171), green (100), local (99), reuse (72), quality (69), climate (68), value (65), luxury (60), material (59), reduce (55), sustainable (50), consumption (45), wasting (45), economy (44), footprint (33), resource (33), furbish (18), emission (17), CO_2 (15), knowledge (15), profit (12) and label (10). See Figure 6 for a visualisation of these keywords.

Figure 9: Word cloud of keyword frequency from the environment, economy, and inconspicuous category. Visualisation using WordArt (WordArt, 2021).

The keyword frequency results also demonstrate that the maximum number of keywords in a response is 11. This response was identified as:

> *"Environment: how efficient is your heating system really given you are located in a country that requires use of it for large parts of the year? What about intrinsic design there did not seem to be any windows that were openable for fresh air - so presumably you waste a lot more energy on air conditioning to get decent air quality - big parts of the hotel were painted black with a lot of dividing structures and walls and so little efficient use of natural light - that must really drive up your electricity use and does not come across as very green. Big bottles of toiletries instead of single use and less washing of towels is very good in terms of being green, but my initial impression is you could do a lot more!"*

The overview in Table 7 demonstrates that the number of keyword frequencies distributed among the responses contain 0 of the keywords, followed by 1, 2, and 3 keywords. The higher number of keyword hits may indicate something about the constructiveness of the comments as it can suggest that few customers took the time to leave detailed and in-depth responses.

Table 7: Tabular overview of the number of keywords selected in the responses, with a maximum of 11 and a minimum of 0 keywords appearing in a response.

Keywords appearing in responses	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Number of responses	5376	2496	882	317	84	34	13	5	0	1	0	1

5376 responses did not contain any of the keywords searched for in PostgreSQL (The PostgreSQL Global Development Group, 2021). Therefore, the keyword frequency search result narrowed the sample down from 9210 responses to 3834 responses, which were transferred to Nvivo (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2020) for manual systematisation.

4.3. Results from manual systematisation of open-ended text responses

The open-ended text responses aimed to answer the follow-up question: "*How can we improve our work to take care of the environment, people and community?*". However, the results illustrate that the difference between this question and its predecessor: "*I feel that this hotel contributes to taking care of the environment, people, and community",* was not perceived by all respondents. As pointed out by some customers*: "I did not get a feeling at all", "How do I know if this hotel takes care of the community? There is nothing to tell me what the environment policy is".* Some, on the other hand, have answered the follow-up question directly, with short, generic responses such as "*More information"* or "*Reduce plastic".*

The findings from the manual systematisation of the open-ended text responses are presented in the following sections using the two different categories for coding the responses, namely implication and constructiveness. Approximately 389 comments were categorised as "not relevant" and therefore excluded from further analysis (examples of these comments are presented in Appendix F).

4.3.1. Findings from the implication category

Results demonstrate that many customers feel that there is room for improvement, and that most of the feedback can be categorised as concerns. Much of the feedback was incoherent and difficult to categorise with determined conviction. Customer feedback was categorised exclusively in this category, meaning that a comment was categorised as either PCF, concern, or NCF. It is important to note that there is a likelihood of duplicates, missing comments, as well as incorrect categorisation, as it was challenging to separate comments between negative and concerns due to the difficulty interpreting sentiment, sarcasm, irony, and other emotions.

Regardless, the intent of the manual systematisation was not to obtain exact numbers or present a statistical overview of category trends, but to understand trends, general patterns, and identify which

categories can be considered to have the highest response frequency. The results are presented as greater than (>) and less than (<) with numbers rounded up or down to the nearest 100. Based on the criteria of the variables, the trend of customer responses in this category reveal that the variable concern had the highest recurrence (> 2400 responses), negative responses had a medium recurrence (> 900), and positive responses had low recurrence (< 100). Visualisation of the coding of the responses into the category implication are presented in Appendix F and broken down into PCF, concerns, and NCF. A range of ten customer responses within each variable is included to underscore the wide range of comments, as well as highlighting some of the responses and in the text.

Positive customer feedback

Findings from the variable PCF revealed a low recurrence of responses that can be understood as positive. This low recurrence was to be expected as the open-ended text responses were left by customers who initially did not agree, or strongly disagree with the statement: *"I feel that this hotel contributes to taking care of the environment, people and community".*

The trend for those who did leave a positive response was that few leave completely PCF. There were some customers who had a positive perception of ESP, as highlighted by two customers: *"Continue with your environmental work.";* *"Continue with a good environmental profile and focus on the environment."* On the other hand, most responses started with or were accompanied by a positive statement but also include a concern or an idea for improvement. When asked how they feel NCH contributes to the environment, people, and community, and how they can improve, one customer noted: *"More vegan products on the menu and breakfast that is labelled with a green leaf or similar. Nice sign at the pool/gym/sauna that encourages to only use one towel."* Two other customers found differences in activities: *"Charging stations for cars is good. The food should perhaps have a more environmental focus.", "Environment seems to be a big concern for Son Spa[18], which is great. However, service still needs to be improved."* These comments can also be understood as concerns, as customers describe a positive experience with one activity while not having the same experience with another. These double meanings highlight how difficult it was to systematise the open-ended text responses.

Concerns

As the presented findings demonstrate, the greatest recurrence of customer feedback can be understood as concerns. This implies that most customers are describing issues or problems that are not directly complaints and signs of dissatisfaction, but which, if not addressed, have the potential to become complaints.

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[18] Assumed reference to Son Spa located close to Oslo.

When asked how they feel about the contribution, and how NCH can improve, more than half of the feedback briefly pointed to improvements in product options, service, and other facilities and activities: *"More ecologic products at the breakfast (…), "Better options for sorting garbage/recycling in the rooms", "Lights in the rooms that automatically turns off.", "Give the guests possibility to use bikes for free. Use electricity driven shuttle cars."* These responses can be considered as concerns, as customers were not satisfied with current products and activities subsequently pointing out what they think can be improved to increase their positive perception of environmental contribution.

Other customers point out discrepancies in perceived information during their stay. For example, one customer noted: *"There was a note in the bathroom to reuse the towels, but they were refreshed anyway."* Others fault the absence of information, as two customers wrote: *"Tell us how the heat is recycled and whether you use renewable energy, drop single-use plastic, or make other major contributions. Especially a water park needs to defend itself in terms of water and electricity consumption.", "Tell more about your environmental efforts with a leaflet in the room.",*

Findings in this category indicate a neutral tone from customers, who come with precise and often brief suggestions for improvement or refer to elements that they noticed during their stay.

Negative customer feedback

The counterpart to PCF, is the NCF. In this study a medium recurrence of customer feedback can be understood as negative. The negative responses demonstrate that some customers pointed out that they basically do not know what the hotel does, therefore they did not know how to offer improvements: *"I do not know what you do in the first place. I'm tired of everyone talking environment just to score cheap goodwill.", "Do not know what you do, therefore I do not know how you can improve. (Perhaps) KRAV-certified eggs, ecologic, local produce."*. Other customers argue that they did not perceive NCH as environmentally conscious because of luxury: *"Do not know, the whole concept is luxury consumption or?".*

In line with one of the NCF criteria, some customers left complaints. As one customer experienced: *"During breakfast the food was taken away too quickly. When you are alone this is not nice. I told the staff I was not finished. I went and got a coffee. Came back and everything was gone. It is not good environmental policy to throw food away!".* Furthermore, an interesting trend in these negative responses is that several of them could be understood as perceptions of greenwashing. One respondent noted: *"You write that if guests need new towels, they must be put on the floor, however the cleaning staff change towels no matter what you do. I hung it up for drying and reuse, but when I came back a new towel was put in place. So, try to walk the talk."* Another pointed out that NCH environmental concerns were easily seen as a cost-saving concern instead: *"Make a significant*

difference, now I experience that you as all other hotels are "greenwashing" which at the same time reduce your costs."

Combined, the findings demonstrate a very high recurrence of responses that can be categorised as concerns and negative. With the negative skewed bias dataset that constitutes the customer responses, this finding was expected. In the next section, results from the constructiveness category are presented.

4.3.2. Findings from the constructiveness category

In addition to coding in the implication category, all comments were also coded in the constructiveness category based on the constructive variables: solution, specific point, personal experience and evidence, and the non-constructive variables: non-informative, no respect, provocative and wrong evidence. Overall, the results demonstrate that the majority of responses can be understood as constructive (> 3100 responses), while significantly fewer are categorised as non-constructive (< 300 responses). Appendix G provides an overview of responses categorised by constructiveness, with a range of five comments that provide an overview of each variable. Exemplary responses are highlighted in the text.

Unlike the implication category, where each comment was categorised exclusively, the coding of comments in terms of constructiveness was not exclusive. A response may be categorised as constructive in more than one way. For example, this comment was coded as both personal experience and specific point: *"I haven't seen any specific action. It is always cold in the room when I check-in. Gives me the impression that the energy efficiency in the building is not up to standards, as is not unusual with old buildings."* This customer likely had personal experience from a previous stay at NCH and therefore pointed to one specific point that should be improved, namely energy efficiency.

Constructive responses

Findings demonstrate that responses to the questions about how customers feel that NCH contributes and how to improve its work, were significantly constructive. Among the constructive responses, the variable solution had very high recurrence (> 1700 responses), specific point had high recurrence (> 1100 responses), personal experience had low recurrence (< 400 responses) and evidence had very low recurrence (< 100 responses).

Taking a closer look at the solution variable, reducing plastic, improving routines (e.g., towel reuse programme) and technical issues (e.g., water leakage, busted heating), more and better information about its work for the environment, improved waste sorting, more ecological products, and more vegetarian or vegan options, were recurring topics of improvement solutions perceived by customers. These findings correspond with the keyword frequency results where high frequency keywords were

indeed keywords such as plastic, waste, towel, water, information, ecological, organic, etc. In addition to these topics, some customers pointed out improvements related to reduction of meat and dairy products, installation of automatic lights, use of renewable energy, and implementation of second-hand products.

Concerning plastic, some customers pointed out that NCH should, quote: *"Take away all plastic from the breakfast."; "Stop using plastic products in the rooms.".* In relation to routine and technical issues, a customer wrote that improvements in technical installations are necessary for environmental contribution: *"Use modern windows. You will save energy in heating and cooling with prober windows. Currently they are the worst that I have ever seen in hotels."* Others argued that they find it difficult to evaluate performance and call for more and better information: *"What are you doing for the environment? Increase the communication of measures that you implement and what you do."* In terms of waste, some customers identified the lack of recycling facilities in their rooms to be of concern: *"With environmental certification one should be able to recycle waste in the hotel rooms. That would give an increased credibility."*

The same trend was found concerning organic and ecologic products, calling for more and improved product selections: *"Make sure that the guests are served good and sustainable, favourably local food, during breakfast.",* and *"Switch out everything in favour of ecologic and fair trade. More organic/ecologic alternatives at breakfast."* Some also argued that NCH should offer more wholesome vegan dishes: *"The biggest environmental culprit right now for the climate is our diet. Therefore, as a vegan, I would have appreciated more all-vegetarian alternatives.".*

Specific point was the second largest variable with a high recurrence of responses. The classification of this variable is understood as customers pointing out specific points of improvement without providing a solution to the problem. The two categories of specific point and solution have similar criteria, however, comments assigned to the solutions category were considered more clear-cut as they offered solutions for improvement rather than just pointing out activities or products they were satisfied or dissatisfied with. For example, one commented in relation to the food standard: *"A lot of food from lunch and dinner at the conference was not eaten, thus thrown away because it had unusually poor standards."* This type of response can be seen as constructive feedback for NCH as the customer points to a specific point of dissatisfaction, albeit not offering a solution of improvement.

The variable personal experience had a low recurrence, and some of these also merged with the comments mentioned above. For example, one experienced during the stay: *"Regarding only the environment part: please do not throw away food as easily as you did during breakfast on Saturday*

13.4. We would have enjoyed the food and finished it so nothing would have had to be thrown away. Thank you!".

A very low recurrence of responses was identified as evidence- or expert-based. For example, one customer displayed a form of personal expertise in relation to material by criticising NCH for using materials that are not environmentally friendly: *"More environmentally friendly materials. Too much synthetic fibre/plastic surfaces. E.g., use chalk paint instead of plastic paint, natural fibre instead of acrylic carpet in the hallway. Alternative to laminate flooring in rooms – unsure of what is affordable and durable: cork linoleum perhaps. Too much chemical and synthetic fibre dust in rooms = poor indoor climate. Noticed smell of plastic when I arrived."*

The results in this category illustrate that in response to the statement: "*I feel that the hotel contributes to taking care of the environment, people and community"* and the follow-up question: "*How can we improve our work to take care of the environment, people, and community?"*, customers gave constructive feedback that predominantly offered solutions on how NCH can improve its performance.

Non-constructive responses

On the opposite side of the constructiveness spectrum are comments that can be considered non-constructive. Not to be confused with non-relevant comments, these are responses that illustrate perceptions of NCH's ESP, but can be considered non-constructive due to attributes such as insults, provocations, personal attacks, and lack of respect. The results illustrate that significantly fewer responses could be classified as non-constructive, and the recurrence of these variables were close to each other. Due to this fact, the numbers are rounded up to the nearest 10, instead of 100 which the previous numbers used. They break down as follows: non-informative responses had high recurrence (> 100 responses), provocative responses had medium recurrence (> 70 responses), no respect responses had low recurrence (< 50 responses), and wrong evidence responses had low recurrence (< 50 responses).

A high recurrence of responses was coded as non-informative. These responses present the interpreter with the insurmountable task of capitalising on these types of comments, even though they carry a negative implication, such as: *"Your environmental profile is not credible."; "Very difficult hotels are generally not very sustainable"; "You are taking care of the environment and community which is good but people".* The other trend with responses coded in this category, was that many of the responses were concise and focused more on other sustainability domains rather than environment. As noted by one customer: *"Care about the guest and be more service-oriented and help guests. Environment and community I'm not bothering to answer, but nothing special."*

Findings reveal that the variables no respect and provocative contained similar elements, with some of the responses overlapping. Few comments used derogatory language. It was a low recurrence of responses coded as no respect, such as: *"You are using the environment to make more money, it is distasteful and provocative. Nowadays I always throw the towel on the floor.", "Use your head, removing the water glass in the room is ridiculous!".* Others attacked the management: *"Hr. Stordalen flies a private jet. Hanging up the towel to save washing is ridiculous."*. A medium recurrence of responses was coded as provocative, most of these responses were disrespectful and referred to greenwashing, as commented by three different customers: *"Today's concept is to save money, not the environment"; "Make a difference instead of 'greenwashing' like many others"; "Make a big and clear difference. Not enough to do like everyone else. It is perceived as pathetic 'greenwash'.".* Although some of the responses contain non-constructive language, it is important to emphasise that these are not irrelevant.

