



LUND UNIVERSITY
School of Economics and Management

The 'real' marketers

Destination Branding and Marketing 2.0

by

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Abstract

Due to an increasing ease of access to social media outlets, more tourists than ever are able to share their comments, images and videos of travel experiences. As such this user generated content is said to have more of an impact than professionally produced content on the decisions of prospective travellers. On this basis the major objective of this study is to identify the overall perspectives held by destination marketing organisations on the importance of user-generated content.

The research adopted an exploratory study based on semi-structured qualitative interviews. A sample of seven stakeholders, all with working knowledge of destination marketing within Sweden were interviewed. These interviews investigated (1) marketing strategies that were currently in place, (2) the understandings held of social media, (3) user generated content and (4) challenges, risks and restrictions perceived to be associated with its use.

Beliefs and perspectives were identified and deconstructed according to relevant literature and interviews enabling us to believe that user-generated content is perceived by all interviewees as being of some importance. However, it was concluded that the extent of importance and its utility can be divided into three varying perspectives; Futuristic, Traditionalist and Realist, all of which served as our theoretical contribution. The results further revealed a unanimous preference for the use of ambassadors.

Keywords: User-generated content, Destination branding and marketing, Destination marketing organisations attitudes, social media

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Abbreviations

B2B Business-to-Business

B2C Business-to-Consumer

CEB Customer Engagement Behaviours

CVBs Convention and Visitor Bureaus

DMO Destination Marketing Organisations

ICT Information Communication Technology

UGC User-Generated Content

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

\$1.860 billion, this is the estimated amount of profit generated by consumer websites through user-generated content (adweek.com, 2011). Of late, the roles of consumers in society have become increasingly blurred, students have become photographers, those without any experience in marketing are co-creating promotional messages and involved in product design (Berthon et al. 2007). Even more spectacularly has been their contribution to the creation and marketing of an actual location, a destination brand. This alteration in marketing's ecosystem has been put down to the role of social media (Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011; Walmsley, 2010). Beliefs surrounding some marketing activities have become nothing more than myths including the belief that consumers purchase products promoted by marketers (Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011).

Social media has had an unprecedented impact on an array of industries and additionally on the lives of individuals. This once so called phenomenon has become a staple in everyday life, making it possible for one person to communicate with thousands of others about products, companies and destinations (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Wang, Quaehee & Fesenmaier (2002) suggest that since people can now surmount time and space thus 'be' anywhere at any time, marketing organisations should adapt accordingly and embrace new virtual communities. This is as marketing tools are capable of organising people's knowledge about and desires for, the places they may wish to visit (Wang, Quaehee & Fesenmaier, 2002). Recent developments that have highlighted the move to such virtual communities include 'The @Sweden project' a destination marketing campaign launched in 2011. The campaign sees a new person in Sweden taking ownership of the '@Sweden' twitter account each week to recommend tourist activities, places to see and share their own advice, as such those on this campaign create their content (Christensen, 2013).

The '@Sweden' campaign indicates how the lines of communication are no longer one way or limited to producer-to-consumer, in place a unilateral consumer-to-consumer, consumer-to-producer, many-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many way of communication has evolved (Buhalis, 2003).

In recent years the emergence of Web 2.0 and creation of Travel 2.0 has led to the marrying of social networking and tourism (Katsoni, 2014) with the '@Sweden' campaign being just one of many examples. Destination and tourism practitioners are attempting to actively involve travellers with their business operations in order to benefit from and exploit the intelligence and social influence of traveller networks (Sigala, 2012).

Travellers use user-generated content (UGC) as a key source when finding information on locations to visit (Llodra-Riera et al. 2015). Existing literature on this topic delves specifically into the tourist/traveller habits of choosing a destination, as such few studies have analysed perspectives and exactly how destination marketing and tourism practitioners as an entity cope and adapt to the on surge of user-generated content. Sigala, (2012) suggests that travel and tourism organisations are in a constant state of flux, with the need to change and redefine their business models in order to address the needs and expectations of the newer generation of travellers. As it stands the majority of social media posts on the Twitter and Facebook accounts of destination marketing organisations (88.2%) are not what can be classed as “interactive” in nature (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013).

1.2 Problem definition

The rise in popularity of social media has had a two-fold effect within the tourism industry; users, in this instance tourists have gained more power whereas on the other hand there has been a decline in the authority of marketers and institutions (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013; Thevenot, 2007). Simply put a power-shift has occurred.

As such what can be deemed as a cause for concern would be that marketers and institutions no longer have control over the image of their destination or product (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013; Thevenot, 2007). This lack of control has been assisted by a lack of understanding of social media platforms and its usage related to their specific field (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013). Thus “the extent to which social media constitutes the online tourism domain is not well understood in an objective, comprehensive way” (Xiang & Gretzels, 2010).

To date the works of Li and Liew, (2015) has made significant strides in analysing user-generated content. Popular works of literature have since focused on research conducted mainly from a user perspective. However, this study takes a more managerial stand point and attempts to understand the perspectives of destination marketing organisations on user-generated content.

The study will not address how engagement across user-generated content affects tourism numbers and as such does not seek to measure an outcome or explain the return on investment of utilising UGC. Furthermore, this study will not analyse select social media platforms.

1.3 Research Purpose

The increased importance of information and communication technologies has had a significant impact on today's tourism destinations (Buhalis & Law, 2008). In general it has affected the branding of tourism products and in particular the branding of destinations, the latter being the main research focus of this paper (Munar, 2011). Social media platforms such as Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, commonly associated with user generated content, have gained prevalence as information sources among travel and tourism communities. These platforms have reshaped the way tourism-related information is spread, customers are no longer only searching for destination insights, but are also creating and sharing emotions, opinions and personal experiences related to a specific destination through the variety of social media channels (Buhalis & Law, 2008).

By developing a unified message destination branding aims at building up a destination's unique identity and image in the mind of a traveller in comparison to competing destinations (Qu, Kim & Im, 2011). As a consequence of this 'phenomenon' destination brand managers confront difficulties in retaining control over the creation of online destination branding in terms of destination awareness and image. As it stands web branding content is mainly a result of end-user interaction, in comparison to previous years where it was controlled by destination branding organisations (Munar, 2011). Therefore, UGC is considered as a 'global late-modern risk,' where tourists have the opportunity 24 hours a day to post and share instant real-time insights of a destination all around the globe. Hence, the impact of UGC can be perceived as de-localized, because it is not geographically limited. Furthermore, considering the fact that the consequences of a negative review or video cannot be scaled, the impact of UGC can be deemed as incalculable (Munar, 2011).

The risk perception of the 'phenomenon' by destination brand managers is strengthened by the inability to define which user generated content will reach a vast amount of consumers, ultimately going viral (Munar, 2011). As a result destination brand managers that play a crucial role in destination promotion must be able to anticipate and react to the challenges that evolve through new communication and interaction patterns (Roque & Raposo, 2016). Existing research has so far focused predominantly on destination branding strategies in general (Marzano & Scott, 2009; Murphy, Moscardo & Benkendorff, 2007; Cai, 2002), with a handful focused specifically on UGC and destination branding from a managerial perspective. Thus what can be argued as lacking within this field is a precise theory of destination brand managers' general perceptions towards UGC as a tool for engagement and interaction (Munar, 2011). Collecting insights related to this phenomenon from a managerial perspective will not only add value to managerial practice but will also provide a foundation for further academic research (Hankinson, 2009).

Therefore, the aim of this paper goes beyond simply providing a comprehensive answer to the question: "What are the overall perceptions of destination marketing organisations (DMOs) on user-generated content (UGC)?" The research purpose is (1) to investigate the relationship between destination branding and user-generated content in theory and practice, (2) to analyse the factors forming the general perception of the DMOs towards UGC utility and to compare

with those defined by previous studies, and (3) to deliver managerial insights about challenges, risks and limitations related to the researched ‘phenomenon’ within the tourism sector.

1.4 Thesis outline

The paper begins with a literature review where the key concepts throughout the research are defined. Following which an outline of the research method used will be provided, preceded by an analysis of the findings taken from semi-structured interviews conducted with seven destination brand managers within Sweden, all of whom play a partial role or possess knowledge of a destination brand. The insights gained from the interviewees are then compared with and reflected upon the key insights and strategies identified from the literature. The paper concludes with a discussion of the theory and practice utilised to incorporate the UGC and the implications on destination brand management (Hankinson, 2009). The paper concludes with a discussion on three varying perspectives held by DMOs on user-generated content, all of which were uncovered throughout the analysis.

2 Theoretical Review

The purpose of the literature review is to not only provide an insight into the current discussions related to the field but also provide a deeper understanding of the topic area. As such this section will work within a theoretical framework that takes a wider perspective on the two subject areas that form the research question. The initial focus will explore the varying facets of the destination branding and marketing industry before outlining how the insurgence of the phenomenon, user-generated content came about through the web and social media. Finally, the interaction between and applicability of user generated content to destination marketing will be reviewed.

2.1 Destination branding and marketing

2.1.1 Tourism

On a global scale, the development and marketing of destinations is growing proportional to the tourism industry. Taking into consideration several structural factors such as population expansion, economic affluence, business growth, age-related travel patterns together with globalised cultures and social media connectedness, diverse sources have proven that the tourism industry is growing and has the potential to continue growing. As a result, various businesses have been stimulated to improve and continue selling and delivering services to travellers (DMAI, 2008).

In order to define the origins and scope of destination branding it is necessary to investigate the importance of tourism as it currently stands. Within the second half of the twentieth and early twenty-first century tourism emerged as a major industry and has since gained popularity amongst researchers. Tourism has turned into a socioeconomic phenomenon, perceived as an integral element of life and as a dominant part of the global population. Based on the variety of scientific approaches to understanding tourism, economic literature does not provide a universally accepted definition of the term (Gligorijevic & Stefanovic, 2012). A more traditional definition of tourism is provided by Mill & Morrison (1992, p. 9):

“Tourism is the term given to activity that occurs when people travel. This encompasses everything from the planning of the trip, the travel to the destination area, the stay itself, the return and the reminiscences about it afterward. It includes the activities the traveller undertakes

as part of the trip, purchases made, and the interactions that occur between host and guest in the destination area. In sum it's all of the activities and impacts that occur when a visitor travels."

A newer and more synthesised definition is presented by Sharpley (2002, p. 22): "It is, in short, a social phenomenon which involves the movement of people to various destinations and their (temporary) stay there."

The majority of tourism activities occur within destinations, where a destination has become an integral part of tourism analysis (Pike, 2008). However, destination branding and marketing are comprehensive issues that in order to be understood demand a complex, complete and systematic approach. From the demand perspective, tourists have a vast array of destinations to choose. From the supply perspective, destination marketing organisations (DMO) at different levels are aiming to build up a top of mind destination among the highly competitive marketplace (Wang & Pizam, 2011). Therefore, in order to develop a competitive and attractive destination a powerful and unified marketing and branding strategy is required (Pike, 2008).

Tourism occurs only in cases where a tourist leaves their own residence for a particular destination for diverse reasons, including and not limited to, exploring new territory and enjoying beautiful sceneries or to get to know new cultures. The key element that enables a person to be labelled as a tourist is that he or she has to travel away from his or her place of habitat or residence. In relation to the motivation and activities that provoke the journey, tourist/travellers can be divided into different segments, including leisure, business and common-interest (Wang & Pizam, 2011). Further differentiation occurs in accordance to the time spent on traveling, day trips or excursions that do not include an overnight stay. However, tourism often refers to stays at a specific destination for at least 24 hours. Hence, the spatial movement from the place of residence to the desired destination has a significant role in accomplishing the travel desire. During the travel period, a tourist is consuming the tourism product through which the visited destination benefits (Wang & Pizam, 2011).

Over the years, destinations have undergone some changes that may have resulted in the emergent nature of their appeal and as such their target markets may have evolved. Destinations that aim to become popular and on top of the travellers' mind-sets need to maintain strong destination branding and marketing strategies by developing a unified image of the destination as a brand (Wang & Pizam, 2011).

2.1.2 The destination as a tourist product and brand

Taking into consideration the rapid increase of globalisation and the high impact of the tourism industry, cities, regions and countries perceive the need to be able to compete with other territories to gain more resources (Fernandez-Cavia et al. 2013). According to Anholt (2007, p. 1): "Today, the world is one market. The rapid advance of globalization means that every country, every city and every region must compete with every other for its share of the world's tourist, and for the attention and respect of the international media, of other governments, and the people of other countries." Said competition is not a new phenomenon, however, its anticipation merely intensifies the competitiveness of the territories, resulting in the need to

create a powerful destination brand in order to stand out from competing territories (Fernandez-Cavia et al. 2013).

Kotler and Keller (2006 p. 372) believe that “a product is anything that can be offered to a market to a want or need” said products are classed as “physical goods, services, experiences, events, persons, places, properties, organisations, information and ideas.” Within the travel and tourism industry a tourist product incorporates a set of transportation and accommodation services but also available attractions at the specified destinations. Therefore, it represents a very heterogeneous product, where the quantity and quality of each service that it is part of may vary (Rakita & Sipragic, 2014). Moreover, the risk arises that an unsatisfactory experience with only one segment of the service may lead to a negative perception of the tourist product as a whole. However, it is necessary to take into consideration that tourists do not buy a series of services - they pay for an experience that they expect from a particular destination and for memories which at a later stage they will remember and share. Considering the high level of expectations, the intangibility of the tourist product and the related financial costs, the process of choosing the right destination is perceived as very risky by tourists. Therefore, in such situations visitor’s trust a destination image and the development of powerful destination brand are vital (Rakita & Sipragic, 2014).

A destination represents a “place that gains relevance because of its power to entice people to leave one location in order to visit or relocate to another” (Baker, 2007, p. 25). Moreover, a destination is not only a geographical place but also a metaphysical space defined by a mixture of networks and values. Taking into consideration the substantial impact of tourism on a destination, it is vital while creating the brand to have not only an in depth understanding for what the destination brand stands for but also to have precise guidelines in its development and management (Blain, Levy & Ritchie, 2005). A destination brand determines the future of a place, region or city, it makes promises not only to tourists but also to the inhabitants. Similar to products, destination brands possess a name, logo or symbol for purposes of identification and differentiation (see Appendix A for ‘Visit Sweden logo’). Effective branding allows travellers to connect the symbol with the destination in their minds. In the best case this leads to emotional attachment, reducing the perceived risk and creating a positive image (Blain, Levy & Ritchie, 2005). Hence, this goal is achieved when a destination brand manages to supply visitors with a unique and unforgettable experience that is impossible to be accomplished at any other destination (Rakita & Sipragic, 2014). The destination brand must emphasise the most essential traits and values of a destination and must align with the target market needs but at the same time it is vital in the development of a unified image to be accepted by the local stakeholders such as local businesses and residents (Rakita & Sipragic, 2014). Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) suggest that a destination brand is developed as a sustainable strategic element, whereas a destination image aims to be considered as more tactical element. Hence, a positive image of the destination is created in order to attract as many tourists as possible. A favourable image results in a unique brand identity. Branding activities that communicate all elements of the brand identity build up a powerful brand image. In order to measure brand image, a destination needs to be managed as a brand and needs to achieve a unique brand identity that is used as the main tool of contrast to other destinations (Rakita & Sipragic, 2014).

It can be concluded that a destination brand identifies, outlines and distinguishes a destination and communicates its image as an integral element of its appeal to tourists in order for them to

experience the features and characteristics that define it as a unique, attractive and top of mind destination (Blain, Levy & Ritchie, 2005).

2.1.3 Destination branding

According to Pike (2008, p. 24) destination branding is defined as:

“[...] an accumulation of tourist resources and attractions infrastructures, equipment, service providers, other support sectors and administrative organisms whose integrated and coordinated activities provide customers with the experiences they expected from the destination they choose to visit.”

A destination brand is best characterised as the destination’s meaning from the view-point of potential visitors. Of particular importance to add is that this should be also recognised by the residents. Therefore, to build up a successful destination brand it is necessary to have both perspectives which strengthen each other (Anholt, 2007).

2.1.3.1 Destination branding versus Place branding

Regarding the theoretical distinction between place branding and destination branding there are a variety of existing perspectives depending on the research focus of the analysis. Taking into consideration the fact that a destination is an integral part of a place, many authors argue that it is impossible to separate both concepts and perceive them as interchangeable within their studies (Rinaldi & Beeton, 2015; Hankinson, 2007; Campelo et al. 2014). However, it is examined that the term “place” indicates a more complete concept in comparison to “destination.” With relation to “places” this suggests that all economic attributes and feelings are considered - it is not solely focused on tourism activities. Therefore, the aim of place marketing and place branding is to target not only visitors but also those with a desire to live, work or study at the particular place – those, who are eager to contribute to the wealth of a place and bring investment along (Anholt, 2007). An even more detailed perspective is presented by other authors including (Govers & Go, 2009, p. 14) suggestion that:

“Where branding using the term ‘destination’ implies a tourism perspective, place branding provides an even wider perspective that would include all interactions of a place with its environment, including political, outside investment, trade, immigration and media issues. Both destination branding and place branding could include country, region or city branding.”

