THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN THE REPOSITIONING STRATEGY OF A TOURISM DESTINATION. A CASE STUDY OF A FRENCH SKI RESORT: AVORIAZ

Dissertation in marketing, 15 ECTS credits

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the role and impact of the promotion tools in the repositioning strategy of a tourism destination. Building on a theory which brings together the repositioning strategy process and the communication mix, this study is conducted through the examination of a case study based on one of the most important and innovative European ski resort: Avoriaz. The research has been made through an in-depth interview with a manager of the ski resort in charge of the communication, which has been completed by a content analysis of the communication supports edited by the resort. As a result, this study concludes that the communication tools have a main role in the implementation a repositioning strategy by having a major impact on the image of the tourism destination.

Keywords: Tourism marketing, core strategy, positioning, repositioning, communication mix, image, ski resort, Avoriaz.
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1. **Introduction**

1.1. **Background**

Tourism, and particularly winter tourism, is one of the most important sources of incomes for the countries in Western Europe. In fact, the high quality of the European ski resorts is well known all over the world. This is due to a favorable landscape which allows creating high altitude slopes with guaranteed snow (Lennon, 1997). Thus we count more than 200 ski resorts in Western Europe, mostly spread in the Alps, in Austria, France, Italy, Germany and Switzerland (The European Consumer Centres’ Network, 2010).

After a long development period, winter tourism is now more defined as a low growth market which has as an effect to increase the competition between the ski resorts. Moreover, the reduction in snowfall during the few past years and the increased cost of slopes exploitation and modern transport contribute to make the destinations need to be more competitive (Sainighi, 2008).

At the same time, the tourism market is seen as a very dynamic environment which may change very often. These changes can be a threat for tourism destinations as well as it can provide great opportunities for market development. To be able to face this kind of situation, it seems that the adoption of planned-market approach is determinant to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the destinations to realize their goals. The principle is that planning stimulates destination to prepare their future by being more adapted to the changes of the marketing environment (M. Djurica and N. Djurica, 2010).

A planned-market approach is based on three steps which are segmentation, targeting and positioning. This last step is a main task for tourism destinations in the way that it will determine the customers’ perception of the destination, relatively to its competitors (Kotler, 2008). Moreover, as the tourism market evolves very quickly, the chosen positioning may not be effective anymore and the destination becomes unattractive and less profitable. To avoid this situation, tourism places have sometimes to operate a repositioning strategy (Doyle and Stern, 2006).

We can define ‘repositioning strategy’ as the action of enhancing the strategic position of a brand on the market. To implement such changes of strategy, a tourism destination might
require applying some adaptations on its product and image (Kotler, 2008). These adjustments are made through the marketing mix. The marketing mix, also known as the ‘4-Ps’ is constituted by four variables: product, price, place and promotion (Doyle and Stern, 2006). During this study, we will focus more precisely on the promotion (or communication) tools used by the ski resorts to enhance their repositioning strategy by defining an image.

### 1.1. Problem formulation

All along our thesis we try to give answers to a main problem which can be stated as the following question:

**In what extent, the promotion tools have a role in a repositioning strategy of a tourism destination?**

In the aim to better understand our task, and also to bring a more structured answer, we have decided to divide our problem into the three following sub-questions:

- What is the process of a repositioning strategy?
- What is the link between image and positioning?
- How the promotional tools are used and constructed to manage the image?

### 1.2. Delimitations

Our main theory shows how promotional tools are effectively used to promote a tourism destination, and in particular how to create an optimum communication mix.

This study will focus on the relation between ‘image’ and ‘positioning’. Some studies have shown that image is a determinant factor in the tourists’ decision-making process (Molina, Gomez and Martin-Consuegra, 2010). Thus we will see how promotional tools can contribute to give a good image to the customers, and hence place the destination at a competitive position on the market. This implies that we will focus only on the promotion variable of the marketing mix.
Moreover, we have decided that this study will be limited on the promotion of winter tourism destinations, because it is a dynamic and challenging market (M. Djurica and N. Djurica, 2010), on the ones used by the ski resort of Avoriaz which is our case study.

1.3. Purpose

Many studies have been done about the promotion of tourism destination. Besides as the market environment is changing, many destinations choose to change their strategy to enhance their competitiveness. The purpose of this study is to outline and analyze the use of promotional tools by the tourism destinations, to see how they can contribute to a repositioning strategy. Our research will apply a theory to a case study with the analysis of the utilization of commercial tools. Then we will make a connection between the theory and the primary data that we have found in the analysis.

2. Theoretical frame of references

2.1. The tourism marketing

Tourism marketing is a special form of marketing. According to Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2010), it regroups hospitality and travel industry. We call hospitality the cooperative relationship which is involved between the different actors of the tourism industry (Kotler, Bowen, Makens, 2010). These actors may be the airlines companies, the rental firms, the tour operators, etc…

According to Doyle and Stern (2006), as well as general marketing, to achieve its goals, tourism marketing need to implement a planned strategy which implies the following point:

- Understanding the market place as well as the customer needs and wants.
- Designing consumer-driven marketing strategy.
- Constructing an integrated marketing program.
- Building a profitable and lasting customer relationship.
• Capturing value from customers to generate profits and customer equity.

We can include tourism marketing in another, larger form of marketing called service marketing (Kosic, Lizic, and Stojanovic, 2010). This form of marketing is differentiated from the general marketing by five characteristics (Kotler, Bowen, Makens, 2010):

• Intangibility: the product sold is not physical which means that it cannot be touch, seen, tasted, or smelled.
• Inseparability: the consumer is directly involved which implies a direct contact between consumers and employees of the company.
• Variability or heterogeneity: as it involves people, it is difficult to achieve a perfect standardization of the product quality.
• Perishability: the product cannot be stored.
• Lack of ownership: the customers cannot own the product which means that services are leased.

2.2. The core strategy

In the aim to better understand what is a positioning and a repositioning strategy, it is important in a first time to understand what the core strategy of a company is. According to Lynch (2006), the core strategy defines the purpose of an organization and the action plan to achieve this goal. Kotler (2008) explains that the core strategy may be divided in two parts: the identification and selection of a group of customers for whom the company has a competitive advantage to propose, and its positioning in this precise market.

To represent the process involved by the core strategy, Doyle and Stern (2006) propose a model developed in three steps: the market segmentation, the target marketing, and the marketing positioning. This model is represented in the following figure.
2.2.1. Market segmentation

Shaw (2012, p.36) gives the following definition of segmentation: “market segmentation may be defined as subdividing a heterogeneous market into more homogeneous subgroups based on some common customer characteristics.” In other word, we can say that segmentation is separating a market into several different markets according to the particularity of the customers. There are different goals of segmenting a market. First, in the way that marketing is based on customers’ needs, segmentation helps to better fit their diversity. Next, it aims to enhance the retention of customers. When a customer’s need is perfectly satisfied, he should not want to try another product. Finally, segmentation tends to improve communication by helping to develop the most adapted message to the potential buyer (Doyle and Stern, 2006).

Market segmentation may be based on several criteria, but concerning the tourism market, Tkaczynski, Sharyn and Beaumont (2009) propose to retain the two following types of segmentation strategies. The first one is the so called ‘Destination Marketing Organization segmentation’. It draws different customer profiles based on five characteristics: age, household income, travel party, transport and type of trip (stay duration). The second way of segmenting the market is the ‘Fraser Coast tourism stakeholder segmentation’. This one is more precise because it is based on more criteria:

- Demographic
  - Age
  - Gender
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- Travel party
- Income

- Geographic

- Psychographic
  - Trip purpose
  - Motivations
  - Lifestyle

- Behavioral
  - Activities sought
  - Expenditure
  - Purchasing behavior

All these criteria are not used by all the tourism stakeholders, these only focus on the ones that are the most relevant for their business. For instance, a tour operator may not utilize the same characteristics as an accommodation provider (Tkaczynski, Sharyn and Beaumont, 2009).

2.2.1. Target Marketing

Targeting is choosing the segments that seem to be the more valuable for the company. Besides, management has different strategic possibilities (Doyle and Stern, 2006). The undifferentiated marketing strategy implies that the company develops only one marketing mix for the whole market. At the opposite, the differentiated marketing strategy consists to a tailored marketing mix for each segment. In the last strategy: focused marketing, the company focus on only one segment called ‘niche’ (Doyle and Stern, 2006).

According to M. Djurica and N. Djurica (2010), marketing strategy of tourist destination chooses most of time the last possibility (focused marketing) which implies to do an efficient selection of the target segment. Five factors determine the attractiveness of a segment: its size, its growth, the profitability of the segment, current and potential competition and the capabilities of the business (Doyle and Stern, 2006).
Some models such as BCG matrix or McKinsey/GE matrix have been developed to determine the attractiveness of the market’s segments for a company according to its actual portfolio. The following one may be relevant as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Market segment attractiveness</th>
<th>unattractive</th>
<th>average</th>
<th>attractive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current and potential company strengths in serving the segment</td>
<td>weak</td>
<td>Strongly avoid</td>
<td>Avoid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average</td>
<td>Avoid</td>
<td>Possibilities</td>
<td>Secondary Targets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strong</td>
<td>Possibilities</td>
<td>Secondary target</td>
<td>Prime target</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2: Target market selection (Hooley, Piercy, and Nicoulaud, 2008).**

We understand that most of the time, companies target the position at the bottom right corner of the table. But unfortunately, this opportunity does not often exist. Thus the most reliant strategy is to aim one of the two secondary targets, and then wait for the segment to begin more attractive (bottom middle) or involving its capabilities to reach the prime target (right middle), which often implies huge investments (Hooley, Piercy and Nicoulaud, 2008).