Finally, low recurrence of comments was found to be appropriate for the variable wrongful evidence. Scepticism about ecological products and palm oil were some of the themes that stood out in this variable, as were climate change sceptics: *"Stop pretending you care about the environment and that CO_2 will lead to a warmer climate. The average temperature on Earth dropped 0.6 degrees between 1945 and 1975, at the same time CO_2 levels in the air increased."*

To summarise the findings from the manual systematisation of the open-ended text responses, most of the data were coded as concerns and solutions.

Finally, this chapter has presented the results from complementary exploration of the data, with the different qualitative and quantitative analyses unfolding undisturbed by each other. The next chapter follows a comprehensive interpretation of all the results and datasets, with the final chapter providing the conclusion to the research questions and research objective of this study.

5. Discussion

The main purpose of this study is to interpret customer feedback data and analyse how customers perceive Nordic Choice Hotels' environmental sustainability performance and to compare it to NCH's own perception of its performance. The data consists of three different datasets, namely document analysis of how NCH reports and perceives its ESP (dataset 1) and text mining of customer feedback data. The customer feedback data is split into two datasets: dataset 2 containing aggregate statistical results from the survey statement: *"I feel that this hotel contributes to taking care of the environment, people and community."*, and dataset 3 containing open-ended text responses from customers who disagreed with the aforementioned statement and answered a follow-up question: *"How can we improve our work to take care of the environment, people and community?"*. Although these are two different questions, the results indicate that the customer responses often do not differentiate between these questions, indicating that they, as perceived by customers, are often just seen as one merged question. In this chapter, I will discuss the findings from the different datasets to ascertain how customers perceive and react to hotel-driven ESP interventions. More specifically whether customers perceive NCH's ESP as trustworthy and competent and whether these interventions are something they agree upon or oppose.

5.1. Discussion of aggregate statistical survey data

Interpretation of the preliminary results from dataset 2 indicates that customers perceive the NCH's ESP to be satisfactory, as 48% of customers who responded to this survey statement answered the alternative "I totally agree". This can be interpreted to mean that customers show green trust in NCH, which in turn means that they find it easy to make environmentally friendly choices during their stay. Consequently, the nudges are working.

However, since customers who checked the alternatives "I totally agree", "I somewhat agree", and "Unable to answer" did not have the option to leave an open-ended response, the interpretation of these statistically aggregate results is therefore limited and likely to be blemished. Furthermore, since a relative high percentage of customers answered, "Unable to answer" (23%), this may be indicative of some concerns: 1) customers do not understand the statement and are therefore unable to provide an answer, 2) they are not interested in the topic they were asked, 3) they are unable to answer because they have not seen that NCH contributes. The last concern can be reflected to some extent in the NCF variable, where a pattern illustrates that customers could not find any information or evidence that NCH contributes to caring for the environment. In addition, there is also uncertainty associated with the category "I somewhat

agree". The word "somewhat" postulates that there is some scepticism among customers about NCH's ESP and therefore green trust.

As the two categories, "Unable to answer" and "I somewhat agree", together account for 47% of the total customer responses, it calls into question the overall performance of NCH and the reliability of these statistical results. This uncertainty and unreliability can be attributed to respondent bias and errors, such as misunderstanding the question, limited language skills, and distorting their responses to look good as the statement presented to them is ambiguous and difficult to understand resulting in not all responses being captured (Fowler, 2014; Grandcolas et al., 2003). Interpreting how customers perceive NCH's ESP and whether they trust its performance is difficult based on the statistical survey data. However, based on the uncertainty of the "Unable to answer" and "I somewhat agree" alternatives, which likely include some form of scepticism and perception of ambiguity, it can be argued that the statistical results indicate a moderate green trust in NCH's ESP.

The aggregate statistical results provided by NCH demonstrate that there are few respondents who disagree with the statement in the survey question. It can be argued that they disagree for reasons such as: 1) that they find that the performance does not meet their expectations and that the sense of contribution is not perceived, 2) that they do not care about or that they find that they do not agree with the statement itself and that this is not something that they think the hotel should or can contribute to, 3) that they have experienced something dissatisfying in relation to one of the themes, namely environment, people, and community. It is this strongly negative data that has formed the bulk of the data analysis in this thesis and will therefore fundamentally shape the following comprehensive discussion of all the data. These responses have important implications and significance as they demonstrate mistrust and dissatisfaction with NCH performance, but also suggest how improvements can be made which, if identified, can be utilised by NCH.

5.2. Symptoms of perceived greenwashing

The results from the open-ended customer feedback indicate that there are some customers who exhibit positive perception and behavioural intentions when it comes to ESP and green trust in NCH, in line with the high rate of customers totally agreeing with the statement. For example, one customer indicates revisiting intentions and also chooses NCH because of its environmental focus:

> "Difficult to answer, we have over 10 years chosen to stay in choice hotels due to your clear environmental and people profile. You do a good job in this area. (…)"

Existing evidence suggests that positive perceptions of ESP and green trust lead to revisit intentions (Chen et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2019), which is also indicated by this response.

However, as expected given the negative predisposition of the open-ended text responses, the results suggest that customer perceptions of NCH's ESP are consistent with previous research that have linked negative perceptions to greenwashing (Chan, 2021; Chen et al., 2019; Parguel et al., 2011; Rahman et al., 2015). The findings in this study include the following elements of perceived greenwashing by customers, suspicion of hidden motives and mistrust in management, weak green trust in symbolic environmental activities, discrepancy between information and compliance, and inconsistency within NCH's ESP. The latter is an exclusive finding of this study.

5.2.1. Suspicion of hidden motives and mistrust in management

Rahman et al. (2015) argue that customers become more sceptical when hotels do not disclose their underlying cost-saving motives. Consequently, when customers are unable to verify the credibility of such initiatives, they view the hotel and its akin management as complicit in greenwashing (Bicchieri & Dimant, 2019). This issue is supported by the findings in this study, with customers identifying suspicion of hidden cost-saving motives behind environmental practices as a reason for unfavourable feedback:

"It is so evident that you do this to save money and not the environment that it makes me uncomfortable".

"Clearer environmental profile that does not necessarily make its advantage point from profit, but a genuine wish to contribute without thinking of shareholders."

Furthermore, and based on the company specific investigation of this study, there is evidence of perceived greenwashing by customers in relation to the credibility of the top management of the company. The owner of NCH, Petter Stordalen, is a prominent figure in the media who preaches about the importance of the environment while simultaneously flying a private jet and investing large fortunes (Hessen, 2020; Iversen, 2019). Some customers perceive this behaviour as hypocritical and are not shy to point out that their perceived green trust and credibility in NCH's ESP is weak due to the double moral message from top management. One customer elaborates:

"This with thoughts of the environment and contributing to helping the needy seems to me like hypocrisy about the owner of the hotel chain appearing as a national icon

of greed and vulgar spending. Encouragement of saving towel washing etc., to help

those in need of help would have better been suited for Thon Hotels."

Interpreting these responses in terms of nudging, one can also understand the customers' perceptions of hidden motives beyond environmentally friendly practises as they have a weak trust in NCH as a suitable choice architect who subsequently nudges people to make good choices. It was found by both Nyilasy et al. (2014) and Ellen et al., (2006) that customers are negative toward egoistic-driven CSR and ESP, which supports the findings of this study.

5.2.2. Weak green trust in symbolic environmental activities

Weak green trust in symbolic environmental activities can also be a symptom of perceived greenwashing (Chen et al., 2019). As Delmas and Burbano (2011) argue, many companies offer the same environmental activities and messages for fear of falling behind competitors. However, when activities no longer can be distinguished between hotels, it can be viewed as greenwashing to promote it as green, as it is no longer perceived as an exclusive green attribute but rather an integrated part of the service (Robinot & Giannelloni, 2010). An example of one such activity, is the perception of the towel reuse programme, which is a popular practise adopted by hotels but can be perceived by customers as greenwashing (Rahman et al., 2015). In the keyword frequency analysis, towel was one of the highest frequency keywords, indicating high customer awareness. Deeper interpretation of the responses referring to towels suggests that the conviction of the towel reuse programme not being perceived as a green attribute is supported by this study. Customers perceive the towel reuse programme as a minimal effort by NCH that does not indicate a strong ESP commitment:

"The only hint of environmental focus was the reminder to hang up your towels if you

do not need replacing. Most hotels I stay in do this now and it is not a differentiator

and does not make me think the hotel is particularly focused on the environment. It is

a very easy, low hanging fruit for any hotel to implement and it saves costs for the

hotel as well. i.e., nothing about it makes me think you take the environment

seriously."

"Adopted environmental focus like all other hotels. reuse of towels is not a good

enough environmental measure."

If these customers perceive the towel reuse programme as the singular environmental focus, or feel that the activities are no different from other competitors, the ESP and green trust will be discredited (Verma

& Chandra, 2016). The perception of the towel reuse programme as a low hanging fruit amongst customers challenge the findings Chen et al., (2019) who found that the towel reuse program signs were perceived more favourable than energy conservation reminder signs (which was the comparison in this study). Compared to the towel reuse programme, the energy conservation sign was perceived as a significantly weaker environmental activity. However, both Chen et al. (2019) and Trang, Lee, and Han (2019) emphasise that greenwashing perceptions can be avoided by offering a range of environmental practises that go beyond a few low-cost initiatives. Some of these investments, which differ from low-cost measures, can take the form of green roofs, solar panels, on-site composting systems, energy-saving heat pumps, occupancy sensors, and other environmental technologies (Chan et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2019). This conviction that disclosure and information about more environmental activities can improve green trust in performance is supported by findings in this study:

> *"You publish (as far as I know) little to no information about which environmental considerations you make. It is fine not to throw the towel to wash every day, but this has little effect. How is f. ex the food you serve grown and processed? Have you installed solar panels that cover the whole/parts of the hotels' energy consumption? What kind of energy classification does the building have?"*

Comparing this perception of weak green trust in symbolic environmental activities to the document analysis of NCH own perception and reporting of ESP, findings demonstrate that they do publish information about activities such as energy consumption and that they have committed to purchasing renewable energy. However, uncovering customers' perception indicates that this commitment is not perceived by some customers while staying in NCH, indicating that the information is not accessible in their immediate environment. In other words, the potential of the information that can be disclosed by NCH is there, but it is not fully realised and perceived by the customers.

5.2.3. Discrepancy between information and compliance

Another symptom of greenwashing is the discrepancy between information and compliance (Chen et al., 2019; Nyilasy et al., 2014; TerraChoice, 2009). The findings demonstrate that some are concerned about the inadequate information provided by NCH, and that there is a discrepancy between what is communicated, and the actual performance as perceived by the customer. The findings of these discrepancies in this study are predominantly related to the towel reuse programme where customers engaged in the activity (namely hanging up the towel as instructed) only to find that the hotel did not follow their instructions.

To use a different example of perceived discrepancy between information and compliance, let us take a look at plastic. The findings from the keyword analysis indicate that the issue of excessive plastic was a high priority among customers, and some find that the use of single-use plastic in hotel rooms is not consistent with the environmental message:

> *"From all the information you have in the hotel/rooms you tell about being nice to the environment – but still you use plastic glasses in the bathroom. It is not very clear to me how this corresponds to the environment friendly setting that you describe."*

Matching this discrepancy to the document analysis of NCH sustainability reports, plastic became a high priority focus area for NCH in 2019. The comment above is from 2018 prior to this plastic initiative, but there are comments from 2019 and 2020 that suggest customers find no information about this plastic campaign available, with one customer writing:

> *"I saw no evidence of what you are doing in the hotel, and things in the room were fairly packaged in plastic!"*

Others state that they saw press releases from NCH stating that the company would ban all single-use plastic, yet they were still served plastic straws. In other words, customers find the ESP untrustworthy and unsatisfactory when information and compliance do not match:

> *"It does not appear clear before, during or after. And we were served plastic straws despite the fact that as a customer you could read a press release that the entire Nordic Choice has banned plastic and that the straws would be gone before the summer…"*

Adding to this information and compliance discrepancy, and perhaps more importantly, some customers point to faulty information and compliance regarding certifications that NCH employs. Contradictorily to some studies that have demonstrated a positive correlation between customer perception and environmentally certified hotels (Ko et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2019; Martínez Garcíade Leaniz et al., 2018; Verma & Chandra, 2016), this study reveals a negative customer perception of certification if they find that NCH performance did not meet the expected standard of, for example, ISO 14001. One customer eloquently points out the perceived discrepancy the ISO 14001 advertising and its perceived performance, highlighting the lack of recycling facilities:

"I register that you are ISO environmentally certified, but in the hotel and village, you do not facilitate waste sorting in the rooms/apartments. Metal and glass most people can sort, but with you my contention is that food waste, plastic, and various residual waste (?) as there is little focus on waste sorting. Only in the acquisition it is split, but even there it is poorly labelled, and one can wonder how much is actually recycled. (…) The reason for this proposition is that you promote in the media and in your homepage but feel that this is not done in practise. If DNV, who has the ISO certification (…), I think you would receive comments during an audit. Even with this said, it is each individual's responsibility to recycle, but one must expect that this is facilitated in an ISO certified hotel."

This response also highlights a common concern for customers. Waste was a keyword with high frequency, indicating high awareness. Looking more closely, many of the comments expressed concern about a lack of waste recycling options, especially in the rooms. Although waste was described in sustainability documents as an important focus area, these goals and targets tended to relate to internal waste management and did not include information on better facilitation of waste recycling in the hotel rooms. This negative relation between absence of recycling facilities and customer feedback is supported by Berezan et al. (2014), who found that the highest level of satisfaction was placed on the hotel with a convenient recycling policy. Furthermore, Verma and Chandra (2016) underscore that recycling bins in the hotel room was one of the green attributes that was best accepted by customers. In other words, the full recycling potential seemed to go awry on several occasions, leading to weak green trust in NCH's ESP.

On the one hand, many studies indicate that environmental certifications lead to positive perceptions and behavioural intentions of ESP (Esparon et al., 2014; Gao et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2019; Verma & Chandra, 2016). On the other hand, other studies find that environmental advertising can backfire, especially if it is perceived negatively by customers (Nyilasy et al., 2014). Moreover, Bachnik & Nowacki (2018) point out that despite certification schemes objectively confirming that a company complies with the standards, it is the customers who evaluate the activities. In other words, it is their evaluation and perception that either confirms or challenges the performance advertised and, in the case of an unfavourable evaluation, leads to unfavourable feedback. Findings in this study support the latter convictions, namely that a pitfall in communicating environmental certifications may be that customers do not perceive that the hotel complies with the certifications, leading to weak green trust. As a final reflection on the issue of discrepancy between information and compliance, further research is probably needed to understand

more deeply the relationship between environmental certifications and customers perceptions and expectations.