The research question: ‘What are the overall perspectives of Destination marketing organisations on user-generated content?’ aims to provide managerial insights specifically within the tourism industry as stated in the purpose. Therefore, based on the research purpose of the study on the one hand and the defined concepts of destination branding and place branding on the other this paper will use the term ‘destination branding,’ when referring to the travel and tourism industry. Additionally consumers and customers will be referred to as tourists and/or travellers and/or visitors.

2.1.3.2 Destination branding challenges

To provide accurate findings in terms of the extent of user-generated content and its applicability within destination branding strategies, it is necessary to mention the main challenges within the industry that may influence the degree of its utility. Destination branding is a challenging process not only because of the unique characteristics of the tourism industry but also because of additional factors including: multiple stakeholders that typically do not have unified authority or purpose, lack of ownership of the destination brand, the involvement of politics, scarcity of resources including professional human resources and monetary resources, diverse nature of the destinations (tangible and intangible attributes), lack of fast and precise measurement tools for the effectiveness of branding strategies and a variety of segments and ever changing market preferences (Wang & Pizam, 2011; Baker, 2007; Morgan, Pritchard & Piggott, 2002).

2.1.3.3 Destination branding stakeholders

A facet that intensifies the destination branding process is the fact that tourism industry organisations are characterised as being extremely fragmented, heterogeneous and dispersed (Wang & Pizam, 2011; Gnoth, 2002). Tourism organisations encompass: local government (at national, regional, state, country, provincial and municipality level): tourism offices, departments, commissions and convention and visitor bureaus (CVBs); tourism development council or commissions; chambers of commerce; and public or private suppliers (tour operators, travel agents, attractions, transportation bodies, accommodation, and restaurants), association and organisations of the aforementioned suppliers (Wang & Pizam, 2011; Gnoth, 2002). Aside from industry partners, the news, media and private citizens are also considered as stakeholders of destination branding. Since all stakeholders hold different characteristics, attitudes, interests, capabilities, values and resources as stated above this diversity challenges the entire destination branding process (Wang & Pizam, 2011; Gnoth, 2002). In order to build up a powerful destination brand it is vital that stakeholders participate in all of the phases from research through to brand idea generation and implementation up to evaluation and control (Morgan, Pritchard & Piggott, 2002).

2.1.4 Destination marketing and DMOs

In today's landscape it is clear that branding and marketing are not only perceived as commonplace, but also as essential for cities, regions and countries globally (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). Destination marketing is defined as a collective effort where diverse organizations and businesses in a limited geographically area need to work together in order to achieve a common goal (Vernon et al. 2005).

The major marketing responsibilities that are undertaken by local destination marketing organisations are characterized as the force that drives the marketing of the destination to consumers (Fesenmaier, Pena & O'Leary, 1992). Therefore, taking into consideration the

various tasks and responsibilities of the intended interviewees within this research, this paper will refer to the interviewed specialists under the collective term DMO.

Pike (2004, pp. 14-15) defines destination marketing organisations as: “Any organisation, at any level, which is responsible for the marketing of an identifiable destination. This therefore excludes separate government departments that are responsible for planning and policy.” Moreover, DMOs according to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2010) are perceived as the force that unifies all the authorities, stakeholders and professionals and also fosters partnerships within the tourism industry in order to build up a universally accepted vision of the destination. DMOs are ultimately aiming at developing and promoting the destination through managing and coordinating a variety of activities such as strategic planning, marketing, financing, decision-making and development of the destination product (Roque & Raposo, 2016; UNWTO, 2010).

Since as previously mentioned tourism’s popularity and the competition of capturing tourist’s attention among destinations on the global market is increasing proportionally, DMOs have come to play an even more crucial role in the development of a destination. Thus, they take the function of catalyst and facilitators in the development of powerful tourist destinations. Therefore, presently their responsibilities stem further than marketing activities although marketing still remains their principle purview. They must also consider incorporating strategies that enhance a destination’s competitiveness and sustainability (Roque & Raposo, 2016; Presenza, Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005). In general it is accepted that destination management is an extremely important process where tourist’s experience is maximized while securing financial benefits and sustainability for local businesses. Effective and successful destination management is characterised by improved performance of the destination on an operational level and realizing a competitive destination brand identity at the same time (Roque & Raposo, 2016). An example of successful destination management is the ‘Travel 2.0 promotion in Asia and Pacific’, conducted by the Scandinavian Tourism Board Asia/Pacific through which innovative and efficient branding and marketing communication, such as tourist generated content has led to tremendous improvement of the travel trade between Scandinavia and Asia/Pacific (Munar, 2011).

However, the most essential role for DMOs is to ensure a competitive edge of the destination, which is enabled by increased cooperation and coordination among the variety of stakeholders and excludes any conflict of interests. In today’s society, tourists tend to demand more information prior to travelling and as such seek more flexible and easier ways of arranging their journeys. Thus, DMOs must be active in mediating the vast stakeholder’s interests and additionally in destination’s brand strategy generation and implementation (Roque & Raposo, 2016).

Drawing on all the aforementioned literature surrounding destination marketing it must be mentioned that destination branding and marketing, as a field of study and practice, has not only provoked a level of insatiable interest over the past decade and a half, but it has also overcome an evolutionary and challenging journey that continues to emerge today. The field has advanced significantly in a relatively short span of 15 years. It has transformed from a mere marketing or management function within tourism to a highly complex, unique and discussed notion which significantly impacts the tourism industry and elaborates on the web of socio-

psychological foundations to which it is part of and ironically shapes at the same time (Dioko, 2016). This is figuratively represented in the DMO framework, figure 2.1 which symbolises its ecosystem and all facets surrounding it. In the figure are summarised all the discussed concepts so far. As such (1) the relationship between place and destination branding is presented, (2) the most significant DMOs tasks are depict and (3) all the elements that build up a destination brand are outlined.

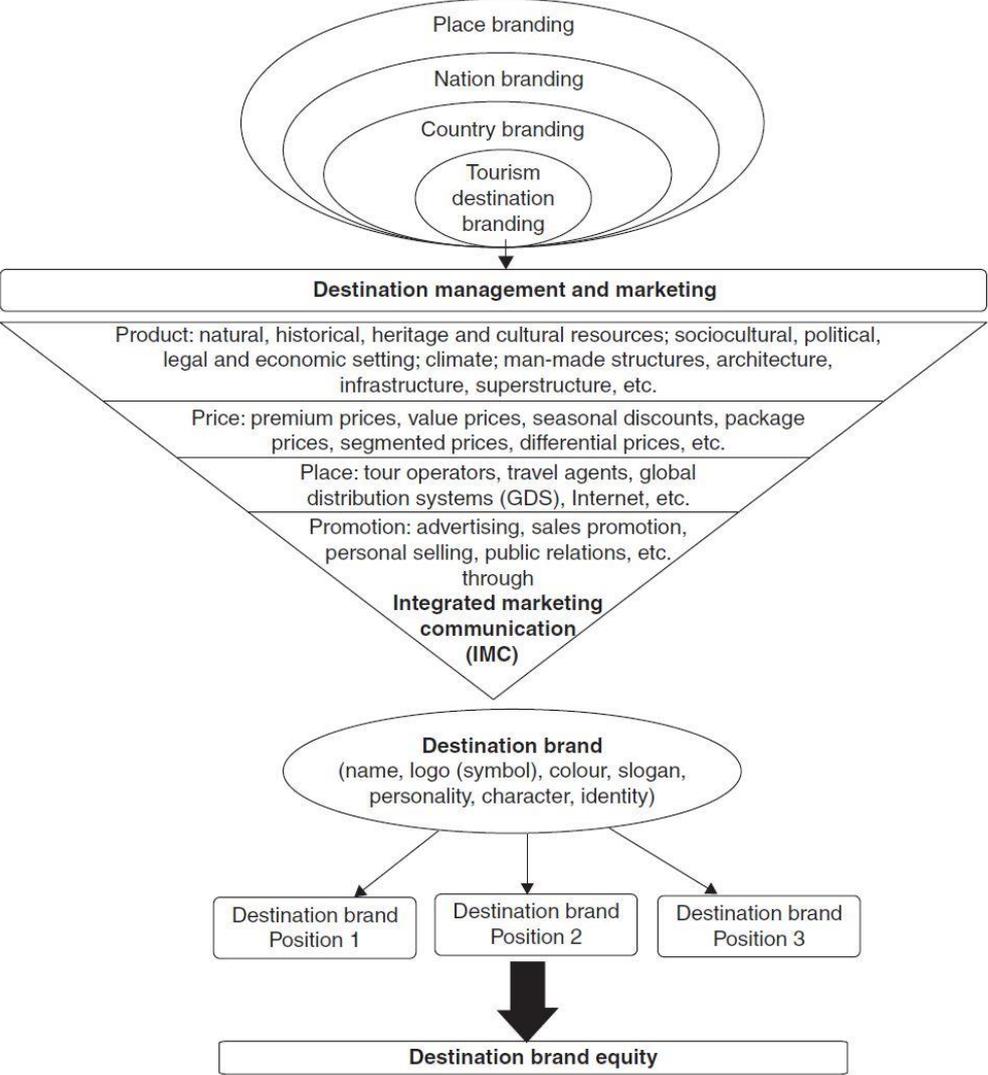


Figure 2.1 A framework of concepts relevant to destination and place branding adapted from (Tasci, 2011, p. 114)

2.2 Social Media

2.2.1 The web age, a digital era.

In their study Li and Liew (2015) suggest that due to the rapid growth of Web 2.0 and its applications including the more commonly known social media, there now exists sophisticated streams for tourism promotion as travellers are able to help form a destinations image by sharing their experiences, leaving comments and joining discussions. Brake and Safko (2009) provide the suggestion that the existence of the revolutionary technology that is Web 2.0 has given rise to content from an array of producers through social media. Further insights and literature surrounding this rise in technology argue however that the advancements and functionalities of social media encompasses and facilitates five key properties; information representation, collaboration, communication, interactivity and transactions (Gretzel et al. 2006). Many have attested that on the basis of the aforementioned properties, the ways in which marketing activities have advanced significantly, with a shift in power leading to a more informed and powerful consumer and tourist.

Through this emergence of web 2.0, power has been given back to consumers who in turn are able to seek and obtain a wide array of information, Llodra-Riera et al. (2015) but also produce and create new content that expresses their opinions and experiences (Dickey & Lewis, 2011). With the ever increasing prominence of social media, the power gained by its users surpasses that of marketers, Thevenot (2007) and particularly that of destination marketers whom many argue no longer possess ultimate control over their destinations image (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013) and as such seek to adapt their strategies.

The internet has pushed tourism organisations globally to change their strategies dramatically Buhalis & Zoge (2007), this has involved constant innovation to support both proactive and reactive strategies (Katsoni, 2014; Buhalis, 2003). Gretzel et al. (2006) suggest that it has become increasingly difficult for most destination marketing organisations to keep up the pace of technological changed and changes in the consumer market.

As a result of web 2.0, what has occurred has been an introduction of sheer transparency within the marketplace for both individuals and organisations Katsoni (2014), all of which has been a result of newer technologies, more powerful and affordable hardware, advances in easy-to-use tools for creating and sharing content, higher e-literacy amongst the world's population and increases amongst portable and wireless platforms (Parameswaran & Whinston, 2007).

Those researching this constantly changing field of technology and communications, have come to find that what has become common place today is a reference to the digital environment and 'social media,' the latter of which has essentially been regarded as a reinvention of what the internet was created for; a platform in which users exchange information (Kaplan & Haenlin, 2010).

2.2.2 The ‘social’ component of social media

Early works into the consumer marketplace which has now come to be known as the social media ecosystem, indicate that markets are not about messages but instead about conversations choosing not to engage in this [social media] marketplace is a prerequisite to not having a future, silence is therefore fatal (Levine et al. 2001).

By providing a common platform for people across nations and cultures to generate and share knowledge Kaplan and Haenlin (2010), indicate that social media has led to significant and pervasive changes to communication between organisations, communities and individuals (Kietzmann et al. 2011). It must not be seen as a static entity due to its constant evolution furthermore it has now become top of the agenda for many business executives and marketers and additionally those dealing with experiential services particularly tourism (Stankov, Lazic & Dragicevic 2010).

In comparison to more traditional methods social media allows firms to partake in intimate and direct engagement with end consumers at a lower cost Llodra-Riera et al. (2015), making it relevant for a range of participants from businesses to governmental organisations (Kaplan & Haenlin, 2010).

Common misconceptions surround the idea of social media, with existing literature grouping the various forms into one. However, Kaplan and Haenlin (2010) provide six variations of social media, collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds and virtual social worlds. The four variations indicated in table 2.1 below have come to represent ways in which brands are able to communicate, captivate and also attract their specific audience segments (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Murdough, 2009) and as such will be variations referred to throughout the course of our research.

Table 2.1 Taxonomy of social media variations based on (Kaplan & Haenlin, 2010)

Variation	Description	Example
Collaborative projects	Enables the joint and simultaneous creation of content by multiple end users	Wikipedia
Blogs	Managed in most cases by one person, interaction occurs through comments	Tumblr
Content Communities	Sharing of differing media content between users	Flickr & YouTube
Social Networking Sites	Applications enabling user connection based on personal profiles	Facebook

Roque and Raposo (2016) highlight that the variations provided by Kaplan and Haenlin (2010) neglects newer forms of social media including, microblogging (Twitter), consumer review sites (TripAdvisor) and Internet Forums, to some extent this proves how rapidly technological advancements occur. Nevertheless the plethora of outlets and fast moving pace of social media can be said to cause confusion amongst organisations with some not knowing which to utilise.

Marketers from a range of industries not limited to travel and tourism, have taken to social media within a particularly short space of time and embraced the facilities on offer for a variety of their marketing objectives ranging from branding and research, customer relationship management to sales promotions (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Solis (2010) argues that there are other uses of social media beyond what is on the surface, these include the mining of innovative ideas and 'authentic' engagement with customers. On the basis of such capabilities, Stelzner (2013) found that over 86% of marketers believed that social media channels played an important and integral component when it came to their marketing initiatives. Within the scope of destination branding and marketing, visual and photographic aids have made it possible for the image of a destination to be formed through social media (Munar, 2011)

Travel and tourism is a particularly fragmented sector, making it receptive to the benefits offered by the internet (Scharwitz, 1998). Communication has become multidirectional and in turn empowered tourists to contribute in a collaborative/non-collaborative way, helping to overcome various barriers including those that are time-related or geographical (Roque & Raposo, 2016). However, it is further possible to suggest that, the trend that is not synonymous of social media but also applies to tourism's move to a 2.0 version (Roque & Raposo, 2016).

Although identified as an important and integral component, the options available to marketers on social media platforms can be regarded as both extensive and exhaustive, Ashley and Tuten (2014) with the potential gains are often far from being negligible (Kaplan & Haenlin, 2010). Furthermore, despite the array of success stories that exist with the likes of destination marketers on social media a particular example being that of the '@Sweden' campaign (Christensen, 2013), there are additional challenges that have arisen. According to Sheehan and Morrison (2009) the following challenges are experienced by all brand marketing practitioners on social media. 1) Effective use of social media 2) Grow marketers who possess creative vision 3) Challenges of involving consumers in telling their own stories and 4) challenge to reinvent the mass media model. Effective social media has commonly been aligned with engaging and involving consumers through an array of actions.

When looking at the actions of organisations on social media, Corcoran (2009) suggests that there is a 'social media ecosystem' from which destinations and companies alike work. Within this system, there exists three forms of media;

- Owned media: controlled by marketers e.g. company websites
- Paid media: bought by the marketer e.g. sponsorships
- Earned media: not controlled or bought by the marketer e.g. word of mouth

Li and Bernoff (2008) provide a varying perspective of this eco-system by looking at attitudes and behaviours of those on 'active' on the medium and identifying five social behaviours;

- Creators (Publish, maintain and upload)
- Critics (Comment and rate)
- Collectors (Save and Share)
- Joiners (Connect and unite)
- Spectators (Read)

On the basis of both categories within this ecosystem Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden (2011) note that to engage effectively marketers must learn to navigate and integrate between the various types of behavioural segments.

The interactivity of destination marketing organisations on social media involves them directly presenting questions, content or feedback from the audience. In their study of social media activities of destination marketers from the top 10 international destinations Hays, Page and Buhalis (2013) suggest that strategies employed vary significantly with some destinations such as 'VisitBritain' choosing to focus more on consumer trust and engagement, in addition the extent to which platforms were used to interact and engage with consumers differed.