### 2.2.1. Marketing positioning

As we said before, positioning represents the second part of a company’s core strategy. The exact definition given by Hooley, Piercy and Nicoulaud (2008, p.207) is the following one: “Positioning is the act of designing the company’s offering and image so that they occupy a meaningful and distinct competitive position in the target customers’ minds”. In other terms, it is the position occupied by the company in the minds of the customers, relatively to its competitors.
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The positioning strategy is determined by the competitive advantages owned by a company, which make it different from its competitors (Kotler, Bowen and Makens, 2010).

When talking about tourism marketing, Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2010) propose a three steps process to choose and implement a positioning strategy. The first step is the identification of the possible competitive advantages. These may be based on physical attribute differentiation, service differentiation, personal differentiation, location differentiation, or image differentiation.

The second step is the selection of the right competitive advantages on which will be built the positioning strategy. Thus some criteria must be followed by the competitive advantages to make the most relevant selection possible (Hooley, Piercy and Nicoulaud, 2008):

- The importance: the difference should bring a real value for “significant numbers of customers”.
- Superior: the difference should bring a more efficient answer to a customer need.
- Communicable: the company should be able to communicate about the difference.
- Distinctive and pre-emptive: the difference cannot be copied or “performed better” by competitors.
- Affordable: the potential customers should be capable to pay for the difference.
- Profitable: the difference should bring revenue to the company.

Finally, the last step is communication and delivering the chosen position, which is made through the implementation of the marketing mix.

It may be interesting sometimes to measure a brand’s position. Thus the model which is often used is called perceptual mapping (Kotler, Bowen and Makens, 2010). This model makes a correlation between to variables, which are often the price and the quality; it is presented as a map on which we place the different brands of the market. We have chosen to mix this perceptual map with the model which represents the positioning on a segmented market made by Doyle and Stern (2006) to obtain the following model.
2.2.1. Repositioning strategy

Repositioning happens when a company decides to change its position on the market. This decision is inevitable when the company or its product is “inadequately positioned”. It can happen for three reasons (Doyle and Stern, 2006). First when the target segment becomes unattractive, because it is unprofitable, too small, too competitive, or it declines. The second reason is when the cost of a product is too high relatively to its quality (product X on the figure 3). The third reason is when the quality of a product does not attract the target segment (product Y).
Doyle and Stern (2006) explain that a repositioning strategy is involved through two avenues that may be complementary. First, it is called ‘real repositioning’ when the management decides to “update the brand by incorporating the latest technology, functions or design” (Doyle and Stern, 2006, p.184). In the case of tourism marketing, it means renewing, or refreshing the services proposed (Kotler, Bowen, and Makens, 2010).

The second possibility is the ‘psychological repositioning’ which seeks to change the beliefs of consumers concerning the company’s competitiveness (Doyle and Stern, 2006). In other terms it aims to have a direct impact on the image of the company.

In parallel of the repositioning strategy, a revitalization strategy is also often implemented by the companies to expand their market. This extension may be done by finding new markets, by entering new segments, by finding new application of the brand, or by increasing the brand usage rate (Merrilees and Miller, 2008).

The repositioning strategy theory developed by Sloan (1921) shows that it involves changes in the first part of the core strategy (segmentation and targeting). He has also shown that all the variables of the marketing mix have an importance to change the position of a product, a brand, or a company (Powers and Steward, 2010).
2.1. The marketing mix

Marketing mix is the decisions taken to implement the positioning strategy. Most of the time, when talking about marketing mix, we talk about the ‘four Ps’ which are the four variables of the mix: product, price, promotion, and place (Shaw, 2012).

Concerning tourism marketing, Kosic, Lizic, and Stojanovic (2010) define these four variables as it follows. ‘Product’ represents the global offer proposed by the destination. It regroups the accommodation, the possible activities, the services, etc…

The ‘price’ is considered as the most dynamic variable of the mix. It is decided according the market evolution. It will also have a heavy influence on the attractiveness and on the positioning of the destination.

‘Promotion’ is an important vector of the marketing mix. It aims to create a certain “consciousness” of the product in customers’ minds, to manage the image, and to determine to position. We will see this factor more precisely in the next part.

Finally, ‘place’ defines the sale channel chosen to make the link between the destination and its potential customers.

According to Kosic, Lizic, and Stojanovic (2010), we can add another variable to the tourism marketing mix. ‘People’ which is the variable that regroups all the actors of the tourism destination. Their ability of operating the place, and host/inform customers represents, in fact, a determinant factor of the mix.

2.1. The promotion variable

Promotion or communication is one of the main variables of the marketing mix. According to the definition of Kosic, Lizic, and Stojanovic (2010), we can define communication in the destination marketing area, as the activity managed to create a “consciousness” about the tourism destination, to create its image at the best possible market position. Hence, we understand that communication plays an important role in the positioning strategy of the destination.
2.1.1. **The image**

‘Image’ is a key factor of a destination marketing strategy success, in the way that it has an influence on both positioning and demand (Molina, Gomez and Martin-Consuegra, 2010). In fact creating a differentiated image helps to define a clear positioning relatively to the competitors as it aims to create a favorable perception of the destination in the customers’ mind based on its competitive advantages (Frochot and Kreziak, 2008).

The theory of Frochot and Kreziak (2008, p.299) shows that “image formation is a dynamic process” which is developed in three phases. First, the ‘organic image’ is unclear, and it is produced by the exposure of several source of information such as magazines, films, reports, or friends and relatives. This ‘organic image’ is transformed into what we call ‘induced image’ when the potential customer has decided to take a vacation and starts to get information from the formal sources provided by the tourism destination (brochure, website…). This kind of image is determinant as it may have a considerable impact on decision-making process of the tourists (Molina, Gomez and Martin-Consuegra, 2010).

Consumers finally develop a ‘complex image’ of the tourism destination once their vacation is over. This image is directly influenced by the quality of the service provided and the global impression of the visit. This last phase is also determinant in the way that it is directly link to the consumers’ satisfaction which means that it has an influence on customers’ loyalty (Faullant, Matzler and Füller, 2008).

According to Day, Skidmore and Koller (2002), when developing their image, tourism destinations have to follow five criteria to be efficient:

- Be valid
- Be believable
- Be simple
- Have appeal
- Be distinctive

Besides, the image has also to be warm and welcoming (Ashcroft, 2010). We will see that the image can be managed through several tools of the communication mix.
2.1.1. The communication mix

In the case of tourism marketing, the communication mix regroups six communication tools: advertising, public relations, sales promotions, direct marketing, personal selling, and e-marketing (Kotler, Bowen and Makens, 2010). These tools aim to inform, persuade, create an image and reinforce the market share of the destination (Doyle and Stern, 2006).

2.1.1.1. Advertising

Advertising is the most visible communication tool. It consists of presenting a product/service through mass media such as radio, television, newspapers and the internet (Pelsmacker, Geuens, and Bergh, 2010). To be effective, the development process of an advertising program should follow six steps (Peter Doyle and Philip Stern, 2006):

- Identify and research the target market
- Define advertising objectives
- Determine advertising budget
- Develop media plan
- Create advertising message
- Evaluate advertising effectiveness

We usually distinguish two types of advertising communication: audiovisual and printed (Pelsmacker, Geuens, and Bergh, 2010). The second one is often the most used for tourism communication in the form of brochure which is the main information vector utilized by the tourism destinations (Molina, Gomez, and Martin-Consuegra, 2010). Coltman (1989) explains that it is likely that potential customers compare several destinations’ brochures, and finally go to the one with the best brochure.

Moreover, this type of advertising support may be very effective to define the destination’s positioning in customers’ minds, by showing the different competitive advantages of the place (Frochot and Kreziak, 2008). Indeed, Frochot and Kreziak (2008) explain that it is possible to define the precise positioning of a tourist destination by analyzing deeply the content of its brochure. They say, for example, that we can compare the number of pages dedicated to the
ski activity, with the number of pages dedicated to out-of-snow activities, in a brochure of a ski resort, to determine if this resort position itself more as a relaxing place, or more as an extreme skiing place. Nevertheless, the goal of brochures is clearly to have an influence on the ‘induced image’ of the destination (Molina, Gomez, and Martin-Consuegra, 2010).

2.1.1.2. Public relation

Public relation is a very important communication tool in addition to advertising, its main goal is “to bridge the gap between the company’s point of view and media coverage of the company’s activities” (Pelsmacker, Geuens, and Bergh, 2010, p.339). It exists different types of public relation communication, but the most important for tourism marketing is ‘media public relation’. Its purpose is to generate publicity by encouraging media to cover events which happen in the tourism destination, and hence, reach other important audiences (Pelsmacker, Geuens, and Bergh, 2010). One of its advantages is that it permits to lower the cost of communication through the use of a tierce person: the media (Kosic, Lizic, and Stojanovic, 2010). Public relation is a main task for companies in the way that it has a direct influence on the destination’s image (Pelsmacker, Geuens, and Bergh, 2010).