5.2.4. Inconsistency within Nordic Choice Hotels' environmental sustainability performance

NCH is a hotel chain operating in multiple countries. Therefore, one challenge is to maintain an interconnected and consistent ESP across all the different hotels in the chain (Chan et al., 2019). In light of the findings from the document analysis, the employment of an environmental coordinator in each hotel can be seen as a good measure to ensure consistency in the performance (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g). However, errors and inconsistencies between hotels are likely to occur. Indeed, two customers points out:

> "I have been spoiled with many excellent ecological breakfasts at your hotels. In this regard, Ekoxen[19] is probably the worst yet. Organic eggs and sunflower seeds I have seen. Surely there was something more. But when there is not even any organic juice, at least I am disappointed. Otherwise, the breakfast was perfectly ok."

> "Breakfast. I hope that the Choice chain will be focused on ecology and environmental friendliness, that they actually become the hotel chain who is recognised for this focus. My experience is unfortunately that this is not profiled as visibly anymore, having experienced this both in Trondheim and now in Bergen."

The importance of synergy between the different hotels operating under NCH is therefore critical, because inconsistency of environmental activities and information can be perceived by customers as greenwashing or weak green trust (Chen et al., 2019; Nyilasy et al., 2014). Furthermore, it highlights the pivotal role of another stakeholder for NCH, namely the employees who carry out the environmental activities (e.g., towel change, buffet design, etc.). Employees are therefore a key determinant of company performance (Chan, 2021; Tariq, Yasir, & Majid, 2020). As previous studies suggest, employees with higher motivation contribute to better ESP due to their awareness, knowledge, and concern for the environment (Fukey & Issac, 2014; Goodman, 2000; Tariq et al., 2020). Considering findings in this study, an absence of knowledge among employees may have a negative impact on customer perceptions. One customer experienced that an employee could not answer inquiries about the environment, which consequently lead to an unfavourable feedback:

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[19]Assumed reference to Quality Hotel Ekoxen, Linköping, Sweden.

"Stop pretending that you care about the environment. It is only economic. It provokes me that you are forcing all this nagging about how much you take care of the environment. I asked one of the cleaning staff how she perceived cleaning and the environment. She did not understand what I was saying."

To summarise these findings of symptoms of perceived greenwashing, this study supports previous studies indicating that greenwashing negatively impacts green trust (Chen et al., 2019; Chen & Chang, 2013; Chen et al., 2015). If the symptoms are not addressed, it is perhaps inevitable that green trust will remain mediocre and weak, and the perception of greenwashing will become greater. The interpretation of negative perceptions and the impact of behavioural intentions remains inconclusive in this study, likely due to the framing of the survey, which asked for feelings and suggestions for improvement rather than direct behavioural intentions and observable action points.

Despite this inconclusiveness, it can be argued, based on previous research that has examined perceptions of ESP and subsequent behavioural intentions, that for NCH, customers negative perception of their ESP can have negative effects on behavioural intentions such as paying premium, spreading of positive WOM, intentions to revisit, and overall satisfaction (Berezan et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2019; Martínez García de Leaniz et al., 2018). As Chen et al. (2019) underscore, the importance of customers' green trust in a hotels' environmental activities and subsequent ESP strongly influences revisit intention and negative WOM intentions. Some observations in this study suggest that there are some customers who argue that they would pay a premium for a stronger ESP. However, their feedback can be interpreted to mean that their impression of the ESP is now weak:

"Your environmental contribution was similar to the standard for hotels and in general it was greenwashing. You should consider how you can become a circular economy/sustainable hotel and make it part of your core values. You will find that your guests will ask for this. Young people especially will ask for it, and I personally will pay more for my room if I know you are taking good care of the environment."

"I do not know at all how Comfort works with this or perceive that anything separates you from other hotel chains. Personally, I would find it very positive if Comfort took a leading position and started to differentiate themselves and become climate positive in regard to CO_2 emissions. Either by planting forests or other stronger negative emissions initiatives such as direct CO_2 capture. It is about time that we fix the climate

together! Then I would always choose Comfort during work as well as leisure travel

and sleep better at night. I would definitely pay for that too, because that's an

important issue for me right now!"

5.3. Evidence of homo economicus?

In light of the strongly negative data analysed in this study, the interpretation of this customer feedback has led to some visible trends of weak green trust; therefore, NCH communication of ESP and subsequent choice environment is perceived as neither competent, nor trustworthy. Added to these negative perceptions are some findings of customers reacting negatively to environmental interventions. Remarkably, some of these are coded in the variables provocative and no respect (see Appendix G).

As postulated by RCT, humans perform (think and act) based on a calculus between loss/pain and profit/pleasure (Andreadakis, 2019; Kahneman, 1994; Sen, 1977). When staying in a hotel, people arguably seek the ultimate pleasure in the form of time away from everyday life by being treated to excellent food and comfortable accommodation to maximise pleasure. For some customers, reminders of environmental concerns, too much informational "noise", as well as encouragements to participate in reducing hotels' environmental impact, can quickly become a pain (Dolnicar et al., 2008):

"I have been a silver member for about 10 years and for every passing year, staying at

your hotel becomes more and more like attending the annual conferences of the

Environmental Party. There is just too much talk about the environment and climate

in a way that does not feel true, simplified conclusions based on cherry-picking of

facts, i.e., pure environmental/climate populism. An example of this is the pledge on a

piece of paper hanging on the wall between reception and the breakfast room to stop

using plastic in 2020. Plastic is a really excellent material – it is not plastic's fault that

some people throw plastic in the wrong place. Running a hotel completely without

using plastic is completely impossible, so your commitment will be a phrase that you

will probably think is right in time."

Such remarks on pleasure maximisation and "noise" somewhat contest the notion that information about environmental activities can build stronger green trust and positive perception of ESP (Chen & Tung, 2014; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014; Trang et al., 2019). Interestingly, this customer has observed the environmental message of banning plastic, as the sustainability reports set as an important goal. Unlike previous customer comments arguing that the use of plastic leads to a negative perception of ESP (see subchapter 5.2.3.), this

customer expresses a polarising opinion and argues that this type of intervention leads to an unfavourable evaluation. Further complimentary comments are made by customers who perceive the constant reminders to participate in environmental activities as negative and argue that the interventions can lead to annoyance:

> *"Excuse me, I stay in several hotels throughout the year. I am tired of being constantly confronted with notices about support for one thing and the other, that I as a customer can clean the room myself and reuse towels etc. This does not take care of the environment and community. (…) I cannot understand why this should be imposed on me. I find other independent ways to take care of the environment and humanity."*

> *"(…) I stay in a hotel on vacation to get a break from everyday life, not to be the conscience of the whole world. You go too far when you claim that all withdrawals are due to the environment. I do not want to know how much food you throw away at breakfast etc., too many pointers! Feels like eating a school lunch."*

This first customer is likely to be a frequent user of hotel accommodation, perhaps through business travel. Previous studies have indicated that a majority of hotel customers from the business and work segment are not interested in environmental activities in their rooms while travelling (see e.g., Verma & Chandra, 2016), although the data in this study cannot clearly confirm this concept due to the lack of comparable variables. Lack of interest is often attributed to loss of luxury and the associated high cost, as well as finding attributes such as sleep quality more important (Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004; Rhee & Yang, 2015; Verma & Chandra, 2016). Accommodating several markets is a major challenge for hotel management, as different segments often want different attributes, and their behavioural intentions are likely to reflect this set of preferences.

What these responses ultimately illustrate is dissatisfaction with environmental interventions, which support the findings of Dolnicar and Grün (2009), who suggest that hotel customers are likely to be less inclined to participate in hotel environmental activities compared to home. Furthermore, Weale (1992) argues that in the calculus of economic and personal well-being, environmental concerns are likely to be less important to some individuals. Some customers will never willingly accept trade-offs in quality, luxury, performance, and convenience when exposed to green products and services (Chan et al., 2019; Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004; Verma & Chandra, 2016). The unwillingness to accept inconvenience and perceived trade-off between environmentally friendly behaviour and comfort sacrifice is likely to be perceived as stronger

in the hotel context, as holidays and travel are fundamentally about pleasure and not sacrifice (Dolnicar et al., 2008). Staying in NCH, some customers react negatively to the trade-off:

> *"It honestly feels like a party speech to me…You pull the environmental card, but it is perceived as stingy. A warm, nice bed, good towels and a good shower (not a saving shower that takes twice as long) is incredibly important for a good hotel experience."*

To summarise, these comments illustrate that if information and interventions becomes too intrusive, some customers are likely to react negatively and feel their autonomy is threatened (Jung & Mellers, 2016; Schmidt & Engelen, 2020; Wilkinson, 2013). If it is perceived by customers that NCH exclusively communicates environmental-friendly initiatives that inform and require them to sacrifice comfort, this may lead to higher scepticism towards the hotels' hidden motives (Rahman et al., 2015). Moreover, environmental messages may prove to be ineffective and rejected if the information given is inconsistent with their belief (Bicchieri & Dimant, 2019). In a study by Chen and Tung (2014), inadequate information was considered one of the main elements contributing to customer inactivity in environmental activities, and this notion is supported by the findings of this study.

5.4. Customers need navigation and increased transparency?

Despite some evidence that customers are likely to react negatively to environmental interventions, the prevailing understanding of the customer feedback analysed in this study is that customers want more environmental interventions, education, and information to help them to make the best choices while staying in NCH. Interpretation of the customer responses suggests that the main reasons customers responded that they disagreed with the statement that NCH contributes to taking care of the environment, people, and community and perceive symptoms of greenwashing ultimately stem from two main issues. First, perceived insufficient facilitation and infrastructure of environmental activities in which customers can participate. Second, perceived absence of accessible information and deliberation transparency of NCH's ESP. These negative perceptions of NCH's ESP likely lead to diminishing green trust in NCH as a competent choice architect that can nudge their customer.

5.4.1. Improving facilitation and interventions

Based on the majority of the responses, the understanding is that customers are predominantly interested in ESP and encourages NCH to take more actions and better facilitate customers to participate in the environmental activities. This interest and willingness to participate is supported by De Mendonca and Zhou (2019), who maintain that customers would be willing to engage in corporate environmental

activities because they are not only consumers of goods and services, but also have a genuine interest in the hotel improving its ESP. In other words, NCH can benefit from their investment in ESP in the long run. However, as the performance is perceived today, customers feel constrained by the environment mediated by NCH and are therefore sceptical and critical of NCH as a credible and competent choice architect (Selinger & Whyte, 2010). Based on the findings from the solution and specific point variables, customers demand more infrastructure to help them make more environmentally friendly choices:

"Waste sorting of trash in the rooms or on each floor. At home we sort everything…"

"Better vegan and vegetarian options should be made available (…)"

"Connect the light and TV to the key card reader, so the light does not stay on when one leaves the room."

"Could not see any charging stations for electric vehicles."

Conceivably, comments and responses such as these calling for more and better facilitation can be interpreted to mean that customers are not finding it easy to make optimal choices while staying in NCH, so nudges and other interventions, as they are in use now, do not work. Therefore, the effectiveness of the ESP and nudges used by NCH is challenged. The effectiveness of nudges is a contested topic in the nudging literature (Bruns et al., 2018; Hertwig et al., 2019; Hummel & Maedche, 2019; Mols et al., 2015). Regardless, environmental interventions and nudges are likely to be welcomed, and customers perceive that they need navigation to make environmentally friendly choices (Sunstein, 2019), with one elaborating:

"So…it is not apparent that you are committed to the environment! The plates at breakfast are huge, remind people about waste and not to throw away. Help people make the right choices. As a vegan I find alternatives, but it is still sad that bacon and sausages have so much space. If the company is working with the EAT Foundation[20] make it visible. (I) think many want to do the right thing and even talk to their kids about it. Have a picture of Greta and remind us :)"

As suggested by Dolnicar & Grün (2009), an issue for the hospitality industry is precisely that the infrastructure available in the vacation environment is often insufficient to enable customers to maintain their usual level of environmentally friendly behaviour (such as recycling, energy saving, etc.). The results

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[20] The EAT Foundation aims to transform the global food system through novel partnership, science and impatient disruption, more information can be found at their web site: https://eatforum.org/about/who-we-are/

from this study support the issue of insufficient infrastructure and facilitation as a barrier to environmentally friendly behaviour, and suggest for the akin management to strengthen their facilitation and intervention to increase green trust in them as choice architects (Trang et al., 2019; Verma & Chandra, 2016). Despite the fact that customers predominantly want simple changes and interventions, some advocate for more radical changes to increase green trust. Some of the changes and interventions suggested by customers can be found in Figure 10.

HOW CAN THE HOTEL IMPROVE THEIR ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE, AS PERCEIVED BY GUESTS

"Much more vegan options, please. The meat and milk production destroy our earth (about 50% of the co2 production in the world comes from those industries!) and animal proteins is no good for humans. Idea: can Nordic choice start the first vegan hotel in the Nordic? I would love it!"

"Find more smart solutions to run the hotel. Solar panels on top of the parking, reuse of water/rainwater."

"Take away all meat and dairy products

"Please get rid of the excess plastic. It's so much nicer when hotels use reusable dispensers. Then I don't have to feel guilty about washing my hair."

"Have you considered trying to serve an all-organic menu instead of offering organic alternatives to those interested? That would be noticed widely. I must eat gluten-free and I seldom see organic products at hotels which I can eat."

"Ecological/organic products"; *"Install charging stations at your parking space" ; "Renovate."*

"Opportunities to sort rubbish and waste already in the room."

"The environmental profile is not credible."

"Drop the saving measure with plastic you do not save the world by removing water glasses"

"A tourist machine like this will never be environmentally friendly"

High — Low (Green trust/perception of ESP)

No change — Moderate change — Radical change

Figure 10: Scope of customer feedback highlighting different perceptions of intervention that could improve green trust.

Contrary to the fact that the findings of the document analysis indicate that NCH has implemented more organic and vegetarian options, for example, 10% of all burgers are vegetarian, as well as offering a selection of organic products with third-party environmental certification, customer responses suggest that these initiatives have not been communicated sufficiently. These products need to improve, by some opinion, radically. As expressed by one customer (see Figure 10), ESP and green trust would likely increase if they offered an all-organic menu instead of only offering a minimum of 22 (Sweden) and 15 (Norway)

ecological products at breakfast, as stated in the WeCare Annual Report 2019 (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2019g). The customer response at the top of the scale in Figure 10 is one of the few dissenting comments calling for a radical transformation of the ESP in terms of food, which supports the recent findings of Trang et al. (2019), who found that a customer benefit such as vegan food as an environmental attribute significantly contributes to customers' pro-environmental behaviour, and that developing these attributes can make a favourable impression on hotel customers. However, it is also likely that a full vegan or vegetarian menu will be met with resistance and perceived as high interference (Dolnicar et al., 2008; Evers et al., 2018; Jung & Mellers, 2016).