Variations in the social media strategies of DMOs has led to Hays, Page and Buhalis (2013) to class social media usage as largely experimental. Based on Gretzel et al. (2006) publication a challenge faced by DMOs with regards to social media will arise in the difficulty that exists in attempting to adapt to technological changes. Those organisations and bodies that do not adopt to social media will lag behind and will be unable to compete (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013; Stankov, Lazic & Dragicevic, 2010; Wang, Quaehee & Fesenmaier, 2002). Furthermore, poor practices on social media may prove more detrimental than no social media activity (Wang, Quaehee & Fesenmaier, 2002). Hays, Page and Buhalis (2013) note that a lack of social media activity and engagement can be seen in relation to priorities, in addition DMOs may lack the adequate resources (monetary and human) in order to champion social media engagement. As such the question of how DMOs are able to move away from current business methods to a more responsive techniques has become vital to practitioners (Gretzel et al. 2006).

Hays, Page and Buhalis (2013) present the notion that the prominence of social media particularly within DMOs occurred at a time that public sector cuts lead to a reduction in marketing funds, as such its use initially helped DMOs reach wider audiences at lower costs.

Over the past few years the popularity of social media platforms amongst travel communities as a source of information has increased (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Those who could once be deemed as passive consumers have been promoted to the realm of tourists 2.0 in which they are active and increasingly motivated. Destination marketing organisations have struggled to integrate several technological advancements into their communications due to limited financial and human resources as well as technological and time constraints (Gretzel et al. 2006).

Recent research conducted by Hays, Page and Buhalis (2013) has provided three key insights into the use of social media by destination marketing organisations, these include the following:

- DMOs are not currently utilising social media to their full effectiveness when it comes to their ability to interact and engage with consumers.

- Social media is not recognised or accepted as a vital tool with regards to marketing strategies thus is vastly underfunded and neglected.
- Increased innovation and creativity regarding social media strategies would vastly benefit DMOs.

On the basis of the aforementioned findings of Hays, Page and Buhalis (2013), this study will attempt to observe if these three insights to some extent true and if they impact the use of user-generated content by DMOs.

2.2.3 Disengaged engagement

According to Lee, Hosanagar and Nair (2014) achieving engagement on large audience social media platforms such as Facebook is one of the most important social media marketing goals. Common measurements of such consumer engagement on social media include bookmarks, blog referrals, clicks, friending, connects, subscribes, submits and inquiry or idea and or buys the product or service (Falls, 2010).

Although a plethora of literature and research exists that defines customer engagement on social media, Ashley and Tuten (2015) and Hutton and Fosdick (2011) indicate that it is marketers themselves that must define their own customer engagement behaviours (CEBs). Marketers cannot expect that the engagement and influencing of attitudes will simply just occur, they must ensure that good content is put out to trigger audiences to engage (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). However due to the volume of social media networks available Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden (2011), it comes as no surprise that marketers are in a constant state of experimentation.

For marketers, their attitudes towards engagement and participation on social media can be what Hutton and Fosdick (2011) describe as either passive or active, the latter refers to merely consuming content (passive engagement) or to share, like and submit consumer-generated content (active engagement) (Hutton & Fosdick, 2011). Taking a less proactive stance involves social media being utilised as just another push channel for promotional purposes with the occasional response to what consumers may say (Smith, Fischer & Yongjian, 2012) whilst a proactive strategy can be seen as one that satisfies 'consumers needs to create, consume, connect and control' such strategies may have further repercussions on the type of content produced (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010) it would further entail creating content more regularly whilst initiating and maintaining conversations with consumers on an on-going basis (Smith, Fischer & Yongjian, 2012).

Social media has not only allowed users to generate and share content but has also enabled them to become critical of and rank other online content (Dickey & Lewis, 2011). FMCG giant Procter and Gamble championed their "Thank You Mom" campaign through the use of social media but in addition asked their audience/consumers to contribute their own stories thanking their mothers (Berkowitz, 2012), such contributions by the audience is what has been classified and defined as user-generated content (Ashley & Tuten, 2015).

Customer interactions and user-generated content add value to firms by generating content, becoming advocates of brand and influencing other consumer choice of purchase through electronic word-of-mouth (Bianchi & Andrews, 2015; Bruhn, Schoemueller & Schafer, 2012).

2.2.4 The ‘phenomenon’, user-generated content

The non-exclusive dimension of social media prompts anyone to publish content in varying forms including, blogs, videos, wikis, reviews or photos (Boyd & Ellison, 2008) such actions have been made possible as social media is in short a ‘participatory’ ‘conversational’ and ‘fluid’ online community (Qualman, 2009; Tuten, 2008).

The social media ‘ecosystem’ centres on consumer experiences (Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011). Thus much of the content that can be found on social media is in the form of customer content. The extent to which UGC has caused a disruption can be seen when looking at internet content within certain countries, Xiaoji (2010) analysis on the content in China indicated that user-generated content at one point exceeded that which had been professionally produced.

Existing literature suggests that the means through which consumers express themselves and communicate with others online has come to be defined as user-generated content (UGC) (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Commonly viewed as ‘content that is created outside professional routines and practices’ (Kaplan & Haenlin 2010), there exists varying modes of user generated content, one variation is that which is created by tourists, tourist-created content (TCC) and refers to the “active and creative contributions of tourists on the web” (Munar, 2011 p.292). In addition, it is possible to regard content generated by tourists as playing the function of a ‘virtual mediator’ this is as their content is not representative of any organisation or industry but rather their own “personal reflexive consideration of a tourism experience (Munar, 2011 p.297)” For the purposes of this study the term user-generated content will refer directly to tourism-created content.

There are three main categories that are commonly associated with user-generated content, narrative, visual and audio (Munar, 2011). However, in order for content to be characterised as user-generated it must adhere to the following principles suggested by Llodra-Riera et al. (2015);

- That it is made publicly available to the internet
- That boasts a level of creativity
- It is created outside of professional practices and in addition without the expectation of profit.

Munar (2011) suggests that instances in which images are uploaded and tagged online by users or videos are shared on the likes of YouTube, provide a real life approach, therefore providing only a minimum amount of manipulation. In cases that destination managers manipulate content uploaded by users, it is possible that it is no longer deemed as user-generated content.

Whilst it may be true that UGC comes about through social media channels, literature points out that with each type of social media platform there also exists an assortment of user-

generated content. Vasant and Chang (2009) and Muñiz, Alber and Schau (2007) identify the varying forms as Twitter tweets, Facebook status updates, YouTube videos and consumer created product reviews and adverts. The average network size among social users, ease of spreading information within and across social networks and the credibility associated with information shared peer-to-peer contribute to the perceived value of social word-of-mouth communication (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Kerr et al. 2012).

A further role played by UGC is one which is ‘complementary’ to the knowledge of prospective tourists, the content of tourists that have already visited a destination, may have a greater impact in affecting other users’ motivations for their travel choices. Furthermore, UGC can be regarded as creating a ‘surveillance society’ through which there is no deception, real-time information and no longer the any authoritarian control, instead providing a new level of transparency (Munar, 2011).

In many cases the social media strategies of DMOs consist of the frequency, interactivity and nature of posts (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013). Without a solid understanding of the role played by User Generated Content for tourists it will prove impossible for DMOs to leverage any strategic knowledge and use it to their advantage (Roque & Raposo, 2016). Hays, Page and Buhalis (2013) suggest that social media is an additional tool that should not be used in isolation but instead in conjunction with older strategies, DMOs however view social media as a substitute for pre-existing methods and technologies (Gretzel et al. 2006).

2.3 User-generated content and Destination Marketing – An unruly relationship

Borges (2009) suggests that previously marketing 1.0 consisted primarily of an intrusive, interruptive and one-way communication style’ an example being television commercials. Present day literature has pointed to the shift with this form of marketing by DMOs being classed as ‘ineffective’ and ‘out-dated’ (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013).

A tourist with a combined mobile and photo/video phone can show any detail of a destination to the rest of the world. 24 hours a day (Munar, 2011). Table 2.2 below provides an insight the difference that exists between content created by tourist and that which is produced by destination marketing organisations and how they contribute to destination image formation.

Table 2.2 User and DMO generated content adapted from (Munar, 2011, p. 295)

User Generated Content	Destination Marketing Content	Destination image formation
Narrative – Reviews, comments, travel diaries and blogs, microblog (twitter)	Narrative - Slogan, tagline, brand name	Narrative text of impressions, beliefs and attitudes on destination experience
Visual – photography and video	Visual – Logo, advertising campaigns (photos or video)	Images of the destination experience
Audio (narrative and/or musical)	Audio advertising campaigns (music/text)	Audio stories about the destination experience

Travellers and tourists that share their positive or negative experiences and images on a frequent basis via social media are said to considerably affect future travellers with their content thus this has become a significant area of focus for destination marketing practitioners (Li and Liew, 2015).

Current examples of destination marketing organisations utilising user/tourist generated content include that of VisitBritain in which 95% of images streamed on the official website come from the social media accounts of tourists (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013). Alongside review websites such as Tripadvisor.com, the authority of traditional destination marketing organisations has been undermined (Gretzel, 2006).

In order to understand the existing image of a destination, practitioners have focused on user generated content from blogs and social media channels (Sigala, 2012; Ye et al. 2011). The link between social media and tourism can be seen from the perspective suggested by Sigala (2012) in which online social networking websites have provided a platform for participants to interact and share their experiences, Tham, Croy and Mair (2013) suggest that to address this form of content, UGC must be seen and acted upon as a unique entity that assists in narrating memorable tourism experiences, as such it can be utilised in marketing strategies with the intention of improving a destinations image (Banyai & Glover, 2012; Pan, MacLaurin & Crofts, 2007).

Jani and Hwang (2011), make clear the importance of the correlation by noting that UGC for services on social media has become the most powerful resources in building a destinations image for travellers (Jani & Hwang, 2011). Through a study that carried out content analysis on user generated content and destination marketing, Munar (2011) concludes that travellers significantly affect image formation and in doing so are able to affect new opportunities for destination branding. Literature presented by Li and Liew (2015) note that UGC has seen the creation of a plethora of niche markets through online social media.

From a managerial perspective, when looking at this phenomena how it has led to challenges, Hays, Page & Buhalis (2013) found that several destination marketers felt discomfort at tourists voicing their opinions, criticisms (negative content) or ideas. In addition there exists the fear of the destination image being manipulated by of user-generated content. However, from the consumer perspective studies have found that UGC acts as a reducer of uncertainty when it comes to choices on where to visit (Leung, Law & Lee, 2011).

2.3.1 Coping mechanisms

The ways in which said challenges posed by user-generated content are embraced have been based on three strategies (Munar, 2011); Mimetic, Advertising and Analytic.

Strategies that are mimetic in nature notes that DMOs emulate styles of social media in order to create their own website, the execution takes place in the form of the DMO opening their official website to the content, as such user generated content is enhanced through uploads and downloading. Regarded as a relatively inexpensive way to participate in Web 2.0, mimetic strategy is 'conservative' in nature as it ensures organisations are able to keep control of web content (Munar, 2011). Furthermore, it provides only a narrow opening for user contributions. Overall the main purpose of such strategy is that of destination promotion, rather than of user-to-user communication, DMOs that fall into this strategy take the initiative to invite users to document or upload photos of their experience with little attention paid to the corporation component. The particular strategy does not benefit from the wide volumes of content on popular networking sites including Facebook and YouTube (Munar, 2011).

The second strategy, advertising, incorporates a traditional and conservative approach to handling user generated content, by utilising social media as an advertising platform, through the use of banners and other social media advertising techniques. Through this approach communication still remains a one-way format, thus although it helps to increase the presence of DMOs it does not utilise the pool of user generated content. (Munar, 2011)

The final strategic approach, 'Analytic' indicates two dimensions, one of prevention and the other knowledge. The former, prevention technique ensures that DMOs understand how content generated by users develops in relation to the brand, through which crisis prevention and actions to improve marketing can occur. The knowledge dimension of an analytical strategy is particularly concerned with the transformation of vast amounts and chaotic user content into strategic knowledge, however this is seldom utilised by DMOs (Munar, 2011).

Finally, Munar (2011) suggests that of all strategies, the analytical approach does not utilise corporate sites or mimicked social media outlets, it focuses instead on the vast array of user generated content that is already available on social media, the flexibility of this approach ensures that those DMOs fearful of risks associated with user generated content are able to monitor and forecast the opinions of tourists.

2.4 Chapter summary

The focal point of the literature review, surrounds the dimensions associated with the research question "What are the overall perspectives of destination marketing organisations on user-generated content?" Existing key theories on destination branding and marketing, Web 2.0 and social media and the correlation between these fields of study have been discussed.

Since tourism is traditionally studied and examined in relation to geographic places or space, it is understandable that some tourism marketing organisations lack confidence in and basic understanding of how a virtual community can be used as a marketing tool.

Tourism as a whole has turned into a socioeconomic phenomenon. With the majority of tourism activities occurring within destinations, many suggest that what is regarded as ‘a destination’ has in essence become an integral part of tourism analysis (Pike, 2008). As such there has been a need to market destinations to tourists, thus destination marketing and branding has become increasingly perceived as essential for cities, regions and countries. In order to understand and formulate strategies, it has proved imperative to differentiate between the ideas of ‘Place branding’ and ‘Destination branding’ with terms commonly being used interchangeably, marketing strategies may fail at their purpose to attract tourists if no clear outline is made.

It is further argued that the role of destination marketing organisations (DMOs) is to ensure a competitive edge of a destination. However, advancements in technology and communicative techniques have led the likes of Hays, Page & Buhalis (2013) to argue that DMOs must utilise more two way communication techniques in order to remain competitive and engage with tourists, who are now increasingly becoming creators of content, user-generated content (UGC).

Information and communication technologies (ICT) is of great importance in understanding the development of tourism destinations (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Social media advancements, steaming from the dimensions of Web 2.0 has meant that marketers have become engaged in a variety of two-way and many to many conversations. DMOs who are in the business of selling intangible experiences (destinations) have faced an array of challenges including the increased power of tourists, through which they have been able to share their own impartial travel experiences with a wider audience. The literature acknowledges that social media and user-generated content has been neglected by DMOs (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013). The growth and increasing availability of content created by users has left practitioners (DMOs) uncertain of how to effectively communicate and engage, with some fearing a loss of control of a destinations image if UGC is embraced.

The use of web 2.0 by tourists had mainly been centred on getting information and sharing of tourism experiences. This information is provided in digital form and as argued by Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) influences destination awareness and image creation. Literature surrounding the use of user generated content by destination marketing organisations identifies that there exists three key strategies in coping with the challenges of user-generated content; mimetic, advertising and analytic (Munar, 2011).

3 Methodology

The crux behind a strong and balanced analysis often hinges on the thought and detail of one's methodology. The research philosophy will be broken down into the facets of: ontology and epistemology. The research philosophy will connect the streams which then flows into the wider ocean of research strategy and chosen method. The construction of the interviews stemming from planning, design and commencement will be outlined and evaluated. A rigorous sampling method and participant selection process enables our findings to be as reliable as possible. The validity of the study will then be appraised through the optical lenses of: appropriateness, trustworthiness and consistency in approach, whilst possible limitations encountered are highlighted. Finally the data will be analysed in an attempt to provide relevant insight into the research question.

3.1 Research Philosophy

Philosophical assumptions have been taken into consideration to help ensure that the right strategies and techniques are chosen. Furthermore, as researchers we aim to design a suitable data collection method in a clear and concise manner whilst developing our research identity (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 2004).

With regards to the ontological position, the social entities within the study have been perceived as subjective based on the notion that the social phenomena of user-generated content and its meanings are “continually being accomplished by social actors” (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.22). More specifically a subjective as oppose to objective ontological stance has been taken, this philosophical assumption accommodates the need to understand perspectives and interpretations of participants currently active within the field of destination marketing that may surround the user-generated content and social media (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 2004). By adopting this viewpoint, it has been possible to look at the totality of our investigation whilst inducing ideas generated from a small sample investigation. Taking an objective ontological perspective would suggest that a hypothesis is required to be tested with a focus on larger samples and on facts, such an outlook would not permit us to gain a thorough understanding of user-generated content with regards to destination marketing, thus would not be deemed suitable for the field of study.

As mentioned a subjective ontological assumption has been acknowledged, however, the epistemology (alternative paradigm) that will guide the research into action and that will act as the theoretical framework through which the research is conducted is a constructivist/

interpretative approach (Ates, 2008). The subjective nature of destination marketing would suggest that this approach provides us with a “general set of assumptions about the best ways of inquiring into the nature of the world” (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 2004, p. 31). It is hoped that it will permit in depth open minded research in turn inducing or generating a theory and possible pattern of meaning surrounding user generated content and its applicability to destination marketing (Creswell, 1998).

Utilising a constructivist paradigm, will permit the development of idiographic knowledge surrounding the tourism industry based on social experiences of the destination marketers. In keeping with the subjective reality, outputs gathered will be contextual and non-statistical with outcomes focused on primarily gaining an understanding of perspectives (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 2004).

3.2 Research Strategy

The need to find out and understand more about the perspectives of DMOs leads us to conduct a study that is exploratory in its nature (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013). Furthermore, in an attempt to investigate the usage of user-generated content by destination marketing organisations an iterative approach will be sought permitting data to be revisited and connected with emerging insights (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009).