2.1.1.3. Sales promotions

Sales promotions give an economic argument to attract consumers by lowing prices, giving free goods, or giving the chance to win prices (Doyle and Stern, 2006). The goal is to increase the sales of the company on a short-term period (Esteban-Bravo, Múgica, and Vidal-Sanz, 2009). Concerning the destination marketing, we can use sales promotions in the low-season to ensure a satisfying influence during this period. Besides the sales promotions have to be used carefully as it may be a threat to the long-term image of the company (Pelsmacker, Geuens, and Bergh, 2010). In fact, according to Pelsmacker, Geuens, and Bergh (2010), a too frequent utilization of this tool may influence an image of ‘cheapness’ and destroy the perception of quality.
2.1.1.4. Direct marketing

Contrary to advertising, direct marketing does not utilize the mass media to touch as much people as possible in one time, but it targets “named individual customers” (Peter Doyle and Philip Stern, 2006, p.272). This communication seeks both to obtain immediate responses and develop a lasting customer relationship by the establishment of direct connection with “carefully targeted individual customers” (Kotler, Bowen, and Makens, 2010, p.468). It exists several technics of direct marketing which can be classified in two groups: the traditional forms, and the digital direct marketing technologies (Kotler, Bowen, and Makens, 2010).

The traditional forms consist to deliver a message through the utilization of direct-mail or telephone (Pelsmaker, Geuens, and Bergh, 2010). Moreover, another technic takes part of this group, the kiosk marketing which involves the use of in-store machines to allow customers to get information or to order products or services by themselves (Kotler, Bowen, and Makens, 2010).

The direct marketing technologies, also called interactive marketing regroups four technics (Doyle and Stern, 2006). Direct e-mailing which consists of delivering a message through the use of e-mail (Doyle and Stern, 2006). The second technic is called mobile phone marketing, it involves the utilization and the development of application dedicated to smartphone devices (Kotler, Bowen, and Makens, 2010). The third technic is the use of podcasts and vodcasts. These are downloadable audio and video files via the internet. It is comparable to music and films on-demand. This technology may be used for direct marketing in the way that companies can link dedicated advertisement to them (Kotler, Bowen, and Makens, 2010). Finally, the last technic is the interactive TV which allows television viewers to use their remote control to interact with TV programs and advertisements (Kotler, Bowen, and Makens, 2010).

2.1.1.5. Personal selling

Personal selling is a very old marketing technic which is now evaluating in the way that it has been totally transaction based, and has moved to a more customer oriented form
(Pelsmaker, Geuens, and Bergh, 2010). In other words we can say that today personal selling focuses on customers’ problems solving. This marketing technic is used as a communication tool in the way that it is “used to inform, give demonstrations to, maintain or establish a long-term relationship with, or persuade specific members of a particular audience” (Pelsmaker, Geuens, and Bergh, 2010, p.529).

In the tourism marketing field, to principle type of sales forces used are the tourism agencies and the tour operators (Kotler, Bowen, and Makens, 2010). According to Kotler, Bowen, and Makens (2010), in order to make them being efficient, it is important to select them carefully, to train them, and to give them the supports they may need to sell the product or service effectively.

2.1.1.6. E-marketing

E-marketing, or online marketing, is a recent kind of direct marketing made on the internet (Kotler, Bowen, and Makens, 2010). It is possible to divide it in four domains that are different by the initiator of the message and by the targeted audience as it is shown in the following figure.

![Figure 5: Online domains (Kotler, Bowen, and Makens, 2010)](image-url)
Kolter, Bowen, and Makens (2010) explain that there are three possible ways to set up a presence online. The first one is the creation of a website for the company or, in the case of tourism marketing, for the tourism destination. As the brochure, the website has a determinant role to constitute the image of the company (Pelsmaker, Geuens, and Bergh, 2010). The second technic is online advertising through the utilization of banners or pop-ups. This can also be made through search-related ads on search engine websites such as Google, Bing, or Yahoo. The last technic is participating on online social networks such as Facebook or Tweeter. This technic may be useful to manage and maintain a lasting relationship with customers (Kotler, Bowen, and Makens, 2010).

There is no best communication mix that works for every destination. Thus to develop an optimum mix, the first step is to know which media will have the best impact on the targeted audience (Ashcroft, 2010). The following steps are a crossing between ‘more effective communication needed’ and ‘effective communication’ represented by McCartney, Butler and Bennett (2008) in the following model.

![Figure 6: Reaching an optimum communication mix](image-url)
3. Methodology

In this part, we will explain the strategy and method that we have chosen to conduct our research. Our aim is to help our readers to understand how we managed our empirical study. Readers have to keep in mind that the purpose of our study is to analyze the role of the promotional tools in a repositioning strategy of a tourism destination. Thus, the entire research method that we have chosen is based on this aim.

3.1. Method: research approach

According to Saunders, Levis and Tornhill (2007), a research project should be based on the use of theory. This or these theory may be defined clearly in the chosen design of the research. Following the reasoning of these authors, there are two possible research approaches: deductive and inductive.

The deductive approach implies to formulate a theory from which the researcher develops a research strategy to collect the data and verify the theory (Saunders, Levis and Thornhill 2007). To conduct this type of approach, Robson (2002) propose a five steps process:

- Formulating a hypothesis based on the theory.
- Expressing the hypothesis by proposing an interaction between two variables.
- Testing the hypothesis.
- Analyzing the results.
- Modifying the theory, if necessary, according to these results.

At the opposite, the inductive approach supposes a different research process. It consists of the collection and analysis of data in a first time, in the aim of developing a theory in a second time, which is based on these data (Saunders, Levis and Thornhill, 2007).

For our study, we have chosen the deductive approach as it presents several characteristics that are more advantageous for us. In fact, according to Saunders, Levis and Thornhill (2007), this approach has as characteristics to be quicker, less risky, and aims to explain a relationship between two variables, which fits perfectly the purpose of our thesis.
The second step of developing a method is the choice between the quantitative method and the qualitative method.

The quantitative method is based on obtaining numerical data to explain phenomena. Thus it seeks the measurement and analysis of human actions through tools such as face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews or online researches or surveys (Newman and Benz, 1998). This approach implies a “rigorous quantitative analysis in a formal and rigid fashion” of the collected data (Kothari, 2004, p.5). Thus, the reliability and validity of the method are based on the possibility to collect a large number of data (Golafshani, 2003). This represents a difficult and non-relevant process for our study. Thereby, we will not use this approach.

At the opposite, the qualitative method does not aim to numerical data, but it seeks to find cultural specific information about behaviors, social context or values of a place (Sofaer, 2002). There are three common tools for the qualitative method. The first one is the direct observation which consists to observe consumer behavior to obtain conclusions. The second one is interviews. It aims to obtain information about ideas through individual (depth-interview) or group interviews (focus group). The third method is the analysis of existing documents (Patton, 2000). According to Kothari (2004, p.5), this approach provides data “either in non-quantitative form or in the form which are not subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis”.

The Qualitative method has been the most relevant for our study. Moreover, the three approaches that we have described before can be used for this case study. Thus interviews, observations and analysis of brochures, press releases, events and TV commercials will conduct our study.

### 3.2. Type of research

Choosing a concrete type of research is determinant to conduct a study. It helps the researcher to focus on the relevant data by giving him a concrete direction of searching. There are three possible and common types of research: descriptive research, exploratory research and causal research (Sontakki, 2010). Churchill and Iabucci (2010) describe briefly these three types as follow. A descriptive research aims to determine the frequency with which something happens, or the relation between two factors. An exploratory research is based on
defining a detailed insight of a situation. And finally, a causal research studies via experiments the cases and effects of a situation.

A descriptive research design seeks to describe a situation, and more precisely, when it comes to marketing, to describe a marketing mix (Mishra, 2008). According to Kothari (2004, p.3), “the main characteristic of this method is that the researcher has no control over the variables; he can only report what has happened or what is happening”. Therefore, to be effective and give the most detailed representation of something, it should basically answer the following questions: ‘Whom customer buys which product, in which place, at which moment, for which utilization and by which way does he or she buy it?’ (Quickmba, 2007). In other terms we should ask ‘who, what, where, when, why and how’.

Concerning the exploratory research design, “the major emphasis in such studies is on the discovery of ideas and insight” (Kothari, 2004, p.36). This type of research is mainly used in the aim to clarify a situation and have a better understanding of a problem question (Saunders, Levis and Thornhill, 2007). One of the main methods to conduct an exploratory research is through literature research which is based on the analysis of a large amount of published data that can be found in books, newspapers, professional journals, etc… (Sontakki, 2010)

According to Sontakki (2010), it is possible, and sometimes it is even better to combine several research designs to conduct a study. Thus, for our thesis we have chosen to combine the exploratory with the descriptive research design. In a first time, in the theoretical part, we have made an exploratory research through literature survey to have a better understanding of our problem. Then, the descriptive design has been used to describe and analyze the data collected during our study.

3.3. Population and sample

3.3.1. Definitions

According to Kothari (2004), the population represents the totality of the items or units about which we are conducting our research. The population may be said finite when it represents a defined number of items or units. On the other hand, the population is infinite when it is impossible to know the number of items.
As it may be difficult, because of the large or infinite number of items, to study an entire population, researchers often use sample. Kolter (2008) define a sample as a representative and selected segment of the whole population.