On the one hand, some evidence of customers' sense of moral obligation to recycle waste, eat less meat, and conserve water can be found in this study, as also claimed by Han and Hyun (2018). On the other hand, this sense of moral obligation contradicts the previously mentioned conviction of Dolnicar and Grün (2009), who found that customers staying in hotels are less likely to engage in such environmental activities. This divergence between the customer reactions to environmental activities and nudging interventions illustrates the complexity of customer perceptions and behaviours, and in some ways demonstrates the polarisation of the customer feedback sample examined in this study. Furthermore, it highlights the tension in the literature, which is far from unanimous (Berezan et al., 2014; Dolnicar et al., 2008; Dolnicar & Grün, 2009; Purnama Alamsyah et al., 2020; Tierney et al., 2011; Weale, 1992).

To summarise, the findings suggest that the majority of customers want an improved choice environment that facilitates environmentally friendly behaviour. However, the prevailing perception is that NCH does not facilitate this type of behaviour, which supports other studies which argue that environmental facilitation and infrastructure is a recurring issue in the hospitality industry (Berezan et al., 2014; Dolnicar & Grün, 2009; Evers et al., 2018; Jung & Mellers, 2016; Rhee & Yang, 2015). In other words, in the view of customers, improved facilitations and interventions are needed to build strong green trust and foster perceptions of NCH as a competent choice architect who nudges their customers to make environmentally friendly choices.

5.4.2. Framing information and improving transparency

Given that improved facilitation of customer choice environments has been identified as a key component of building strong green trust, it is perhaps even more important to also emphasise disclosure of information and deliberation transparency of interventions as predictors of green trust (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014; Melissen & Sauer, 2019). It is conceivable that some of the symptoms of greenwashing identified in this study overall can be understood as that the information and ESP communicated by NCH are perceived

as ambiguous, and, in some cases, non-existent. Both Castaldo et al. (2010) and Selinger and Whyte (2010) identified competence and integrity as critical components of trust. The findings in this study support this notion of competence and integrity as critical components of trust, arguing that when competence is not perceived, it leads to mistrust, dissatisfaction, dissatisfaction, and unfavourable feedback from customers. The predominant consensus that transparency and more information are crucial for strong green trust and strong ESP (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014; Kim & Kim, 2016) challenge the view of Nyilasy et al. (2014) and Robinot and Giannelloni (2010), who argue that it would be better not to inform customers about environmental activities to avoid unfavourable evaluations of environmental activities. On the contrary, the findings from customer feedback data suggests that lack of information and transparency is one of the key reasons for dissatisfaction, weak green trust, and unfavourable evaluation of ESP, supporting the predominant consensus.

The results from both the keyword frequency analysis and the deeper interpretation of the open-ended text responses demonstrate that there is a significant call for more and improved information and transparency about the environmental activities and measures employed by NCH, supporting previous research that these elements are likely to enhance green trust and acceptance of nudging (Bruns et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2019; Eggert & Helm, 2003; Hansen & Jespersen, 2013). Furthermore, as the interpretation of the statistical results from the customer survey indicate, the responses under the "Unable to answer" and "I somewhat agree" alternatives likely reflect the ambiguity of what customers perceive as NCH's ESP, and that absence of available and univocal information exacerbates this uncertainty.

Despite being disclosed in sustainability reports, information and factual representation of energy systems and CO_2 emissions in the immediate environment should perhaps be more accessible, as some customers perceive that this information can convince them of a more credible performance and commitment, rather than focusing on symbolic hotel-driven environmental activities and transactions, such as the towel reuse programme (Rahman et al., 2015). This is also supported, for example, by Trang et al. (2019), who recommend that hoteliers clearly present statistics about their environmental practises. This presentation of statistics is in the hope that these measures will improve customers' environmental awareness, and that these environmentally friendly practises have significant impacts on customers' perceived attitudes. Looking at some of the goals of NCH, the 2019 results for energy consumption per m^2 and water consumption revealed that the goals were not achieved. By disclosing these negative results to customers, it can possibly lead to increased transparency and trust (Fennis & Stroebe, 2014).

Deliberate transparency of both process and outcome, e.g., energy systems and emissions, should be presented to customers to convince them of competence and compliance with performance, confirming the notion that customers have more knowledge about the environment and that managers need to improve their strategies and communication (Berezan et al., 2014; Eggert & Helm, 2003; Klotz et al., 2008; Trang et al., 2019). In other words, being informed about relevant actions and properties of the other party in the interaction, is likely to develop perceptions of strong green trust, as two customers indeed note:

> *"Transparency. How do you heat the facilities? Solar, wind power? Solar panels with self-production presentation. Energy recycling. Give people feedback on how much CO_2 is saved by saving energy or how many trees are saved. Waste sorting and smart packaging, beer in glass bottles is not an energy efficient choice for making a bottle and transporting the bottle causes a big impact. Think about the whole life cycle of everything you use, then I think you can get a really high energy savings profile."*

> *"Survey all areas of CO_2 emissions in your organisation and systematically work towards 0 emissions. Do this and share the story of your transition transparently and I would know and not "feel" that you contributed."*

Furthermore, an interesting observation from the document analysis illustrates that NCH measures all its aggregate numbers of emissions and consumption using the standard unit "per guest night". This framing postulates that the impact of each individual customer staying at NCH is critical to overall performance, with further reasoning suggesting that collective action to reduce these consumption is key to stronger green trust and ultimately a stronger ESP (Bachnik & Nowacki, 2018; Rahman et al., 2015; Ritzer, 2015). Disclosing this collective action element when framing information can therefore be crucial, otherwise perceived imbalance between what is expected from the customer and what is disclosed by NCH in relation to the hotel-driven environmental activities, may trigger an unfavourable customer evaluation. This imbalance was indeed perceived by a customer, who found the nudging sign used by NCH to encourage customers to help themselves to less food as wrongful framing of the food waste issue:

> *"Very large selection at the breakfast buffet. There was a sign informing that you throw away 50kg of food every day. Realise that this is largely due to hotel guests helping themselves to more than they can eat and that this is out of your control. My personal opinion, however, is that the selection was even greater than necessary, and that less food could have been thrown away by reducing some. (…)*

This customer response highlights the importance for NCH to disclose process transparency, and frame environmental issues as a collective action of mutual accountability (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014; Pucker, 2021; Sunstein, 2017). In other words, disclosing what NCH is doing and framing how customers can contribute can increase green trust and improve nudging interventions. Already found to be efficient nudging interventions, Kallbekken and Sælen (2013) separately examined the effects of plate reduction (default nudge) and a social cue with a sign encouraging customers to help themselves more than once (informative nudge). Results indicated that plate size change reduced food waste by 19,5%, and social cuing reduced food waste by 20,5%, compared to control experiments where no nudge intervention occurred. In discussing and interpreting customers' reactions, the findings of this study suggest that informative nudging may be welcome as some customers reacted positively to the intervention:

> *"(…) good that the hotel reminded the guest to help themselves to less food when eating and was open about how much food was being thrown away."*

> *"Select some conscious focus areas and communicate them. For example: At Amaranth in Stockholm, the plates are smaller than usual because the hotel then throws away significantly less food. This is stated on small posters in the breakfast room. This is a way of doing it that I buy 100%."*

In summary, from these comments, informative nudges that inform and help customers reduce food waste can be seen as a credible contribution to reducing NCH environmental impact. This in turn implies that NCH should promote these nudging interventions in the immediate choice environment and ensure compliance throughout the chain. The importance of emphasising and informing customers about the use of various environmental activities in the hotel, corroborates the findings of previous studies that found that non-coercive strategies, such as informing customers about why reducing carbon footprint is important, are better at improving customer perceptions and commitment (Chan, 2021; Chan et al., 2018, 2019; Klotz et al., 2008).

Moreover, other studies have found that increased transparency and the use of informative nudges can be more effective for long-term behaviour change and are also better accepted than nudges that are less transparent and perceived as manipulative (Hansen & Jespersen, 2013; Jung & Mellers, 2016; Kallbekken & Sælen, 2013). On the other hand, others argue that education, not just information, is necessary to advance nudge acceptance and lead to long-term behaviour change (Cadario & Chandon, 2019; Hertwig et al., 2019). Chen and Tung (2014) also suggest that an important strategy for practitioners is to educate

customers about their environmental initiatives by disclosing both the effectiveness and reasons for undertaking these activities. The findings of this study support that education and knowledge sharing can be positively received by customers, and the theoretical viewpoint that travellers are more open to new impressions, knowledge and experiences (Aall, 2014):

"More vegan food at breakfast and perhaps more information about how choosing a vegan alternative to animal products is an important contribution to the environment."

"(…) Provide more information about how the hotel generates energy e.g., do you use renewable energy. Give suggestions on how guests can help save energy."

"Display more about the environmental work e.g., during dinner/breakfast when you sit and eat so we can read more about it."

"(…) Certified skin care products, close floors and units when few guests are staying there, solar and sedum on the roof, grow your own spices in the restaurant, do not put out too many towels in the rooms but let the guest pick up more if needed, lower the temperature in the rooms in the winter, bike rentals, greener outdoor spaces, set up insect hotels, invite guests to travel to you collectively, etc. Talk about what you are doing, and you will help spread the word and create more awareness and knowledge!"

As a final note in the discussion, it is important to emphasise that although transparency correlates with trust, more information and transparency does not necessarily automatically catalyse strong green trust and reliability in NCH as a competent choice architect. As discussed in subsection 5.3, an excess of information and intervention can lead to resistance and negative perceptions, which in turn often leads to confusion, mistrust, and uncertainty rather than trust (Morton, 2018; O'Neill, 2002). Furthermore, in a recent article, Pucker (2021) argues that sustainability and environmental reporting is often confusing and customers usually do not have intuitive reference points that can lead them to understand how environmental impacts and performance are measured. This uncertainty is supported by this study, stating that framing of information and deliberation transparency are critical, with more research needed to improve understanding of how different framings, levels of disclosure, and amounts of information are perceived by customers for the purpose of discovering plausible and effective strategies.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Addressing the research questions

This study was concerned with structuring unstructured data, giving form to a cloud of customer feedback, interpreting it, understanding how customers perceive Nordic Choice Hotels' environmental sustainability performance, and comparing the interpreted meaning of customers' perception with NCH's own perception of its ESP. After categorising this data, a range of customer reactions to NCH's ESP were identified. Returning to the research questions, the conclusions are as follows:

1) How do customers react to Nordic Choice Hotels' environmental sustainability performance and choice environment?

This study identifies absence of environmental facilitation and information as key elements of dissatisfaction, which can be interpreted as the majority of customers reacting to the choice environment as ambiguous. The conclusion moves towards the school of Behavioural Economics, that is, an understanding that there is an increasing demand among customers that improved environmental facilitation and interventions are welcome, and that NCH should therefore improve green trust and further promote their ESP.

2) Do customers find the environmental sustainability performance of Nordic Choice Hotels trustworthy?

The conclusion to this research question is twofold. First, interpreting the total customer feedback data, which includes both the aggregate statistical data and the open-ended text responses, leads to the conclusion that customers perceive moderate green trust in NCH's ESP. Second, considering and emphasising the strongly negative nature of the open-ended customer feedback data, the conclusion is that customers perceive weak green trust in NCH's ESP.

3) Do customers perceive that the choice environment enabled by Nordic Choice Hotels motivates them to change their behaviour toward a more environmentally friendly orientation?

Based on moderate to weak green trust, customers predominantly perceive that NCH performance does not motivate them to change their behaviour toward a more environmentally friendly orientation.

6.2. Final reflections

As a conclusion of the empirical investigation, and interpretation of discrepancy causes, customers perceive absence of facilitation and infrastructure, and transparent information, as major causes of mistrust and discredit in NCH as a trustworthy and competent choice architect. Further damaging the customer-company relationship and green trust are the symptoms of greenwashing identified in this study, such as suspicion of hidden motives and mistrust trust in management, weak green trust in perceived symbolic environmental activities, discrepancy between information and compliance, and, a novel finding, inconsistency within NCH's ESP.

The answers to the research questions demonstrate the ambiguity of ESP and that NCH uses this ambiguity to damage transparency. And this is the real problem. In conclusion, and according to scholarly consensus (Bruns et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2019; Hansen & Jespersen, 2013; Morton, 2018; O'Neill, 2002; Sunstein, 2017), the point where much goes wrong when NCH try to build green trust with customers is that they do not understand deliberation transparency and thought processes as fundamentals of trust, but provide customers with few, inaccurate and confusing factoids. It is not enough to just say that by hanging towels you are helping the hotel save water, there must be deliberation and disclosure of both the process and the outcome to build stronger green trust. This conclusion supports the notion that customers are likely to be more concerned with the environment and have greater environmental awareness, and seek information and education (Berezan et al., 2014; Purnama Alamsyah et al., 2020; Tierney et al., 2011). Specifically, building a strong green trust is useful, even necessary, for NCH to improve their total ESP. Furthermore, ESP needs to be communicated as a collective action of mutual accountability between NCH and customers (Chathoth et al., 2013; Chen et al., 2019; Rahman et al., 2015). Without this salience of mutual accountability measures, strong green trust, hotel-driven motivation to change customer consumption behaviour, and ultimately a strong ESP for NCH shall remain elusive.

6.3. Recommended actions for Nordic Choice Hotels to improve green trust

This study has unfolded its narrative from the perspective of customers staying at NCH and how they react to NCH's ESP. A future question that arises is how NCH responds and acts on this information. This was not the main intention of my study, but I still see it as important to highlight some actions NCH can take to build a stronger green trust relationship with its customers, which further can strengthen the total ESP. Customer behaviour and perception in the context of the hospitality industry is not an easy task and my study has shown that there is a persistent problem of greenwashing perception and consequently weak green trust. Nonetheless, the concluding observations also demonstrate that nudging and environmental

interventions are something that customers desire, suggesting that NCH can capitalise on improving green trust with its customers.

In light of this conclusion, it would be advisable for NCH to take a more holistic approach in communicating and disclosing its ESP to customers. Environmental activities such as the towel reuse programme can no longer be considered as exceptional environmental commitments. Hence, communicated performance should shift towards more unique commitments, such as social cuing signs at the food buffet, which can differentiate NCH from its competitors. In addition, for different brand concepts such as spa hotels, information about environmental activities could emphasise the core elements of a spa rather than generic environmental activities. Information that discloses how the spa is heated, what energy source is used, and the life cycle of the water consumed. An informative approach that educates customers about performance by disclosing effectiveness and rationale and disclosing both process and outcome transparency is likely to significantly increase customer green trust (Chen et al., 2019; Chen & Tung, 2014; Morton, 2018; Rahman et al., 2015; Sunstein, 2017). Transparent information about both cost-benefit and environmental benefits can reduce perceptions of greenwashing (Chen et al., 2019). In addition, framing environmental contribution as a collective contribution and mutual accountability rather than a unilateral action by customers can be viewed positively (Bachnik & Nowacki, 2018). Simply put, avoiding vague, contextless, and opaque information is pivotal for strong green trust and ESP.