Taking a meaning-centred outlook, qualitative research will allow us to describe and understand the social world being investigated, that is the use of user-generated content in destination marketing through the eyes of destination marketing organisations. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p3) refer to qualitative research as studying “things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.” Unlike quantitative strategies which would require a focus on numerical data and statistical interpretations, qualitative research will allow us to interpret the phenomenon currently being experienced by DMOs by ensuring we answer the question of “how, where, when, who and why’ (Leung, 2015). To take on a quantitative strategy would mean that opinions, perspectives and explanations would not be identified. Thus a qualitative approach will enable fewer assumptions to be placed on data collected and will help us to “understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing” (Esiner, 1991, p.58).

The study will not be centred round testing a hypothesis surrounding the use of user-generated content, rather it will analyse, describe and interpret the constructive aspects of this phenomenon related to the perspective of DMOs McLeod (2001) further clarifying how user-generated content has been acknowledged by those within the field of destination marketing.

Quotes and key themes throughout the interviews will be taken from participants and utilised to provide evidence of differing perspectives (Creswell, 1998). The intent of the study will be to report and highlight multiple realities, through the use of respondents’ quotes.

3.3 Research Method

In an attempt to make sense of the perspectives and current strategies employed by destination marketing organisations our research has been conducted through a constructivist perspective (Mir & Watson, 2000). By adhering to the constructivist philosophy we will not merely present the results of our findings but will attempt to generate knowledge surrounding current social media strategies. Glaserfield (1995) suggests that constructivism is a theory of knowledge that holds its roots in philosophy and psychology. As such existing theory plays a crucial role, our theoretical insights into destination marketing activities will drive our empirical inquiry and help us to decipher which problems are attention worthy. It is integral to understand that concepts, models and theories are viable for our research only when they are within an adequate context (Glaserfield, 1995). This method further takes into account that by being transparent about our preconceived notions regarding user generated content, the research to be conducted will prevent impediment (Mir & Watson, 2000).

By focusing on a methodology that works on a level of assumption, its applicability to the research question will help bring assumptions found throughout the study to the forefront helping to avoid probable instances of overgeneralisation (Mir & Watson, 2000). With regards to its applicability to our research problem, Mir & Watson (2000) suggest that constructivism is a useful mythological frame to use when trying to make sense of strategy. As such when applied to our study will offer the opportunity to formulate links between current organisational realities and social systems.

Our decision to work within a constructivist perspective aligns with the overall aim of the research through the creation of a situation in which theory and present situations are linked.

3.4 Data Collection

Qualitative interviews are defined by Burgess (1982, p.107) as “the opportunity for the researcher to probe deeply to uncover new clues, open up new dimensions of a problem and to secure vivid, accurate inclusive accounts that are based on personal experience”. Hence, the main goal of a qualitative interview is to gain as in depth as possible insights from the viewpoint of the respondents and to answer the question why they have this particular understanding of the researched phenomenon (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). Therefore, taking into consideration on the one hand the purpose of this research question, “What are the overall perspectives of destinations marketing organisations on user-generated content?” which aims to add insights to the theory by providing a managerial perspective of the user generated content applicability in current destination branding strategies and the main goal of qualitative interviews, we adopted interviews as our main source of data collection.

It is believed that qualitative techniques, such as interviews manage to deliver a more precise understanding of the investigated phenomena in comparison to quantitative tools, such as questionnaires. Taking into account the two facts: firstly, qualitative interviews are mostly applicable in cases where little is known about the phenomenon and secondly, there are only

few researches so far that put together the two dimensions user generated content and destination marketing and branding, qualitative interviews are an appropriate tool for information gathering (Gill et al. 2008). Interviews will provide face-to-face contact with the interviewees, making it possible to observe both aspects of the answers, i.e. the affective and the cognitive. Therefore, we will have the opportunity to investigate the topic in depth. It is important to mention the fact that interviews facilitate the possibility of clarifying some misunderstanding that may arise in questions, and as such increases the chances of collecting more accurate and reliable data (Frechtling, 2002).

The term “qualitative interviews” incorporates a wide range of possible interview types: those that are more open and not structured to those, which have a structured list of questions developed in advance (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). There are two major qualitative interviews categories: unstructured and semi-structured. However, taking into consideration the nature of the research question a semi-structured interview design was chosen. Therefore, the interviewees were able to answer the questions freely within the range of their own reference. Moreover, they were allowed and even encouraged to provide as much as possible information for each question without being interrupted unless a clarification or change of direction for a better outcome was required (Hankinson, 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2011). In addition we adopted an interview guide (see Appendix B) in order to make sure that a set of key questions addressing the research purpose was asked in each interview. The interview guide included the following main research areas for the discussion: (1) current challenges within the field of destination branding, (2) social media strategies for customer’s engagement and interaction with the destination brand, and (3) main obstacles for incorporating user generated content into the destination branding strategies (Hankinson, 2009). Thus, we attempted to create a loose structure for the questions, albeit questions weren’t asked in the exact same sequence each time and additional questions were broached upon the interviewees input. Furthermore, the interview guide encompassed diverse types of questions such as introducing -, follow-up -, specifying- and direct questions. This interview strategy provided us with a framework from which we were able to outline the interview topic areas and facilitate an unbroken discussion (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2011).

3.5 Sampling Method and Participant Selection Criteria

“To say that one will engage in purposive sampling signifies that one sees sampling as a series of strategic choices with whom, where, and how one does one’s research” (Palys, 2008, p.698). Purposive sampling strategies are characterized as non-random methods which assure that specific category of cases is included in the sample. Purposive sampling techniques are widely utilized in qualitative research in cases when information-rich samples with limited resources need to be identified and selected. On this basis the chosen individuals within the study not only have vital knowledge and experience with the investigated phenomenon, but were also available and willing to participate by communicating their insights on the matter of user-generated content in an expressive and reflective way (Palinkas et al. 2015; Patton, 2002). Based on our prior theoretical understanding we were able to identify which category of individuals would provide a unique, essential and ultimately different angle on the researched phenomenon, user

generated content and its utilisation in destination branding strategies (Robinson, 2014). Since the aim of the study is to investigate how the phenomenon is perceived in practice and perceptions towards its use thus contributing to the existing theory by delivering managerial insights we chose to interview destination and/or place brand managers and tourist development representatives within Sweden. Our main area of focus was on interviewees within Sweden due to constraints in geographical reach and in addition the perception of Sweden as a forward thinking example of destination brand management evident through the previously mentioned '@Sweden campaign'.

Despite the notorious reputation of difficulty in accessing elites/ practitioners within the field, we drew inspiration from the assumptions of Pettigrew and McNulty's research (1995) presented by Bryan and Bell (2011). This research argued that access to elites is achieved through other elite members (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Thus we employed a commonly used sampling method in qualitative studies 'snowball sampling' alias chain-referral sampling. It is defined as an extremely valuable research tool within the marketing industry particularly in cases when individuals to be interviewed provide unique in-depth information not easily accessible through any other source. Since our aim was to reach highly knowledgeable and experienced professionals within the field of destination branding, the snowball sampling technique appeared to be without doubt the most efficient tool for this purpose (Voicu & Babonea, 2011).

The method began by interviewing a professional that adhered to all the necessary sampling requirements, they were then asked to provide us with further contacts that would add value to the research. This procedure continued until the sample size was large enough to satisfy the purpose but also until the repetition occurred amongst respondents recommendations. Prior to our research we contacted a destination branding professor who provided us with an array of contacts practicing or knowledgeable in the area. Following our fourth interviews repetition amongst recommendations of professionals within the destination branding industry in Sweden occurred, this can be seen in Table 3.1. Therefore, it was decided that our empirical data collection sample would be restricted to seven interviews, since it is argued that a subsequent interview round would not add vital input (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012; Voicu & Babonea, 2011).

Furthermore, it was decided that the research would be confined to seven interviews on the basis of saturation principles. According to Trotter (2012, p. 399) saturation occurs when "all questions have been thoroughly explored in detail [and] no new concepts or themes emerge in subsequent interviews." Saturation can be categorised into two forms: data and theoretical. Common practice with regards to data saturation is that after a certain point of data collection no new information emerges. Whereas, theoretical saturation occurs in cases when no new themes are recognised within the data and researchers seek concept variations until redundancy occurs. However, although saturation is used as a gold standard for determining a purposive sample size, it has proved crucial and challenging for us to highlight that saturation is prevalent among the collected empirical data (Walker, 2012; Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). Definitive definitions of saturation are dependent upon several factors such as the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the sample, the selection criteria, the budget and time restrictions we aimed to identify and take into consideration each of these factors. Moreover, our research was mainly focused on 'themed saturation,' evident at a later stage in the research.

To achieve both an indication and better representation of the sample Table 3.1 provides an overview of each interviewee alongside details of their interview.

Table 3.1 Participants profile

Name	Occupation	Interview Location	Referred by	Interview duration
Karin Lilja	Brand Strategist	Lund	Frans Mellin Sofie Svensson Karoline Saether Mikael Bystrom	45min
Sofie Svensson	Tourism development (Visit Lund)	Lund	Karin Lilja Mikael Bystrom	28min
Karoline Saether	Tourism development (Visit Lund)	Lund	Karin Lilja Mikael Bystrom	28min
Anna Wittgren	Head of leisure tourism, Destination brand Manager Malmo	Lund	Sofie Svensson Karoline Saether	30min
Johan Gromark	Place Branding consultant	Lund	Frans Mellin	27min
Micco Gronholm	Destination Brand Manager	Telephone	Karin Lilja Johan Gronmark	20min
Mikael Bystrom	Senior Advisor Tendensor	Malmo	Anna Wittgren Karin Lilja	30min
Marcus Andersson	CEO Tendensor	Telephone	Anna Wittgren Mikael Bystrom	25min

3.5.1 Participants' occupation and main responsibilities

Interview 1: Karin Lilja, Brand Strategist Lunds Kommun

Karin Lilja is a Brand Strategist at the municipality of Lund. Her main responsibilities are maintaining a unified place and destination branding strategy of Lund's image. She is in charge not only of the print but also social media communications.

Interview 2: Sofie Svensson & Karoline Saether, Tourism development (Visit Lund)

Sofie Svensson & Karoline Saether both work as tourism developers for Lund in addition to their tourist information responsibilities. The findings show that their main task is to succeed in creating a unified message and perception of Lund as a city among all the stakeholders contributing to its image. Moreover, while doing this they put emphasise not only on unified marketing activities, but also try to build up relationship with these stakeholders

Interview 3: Anna Wittgren, Head of leisure tourism, Destination brand manager, Malmo

Anna Wittgren is a Business Area Manager and Head of the leisure tourism department in Malmo. Her work within the sector relates to PR, business-to-consumer (b2c), business-to-business (b2b) and hosting. The driving force for her success at work is to make people who don't get paid to smile, when they meet tourists in Malmo, *"The taxi driver, the bus driver, the train driver, when they are all smiling about Malmo, then we have done the best job!"*

Interview 4: Johan Gromark, Place Branding consultant

Johan Gromark is a place branding consultant, who started his PHD studies in 2012. Prior to academia he had 15 – 20 years of experience from advertising and communicating mainly focused on place branding.

Interview 5: Micco Gronholm, Place and Destination brand manager, Helsingborg

Micco Gronholm is a Place and Destination Brand Manager of Helsingborg. His role entails all the tasks and responsibilities relating to the way in which people associate with the place Helsingborg. It refers both to the people, who live or just visit the city.

Interview 6: Mikael Bystrom, Senior Advisor Tendensor

Mikael Bystrom is a Senior Advisor at Tendensor a Swedish company that is described as a strategy consultancy mainly focused on place attractiveness, places' brand image and their ability to innovate (Tendensor, 2014). The main goal of the role is to develop a buzz, a strong image for the specific destination or place brand. It is important to mention that Mikael was also involved in the development and the strategic planning of the destination branding strategy of Lund and Malmo, which will be analysed further in the study. As such, he was able to present us with the strategic intention behind the specific destination brand.

Interview 7: Marcus Andersson - CEO Tendensor

Marcus Andersson is CEO of Tendensor International. His role is focused on advising cities, regions and countries on place development, place marketing and branding. The overall place branding strategies that the agency developed are normally additionally used for destination branding and marketing.

3.6 Designing and conducting the interview

To permit the efficient design and conduct of the interview process the following factors must be taken into consideration: obtaining respondents trust, an awareness of social interaction, appropriateness of language, choice of interviews the location and recording interviews.

To create a sense of ease and build trust with the interviewees an awareness of concepts and challenges faced by their industry was broached, to further cement this our research purpose was outlined in a professional and enthusiastic manner. On this basis we found interviewees to be open and eager to share as many insights and knowledge as required, with several

providing us with additional literature sources post interview. As interviews were conducted with knowledgeable representatives within the fields of destination and place branding industry another crucial factor was to make sure that appropriate language was utilised whilst collecting the empirical data. The correct use of language enhanced trust levels within the relationship again providing the opportunity for further in-depth data collection (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson, 2012). Identification of what could be deemed as the right location in which interviews would be conducted proved to be a challenging process.

To ensure that the quality of recordings would not be compromised, advanced acoustic testing took place where possible. It was imperative to find a balance between the most appropriate place for interviews and convenience of the interviewees. Thus in some cases it was necessary to conduct interviews at locations chosen by interviewees, including on site at their place of work. In addition, based on geographic restrictions affecting access to two interviews it was decided that telephone interviews would be conducted as both were deemed as pivotal in providing unique managerial input. In both cases we were able to gain essential insights since the interviewees are used to operate via phone in their everyday professional life (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson, 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2011). On average, the seven interviews lasted thirty minutes and were recorded prior to transcription (Hankinson, 2009). Through the use of transcripts we managed to obtain an overview of each interview and to take into account every detail. In addition we were able to examine the data repeatedly, which facilitated significantly the data analysis process. It should be acknowledged that the principle of ‘multiple interviewers’ was applied as an interview strategy, i.e. there were two interviewers within each interview. Through this approach a more informal atmosphere was created which contributed to fluid and open conversations. As a general overview of how this worked one interviewer was responsible providing an introduction and overview of theory and the other intervened where necessary to pick upon certain topics or to facilitate the discussion further (Bechhofer, Elliot & McCrone, 1984).

As previously mentioned to gain an in-depth understanding of input provided by the interviewees thematic analysis will be applied. This approach identifies, analyses and reports patterns also known as ‘themes’ within the collected empirical data. Thus the data is arranged and presented in a detailed manner. Nonetheless, in most cases this analytical tool goes some steps further in interpreting diverse aspects related to the research topic, i.e. utilising user-generated content within the destination branding strategies (Boyatzis, 1998). The final result of thematic analysis emphasises the most implied constellations of meanings provided by the data set. Such constellations incorporate affective, symbolic and cognitive aspects. Since in this paper we investigate the perception of DMOs in adopting user-generated content within their strategies, a thematic analysis of the interviews discloses the perceived impact of the user-generated phenomenon within the tourism industry in general. This, in return, would reveal if they take actions to respond to the increasingly evolving phenomenon within the industry and if yes, what actions. Thus a thematic analysis can acknowledge the unambiguous and hidden drivers and constrains that influence the level of destination brand managers’ perception and utilisation of user-generated content (Joffe, 2012). It is not only characterized with reflecting the reality, but also with explaining the meaning beyond reality (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In order to accomplish an in-depth analysis required for this study, it can be argued that thematic analysis is the best option for an array of reasons; Firstly, it does not require a comprehensive

theoretical or technological knowledge of approaches and due to limited experience of data analysis within this field, the chosen method provides us with a more accessible form of reasoning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Secondly, thematic analysis can be applied within various theoretical frameworks based on the fact that it is not an integral part of any pre-existing framework. Finally this mode of analysis is relatively flexible and refers to a wide range of research methods from essentialist or realist to constructionist methods, the latter of which is the chosen outlook utilised for this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Before proceeding with the guide utilised for conducting a thematic analysis there are a range of issues that were taken into account prior to the data analysis. As the integral component of the method is defined by themes a more detailed notion of what a theme is, is required (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Simply put it encompasses some essential information regarding the research question and depicts some degree of patterned answers or meaning within the data set. On this basis vital questions arise when referring to coding, i.e. what actually counts as a pattern/theme and what can be regarded as a suitable 'size'? Considering the nature of the qualitative analysis there is no exact number that states a specific data item proportion in order to prove that a theme is existing. A theme is defined as such not according to quantifiable data but rather by its importance for generating insights to the research question evident throughout our analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

It is of importance for our chosen method of analysis to predefine the ways in which patterns/themes will be determined: inductive (bottom up) or theoretical (deductive, top down) (Frith & Gleeson, 2004; Boyatzis, 1998). In order to decide which the most appropriate approach, three important aspects were taken into consideration (1) the coded data refers to a specific narrowed research question: 'What are the overall perception of Destination Marketing organisations towards incorporating user-generated content?' (2) the analysis seeks to uncover more nuanced and detailed insights of the developed themes within the data set and (3) the analysis is driven predominantly through our theoretical interest within the field. All three points in relation to our research purpose aligned to ensure that a deductive approach was utilised to identifying patterns and determining themes.