### 3.3.2. Sample design

While constituting a sample design, researchers have to follow a special reasoning (Dhawan and Sanjeev, 2010):

- Clear definition of the type of population.
- Definition of the sample unit which may be geographical, social, or individual.
- Constitution of the source list which regroups the names of all units of a population, in the case of a finite population.
- Definition of the size of the sample, which defines how many items have to be studied.
- Determination of the population’s parameters of interest.
- Consideration of the budget needed to conduct such study according to the size of the sample.
- Choice of sampling procedure, which defines clearly the type of sample used by researchers.

#### 3.3.2.1. Probability and non-probability samples

According to Kothari (2004) the two basic types of sample are probability sample and non-probability sample.

With the probability type, all the items of the population have the same chance to figurate in the sample, which is defined by an estimated probability. At the opposite, with the non-probability type, there is no probability as the items that constitute the sample are deliberately chosen.
3.3.2.2. Sampling procedure

Defining a sample design is defining plan in the aim to constitute a sample from the entire population (Kothari, 2004). We will see here that different sampling procedures are possible:

- **Random sampling** (probability): under this sampling design, every items of the population have the same chance to take part of the sample (Kothari, 2004).
- **Systematic sampling** (probability): it defines the sampling design where researchers select “every ith item on a list” (Kothari, 2004, p.62).
- **Stratified sampling** (probability): this technic is used when the entire population is heterogeneous. Thus, in a first time the population is divided into several homogeneous sub-groups, and then items to constitute the sample are selected from each stratum (Kothari, 2004).
- **Cluster and area sampling** (probability): when the area of interest is too big, we divide it into smaller areas called cluster, to finally select some of them to constitute the sample. We call it area sampling “if clusters happen to be some geographic subdivisions (Kothari, 2004, p.65).
- **Multi-stage sampling** (probability): It is a “further development of cluster sampling” in the way that we choose deliberately the cluster in which we will select the items for the sample (Kothari, 2004, p.66).
- **Sequential sampling** (probability): under this technic, the size of the sample is not fixed in advance. It is defined “according to mathematical decision rules on the basis of information yielded as the survey progresses” (Kothari, 2004, p.67).
- **Deliberate sampling** (non-probability): the researcher deliberately selects the items for the sample. The items are chosen according to their favorable characteristics for the study (Kothari, 2004).
- **Quota sampling** (non-probability): as it made for the stratified sampling, the population is divided in several sub-groups, and the researcher deliberately selects some items in each group (Kothari, 2004).
3.3.2.3. Sampling design operated for this study

We will define here our sample design by following the different steps enumerated above one by one. We have chosen to focus our study on winter tourism destination. Thus, our population is all the ski resorts of the world.

We have defined our sample unit as an individual, as a ski resort is considered as a brand in our study. The source list may be done as the population is finite. This list regroups the name of all the ski resorts of the world. The size of sample is one as we have based our study on only one ski resort. The parameters of interest that we have defined the following ones: we were searching a ski resort based in Europe for some practically reason, that aims to an international market, and that has operated or that is operating a repositioning strategy. The budget dedicated to this study was near zero. Finally, we have made a deliberate sampling as the item that we wanted to study had to fulfill several criteria.

After making our choice, we have chosen Avoriaz which is one of the biggest European ski resorts, which is situated in France, and which is now operating a repositioning strategy.

3.4. Instruments to collect data

There were five possible strategies on which we could base our study: case study, experiment, survey, histories and analysis of archival information (Yin, 2009). We have finally chosen the case study to manage our thesis.

A case study is the analysis of an organization or of an individual. It consists of the “examination of existing records, by observing the occurrence” of a phenomenon (Mishra, 2008, p.70). It aims to find explanations of hypotheses.

According to Saunders, Levis and Thornhill (2007), there are two possible kind of case study: the single-case, and the multiple-cases. The single-case often represents a critical or a very unique case. Thus, it may be selected as it presents a rare and favorable opportunity for the study (Saunders, Levis and Thornhill, 2007). The multiple-cases approach is based on several cases in the aim to be able to generalize the findings (Yin, 2009).
We have based our study on a single-case which is Avoriaz. We have chosen this option as we wanted find a destination that operate a repositioning strategy at the same time we were conducting our research. The aim was to have the most modern results possible. Moreover, due the time issue, it would have been too long to conduct a multiple-cases study.

When it comes to the explanation of the instruments to collect the data, we should first distinct the two kinds of data: primary data and secondary data. These two types of data are different from the other by the nature of the information that they provide, but also but the source of the information (Mishra, 2008).

3.4.1. **Primary data**

3.4.1.1. Definition

The primary data are information that does not already exist. According to the definition of Kothari (2004, p.95), “the primary data are those which are collected afresh and for the first time, and thus happen to be original in character”. The objectives of the primary data are to set the direction of the research. In other words, these data formulate the base of the study (Mishra, 2008). The principal method to collect primary data information is surveys made through observations, interviews, questionnaires, and schedules (Nair and Suja, 2009). The second method that can be used is experiment (Kothari, 2004). There is a third possible method which consists in content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004).

3.4.1.2. Primary data collection in our study

To manage our study we have decided to use both survey made through an interview and content analysis. Our goal was to gather two types of primary data to be able to generate complete information.
Interviews

An interview is often used to “secure data” that are not available in the secondary source, or they are difficult to obtain through a close-ended question questionnaire (Phillips and Stawarski, 2008, p.23). In our research we have made a depth-interview which is a type of interview that aims to discover the underlying motives and desire of the respondent (Kothari, 2004). We had the opportunity to meet Stéphane Lerendu who is the director of the Tourism Office of Avoriaz, and who also manage the communication service of the resort. Our main goal during this interview was to clarify and understand precisely what the new position of the ski resort is.

According to Phillips and Stawarski (2008), there are two common methods to conduct an interview: structured and unstructured. A structured interview is close to a questionnaire by its form, and it implies that the interviewer ask specific questions which he has prepared a priori. For our thesis, we have chosen the unstructured method which “allows the interviewer to probe for additional information” according to the answers of the participant (Phillips and Stawarski, 2008, p.24).

To ensure a successful interview, its preparation should follow a precise process, called guidelines (Appendix 1), which is developed in five steps (Phillips and Stawarski, 2008):

- Development of the questions.
- Testing the interview.
- Preparation of the interviewers.
- Providing instructions to the participants.
- Schedule the interview.

Content analysis

“Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use (Krippendorff, 2004, p.18). According to Epstein, Vonk and Tripodi (2007, p. 106), it is a way to collect descriptive information from “written documents, audio and video recording, or other forms of media”. Through a content analysis, which represents the second step of our study, we wanted to
analyze the communication tools by Avoriaz to understand their role in the repositioning strategy of the ski resort. Barker (2009) proposes a description method based on six elements:

- The mood: feeling or mood stimulated by the content.
- The design: what is the basic design of the content?
- Context and content:
  - Figures present in the advertisement.
  - Suggestion made by the background.
- Signs and symbols: their role in providing a positive feeling about the product.
- Language: how is it used in the advertisement?
- Themes: basic theme, message.

Based on this method, we have developed a precise guideline for our content analysis (Appendix 2).

3.4.2. **Secondary data**

Secondary data are information that has already been produced, so they are available for other studies. We can take the examples of official statistics or different kinds of documents such as newspapers, websites, catalogues, etc… (McNeil and Chapman, 2005). As main advantages, secondary data are most of the time more economic and easier to collect than primary data. Moreover, it may help to determine a direction for the primary data. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware of the context where the data were collected, because it exist the danger that the data may be outdated (Burns and Bush, 2000).

During our study we have used secondary data mainly in the theoretical part, in the aim to constitute our hypothesis. With the objective of being reliable and valid, our researches were based on recent well-known literature review and official statistics and figures.
4. **Empirical data**

We have conducted our research through the analysis of a case study based on Avoriaz. Therefore, we will see in this part what is precisely the new positioning adopted by the ski resort, and what are the communication tools used to communicate about it.

4.1. **Presentation of Avoriaz**

It is important for the readers to have a clear view of what is Avoriaz and what is the basic concept of this ski resort, in order to better understand the goal of the communication tools describes in this study.

Source: www.avoriaz.com

Avoriaz is a French ski resort situated in the Alps, at 1800 meters high, in the department of ‘Haute-Savoie’, at the border of Switzerland. The resort began to be built in 1963 from the idea of the famous French skier Jean Vuarnet. With the help of Gérard Brémond, Jacques Labro, Jean-Jaques Orzoni and Jean-Marc Roques, they developed the concept of Avoriaz: a place without car where people can move by ski in the streets, and which is eco-friendly. Its architecture should be inspired by the surrounding mountains, and its goal is to make people totally forget their normal life during their vacations. Avoriaz became rapidly famous during the 70’s and the 80’s thanks to the ‘Festival International du Film Fantastique d’Avoriaz’ which was a film festival devoted to horror and science fiction. This festival ended in 1993 and it has helped to attract the world’s finest jet set which made the reputation of the place. After this period, Avoriaz became for a few years the snowboard capital of Europe, especially thanks to its ski area. The ski resort takes part of the area of ‘Les Portes du Soleil’ which is the second biggest ski area of the world. It regroups 14 ski resorts between France and Switzerland which provide the skiers and snowboarders the possibility to slide on 283 tracks (650 km of groomed slopes). During the last ten years, Avoriaz has aimed more to target families with children by proposing them a large range of ‘apres-ski’ activities, and by the implementation of the ‘Village des Enfant’ which is a ski school for kids which provides a revolutionary new way of learning developed by Annie Famose.
We can see here, that Avoriaz has already changed two times its positioning strategy since its creation. After being a famous destination for the jet-set, it became more oriented to a young target searching for extreme sensations. And it became finally more ‘family-friendly’ by developing the activities for children.
It seems that the directors of the resort have decided to change Avoriaz’s positioning, according to the big changes operated nowadays in the village.