Another important recommendation for NCH management is to change the survey questions. Based on the unstructured and extensive amount of customer feedback that has accumulated in the NCH survey database over the past few years, it is apparent that the results from it are too complex and ambiguous for management to identify and capitalise on. Since the sustainability question in the current survey aim to capture subjective states (i.e., how the customer *feels* about the performance) based on a scale with alternatives as well as open-ended text responses if they disagree with the statement, it implies that customers found this question as ambiguous and therefore both difficult to understand and answer. This in turn leads to low validity and reliability of the data, both internal validity due to the low response rate and external validity as the findings are not generalisable and may remain difficult to interpret.

If the question is to be retained, some recommended changes to the survey are, first, to mirror the categories and create an alternative break-even point or a neither/nor alternative. Second, as the follow-up question is currently worded, the question "How can we improve our work…" can be answered by checking off categories such as "more ecological food/hygiene products," "less meat," "more recycling," etc. instead of leaving a text response. Since these were many of the responses in the open-ended text

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responses, management could more easily interpret the objective data by using such categorisations. Moreover, all customers should have the opportunity to answer this open-ended question, not just those customers who disagree or strongly disagree with the statement. Then NCH could get a broader understanding of the full spectrum of customer feedback, not just the negative, and often out of context, feedback they receive now. Third, creating a survey with more comparative, aggregative, and longitudinal metrics related to the sustainability aspect of the business could also provide the NCH with more valuable data.

All these recommendations come down to the point that to build a stronger relationship with customers and build green trust, the survey needs to reflect the full spectrum of customer perceptions and evaluations of the signals the hotel is providing – what are we doing right, what can we do better? Without a clear sense of orientation on the crux of ESP, all efforts to capture valuable customer feedback remain ambiguous. Ultimately, by capitalising on these recommendations and interpretations of customer responses, NCH can be a leader in the hotel sustainability discourse and foster a unique and sophisticated environment to motivate its customers to change their behaviour toward more sustainable and environmentally friendly consumption.

As a final note, generalisation of the results cannot be justified due to the limitations of both the context and the data of the study in terms of negative bias, validity, and reliability. Nonetheless, I would argue that the discussion of the customer feedback data highlights general issues facing the hospitality industry and arguably other industries in today's sustainability landscape. Suspicions of greenwashing, opaque and ambiguous information, confusing sustainability reporting, absence of disclosure and transparency, and communicating ESP as a collective effort of mutual accountability for both the hotel and the customer rather than unilaterally, are all challenges facing not only NCH but the entire hospitality industry (Chen et al., 2019; O'Neill, 2002; Pucker, 2021; Rahman et al., 2015; TerraChoice, 2009).

6.4. Limitations and further research

The limitations of this study are many, with methodological limitations disclosed in subsection 3.4. These limitations are compounded by theoretical limitations, as the understanding of ESP is an elusive concept that is constantly changing over time as new trends and standards are introduced into the world (Pucker, 2021). As both external (e.g., customers, competitors, government) and internal factors (e.g., management, employees) are expected to change over time, what is considered sustainability and green trust will also evolve. In this regard, future research should examine not only performance, but also how the landscape of values, norms, environmental trends, policy regulations, market dynamics, and disruptive

events, such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic, are changing in the hospitality industry (Dolnicar, 2020; Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020; Postma et al., 2017).

Adding further theoretical complexity is the tricky notion of transparency and green trust, whether it is even possible to achieve or whether it is a lost cause. Indeed, while increasing transparency can open an abundance of information and openness, it can also open up a flood of misinformation that, if not assessed and sorted, is likely to lead to uncertainty as opposed to the desired outcome, which is trust (O'Neill, 2002). To contribute to the understanding of the complex relationship between transparency and trust, future research could investigate how customers respond to different levels of information disclosure and environmental cues in hotels.

In this study, both internal and external validity suffers because it is a small sample from the total number of guest nights in NCH, in addition to a negatively skewed dataset of open-ended text responses. Therefore, the results cannot be generalised. In particular, there is a lack of good quantitative data on measurable variables such as age, gender, nationality, education, and purpose of travel (e.g., business, leisure), as well as qualitative data on aspects that are needed to understand before they can be measured. The future of such work would be to focus on investigating the contrast between self-reported (i.e., customer responses) and empirical customer feedback from fieldwork (i.e., field experiments, interviews). As with the responses analysed in this study, they contain many disjointed and out of context reactions, and it has proven difficult to systematise them to interpret their perceptions of and reactions to NCH's ESP. Therefore, using a mixed methods design and focusing on qualitative approaches of interviews and field experiments may eventually provide a deeper understanding of customer reactions that is nuanced, interactive, and tailored.

Because of the nature of the customer feedback data in this study, the relationships and effects of green trust and greenwashing on behavioural intentions (e.g., customer loyalty, revisit intentions, positive WOM, paying a premium for green attributes), remain inconclusive. Further research using more qualitative methods should be conducted to understand what economic benefits green trust may have for hotels. Despite several studies that have examined the relationship between customer perceptions of ESP and behavioural intentions using quantitative statistical analysis and hypothesis testing, little attention has been paid to a qualitative, in-depth examination of behavioural intentions, particularly in a negative context of perceived greenwashing.

In this thesis, I have discussed some important moral and ethical concerns related to NCH as a credible and trustworthy choice architect that aims to nudge its customers to make more environmentally friendly

choices and links this trust to green trust. Further research on nudging is needed in an industry context such as the hospitality industry particularly in relation to customers' reactions to being nudged, what type of nudging is preferred and perceived competence and trustworthiness of the source (Schmidt & Engelen, 2020; Selinger & Whyte, 2010).

Another important potential research objective related to the choice environment and the notion of nudging, derived from the third research question on motivating behaviour change, may be to analyse the transformative effect of NCH's nudging interventions on private consumption. In particular whether customers' behaviour changes to a more sustainable consumption in the private household context. If NCH establishes more process outcomes, transparent information, and educational nudges, as recommended in this study, this postulates that NCH potentially can influence behaviour in the long-term (Bruns et al., 2018; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). Future research projects on BE and nudging in the hospitality industry could therefore focus on tracking and measuring whether interventions and learning that take place in hotels have a transfer effect on private behaviour and consumption and any long-term cascading effects. The potential climate effect of this transferred behaviour change in terms of private consumption may be significant.

As a final reflection, my study has in some ways highlighted the importance of customers as a driving force in the hospitality industry sustainability debate, arguing that strong green trust is necessary for strong ESP. To put this in a larger context, the tourism industry is predominantly self-regulatory (Aall & Koens, 2019; Holden, 2009) and there is debate as to what driving forces are driving the sustainability discourse. More specifically, whether it is economic motives to harvest "goodwill" from customers, personal morality, compliance with government or industry requirements, market and political driving forces, or customer demand (Berezan et al., 2014; Hall, 2019; Melissen & Sauer, 2019; Postma et al., 2017; Skaug, 2020). Therefore, this research does not position NCH in the broader landscape of the tourism industry or demonstrate how it compares to the rest of the tourism industry and its competitors. Future research could therefore explore data points that illustrate the process of the industry, driving forces of sustainability, as well as data that compares tourism industry players or competitors within the hospitality industry.

In conclusion, future research should enable such questions to be meaningful and provide a clearer interpretation of the inherent ambiguities of ESP and move the overall discourse of green trust towards genuine, strong sustainability.

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8. Appendix

Appendix A: Overview of NCH customer survey from the Loopon portal

This is the customer survey sent out by all hotels in Nordic Choice Hotels to all customers with their email address registered in the booking system. Question number 7 is the survey question that has been analysed in this thesis. The follow-up question only shows up when the disagreement categories are checked off.

How likely is it that you would recommend XXX to your friends or colleagues?

(1 – 10)

Comment:

How likely is it, based solely on our service and personal treatment, that you would recommend us to friends or colleagues?

(1 – 10)

Comment:

Last Name

Comment:

What could we do to make it more likely for you to recommend us?

(1 – 10)

Comment:

To what extent do you agree to the following statements?

I totally agree – I somewhat agree – I do not agree – I strongly disagree – Unable to answer

1. I was satisfied with the cleanliness of the room on arrival.
2. I am satisfied with the standard of my room.
3. The reception staff did a good job.
4. The breakfast gave me a good start of the day.
5. I am satisfied with the food at the restaurant.
6. I am satisfied with the service at the restaurant.
7. **I feel that this hotel contributes to taking care of the environment, people and community.**
8. In light of the Covid-19 outbreak, I feel confident that measures had been put in place by the hotel to provide a Safe Stay.

Appendix B: Step-by-step explanation of data cleaning

First, the two top cells were chosen: A answer B year.

Second, some of the feedback in the cells were written with influx or pointwise using e.g. "-". These had to be manually deleted for each cell they occurred, otherwise PostgreSQL did not recognise the format, consequently the data would not import into PostgreSQL.

Third, some of the cells contained the number "0" which PostgreSQL does not recognise, they were subsequently deleted.

Fourth, it was essential to format the language. The standard language setting UTF-8 was chosen, but as Nordic languages contain extra letters such as æ, ø, å, ä, ö, ü this is not recognised by PostgreSQL. To be sure, I also searched and replaced the German letter ß as well as signs of money, £, € and $. In order to make it easier for the programme to read the text, I converted the letters and symbols as found in Table 8.

Table 8: Overview of converted letters and other symbols.

Letters and other symbols	Æ	Ø	Å	Ä	Ö	Ü	ß	£	€	$
Converted	Ae	Oe	Aa	Ae	Oe	Ue	Ss	Pound	Euro	Dollar

Five, all cells only containing "N/A", "…" and "-", were manually deleted from the document, as these cells do not contain any text answer. Deleting these cells narrowed down the dataset from 9612 entries to 9210 entries.

Six, "," was replaced with " ", and eliminated from the text. Even though "," was not set as the delimiter, the programme had issues with commas and consequently recognised all sentences after a comma as a new customer feedback instead of ignoring it. This was a process of trial error, and the final decision was to cut "," in the whole document.

Seven, ";" was chosen as a delimiter, and was subsequently replaced with ":" in the document. A delimiter means that PostgreSQL recognises a whole text from ";" to ";" as one customer feedback, and in this CSV file this is set for each cell. One cell equals one customer feedback and is defined by ";" as the delimiter.

Appendix C: Overview of word frequency from the WeCare Annual Report 2019 Part 1

Word cloud visualisation of the word frequency found in the WeCare Annual Report 2019 Part 1, that functions as the inspiration for selected keywords in the analysis. See Figure 11 for visualisation of these keywords in a word cloud. The document was entered into Nvivo (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2020), giving the following commands for a word frequency search:

- 100 most frequent

- Minimum length: 1

- With stemmed words, e.g., "talking"

Figure 11: Word cloud frequency from WeCare Annual Report 2019 Part 1. Visualisation Nvivo (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2020).

Appendix D: Table of keywords

Overview of the selected keywords and their classification based on the different focus areas of sustainability activity at NCH, see Table 9 (Nordic Choice Hotels, 2021g, 2021a, 2021e).[21]

Table 9: Table of keywords.

Hotel focus areas	Keyword in English	Norwegian translation	Swedish translation
Sustainable operations			
Water	Water, towel	Vann, håndkle	Vatten, handduk
Chemicals	Chemical, pool	Kjemikalie, basseng	Kjemikalie, pool
Energy	Energy, light, electric, air condition, ventilation, heating	Energi, lys, elektrisk, aircondition, ventilasjon, varme	Energi, ljus, elektricitet, luftkonditionering, ventilation, värme
Waste	Waste, garbage, sorting, packaging, plastic	Avfall, søppel, sortere, emballasje, plast	Avfäll, sopor, sortera, emballage, plast
Transport	Electric car, parking, fee	Elbil, parkering, avgift	Elbil, parkering, avgift
The food revolution	Organic, ecologic, vegetarian, vegan, palm oil, biodiversity, commodity, debio, krav	Organisk, økologisk, vegetar, vegan, palmeolje, biodiversitet, råvarer, debio, krav	Organisk, ekologisk, vegetar, vegan, palmolja, biodiversitet, råvara, debio, krav
General			
Ethical trading	Fairtrade, ethic, trade, supplier	Fairtrade, etisk, handel, leverandør	Fairtrade, etisk, handel, leverantör
Environment	Sustainable, climate, environment, green, emission, Co2, footprint, label	Bærekraft, klima, miljø, grønn, utslipp, Co2, fotavtrykk, sertifisering	Bärkraft, klimat, miljö, grön, utsläpp, Co2, fotavtryck, certifer
Economy	Economy, profit, material, reuse, value, consumption, furbish	Økonomi, profitt, materiale, gjenbruk, verdi, forbruk, renovere	Ekonomi, profit, material, återvinning, värde, konsumtion, renovera
Inconspicuous	Product, wasting, reduce, quality, local, resource, knowledge, information, luxury	Produkt, sløse, redusere, kvalitet, lokal, ressurs, kunnskap, informasjon, luksus	Produkt, slösa, reducera, kvalitet, konsumtion, local, resurs, kunskap, information, lyx

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[21] For translation of the keywords, see both The Norwegian-English dictionary: https://www.dinordbok.no/norsk-engelsk/. Norwegian-Swedish dictionary: https://www.dinordbok.no/norsk-svensk/