Since our aim was to define and explore the underlying ideas, perceptions and conceptualizations of the interviewees regarding the research area, we based our themes on the latent approach which sought an in depth meaning of data. Furthermore analysis originated from the latent point of view tends to be based on a constructionist paradigm, making it more apt for our study. Thus in summary our thematic research analysis was based on a theoretical (deductive) approach for generating themes, investigated based on a latent approach and framed within the constructivist epistemology (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). As previously discussed inspiration for our six step analysis has been drawn from Braun & Clarke's (2006) study and ranges from gaining a familiarity with our data through to defining themes.

3.6.1 Step-by-step thematic analysis:

Data familiarisation

From the onset interviews were recorded and transcribed. Prior to the coding both researchers read through all transcriptions to gain further understanding of the data. This step was repeated a number of times to understand the depth and breadth and to search for possible patterns. In addition side notes were collated that consisted of initial ideas, which helped us later in the process.

Initial code generation

Once confident with our data a coding system was generated. The codes represented latent features of the transcripts that were relevant for the research purpose and related to the basic aspect of the researched phenomenon. In this process we aimed to organize the data into meaningful categories. As we approached the data through the ‘latent theoretical point of view’, while collecting information for each of the codes our goal was to investigate the data based on the specific research question and on the questions from the interview guidelines. The use of a colour-coded system provided a means by which clear distinctions could be made surrounding each code and its meaning as you can see in the table below (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Coding system

Codes	Meanings	Colour
UGC usage	Reflects the utility of UGC by the various DMOs and their perception of the phenomenon.	Blue
Frequency of UGC use	How often UGC is incorporated	Purple
Embracing negative UGC	How DMOs react to negative UGC	Brown
Strategy	What is the current overall strategy in relation to UGC	Yellow
Challenges	Represents the main predicaments which are currently challenging the destination branding and marketing industry.	Orange
Actions – do	How UGC is used and what are the channels currently being used	Light Green
Intentions - want to do	What are the desired strategies	Pink
Limitations	What are the factors that constrain the expansion of UGC	Grey
Risks	What are the possible drawbacks of utilising UGC	Dark Green
Restrictions of usability	What limits the incorporation of UGC	Red

Searching for themes

Following on from the aforementioned means of coding, conflicting and complimentary codes were combined and categorised into specific themes. By searching for patterns we managed to group all codes leading to the creation of an initial thematic map.



Figure 3.1 Initial thematic map based on (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Reviewing themes

Once the initial mind map was created, themes were refined. However, within this stage some of the initially defined patterns were reordered by being split or evolving into new patterns by applying the principle of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity for judging the categories (Patton, 1990). Hence, it became possible to identify the final key themes. In order to achieve this result we followed two levels of review. Firstly, we read through all the code categories and examined if in each a coherent pattern was present. Secondly, the validity of each theme was analysed in relation to the whole data set. Upon completion of this phase there was a clear distinction of the themes within the study, there was further clarity as to any relations that occurred.

Theme definition and naming

This stage ensured that themes were refined further to generate a precise distinction among them and to name them. Following the clarification of links between themes further refinement occurred through which three themes were distinguished and named. At this stage it was vital to specify what and why each theme was of relevance for the research question.

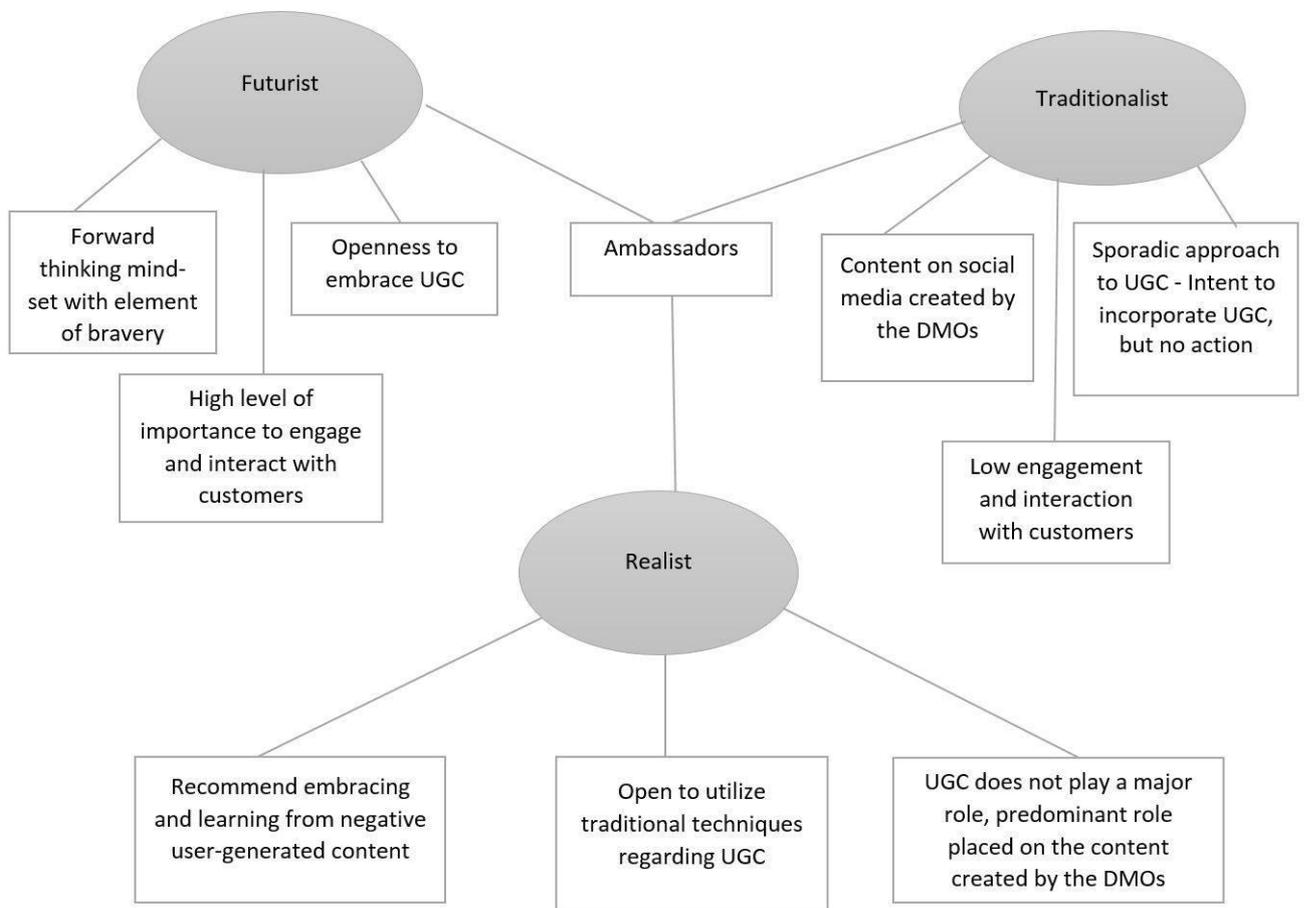


Figure 3.2 Final thematic map inspired by (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Production of report

To conclude the process, the final stage of analysis required revisiting the initial theory. In doing so, a concise and logical report that further reiterates the appropriateness of the study is created. Vivid extracts in the form of quotations have been utilised to display themes and demonstrate arguments in relation to the research question. The end report is developed in a way that goes beyond pure data description, thus provides e a clear argument in support of supporting the research question.

3.7 General quality, ethics and limitations

3.7.1 General quality: Appropriateness, Trustworthiness and Consistency.

The ability to test both the quality and robustness of qualitative studies, is one that is constantly critiqued (Leung, 2015). Qualitative researchers have for decades attested to any attempts to appraise varying studies under one system as impossible and conceptually wrong. The use of specific measures including triangulation and respondent validation when taken from a philosophical angle are indeed futile thus lack validity (Barbour, 2001). The use of terminology commonly linked to appraisal within quantitative research cannot be aligned to that of qualitative research, due to the difference in nature. As such for the purpose of our research the terms ‘appropriateness’, ‘trustworthiness’ and ‘consistency’ will act as yardsticks in place of ‘reliability’ and ‘validity’ which are commonly associated with quantitative studies.

Meyrick (2006) suggestion that studies must fulfil a dual core criteria of ‘transparency’ as a point of reference to determine the quality of our study has been used as a base of inspiration. As such throughout each stage, from our initial theory formation to our analysis of results and conclusion, validation will take place to ensure that the study is both robust and of high rigour.

In an attempt to ensure the appropriateness of research tools, processes and data with regards to our methodology, sampling, data analysis and conclusions a variety of considerations have been taken into account. These are inclusive of and not limited to the decision on our ontological position, the choice to conduct semi-structured interviews which would assist us in finding themes linked to the perspective of DMOs and the use of 1st tier triangulation methods when analysing interview transcripts (Leung, 2015).

As the essence of reliability within qualitative research abides in consistency Leung (2015), once all interviews have been conducted the accuracy of data will be verified through constant review and comparison by each researcher. However, this study notes that in appraising the quality, trustworthiness and validity, the call of the studies appropriateness, judgement will also occur on the part of the receiving party and as such does not remain solely with us the researchers.

3.7.2 Research ethics

Several ethical issues were taken into consideration while implementing the data collection design. The first of which relates to confidentiality. The main aim of the research topic is to provide insights and understandings of attitudes towards to user generated content implementation into destination branding strategies, which is concerned with strategy development and implementation. It should be expected therefore that some interviewees would be unwilling or uncomfortable disclosing some strategic information unless a confidentiality agreement is present (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Furthermore, taking into account the fact that transcription will occur, the issues of copyright must be broached. This is as in the case of interviews the interviewee owns the copyright of the spoken words. It is essential that if data is to be shared amongst others, as is the case with this research, it is made clear to the interviewee

during the process. Furthermore, on this basis, ethical issues can arise if there is a lack of informed consent thus interviewees were informed of that recording equipment would be utilised and their full names will be disclosed in the thesis (Bryman & Bell, 2011). As a solution to these ethical issues a consent form outlining participants rights to withdraw from the inter was provided and was presented prior to each interview either stated verbally in the case of the phone interviews or read by participants in person, see appendix C for consent form.

3.7.3 Limitations

In every research design, there are some critique points that need to be revealed, in order to avoid some inaccuracy of the research findings. The main issue to the chosen method in this study is the difficulty of generalisability. In general, it is argued that the resulted findings of a qualitative research are restricted. However, the chosen interviewees for the qualitative research are not intended to be representative of the whole population. Some industries such as tourism are very broad and encompass many experts (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Therefore, it is difficult and even impossible to list the population representatives in any accurate manner. Thus, through the findings of the qualitative research the aim is to make generalisations to the theory rather than to populations. As, our study investigates seven DMOs representative within Sweden and since the tourism sector is so diverse, the research does not provide the possibility for generalisations among other DMOs. Instead the findings which refer to the theory can be used as inspiration or benchmark for various DMO representatives who identify their perspectives within one of the categories (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Furthermore, qualitative findings with their naturalistic character depend strongly on the view points of the researcher and as such are considered as too subjective and difficult to replicate. Therefore, to reduce these issues we aimed to analyse the phenomenon of user-generated content within the tourism sector objectively, starting with in an open-ended manner and gradually narrowing-down the research question until the required data for answering the research question was generated as will become evident throughout our data analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Another limitation to mention is the fact that we conducted two of the interviews via phone as we previously mentioned. Although, we managed to gather all the necessary data required and also obtained some new viewpoints on the research topic, conducting a face-to-face interview may have added further value to the study. As Bryan & Bell (2011) argue telephone interviews in most cases are not sustainable after 20-25 minutes, whereas in face-to-face communication there always arises the possibility to extend the interview in instances that additional topics arise that need more time to discuss.

Although, were aware of the fact that the issues of generalisability and subjectivity would have been diminished by utilising a quantitative research method, we followed the recommendations of Bryan & Bell (2011) and applied a qualitative approach in terms of qualitative interviews. The decision was supported by the qualitative nature of the research question and the problem of quantifying it. Moreover, based on the time restrictions and the difficulty of gaining access to higher numbers of experts within the field of destination branding and marketing, which is a requirement for a representative quantitative research, we would have had even higher risk of

developing inaccurate findings. However, an alternative that may have further cemented our study, would have been utilising a content analysis. Thus, this method may have added value to our research by providing more in-depth insights of DMOs perceptions toward UGC within destination marketing and branding field.

3.7.4 Collection of Primary and Secondary Sources

To gain more of an understanding of both fields of study, literature on social media and destination marketing was sought and reviewed. Due to the relative newness of social media as an area of study, preferred sources were those focusing on latest developments. Primary sources were accessed through a range of electronic mediums in which much of our search focused on key terms such as ‘destination marketing’ ‘place branding’ ‘tourism’ and ‘social media.’ Primary sources are those that provide direct or possible first hand evidence. Furthermore empirical study results proved to be a constant point of reference. Although to understand the view point of others that had worked within the field and built on previous works, secondary sources were an occasional point of reference. Such sources describe, discuss, interpret and evaluate primary sources. The use of secondary sources was mainly restricted to cases in which original ideas or information could not be located or instances that involved an analysis of previous case studies.

4 Analysis

In following the thematic approach of data analysis, once we familiarised ourselves with the transcripts and coded the data, we started seeking patterns amongst the different respondents. In order to provide more in-depth background information for some of the developed categories, we started by analysing the most essential input provided by the DMOs such as strategy, social media, UGC, risks and limitations relating to the research question and the interview guide questions.

4.1 DMOs' strategies: challenges, actions and intentions

Since the key responsibilities and tasks of the participants have already been outlined (see Table 3.1), it is vital for the purpose of this study to investigate if firstly there are strategies implemented with regards to UGC and if yes, what are the perceptions and challenges behind them. For this reason, we will analyse and investigate said strategies that various DMOs in different cities implement. The identified patterns will be related to:

- Is there a strategy at all?
- Previous strategy
- Current strategy
- Future strategy
- How often DMOs rethink their strategies
- Utilisation of ambassadors
- Challenges for implementing the desired strategy

In recent years consumers obtained more power to co-create and promote a destination brand (Sigala, 2012). This phenomenon has led to the fact that DMOs have started utilising user-generated content within their destination branding and marketing strategies, in order to enhance the destination brand image through the travellers' social power to influence (Berthon et al. 2007). The findings of the study show that the DMOs' perceptions towards the level of user-generated content utility is variable from destination to destination and is determined by several challenges. Before delving into the difficulties that DMOs need to overcome in order to build up a powerful destination brand, we will analyse the different strategies and tactics presented by the interviewees.

Karin Lilja, Brand Strategist of Lund, discloses that the way Lund destination brand is communicated doesn't follow a certain predefined strategy: "...*So the way we communicate the city, this is not a strategy...*" However, there are specific trademarks that are utilised frequently within the communication channels of the city such as the 'Magnolia' flower, the cobbled

streets, small houses close to botanic garden plus a small portion of humour. The reason why there is no strategy is explained by the fact that until now Lund municipalities did not take into consideration the way their customers perceive their brand. *“I actually think that the city brands have always been defined by the people but we have not known that.”* Karin Lilja argues that the fact that a destination brand has no ownership is a challenge common for many cities and also for Lund. Since a destination brand is characterised by being dependent and influenced by many diverse stakeholders Blain, Levy & Ritchie (2005) argue that a well-developed strategy and a unified communications are two solutions that would facilitate this issue. However, Lund is currently lacking such solution. A good example that depicts the issue with destination brand ownership and a missing coherent unambiguous brand image promotion is this years case with the hashtag Lund2016. Since the Lund DMOs and the church didn't communicate in advanced the hashtag for 2016 will be used by the church only for promoting the Pope visit in 2016.

The majority of the interviewees introduce another issue important to consider relating to the strategy implementation. This concept of whether or not there is or must be a distinction between destination brand and place brand is largely discussed in theory and practise and is mostly defined through the applied approaches of the DMOs towards the destination brand (Hankinson, 2007; Campelo et al. 2014; Rinaldi & Beeton, 2015). Micco Gronholm, Brand Manager of Helsingborg, believes that even though working within the field of destination branding or place branding to encompass relatively different approaches, there must be no difference between place and destination brand in order to create a unified image of the promoted city, country or region. *“So I think when you talk about place brand, you should incorporate destination brand in the concept.”* Johan Gromark supported this idea and even extended it further by conveying a big transition from destination perspective, where it is no longer aimed to market only a destination to the tourists, but it is needed to promote a place to tourists.