4.2. The new positioning strategy

The first step of our empirical study consists on the understanding of the new positioning strategy of the ski resort. This information has been collected during the interview we made with Stéphane Lerendu who is the director of the Tourism Office of Avoriaz.

4.2.1. Decision of changing the strategy

The decision of operating a repositioning strategy have been taken when some marketing research have shown that the resort’s positioning was not competitive anymore relatively to the competitors. The past positioning of Avoriaz may be represented on the following figure
We can see here that the positioning was not adapted anymore. According to Stéphane Lerendu, “the resort was aiming a position in the ‘mass market’ but the quality of the its ski area was not in accordance with its price politic.” This situation made that Avoriaz was not as profitable as it could be.

### 4.2.2. Defining and implementing the new positioning strategy

Avoriaz is now aiming a higher position by repositioning the ski resort from the mass market to the premium market. This change could not be made only by raising the prices. We have seen in the last figure that the ski area was already adapted to the premium market. But to be able to compete on this market, as Stéphane Lerendu said “Avoriaz had also to improve its surrounding services such as the accommodation offer and the après-ski activities proposition”. He then explained us the adaptation process adopted by the company Pierre & Vacances, which is the property developer of Avoriaz, has been made in two steps. First, from 2001 to 2007, the resort has operated the renovation of all its buildings. Then, from May 2011 to December 2012, it has constructed two brand new districts:
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- ‘Les Crozats: 4 residences Pierre & Vacances (3 stars) which represents 271 new beds.
- ‘Amara’: a new luxury district with 5 new premium residences (4 and 5 stars), new shops, new restaurants and bars, and a spa.

Concerning the evolution of the après-ski activities and other services, Avoriaz has also done a huge investment:

- Construction of a new ice rink at the main center of the resort.
- Building of two indoor car parks which provide 1004 new spaces.
- A new reception bay, more practical, and more comfortable.
- The replacement of the cable-car of ‘Les Prodains’ to provide a better access to the resort.

These changes have contributed to considerably improve the position of Avoriaz on the French market of ski resort relatively to its competitors. The following figure represents the evolution of Avoriaz’s position on this market described by Stéphane Lerendu.

Figure 8: Evolution of Avoriaz’s positioning
Besides these changes, Avoriaz has also decided to adopt a new motto: “Avoriaz: ski and music world”. Stéphane Lerendu told us that “the goal was to transform the resort and its ski area into the biggest snow-dance floor of the world.” The aim here is basically to create a link between ski and entertainment and to make Avoriaz being seen as one of the best place to go skiing, but also as a place where there is a lot more to do, and where there is always something happening.

### 4.3. The communication strategy

To better understand the use of the communication tools we have studied, it is important to understand how is developed the communication strategy of Avoriaz. Stéphane Lerendu explained us that “as the turnover of the resort is divided between two distinct sources of benefit, it is obvious that the communication strategy had to be differentiated.”

#### 4.3.1. The tour operators

One third of the turnover of Avoriaz is made thanks to the tour operators, mainly from United Kingdom, Russia and Belgium. In this case, the resort cannot communicate directly to the final customer, so it has to convince and help the tour operators to do it. Thus the communication is developed in two times:

- The goal of the first step is to persuade the tour operator to propose Avoriaz as a winter holiday destination to the finale customer. For this, Avoriaz invites them to visit and discover the resort during the winter, to show them the benefits provided by the destination.
- The second step consists of giving them the good direction to communicate to the final customers. For this, Avoriaz organizes series of dedicated formations, and it provides them some kinds of specialized supports such brochures and flyers. At the same time, in UK, the resort also uses operations of joint-marketing with the tour operators to create advertisements in the British press.
4.3.2. The direct customers

The two other thirds of the turnover are made thanks to the direct customers. These are mainly influenced by the word-of-mouth. Avoriaz is using two different ways to have an impact on it: internet, the public relation.

Concerning the internet, Avoriaz has recently hired in December 2011 a person who is totally dedicated to the image of the resort on the web. This is mainly implemented by operations of search engine optimization (SEO), by the utilization of banners, by the actualization of the official website of the resort and by the presence of Avoriaz on the social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. The development of an application for smartphones has also been done to permit to the customers to be updated on the resort’s news, at any time, from their pocket. According to Stéphane Lerendu “the public relation has a huge importance among the word-of-mouth.” The goal is to have the maximum of presence is the mass media (television, radio and press) all along the winter. Thus, he said that Avoriaz edits a press kit every season to inform the editorial offices about the resort’s news. Every year, between 120 and 250 journalists are also invited in Avoriaz to try to make them write about the ski resort. Nevertheless, as Stéphane Lerendu said “we have to keep in mind that the word-of-mouth is mainly influenced by what the customers say about the destination to other potential customers.” Thus Avoriaz tries to organize a lot of events and animations all along the winter and the summer to give them an unforgettable experience of the mountain. The goal is to make them have a positive image of the resort.

A second way to attract direct customers is the sales promotions. These are used mainly in two parts of the season: at the beginning of March and at the end of April. Usually the customers of the new segment targeted by Avoriaz (premium market) are not really influenced by the price. But these two periods are the low periods of the season. Thus sales promotions are used in order to fill in completely the resort, even during the low season.

4.4. The promotion tools

In this section we have analyzed four different printed communication supports used by Avoriaz. We have studied one brochure dedicated to the Russian tour operators, one press
kit, and two printed supports dedicated to the potential customers (one flyer and one summer brochure). We have also analyzed the principal events of the winter, and the online presence of Avoriaz.

4.4.1. The brochure for Russian tour operators (attachment 1)

The support studied here is a printed document which has the form of an advertising brochure.

This brochure is entirely developed for the tour operators, and more precisely, this one is developed for the Russian tour operators.

When describing the support, the principal feeling given by this brochure is that is makes the reader dreams mainly thanks to the pictures which all show a beautiful landscape full of snow under a prefect blue bird.

Concerning the design of the brochure, it is made of a kind of glossy paper which emits a sensation of quality, and it is presented in the landscape format. Inside, we find much more pictures than texts, and the photos are most of the time displayed on full page. Moreover, the principal colors used are white, dark blue and silver.

On almost every picture there is the presence of people, most of the time they are smiling in face of the camera, or they are clearly having fun while skiing, snowboarding, sledging, having a dinner, etc… This suggests that customers always spend a good time in Avoriaz.

The only sign or symbol that comes back at the top right of the support every two pages is the logotype of the ski resort.

Concerning the language used in the brochure, everything is written in Russian. It only consists on short sentences about the concepts, some activities, or some facilities of the resort. These sentences may be used directly as arguments by the tour operators to present Avoriaz the potential Russian customers. We can take the example of the two first paragraphs found on the two first pages:
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The theme of this advertisement is basically about presenting Avoriaz and its different activities. Nevertheless, the pages 18 and 19 are dedicated to the introduction the new constructions of the resort and principally the new luxury district of ‘Amara’ and the ‘Aquariaz’.

These brochures were given to the Russian tour operators in August in order to be able to prepare and communicate about the next winter.

Stéphane Lerendu explained us that this support has clearly the role of presenting the new product offered by Avoriaz to the Russian audience. Moreover, we can notice that the information is well-selected to fit the best this segment of customer. In fact, Russians are well-known to be most of the time searching for premium or luxury holidays. Thus, the only accommodations presented in this brochure are the luxury one from the ‘Amara’ district.

Besides, the sense of quality emitted by the support reflects well the high quality level targeted by the ski resort.
4.4.2. The winter press kit (attachment 2)

This support is a press kit which has been given to all principal media which specialized on winter tourism or winter activities. The one we have analyzed has been edited to present the winter season 2011-2012.

The target audience here is clearly not the general public but it is more dedicated to journalists and media which may be interested to speak about Avoriaz.

The general impression given by this document is that it seems to be very informative and complete concerning the ski resort.

Speaking about the design, this press kit is presented in the landscape format and it is made of some kind of very qualitative glossy paper. Inside, we find much more texts than picture and the principal colors used are black and white, with some touches of ‘poppy’ colors such as red, orange, and green.

The pictures utilized here are clearly used in a descriptive goal, to illustrate what is said in the texts. When there is the presence of people on the photos, it is almost always on action pictures, meaning that these people are skiing, snowboarding, swimming…

There is no special sign or symbol that comes back on every page, but one content is present on the bottom of every page, it is the press contacts of Avoriaz.

Concerning the language used in this support, as we mentioned before, there is a huge utilization of text. Through these texts, we have a precise description of each facets of Avoriaz often using figures.

Focusing on the content itself, we have noticed that the first four pages talk about the new building and the new premium services offered by the resort. The next topic is the eco-friendly aspect of Avoriaz, and then there is a part about the events and more precisely about the ‘Ski & Music festival’. It has been interesting to notice that the ski topic comes only after, on page 18. At the very last page, there is another interesting content made only of figures about the ski resort.