Appendix E: Overview of the ISO 14001 process used by Nordic Choice Hotels

Visualisation of how NCH manages and complies with the ISO 14001 certification, see Figure 12 (Killie, E., personal communication, 15 February 2021).
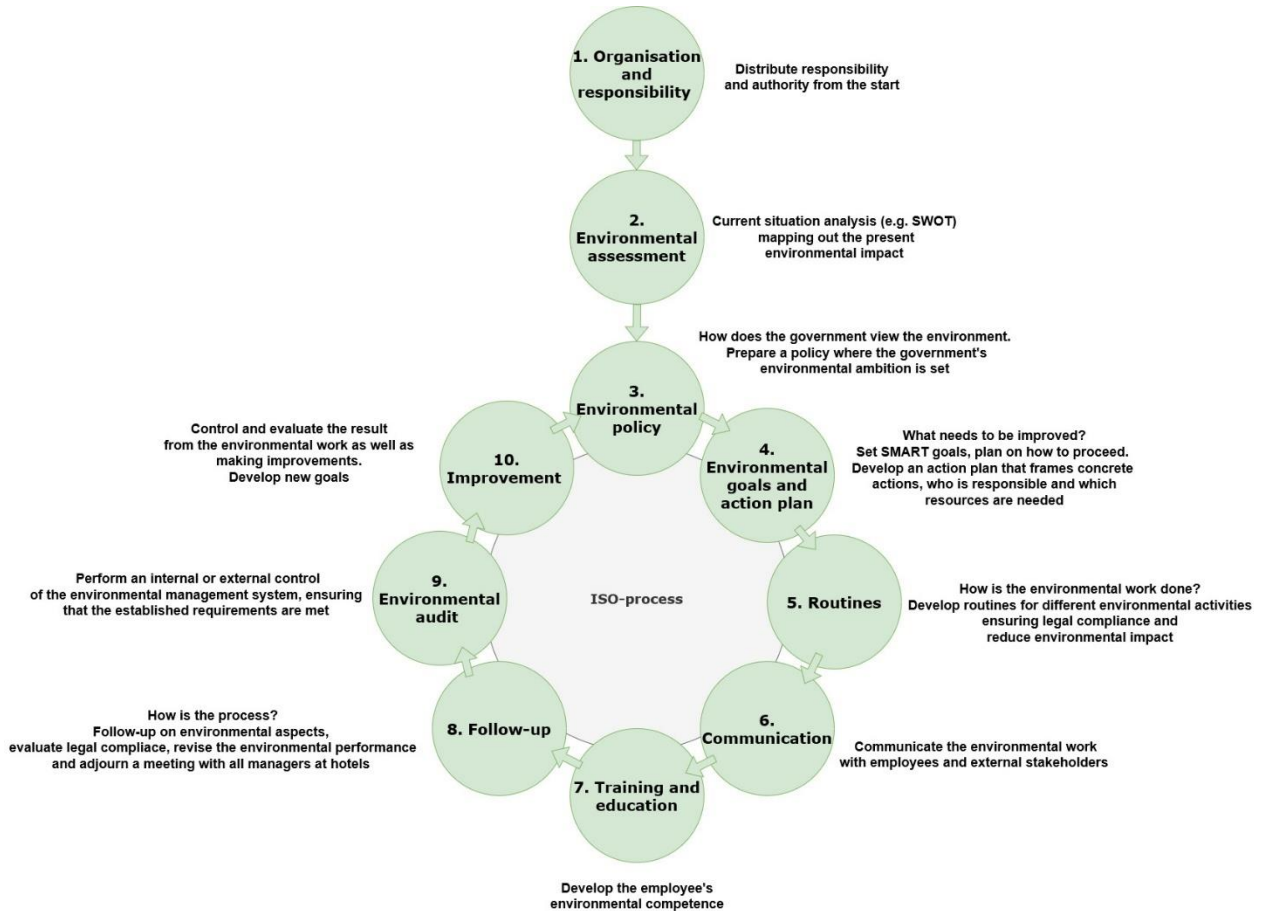

Figure 12: *ISO 14001 certification used by NCH (Data source: Killie, E. personal communication, 15 February 2021, Author's visualisation).*

Appendix F: Overview of the coding in the implication category

Table 10: *Overview of customer feedback coding in the implication category.*

How can we improve our work to take care of the environment, people, and community?		Frequency
Positive customer feedback (PCF)	*"Continue with a good environmental profile and focus on the environment."* *"Good information. Good service. (…)"* *"Continue with a good environmental profile and focus on the environment."* *"The breakfast had a good selection of ecologic products, but you could also transfer this to the restaurant."* *"More ecologic food and vegetarian alternatives. Very nice with local products, hooray for that."* *"Nice that you do not have disposable soaps and shampoo in plastic, please drop the water glass in plastic as well."* *"Continue with your environmental work."* *"Environment – good this with the towels in the bathroom (…)."* *"I guess you take care of the environment just fine."* *"The concept in itself is probably not so environmentally friendly, but good that the heating is bio-based."*	Low recurrence (< 100 responses)

Concerns	"Less meat and other groceries with high GHG-emission in the breakfast buffet."	High recurrence (> 2400 responses)
	"Plastic cups do not belong in the environment."	
	"Clear information about your idea of how you contribute to the environment."	
	"Had hung up the towel that was used one time and placed a floor towel in front of the shower. This was removed the day after, and I got three new towels. This was unnecessary."	
	"More than letting the towels hang. Environmentally friendly spa and improve and inform the technique to customers. A lot of buffet, what happens with all the food that is not eaten? Inform about this.	
	"Ecologic food, tea and coffee. More vegetarian food and illustrate this in the menu. Perhaps make a roof garden with self-produced vegetables and herbs. And again, more plants for a fresher and more pleasant atmosphere for customers at the hotel."	
	"Renovate the old windows so that no cold air enters. That saves the heating cost."	
	"The electric car park (there is only one) has no standard socket, and the reception has no adapter. Perhaps not a problem if it is your own car, but rental cars rarely have a lot of adapters, but usually go in regular outlets."	
	"An element that I feel is very important is the ecological philosophy of the hotel. I was a single person in the room and I'm sure all four towels would be washed after my stay (although I only used one of them). Please put only enough towels in the bathroom for the number of people staying in the room i.e., you knew I was there alone so why put towels for two people? In our current ecological situation, we all have to make more effort in this regard!"	
	"A spa in itself is not environmentally friendly and demands a lot of energy. Employment of solar panels could perhaps make a difference?"	
	"Describe how you work to reduce your energy and water consumption. Copious amounts must be wasted!"	

Negative customer feedback (NCF)	"I cannot see anywhere that you take care of the environment, people or community in any specific way." "Replace your plastic glasses in the rooms with glass that is washed and used. 'We care about the environment' in regard to towels but then there are disposable plastic mugs right next door which is a bit of a double standard." "I do not know, it is a natural large consumption of water, towels etc at a spa hotel." "Stop being so complacent that you do not wash due to the environment when everyone knows it is to save money. Appears false." "Doubt that your work carry fruit, or if it is just greenwashing." "Today's concept is to save money, not the environment." "By providing more reasonably-priced food. Also, the social marketing campaign material in the room was annoying. For the guest to align themselves with social causes is great, but they should make their donations in a dignified way rather than presenting the guest with several leaflets of trafficked third-world children. I think this is a failed attempt to raise the ethos of the hotel chain that comes across instead as too pushy. I'm sure there are one hundred things the hotel could do behind the scenes to save money towards this cause rather than making it about the guest getting their towels changed over." "Would demand very clear communication about this. 'Everyone' in 2020 are supposed to do this. Demand distinct and better measures if you are to be credible in this regard." "You can make a number of real commitments: a guarantee. Palm oil free zone is populism." "Stop running hotels. Travel is inherently hostile to the environment and contributes to maintaining social inequalities."	Medium recurrence (> 900 responses)
Not relevant	"Deny Tesla owners parking, they do not know the meaning of the word consideration." "Cheaper parking, better breakfast." "Was too strong perfume smell in the common facilities (…)" "The bar needs to open earlier (…)" "Reduce the noise from the bar."	

Appendix G: Overview of the coding in the constructiveness category

Table 11: *Overview of customer feedback coding in the constructiveness category (white table body constructive, blue table body non-constructive variables).*

How can we improve our work to take care of the environment, people, and community?		Frequency
Solution	"I miss more marking and profiling of ecological food etc. Please also change egg glasses in plastic :). Use more TINE products to the food outside the meeting rooms (more eco-friendly) food and cakes here can also be made more focused on ecological profiling." "You should invest in using high quality lights that will allow you to light up the entire room and to save energy as well: instead of lighting up so many lights as it happens right now because of their poor quality." "'Greener food', more vegetarian." "Fix the ventilation." "Enormous amounts of plastic to protect the food can easily be reduced or cut out. What about having employees handing out the food the guest wants instead?"	Very high recurrence (> 1700 responses)
Specific points	"Eco-products." "Plastic mugs do not belong in the environment." "No information about EV charging or parking with charging sockets for EV cars." "What about waste sorting?" "Otherwise, great job but because the water stayed on the floor the floor heating was at 40 degrees when we arrived. That's a lot of heating wasted. I understand this was a construction flaw and not a lot the staff can do about it."	High recurrence (> 1100 responses)
Personal experience	"Exchange soap dispensers by the sink and shower to metal. Both of these were in plastic – both the wall mount and the dispenser itself. I experienced on multiple occasions, both by the sink and the shower, that the dispenser slipped out of the mount. To me, this indicates that these often have to be changed out = a lot of plastic in circulation = negative for the environment." "Make food that I want to eat and not throw away." (also understood as an insult)	Low recurrence (< 400 responses)

	"Well. You did not wash, so that much impact on the environment was it not."	
	"I did not see anything about your environmental contribution anywhere. I could have overlooked it."	
	"I returned a swimsuit to ask for a bigger size and was told to simply throw the other one away as I had tried it on. If you throw away every single swimming item, then that is a huge waste. Really unbelievable."	
Evidence	*"The built-in refrigerator in the rooms was very hot (poorly ventilated) which contributes to poorer efficiency and thus increased energy consumption. (…)"*	Very low recurrence (< 100 responses)
	"You serve little fish for breakfast even though this is much more sustainable food compared to the liver pate, ham and bacon." (also specific point)	
	"Building needs to be renovated to a higher environmental certification. Ever heard about Breeam certification? In sum, it is hopeless to deliver hotel services in a room filled with mould. Consider sending mail directly to the owner of the chain."	
	"Food contributes a large share of emissions in our environment. So, adjust the food further, amongst other things. Another tip is to skip straws in the drinks, many rivers small ;)."	
	"Companies as well as private individuals need to do much more than we do now if we are to reach the 2030 climate targets. For example, work more with sustainable transport and renewable energy."	
Non-informative	*"It feels a bit too much like a slogan to live up to the environment, but more action is really needed."*	High recurrence (> 100 responses)
	"Actually contribute to taking care of the environment, people and community."	
	"'Very difficult hotels in general aren't very sustainable."	
	"A spa hotel can impossibly take care of the environment."	
	"Listen more and think at least one step further."	

No respect	*"I wish you could focus more on taking care of me as a guest instead of the environment and community….me, me, me!!!"* *"Environment: do not know, and it does not interest me very much either! People: start treating customers as guests and not as a burden! Community: do not care!"* *"Tired of the environment nagging."* *"To me, it is about light in the room for the individual me."* *"When I stay in a hotel, I want comfort, the environment we think about all the other days during a year."*	Low recurrence (< 50 responses)
Provocative	*"I mean, give a child a safe night's sleep…what bullsh*t: you save staff cost by playing on people's bad conscience. Same with the towels."* *"Really? Just master the fundamentals and then you can think about the environment and the community."* *"This is something you should know as a hotel owner. You are a known hotel chain in the north. Listen and act. We are not stupid in accepting anything when we pay for our stay at the hotel."* *"You are more concerned with profit than the environment. Stop with the nonsensical arguments."* *"Make a difference instead of "green washing" like many other."* *"Stop having environmental focus when the boss ravages around."*	Medium recurrence (> 70 responses)
Wrongful evidence	*"Focus more on the guest well-fare. It is not those 4-5 degrees increase in temperatures in the rooms and water that saves the environment."* *"I'm not using your hotel chain because of environmental considerations. Using organic food etc., on the other hand, contributes to food shortages in the world as crops etc. are lower than in conventional operations."* *"Get rid of the ecological food."* *"Increase the heat."* *"Stop boycotting palm oil, the wrong way to go."*	Low recurrence (< 50 responses)

Supplementary document 1

This document contains the quotes used in the master thesis, **Towards Green Trust: An Interpretation of Nordic Choice Hotels' Environmental Sustainability Performance based on Customer Feedback Data.** They contain the original language and format of the quotes appearing in this study as they were analysed by the author. The supplementary material is structured along the thesis structure, which is why it starts with chapter 4, and all quotes appear in the same order as they appear in the main document. All quotes are formatted in the following way: Quote ID; 'quote text'; year.

4. Results

4.2. Results from thematic keyword frequency analysis of open-ended text responses

- 3651;'environment: how efficient is your heating system really given you are located in a country that requires use of it for large parts of the year? what about intrinsic design there didn't seem to be any windows that were openable for fresh air - so presumably you waste a lot more energy on air conditioning to get decent air quality - big parts of the hotel were painted black with a lot of dividing structures and walls and so little efficient use of natural light - that must really drive up your electricity use and doesn't come across as very green. big bottles of toiletries instead of single use and less washing of towels is very good in terms of being green – but my initial impression is you could do a lot more!';2018

4.3. Results from manual systematisation of open-ended text responses:

- 1277;'fick ingen feeling alls.';2018
- 1281;'how do I know if this hotel takes care of the community. there is nothing to tell me what the environment policy is.';2018

4.3.1. Findings from the implication category

Positive customer feedback

- 1518;'fortsaetta paa erat miljoearbete';2018
- 6151;'fortsette med god miljoeprofil og fokus paa miljoeet.';2019
- 2662;'mer veganska produkter paa menyn och frukosten som aer utmaerkta med groent blad eller liknande. fin skylt vid poolen/gym/bastu som uppmuntrar till att bara anvaenda en handduk.';2018
- 4225;'laddplatser foer bil bra. maten kanske skulle kunna ha mer miljoefokus.';2018

- 5699;'environment seems to be a strong concern for son spa which is great. however service still needs to be improved.';2019

Concern

- 46;'mer oekologiske produkter under frokost drikkeglass av glass paa rommene vannkoker og kaffe te paa rommene';2018
- 115;'baettre moejlighet att sortera skraep/aatervinning paa rummenz';2018
- 5607;'lys paa rom som skrur seg automatisk av';2019
- 7007;'give the guests possibly to use bikes for free. use electricity driven shuttles cars.';2020
- 5770;'det staar lapp paa badet om aa bruke haandkler flere ganger men alle ble skiftet likevel';2019
- 6490;'fortelle hvordan varmen gjenbrukes om dere bruker fornybar energi dropper engangsting el stoerre grep. saerlig en badepark maa forsvare seg mer mht vann og stroemforbruk.';2019
- 5268;'beraetta mer om era miljoeinsatser gaerna med en folder paa rummet';2019

Negative customer feedback

- 6391;'jeg vet jo ikke hva dere gjoer i utgangspunktet. jeg er lei av at alle snakker miljoe bare for aa score billig goodwill.';2019
- 1749;'vet ej vad ni goer daermed inte vad ni ska foerbaettra. kravmaerkta aegg ekologiskt och naerproducerat';2018
- 4915;'vet ej. hela konceptet aer ju lyxkonsumtion eller?';2019
- 1935;'ved frokost tas maten vekk alt for raskt. naar man er alene er det litt kjedelig. sa i fra til betjeningen at jeg ikke var ferdig. jeg gikk og hentet kaffe. kom tilbake og alt var borte. det er ikke god miljoepolitikk aa kaste mat!!';2018
- 3277;'you write that if guests need new towels they must be put on the floor however the cleaning staff change towels no matter what you do. i hang it up for drying and reuse but when i came back a new towel was put in place. so try and walk the talk.';2018
- 4958;'goer en markant skillnad upplever att ni som andra hotell haaller paa med "green wash" som samtidigt reducerar era kostnade';2019