“It's not only about destination anymore it's about place. So it's a big move from a destination perspective where you want to market your lace to tourists.” - Johan Gromark

In the context of Lund it is difficult to develop a unified message between the place and destination brand or in other words between municipalities and tourist office since the city is missing a unified destination brand approach. Lund municipality perceives Lund as a cosy Swedish city with an abundance of history, which differs from the tourist office understanding that emphasises Lund is known for knowledge tourism because of the highly world ranked Lund University. In order to obtain a full picture of the current situation, we interviewed the tourist office representatives, Sofie Svensson and Karoline Saether. The majority of the input they provided was correlating to the main aspects and challenges that were presented by Karin Lilja. The main focus of their tasks is Lund as a destination brand whereas Karin Lilja's tasks incorporate both destination and place brand. However, the tourist office summarised their plan of action as follows: *“...we can say that we interact more than we have strategies.”* What they do differently is that they integrate their network of stakeholders such as hotels, cafes, museums etc. into the destination brand promotion activities as ambassadors. This means they aim at *“spreading our message through ambassadors”* who can provide tourists with as much information as they can find in the tourist office. This strategy is supported by the destination brand consultant Mikael, who considers ambassadors implementation as a key success factor for a destination branding and marketing strategy. As an example he mentioned the Danish

student ambassador strategy in Copenhagen, where students have the chance to meet the Prince of Denmark or to cook with the best chefs in order to collect pleasant experience which they will share further.

Even though currently there is almost no recognised strategy between them, Lund municipality and the tourist office are working together on developing one coherent strategy in the future. As such it will put emphasis on the young people as a target group who will be at the same time the main contributors of content. In addition social media channels will play a vital role by being utilised as the major communication platform.

“I think we can be more into the digital world and have a strategy and be more user-integrated and take bigger part in it because this is what is happening...” - Sofie Svensson

Anna Wittgren, destination brand manager for Malmo and Micco Gronholm, place and destination brand manager for Helsingborg, introduced opposite perceptions of destination branding and marketing strategies applied in Malmo and Helsingborg. Both their strategies were based on keeping up with the current trends and attempting to be one step ahead. Over the course of a year and a half, Anna Wittgren and her team have totally restructured their plan of action. In the past Malmo was communicated traditionally, the communication input was developed solely by DMOs and the tourist information centre was the main place for tourists to collect information about the city. Currently, the situation looks completely differently.

Those they aim to target has been changed tremendously, previously they aimed to target 90%, as such broadcasting Malmo to everybody. As it stands currently the target is the main social influencers who amount to 9%. Malmo is extremely active through all the social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Trip Advisor and has its own webpage. However, their main goal is not to expand their communication channels, instead they aim at finding and connecting to the people, who talk about Malmo and have a lot of followers *“...what is interesting for us is finding all the other people from Trip Advisor [...] and getting them the material they need and also get to them to say what we want.”* Another big step they undertook in January 2016 was the decision to begin the process of closing the website and the tourist information office as the majority of the other cities did. The argument for this move is on the one side is inspired by their mission, i.e. to be one step ahead and on the other they argue that it does not matter how many people visit the website, the majority of them will never visit the city. Therefore, their strategy is determined to understand what people want and to make sure that people not only talk about Malmo but actually visit it. In addition Malmo city cancelled the contract for its printed guide and instead the guide will be available to download and a one page with top 10 to dos will be created in place. After the big shift of Malmo destination branding and marketing strategy Anna Wittgren explains that now it is no longer necessary to change strategies, but rather constantly adjust. *“The thing that is one of our key things is to be a quick mover.”*

The concept of being ‘active’ and ‘one step ahead’ is supported by Micco Gronholm, destination brand manager of Helsingborg. He introduces an interesting point of view by defining strategies as tactics. He believes that there are many misconceptions about the term strategy. Therefore, he prefers defining his plan of action as tactics in order to remain flexible and not to miss any opportunities by following only a certain strategy pattern. He discloses *that*

“The tricky part is not to listen but to organise the next step, going from insight to action. This is when we do branding for real it’s not about strategy or good thinking but about action.” Within the past 3 to 5 years he perceives that the way a destination is communicated has changed tremendously. It is no more about marketing communication, instead it is about marketing dialogue. Therefore, he believes that strategy relates to the previous years where predictability was evident. Nowadays, it is about being fast, flexible and sharp. He argues that the best way to achieve this goal is to make the people, who are already living or have business in the destination you promote to be your ambassadors.

The three destination branding consultants, Johan Gromark, Mikael, Marcus, extended and provided additional insights to the strategies applied in Lund, Malmo, Helsingborg and Sweden as a whole. Moreover, they delivered some strategic recommendations for the DMOs. Johan Gromark for example suggests a strategy that ads to the previously mentioned challenge of unified destination and place brand by adding one more perspective, political science. He argues that building up a coherent image while mixing place/destination branding strategies with political theories will *“create legitimacy for destination and place branding processes”*.

The two Tendensor brand consultants still support the idea of strategies that *“can be carried out online and offline.”* Despite all the challenges and increased social media influence they believe that print media is still not dead and argue that the normal platforms are still needed in addition to all the social media channels.

According to the challenges within the tourism industry all of the interviewees agreed on the fact that the biggest challenge within their strategies is to find the right way to make tourists engage and interact with the brand. In addition the majority perceive the lack of ownership and control over the destination brand, the high amount of stakeholder involvement and the various ways of approaching destination and place brand as main issues, while implementing a successful branding and marketing strategy. They all link to the previously discussed challenges presented by (Wang & Pizam, 2011; Baker, 2007; Morgan, Pritchard & Piggott, 2002). The interviewees also contribute to some other challenges that DMOs might need to take into consideration such as the constant changing lifestyle patterns, the internet of things and its unpredictability.

Based on the discussed strategies and the defined patterns among the DMOs we developed our initial thematic mind map as you can see in Figure 3.1. Each category of this mind map, deriving from the identified strategy patterns, will be adapted through the lens of further analysed input, i.e. social media, UGC, restrictions, risks.

What is interesting in our findings is the fact that the main challenges with regards to strategy is that all DMOs incorporate very diverse strategic approaches. Some have no strategy, whereas others are constantly competing to be one step ahead of the future trends and as such have a rigorous strategy in place.

4.2 Social media – too much choice, too little strategy and understanding

In order to understand the perceptions of destination marketing organisations, our research sought to understand the perspectives towards social media usage. Our findings indicated that the ways in which social media is truly utilised by destination marketing organisations varies significantly.

4.2.1 Engagement and variety

Despite acknowledgement of the importance and integral role of social media amongst DMOs, it became evident through the course of our research that the extensive and exhaustive list of options available, has meant that in the majority of cases, the gains of social media are still far from negligible. Marcus Andersson, who provides a consulting perspective on DMOs suggested that: “[DMOs]...are just after Instagram accounts with the nicest picture of the day for their city but they will not engage in strategies.” On this basis it would seem that, the greater strategic role of social media and its functions may still be misunderstood, with DMOs placing more of an emphasis on merely having a presence on social media, rather than a presence with a clear cut purpose. In addition, this finding indicates that there may exist no real reason as to why DMOs are on social media, they may simply be going with the flow.

The channels used and the reasons as to why they are used differ significantly for each organisation as suggested by varying DMOs. Our findings indicate that many simply refer to a list of social media outlets when asked what their social media strategies are, “*we have a Facebook and Instagram.*”- Karoline Saether and Sofie Svensson. However, simply mentioning that these channels are in place does not indicate there is engagement or interactivity through that said engagement is ‘proactive’ in nature (Hutton & Fosdick, 2011).

With several organisations making use of varying platforms, there still exists a vast amount who do not effectively use or understand how to engage on social media. Not only does the abundance of choice seem to be playing a role, what is often deemed as being interactive and engaging lacks definition. Making it far from the perception that interactivity of DMOs on social media involves the direct presentation of questions, content and feedback. What many theorists had emphasised as a shift towards the development two-way communications, seems to not be a generalizable concept with our findings indicating that DMOs are still failing to engage in conversations; “*too many places follow a one-way communication mode when they go to social media. They start disseminating information about themselves and then they ask why not engaging with them*”- Marcus Andersson. On the basis of such response, it would seem that the idea of the ‘social media’ ecosystem consisting of the varying behavioural segments (*Creators, critics, collectors and joiners*) is not always taken into consideration when decisions regarding which platform to use are taken.

The importance of creating an environment through which users and destination marketers themselves exchanged information (Kaplan & Haenlin, 2010), was known by all respondents. However, our research revealed that in practice, only a couple of DMOs were facilitating this

process “*we are looking at a possibility now to create a platform where we listen to conversations about the city and can interact*”- Micco Gronholm. In addition, it could be seen that there were ultimately two types of perceptions towards such forms of engagement that could be seen as proactive or reactive attitudes. Those that could be regarded as boasting a proactive perceptions, strived to find ways to improve communications and ensure that tourists were involved and if not at the centre of communications by finding ways through which conversations were maintained or initiated evident thorough Micco Gronholm’s quote. The second perception was one that could be classed as being particularly passive. Engagement could be seen as taking place in one dimension, as such outlets were being used for more promotional purposes thus a push channel that did not fully facilitate the ability to gain or benefit from engagement. Once again indicating that to some the idea of social media remains a one-way communication outlet. Interestingly enough, the perspective provided by respondents that held more of a consultancy role indicated the true extent to which social media has been regarded as a two way communication outlet: “*Maybe 1/3rd placed have figures it out and 2/3rd places still need to figure this out.*” –Marcus Andersson

Our findings therefore indicate for the majority of our respondents as it stands social media, may not play much of a ‘social’ two way communicative role but instead one used in more of an ‘informative’ capacity.

Despite the aforementioned insight, an interest finding revealed that destination marketing organisations are not naive to the fact that it is the role of the marketers themselves to define customer engagement and to facilitate it. However, the attitudes initiating customer engagement range from fear to that of risk taking “*It’s not everybody’s cup of tea and not everybody would or could do it but I just think you got to try it*” – Anna Wittgren. This suggestion by Anna Wittgren indicates that although the role of DMOs in promoting their destination may be the same, there really is no one perspective on how social media engagement should occur.

Furthermore, the choice of wording by some respondents highlighted the perceived importance of engagement, words such as ‘have to’ and ‘need’, indicated that said DMOs placed a high level of importance on the fact that they were facilitators of engagement.- “*So you really have to bring those people on board to get them engaged. You cannot really expect people to engage with you if you do not invite them*” –Marcus Anderson. By using phrases including ‘*it would be nice if*’-not only indicated to us a laid back attitude but also marginalised the role of the DMO from a facilitator of engagement to that of an observer. - “*...we need to make sure that people talk about Malmo, say what we want them to say*”- Anna Wittgren. In contrast Anna’s response indicates her perspective on the importance of people engaging with and discussing Malmo. Once again reiterating the vast difference between DMO perspectives.

4.2.2 Frequency of use and perceived importance

Surprisingly when asked how often activities took place on particular outlets, there was no definitive answers, respondents across the board indicated that usage was ‘frequent’. However, what was deemed as frequent by one DMO was not comparable to another, due to the variance in the activities that were actually taking place. The monitoring of social media activities

ranged based on the organisation: *“During the day. Every day. We always have staff on social media”-Anna Wittgren.*

“it is hard to say... It’s quite general” – Karoline Saether & Sofie Svensson

Those that could provide a definitive answer, seemed to have a clearer strategy and resources in place that meant they were able to designate a set amount of time to social media activities.

Our research suggested that importance was placed on ensuring that activities did take place and social media accounts weren’t simply left idle, indicating that DMOs have become aware “silence [on social media] is fatal” (Levine et al. 2001, p.87).

“I think we are looking at a situation where more places will work with integrated strategies, multichannel strategies where it does not really matter whether it is social, digital, print.” - Marcus Andersson

The perception and prioritisation of social media revealed to us that there still exists differing perceptions regarding the importance of social media and its applicability to marketing strategy, many still view it as a nicety and great addition to existing strategy. However not necessarily the most important or integral component as was suggested by Stelzner’s findings that indicated 86% of marketers believed that social media played an important and integral role (Stelzner, 2013). *“If you want to take it seriously, you have to go with the flow. You have to be on Instagram, Twitter and you have to be on all those platforms that are interesting.”* Whereas the likes of Mikeal Bystrom seem to hold the perception that increasingly social media has come to play an integral role in surviving the competitive landscape that exists within destination marketing; *“Basically, print is dead, and you have to have social media integrated with your website you can’t ignore social media.”*

Overall our research indicated that the impact and understanding of the importance of social media channels is one that across all interviews proved significant – *“social media has a huge impact”- Johan Gromark*, however it indicated that there exists a clear variation in both the frequency and attitude surrounding its use. On the one hand it can be suggested that some view it as an integral tool, with others deeming it as more of a nicety. Furthermore, the ways in which it is used and key functionalities highlighted differed with focus on both content and communication; *“People can now share more photos and ideas and impressions, whatever experience from different places. Even places become more transparent”- Micco Gronholm.*

Whilst our findings indicate that all DMOs interviewed utilised an array of social media outlets some continuously seem to seek new and more efficient uses, including utilising it in a more personalised manner by creating and highlighting tools that work for them as oppose to taking a generic approach thus not viewing social media as a static entity (Stankov, Lazic & Dragicevic, 2010). This was further made evident by Micco Gronholm’s suggestion *“What we try to do is that, we are trying to create social platforms where people living in the city can interact with each other and with us.”* Thorough this finding it was seen that the reach and types of social media outlets being considered are in addition developing further beyond networking sites and have now encompassed blogs and content communities. Thus in this regards it was possible to identify some instances of ‘a forward thinking’ approach to social

media usage, further reiterated by Mikeal Bystrom; *“may be the next thing will not be about Snapchat, may be the next thing will be about an application that we start marketing things based on my lifestyle.”* A proportion of DMOs are looking beyond the current offerings and into the future, with an attitude of willingness to *adapt*, *“it is just being bold and being brave”* – Anna Wittgren. However, to others *“with fast moving digital marketing initiatives...especially with social media it is hard sometimes to keep up”* Karoline Saether and Sofie Svensson.

As made evident by our findings all DMOs have some form of presence on social media which, however the extent to which it is used to its full capabilities is the main concern. Thus when reviewing our findings one could agree that with regards to social media they align with Hays, Page and Buhalis (2013) findings that indicate;

- DMOs are not currently utilising social media to their full effectiveness when it comes to their ability to interact and engage with consumers.
- Social media is not recognised or accepted as a vital tool with regards to marketing strategies thus is vastly underfunded and neglected.
- Increased innovation and creativity regarding social media strategies would vastly benefit DMOs.

However, perspectives offered by Anna Wittgren, indicate that in cases where there is an attempt to engage or interact with tourists, it occurs through the use of ‘user-generated content’ *“We are using other social media as a way of talking because people are never going to follow us.”* this particular comment reiterates Boyd and Ellisons (2008) suggestion that the non-exclusive dimension of social media prompts anyone to publish content in varying forms including, blogs, videos, wikis, reviews or photos. Overall, those in charge of its use held misunderstandings surrounding ways in which to engage or which platforms to utilise.

4.3 User-Generated Content, a love hate relationship

This particular section, aims to provide insight into perspectives and actions related to the integral component of the research question ‘user-generated content.’ As a component and outcome of social media, the outlook and emergence of UGC is not one that has been ignored by DMOs, however our research has highlighted and indicated the extent to which it is regarded as a positive feature, perceptions of negative content and possible variations in its usage.

4.3.1 Importance & Utility of user generated content

Our findings indicate that there does not exist a generic way in which user-generated content is utilised by DMOs. Partially aligning with the views on the use of social media as whole, what participants regarded as the utility of user generated content seems to be both subjective and extremely differentiated. The likes of Karoline Saether and Sofie Svensson acknowledged that by *“incorporating a direct feed from Instagram”* onto their website they utilise user-generated content. Furthermore, they ensure engagement by ‘liking’ and ‘commenting’ on particular content. If the latter approach of only liking and commenting on user-generated content was the

sole approach taken, DMOs would be unable to benefit from the vast volumes of content provided and as such there would be poor scalability (Munar, 2011).

The extent to which UGC was utilised by Anna Wittgren, indicated that it had governed much of the strategic decisions taken and to some degree determined the overall social media strategy,

“So we are not necessarily looking at expanding our channel. We got Facebook and Instagram ... but actually what is interesting for us is finding people from TripAdvisor ... and getting them the material they need and also get to them to say what we want.” Such finding seems to be an indication that UGC is perceived as being highly important.

The responses and attitude of Anna Wittgren, towards the use of user-generated content proved to echo suggestions made by Roque and Raposo (2016) that it is important to gain a solid understanding of the role played by user generated content in order to leverage any strategic knowledge and use it to an advantage. By incorporating UGC into her overall marketing strategy Anna Wittgren seems to be making proactive strides towards improving the destination image of Malmo. Anna’s perspective seems to ensure that UGC is seen and acted upon as a unique entity that assists in narrating memorable tourism experiences, as such it can be utilised in marketing strategies with the intention of improving a destinations image (Banyai & Glover, 2012; Pan, MacLaurin & Crotts, 2007).