This communication support is distributed every year to some selected media at the end of the month of August. For the others, it is available and downloadable during one year on the website of Avoriaz.
Stéphane Lerendu told us that this document has also an important role in the repositioning strategy of Avoriaz in the way that it has been created to support the public relation communication tool. It seeks to give precise information about the changes of the resort to media, which they can possibly use to write subject or make report about Avoriaz. Through this press kit, the managers of the resort aim to have a positive impact on the image Avoriaz given by the media.

4.4.3. The summer flyer (attachment 3)

This support is a flyer which was distributed in the stores and restaurant of the resort and the end of the winter 2011-2012 to introduce the opening of the new water park in July 2012.

The targeted audience of this support was people who were already customers of Avoriaz, so could be potential customers for the summer season.

When describing the flyer, the principal impression provided by this document is that it makes the reader want to see this new water park when it will be finished.

It is made of cardstock, and it is presented in the landscape format. It consists of a computer generated images of the Aquariaz with small textboxes that describe the features. The two main colors used are blue and green.

There are exactly 28 people on the picture whom are enjoying the bath. In fact, each activity which is possible to do in the Aquariaz is illustrated by one or two persons who are doing it in the picture.

Concerning the signs and symbols, there are two big pink rounds at the top of the flyer which highlight the opening date of the water park and a special offer made by Pierre & Vacances for this occasion. We have also found the logotypes of the Aquariaz and Avoriaz at the top left corner.

The language used here is exclusively descriptive with the utilization of figures in almost every textbox.

This flyer was available in every shops and restaurant of Avoriaz from the end of March 2012.
The role of this flyer for the repositioning strategy is clearly informative. Its aim is to present a new service which will be available in Avoriaz thanks to this new choice of position.

4.4.4. The summer brochure (attachment 4)

This support is an advertising brochure which has been edited to promote the summer season 2012.

The target audience of this support of communication was the potential customers of Avoriaz for the summer season 2012. Moreover, the actual customers of the resort were also targeted as this brochure was also distributed in the tourism office of the ski resort.

The global impression emitted by this document is that it makes the reader want to visit the resort which is an impression mainly given by the beautiful pictures used inside. It is presented in the portrait format, and it is made of glossy paper which again gives a real feeling of quality. The principal colors used are white, green and blue, but there is also the utilization of warmer colors for the titles such as red, brown and purple.

Inside, we have found mainly double-page pictures with small textboxes to explain what is described in the photos. There are people on every illustration, these people are of every age: from children to adults. Nevertheless, they are never posing for the picture which means that they are always enjoying an activity proposed by Avoriaz: horse riding, swimming, playing volley-ball, etc…

Concerning the signs and symbols, we have noticed that the typography is the same as the one used in the flyer studied before. There is also the utilization of colored round to highlight some important information. Moreover, the logo of Avoriaz has changed from ‘Avoriaz 1800 ski resort’ to ‘Avoriaz resort’, which is according to Stephane Lerendu a choice that has been made to differentiate the summer resort from the winter ski resort.

The language used here is mainly descriptive to explain what is the concept of Avoriaz, and what are the activities that can be done in the resort.

Speaking about the content itself, we have observed that two pages are used at the beginning of the brochure to introduce the Aquariaz which is the main new activity for the summer 2012. Also at the end of this document, the two last pages highlight the presence of a golf club in the resort.
This brochure was available at tourism office of Avoriaz since the end of March 2012. In parallel, it was possible to download it, or to ask the resort to send it from Avoriaz’s official website.

Stéphane Lerendu explained that this support has two different roles in the repositioning strategy. First it presents the new product and services offered by the resort, and notably the Aquariaz which is the main new activity of the summer 2012. At the same time, it aims to have an influence on the premium image of Avoriaz by the quality of the materials used and by the premium services presented inside such as the golf club.

4.4.5. Events of the resort

Since the winter 2010-2011, organizes five big music events spread all along the season. These five events are programmed and regrouped under the name ‘Avoriaz: ski and music world’ which the concept is to create a link between the activity of skiing and the music.

4.4.5.1. Event 1: ‘La Fête de la Glisse’ (December 15th and 16th 2012)

Organized during the opening weekend of the season, the ‘Fête de la Glisse’ (‘Glide Feast’ in English) has been created to mark the commencement of the winter. During the event 50 ski and snowboard brands were invited in Avoriaz to give to the tourists the opportunity to try for free there new equipment. Moreover, at night parties were organized in every bar, pub, and club of the resort with rock concerts, and DJ sets.

This event is dedicated to a large audience as it permits to advanced skiers to start the new season in a good mood, but it also allows beginners of every age to make their first turns on snow.
4.4.5.2. Event 2: ‘Avoriaz Cabaret’ (January 5\textsuperscript{th} to 11\textsuperscript{th} 2013)

During this week, Avoriaz proposes each night 6 ‘cabaret-dinners’ in the restaurants of the resort. The concept is to bring from Paris to Avoriaz the ambiance of the famous ‘Moulin Rouge’. Thus we find different kinds of show such as French music, can-can dance, visual show, etc…

This event targets a relatively mature audience, who wants to spend good and distracting moments with their friends or family at the restaurants after skiing. We have also noticed that this kind of show is particularly liked by the Russian public. Thus the ski resort has decided to organize the ‘Avoriaz Cabaret’ exactly during the Russian Christmas vacation, and also to propose them a special night for the Russian Christmas on January 7th 2013.

4.4.5.3. Event 3: ‘Avonight Parties’ (from January 21\textsuperscript{st} to February 9\textsuperscript{th} 2013)

During almost 3 weeks, Avoriaz invites DJs from all around Europe to organize more than 120 parties in the bars, pubs and clubs of the resort, but also on the slopes. These parties begin at the end of the afternoon, during the after-ski, until the end of the night. During the day, some contests and demonstrations of ski and snowboard are organized on the ski area.

This event is clearly dedicated to a young audience between 20 and 30 years old who comes to Avoriaz for skiing as well as for partying and meeting new people.

4.4.5.4. Event 4: ‘Rock the Pistes Festival’ (March 23\textsuperscript{rd} to 27\textsuperscript{th} 2013)

This is the main event which represents the best the concept ‘Avoriaz: ski and music world’. During 5 days one or two concerts a day take place on the slopes of the ski area of ‘Les Portes du Soleil’. The invited artists are well-known internationally such as Keziah Jones, Jamaica, Archive, etc…
The special thing of this event is that tourists don’t where will take place the concert. To know it, they have to register on the website of the event, and then they will receive a SMS giving them the information a few hours before the gig.

This festival does aim to a really specific audience as the concerts are all of different kinds of music which may seduce a large public. The only specification that we have notices is that the people targeted don’t seek to pure skiing during their stay; they also want to live a special and different experience on slope.

4.4.5.5. Event 5: ‘Jazz Up Festival’ (April 6\textsuperscript{th} to 12\textsuperscript{th} 2013)

The ‘Jazz Up Festival’ is one most important jazz festival in France. During one week 40 concerts are organized in the restaurants of Avoriaz, and 7 major shows are given in the resort’s concert hall.

The target audience for this event is a little bit older in the way that jazz music seduces more mature people. Moreover, it targets more prosperous people as the restaurant where the concerts take place are often the more fancy places of the resort.

4.4.5.6. Role in the repositioning strategy

Stéphane Lerendu told us that these events have a major importance in the repositioning strategy of Avoriaz as their organization has two goals. First it has a great influence on the image of Avoriaz, comforting in new positioning as a resort which offers good ski possibilities, but which also proposes a lot more to do besides skiing. In the second time, these events aim to boost the public relation by giving some interesting subjects to speak about to the media, and hence gain a maximum of publication in the mass media.
4.4.6. **Online presence of Avoriaz**

In this part, we have done a study of the presence of Avoriaz on the internet. Reader has to notice that the following observations have been made in May 2012 and that the contents of the websites described below may have changed since this date.

4.4.6.1. **The websites**

Avoriaz manages two websites: its principal one (www.avoriaz.com) and another dedicated to the events of the resort (www.avoriaz-events.com).

The principal website is divided in two distinctive parts, one for the winter and one for the summer. When going on the winter one, a pop-up opens with a short video explaining the changes that are operated in the resort. This video starts with the sentence “2012, Avoriaz reborn”. The winter part of the website is available in French, English and Russian. Its main page is constituted by a slide show of big pictures of Avoriaz with some short comments concerning the concept of the resort. On this website, we can find a lot of contents about the resort such as information about skipass prices, information about shops and restaurant, webcams, etc… Nevertheless, an interesting page is the one called “new projects 2011/2012” which explains in details what the new constructions of the resort are and which special services they provide.

Going on the summer part of the website, we have noticed that the Aquariaz is clearly highlighted as a picture of its inside occupies the main part of the welcome page. This part of Avoriaz’s website is available in French and English, and its content is close to the winter’s one but adapted for the summer. The color used have changed too: the blue of the buttons have been replaced by a light green.

The second website of Avoriaz is, as we said before, entirely dedicated to the events organized in the resort. The main part of its content is made of videos that are either teasers or reports of these events. On this website, we have also found the video publications of Avoriaz in the mass media.
4.4.6.2. The banner advertising

We have found on a vacation website, a banner of Avoriaz which advertise the summer season in the resort. The main part of this banner is made of the same picture of the Aquariaz found on the flyer studied before. Moreover, the graphic style is exactly the same as the one used in the summer brochure. When clicking on the banner, we are redirecting on Avoriaz’s principal website.

4.4.6.3. The social networks

Avoriaz is present in both Facebook and Twitter. Facebook is used to share a large range of content such as pictures of the resort and of the events and videos. The page’s status is updated almost daily during the winter and summer season with news about the resort. People are also allowed to send posts on Avoriaz’s wall to ask questions or to give their feedback about their stay in Avoriaz. On May 9th, 2012 the page had 12 472 fans.

The utilization of Twitter is less developed as it used only to give news about the resort. On May 9th, 2012, Avoriaz had 332 followers.

4.4.6.4. Role in the repositioning strategy

The presence online of Avoriaz has a great and a multiple role in the repositioning strategy. First, it gives a lot and detail information about the new products and services of the resort. It has also an impact on the modification of the image of Avoriaz thanks to some content like the ‘Avoriaz reborn’ video. Finally, it also aims to create an efficient and lasting relationship with the resort’s customers through the social networks.
5. **Analysis**

In this part, we will conduct a detailed analysis of the data collection studied in the previous part. We have decided to focus this analysis in two main parts. First the repositioning of Avoriaz, we will see how Avoriaz has modified its positioning by changing its core strategy and creating new competitive advantages. In the second part, we will focus on the communication mix to see what the role of each communication tool used by the ski resort is.

5.1. **The repositioning strategy**

Following the theory of Doyle and Stern (2006) which explains that a repositioning strategy should be operated by a company when its target segment becomes unattractive, or when it has an unclear positioning, we understand that the decision of operating a such a strategy for Avoriaz was inevitable. Indeed, the information collected during the interview with Stéphane Lerendu have permitted to put in light two threats about the past positioning of the ski resort.

The first threat is the result of the evolution of the French ski market. Frochot and Kreziak (2008) explain that this market is now a stagnating mature market which the demand is evolving towards more quality and comfort associated to a development of the out-of-snow activities. Thus the segment targeted by Avoriaz, which was the mass market, became unattractive in the way that it was in decline, so it became less and less profitable.

The second threat is that the positioning chosen by Avoriaz was unclear and out of its target segment. In fact, as it is shown in the figure 7 presented below, the ski resort was aiming the mass market according to its pricing policy, but at the same time, it was offering a quality of service, and especially a size of ski area, as good as some resorts present in the premium and even in the luxury market. In other words, Avoriaz was not as effective and profitable as it could be.

The decision of repositioning Avoriaz in the premium market has involved the two possibilities proposed by Doyle and Stern (2006): ‘real repositioning’ and ‘psychological repositioning’. At the same time the change of target segment has implied a revitalization
strategy explained by Merrilees and Miller (2008). We will now focus on the changes made in the core strategy of the resort and on the evolution of its competitive advantages which were used to implement the repositioning strategy.

5.1.1. The core strategy: segmentation and targeting

5.1.1.1. Segmentation

As it is explained in the theory of Tkaczynski, Sharyn and Beaumont (2009), several criteria are possible to be used to operate the segmentation of a market: geographic, demographic, psychographic, and behavioral. Avoriaz has decided to base its segmentation on some typical characteristics such as demographic and geographic, but the main distinctive aspect of the ski market segmentation operated by the resort is based on behavioral criteria like activities sought, expenditure, and purchasing behavior. The aim is clearly to distinguish the potential customers by their living standards, and hence separate the entire market into four sub-groups: the eco market, the mass market, the premium market, and the luxury market.

5.1.1.2. Targeting

We have noticed that Avoriaz has made its targeting strategy changing from the ‘focused marketing’ to the ‘differentiated marketing’. This means that the resort will not totally abandon its past customers. At the opposite, Avoriaz will keep proposing them the same offers, but at the same time it will enter the premium market segment by proposing them a different and tailored offer. This is made in order to expend the resort’s market and increase its sales volume, which is exactly the revitalization strategy proposed by Merrilees and Miller (2008).

If we replace these two target segments in the table presented in the figure 2, the mass market would be the secondary target placed at the bottom middle, and the premium market would be the prime target. But, as it was explained by Hooley, Piercy and Nicoulaud (2008), the
opportunity to target this prime segment does not often exist naturally. Thus Avoriaz was not able to compete on this market with its actual capacities. It has implied huge investments to create the necessary capabilities for this target, which we will see in detail in the next part.

5.1.2. The core strategy: positioning

5.1.2.1. New competitive advantages

When talking about the new competitive advantages of Avoriaz, we have to distinguish the modification of the actual competitive advantages of the resort, and the creation of new ones. It is also interesting to notice that all these modifications and creations concern only competitive advantages based on service differentiation.

Concerning the modifications, the two main ones are the renovation and renewing of the actual existing accommodations of the resort, and the incorporation of the latest technologies to the ski lifts of the ski area. These two modifications implement exactly the idea of ‘real repositioning’ developed by Doyle and Stern (2006).

The creation of new competitive advantages concerns the construction of new premium and luxury accommodation possibilities, and the development and enhancement of the out-of-snow activities. This creating of new advantages was indispensable in order to target the new segment of premium market.

5.1.2.2. The new positioning

The new positioning of Avoriaz in the premium market has involved the theory of ‘psychological repositioning’ developed by Doyle and Stern (2006). It means that the resort had to change the beliefs of the customers about the competitiveness of the destination. In this aim, Avoriaz has followed the theory of Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2010) which explains that a positioning strategy, or in our case, a repositioning strategy should rely on the competitive advantages of the destination.
The first step of this process is identifying the competitive advantages of the ski resort. Concerning Avoriaz, we have found different kinds of competitive advantages:

- Physical attribute differentiation: Avoriaz is an eco-friendly ski resort, without cars, which has an unusual architecture.
- Service differentiation: the resort takes part of ‘Les Portes du Soleil’ which is one of the biggest ski areas of the world, and its ski lifts utilize the latest technologies. Moreover, besides skiing, Avoriaz proposes a large choice of out-of-snow activities and a premium offer for accommodation.
- Personal differentiation: the staff of the ski resort provides a personalized welcome for each customer, and they are also able to speak several languages.
- Location differentiation: Avoriaz is well-situated at 1800m high, in the French Alps, between the Leman Lake and the Mont-Blanc.
- Image differentiation: Avoriaz is a premium resort where there is always something that is happening.

We have then noticed that the ski resort has not made selection between these competitive advantages as they all fulfill the selection criteria determined by Hooley, Piercy and Nicoulaud (2008): Importance, superiority, communicable, distinctive, affordable and profitable.

Besides we have observed a kind of classification by level of importance of these advantages, in the way that some of them are really highlighted in the resort communication, when others are just quickly mentioned. We have determined a classification in three stages:

- Great importance: location differentiation and physical attributes differentiation.
- Medium importance: service differentiation and image differentiation.
- Moderate importance: personal differentiation.
5.2. Promoting the repositioning strategy

According to Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2010), communication is the last phase of positioning and a repositioning strategy. This is the way of implementing the new positioning among the past customers, the potential customers and the large public in general.

We have seen in the theoretical frame of references that the image of a tourism destination is directly linked to its positioning (Frochot and Kreziak, 2008). Thus in this part, we will see which is the impact of each communication vector on the image of Avoriaz, and more particularly on the image dynamic process developed by Frochot and Kreziak (2008): organic image, induced image and complex image. In parallel, we will see that some supports of communication may have another utility which is important for the communication strategy.

5.2.1. Public relation

Public relation is the main communication tool chosen by Avoriaz to influence its organic image in the mind of potential customers. The resort makes big effort every year to develop its presence in the mass media, in order to touch the largest audience possible. Thus, public relation is the principal vector of communication which permits the first contact with customers.

In this aim, during the winter 2011-2012, Avoriaz has developed a press kit, and the ski resort has invited more than 120 journalists. This action has permitted Avoriaz to appear on 21 TV reports and 10 radio interviews, and to be published in 122 internal press articles.

5.2.2. Advertising

Between the two possible forms of advertising, Avoriaz is using mainly the printed one. In fact, a big part of the resort’s communication is made through different kinds of brochure. According to Molina, Gomez, and Martin-Consuegra (2010), this support may have
a major influence on the induced image, which is the goal sought by Avoriaz when editing its printed communication support.

When studying the brochure of the resort, we are able to observe that its content defines clearly the positioning of the resort. First, it permits to differentiate Avoriaz from the ski resorts of the other segments of the market, and plainly place itself in the premium market. This is made already by the general impression of quality given by the brochures thanks to the material used, the type of language, and the pictures. And this impression is even reinforced when focusing on the content, and discovering the services available at the resort.

In a second time, the brochure also permits to differentiate Avoriaz from its direct competitors and defining its precise positioning within the premium market. This is possible by presenting its competitive advantages. Thus when studying in detail a winter brochure of the resort, we notice that approximately 40% of the content is about skiing, snowboard and the ski area, 25% is about the out-of-snow activities, 20% is about the concept of Avoriaz, and 15% concerns the accommodation offer.

If we analyze these results, we notice that the main part of the content is dedicated to the ski activity, which is normal for a ski resort. But an interesting point is to notice that the proportion of content about out-of-snow activities is really high, which proves that Avoriaz now position itself as a very good place to ski, but also as a place where there is a lot more to do, and a place which proposes premium services.

5.2.3. E-marketing

The presence online of Avoriaz has almost the same utility as the brochures edited by the resort. We mean that the websites are mainly used to influence the ‘induced image’ of the potential customers by putting at their disposal even deeper and more diversified information about the resort than the brochures. It also allows them to make and verify their personal opinion about the resort thanks to the live webcams available online. Moreover, the fact that Avoriaz has chosen to develop two distinct websites, one of which is totally dedicated to the events, affirms again the new positioning of the ski resort as a premium winter destination which gives a great importance to out-of-snow activities, and especially to entertainment.
On the other hand, the use of the social network has a different utility. Indeed, it seeks more to keep a contact with the actual customer of the resort, and create a lasting relationship with them. Besides, in another way, it can also be used to have a first contact with potential customers, and influence the development of their ‘induced image’ by permitting them to ask questions directly to the staff of Avoriaz’s tourism office, and by allowing them to take a sight to the feedback of the customers who already came to the resort.

### 5.2.4. Personal selling

Personal selling is one of the principal tasks for Avoriaz in the way that tour operators represent 1/3 of the turnover. It is important to the resort that the salespersons of these companies give the image of the ski resort sought by it to the final customers. In this aim, Avoriaz proposes them formations, and provides them tailored printed tool such as brochure to support and enhance their selling argumentation.

### 5.2.5. The events

The events organized by the resort may be analyzed in two different ways as they have two different goals. In one hand, their organization seeks to have a major impact on the development of the ‘complex image’ of Avoriaz in customers’ mind. Thus, the aim here is to make them live an unforgettable and positive experience in the ski resort.

On the other hand, these events make also a link to the public relation in the way that it gives to the media subject to speak about in their reports. So, in this way, they also have an indirect impact on the ‘organic image’ of the potential customers.

At the same time as communicating about the image, we have noticed that some of these communication tools are also used to communicate directly and implicitly on the repositioning of Avoriaz. We can take the example of the video found on Avoriaz’s website that starts by the sentence “2012, Avoriaz reborn” which is pretty clear. In the brochures
studied, there is always a part concerning the new accommodations and the new services proposed by the resort which are also presented as the ‘new Avoriaz’. In this way of communicating, it is easily possible to find the idea of renewal like it if was a new start in the story of Avoriaz. By this way of promoting, Avoriaz seeks to implement and make its customers understand its new positioning faster, and at the same time, these types of advertising may make people want to discover these new features, which may increase the profitability of these investments.

6. Conclusion

We can begin this conclusion by reminding the readers the purpose of this thesis. The aim was to study the utilization of the communication mix to implement a repositioning strategy in the case of a winter tourism destination. Thus, the principal question we sought to answer was the following one: in what extent, the promotion tools have a role in a repositioning strategy of a tourism destination?

While conducting this study, in a first time, we have seen in what case the repositioning strategy is inevitable which has permitted us to understand why such a strategy has been operated in the ski resort of Avoriaz, which was our case study.

We have also seen what the process to operate and implement a new positioning strategy is. This process is deeply rooted to the core strategy of the company or the brand which implies, in a first step, to reevaluate the segmentation and the targeting policy. In the case of Avoriaz, we have seen that in the aim to extend its market, the resort has chosen to target the premium segment of the market. But to be able to compete on this segment, Avoriaz had to create new competitive advantages adapted to this market, which bring us to the second step of the repositioning process.

Indeed, we have seen that to reach what we call the ‘prime target’, it is often inevitable to operate great modifications of the service provided which involves huge investments. We need then to identify the new competitive advantages and select those on which the repositioning strategy will be based according to their importance, their superiority, their communicability, their distinctiveness, their affordability, and their profitability. In the case of
Avoriaz, we have seen that all the competitive advantages have been selected but that a classification according to their level of importance was operated.

In the next step, we have discovered that communication has a determinant role in the repositioning strategy as it is the last part of the process. In fact, image is the main element which defines the positioning of a tourism destination in customers’ mind, and the communication tools may have a major influence at every level of the image creation.

At the first level, the ‘organic image’ is influenced by the public relation. Then, in a further level, advertising, and more particularly brochures have a main impact on ‘induced image’ by clearly positioning the resort on its market, and by differentiating it from its direct competitors. The e-marketing has also a role in the creation of the ‘induced image’, but it has, at the same time, another utility through the social network, which is to develop a lasting relationship with the customers of the resort.

At the last level, the event promotion has an important effect on the ‘complex image’ which then will have an impact on customer loyalty and the quality of word-of-mouth.

In parallel of image communication, we have noticed on the case of Avoriaz that some vectors are used to communicate directly on the repositioning of the resort in the aim to clearly highlight the renewing, refreshing, or new start in the story of the ski resort.

6.1. Limitation and further research

Studying the role of communication tools in a repositioning strategy, this study has some limitation concerning a single branch of the marketing mix. Indeed, we can imagine that the other variables of the marketing mix have an important impact on the repositioning. Thus, it would be interesting for a further research to study the impact of the product, of the pricing policy and of the distribution strategy.

Also, we have based our study on a single case study: the French ski resort of Avoriaz. Thus, we have tough that it could be interesting to extend this kind of study to a multiple-case study in order to verify our results. It could also be relevant to conduct this study in different countries to be able to observe the possible difference according to the place.
Another limitation is that this thesis studies the role of communication tools from the company’s point of view. We mean that it studies the impact that the company wants to have through the utilization of these promotion tools. So it could be interesting to manage a study from the customers’ point of view to observe the real impact of this communication on their beliefs about the ski resort, and hence being able to determine the effectiveness of each tool.

7. References

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8. **Appendix 1**

**Interview guidelines**

*Development of the questions:*

As we have decided to use an unstructured type of interview, we did not prepare any precise questions. Besides we have prepared a list of topics to talk about, which constitute the base of the interview:

- Repositioning:
  - Why?
  - Differences between old and new position.
- Target:
  - Principle characteristics.
  - Atractiveness.
- Situation among the competitors.
- Work on the image of Avoriaz.
- Communication mix:
  - Advertising
  - Marketing direct
  - Public relations
  - Sales promotions
  - New communication technologies (internet, smartphones…)

*Testing the interview:*

We did not test the interview as there was no specific question prepared.

*Preparation of the interviewer:*

We conduct the interview by ourselves, so there was no problem concerning a lack of knowledge about the topic. Moreover Léo has already done this kind of interview before, so he had some training and he knew how it works.
Providing information to the participants:

We sent an e-mail to Stephane Lerendu 3 days before the interview, which detailed the goal of our thesis, and the topics that we wanted to talk about with him.

Schedule the interview:

We took an appointment with Stephane Lerendu, at his office, on March 25th 2012. And we had envisaged that the interview last approximately one hour.
9. **Appendix 2**

Content analysis guideline

*Support of information:*

Brochure, press release, printed advertising, sales promotions…

*Description of the tool:*

- Target audience.
- Deep analysis:
  - Barker’s model for printed materials.
  - Progression for events.
  - Description of the offer for sales promotions.
- Release date.

*Role in the repositioning strategy:*

Product, price, image…
10. **Attachment 1**
The role of communication in a repositioning strategy

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11. **Attachment 2**
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Opening of an experimental "Extended Range Communication" energy-efficient holiday residence

In Summer 2011, the energy-optimized "Extended Range Communication" holiday residence with an energy efficiency of 0.34 kWh/m² will be sold. The project demonstrates the project’s commitment to the "extended range communication" concept that will be sold in the future.

The building includes a high-quality solar-photovoltaic system, which generates enough energy to cover the needs of the holiday residence. The project team has worked hard to ensure that the holiday residence is energy-efficient and sustainable. The project is a great success and will set an example for future developments.

Construction of a dual-energy central heating plant

From December 2011, a dual-energy central heating facility will be installed, which will provide a heating network for the entire building, with heating pumps and domestic hot water, and a solar system for the summer months.

Press contacts

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The role of communication in a repositioning strategy continues...

Six area management initiatives (ISO 14001 certified)

The six area management initiatives, which is ISO 14001 certified, is invested in a scheme that requires minimization measures to be set in place.

Waste

Reduction of waste at source: careful packaging and packaging design to reach recycle products.

Improvement of sorting in plants and sent for recycling and processed through the appropriate channels.

Wastewater treatment facilities are ready to treat wastewater and on-site water recycling.

Water

Waste water from the water recycling plant is high-quality drinking water recycled from the natural outfall located, 30m from the south face the water treatment line is returned at the end of the season.

To optimize efficiency and use of on-site water as possible, the collection is calculated and provided for in order to prevent waste and more water necessary.

Press contacts

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The French, Europe's most eco-friendly snowpark

Built in 2004, the French has made its name as Europe's top ecological concept.

This unique concept was brought to life by the French, who developed a snowpark where ski slopes are dynamic and the landscape is adapted to the needs of the snowpark.

Conceived by Arminius, the snowpark is a unique concept where the ski slopes are adapted to the landscape and the landscape is adapted to the needs of the snowpark.

John Bartlett’s is a symbol of the country’s determination to be efficient and environmentally friendly. He has been a leader in this area for many years.

The French, Europe’s most eco-friendly snowpark

Located in the middle of a large area of untouched and preserved snow, the ski park is a natural paradise for skiers. The snowpark is designed to minimize environmental impact and maximize its contribution to the local economy.

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Halmstad University – for the development of organisations, products and quality of life:

www.hh.se

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12. **Attachment 3**
13. Attachment 4
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