4.3.2. Findings from the constructiveness category

- 588;'eg har ikkje sett nokre konkrete tiltak. det er alltid kaldt paa rommet naar eg sjekkar inn. det gir meg eit inntrykk av at energieffektiviteten i bygget ikkje er paa topp noko som ikkje er uvanleg med eldre bygg.';2018

Constructive responses

- 29;'ta bort plastskedarna paa frukosten.';2018

- 45;'slutte med plastprodukter (plastglass) paa rommene.';2018

- 7060;'use modern windows. you will save energy in heating and cooling with prober windows. currently they are worst that i have ever seen in hotels.';2020

- 6566;'hva gjoer dere for miljoeet. oeke formidlingen av tiltak dere gjoer og hva dere skal gjoere';2019

- 738;'med miljoecertifiering borde man kunna sortera soppor paa hotelrummen. det skulle ge en stoerre trovaerdighet';2018

- 6415;'soerge for at gjestene faar servert god baerekraftig gjerne kortreist mat i frokosttiden!!';2019

- 243;'byta ut allt te till ekologiskt och fair trade. fler ekologiska alternativ paa frukosten.';2018

- 526;'mer synliggjoering for eksempel oekologisk saape/balsam/shampoo';2018

- 2386;'den stoersta miljoeboven just nu foer klimatet aer vaar kost. daerav skulle jag som vegan uppskattat mer helvegetariska alternativ.';2018

- 3995;'mye mat fra lunch og middag paa konferansen ble ikke spist og dermed kastet fordi den var av usedvanlig daarlig kvalitet.';2018

- 5085;'regarding only the environment part: please do not throw away food as easily as you did during breakfast on saturday 13.4. we would have enjoyed the food and finished it so nothing would have had to be thrown away. thank you!';2019

- 3447;'mer miljoevennlige materialer. for mye kunstfiber / plastoverflater. feks - bruke kalkmaling istedenfor plastmaling naturfiber isteden for akrylteppe i gang. alternativ til laminat paa gulv paa rom - usikker paa beste rimelige og slitesterke : kork linolium kanskje. for mye kjemikalie og kunstfiber stoev paa rom = daarlig inneklima. merket plastlukt. ed ankomst.';2018

Non-constructive responses

- 765;'miljoeprofilen virker ikke troverdig.';2018

- 1480;'very difficult hotels in general aren't very sustainable.';2018

- 898;'you are taking care of environment and community which is good but people';2018

- 468;'bry er om era gaester och vara serviceinriktade och hjaelpa gaester. miljoe o samhaelle orkar jag inte svara paa men inget speciellt';2020

- 3659;'ni anvaender miljoen foer att tjaena mer pengar det aer motbjudande och provocerande. numera slaenger jag alltid handduken paa golvet.';2018

- 2430;'bruk hodet aa fjerne vannglass fra er hotellrom er latterlig';2018

- 2435;'mr stordalen kjoerer privatfly. aa henge opp haandkle for aa spare en vask er en vits.';2018

- 6847;'dagens konseptet er aa spare penger ikke miljoe';2020

- 8802;'make a difference instead of "greenwashing" like many other';2020

- 4613;'gjoer en stor o tydelig foskjell. holder ikke med aa kun gjoere som alle andre. det blir oppleves som patetisk «greenwash»';2019

- 8229;'slutte aa fremstille dere som om dere var opptatt av miljoe og som om co2 vil foere til varmere klima. gjennomsnitt temperaturen paa jorda sank 0.6 grader mellom 1945 og 1975 samtidig oekte co2 innholdet i lufta.';2020

5. Discussion

5.2. Symptoms of perceived greenwashing

- 797;'svaart att saega vi har i oever 10 aar valt att bo paa choice just paa grund av den tydliga profilen foer miljoe och maenniskor. paa den omraadet tycker vi att jobbet goers bra. bortsett fraan koeket.';2018

5.2.1. Suspicion of hidden motives and mistrust in management

- 3476;'det skinner saa tydeleg gjennom at ein gjer dette for aa spare pengar og ikkje miljoeet at eg blir litt ukomfortabel med dette.';2018

- 185;'tydeligere miljoeprofil som ikke tar noedvendigvis tar utgangspunkt i profitt men et genuint oenske om aa bidra tilbake uten tanke paa aksjonaerer.';2018

- 1143;'dette med tanker om miljoe og aa bidra til aa hjelpe trengende synes for meg som hykleri iom at eieren av hotellkjeden fremstaar som et nasjonalt ikon paa fraatsing og vulgaer pengebruk. anmodninger om aa spare paa handklevask osv. for aa bidra til hjelpetrengende hadde passet bedre for thon hotels.';2018

5.2.2. Week green trust in symbolic environmental activities

- 5422;'the only hint of environmental focus was the reminder to hang your towels if you don't need them replaced. most hotels i stay in do this now and it's not a differentiator and does not make me think the hotel is particularly focused on the environment. it's a very easy low hanging fruit for any hotel to implement and it saves costs for the hotel as well. i.e. nothing about it makes me think you take the environment seriously.';2019

- 3267;'paatatt miljoefokus slik som alle hoteller. gjenrbruk av haandklaer er ikke godt nok miljoetiltak.';2018

- 3602;'dere publiserer (det jeg kjenner til i alle fall) lite eller ingen informasjon om hvilke miljoehensyn dere tar. greit nok aa oppfordre til aa ikke kaste haandkleet til vask hver dag men det utgjoer noksaa lite. hvordan er feks. maten dere serverer dyrket og tatt frem? har dere solcellepaneler som dekker hele/deler av hotellets energibehov? hvilken energiklasse er bygget?';2018

5.2.3. Discrepancy between information and compliance

- 2592;'from all the information you have in the hotel/rooms you tell about being nice to the environment - but still you use plastic glasses in the bath room. it is not very clear to me how this corresponds to the environment friendly setting that you describe.';2018

- 5533;'i saw no evidence of what you're doing in the hotel and things in the room were fairly packaged in plastic!';2019

- 5645;'det framgaar inte paa ett tydligt saett innan under eller efter. samt att vi fick platssugroer trots att man som kund kunnig laesa pressmeddelande om att hela nordic choice har plastbantat och daa att sugroeren skulle varit borta innan sommaren ..';2019

- 5334;'jeg registerer at dere er iso miljoesertifisert men paa hotellet og i landsbyen er det ikke lagt opp til kildesotering paa rommene/leilighetene. metal og glass avfall greier de fleste aa skille bort men hos dere er min paastand at matavfall plast og diverse rest avfall siden det er lite fokus paa kildesortering. kun i mottaket er det splittet men selv der er det daarlig merket og man kan undre seg hvor mye som faktisk blir kilde sortert. har tatt bilder av dette ogsaa men ta en tur a se. grunnen til innspillet er at dere gaar hoeyt ut i media og paa hjemme siden men faar innstykk i at det ikke foelges i praksis. om dnv som har iso sertifiseringen tror jeg dere ville faatt noen merknader under en audit. naar det er sagt har den enkelte et ansvar for kildesortering men man maa kunne forvente at det blir lagt tilrette for dette ved et iso sertifisert hotell.
  https://www.nordicchoicehotels.no/samfunnsansvar1/vart-miljoegasjement/miljoengasjement/';2019

5.2.4. Inconsistency within Nordic Choice Hotels' environmental sustainability performance

- 4633;'jag har blivit bortskaemd med maanga utmaerkta ekologiska frukostar paa era hotell. i just det avseendet aer nog ekoxen det saemsta hittills. ekologiska aegg och solrosfroen saag jag. saekert fanns det naagot mer. men naer det inte ens finns naagon ekologisk juice blir aatminstone jag besviken. annars var frukosten helt ok.';2019

- 132;'frokosten. jeg haaper choicekjeden vil vaere fokusert paa oekologi og miljoevennlighet at de faktisk blir den hotellkjeden som er godt kjent for dette fokuset.

min erfaring er dessverre at dette ikke er saa hoeyt profilert lenger har opplevd det baade i trondheim og naa i bergen.';2018

- 7276;'slutt aa late som dere bryr dere om miljoe. det er kun oekonomi. blir provosert over aa bli pakket paa alt maset deres om hvor mye dere bryr dere om miljoe. jeg spurte en renholder hos dere hva hun mente om renhold og miljoe. hun fotsto ikke engang hva jeg sa.';2020

- 2536;'jeres miljoe-del var meget lig standarden for hoteller og generelt var det greenwashing. i boer se paa hvordan i kan blive et cirkulaert oekonomisk / baeredygtigt hotel og goere det til en del af jeres kernevaerdier. det vil i opleve at jeres besoegende i stigende grad vil efterspoerge. saerligt unge mennesker vil efterspoerge det og jeg vil personligt godt betale mere for mit vaerelse hvis jeg ved at i tager godt haand om miljoeet.';2018

- 8727;'kaenner inte alls att jag fick ta del av hur comfort jobbar med detta eller upplever att naagot saerskiljer er fraan andra hotellkedjor. personligen skulle jag vara vaeldigt positiv till om comfort tar paa sig ledartroejan och boerjar saerskilja er foer att bli klimatpositiva paa co2 fronten. detta genom skogsplantering eller andra mer potenta negativa utslaeppsformer som t.ex. direct air capture. nu aer det hoeg tid att vi fixar klimatet tillsammans! daa skulle jag alltid vaelja comfort i mitt arbete och privat och sova baettre paa natten. jag skulle absolut betala foer detta ocksaa daa detta aer den viktigaste fraagan foer mig just nu!';2020

5.3. Evidence of homo economicus?

- 8381;'jag har varit silvermedlem i ca 10 aar och foer vart aar som gaar blir vistelse paa era hotell allt mer som ett besoek paa miljoepartiets aarskonferenser. det aer helt sonika foer mycket miljoe och klimat paa ett saett som inte kaenns aekta foerenklade slutsatser baserade paa cherry-picking av fakta dvs ren miljoe-/klimatpopulism. ett exempel paa detta aer den utfaestelse ni goer paa ett papper som haenger paa vaeggen mellan receptionen och frukostmatsalen att sluta anvaenda plast aar 2020. plast aer ett alldeles utmaerkt material - det aer inte plastens fel att en del maenniskor slaenger plast paa fel staelle. att driva ett hotell helt utan anvaendning av plast aer fullstaendigt omoejligt daerfoer blir er utfaestelse en floskel som ni foermodligen menar ligger raett i tiden.';2020

- 2492;'ha meg unnskyldt jeg bor paa en del hoteller ila aaret. blir lei av stadig aa bli moett med oppslag om stoette til det ene og det andre ved at jeg som kunde selv kan rydde rommet gjenbruke haandklaer osv. dette ivaretar ikke miljoe mennesker og samfunn. la

ansatte gjoere jobben og gi dem tro paa en sikker arbeidsplass baade for egne ansatte og kontraktoerenes ansatte. jeg kan ikke begripe hvorfor jeg skal paadyttes dette. jeg finner andre og selvstendige maater aa ivareta miljoe og menneskeheten.';2018

- 3142;'jag bor inte paa hotell foer att stoedja projekt i kambodja. ni maaste kunna ha ett miljoetaenk utan att dra ner paa allt. jag bor paa hotell paa semestern foer att faa en paus fraan vardagen inte foer att vara hela vaerldens samvete. ni har gaatt foer laangt med att haenvisa till att alla indragningar beror paa miljoetaenk. jag vill inte veta hur mycket mat ni slaenger vid frukosten osv alldeles foer mycket pekpinnar! kaenns som en skolbespisning.';2018

- 671;'dette blir aerlig talt litt festtale for meg... dere kjoerer miljoekortet men oppfattes som gjerrig. varme god seng gode haandklaer og en god dusj (ikke sparedusj som tar dobbelt saa lang tid) er utrolig viktig for en god hotellopplevelse.';2018

5.4. Customers need navigation and increased transparency?

5.4.1. Improving facilitation and interventions

- 3978;'kaellsortering av sopor paa rummet eller paa varje vaaningsplan. hemma sorteras alla sopor...';2018

- 2253;'beter vegan and vegetarian options should be made available. you claim to care about sustainability but that does not show through your foodoptions at all. why so few and tasteless vega menus. you should consider contacting www.smarterfoodchoices.org for some advice on sustainable and tastier food options.';2018

- 6742;'koppla lyset och tv till en nyckelkortlaesare saa att det inte lyser naer man laemnar rummet.';2019

- 8407;'kunde inte se laddningsstationer foer elbilar.';2020

- 5438;'alltsaa... det syns inte att ni jobbar med miljoen! tallrikarna aer super stora vid frukost paaminn folk om svinn och att inte slaenga. goer det till en utmaning nodging pratas det om men syns inte. hjaelp folk att goera raett. jag som vegan hittar alternativ men det aer fortfarande sorgligt att bacon och korvar har saa stort utrymme. om koncernen arbetar med eat foundation laat det synas. tror att maanga vill goera raett och aeven samtala med sina barn om det. ha en bild paa greta och paaminn oss :)';2019

Figure 10: Scope of customer feedback highlighting different perceptions of intervention that could improve green trust

- 3014;'much more vegan options please. the meat and milk production destroy our earth (about 50% of the co2 production in the world comes from thoose industries!) and

animal proteins is no good for humans. idea: can nordic choice start the first vegan hotel in the nordic? i would love it!';2018

- 1052;'bort med allt koett och mejeriprodukter.';2018

- 7707;'hitta fler smarta saett att driva hotellet. solceller oever parkering aateranvaenda vatten/regnvatten.';2020581;'en lokal solcellsinstallation som tar hand om en stor del av hotellets energifoerbrukning.';2018

- 1139;'have you considered to try serve an all-organic menu in stead of offering organic alternatives to those interested? that would be noticed widely. i must eat glutenfree and i seldom see organic products at hotels which i can eat.';2018

- 3956;'please get rid of the excess plastic. it''s so much nicer when hotels use reusable dispensers. then i don''t have to feel guilty about washing my hair.';2018

- 6790;'moejligheter till att sortera skraep och avfall redan paa rummet.';2019

- 7120;'ekologiska produkter';2020

- 9204;'installera laddstationer paa er parkering';2020

- 1940;'renovera';2018

- 2251;'droppe sparetiltaket med plast du redder ikke verden med aa ta bort vannglass.';2018

- 765;'miljoeprofilen virker ikke troverdig.';2018

- 7878;'en turistmaskin som dette blir aldri miljoevennlig';2020

5.4.2. Framing information and improving transparency

- 4791;'tranparans. hur vaermer ni anlaeggningen? solenergi vindkraft? solceller med egenproduktionspresentation. energiaatervinning. ge maenniskor feedback paa energibesparingar som minskar co-ton eller hur maanga traed som sparas. kaellsortering samt smarta foerpackningar oel i glasflaska aer val inte energismart att tillverka en flaska samt transportera den ger en hoeg belastning. taenk hela life cycle paa allt ni anvaender saa tror jag att ni kan faa en raett hoeg energisparprofil';2019

- 4463;'survey all of your co2 emissions sector by sector throughout your organisation and systematically work towards 0 emissions. do this and transparently share the story of your transition and i would know and not "feel" that you contributed.';2019

- 4439;'veldig stort utvalg paa frokostbuffeten. det stod skilt med informasjon om at dere kaster 50 kg mat hver dag. skjoenner at dette i stor grad skyldes at hotellets gjester forsyner seg med mer enn de kan spise og at det er utenfor deres kontroll. min personlige mening er likevel at utvalget var enda stoerre enn noedvendig og at det kanskje kunne blitt mindre matsvinn ved aa redusere noe. i tillegg maa det bli enormt

med vask av haandklaer badekaaper etc. dette er selvsagt en del av businessen men det skal litt til foer man kan si at et spa-hotell bidrar til aa ta vare paa miljoeet. det bidrar imidlertid til at mange mennesker faar et positivt avbrekk fra hverdagen.';2019

- 5751;'maaten romservice intervallet ble formidlet paa fikk meg egentlig til at aa tenke paa at her er det bedriftoekonomiske hensyn som veier tyngst bra at hotellet minnet paa gjestene om bare aa forsyne seg med den maten de skulle spise og var aapen paa hvor mye mat som blir kastet';2019

- 5752;'velg noen bevisste satsingsomraader og kommuniser om dem. eksempel: paa amaranten i stockholm er tallerknene mindre enn vanlig fordi hotellet da ender opp med aa kaste vesentlig mindre mat. dette er det opplyst om paa smaa plakater i frokostsalen. denne maaten aa gjoere det paa kjoeper jeg 100%.';2019

- 846;'mere vegansk mat paa frokostbuffeten og kanskje info om at hvis en velger veganske alternativer fremfor animalske saa er det et viktig bidrag med tanke paa miljoe og klimautvikling.';2018

- 22;'option to turn the air conditioning off. as this was not always needed and the room was too warm. this would save energy. provide more information on how the hotel generates energy e.g. does it use renewable energy. provide suggestions on how guests can help to save energy.';2018

- 5724;'skylta mer om miljoearbetet ex vid middag/frukost ex daer man sitter och aeter saa man kan laesa lite om arbetet.';2019

- 7511;'se ovan! certifierade hudprodukter paa rummen staeng ner vaaninsgar helt naer faa gaester bor daer solceller och sedum paa taken odla egna kryddor i restaurangen laegg inte fram foer maanga handdukar paa rummen utan laat gaesterna haemta fler om man behoever saenk tempen paa rummen vintertid laana ut cyklar mer groent utanfoer saett upp insektshotell uppmana gaesterna till att resa till er kollektivt osv. beraetta vad ni goer saa hjaelper ni till att sprida ett viktigt budskap och skapa stoerre medvetenhet och kunskap!';2020

8. Appendix

Appendix F: Overview of the coding in the implication category

Tabell 1: *Overview of customer feedback coding in the implication category.*

How can we improve our work to take care of the environment, people, and community?	
Positive customer feedback (PCF)	6151;'fortsette med god miljoeprofil og fokus paa miljoeet.';2019
	17;'god informasjon. god service. noe av maten var ikke helt originalt smakte ikke opplevdes ikke som forventet. eggeroere og bacon.';2018
	6151;'fortsette med god miljoeprofil og fokus paa miljoeet.';2019
	108;'frukost hade maanga goda ekologiska alternativ men gaar att utveckla mer och aeven att ta detta till restaurang..';2018
	656;'mer oekologisk mat og flere vegetaralternativer. veldig bra med kortreiste produkter hurra for det!';2018
	1221;'fint at dere ikke har engangssaaper og sjampo i plast dropp gjerne tannglasset i plast ogsaa!';2018
	1518;'fortsaetta paa erat miljoearbete';2018
	1496;'miljoe - bra detta med handdukarna i badrummet. maenniskor - om en gaest kommer foer foersta gaangen speciellt om hotellet inte aer fullbokat laat dem faa ett rum som sticker ut ett som de inte gloemmer. det goer att de kanske fotograferar det och laeger ut i sociala medier och kanske rent av vill komma tillbaka till.';2018
	3268;'bidrar antagligen bra vad gaeller miljoe.';2018
	8030;'konseptet i seg selv er vel ikke saa miljoevennlig men bra at oppvarming etc. er biobasert.';2020
Concern	5352;'mindre kjoett og andre matvarer med hoeyt klimautslipp i frokostbuffeten';2019
	36;'plastmuggar hoer inte hemma i miljoen.';2018
	649;'tydlig information om er idé kring hur ni bidrar';2018
	6526;'hadde hengt opp haandkle som var brukt én gang og lagt frem gulvhaandkle foran dusjen. dette var fjernet dagen etter og jeg fikk 3 nye haandklaer. dette var litt unoedvendig.';2019
	4383;'mer enn aa la haandkleene henge. miljoevennlig spa forbedre og forklare teknikken til gjester. mye buffet hva skjer med all maten som ikke spises? evt informere om det.';2019
	150;'oekologisk mat te og kaffe. mer vegetar mat og illustrere dette i menyen. eventuelt lage en takhage med egenproduserte groennsaker og urter. og igjen mer

	planter for en friskere og mer behagelig atmosfaere for menneskene paa hotellet.';2018
	152;'renovera de gamla foenstren sa att ingen kall luft kommer in. det sparar uppvaermningskostnaden.';2018
	5921;'elbilsplatsen (det finns bara ett) har inget vanligt uttag och receptionen ingen adapter. kanske inget problem om det aer ens egen bil men hyrbilar har saellan en massa adaptrar men gaar oftast i vanliga uttag.';2019
	3877;'an element that i feel is very important is the ecological philosophy of the hotel. i was a single person in the room and i''m sure all four towels would be washed after my stay (although i only used one of them). please put only enough towels in the bathroom for the number of people staying in the room ie you knew i was there alone so why put towels for two people? in our current ecological situation we all have to make more effort in this regard!';2018
	6707;'spa i seg selv er vel ikke saerlig miljoevennlig og krever mye energi. bruk av solceller kan kanskje gjoere en forskjell?';2019
	6848;'redogoer foer hur ni arbetar med att minska er energi- och vattenanvaendning. det maaste gaa aat kopioesa maengder!';2020
Negative customer feedback (NCF)	*916;'jag kunde inte se naagonstans att ni tar hand om miljoe maenniskor eller samhaelle paa naagot saerskilt saett.';2018*
	16;'byt ut era plastglas paa rummen mot glas som diskas och aateranvaends. "vi vaernar om miljoen" ang. handdukar men sen staar det engaangs plastmuggar precis bredvid blir lite dubbelmoral.';2018
	9;'vet ikke det er naturlig et stort forbruk av vann haandklaer etc paa et spa hotell.';2018
	3895;'sluta vara saa sjaelvgoda oever att ni inte staedar pga miljoen naer alla vet att det aer foer att spara pengar. framstaar falskt.';2018
	8614;'tveksamt om ert arbete alls baer naagon frukt eller om det bara aer greenwashing';2020
	6847;'dagens konseptet er aa spare penger ikke miljoe';2020
	5567;'by providing more reasonably-priced food. also the social marketing campaign material in the room was annoying. for the hotel to align themselves with social causes is great but they should make their donations in a dignified way rather than presenting the guest with several leaflets of trafficked third-world children. i think this is a failed attempt to raise the ethos of the hotel chain that comes across instead as too pushy. i''m sure there are one hundred things the hotel could do behind the scenes to save money towards this cause rather than making it about the guest getting their towels changed over!';2019
	6877;'ville krevd veldig tydelig kommunikasjon paa dette. «alle» i 2020 skal jo liksom dette. krever klare tydelige stoerre grep dersom en skal vaere troverdig paa dette.';2020
	3264;'dere kan gjoere en rekke reelle forpliktelser: en garanti. palmeoljefri zone er populisme.';2018

	8089;'slutte aa drive hotell. reise er i sin natur miljoefiendlig og bidrar til aa opprettholde sosiale forskjeller.';2020
Not relevant	1;'nekte teslaeiere parkering. de kan ikke parkere og aner ikke betydningen av ordet hensyn.';2018
	506;'billigare parkering baettre frukost.';2018
	3141;'var alldeles foer stark parfymlukt i allmaenna lokalerna. tycker aeven det var konstigt att man inte fick ordning paa tv4 paa hela tre dagar fast vi sa till foersta dagen kan foerstaa om det var en udda kanal. ingen aaterkopplade till oss fast vi klagade och inget haende paa3 dagar.';2018
	250;'baren maa aapne tidligere. ikke bra at man maa vente til kl 1500 formaa faa en kaffe/ brus/vin i baren. helse: stroe utenfor hotellet samt skilte hvor man boer gaar for aa informasjon om aa komme seg til sentrum og flyplassen. vet det er en byggeplass uten for hotellet/ havna derfor enda viktige aa gi folk informasjon.';2018
	5303;'redusere stoeyen fra puben i 1 etg.';2019

Appendix G: Overview of the coding in the constructiveness category

Table 2: *Overview of customer feedback coding in the constructiveness category (white table body constructive, blue table body non-constructive variables).*

How can we improve our work to take care of the environment, people, and community?	
Solution	3438;'savner litt mer merking og profilering av oekologiske matvarer mm. skift gjerne ogsaa ut plastikk eggeglass :-). bruk mer tine-produkter til maten utenfor moetelokalene (mer miljoevennlig) mat og kaker her kan ogsaa gjoeres mer spisset mot oekologisk profilering.';2018
	3453;'you should invest in using high quality lights that will allow to light up the entire room and to save also energy as well: instead of light up so many lights as it happens right now because of their poor quality.';2018
	3525;'"groenare" mat. mer veganskt.';2018
	7572;'fiks ventilasjonsanlegg.';2020
	7688;'enorme mengder plast for aa beskytte maten kan enkelt kuttes ut. hva med aa ha ansatte som deler ut maten gjesten oensker istedet?';2020
Specific points	4;'eko-produkter';2018
	36;'plastmuggar hoer inte hemma i miljoen.';2018
	8797;'ikke info om el bil lading eller ladeplass for elbil';2020

	6498;'hva med soeppelsortering?';2019 7310;'otherwise great job but because the water staying on the floor the floor heating was at 40 degrees when we arrived. that's a lot of heating waisted. i understand this was a construction flaw and not a lot the staff can do about it.';2020
Personal experience	340;'bytte ut saapedispenser ved vask og i dusj til metall. begge disse er i plast - baade veggfeste og selve dispenseren. jeg opplevde flere ganger baade ved vask og i dusjen at dispenseren skled ut av festet sitt. det indikerer for meg at disse ofte maa skiftes ut = mye plast i omloep = negativt for miljoeet.';2018 4930;'lage en slik mat at jeg har lyst til og spise opp og ikke kaste';2019 5018;'tja. dere vasket ikkje saa mye slitasje paa miljoe var det vel ikke.'; 2019 6523;'jag saag ingenstans naagonting om ert miljoearbete. jag kan har missat det.';2019 8414;'i returned a swim suit to ask for a bigger size and was told to simply throw the other one away as i had tried it on. if you throw away every single swimming item then that is a huge waste. really unbelievable.';2020
Evidence	292;'den inbyggda kylen paa rummen stod vaeldigt varmt (daaligt ventilerad) vilket bidrar till saemre effektivitet och daermed oekad energifoerbrukning';2018 475;'dere serverer lite fisk til frokost selv om dette er mye mer baerekraftig mat sammenlignet med leverposten skinke og bacon';2018 2301;'bygget maa renovereres til en hoeyere miljoe sertifisering. hoert om breeam sertifisering? i sum saa er det helt haaploest aa levere hotelltjenester i rom som er pakka med muggsopp. vurderer aa sende mail direkte til eier av kjeden.';2018 4533;'maten staar foer stor andel utslaepp i vaar miljoe. saa anpassa maten ytterligare bl.a. ett annat tips aer hoppa oever sugroer i drycker osv maang baeckar smaa ;)';2019 9091;'foeretag saa som privatpersoner behoever goera mycket mer aen vi goer nu om vi ska naa vaara klimatmaal till 2030. tex arbeta mer med haallbara transporter och foernybar energi.';2020
Non-informative	608;'det kaenns lite foer mycket som en slogan att efterleva miljoen men behoevs mer action paa riktigt.';2018 654;'faktisk bidra til aa ta vare paa miljoe mennesker og samfunn.';2018 1480;'very difficult hotels in general aren't very sustainable.';2018 346;'et spa-hotell kan umulig ta vare paa miljoeet.';2018

	8163;'lyssna mer och taenka minst ett steg laengre.';2020
No respect	226;'jeg skulle oenske dere kunne fokusere paa aa ta vare paa meg som gjest istedenfor miljoe mennesker og samfunn ... meg meg meg ... !!!';2018 1808;'miljoe: vet ikke og det intresserer meg ikke saa veldig heller! mennesker: begynne aa behandle gjestene slik at de foeler seg som en gjest og ikke som en bydre! samfunn: bryr meg ikke!';2018 7405;'troett paa miljoetjatat';2020 6673;'for meg handler det om lys paa rommet for enkeltmennesket meg.';2019 5893;'naar jeg bor paa hotell vil jeg ha comfort miljoeet tenker vi paa de andre dagene i aaret';2019
Provocative	1737;'alltsaa ge ett barn en saeker nattsoemn.. vilket bullsh*t: ni sparar in paa personalkostnader genom att spela paa folks daaliga samvete. samma med handdukarna.';2018 4720;'det borde ni veta som hotell aegare. ni aer en kaend hotell kedja i norden. lyssna och goer aatgaerder. vi aer inte dumma i huvudet att accepterar vad som helst naer vi betalar foer vaar vistelse paa hotellet';2019 5771;'dere er mer opptatt av fortjeneste enn miljoe. slutt m tullete argumenter.';2019 8802;'make a difference instead of "green washing" like many other';2020 7742;'slutt aa ha miljoefaktorer naar sjefen herjer rundt';2020
Wrongful evidence	315;'fokuser mer paa velvaere til gjestene. det er ikke de 4-5 gradene oekt temp paa rommet og vannet som redder naturen.';2018 984;'jeg bruker ikke deres hotellkjede pga mijloehensyn. aa bruke oekologiske matvarer etc. bidrar derimot til stoerre matmangel i verden da avlinger etc er lavere enn ved konvensjonell drift.';2018 6145;'faa vekk den oekologiske maten!';2019 6599;'oeka vaermen';2019 5088;'sluta bojkotta palmolja fel vaeg gaa.';2019