Interestingly unlike Anna, Karoline Saether and Sofie Svensson utilise UGC in conjunction with more traditional strategies and prove to contradict suggestions that DMOs view social media as a substitute for pre-existing methods. As such when comparing the practices of Karoline Saether and Sofie Svensson to that of Anna Wittgren , the latter could potentially be seen as more future oriented due to the constant search for the innovation *“out in the digital world is where you need to be”* – Anna Wittgren . The former, Karoline Saether and Sofie Svensson, may be deemed as holding more of a traditionalist and sporadic approach to utilising UGC *“...It [user-generated content use] is still a work in progress... We do not have a written strategy we just do things as it comes along.”*

Our research indicates that one thing is for sure, respondents do not view UGC as a phenomenon or a simple passing trend but instead an element that must constantly be considered. In most instances there does still exist much reliance on firm produced content, as highlighted by Karoline Saether and Sofie Svensson:

“Much of the content is our own. We can probably use more [user-generated content] but we have not really decided how we are going to work with this. But at the moment we mainly use what we produce...we cannot really stop it or work against it. It is really something to work with and it is also a positive thing. And you can see that this is what people are asking for, so I think we can get better.” - Karoline Saether and Sofie Svensson

This finding indicates that although there exists a lack of insight and direction surrounding the use of UGC by some destination marketing organisations. There is a clear desire for more to be done due to realisation that it plays an inevitable role within the sector and industry. On the basis of the responses this open-minded approach to using user-generated content has been linked to the positive outcomes associated with its use.

4.3.2 A look on the positive side

There were varying advantages based on the DMOs understanding of the possibilities that exist with UGC. Those that had active strategies in place and perceived user-generated content in high regard and identified further insights into its advantages. Mikael Bystrom, indicated the ability to build a community of like-minded people, with similar interests and lifestyles based on user-generated content, “...*the driving forces in destination branding and destination marketing in the future is the use of user content in lifestyle communities,*” - Mikeal Bystrom.

“we are looking at a possibility now to create a platform where we listen to conversations about the city and can interact where we feel, for instance, if somebody is annoyed” - Micco Gronholm

These findings from Micco Gronholm and Mikeal Bystrom indicate that some DMOs are able to benefit further from such communities by receiving a better understanding of their target audiences and any issues they face. This insight is additionally supported by the future intentions of Micco Gronholm and as such it could be perceived that the handling of issues indicated by UGC can act as a means through which tourist satisfaction levels can be increased.

Anna provided the following insight on a social media user *“he has got 1.5 million people following him on Facebook. Do you see what I mean, So we are changing. We are using other social media as a way of talking because people are never going to follow us.”* Therefore, in the eyes of Anna Wittgren in this instance the large pool of resources and network size of this social media user is perceived as an advantage and means of accessing a wider audience.

“It is great because you get much more pictures and ideas and the quality is shown in a much better way than we can ever do because we can never go to these parties and that’s good but if someone is not happy about going to Lund” – Karin Lilja An additional positive perspective of the user-generated content is seen through Karin’s insights, which indicates and reaffirms that of Anna Wittgren, being that; user-generated content provides destination marketing organisations with increased content from a wide pool, they may otherwise have not had. Leading to the generation of increased content, that is readily available and in essence reducing the efforts of DMOs in creating such content.

Overall, despite initial findings indicating mixed understandings surrounding user-generated content, there seems to exist a unanimous perspective that UGC does provide positive benefits.

Dealing with the inevitable – negativity

Findings throughout our research provided us with an array of insights that covered the positive viewpoints associated with user-generated content However, as it was later discovered, perceptions and opinions were not without their negative insights.

The inability to screen or moderate content created by users has to some extent, sent a wave of fear and uncertainty through several DMOs, this is as in essence anyone can post, either positive content or as feared by DMOs, negative. Negative content can have rippling effects due to its ability to go viral and impact the destinations through the posting of bad pictures, comments or blog posts

What was uncovered throughout the research however was the mind-set utilised when dealing with negativity. Anna Wittgren, has encountered the situation in which negative user-content and comments became common place after a promotional visit Malmo video was created and posted to social media, comments included negative thoughts on the city and reviews indicating that the video did not depict the true reality of the city. In some cases, such occurrences could cause DMOs to disengage. However, what came as a surprise was Anna Wittgren's insight into how positive content and commentary from other users who were essentially a part of the online 'community' emerged to tackle the negative content "*people started saying, this is not Malmo, Malmo is crap blah blah. Actually we didn't have to say anything because people went in and said you're saying rubbish.*" Anna Wittgren went on to provide us with further insights by suggesting that negative-user generated content had not only been created by tourists but also others within the tourism ecosystem, as promotions by the airline Wizz Air had not presented the idea of Malmo as a tourist destination, in the best light. Such occurrences from our perspective may not have been regarded as instances of negative user-generated content, however from the interviewees' suggestions, this was regarded in the same way as that of the negative commentary on the promotional video. The ways in which this instance was handled however differs as Anna Wittgren mentions, an attempt was made to provide them with 'firm-produced' content that was created by the DMO, such an approach was not forced onto the stakeholder as Anna Wittgren noted that if the approach to provide their own produced content did not work they would just have to deal with it "*if that doesn't work, we happily go along with theirs.*"

Thus by looking at the reaction of Anna Wittgren towards negative content, it can be seen that there are instances in which the DMO can take a non-controlling perspective. Such views are held in similar regards by the likes of Johan Gromark, Marcus Andersson and Mikael Bystrom all of whom held the view that it can cause more harm than good if negative content is not acknowledged. This particular view proved of interest as it brought about the idea of transparency, which as suggested by Katsoni, (2014) transparency in the marketplace is a result of web 2.0. Our findings as such indicated that if DMOs are transparent by embracing the negative, not attempting to cover it and even in some cases utilising it within their strategies, as was the case with Sweden mentioned by Johan Gromark then it can actually enhance the view of a destination to tourists, making seem not only forward thinking but 'real' and able to handle the negatives.

"at one point they had the nation branding inside Sweden, instead of just having like smiling people and positive image..., some stories about our past which was not that good, people all over the world thought that this was so cool that they actually took a bad message and discussed on the web page." – Johan Gromark

This finding was further supported by Mikael Bystrom who added the dimension that;

"People will understand that everything can't be perfect in a place. They will be fine with that. They will expect nothing less. So it shows you are aware of efficiencies of the place or bad product and work to improve the product ... You have to have the transparency, you live in an aquarium and get used to it. You have to tell the truth and be honest about it. No we don't have this tool here, there is no sea in Lund. But we have a lot of other qualities. Instead of coming up with a Tweet like no, but it is very close to a sea ... because now the weaknesses will be

revealed already when we look at it on the internet. Unlike ten years ago when you had to actually go to places”- Mikael Bystrom

These findings indicate that the attitudes taken by the majority of DMOs has been to remain authentic throughout the occurrence of negative UGC, due to the fact that the results of false promotion or content could be easily be uncovered.

Despite what may be seen as a consensus towards dealing with negative user-generated content. Not all findings indicated that DMOs knew or had a strategy in place for when such instances would occur;

“But it is a balance all the time. We haven’t really landed on what is best yet. But I think it is important to be more authentic. People would like to see the kind of life around here”- Karoline Saether and Sofie Svensson

“For example if a person has tweeted in spring how he hates the municipality of Lund, we had pretty much this sort of thing, if it is on our Facebook that you can have conversation and it is always a private message to ask them,. But on Twitter it is pretty quick because it has shorter space so it’s more impersonal so you don’t really send personal message in the same way and it is so fast and it could reach much more people. And I think that is difficult and I really don’t know what to do with this situation” – Karin Lilja

The fear of having to deal with instances that could arise in negativity has meant that the likes of Karin Lilja may ‘play it safe’ when creating strategies for engagement that are aligned with UGC.

4.3.3 Restrictions for implementing UGC

As it was outlined in the literature review the extent of UGC utilized within the branding strategies is not only defined by the overall perceptions of the DMOs, but there are also some other factors that play a key role in its implementation and can be defined as obstacles on the way of the UGC incorporation. As such are perceived the multiple stakeholders, missing accurate measurement tools, various segments, fast changing market preferences and the lack of human and/or monetary resources (Wang & Pizam, 2011; Baker, 2007; Morgan, Pritchard & Piggott, 2002). The restrictions provided by the literature align with the insights delivered by the interviewed DMOs as you can see further in this section.

Most of the interviewees mention limited budget and human resources as main obstacles, but they attach different meanings to them. For example, Karoline Saether and Sofie Svensson described as a main obstacle the people shortage. Currently, they are five people doing everything in the Tourist office. In addition they argue that not only the fact that they are not enough people working on the development of Lund as destination makes the implementation of UGC more difficult, but also the fact that most of them have better knowledge of traditional marketing. Even though they try to keep up with the phenomenon, they still need some more time to be able to embrace it more efficiently. However, another interesting point of view was mentioned by one of the interviewees, who argued that sometimes having the right people with

a high level of social media knowledge might still not be profitable. His believe is based on the fact that to work in a small city, which has a long history as a brand heritage, it is necessary to know all that hidden facts in order to develop the unique brand message and to embrace the right UGC.

On the other hand, DMOs who have no restrictions in terms of budget and team of professionals face other impediments. Such case is outlined through Anna Wittgren's attitudes. As analysed in the strategy section the main goal of her and her team is to develop such destination brand that is always a step ahead of the current trend and to be at the edge of competition. Therefore, the restriction that appears within their work is the always changing market preferences. Their main goal is to understand "what you want when you go abroad so we do this exercise all the time." In addition to this Micco Gronholm adds that the market based on the constantly changing lifestyle patterns became so unpredictable that it is impossible for them to know what will happen in a year so that they can fully develop a strategy that is well planned and relies on UGC input. This attitude is reflected upon Mikael Bystrom's opinion about the high degree of unpredictability provoked by the constant and fast pace of social media evolving. *"But maybe the next thing will not be about Snapchat, may be the next thing will be about an application that we start marketing things or we start marketing things in application that is close to my lifestyle"*.

Another interesting case that was outlined within our findings is the situations in which stakeholders with higher authority can hinder DMOs' attitudes towards destination branding strategies and innovative phenomenon such as UGC. Since in the destination branding process there are many stakeholder who poses various interests, capabilities, authority and understanding of the destination brand, it is a challenging process to develop a successful brand image that is recognized by all of them (Wang & Pizam, 2011; Gnoth, 2002). For this reason, it is necessary all the diverse stakeholders to actively participate in the phases of the destination brand creation and to co-create together a unified brand message (Morgan, Pritchard & Piggott, 2002). This theory aligns with the brand consultant's opinion Marcus Andersson, who believe that: *"There is a co-creation participative approach, where you really work with the stakeholders"*.

However, in some cases such as Lund it can happen that some of the stakeholders restrict the DMOs to fully integrate new concepts such as the UGC. Besides budget and limited human capacity another hardship for cities might be political restrictions. In this situations is does not matter what the attitudes of the destinations brand managers are since they are legally restricted in their work. Therefore, in the case of Lund the DMOs have seen the necessity of incorporating UGC while the phenomenon was arising but it's fully embracement was hindered, because they were not allowed to use some social media channels for Lund branding until 2014. However, since than a lot have changed and even though they interact much more with customers, they still need more resources in order to keep up with the increasing importance UGC for more transparent and powerful destination branding.

4.3.4 Risks, a crippling effect or necessary push

The game of strategy

Further insights into our findings revealed that the occurrence of negative user-generated content was not the only perceived risk with regards to user generated content. There were varying attitudes towards possible cases in which strategy was changed too dramatically, from his response to ideas that strategies would no longer utilise traditional techniques such print media when it came to engaging tourists. Marcus Andersson suggested that although social media is important and utilising user-generated content was crucial the likes of traditional marketing techniques were still important *“Print media is not dead, people want these kind of things as well, in addition to, social media it can be carried out online and offline.”* Thus in DMOs believing otherwise they face risks of shutting out tourists who may not be interested in social media, Mikeal Bystroms perspective towards strategic changes may not be that of being a risk taker, but instead taking more caution. Such an approach differs to that of Anna, for whom dramatic strategic changes are seen as a push to innovate *“we have always been thinking traditional like thinking we need to create huge campaigns to everybody to get there. That’s the wrong idea. We need to keep going where [Innovation] goes, so that is a huge strategy thing we are doing with media in general and also social media”*– Anna Wittgren.

Holding on or letting go – the risk of losing control

Findings from Micco Gronholm’s interview present the insight that DMOs never truly determine or control the destination brand image *“the place itself can be in constant development but the image is fixed.”* As such it is possible this risk is not perceived as being of importance to the likes of Micco Gronholm as control is never truly lost, since it was never owned by DMOs. However, Anna provides a varying perspective of this risk, although she describes her strategies and vision for the use of UGC as being *‘innovative’* she refers to the ability to get users to *“say what we want them to say”* thus attempting to still control the brand image by finding ways to publish content guided by DMOs through the guide of being user generated, the ways in which this been achieved has been with the use of ambassadors.

You create, I dictate - the use of ambassadors, an unexpected twist

From our findings key influencers have been recognised as ambassadors and have been selected by DMOs to communicate and portray a message to other tourists, *“saying you are an important person. You need to come and experience us. And then they will talk about it or write about it or whatever they do”* – Anna Wittgren. Mentioned across all interviews the definition, role and importance of ambassadors is one that seems to vary.

Findings from Karoline Saether and Sofie Svensson, indicate that they are both willing and positive about the use of ambassadors as is the case currently to them ambassadors exist by way of those who own businesses related to tourism within Lund, such as hotels and shops:

“we have a network of companies in Lund with the tourist industry and we also try to integrate and make them like ambassadors. So tourists might go to a shop, museum or hotel and get as much information there as compared to here. So that is also a part of spreading our message through ambassadors”

However, Karoline Saether and Sofie Svensson have also indicated the possibility of using tourists as ambassadors *“we have been thinking a lot about either having people living in Lund use our Instagram account for example and showing their Lund.”*

The extent to which these ambassadors produce content was not suggested, however the ways in which they are utilised varied, to some their purpose seemed to be about ultimately ensuring that tourists gain a positive image and experience of the city thus it could be suggested would lead to the creation of positive user-generated content. In contrast to Karoline Saether and Sofie Svenssons use of ambassadors is that of Anna Wittgrens.

Through our findings it could be seen that to Anna an ambassador did not need to be a person who resided in the destination, in this instance Malmo but instead one who had the ability to influence a vast global following and in addition a tourist who may have had a positive experience whilst in Malmo. The role of the ambassador, differed further to that of those utilised in Lund as they were used to create content that adhered to the image the destination marketing organisation wanted to create, said content would then be published on blogs, Facebook, Instagram or other social media outlets.

“We need to make sure that people talk about Malmo, say what we want them to say. I had meeting with a guy {blogger}, he has got huge followings on Facebook. And he goes around filming Malmo and people say “Hey, we want to go there”. A: It is a group we would never normally target towards and B: there is so many people like him out there talking about Malmo. We cannot say that he works for Malmo tourism. He has got 1.5 million people following him on Facebook his credibility is higher already. He has a lot of people” – Anna Wittgren

When looking at the reasons behind the use of an ambassador as suggested by Anna, it can be regarded as explicitly used for promotional purposes, but is underlined by the need to build trust. On this notion of building trust our findings indicate that *“People are sceptical towards communication. If the communication is coming from corporations or governments, it can be seen as propaganda. So you need to find a way to get the stakeholders to do it for you.”* Marcus Andersson The extent to which the DMOs referred to the use of ambassadors as means of generating trust varied, with Anna providing more of a focus on promotion and Micco Gronholm on that of branding and building the destination image;

“I think the best way to brand a place is to make the people who already are living there or having business there, make them your ambassadors. That should be your main aim” – Micco Gronholm.

Although, not taken into perspective when considering the type of platform to utilise, on the basis of our findings it could be suggested that Li and Bernoffs (2008) social media behavioural segments are considered when seeking those that are influencers and as such could be ambassadors.

Furthermore, our findings indicated that for some the role of content generated by ambassadors is one that has taken precedence in terms of strategic decisions and moulded future decisions on how a destination will be marketed;

“We used to target 90%, we now target 9% more and that is a big strategy change for us to who we actually market. No more campaigns, no more banners, none of that, get people to talk about us instead. Identify these people” – Anna Wittgren

To conclude, perspectives surrounding the use of ambassadors by DMOs regardless of their roles are optimistic. However, the extent to which DMOs feel comfortable providing control over content creation by ambassadors varies. In addition the extent to which content produced by ambassadors can be regarded as being ‘user-generated’ remains blurred as a criteria of UGC is that there is minimal manipulation and in addition is not representative of any organisation or industry, rather the users own personal reflexive (Munar, 2011). It could therefore be of importance to DMOs that the tone utilised by ambassadors remains authentic and content produced does not become overly regulated.

5 Discussion

By aligning the research question of this study with both the aim and the aforementioned findings, it has been possible to generate three overall themes that encompass the varying perspectives of DMOs towards the use of user-generated content. A comparison and review of DMO responses indicates that there are varying perspectives across elements that define user-generated these elements constitute those previously discovered throughout the first round of coding and include, the risks, strategies, challenges and utility of user-generated content and the importance of social media. The findings do not suggest that one perspective is better than the other but rather that all seven interviews fall into one of the three perspectives, but rather three; futurist, realist and traditionalist.

5.1 Futurist

Anna Wittgren & Micco Gronholm “*We are free to talk, it is like a blog. Everybody is free to publish in their own name*”

Although perspectives towards some form of integration between user-generated content and strategy was positive. Two of the interviewees, Anna Wittgren (Malmo) and Micco Gronholm (Helsingborg) provided insights that in comparison to other respondents highlighted not only their openness but also willingness to embrace new techniques with regards to UGC. Their perceptions towards the importance of UGC use were further reiterated by financial and human resources allocated to social media, these allocations included higher numbers of staff dedicated to specific activities related to UGC “*During the day. Every day. We always have staff on social media*”-Anna Wittgren. Although it cannot be said that the main priority of those with a futurist attitude is on user generated content, the content plays a critical role with these specific DMOs looking beyond the ‘phenomenon’ of UGC and being placed on the idea of ‘Ambassadors.’ Proving to be the ‘preferred’ means by which to both engage and interact with tourists, futurist DMOs express a willingness and preference in using content created by key people, known as ambassadors, as such going one step further with the idea of using UGC, possibly making them ahead of trends.

The idea of strategy is rather perceived as tactics whilst there seems to be a constant battle to be ahead of competition whilst keeping up with trends. Furthermore the idea of strategy/tactics used by futurists which sees the social media and UGC being addressed in its own right, validates the suggestion of Tham, Croy & Mair (2013) who suggest that UGC must be seen an acted upon as a ‘unique entity.’

Those that hold this perspective have seemed to focus on innovation as a response to the development of UGC therefore seeking new and more efficient uses “*we have always been*

thinking traditional like thinking we need to create huge campaigns to everybody to get there. That's the wrong idea. We need to keep going where [Innovation] goes, so that is a huge strategy thing we are doing with media in general and also social media"– Anna Wittgren. They could therefore be regarded as having a forward thinking perspective that keeps an eye out on trends and with willingness to adapt, thus aligning with Solis (2010) suggestion that the use of social media provides the opportunity to partake in mining of innovative ideas.

Our research indicates that the futurist mind-set is one that incorporates an element of bravery and courage with regards to decisions and actions to be taken evident with decision by Anna Wittgren Malmo to shutdown both the tourist centre and website, as such UGC can be regarded as having governed much of the social media strategies taken, such actions have been permitted of all perspectives futurists seem to have more of an understanding on the role played by user generated content in leveraging strategic knowledge (Roque & Raposo, 2013).

Patterns amongst this category indicates the proactive perception towards advancing the utility of user-generated content. The high level of importance placed engagement with users, reiterated that perspectives of the destination marketers role is that of a facilitator with regards to engagement. As a tool, futurists deem social media as playing an integral role in surviving the competitive destination marketing landscape. The futurist perspective additionally does not hide from negative user generated content.

Although UGC was discussed, conversation and preferences went into further depth about ambassadors, more specifically making use of ambassadors ensures that DMOs holding the futurist perspective have the option and ability to control content produced by key figures, although from the perception of users, it may not be known that the content by ambassadors is not completely impartial. The ability to identify such positive elements indicates that the likes of Anna Wittgren and Micco Gronholm, view what many may have deemed as negatives as advantageous.

As such it can be suggested that to the futurist perspective of UGC is that it is indeed a highly important and unique entity that assists in narrating memorable tourism experiences.

Overall it can be suggested that the futurist perception of UGCs contribution to destination branding and marketing, aligns with that of Sigala (2012) who suggests that user generated content assists destinations in understanding the existing image of a destination, further this perception is one that views UGC as playing more of a 'virtual mediator' role that allows for easier two-way interactions.

5.2 Realist

Mikael Bystrom/Marcus Andersson & Johan Gromark - *"Be honest to yourself and accept the fact that you have to embrace this openness and transparency"*

On the basis of the research it can be found that those who play a consultancy role within the DMO ecosystem possesses perspectives that are in one regard, open but in the other cautious

towards user generated content. Classed as ‘realists’ this group of DMOs, indicated that the use of ambassadors to spread knowledge about their experience of a particular location was of great importance.

Furthermore, the open mined approach not only acknowledged that negative user-generated content is common-place but that they further recommend embracing and learning from such instances. Thus showing tourists that the destinations attitude is both transparent, truthful and accepting (Katsoni, 2014). Our research indicates that the ‘realist’ perspective was one that acknowledged that DMO strategies are not only affected by this phenomenon of user generated content but also by the wider political environment of said location.

A key differential factor between what has been classed as a realist and futurist perspective, is that realists are open to the idea of utilising traditional techniques with regards to user generated content.

Furthermore, perspectives indicate that engagement strategies and use of user-generated content does not make up the majority of strategies but instead use of information created by DMOs still plays a substantial role. As such from the realist perspective, UGC cannot and should not become an integral part of the DMOs strategy, as is the case with futurists.

The realist attitudes towards overall social media and particularly UGC usage, embraces a more customised approach, rather than a generic ‘one size fits all’ perception. As such social media channels and content utilised must be revised on a case-by-case basis and used with caution.

5.3 Traditionalist

Karin Lilja, Sofie Svensson & Karoline Saether – *“We try to do as much as we can with the information that we have, but it sometime feel like it is not enough.”*

Although through our research it has become evident that many DMOs have taken both actions and a proactive mentality towards user-generated content, findings have further revealed there are those that possess an intent to incorporate UGC further. However do not do so due to limited resources, including know-how as suggested by Karoline Saether and Sofie Svensson (Gretzel et al. 2006).

“We can probably use more [User-Generated Content] but we have not really decided how we are going to work with this. But at the moment we mainly use what we produce...we cannot really stop it or work against it”

On this basis this group have been regarded as the ‘traditionalists.’ Our research indicates that this type of DMO have no real strategy or long-term perspectives regarding UGC, instead the destination brand trademarks are relied upon, as suggested by Blain, Levy & Ritchie, (2005) this approach should help create an emotional attachment.

As such a more sporadic approach to the use of user generated content is preferred. The view of UGC in light of our research suggests that amongst this group, ambassadors are limited to

local stakeholders within the destination such as local shop owners and hotels, as oppose to digital ambassadors championed by futurists and realists this is in part due to the fear of negative content being generated that may damage the destination image.

Perspectives do not shun the idea of strategies that focus on user generated content, however approach them with caution, much of the interaction that does take place revolves around simple 'commenting' and 'liking' of created content. As such much of the content placed on social media sites has been created by the organisation and thus can be classed as 'passive' and 'one-way engagement.' Thus more traditional strategies such as the use of print media and tourist information centres as still prominent, the traditionalist perspective therefore contradicts the findings of Gretzel (2006) who suggests that that DMOs view social media as a substitute for pre-existing methods.

Furthermore, the perspective concerning social media is one that is in low regards in comparison to that of the futurist and realist. As such limited resources both human and financial are allocated, thus leading to uniformed and inexperienced staff handling user-generated content.

With regards to innovation there does not seem to exist a time frame or rush to compete with new innovative ideas and as such the traditionalist perspective is one that can be regarded as taking on more of the follower as oppose to leader form. Due to the slow and often non engaging way in which user-generated content is utilised, it is possible to suggest that the traditionalist perspective of UGC exists because the type of tourist/traveller that may visit their destination is one that is not particularly concerned with social media. Additionally the destination may boast pre-established key drivers through which tourists may not necessarily need to be marketed to e.g. the draw of students to Lund due to its educational pull, thus students become tourists.

Overall the perspective of the 'traditionalist' seems to be one that acknowledges the existence of UGC, however does not regard it as being an overly important phenomenon that would require the replacement of traditional techniques. Additionally this perspective is backed by fear of making the wrong move in a world that anything can become viral via social media.

When applying our research into Munars (2011) strategic frame of coping mechanisms, an array of interesting findings occurred. Firstly it can be suggested that the lines between each strategy, mimetic, advertising and analytic are extremely blurred and not as clear cut as described by Munar. Respondents such as Anna Wittgren demonstrated signs of utilising a mimetic strategy in the sense that her perspectives centred on keeping control of the destination image, however an additional trait of a mimetic strategy was that of DMOs being unable to benefit from the wide pool of content created by users, through our studies we found that this was not the case.

Although Munars (2011) mimetic strategy of coping with user-generated content did not seem to align with our findings, his second strategy (Advertising) was to some extent evident as a method utilised by some DMOs. The concept of utilising this strategy suggests that the approach taken by DMOs still remains a one-way communication format, as social media is utilised solely for promotional techniques. Throughout our study and based on our findings it

can be seen that the 'traditionalist' perspectives could be aligned with this strategy due to the lack of engagement and interaction that was found to be a characteristic of this group.

Thus, when relating the three perspectives, futurist, realist and traditionalist found throughout our study to that the coping strategies Munar (2011) suggested was employed by destination marketing organisations, it can be suggested that DMOs do not utilise clear cut and defined strategies such as mimetic, advertising or analytic. In place there exists an array of strategies backed by varying perspectives on user-generated content. Furthermore when taking into consideration Llodra-Riera et al's (2015) criteria of the principles that must be adhered to in order for content to be regarded as 'user-generated,' our findings indicated that one principle in particular 'must be created outside of professional practice' did not seem to a principle taken into consideration when utilising ambassadors. The futurist perspective in particular that of Anna Wittgren indicated that user-generated content created by ambassadors could be based on DMO professional influence. Thus although Llorda-Riera et al (2015) provide an initial basis for the principles of UGC and its traits, this finding of co-created ambassador generated content may provide a new dimension to the suggested principles.

6 Conclusion

Inspiration for this study was drawn from the fact that through their own visual and narrative posts on social media tourists have come to play an extremely active role in the formation of a destination image. What makes the research topic of further interest is that currently there are destinations that to some extent align their marketing strategies with the content provided by these tourists (Munar, 2011). On this basis, the study aimed to contribute to managerial insights within field of destination branding and marketing through the research question “*What are the overall perspectives of Destination Marketing Organisations on user-generated content?*” Taking on the form of an exploratory study, the research focused on understanding the perspectives of destination marketing organisations towards content that has been produced outside the realm of professional environment, user-generated content.

To ensure that the purpose and aim of the study were met, data was collected through semi-structured qualitative interviews with seven experts in the field of destination branding and marketing. Although, a focal point of the study was on that of user-generated content, our findings indicated that a range of factors can be attributed to perspectives held on user generated content. These included; current strategies, perceived risks and restrictions and an overall understanding of social media and the field of destination marketing itself.

On the basis of our findings it was possible to identify that all DMOs viewed user-generated content as being of some importance. The extent of this importance and on analysis of current strategies, it was ultimately possible to identify three overall perspectives held by destination marketing organisations towards user-generated content; Futurist, Traditionalist and Realist.

Destination marketing organisations that poses a ‘futurist’ perspectives were identified as being ahead of trends with regards to social media content. To them the idea of user-generated content was no longer a trend, it has instead become a key component in their marketing strategy and in some cases has overtaken traditional tourism marketing techniques including the use of webpages. Futurists ensure that they dedicate both financial and human resources to monitor and facilitate social media and user-generated content, where negative content is embraced with a brave mind-set. However, although it may seem that the perspective of the ‘futurist’ is one that is non-controlling, there still remains an element of uncertainty with letting go of control and non-monitoring of user-generated content, as such futurists may incentivise or promote certain forms of what they regard as user-generated content that has been created by preselected influential ambassadors.

In contrast, the study identified that the ‘realist’ perspective openly embraces user-generated content, however, some caution is taken in using it in place of professionally produced content. These DMOs perceived transparency as a key element, with the perception that negative content should be embraced and any attempts to paint a positive destination image should be done in collaboration with ambassadors.

The third perspective has been regarded as more traditionalist. Those that held this perspective acknowledged the growing trend towards the use of user-generated content. However, its use was not classed as a priority, thus a passive approach was taken to utilising content with limited resources dedicated to its management. Realists indicated a lack of clear strategy and sporadic approach to the issues that arise with negative content.

What proved of particular interest as a result of our findings was the importance placed on the idea of ambassadors. The vast majority of respondents held a positive perspective on the use of ambassadors producing content under the guise of user-generated content, although this would be with some guidance of the DMOs.

6.1 Theoretical contributions

As outlined in a study conducted on ‘tourist created content’ by Munar (2011) the topic of destination branding and marketing in relation to user-generated content is highly unexplored. Therefore, on the basis of the three perspectives identified by our research, the theoretical contribution of this study is that of a more in-depth managerial perspective. Thus, it utilises comprehensive data to outline the varying perspectives toward user-generated content. Our study reaffirms existing theory that discusses the importance of UGC within the field and goes one step further by delivering topical managerial perspectives rather than the more commonly researched consumer perspective. Moreover, the study provides additional insights about innovative ways user-generated content is being implemented into the strategies of DMOs’, more specifically through the use of ambassadors as content generators.

Furthermore, an essential theoretical contribution is the fact that the study provides a managerial outlook on key terminology, ‘destination’ and ‘place’ branding which is commonly ignored or misrepresented within literature. Although the practitioners argue that place and destination branding encompass different tasks, they acknowledge that DMOs must build only one unified place and destination brand in order to achieve a coherent image.

6.2 Practical contributions

With regards to the perspectives of destination marketing organisations on user-generated content, the study provides an understanding of existing and new concepts such as the utility of ambassadors through the lens of the interviewed professionals. To ensure that in future this paper plays a value-adding role to practitioners the study explains the resulting advantages for destination brands after utilising UGC and in addition possible risks or challenges that may arise. Furthermore, the findings of the study in terms of the three different DMOs’ perspectives may provide a benchmark for current practitioners against their own strategies. As well as an understanding of how user-generated content can be utilised by destination marketing organisations that are yet to use it.

6.3 Limitations and future research

Aside from the previously mentioned methodological implementations, further limitations were uncovered throughout the course of the study. One of the major issues recognised was the fact that our focus was mainly on one field i.e. destination branding and marketing. However, in order to be highly representative and provide a broader understanding, further insights relating to place branding and marketing could have been utilised. In doing so, it would have proved possible to define whether or not DMOs must approach a place and destination brand differently with regards to UGC. Additionally, it is of essence to mention that although this research depicts the current perspectives with relation to strategies and risks on user-generated content, more in-depth research related solely on the risks of utilising user-generated content may prove to be of more use to managers when deciding on a social media marketing strategy that encompasses user-generated content.

Due to the unanimous preference of interviewees towards the use of ambassadors as a source of content creation and the limited research relating to this phenomenon, future studies focusing on the role and importance of social media ambassadors and the possible idea of ‘Ambassador-Generated Content’ in building the image of a destination may prove helpful and advantageous to destination marketers.

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8 Appendix

8.1 Appendix A – Visit Sweden Logo



8.2 Appendix B – Interview guide

The ‘real’ marketers

Destination Branding and Marketing 2.0

Research question: What are the overall perceptions of destination marketing organizations on user-generated content?

Methodology: Semi-structured interviews

Interview guideline:

We would like to start with you giving us an insight into what your role currently entails?

What are the current biggest challenges/obstacles within the industry?

How has the way in which you engage and interact with the audience changed over time?

How has the rise of social media affected the tourism industry in your opinion? Tell us about the current tourism strategies you have in place.

How do you go about engaging and interacting with your target audience?

What are your opinions on social media outlets that have lead to the rise of user--- generated content?

How do you embrace user---generated content?

How has your strategy evolved over the past three years?

Do you consider that tourists today have gained more power over the destination brand communication? If so, in what way?

What do you think is the right strategy (What is the most preferred strategy) in cases where your brand is positively or even negatively targeted?

What you say are the risks that have evolved from increased customer control over the past years?

Has the onset of social media changed the way in which you market? Has social media become an integral part of your strategy?

8.3 Appendix C - Ethical and Consent Disclaimer

Informed Consent Form MSc IMBM dissertation research

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Project Title: Destination Branding 2.0

Researcher: Sally-Anne Amakye and Desislava Nedelcheva

We would like to thank you for your interest being a part of our research. Prior to the any agreement to partake in the research interview, it is imperative that the purpose of the research is explained and the process outlined.

If you have any questions regarding points mentioned, please feel free to ask the researcher before giving your consent. Furthermore, for your reference you will be given a copy of this Consent Form.

Participant's Statement

I agree that:

- I understand that if I decide at any time that I no longer wish to take part in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and withdraw immediately.
- I agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in this study.

Signature:

Date: