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# Tourist Experiences & Zoo Tourism: A case study of Tropikariet

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## **Abstract**

Zoos have been gaining increased popularity from tourists in recent years, as many people feel distant from wildlife and thus are eager to experience closeness with animals. The aim of this paper is to analyse tourist experiences of modern zoo tourism and the research question asked is “What types of tourist experiences are tourists gaining when visiting a modern zoo?” To achieve this aim, knowledge from previous studies on tourist experiences and theoretical perspective discussing these experiences, in particular experiences of wildlife tourism and modern zoos, are presented in the literature review. Empirically the study applies two qualitative research methods, semi-structured interviews and a netnography to the case of Tropikariet Zoo in Helsingborg, Sweden. Data was collected from 103 online comment reviews of Tropikariet from TripAdvisor and 10 interviews with visitors to the zoo. Grounded theory was utilized to code the data, and eight dimensions of tourist experiences were found in the process. They are: entertainment, social interactions, aesthetic, educational values, uniqueness, ease of facilities, negative experience, and subjective well-being.

The results of the study comes with significant social implications, showing how modern zoos are becoming one of the most attractive tourism destinations in cities, as they offer a chance for people to get closer to wildlife. Furthermore, based on the findings in the empirical study conclusions are drawn about how zoo destinations might work to create more memorable tourist experiences for their visitors, for example in terms of improving the on-site guiding, but also regarding developing modern zoos as more sustainable tourist destinations.

**Keywords:** tourist experience, wildlife tourism, modern zoo tourism

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# 1 Introduction

*This chapter introduces the reader to some central concepts related to understanding tourist experiences, in particular experiences of modern zoos. The importance of these concepts and of understanding tourist experiences will be highlighted and knowledge gaps within the field of tourism studies focusing on wildlife and zoo tourism will be identified. Furthermore the chapter presents the aims and research questions of the thesis and outlines how the choice of perspectives will help gain an understanding of tourists experiences of modern zoos.*

The first zoos in the Western world came into existence in the mid 1800's. These were often private menageries of wealthy and affluent people who showcased exotic animals and plants (Berger 2009, p. 21) and in many regards very different to zoo's today. As noted by Berger (2009, p. 21) zoos started becoming popular in the West at the same time as an increasing number of people left the countryside and their previous rural lives to move into the cities. Through urbanization, people became increasingly distanced from the natural world, and from animals, causing a "resurgent interest in wildlife nature and animals through a romanticized way" (Wolch, West & Gaines, 1995, p. 736). Throughout the 20th and 21st century, these romanticized and idealized visions of wild nature and animals have been prolific in nature documentaries and television shows (Higginbottom & Gina, 2003) creating interest in wildlife and in experiencing animals in wildlife like settings. Wildlife recreational outlets have become increasingly popular as tourist destinations, as they help fill the social and cultural voids created when the distance to the natural world is increasing for many people (Curtin, 2005; Decker, Riley & Siemer, 2012; Reynolds & Braithwaite, 2001).

This general interest in nature and nature-based experiences can be seen reflected in an increased demand for these experiences among tourists, and an increased value being placed on seeing animals in a more natural environment (Gauthier, 1993). Wildlife operators, like zoos and aquariums, are established destinations for tourists as they are often located in the city and thus are easily accessible for visits, making them a frequent first choice of attraction. In recent times, zoos have begun to offer experiences that contain more natural interactions with animals (Ballantyne, Packer, Hughes & Dierking, 2007). As opposed to more traditional

zoo's that are often designed so as to keep animals in cages behind bars, modern zoos are more popular and have a more "open" exhibition design - one that takes the animals' welfare into consideration, something that is becoming increasingly popular among tourists. As Nekolny and Fialova (2018, p. 153) points out "zoos are one of the most visited tourist attractions worldwide", and therefore, there is a need to research modern zoo tourism and the experiences that tourists get from these visits.

### **1.1 Knowledge gap**

Although wildlife tourism experiences can provide people with emotional, psychological, and physical benefits (Curtin, 2005) the experiential dimensions of wildlife tourism has so far not been widely integrated into tourism experience studies (Schänzel & McIntosh, 2000). Today the tourism industry is widely seen as "the fastest growing business around the world, involving tens of millions of employees and hundreds of millions of customers" (Higginbottom & Gina, 2003, p. 8). With the growth in the tourism industry since the 1960's, increased attention has been given to the tourist experience as a key research issue and important field of study (Zatori, Smith, & Puczko, 2018). The tourism industry is becoming more and more visitor-oriented and interested in facilitating the experiences that will best satisfy their customers.

This is particularly evident in wildlife tourism such as modern zoos, where the visitors experience intense feelings when they build a connection with the natural environment and animals (Bulbeck, 2012). As a result, there is clearly a need for a deeper understanding of wildlife tourist experiences analyzing tourists' thoughts and emotions (Kim, Ritchie & McCormick, 2012). This holds true for wildlife tourism in general, but in particular in relation to tourist experiences of modern zoos. Zoos are one of the most popular tourist attractions and have an important role to play in wildlife tourism. When compared to hunting and fishing, the kinds of wildlife activities in zoos and aquariums can be seen as a more non-consumptive "use" of wildlife and often a more sustainable one as well (Schänzel & McIntosh, 2000).

For a long time however few studies focused on modern zoos as tourist destinations, which leaves a space to be filled in the area of tourism literature (Turyley, 1999). While there are some previous studies that consider wildlife tourism experiences, most of them do not revolve around modern zoos, and the existing literature focuses primarily on Asia, America, New Zealand, and Australia (Grazian, 2012; Schänzel & McIntosh, 2000; Woods, 2000).

Existing research into the area of wildlife tourism can be roughly divided into two main areas. Firstly, there has been much focus on sustainability and on examining the values of conservation (Gauthier, 1993; Reser & Bentrupperbäumer, 2005). Studies examine how the tourism process affects the destination in a long-term period and if it provides benefits for both environmental and animals' well-being (Nekolny & Fialova, 2018). Reynolds and Braithwaite (2001) for example, claim that the sustainable conservation of the natural world and animals should be seen as interlinked with the benefits to the tourist's personal experiences.

Secondly, research into wildlife tourism has focused on the destination aspect where research has been conducted into tourists' satisfaction levels and expectations. This research is often aimed at wildlife operators by detailing how they can improve their products and services to offer better visitor satisfaction in general, and enhance profitability (Braithwaite, Reynolds & Pongracz, 1996; Reynolds & Braithwaite, 2001). Some scholars argue that "research on zoo tourists-related outcomes are largely confined to service-based outcomes, containing word-of-mouth advertising, visitor satisfaction and repeat patronage" (Wijeratne, Dijk, Kirk-Brown & Frost, 2014, p. 149).

The works of literature within the subfield that aims to understand wildlife tourists mostly apply motivational and expectational research methods, usually focusing on the tourists motivations, goals, and desired outcomes (Curtin, 2005). However, these methods come with certain shortcomings. Arnould and Thompson (2005) argue that for first-time customers, expectations are usually very fuzzy or non-existent. Thus, assessing satisfaction in this way, based on how much an experience fulfilled one's expectations, cannot be applied to all situations and does not aid in understanding the nature of every experience. For customers arriving with uncertain expectations, the emotions gained through their experiences may be



more direct and intense, as well as dynamic and vivid. They mainly have memorable experiences based on spontaneous emotions occurring during their wildlife tourism encounter (Zatori & Puczko, 2018).

A considerable body of literature has also been published on wildlife tourism which utilizes the idea of a “cognitive hierarchy”, and builds on insights from social psychology (Jacobs, 2009). This framework of analysis, including values, value orientations, attitudes and norms, and behavioral intentions, emphasizes that values belong to a hierarchy of cognition, which is the basis for human behavior (Jacobs, 2009). While this cognitive approach is widely applied in wildlife tourism, the way individual tourists express their own experiences is an area of inquiry that has not been in as much focus, and the personal and emotive context of visitors’ experiences has been overlooked in many previous wildlife tourism studies.

In sum, while there is some previous research about tourist experiences of wildlife tourism, it seems clear that there is a need for a deeper and more qualitative understanding of these experiences from the tourists’ own perspective. This includes how they express in their own words the way it feels to interact with wildlife, animals, and nature, and how their tourist experiences can best be categorized. Another aspect of the previous research on zoo tourism that needs to be taken into consideration is the quickly changing nature of modern zoos, and their difference to more traditional zoos and zoo experiences. Modern zoos have their own evolution continuum (Reynolds & Braithwaite, 2001) and can be seen as distinguished from traditional zoos in many ways. The design of these zoos aim to provide a better environment for both the animals and the tourists’ satisfaction. “Conservation” and “education” are two words that appear in modern zoo research quite frequently, and this shows one of the ways that modern zoos position themselves in the tourism industry. Modern zoos also usually design their spaces specifically to build a sense of immersion for visitors. Following this, it is reasonable to believe that the kind of values and meanings tourists are gathering from their modern zoo experiences are rather different than those of more traditional zoos, and thus something that needs to be furthered research, especially considering the impact of personal experience engagement on the whole tourism industry. (Ballantyne, Packer & Sutherland, 2011). Additionally, most of the existing research on wildlife tourism focuses on America, Asia, New Zealand, and Australia (e.g. Moscardo, Pearce, Morrison, Green & O’Leary,

2000; Wijeratne et al., 2014; Woods, 2000). With the lack of research about wildlife tourism in Europe and Sweden, and also considering the quickly changing nature of modern zoo destinations and their difference to more traditional forms of zoos (Nekolny & Fialova, 2018), there is a clear research gap into how tourists experience modern zoo's in a contemporary Swedish setting, which is the focus of this thesis.

## **1.2 Aims and research questions**

Curtin (2005) asserts that tourist experience should be a major research priority, not least for the sustainable management of zoo tourism destinations. While the direction in many studies of zoo tourism have been to research tourists' expectations and compare them with their reported experiences after, this study is interested specifically in first time and/or spontaneous zoo visitors, where expectations are not very significant or do not even exist. At the same time these tourists can certainly still experience moments of satisfaction and unforgettable memories of their visits, experiences that this study wants to shed light on.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse tourist experiences of modern zoo tourism in order to contribute to a deeper understanding of the meaning of modern zoo tourism and how it has developed in conjunction with society and culture and the tourism industry at large. In addition, the aim is also to outline how understanding these experiences can help to give recommendations to zoo managers and organizations that strive to improve the tangible and intangible qualities of zoo tourism's products and services. To achieve this aim, the main research question for this thesis is:

*What types of tourist experiences are tourists gaining when visiting a modern zoo?*

The question will be answered using theoretical perspective from tourism studies and using empirical material from a case study of the zoo Tropikariet in Helsingborg.

## **1.3 Societal relevance**

Zoos are not just tourist attractions, they can also be understood as a reflection of local culture, nature, and human relationship with wildlife (Nekolny & Fialova, 2018). As a bridge

between local communities and unique natural destinations, zoos are popular and common around the globe, especially as modern zoos not only exhibit animals but also exotic and attractive habitats (Benbow, 2000). Sweden's zoos are actively participating in international breeding and conservation projects and these zoos are developing together with society and culture; they should not be ignored by the tourism industry. Understanding tourists and their experiences is a key aim of tourism research and an important requirement for informing high quality tourism business practices (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018). It is essential for creating superior value to destinations in order to build a competitive advantage for modern businesses and improve customer experiences (Aho, 2001). In the tourism industry, the design of experiences depends on creating activities to attract visitors. Understanding tourists' personal experiences is thus useful for businesses to learn about customer culture, and rework and design their products to enhance those unique tourists' experiences (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

#### **1.4 Overall structure**

Following this introduction, the second part of the thesis examines existing works of literature in the field of wildlife tourism experiences. It then combines these theories to construct a conceptual framework for a more in-depth understanding of tourists experiences of modern zoos, a framework that is subsequently used both to find an appropriate method for gathering data and, later, for analysing the same data. The third chapter gives an overview of the case study and of Tropikariet. It outlines the methodology of the thesis, a qualitative study using mixed documentary study, and semi-structured interviews, The results section shows examples of the data collected from 10 semi-structured interviews and 124 online comment reviews from TripAdvisor.com in order to answer the research question. In the final parts of the thesis the data collected is analysed using the theoretical perspectives from the literature reviews, as well as discussing limitations of the study and future directions for research within wildlife tourism and tourist experiences of modern zoos.

## **2. Literature Review**

*The main focus of this chapter is to give a review of previous research and theories relevant to answering the research question: What types of tourist experiences are tourists gaining when visiting a modern zoo? The literature review follows a structure of examining more general research before narrowing the focus to more specific research areas. It starts with outlining some of the basic understanding of customer experiences in a general service context, before concentrating on tourist experience in a tourism and wildlife tourism context, and last in the context of zoos specifically.*

### **2.1 Customer experiences in service contexts**

In a service management context, experience is typically defined as the subjective mental state felt by participants of the “mental, spiritual, and psychological outcomes resulting from on-site recreational engagements” (Schanzel & McIntosh, 2000, p. 37). Customer experience is created when “a company intentionally uses services as the stage and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event” (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). A good experience can provide customers with “sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and relational values and outcomes” (Saufi et al., 2017, p. 268). These customer outcomes may include feelings of fun and enjoyment, enjoying the escape from daily routines, sharing memorable time with family or friends, or learning, and they may also trigger stimulations to the senses, the heart, and the mind (Schmitt, 1999). As Dilthey (1985, p. 59) puts it “experience is essential to the soul as our body needs to breathe.” and it can be argued that people need the fulfillment and the emotional reverberance of these experiences.

Customer experience also has an effect on business outcomes such as economic and marketing performance, brand management, and competition with other companies (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Researchers have found that experience is a vital element which affects quality, and customer satisfaction (Rowley, 1999). For this reason, many companies are investing in ensuring their customers have memorable experiences of their products or services (Kim, 2012). In the tourism industry specifically, this has been a strong trend during

recent years, which is what the next section will look closer at.

## **2.2 Tourist experiences in general tourism**

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing service industries globally (Alsos, Eide & Madsen, 2014). This growth is not just a matter of economics, but can also be seen as a growth in the number of new products and experiences that tourism companies today offer their customers. Curtin (2005) believes that tourist consumption today is more focused on the buying of experiences than of products. While products are consistent, unique and more personal experiences can be considered to be of higher value to tourists (Oh et al, 2007). Tourism is no longer like it was in the 1970's only about the journey and the destination. Tourism and the tourism industry is undergoing extensive changes because of a transition to more experience-based products, which can be seen for example in themed guest rooms, eco-tourism destinations, meditation tourism destinations (Norman & Pokorny, 2017; Oh et al., 2007; Otto, 1996). In the shift to more experience based-products, what defines the tourist experience has become an increasingly studied question.

### **2.2.1 Defining the tourist experience**

The concept of "Tourist experience" is essential in contemporary tourism study and research. Tourist experience can be defined as "the way tourists think and feel at the time of the experience, how it will be recalled in the future, and how will it contribute to overall satisfaction with the total activity or trip" (Ritchie & Hudson, 2009, p. 114). The tourism industry has experienced fierce competition during recent years, which has forced tourism services to increasingly try to provide entertaining and memorable experiences for customers (Quadri-Felitti, & Fiore, 2012). The growing interest in experiences affects the whole tourism industry, encouraging companies to adapt and focus their offerings according to the current trend, as an essential component which influences the quality of experiences and visitors' satisfaction levels (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

There are different ways to understand tourist experiences. From the visitors' perspective,

Cohen (1979) attempts to understand tourist experience phenomenologically, and he defines tourist experience as the relationship between people and their total world view, dependent on the location in the society to which they belong (Dash & Samantaray, 2018). Tourists' experiences are different from each other based on the individual tourists. For example, some tourists are novelty seekers, and some are familiarity seekers (Larsen, Wolff, Doran, & Øgaard, 2019). Aho (2001) also argues that tourist experiences vary based on personal resources such as time, money, knowledge, and skills etc. All the views above lead to the research needing a better demographic and sociological understanding of tourists.

Another perspective is how to engage with the destination itself. Instead of simply being in a destination, visitors are participating, learning, and experiencing the destination in various ways (Trinh & Ryan, 2013). Aho (2001) summarizes tourist experience as emotional and learning experiences, recorded as mental imprints. Later Oh et al. (2007) expanded on Aho's (2001) theory, stating that everything tourists experience should be included in research. This includes visiting, seeing, learning, enjoying, and experiencing a different mode of life. Oh et al. (2007) further extends theory of tourist experience so that it can be behavioral or perceptual, cognitive or emotional. As a summary of the theories above, tourist experience may be defined as "a blend of many individual elements that come together and may involve the consumer emotionally, physically, and intellectually" (Walls, 2013, p. 180).

Tourist experience has received much attention in previous research because of its importance in enhancing customer relationships and businesses' economic performance. For example, tourist experience contributes to destination image building and tourists' satisfaction. When there is an encounter between visitors and tourist areas or outlets, it includes physical and emotional senses, and all those feelings are attached to individual tourist memories and experiences (Dagustani, Kartini, Oesman & Kaltum, 2018). Rageh, Melewar & Woodside (2013) propose that experiences mixed with exciting feelings help to make it up to consumers when they are not satisfied with the products, services, employees, or brand. A special experience yields stronger emotions, rather than just a feeling of satisfaction (Dagustani et al., 2018). Experience determines how tourists remember a destination and decide if it is worth revisiting.

### 2.2.2 The different dimensions of tourist experiences

In this section, the aim is to introduce different perspectives on what has been called the different dimensions of tourist experiences and provide an overview of this research area. As Oh et al (2007, p. 120) notes, everything tourists go through “is an experience”. The tourist experience has been studied in many different ways and from different starting points (MacCannel, 1973; Schmitt, 1999; Zatori & Puczko, 2018). In this thesis however, the focus lies on the tourists, and the kind of experiences that they are gaining as tourists.

Pine and Gilmore (1998) propose a theory addressing four dimensions that make tourists have a memorable experience of a destination. The first dimension is *entertainment* and is related to the tourist destination providing entertaining experiences to the tourist. A typical example could be a theme park with its different rides and attractions that is there to entertain. The second dimension is related to *educational experiences*. Pine and Gilmore shows for example how educational activities — such as surfing classes—that more actively involve tourists in the experiences at the destination makes them more willing to come back again. The third and fourth dimension mentioned by Pine and Gilmore are the dimensions of *aesthetics* and *escapism* which can both be seen as related, and are mostly used in relation to nature-related tourism. While the latter one concerns the tourists' experience of getting away from their daily routine, the former one similarly relates to experiences of being immersed in a totally different and often beautiful environment. Pine and Gilmore's theory has been fundamental for the field of study of tourism experiences, but also been critiqued, for example for not considering the tourists' emotions (Dash & Samantaray, 2018). Dash & Samantaray (2018) also argues that Pine and Gilmore's theory lacks a consideration of the physical conditions of tourist experiences and therefore adds a fifth dimension, *ease of facilities*. This dimension highlights the destination's service facilities, like parking spaces and restrooms in public spaces.

Other theories for understanding tourists' experiences have focused on the tourists' subjective and psychological experiences. Aho (2001) for example, proposes four essential elements of the tourist experience, some of which overlaps with Pine and Gilmore's dimensions, but that also has a more psychological focus. These are emotional experiences, learning experiences,

practical experiences, and transformational experiences (Aho, 2001, p. 33). Adding to the understanding of tourist experiences, Ballantyne et al. (2011) propose understanding these as a process rather than as a result and turns attention to what visitors see and hear (sensory impressions), what they feel (emotional affinity), how they are making comments and reflecting on what they saw (reflective response) and what they do about it (behavioral response).

As with Aho's theory, the perspective of Ballantyne et al. is useful for analyzing tourists' deeper emotions and other socio-psychological factors. What Aho and Ballantyne et al. also have in common is a focus on the tourists own viewpoints and opinions and on seeing the tourist experience as anchored in individual socio-psychological states. This also means an understanding of the tourist experience as much more varied depending on the individual tourist and his/her preferences. As Wickens (2002, p. 849) suggests, "in future studies, researchers should focus on multiple types of tourist experience, by identifying and examining the different micro-types, which are specific to the study's particular situation". This study will follow these suggestions and try to capture the individual tourists' experience of a specific form of wildlife tourism, modern zoo's.

### **2.3 Wildlife tourism and the wildlife tourism experience**

Wildlife tourism, which could also be referred to as nature-based tourism, is a significant branch of the tourism industry. The term wildlife tourism implies a complex area of overlap between nature-based tourism, ecotourism, consumptive use of wildlife, rural tourism, and human relations with animals (Reynolds & Braithwaite, 2001). It is based on encounters with non-domesticated (non-human) animals that can occur in either the animals' natural environment or in captivity (Musa et al., 2015). It is an opportunity for people to get away from urban city life, interact with nature, and perhaps to view rare or endangered wild animals. In many countries, wildlife tourism is a growing industry that supports "wildlife conservation" and "local communities" and further ensures sustainable economic benefits (Higginbottom, 2004, p. 23). Therefore, wildlife tourism has attracted the attention of scholars from many different time periods.



### **2.3.1 Motivations for wildlife tourism**

To understand tourist experiences in wildlife tourism, we first need to clarify what the motivation is for tourists to visit wildlife destinations (Duffus & Deardon, 1993). Because of increasing urbanization and mechanization, there is a push factor in society for people to leave the city and an urge exists to connect with nature again (Ballantyne et al., 2011). Besides just observing the animals, there is an increasing demand for tourists to have close experiences with wild animals in the surrounding nature-based environment, not just in a captive or semi-captive situation (Curtin, 2005; Gauthier, 1993). Reser & Bentrupperbaumer (2005) argue that the human need for contact with nature and emotional attachment to wildlife is significant in this process. Tourists value being physically close to the animals and interacting or communicating with them. Some studies reveal the best experiences are usually related to the close interactions with wild animals, “the closer the better,” is especially true in relation to marine wildlife (Curtin, 2005; Orams, 1997).

### **2.3.2 The wildlife tourism experience**

Tourist experience, together with destination conservation and animal welfare, are the three primary branches of existing wildlife research (Reynolds & Braithwaite, 2001). Despite its importance for wildlife research, Tremblay, Ouimet and Houle (2002, p. 164) argue that “there is a well-recognized lack of knowledge regarding the attributes of the wildlife tourism experiences”.

The original aims of wildlife tourism were to provide an entertaining experience, biological diversity, and offer a chance for visitors to observe animals which they may not otherwise see in daily life (Ballantyne, Packer & Hughes, 2009). While education experience as another key aim of wildlife tourism, it has evolved considerably in recent years (Curtin, 2005). For example, making the visitors aware of the need to protect the environment and maintain biodiversity, species, habitats, recreation, research, and conservation (Ballantyne et al., 2011, p. 770; Reynolds & Braithwaite, 2001). Besides entertainment and education, more kinds of tourist experience appear in the wildlife tourism context. For example, Reynolds & Braithwaite (2001) propose a theory which is useful for very detailed analysis of wildlife tourist experience. It concerns four stakeholders: tourists, companies, employees, and animals.

Relevant factors for analyses include: the educational level of observers; communication with others who have previously visited the attraction; communications with the guide (animal keeper); knowledge level of the tour guide (if applicable); on-site interpretation aides; using sounds or food to attract animals thereby increasing sense of intimacy; making exclusive experiences to allow tourists feel special or lucky (Reynolds & Braithwaite, 2001).

Among the relevant publications, Kellert (1976) proposes a typology of nine attitudes (also referred to as values of wildlife) which receive broad attention. This typology is based on human behavior and is guided by the cognitive hierarchy. His typology describes the experiences as: utilitarian, naturalistic, ecology scientific (concern habitat and animals from biological functions), aesthetic, symbolic, humanistic, moralistic, dominionistic, and negativistic. In the context of tourism research, four categories of his typology can be applied. The first is aesthetic, referring to the experience tourists gain through the beauty of wildlife. The second is humanistic, meaning the emotional attachment and love for wildlife a tourist may develop during the visit. After they have an emotional experience with wildlife, the third factor moralistic appears, prompting tourists to think about the spiritual relevance and ethical concerns for wildlife, such as conservation and animal welfare. The last category is negativistic, meaning that not everyone enjoys this experience and tourists can feel fear, aversion, and alienation from wildlife.

With this typology, Kellert (1976) has opened a new gate for research on the complexity of tourist experiences in wildlife tourism. This typology also shows the possibility for each person to have a different relationship with wildlife under different circumstances. But Kellert's study is generalized, and does not focus on tourism, making it too broad and lacking the necessary details to measure wildlife experiences and how to focus on individual differences.

## **2.4 Modern zoos as wildlife tourism**

According to Reynolds & Braithwaite (2001), wildlife tourism outlets can be divided into seven categories: fishing, hunting, bird watching, whale and dolphin watching, zoos, aquariums, and wildlife parks. In general, a zoo is "a facility that breeds, keeps, and displays

animals” (Nekolny & Fialova, 2018, p. 155). Of all those wildlife tourism activities, zoos are one of the most popular destinations worldwide (Nekolny & Fialova, 2018). Turley (1999) claims many animal ecologists believe zoos have contributed to wildlife diversity and preservation of long-term endangered species. Ballantyne et al., (2011) claim that zoos are common sites in cities for recreation and leisure; but it is based on artificial attractions; different animal species are kept in captivity or have even been trained. However, as Turley (1999) and Fraser & Sickler (2009) argue, few studies have concentrated on zoos as tourist destinations.

Zoos are a contrived environment which, involve fewer animals than in natural habitats, but they also do not bring negative impacts like destruction or alteration of habitat and disruption to foraging, nesting or breeding behavior (Ballantyne et al., 2009; Green & Higginbottom, 2000; Shackley, 1996). When compared to fishing and hunting, in a zoo there are more people involved and it is more environment friendly—this ultimately reduces the cost both for the tourists and for natural habitats.

Early zoos usually exhibited wild animals in distant cages or concrete enclosures, with few interactions between tourists and animal keepers. They had a limit for tourists’ proximity to animals and have also been criticized for displaying obvious signs of captivity (Ballantyne et al., 2011). Especially in developed western countries, zoos have begun to respond to growing environmental and animal welfare concerns, which is where modern zoos originated (Higginbottom, 2004). Animal welfare, education, conservation, research, and entertainment are the major goals for modern zoos (Fernandez, Tamborski, Pickens & Timberlake, 2009).

Nowadays, there is a large number of modern and naturalistic zoos oriented towards conservation (Nekolny & Fialova, 2018). Shettel-Neuber’s (1988) research showed that in comparison to the cold cage and bar, modern well-organized zoos are attracting more visitors. The animals in modern zoos seem happier and more relaxed, so tourists spend more time observing them, which increases enjoyment of the overall experience. It is also a sign that tourists tend to feel the animals’ mood during their visit time, and it leads to emotional empathy and other connections (Decker & Siemer, 2012). The newest generation of zoo exhibits tend to build and mimic native environments with natural plants and landscaping,

open areas, water features, and mixed with sounds. Animals freely roam in these exhibits, and there is a chance they will not always be visible to tourists. However, they may also choose to get close to tourists out of their own curiosity, which further encourages interactive activities to build emotional engagement. Modern zoos situate themselves in modern society and reach people by providing a strong connection to wildlife.

Modern zoos have added that interactive activities enable visitors to get even closer and gain personal experiences with animals and wildlife environments. For example, petting nurseries for children and aquarium touch tanks are becoming increasingly popular. There are also several scholars nowadays perceiving zoos as theme parks, because they present different specific themes such as polar themes or tropical themes (Nekolny & Fialova, 2018).

Zoos as a wildlife tourism destination are also becoming more business oriented; a zoo is an organization trying to satisfy different stakeholders and gain maximum interests. This is a challenge for zoo managers (Turley, 1999), as it requires the zoo to be competitive about their product and provide better experiences for tourists.

The discussion above outlines the unique characteristics of zoos in the context of wildlife tourism. Previous research has focused on the tourist experience in general and in other wildlife tourism contexts. However, tourists' experiences of visiting zoos have received very little attention. This paper aims to investigate the kind of experiences tourists are gaining from visiting zoos. This adds to current tourist experience theory and extends our understanding of tourist experiences in the specific context of modern zoo visiting.

### **3. Methods and Methodology**

*The previous chapter reviewed relevant theories and literature to provide a foundation for the analysis of the empirical material. This chapter focuses on methodology and the methods of collecting and analyzing empirical data. It begins with presenting the case study approach and gives an overview of the methodological foundations of the thesis. It then outlines the data collection methods and how the grounded theory approach has been used to analyze the empirical data. Lastly, the limitations of the employed methods and ethical issues related to them are also examined.*

#### **3.1 A case study approach**

As this thesis aims to get a deeper understanding of the multifaceted and diverse experiences that tourists can have from visiting modern zoos, a case study approach was deemed to be an accessible and convenient way to gather data about a single case that would be able to capture the complexities of what tourists experience when visiting a modern zoo (Bryman, 2012, p. 66).

As Bryman (2012, p. 76) explains, an intensive case study can focus on an organization, a life, family, or community. In this study, the zoo *Tropikariet* was chosen as the case for empirical investigation. *Tropikariet* is a private business which was founded by Magnus Lindqvist, CEO and owner, on 13th June 1994. For more than 15 years, it has been a popular destination in Helsingborg and in the Skåne area. It is an indoor zoo and includes four floors with eight departments of different animals such as mammals, birds, reptiles, and an aquarium with species from many areas around the world. *Tropikariet* is a private business without any municipal, state, or other forms of funding, but it has been a successful zoo so far.

*Tropikariet* is a modern zoo in the sense that it is focusing on educating the visitors about the natural world and about nature conservation, and also that animals are kept in areas resembling their native habitats. 70% of the animals are not kept in cages or behind bars but in open areas. According to Magnus, the CEO and owner, *Tropikariet* offers exotic and

unique experiences for people as well as opportunities to learn and view animals and their habitats in a fun way. He also hopes his zoo can encourage people to think more deeply about protecting the diversity of animals and nature (Tropikariet, 2019).

Tropikariet natural wildlife habitats contain many exciting species and are trying to foster a non-captive environment. The environment is both excellent in terms of the visibility of animals for tourists but also in terms of giving the animals a habitat familiar to their native homes and the possibility to get away from the crowds of visitors if they so wish. Compared to traditional zoos, it clearly allows the visitors to have a closer relationship with the animals. According to its website, Tropikariet's ethos is based on unique wildlife entertainment, conservation, education for children, and research. It is also among the topmost attractive destinations in Helsingborg on TripAdvisor.com, where it currently has a 4.5 score out of 5 and approximately 450 reviews (TripAdvisor, 2019). It is also listed in the top three animal adventures highlighted on visitskane.com. In addition to this, Tropikariet is donating part of the entry fee to support endangered animals in Madagascar as well as building a long-term relationship with Madagascan animal welfare organizations. Furthermore, Tropikariet is offering trips for different school levels around Skåne and part of Denmark to help kids and teenagers learn about nature and animals. They are also building a teaching room that is currently planned to be ready in spring 2021 to offer sustainable development and animal nutritional research. The zoo has successfully hatched bamboo sharks that have now been moved to Stockholm University for further animal behavior research. Over the years, it has been very active in the wildlife tourism industry in Skåne and involved in many other social initiatives.

Tropikariet can be seen as a good representative of a modern zoo that fits well for analyzing visitors' experiences of these kinds of zoos. While it shares many aspects with other modern zoos, it also has some more unique characteristics, such as the proximity to animals that visitors can experience. This provides an opportunity for important insights into how tourists experience these relations of closeness to animals and how it impacts their overall tourist experience, knowledge that can be seen as important for the other kinds of wildlife tourism destinations as well.

### **3.2 Research method design**

Many previous studies of zoo tourism apply quantitative methods that detail the tourists' experiences and divide them into different factors that affect their experiences. However these quantitative methods tend to downplay individual tourists' unique personal backgrounds, which is something that also affects their experiences. The aim of this paper is to analyze tourists' experiences from their own descriptions and interpretations, in order to gain an in-depth insight into zoo tourism experiences. Thus, qualitative methods are more suitable for this research, with its potential for capturing multiple voices of participants (May, 2001). Qualitative research is a strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in collecting and analyzing data (Bryman, 2012, p. 380). Qualitative research aims to explain or make sense of different phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (May, 2001). It is often used in the kind of inductive approaches that is also used in this thesis, where findings, results, and ultimately theory emerge from the combination of theoretical perspectives and empirical data to answer the research question.

### **3.3 Data collection**

Qualitative methods help gain rich and in-depth information pertaining to a particular phenomenon (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006; Silverman, 2013). In the case of this thesis, semi-structured interviews were used to gather knowledge about the different experiences that tourists have of modern zoos. To further complement the interviews, a netnography method was chosen in order to collect online data. Observational methods were also considered in the early beginnings of the research, but it became clear that most conversations happening in Tropikariet were in Swedish which was a barrier for the researcher.

#### **3.3.1 Netnographic data collection**

Netnography was originally a qualitative method designed to analyze consumer behaviors. Kozinets (2010, p. 56) describes netnography as a method to analyze existing online community conversations and other internet discourse; it comes from ethnographic research and shares some similarities with this. This method is often applied in hospitality and tourism

research because of the experiential and service-based goods (Whalen, 2018). Hence, netnography can be seen as a valid method for researching Tropikariet. In recent years, tourists are becoming increasingly active online, and valuable information about their experiences and comments can be collected from many online platforms (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018).

There are several advantages to applying netnography in the tourism area. Firstly, with a netnographic method, it is easier to reach a large number of people and populations who may otherwise be difficult to access. Secondly, netnographic data is considered rich and naturalistic, which offers an in-depth and meaningful look into tourist' experiences (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018). With the netnography method, the researcher is "a participant in reading and analyzing" tourists' online accounts of modern zoo experience (Silverman, 2013). Finally, netnography is a highly flexible qualitative method, and is always applied alongside other research methods, for example, interviews (Sandlin, 2007).

With the advent of Web 2.0 users are not just the consumers of content but also contributors to these online communities (Valdivia, Luzon & Herrera, 2017). TripAdvisor.com, which is the website where the netnography took place in this study was formed in 2004 and has been one of the most popular and largest Web 2.0 travel websites for tourists all over the world. It is based on authentic tourist reviews, where people share experiences of hotels, destinations, restaurants, and transportation services (TripAdvisor, 2019). The reviews on TripAdvisor are firstly based on an overall rating system, from one (awful) to five (excellent). Together with this rating, contributors can also offer personal reviews including text and/or pictures from.

It is also necessary when applying the netnography method to consider content integrity and authenticity. First, TripAdvisor encourages every type of tourist to share their experiences no matter if it is a special or normal one, They also claim to use a valid manual system and team to prevent fake and fraudulent reviews. Communities or businesses cannot change the ratings or reviews. Thus, data from a site like TripAdvisor with a high reputation, can be considered a valid for this study, as a text source for data collection (Valdivia & Herrera, 2017).



The TripAdvisor website is changing fast and continuously. Therefore it was necessary to limit the data collection timespan from the earliest comments in September 2012 up until 1st June 2019. The data collected from TripAdvisor.com was in the form of the written text that people share on the site, text that gives an insight into their experiences of Tropikariet. Due to language barriers, only the English text comments gathered from TripAdvisor have been used in the study.

### **3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews**

While a netnographic method was identified as the most effective way to collect a large amount of data from different tourists, at the same time, this method risked not capturing each tourists' unique personal background and identity and how those affect their experiences in Tropikariet. The second part of the research design thus consists of in-depth conversations with the chosen visitors who have been to Tropikariet. As May (2001, p. 149) points out, semi-structured interviews can yield "rich insights into people's biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, attitudes, and feelings". As such semi-structured interviews were considered highly appropriate to gain an understanding of the tourists' unique and personal experiences of visiting Tropikariet.

A semi-structured interview has structured questions but also allows for new questions based on the participants' answers, and it builds on the researcher asking questions that "encourages the participants to tell their stories and to gather the needed data" (May, 2001, p. 149). This method allowed gathering data about the specific case in their own words rather than pre-formulated and highly standardized questions and answers. The semi-structured interview emphasized exploring personal experiences both on-site and after visiting, rather than a quantitative measurement of their experiences (Schänzel & McIntosh, 2000). This method allowed the research to capture the tourists' own words and storytelling, and as a result it was possible to dig and classify deeper personal emotions in order to understand how their thoughts and emotions affect their experiences.

The interview guide questions began by examining visitors' expectations before their visit to Tropikariet. Then it focused on their on-site experiences, especially from the emotional aspect and interactions with surroundings like animals, companions, or animal keepers. The last part aimed at after they left Tropikariet, further sharing, or deepest memories with Tropikariet. Questions are open and generalized without any "Yes" or "No" questions and can see in Appendix 1.

After choosing the semi-structured method, the next step was to build an interview schedule. First, the researcher set a purposive sample, which was aimed at those who have been recently to Tropikariet and thus who can still recall their experiences. The 10 participants were gathered from the researcher's own social group, friend connections, from the entrance of Tropikariet, and internet connections from Instagram and Facebook groups. All participants have visited Tropikariet within the last year, which also means their experiences and memories are fresh and vivid. Moreover, those reached online are still active users in virtual communities and social media, which gives further and more in-depth reviews about netnography research part. All interviews were transcribed and two of them were translated into English.

Each interview lasted around 25-30 minutes; it was based on semi-structured questions (See Appendix 1) and contained further questions relating to the participants' stories and experiences. Except two which were conducted in Mandarin, the interviews were all carried out in English since the participants came from various international backgrounds. Four of the interviews were carried out through Skype, but the researcher was still able to monitor the participants' facial emotions and changes through the video call screen. The researcher let the participants choose the location and time and the interview proceeded in a natural, friendly atmosphere which could help them to feel free and comfortable to express their real thoughts. The interviewees were informed before the conversation that it would be recorded, and later on the recordings were transcribed for coding. Table 3.1 shows the semi-structured interviews' personal information; it is anonymous but shows their true age, gender, race, and occupation.

### **Table 3.1**

#### *Interviewers information*

Interviewers information				
Number	Age	Gender	Nationality	Occupation
1	24	Female	Chinese	Master's student
2	32	Male	Indian	Master's student
3	23	Female	Chinese	Engineer
4	37	Female	Swedish	Nurse
5	24	Male	Swedish	Electricity customer service
6	32	Male	Swedish	Interpreter
7	47	Male	Swedish	Network Engineer
8	33	Female	Swedish	Design
9	26	Male	Chinese	PhD student
10	30	Female	American	Photographer's assistant

### 3.3.3 Sampling methods

A purposive sampling method is generally applied in qualitative research. Its aim is to sample participants in a strategic way, so they are relevant to the research questions (Bryman, 2012, p. 418). In this paper, a purposive sampling method was chosen to seek out the tourists who have recently visited Tropikariet. The sampling target groups were divided in two. The first group contained the tourists who have been to Tropikariet and left comments on TripAdvisor about their experiences. The second group included the interviews which were gathered from the researcher's acquaintances and internet reach. The samplings from both groups guaranteed the collected data related to the research question and was valuable enough to be analyzed.

In the semi-structured interviews, the sampling interviewees were from different backgrounds and quite international, both local Swedish residents and international travelers or students were considered. The samplings were seen as representative for answering the research question.

### **3.4 Data analysis method**

The data collected from the netnography and semi-structured interviews constitutes a large corpus of unstructured textual material, it is not straightforward to analyze them (Bryman, 2012, p. 565). Some collected data came in the format of a short story that tourists told about their experience; this adds a closeness between the research and the tourists. For the purposes of the research, grounded theory was applied to analyze the qualitative data in a categorical way.

#### **3.4.1 Grounded theory**

Grounded theory was created by Glaser and Strauss (1967), they defined it as “the discovery of theory from data-systematically obtained and analyzed in social research” (p. 1). Grounded theory is a general strategy in qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2012, p. 565). It is widely used in the study of tourist experience. For example, Sun, Wu, Li and Dai (2019) apply grounded theory in their exploration of tourist interaction experiences at festivals; Goolaup and Mossberg (2017) apply it to tourists who are seeking food experiences; and Alexander (2012) uses it in his study of international volunteer tourist experiences in South Africa. Others focus on zoo tourist experience, such as Fraser (2009) who applies grounded theory in his case study on why parents choose zoo visits for their family. Fraser (2009) argues that grounded theory is a non-hypothesis-driven qualitative method which could combine observation and collected data; it is very useful for uncovering new theories.

The reason for applying grounded theory is that it is suitable for accommodating theories from a case study, but without a restricted theory framework. This research is based on the case study of Tropikariet, and the collected data reflects the tourist experiences in the zoo branch of tourism. With the research question of finding an area of opportunity in zoo tourism, the aim for applying grounded theory is to find and induct a new theory to answer the research question. Therefore, grounded theory was chosen to be a valid data analysis method for this research. Below is a description of grounded theory applied to analyze data.

### **3.4.2 Initial coding process**

The most central process of grounded theory is to “code the collected data into component parts and given names” (Bryman, 2012, p. 568). Coding means “attaching labels to segments of early data that depict what each segment is about” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 3). There are three common ways to code data: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Bryman, 2012). Charmaz (2006) claims that a valid coding process should include two steps: initial and focused coding. As such, an open coding method was applied in the initial coding process of the present study, to break down, examine, compare, conceptualize, and categorize the data from the netnography and semi-structured interviews (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

To make a better and more efficient qualitative data analysis, NVivo 11 software was employed to analyze collected data. It helps to organize and find insights from otherwise abundantly unstructured qualitative data (NVivo, 2019). There are 448 comments from TripAdvisor. 288 of them were written in Swedish and 108 of them were written in English. Considering the challenges of interpretation, only the English ones are collected for analyzing.

Charmaz (2006) suggests initial coding should start from finding significant codes which occur several times and finally compare them to numerous data. The transcriptions from interviews and netnography data are initial data, however with repeated reading and analyzing, coding categories were found. The initial coding process should be very detailed, and it was crucial to keep an open-mind at this stage (Charmz, 2006).

First, all the comments from netnography were numbered to indicate the quote source. Secondly, since there was plenty of initial data, one function from Nvivo 11 was first used to count and highlight all the keywords that had high frequencies. There were 38 different keywords that appeared more than 3 times in the text. With the key words highlighted, the author read all the data word by word to identify representative text units. This process was

taken thoughtful and selectively, to choose the text units that are relevant and useful to answer the research question. In this process, the author keeps the original words from netnography as much as possible, so it shows their original views. There are many keywords that could be categorized under one representative text, for example, words to express customers’ feelings: “happy, enjoy” etc.

After the step above, the author read all netnography data, and found the connections between these text units. Then, while grouping these units 17 initial codes were found B1-B17, they were: “enjoyment of visiting”, “worth visiting experiences”, “close interactions with animals”, “enjoy natural environment”, “beauty of exotic tropical world”, “ beauty of aquarium”, “concerning animals’ welfare”, “an abundance of animal types”, “social interaction with kids”, “standard of facilities”, “unique experience”, “negative voices”, “constraints of weather conditions ”, “subjective well-being”, “social interaction with friends”, “social interaction with staff”, and “educational experiences”,. Initial coding analyzing process was carried out by reading data line-by-line, it helped to build an initial structure to understand tourist experience and later this structure was applied to analyze semi-structured interview results. This step ensured that the data analyzing process suited two key criteria for grounded theory analysis: fit and relevance (Charmaz, 2006). The author believed that this data coding method was progressive and verifiable hence they related to each other and integration resulted in the 17 codes for later theme concept construction. Here’s an initial coding process example, full process and details can be found in Appendix 2.

**Table 3.2**

*Netnography initial coding process*

Examples of original representative texts and notes	Initial codes
A1 “Nice, fun and admirable place”	B1
A2 “Love at first sight”	Enjoyment of visiting
A3 “Interesting visit at Tropikariet”	

With a similar process as netnography, 10 interview records were also numbered. The

“preliminary analytic notes are called memos and contain the author’s other ideas about data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 4). During analyzing initial data, memos from semi-structured interviews were also considered. These memos can be seen as fieldnotes which contain some details about the interviewees’ behaviors, and senses. For example, for Participant 1, the memos are “Participant 1: loud laughing, obvious body gestures when she talked about monkeys” this provides additional information to the transcription data.

With Nvivo 11 key words and theme analysis function, 40 different key words and 22 themes showed up. With these key words and theme words highlighted, the author read all the data from semi-structured interviews and found representative texts C1-C31, and 16 initial codes D1-D16. They are : “companies with friends”, “an abundance of animal types”, “beauty of the zoo”, “enjoyment of visiting”, “close interactions with animals”, “constraints of weather conditions”, “unique experience”, “social interaction with staff”, “spiritual experience”, “enjoy natural habitat design”, “concerns for animals’s welfare”, “educational experience”, “social interaction with children”, “standards of facilities”, and “negative feelings”.

**Table 3.3**

*Semi-structured interview initial coding process*

Examples of original representative texts and notes	Initial codes
C1 “I knew Tropikariet from a friend, she is an animal lover and strongly suggested I go together with her, so we did.”	D1 Companies with friends
C2 “My girlfriend really wanted to go there so I went there to accompany her.”	

### 3.4.3 Focused coding

To further analyze and induct the data, the next move was focused coding. Bryman (2012, 569) claims that “focused coding entails emphasizing the most common codes and those that are seen as most revealing about the data.” Focused codes are more “directed, selective and

conceptual than word-by-word, line-by-line” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57).

In a focused coding process, the author inducted the initial codes into different categories based on thematic or conceptual similarity. It is important in this process to analyze and figure the variations and interconnections between different initial codes which were shown in direction meaning. This process was also taken with the help of memo and manual analyzing. Focused coding is a process of active involvement to analyze data rather than just passively reading them (Charmz, 2006). It also offers new points of view from texts, interactions, and perspectives into analytic purview which the author did not think about before (Charmz, 2006).

Here shows examples of focused coding and detailed process can be found in Appendix 3.

**Table 3.4**

*Netnography focused coding process*

Categories	Correspond initial codes	Directions meaning
Entertainment	B1 Enjoyment of visiting B2 Worth visiting experience	Tourists think the whole experience is recreational and entertaining.

**Table 3.5**

*Semi-structured focused coding process*

Categories	Correspond initial codes
Social interactions	D1 Companies with friends D5 Close interactions with animals D8 Social interaction with staff D14 Social interaction with children

There are several similar initial codes from netnography data and semi-structured interview data. It also showed the nuance between these two different data, but eight same categories were found to the last. The author inducted eight categories from netnography initial codes.



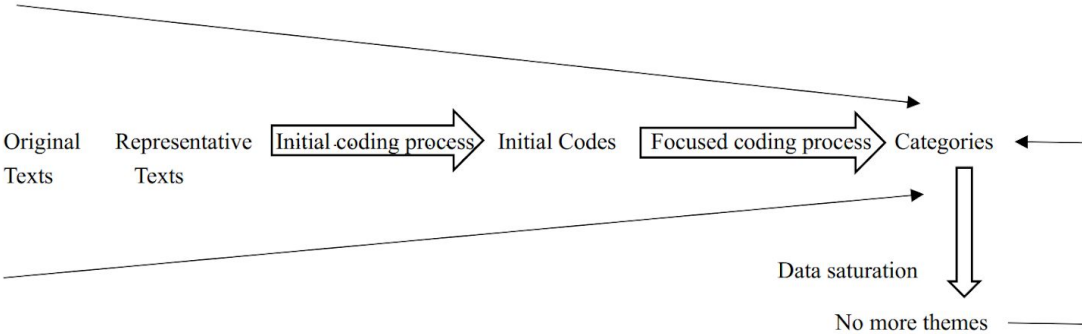
They are: entertainment, social interactions, aesthetic, educational values, unique experience, ease of facilities, subjective well-being and negative feelings. It means each category may include different significant aspects, but they all can be inducted under the same category.

Glaser and Strauss claim that the final aim of a qualitative research is to get “data saturation” or “theoretical saturation” (1967, p. 65). Thus, when applying grounded theory in the data analysis, a theoretical saturation tool was used to ensure the data analysis was valid. Theoretical saturation means “the emerging concepts have been fully explored and no new theoretical insights are being generated” (Bryman, 2012, p. 717). The data from the netnography and eight results from semi-structured interviews were used to code and summarize an initial model to answer the research question. After that, the author used the final two interview results to ensure that there were no further categories. Therefore, there was no need to collect more new data.

Below is a figure which shows the data analysis process.

**Figure 3.1**

*Data analysis process*



**3.5 Ethical issues during data collection**

It is necessary to “consider ethical issues in social research study” which cannot be ignored since it is related to research data integrity (Bryman, 2012, p. 130). The four essential areas

related to ethical issues are: whether the research was harmful to the participants; whether it lacked informed consent; whether there was an invasion of privacy, and whether deception existed (Bryman, 2012, p. 130).

According to TripAdvisor “terms of use” and “privacy policy”, TripAdvisor is a public platform. Every user has been informed that their comments/pictures or other methods of sharing would be open for everyone to read and see on TripAdvisor, and may be shared to other websites or cooperative partners. They should be aware of not posting anything which would harm their personal information and interests. Written confirmation of permission to use comments and pictures from Tropicariet as academic research has been given in writing from TripAdvisor’s permission requirements department. To minimize harm and protect users’ privacy, real account names are not used in the results.

All the participants who took part in the semi-structured interview were informed that this interview would be recorded. Their answers were used as first-hand data for academic writing. Four of them indicated that they do not want their real names to show in the paper, but other personal information could be used. In the results, the interviewees' names are hidden, and they are instead distinguishable by other factors.

### **3.6 Quality of research methods**

There are four aspects to evaluate the quality of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. This section illustrates the quality of the research in relation to the four aspects above.

Credibility refers to how well the findings represent the collected data and how believable the findings are (Bryman, 2012). Peer debriefing and member checking are two common ways to evaluate credibility. Since this is the research of a sole author, member checking was utilized to ensure the credibility of the research. After finishing the transcriptions from the semi-structured interviews, the records were sent to all the participants to allow them to read and check if the contexts are correct, and adequately represent what they were trying to

express. Secondly, after the eight themes were identified through focused coding, the author sent the findings to participants to get their feedback and reviews. Their feedback and reviews are discussed in the results.

Transferability means if the design and findings can be generalized and applied in other contexts or settings. This research is based on a case study of a modern zoo and gathered data from netnography and semi-structured interviews. The design and findings can be generalized to other studies focusing on modern zoo tourists experience but is not very suitable for studies of traditional zoos, since these two types of zoos are very different in structure and function. The study suggests further research should consider the possibility of adding observations of tourists' conversations and behaviors.

Dependability is a significant factor for establishing the consistency of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This is mainly for making sure any important data or findings are not missed in the research study. One common way to examine this is to have an outside researcher conduct an external audit. A PhD student in Service Management was asked to examine the methods design and processes, data analysis and results to ensure the findings are trustworthy. Confirmability is to ensure there is no researcher bias in the study, and this is discussed further in section 3.7: Reflections on methodology.

### **3.7 Reflections on methodology**

In research, it is necessary to understand the methodology advantages and disadvantages. Silverman (2013, p. 569) proposed "all social science should be based on a form of inquiry which is self-critical". Since this paper chose only a qualitative method, it is crucial to evaluate the research quality and data validity as explained above. Bryman (2012, p. 405) summarized some critical comments on qualitative research, for instance: "it is too impressionistic and subjective", the research results may rely too much on the researcher's own view. In other words, the method or the results may be too personal as the researcher's own point of view is limited. There is not another researcher to read and analyze the data and do a horizontal analysis in the present study. It is undeniable that the qualitative method is a subjective approach. Thus, in the analyzing process, I tried to read and compare the data in an

objective and neutral way, and constantly examined the practice and considered new reflections, while also learning from other studies.

This study suggests that a participant observation method would be worth applying in a case study like this one, because observation is an important method by which to collect tourists' on-site experiences through analyzing their conversations and facial expressions. A challenge for this study was that most conversations at Tropikariet zoo are in Swedish, so a language barrier meant it was not possible to collect effective data in this way.

Charmaz (2006, p. 47) claims that "language plays a crucial role in how and what we are coding and analyzing the data." In this study, a limitation for the semi-structured interview is that over half of the interviewees were answering questions in English, which is not their first language. This causes a problem, as sometimes what they interpreted may not be the same as if they were speaking in their first language. I also have noticed that when they speak in English, they tend to use quite simple words to express their feelings. In contrast, the interviews which were taken in the interviewees' own languages, the words chosen were more complicated and perhaps more accurate in capturing their feelings. In an ideal situation, the interview style is supposed to allow them clearly to explain and describe their direct or implied emotions. The language barriers may have blurred expressions or unclear definitions. From this perspective, the author is not neutral in this process.

The disadvantages of applying netnography include that I could only passively read and analyze comments. It is impossible to join online communication actively because of the structure of TripAdvisor. As some studies claimed, the researcher is not able to guide topics and discussion, probe for clarification or details, or confirm demographic information in netnographic research (Valdivia & Herrera, 2017). Because of the privacy policy on TripAdvisor's site, there is no opportunity to explore individual histories or backgrounds. These limitations restricted the dimensions of understanding the individuals behind the comments.

## **4. Results and analysis**

*To address the research question “What types of tourist experiences are tourists gaining when visiting a modern zoo?” this chapter will analyze the material collected from the semi-structured interviews and the netnography. The data will be analysed with the help of the theoretical framework about tourist experiences that was outlined in the literature review.*

### **4.1 Empirical findings**

As shown before in Table 3.1, the gender division among the interviewees was 50:50 female to male. The majority of participants were between 24-35 years old. In terms of nationality, 50% were Swedish, 60% of them had a bachelor’s degree, or equivalent level of education. The rest of the research results are shown in the following section.

As explained before in data analysis, after the focused coding in the netnography and the analysis of the data from the semi-structured interviews, eight categories of tourist experience were identified: entertainment, social interactions, aesthetic, educational values, unique experience, ease of facility, negative feelings and subjective well-being. In the following sections, these eight categories of tourist experience that were identified among visitors to Tropikariet are presented and analysed with the help of the theoretical perspectives previously outlined.

### **4.2 Entertainment**

Entertainment can be clearly seen as the most important and obvious tourist experience in this research. Curtin (2005) claims that the “nature of wildlife tourism is a hedonistic activity”, and the primary reason for many tourists to go to Tropikariet is to have fun. This also can also be understood as an example of what Oh et al.’s (2007) writes about when they assert that enjoying the destination is a big, if not the biggest, part of the tourist experience. It shows how entertainment is one of the main motivations for visiting Tropikariet and a primary aspect of the experiences they gained. Replying to the second question of the semi-structured interview: “What was your motivation to go there?” all the participants mentioned going to

Tropikariet for fun and recreational purposes.

*“Me and my friends were just looking for a place to hang out on the weekend in Helsingborg, Tropikariet seems really interesting so that’s why we went there, and it was a really nice and fun experience.” (Participant 1)*

*“We came to Sweden, visited some relatives who live in Helsingborg, and they recommended that we visit Tropikariet, saying it is a really different special zoo. We will have fun there.....We had a really nice afternoon with all the animals.” (Participant 10)*

What can be seen above is that tourists heard of Tropikariet from their friends or online and went there for recreation or just for a relaxing weekend activity. Their motivations may be a bit unclear at first, but they all expected to have a nice and exciting experience at the zoo. In the end, they were satisfied with their entertaining experience in Tropikariet, gave it a positive comment, and some are willing to visit it again. Beardsworth & Bryman (2001) also propose that it is important for a tourism destination to satisfy visitors’ hedonistic motivations and provide a “feel-good” factor to encourage repeat visits, which is reflected in the participants’ responses.

Entertainment experience is also apparent in the netnography data. Most comments found online used words like: “fun, exciting, fantastic, wonderful, great, perfect, interesting”, all of which shows that they think this experience is recreational and one that affects their moods and feelings in a positive way. One TripAdvisor comment indicated that: *“I fall in love with this place with the first sight.”* [sic]. And another one said: *“There are a few nice animals, and all you need to get entertained.”* These comments prove that entertainment is a significant tourist experience when visiting Tropikariet. .

Furthermore, the entertainment experience can lead to other types of experiences and affect tourists’ emotions. Schanzel and McIntosh (2000) claim that experiencing this kind of pleasant mood during tourism affects the experience’s total value, which may include for example stress reduction. This not only exists during the on-site time, but also continues for a while after leaving too. These experiences result in the visitors posting pictures or comments

on TripAdvisor or on other social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook. Some people claimed that it was such a wonderful experience it made their day. As Turley (1999) said, the leisure and recreation process add value to the lives of tourists. This reflected in this statement by Participant 6:

*“My girlfriend was so excited after visiting Tropikariet, she changed her Facebook profile picture into a picture she took together with a green bird. She kept talking about it when we were on the train back home with ‘awww’ sound.” [sic] (Participant 6)*

In general, most participants expressed a sense of entertainment; they had spent time enjoying Tropikariet together with animals, beautiful nature, and their friends or families.

#### **4.3 Social interactions**

Social interactions are dynamic, interactive social actions between three stakeholders in wildlife tourism (Reynolds & Braithwaite, 2001). This is a major evident category and it contains three different interactive types: with animals, with companions (friends, kids, families), and with staff. This category is based on tourists’ behaviors and analyzed by their words and storytelling. The “animal” and “companion” interactions were the most frequently expressed in the interviews and in TripAdvisor comments.

**Animals:** The first is the social interactions between tourists and animals: what they saw, felt and thought. Many participants noted the abundance of animals they observed in Tropikariet, mentioning several, including lemurs, dwarf monkeys, birds, doctor fish, sharks, spiders, leaf cutter ants, bats, snakes, and turtles. This is an encounter for them to observe diverse animals. Furthermore, as a modern zoo, Tropikariet offers an open encounter for both the tourists and the animals to interact. As the tourists highlighted enjoying seeing the animals’ everyday behavior, and described liking how the animals roam freely in the zoo, without cages, and look happy. Tourists were amazed that some animals came close to them spontaneously and interacted with them. As stated by one tourist on TripAdvisor:

*“The most thrilling part is that most animals roams free, while there is a guided bridge that takes you through the entire indoor ZOO/park — they are free to jump onto your shoulders, so don't be surprised if there's a little monkey on your shoulder who think you're just another branch, don't worry — they really don't bite!”*

Participant 6 also told a story about a colorful bird landed on his friend's head:

*“The bird landed on her head which made her scream a bit, but both of us laughed when we figured out what happened. I even got to take a picture because the bird stayed a while on her head like ‘oh I am really comfortable here’.”*

From the empirical data above, tourists feel happy and amazed by the spontaneous and natural interactions with the animals. They think this is lucky and special. It is clear that the experience of being close to wild animals in the surrounding environment is a crucial element in deciding zoo tourists' satisfaction (Curtin, 2005). As Alexander (2012, p. 3) claims “the encounter between the visitor and the wild animals comprises the core of a wildlife tourism experience.” Tropikariet offers an opportunity to experience an environment similar to the animals' natural habitat, but at the same time tourists get to be close to animals instead a long distance away. Tourists give evidence of liking the opportunity to have some physical contact with animals, and animals get closer actively and spontaneously — making this experience more authentic and special. Curtin's view of “the close the better” is fully proven here. This outcome also corresponds with tourists who visited Penguin Place in New Zealand, where they believed their biggest satisfaction was from being so close to the penguins (Schanzel & McIntosh, 2000).

In addition to the interactions with animals and birds, close proximity with marine animals and being able to touch them is also quite markedly a favorite experience for tourists. There is a touching tank area in Tropikariet, and children and adults are allowed to see them in a closer encounter and stroke the beautiful marine animals. This is also one of the most popular spots in Tropikariet and left tourists with deep memories. As one comment on TripAdvisor stated:

*“.....skin nibbling fish, (stick your hands in the tank! Go on I dare you!)”*



One semi-structured interview participant also mentioned that she enjoyed the touching tank:

*“It was really nice getting nibbled by the fish and shrimp, like having a fish spa, very ticklish but super fun! And it is my first time getting to pet a sea star, I used to think it was soft.” (Participant 3)*

From the author’s personal experience, there are always people gathering around the touching tank. Children seem extra excited and run around, as well as the adults are animated touching the animals. Some of the tourists even refer to it as they have found their “new best friend” in Tropikariet. Tourists show much evidence of enjoying social interactions with animals which aligns with the humanistic factor in Kellert’s (1976) typology. With the help of the zoo, tourists built an emotional attachment and loved the opportunity to be tactile with animals. And this kind of emotional attachment reaches its top when tourists are able to touch and stroke them.

**Companions:** Another of the social interactions that became evident in the data was interaction with like-minded individuals or companions. A family-based tourist type is recurring, showing that many tourists bring their kids to Tropikariet. This is specifically evident in netnography data. Many parents consider Tropikariet as a place for family entertainment and somewhere they can spend some holiday time with their kids outside the home. As one comment from TripAdvisor outlined:

*“From our four years old, ten years old and sixteen years old, up to grumpy old me, we all found something to wonder at.”*

And there is data that shows that many families consider Tropikariet as a destination to visit regularly for them. They get the family pass ticket and go there from time to time. As one comment stated:

*“Love this place, we visit it min three times a year. We had a chance to clap the snake which kids enjoyed a lot.” [sic]*

This shows that family type is one of the most common tourists in zoo tourism and therefore requires further research. And Therkelsen & Lottrup (2015) claim that family zoo visiting experiences help to enhance family bonds. Several comments on TripAdvisor recommended parents/ grandparents take their kids to Tropikariet as a family activity, and very thoughtfully added that the space is quite small, so it is better not to bring a stroller. It is evident that parents enjoy spending time with their children alongside nature and animals. According to Ballantyne et al., (2011), this kind of social interaction between children and parents is likely to have a strong influence on their behavior and memories.

There are only two participants from the semi-structured interview who have kids and family, but both of them pointed out this is a good place for the whole family to visit. For example, Participant 4 felt that Tropikariet is a good place for her family to enjoy weekend time rather than just staying at home watching TV:

*“It was nice because everyone was involved in the situation and enjoyed it. I read the signs for my older son (7 years old) and my husband was holding our daughter (3 years old). She was also really excited about the monkeys, birds and fish.” (Participant 4).*

Another type of companionship present is people visiting Tropikariet with friends or even meeting strangers who share similar interests. Among ten participants, only one (Participant 7) went to visit Tropikariet alone, the other nine went there either with their families or friends. Participant 8 expressed visiting Tropikariet as a social activity that requires a companion for discussions and for taking pictures during on-site time.

*“I went to Tropikariet with my friend, she is such an animal lover and has been there many many times. We made a vlog together about our day there. It was a nice video.” (Participant 8)*

From what was discovered during the interviews, some participants went to Tropikariet just for socializing with their friends/companies who considered wildlife is relaxing and beautiful. And this left them a good experience and made them as potential future tourists visit zoos.

Social interactions with companions including chatting, taking pictures, taking videos/vlogs, and sharing experiences afterwards on social media.

**Staff:** The final type of social interaction that arose from the data is interaction with zoo guides (staff). This type of interaction is not as significant as the previous two. This is also the interaction that some tourists express dissatisfaction with. In general tourism contexts, the staff works as a bridge between their service/products and the customers. In the context of a modern zoo, an experienced guide should provide knowledge of the animals, and help expand visitors' understanding of animals' behavior. Some specific areas of note include the guides encouraging tourists to be closer or have contacts with the animals, or providing incentives and activities to support visitors understanding of long term change in environment conservation and protection (Ballantyne et al., 2007).

There are some positive voices about the experiences with staff in Tropikariet. One tourist on TripAdvisor expressed her experience with the staff Tropikariet:

*“The staff were very kind. We highly recommend asking a staff member if they can feed some snacks to the lemurs! They will hop on you and you can get some awesome pictures.”*

Similarly, one participant also felt she got enough help from the staff:

*“The animal keeper knows a lot of the animals and is really friendly. She showed us how to find the birds hiding around the leaves and gave some food to the lemur so we can observe them in a super close way.” (Participant 4)*

This shows that tourists appreciate and enjoy the opportunities to talk to the staff/ animal keeper to know more knowledge about the animals. And one tourist said his son's birthday party went well in Tropikariet with the help of staff and special activities.

But Participant 1 explained that the zoo staff she met in a zoo in China were better because they took more initiatives to offer their guidance:

*“I don’t think Tropikariet has enough staff there, I only saw one during my entire experience there, and she was just cleaning the floor. The zoo keeper I have met in a Chinese zoo they gave me food in my hand to lure the birds to eat it from my hand, and they were always around and offered interesting knowledge about the animals even I did not ask.” [sic] (Participant 1)*

From her story, it is necessary for the zoo guides to display professional interpretation skills in their jobs. The basic requests for a zoo guide are that he should have abundant knowledge about the animals and be good at communicating with the tourists. And higher requests can relate to the type of tour, tourists group type (family/school), tourists’ mood (excited, angry) etc. A good zoo guide service can build a connection between the tourists and the zoo, to provide a satisfactory experience. There are very few studies that focus on employee functions in modern zoos, and not enough zoos are taking consideration to train their staff to be better guides.

Overall, it was apparent that social interactions are very important experiences tourists gain from visiting Tropikariet, and it greatly affects their levels of satisfaction. Tourists built important emotional attachments with their families or friends while making memories at the zoo, through activities which include talking, taking photographs, or filming (Curtin, 2005).

#### **4.4 Aesthetic**

The third category is aesthetic experience. According to Kellert’s (1976) typology, aesthetics in a wildlife tourism context is defined as the physical appeal and beauty of wildlife. Modern zoos work as a bridge between city and wildlife, so tourists get the chance to enjoy the natural environment. This perspective is usually very apparent in national zoos because of their open and beautiful landscapes (Alexander, 2012). As a modern zoo, Tropikariet provides seemingly authentic and realistic depictions of the natural environment for tourists (Grazin, 2012). Tourists almost forgot they are in an indoor zoo. Both netnography and semi-structured data

showed that tourists describe Tropikariet as “beautiful” and “attractive” and wish to be immersed in this beauty. As Participant 5 indicated:

*“They built the place as beautiful as a picture that you will see in a nature magazine. There are no cages, no glasses. All the plants, the sounds, the water floating sound just feel so real and amazing.” (Participant 5)*

From his words, it showed that tourists are not satisfied with just observing the animals to fulfill their aesthetic needs. Cold cages and bars should be avoided. They expected the whole scene to be real and authentic, with more natural features. This also leads to another branch in aesthetic experience: natural habitat design. This is highlighted in semi-structured interviews, there are seven participants mentioned that they enjoyed seeing the “animals and their natural environment.” This requires the zoo to have an aesthetic design on their exhibitions and overall environments to provide pleasing natural attractions. Modern zoos should build an immersive landscaping with enough space for the animals to live in. The exhibits should also include some playing and climbing apparatuses, swimming pools, or hiding the food to encourage animals “seeking for food”. All such designs will enhance tourists' aesthetic experience and leave them a deeper memory. As Grazin (2012) suggests, modern zoos should consider enclosure technologies, landscape immersion, and animal behaviors to enrich the environment.

Tourists also gain aesthetic experience from Tropikariet exotic themes and beautiful aquariums. There is an authentic exotic tropical forest, allowing tourists to feel the beauty of nature and be amazed by their surrounding environment. It is humid and warm in a tropical forest room, dark light with animals moving around sounds. Tourists expressed their feelings about the beauty of Tropikariet as like a “garden”, full of “well-adapted environments”, and “an amazing jungle”.

*“I love the little jungle there, it was a very warm and humid, mystery atmosphere with birds twittering. I like wandering there and it’s just so beautiful.” (Participant 5)*

It is obvious that in Sweden, the tropical theme in zoos is very welcomed and popular. This

theme offers a special aesthetic experience for tourists because this is so different from their daily environment.

The aquarium in the basement also gained a lot of attention and compliments. According to Zeppel & Muloin (2008), in relation to zoo tourism, aesthetic is a fundamental factor in marine wildlife tourism experience. The aesthetic experience from aquariums is widely accepted and proved that people enjoy observing the beautiful marine animals (Balltanye et al., 2011).

*“Another my big favorite is the big aquarium that is supposed to correspond to a piece out of the sea in Maldives! We saw colorful fish and sharks and sat there for a long time just to enjoy.” (Participant 3)*

Most tourists still have a preference for the land animals (such as lemurs always get more attention than snakes). But they seem to enjoy the beauty of the marine animals in a more balanced way. Tourists like to watch all kinds of fish and turtles swimming around freely and relaxing. The beauty of marine animals is always related to “romanticism” as well.

#### **4.5 Educational values**

The fourth category is tourists gain educational values through visiting Tropikariet. As Patterson, Watson, Williams & Roggenbuck (1998) claim zoos are special cultural and educational facilities, which have four principal functions: protecting endangered species, science, education, and recreation for people. According to Moscardo et al. (2000, p. 252), “people are increasingly interested in active, educational activities involving wild animals.” And this demand aligns well with zoos’ basic functions. Educational values are more evident with school traveling/ family travelling with kids. One comment from TripAdvisor, written by a teacher detailed that he went to Tropikariet with his school students:

*“Joyful time at Tropikariet with my school students, age 7-8. We all enjoyed it a lot and spent half of the day studying all the animals, including patting a crocodile, holing a snake and got nibbled by fishes. A place well worth visiting!” [sic]*

There are other similar comments as above but are from parents, who are happy that their kids learn something about animals and nature on their tour. Tourists' educational experiences in zoos usually relate to their own educational level, and how willing they are to learn during their visiting time (Reynolds & Braithwaite, 2001). It happens more often and obviously between parents and their kids when the parents believe they have the responsibility to impart more knowledge to their children.

When I went to Tropikariet to reach recruit who were willing to join the interviews, I met a middle school group who came to the zoo from Helsingor (Denmark). After a quick conversation with the lead teacher, it was clear that a visit to Tropikariet is a traditional annual trip for that school to learn about biology and gain other knowledge. From a tourism perspective, education is a crucial traditional component of zoo tourism experiences which could increase visitors' awareness of conservation wildlife habitats, attitudes, and behaviors (Ballantyne et al., 2011). Tropikariet acts responsibly in its educational role, and it has collaborations with Stockholm University, as well as actively in building more facilities and rooms for children to learn more about animals and nature.

None of the participants from the semi-structured interview went there for a school trip. But many of them felt that zoos are a good opportunity for both adults and kids to extend their knowledge of animals and tropical nature. Participant 8 also thought it was a nice experience for her to learn about the nature of Madagascar:

*“I knew Madagascar as this island from a Disney movie, have you watched it? It left me with an impression that they have really special and cute animals, but I don't think I would ever have the chance to go there; so far and expensive. It was nice to learn more things about the animals from such a far and amazing island.” (Participant 5)*

It seems mass media reinforces the zoos' amusement images between tourists, and in this process, they also gain educational values. They learned more facts about the exotic wild animals' habitat and life, and also at the same time learned how to respect the truth that people and animals are living on the same earth. One participant indicated that he learned

more about the fact that the natural environment in Madagascar is getting worse and several animals are in danger.

*“I read the sign about the biodiversity in Madagascar and it’s really unique. But it said more than 80% of the forests in Madagascar are gone so the space for animals is getting smaller and smaller. It made me so sad about it and thinking about how humans are conquering nature but this is such a huge damage for the wild animals who are also the residents on earth. I donated a small amount of money to WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature” every year on my birthday. I hope this can help the animals a little bit.”*  
(Participant 5).

In the long term, this experience may also be beneficial to others and society, such as through protecting habitats (Schanzel & McIntosh, 2000). Tropikariet helps tourists learn more about the conservation of wildlife in general. Tourists’ experiences in a zoo may promote their future environmental knowledge and inspire their attitudes and behaviors (Ballantyne et al., 2011). Educational opportunities at zoos also relate to Kellert’s (1976) typology, which highlights the moralistic relationship between tourists and wildlife, stating that tourists feel for animals in an ethical way and are concerned about their welfare. They are pleased when they see the animals are being well taken care of and seem happy.

*“I don’t like animals being trapped in small cages, it is so crucial for them. Imagine your whole life in a small cage or behind cold glass. In Tropikariet it seems they have their own little space and freedom to roam around, they can hide if they want to, they can run around if they want to. It’s a more humanistic way to keep animals in an artificial way.”*  
(Participant 5)

When tourists realized the animals in Tropikariet are living happily, this neutralized the controversy between zoos and urban life – if should keep animals trapped in artificial facilities. Such attention can also spur modern zoos to take animals’ welfare more seriously.

Modern zoos should take more actions in developing their educational values. For example, feeding animals can be an educational and social activity that takes place every day. During



the feeding time, the animal keeper can have a short speech about the animals' behaviors and sharing their experiences together with tourists.

#### **4.6 Unique experiences**

The fifth category is tourists gaining unique experience through visiting Tropikariet. First, tourists are amazed by the diversity of animal types. Tropikariet has different mammals, fish, birds, and most comments from TripAdvisor mentioned 1-3 or even more animals they really like there. Lemur, toucan, doctorfish, bats, dwarf monkey are the most popular ones. Tropikariet also has a unique, attractive, fun animal exhibit: leafcutter ants. It has built a long transparent tube for the ants to live in which begins at the zoo's entrance and ends on the fourth floor. Thousands of ants move in the pipes in their own tiny world full of leaves. This insight to the lives of such a special specie of insect left many tourists with vivid memories:

*“It is like a super huge ant factory. I never had the interest to observe ants before. They ran around lifting leaves and building their home. Was so impressive when I saw the end of their home, it was a huge underground city with everything that had its rules.”*  
(Participant 2)

The nature of the zoo is to provide an opportunity for tourists to observe wild animals in cities. Thus, the abundance of animal types in a zoo is very important. It is also important to combine the animals with special exhibition design style so it left tourists a deep memory.

Another aspect in unique experiences is something special that out of what tourists expected and leave them a deep memory. The results show that tourists consider their experience in Tropikariet as quite unique and special. There are comments on TripAdvisor describing the zoo as a “special acclimatized areas for the various animals”; “Tropikariet provides a unique experience of walking in a zoo”; “With limited space the animals seem to have been chosen for uniqueness and/or interactive behaviors.” In other words, tourists are gaining unique

experiences from visiting Tropikariet by seeing rare animals they normally don't see, and a new environment they normally don't live in. In this case, Tropikariet as a tropical zoo has a natural advantage in Sweden, because it is so different from local people's normal life and the environment they are used to. In this way, the theme of Tropikariet gives tourists a unique experience. Tropikariet also offers close interactions with animals and nature as previously mentioned, which is different from the typical experience tourists expect from a zoo; they are not observing animals in a distance way behind the cages but involving a more holistic natural environment. With special booking, Tropikariet also provides chances for kids' birthday parties and private adult tours:

*“My daughter had her 7<sup>th</sup> birthday party at Tropikariet. By the reaction of her and her friends, I don't think it could have been better! ..... They had a private guided tour to interact with many animals..... She wants us to book again for her 8<sup>th</sup> party already!”*

This uniqueness of Tropikariet makes people likely to stay there longer for further enjoyment. The recommended stay is two hours, but many tourists claim they have spent a whole morning or afternoon there with family for a good time. Because tourists consider visiting Tropikariet a special experience, they are also more willing to give Tropikariet a word of mouth recommendation and/or become loyal customers. They leave positive comments online, and they share pictures and videos with their social groups and on social media. They highlight Tropikariet as one of most attractive destinations in Helsingborg—one that is really worth visiting time and again.

One participant described Tropikariet uniqueness as:

*“Doesn't feel like a real zoo. When I entered the first room, it was like I just opened the door in Alice's adventures in wonderland. The atmosphere, the temperature, the sound from animals, it is so mysterious and unique. For the most of time wandering there I forgot I am in a zoo.” (Participant 3)*

From her words, it is clear to see Tropikariet is a novel and exotic environment for her. It

offers a unique service encounter for tourists to feel special and memorable. As Park and Santos (2017) found in their research into “backpacker travel”, the most memorable tourism experience is usually quite personal and unique. This also shows a clear direction for zoo organization managers to focus on; they are in a clear and unique position to offer attractive services and products.

#### **4.7 Ease of facilities**

The sixth category is ease of facilities. Dash & Samantaray (2018) find that tourists always expected comfortable transport facility, ambiance, convenient services, clean toilets in a destination. This also shows in the comments from TripAdvisor, tourists leave useful information for other readers such as *“enough parking place”, “close to bus station”, “Don’t bring a baby stroller”*.

The facilities mentioned including : parking place, space of the zoo, transport facility, gift shop, bathroom, cafe, restaurant. Some tourists also specifically mentioned their good experience in the restaurant in Tropikariet, as one comment said :

*“No problem spending a few hours in here and then finishing with a nice lunch next to the surikats and turtles.”*

There’s an animal exhibition in Tropikariet restaurant. Tourists can watch cute surikats running around while enjoying food or drinks. This is a good combination of both their service and animals’ exhibition. Physical elements in zoos play an important role in tourists’ experience, such as attracting tourists time and money, determining their attitudes, intention of future patronage as well (Ballantyne et al., 2007).

One of the differences between traditional zoos and modern zoos is modern zoos are usually indoors. Some tourists mentioned their initial reason for visiting Tropikariet was simply to get

away from the typical rainy weather in Sweden. One participant said:

*“Both Skane zoo and Ystad zoo are outdoors so not opening during winter. But Tropikariet is open all year so it is a good choice on a boring cold winter day.”*  
(Participant 8)

One comment on TripAdvisor also said :

*“Perfect to get out of the house on a rainy day and do something with crabby kids.”*  
(TripAdvisor, 2019)

Tropikariet, as an indoor zoo, doesn't get affected much by the weather conditions and seasonality. As Hewer & Gough (2016) 's case study on a traditional zoo in Toronto, both precipitation and wind speed has a negative effect on visitors numbers. Tropikariet has higher weather resilience, and offers tourists a good opportunity during bad weather through its ease of facilities.

#### **4.8 Negative feelings**

The seventh category is some tourists gain negative feelings during visiting Tropikariet. First, some tourists expressed that they are not satisfied with the experience in Tropikariet. This can be because of too crowded people, or that the animals looked too tired and not active, or that Tropikariet does not have the animal species that they wanted to see. As one participant explained:

*“I thought I could see some huge monsters or iguanas in a tropical zoo, but there aren't any. They are so special and are my favorite. I was quite disappointed about that.”*

*(Participant 7)*

When zoo products cannot meet tourists' expectations, it will lower their satisfaction. It is important for modern zoos to update their exhibitions and understand what tourists want to see. Tropikariet built the exhibition as animals' original habitats, this also leads to the environment being tidy and clean. There is one comment complaining about the particular odor inside Tropikariet which made her feel very uncomfortable and caused her continuous sneezing.

*"It was a very horrible smell in there, me and my children only stayed a short while then left". (TripAdvisor, 2019)*

The author thinks such negative voices can be avoided in the future. First, modern zoos should give more clear details about their animal species, not a general concept as "exotic tropical animals". Secondly, as other unavoidable environmental factors, modern zoos can be honest about it and promote it as authenticity experience in real wildlife.

Besides unsatisfied voices, there are always controversial opinions toward zoos. Even though the zoo usually plays an important role in maintaining and protecting habitats and rare species, there are many environmentalists in opposition to zoos because they believe it is wrong to put animals in captivity instead of their natural habits (Malamud,1998). An increasing number of people care about zoo animals' welfare and happiness. This makes change as it forces zoos to develop a better natural environment for the animals. One participant admitted that even though he enjoyed his experience in Tropikariet, he still does not like the idea of keeping animals in such a small space:

*"I like insects, it is shit to see they have been trapped in such small tanks. I think the other animals should also have bigger living spaces, be able to explore and be free. This made me have a complicated feeling about having such zoos in the city." (Participant 2)*

It is also worth considering what it means that so many tourists only like the "beautiful" or "cute" species in the zoo, and that many do not like to see insects or snakes. Those animals

make tourists feel in danger and give them negative feelings about their experiences.

*“I don’t like the night rainforest area, it was so dark, and full of scary disgusting insects.” (Participant 1)*

This is important for modern zoos to take into consideration such negative feelings, tourists should be aware that zoos have the responsibility to exhibit different animals and creatures. In the long term, as Ballantyne et al. (2011) proves, negative tourist experiences in wildlife tourism could transfer into negative impacts on natural habitats, waste action and pollution. Some tourists also mentioned the morality of zoos and some misbehaviors from other tourists.

*“There are very obvious signs telling people don’t use flash when you take pictures of the animals, but there were still many people who just ignored that. In the first lemur room there were some people being sneaky to touch their tails and I am not sure if that will scare the lemurs.” (Participant 7)*

The researcher found that tourists are spontaneously questioning and calling out others’ misbehavior, they emphasized that tourists should not touch the animals, or use a flash when taking pictures of them. This shows that tourists are exhibiting high moral beliefs that guide their values towards animals’ welfare and behave actively to educate misbehaving tourists. And zoos should put more effort to avoid such misbehaviors in case it left negative feelings for other tourists and leave damage for animals.

#### **4.9 Subjective well-being**

The last category subjective well-being focuses on tourists' subjective and psychological experiences. This category includes how tourists' emotional affinity shows, and how they reflect on their experiences in the interviews. For some tourists, visiting Tropikariet is a good way for them to relax from stressful daily life. For example like one participant claims :

*“After the whole week’s deadline and exam, it’s nice to let my hair down a bit there.”* (Participant 1)

Participant 1 is a master student living in Helsingborg, she explained one of the reasons she visited Tropikariet was to get rid of her stress from her exams and deadlines. It was a nice experience to cheer her up and gain some benefits for future life. Packer & Ballantyne (2002) explains such experience can be seen as enjoyment for tourists' subjective well-being, which the tourists can be pleasantly occupied and to feel happy; and restoration (the desire to relax mentally and physically). Such individual emotions can go further and make tourists think about how does this experience has affected on them, as one comment from TripAdvisor indicated:

*“It is in a slightly strange location, but ignore that and let your inner curiosity take over……. It certainly awakes the ‘inner child’ in adults, and excites the young rather well.”*

He talked about his experience in Tropikariet aroused his “inner curiosity” and “inner child” as an adult. That shows he feels strong affection about visiting Tropikariet, with deeper meanings for his personal growth. Emotional expression is more obvious in semi-structured interviews, since participants talked more and gave more information than online comments. And Participant 4 said:

*“When I look at the beautiful fish in the aquarium, I always fall in meditation, it works like my special mind palace, to empty my tiredness.”* (Participant 4)

Her words show that she was immersed in aquarium environments, and that leads to her deeper thinking and meditation. This is a positive experience combined with aesthetic and entertainment, but also benefits her mental health. In some way, her experiences cured her tiredness and benefited her in the emotional world. This is similar as Bruni, Fraser & Schultz (2008) describe zoo visits as restorative experiences.

All the data from above show that to the end, some tourists gain experience that help them to build positive blocks for their subjective well-being. This is very personal depending on their

backgrounds and how sensitive they are about nature and animals. It is not a simple experience and works fast, it is complex and interactive, but in the end it has a strong effect on some tourists that benefits for further life and future. Such subjective well being experience is more common in spiritual and religious tourism, for example in temple tourism, Song, Lee, Park, Hwang & Reisinger (2015) also claim that tourists gain experience from living in a temple, getting rid of anxiety and promoting self-growth.

#### **4.10 Theoretical saturation**

I took one-fifth of the semi-structured interview data and applied theoretical saturation. Using the same process as before, processing initial coding, focused coding and repeated reading, the results did not show more dimensions than the seven above. Therefore, the types of tourist experience gained through visiting Tropikariet are complete and no more new aspects are found.



## 5. Discussion

*This section briefly summarizes the study's main results: the eight types of tourist experience evident when visiting Tropikariet. The summary is followed by a discussion on the importance of the result, and the conclusions that can be drawn from it. Finally, the results are contextualised in relation to the previous research outlined in the literature review.*

The aim of this study is to understand what types of experience tourists gain through visiting a modern zoo. The empirical material was gathered from Tropikariet, a local tropical indoor modern zoo in Helsingborg. The aim is to address what has often been neglected in modern zoo tourism literature — tourist experiences, in particular these experiences as retold by the tourists themselves. To answer the research question, ten participants were interviewed, and 103 comments were collected from TripAdvisor as netnographic data.

As shown in chapter 4, the results indicate that through applying grounded theory analysis, eight dimensions of tourist experience can be identified: entertainment, social interactions, educational values, uniqueness, aesthetic, ease of facilities, negative feelings and subjective well-being. These results can be related to Pine and Gilmore's theory (1998), and shows several similar themes: such as entertainment, aesthetic and uniqueness. Visitors enjoy and gain entertaining experiences through getting close to animals and being amazed by the beauty of nature, and their overall memories were in many ways unique and meaningful. This result further confirms Fernandez & Timberlake's (2009) view that tourist experiences are affected by exhibit design as well as animals' behaviors. Modern zoos provide an opportunity for visitors to see an authentic scenery of animals living in their natural habitat.

Regarding the experiences of entertainment and uniqueness, the idea that “the closer the better” is extremely significant. The participants' closeness with animals highlighted their experiences and left a good memory, something which is confirmed in several previous studies in the field (Curtin, 2005; Orams, 1997). This can also be related to tourists enjoying social interactions with animals. For some participants, being close to animals causes much strong emotions and feelings of connection. This is especially evident with mammals. Some

participants even showed a sense of empathy towards animals and built bonds with the lemurs. Maciejewski & Kerley (2014) find in their studies of wildlife ecotourism that tourists show a strong preference for elephants, leopards and cheetahs. They spent longer time watching these big mammals and taking pictures of them, than with other kinds of animals. Similarly, Lück (2015) also finds how in marine tourism, tourists have higher interest and satisfaction in relation to mammals like whales and dolphins compared to fish or marine birds. This phenomenon can be explained starting in Manfredo et al.'s (2020) study about how people's view on wildlife is changing. They propose that because of urbanization, people have become disconnected from lifestyles in which they are closely connected to nature and animals. Hence many people are longing to have interactions with pets and animals in urban wildlife destinations, and as mentioned, in particular mammals which can be seen as more human-like and thus easier to build a relation to. Over the past decades there has been a strong trend in the view and understanding of human-animal relations as more important, and of animals sharing basic mental and emotional traits with people. Herein lies an opportunity for modern zoos to provide unique services and products to encourage tourists to get close to animals, a closeness that can mean higher satisfaction among visitors who experience excitement and a passion for animals and nature (Woods, 2000).

There are also other social interactions that take place during visits to modern zoos - and that are important for the tourist experience of the zoo as pleasant one. These can be for example interactions with companions but also with staff at the zoo. These findings are consistent with that of Schmitt (1999), who claims that a good tourist experience includes memorable time with family and friends. With friends and companions, tourists are more willing to experience new things, and they also enjoy talking with friends during their on-site time. These experiences in the zoo can be considered a way to forge a stronger friendship and share unique memories. In relation to the zoo staff, it is important to note that in order to ensure memorable and joyful experiences, staff needs to be available to answer tourists questions and initiate conversations (Ballantyne et al., 2011). Zoo staff should also be able provide knowledge, information and help the visitors interpret what they are experiencing, so as to reinforce the tourist's positive memories and feelings of wonder with nature and animals. As Cave & Jolliffe (2012, p. 274) claim, destination staff should make "interpretations revelation rather than information, provoke rather than instruct, distinguish interpretive skills between

children and adults”. The European Professional Zookeeper Organization also suggests that modern zoos should involve their staff in the running of the zoo to keep them active and motivated (EAZA, 2008).

Family type tourists play an important role in zoo tourism. Firstly, parents enjoy spending time together with their children in the zoo as a family bonding trip. Secondly, it is a good opportunity for them to connect with animals to learn about nature and life. For family type tourists, the education that can come with a zoo visit is of particularly high value. The results show that educational opportunities are a key part of a tourist's visit experience to modern zoos, and that people have an awareness that zoos should offer better education and multiple ways for people—especially for children to learn about wildlife. When it comes to educational opportunities, firstly tourists will typically get generally interested by what they see in a modern zoo and would like to know more about the animals, like where they come from and what they feed on. Signs and other interactive devices are usually used to provide visitors with this information. Another aspect of the educational opportunities of modern zoos is mentioned by Fraser & Sickler (2009) who show in their research how some parents try to use animals’ in zoos to explain concepts such as love, responsibility, and bonding to children. They also found that some parents are concerned that their children grow up in urban settings and are disconnected with animals and the natural world, and that parents often see the zoo as a place that can provide a link for their kids to nature. Parents were also shown to use zoos as a place to teach their children about respect, empathy and a sense of morality (Fraser & Sickler, 2009).

There are still many aspects that modern zoos can develop to better fit in an educational role in wildlife tourism. For example, involving more “interactive education” activities where tourists are not just passively reading things, but where they are also encouraged to touch and feed animals and learn about animal behaviours through closely watching them (EAZA, 2008). A successful educational experience is also related to further considerations such as thinking of animal's welfare and conservation of animals’ habitats. Many of the leading and advanced modern zoos have reorientated their exhibitions towards advancing conservation values in society (Dierking, Burtnyk, Buchner & Falk, 2002).

Tropikariet as an indoor zoo, is not affected by the seasonality and weather conditions, it even has more visitors during bad weather. This is part of their ease of facilities that offer tourists a more convenient experience. The exterior design of Tropikariet, doesn't provide much information about what it is, and many tourists think it is just a normal building. Hence in future studies, modern zoos should consider servicescape as an important aspect to enhance their physical encounter environment, including "spatial layout and functionality; signs, symbols, and artifacts; ambient conditions" (Bitner, 1992, p. 57). Servicescape model has been applied a lot in the tourism industry to enhance tourists' satisfaction (Hooper, Coughlan & Mullen, 2013).

In general, tourist experiences of Tropikariet are positive; tourists feel pleasant about their experience and I have found such experiences also have a positive effect on their subjective well being. It is also unique for their self development and personal growth. Smith & Diekmann (2017) note that the concept of wellbeing has been used sparsely in relation to tourism, but research on wellbeing can contribute to further understanding the tourism industry and motivate for more meaningful tourist experiences. Most tourism studies that mentioned subjective well-being are focused on meditation tourism and health tourism, which offer tourists a longer or shorter benefit on physical or mental (Konu, 2010; Tseng & Shen, 2014). Previous studies focused on the subjective well-being in wildlife tourism are rare, in this study however it is found that tourists gain experiences through a combination of aesthetic, hedonic, and immersing memories which in the end benefit their mental world. Such well-being experiences can be seen more valued than purely bodily pleasures. Future studies of wildlife tourism can focus on how to turn tourists' subjective well-being experiences into a longer term, and not only for tourists themselves, but also for environmentally-friendly and local communities.

There are also negative voices about modern zoos, despite that Tropikariet offers good welfare for animals. For example, there are encounter conflicts between visitors and animals. On the one hand, people's economic support builds better welfare for animals. But there are also misbehaviors among visitors that create negative effects on the animals, such as overactive crowds that make animals—especially mammals more tense and stressed (Fernandez & Timberlake, 2009). Despite the critical voices about modern zoos, for many

people in urban settings, the local park, zoo, or aquarium is one of the only opportunities to encounter nature (Bruni & Schultz, 2008). And zoos still have an important entertainment and educational role, especially for school groups and children. Thus, in a foreseeable future, modern zoos will not disappear in urban life and cities. What we should do is to ensure that the animals living in zoos have a good enough welfare, with opportunities to display their natural behaviours. This can be achieved for example through avoiding training the animals in zoos and encouraging proper visitors behaviours. In further studies, it is also necessary to consider the transforming of modern zoos and applying high technology. For example, build virtual reality zoos with immersing and authenticity details, to offer a more moral way for tourists to understand wildlife and animals.

Zoos have a long history of being places of recreation and entertainment (Wijeratne, 2014), but modern zoos obviously have the capacity to offer tourists additional experiences. The evolution of zoos from traditional to modern shows that culture and the relationship between humans and nature has changed. Both governing countries and zoo companies themselves are increasingly considering partnering with wildlife conservation and local communities to start a sustainable development together with the visitors (Higginbottom, 2004). Much of the prior research into wildlife tourism used quantitative approaches which did not show the participants personal contexts or how they expressed their experience as a story or a coherent memory (Schanzel & McIntosh, 2000). Through qualitative research and in-depth interviews, this study puts forward a more open way to explore the experience of the ordinary tourist. The study found that tourist experience is affected by participants' personal background and is relevant to their daily life. Even with the same animals, different visitors have different kinds of experience and reflective thoughts about it—this further proves why it is necessary to apply qualitative research in studies of zoo tourism. This study also contributes more specifically to zoo tourism in Sweden, since previous studies are mostly focused on American, Asian and Australia.

## 6. Conclusion

Zoo tourism related research has been studied in several settings by scholars in relation to motivations and tourist satisfactions. Despite this, the focus on different types of experiences of zoo tourists is still underdeveloped. The results of the research have made contributions to both zoo tourism and tourist experience area fields. This research is the first academic paper to use Tropikariet as a case study to research modern zoo tourism. It is also one of the limited studies that focus on modern zoo tourism in Sweden, and reveals the uniqueness of tropical zoos in Nordic countries—which offer tourists several types of experiences.

From a practical application aspect, this study gives a deeper understanding of tourists' experience which can provide more knowledge for zoos on how to verify their functions and understand tourists. This is especially important for smaller private zoos like Tropikariet which make their entire profits from the tour operations. Therefore they need to build valid attractions for tourists to have a satisfied experience and keep business running. Zoo managers can use the result of this research to develop and innovate their products and services. Further plans, for example, on-site interpretative (guides) skills should be enhanced and offer better knowledge about animals and the natural environment. According to Ballantyne et al., (2011), wildlife interpreters are an effective part of maintaining and strengthening tourist memories and satisfaction.

In this research, social interaction with animals, companions, and staff is shown to be a significant aspect of tourist experience. Arguably this is a positive effect gained by tourists through visiting a zoo, which also reveals their personal and emotive context, something that deserves to be researched more in future studies.

As this paper demonstrates, we should consider zoo tourism as one part of sustainable tourism which adds environmental education meanings to visitors and the tourism industry. From the zoo tourism context and referring to wildlife tourism, tourists' emotional connections with wildlife also leads to deeper thoughts about nature and human-nature relationships. Half of

the participants and several online comments gave evidence that this experience makes people think more about nature and the environment. It is either they learn new interesting facts, or they are aware about the broader worldwide environmental issues. In the longer term, this may be beneficial to both nature and society, in that it emphasises protecting endangered species and wild habitat.

A reflection on the study's discussion and conclusion makes clear that there are some limitations of this research. Firstly, Tropikariet is a modern tropical zoo with specially built natural environments and friendly animals. This research may not be the standard of the tourist experiences in other local zoos, such as Skane Zoo or Ystad Zoo. Secondly, upon further consideration, there are several other modern zoos in the Nordic area — for example, The Blue Planet in Copenhagen, and Universeum in Gothenburg.

Recommendations for this study include extending the present research by comparing these three different modern zoos in order to examine any differences or similarities in the respective tourist experiences on offer. In addition to this, it is clear that while conservation and education are goals for modern zoos, the results indicate that there are conflicts between visitors' and animals' needs. It is difficult to keep a balance between financial challenges and building a better habitat for animals. Sustainable development in modern zoo tourism is one direction that may contribute to zoo tourism in further academic research.

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## **Appendix 1**

1. When was the last time you visited Tropikariet?
2. What was your motivation to go there ?
3. Did you have any expectations before you went there?
4. How did you know about that destination? From friends, read the commercials, internet etc.
5. Did you go there alone, with friends, with family, or with a travel group ?
6. Can you describe your experiences there? (story telling)
7. What stuck out the most while you were there?
8. Did anything funny happen there ?
9. What were your favorite animals there?
10. Did you have any interactions with the animals?
11. Did you have any interactions with the tour guide/animal keeper/staff there?
12. Did you communicate a lot with your friends/family members while there? (If not going alone)
13. Did you feel emotionally affected during your visit ?
14. Were you unsatisfied with any part of your visit? Anything bother you?  
Environment, smell, etc.
15. Did you think Trtopikariet provided good welfare for animals there ?
16. How did you feel after you visited? Did the experiences affect your life in any way?
17. Did you post any pictures/blogs/comments on social media about your visit? Or share with your friends or families?
18. Did you become a loyalty customer for your destination ?

## Appendix 2

### *Netnography initial coding process*

<b>Examples of original representative texts and notes</b>	<b>Initial codes</b>
A1 “Nice, fun and admirable place” A2 “Love at first sight” A3 “Interesting visit at Tropikariet”	B1 Enjoyment of visiting
A4 “It was really impressive.....very much worth the visit ” A5 “Helsingborg is not a particularly big city and Tropikariet is not located in a particularly big building, but this is way better than I expected”	B2 Worth visiting experiences
A6 “You can walk free among monkeys and birds” A7 “I had a lemur’s tail in my face..... A doctor fish gently nibbling my hands” A8 “There is plenty of interaction with all the animals” “The real highlight is the petting zoo style room....”	B3 Close interactions with animals
A9 “This is a great place to see animals in natural habitat” A10 “You walk around in a jungle like environment .....” A11 “It is one experience after another, including being plunged in the darkness of a rainforest night”	B4 Enjoy natural environment
A12 “This is a fabulous tropical world.....” A13 “So warm and humid in a beautiful jungle room....”	B5 Beauty of exotic tropical world
A 14 “The aquarium is not the biggest but very, very beautiful” A15 “The shark aquarium is just plain hypnotic and beautiful”	B6 Beauty of aquarium
A16 “All the exhibits were clean and the animals seemed healthy and happy” A17 “All the animals were well cared for.....”	B7 Concerns for animals’ welfare



A18 “.....tropical animals from all over the world: ants, lemurs, and smaller monkeys.....bats and birds”	B8 An abundance of animal types
A19 “Lots of fun for the children” A20 “It is especially welcoming to children, with lots of activities and events” A21 “Doesn’t matter if you are parents or grandparent, you will have a lovely visit together with the children”	B9 Social interaction with kids
A22 “Plenty of parking and a cafeteria offers light lunch” A23 “We went to their café which offered a perfectly nice selection of sandwiches, a couple pies.....”	B10 Standards of facilities
A24 “.....this is hands-down the best zoo yet, right at the ticket office we saw leaf-cutter ants crawling on a wooden sign” A25 “.....Tropikariet is unlike any zoo in America that I ‘ve ever seen!” A26 “Entire concept is cool as the animals are not locked.....”	B11 Unique experience
A27 “Nothing special.....in the animal floor the smell was almost too much” A28 “I feel the space is a bit constrained for the birds and animals”	B12 Negative voices
A 29“Perfect on a rainy day!” A30 “worth visiting when the weather says no to all other outdoor activities!”	B13 Constraints of Weather conditions
A31 “.....let your inner curiosity take over.....it certainly awakes the inner child in tough adult life.” A32 “The cute animals definitely cure my depression in the cold long Swedish winter!”	B14 Subjective well-being
A33 “Took a friend here.....we were pleasantly surprised!” A34 “.....we wanted to tell all our friends about Tropikariet”	B15 Social interaction with friends
A35 “The staff were all very helpful in explain what we saw” A36 “wonderful staff and very helpful”	B16 Social interaction with staff

A37 “.....we all learnt something new as a good result of our visit” A38 “Went to Tropikariet with my school students.....we spent half of the day studying all the animals”	B17 Educational experiences
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*Semi-structured interview initial coding process*

<b>Examples of original representative texts and notes</b>	<b>Initial codes</b>
C1 “I knew Tropikariet from a friend, she is an animal lover and strongly suggested I go together with her, so we did.” C2 “My girlfriend really wanted to go there so I went there to accompany her.”	D1 Companies with friends
C3 “Not the biggest aquarium but a good mix of different animals including tropical fish and polar fish.” C4 “The fish here are amazing. There is everything from piranhas and crabs to octopuses and huge cute fish that I don’t know the names.”	D2 An abundance of animal types
C5 “The place is very beautiful, but I am sure the experience is totally a different one if you visit when it’s totally crowded.” C6 “Not a very large aquarium, but they have some amazingly beautiful features.”	D3 Beauty of the zoo
C7 “Fantastic visit! Unexpected and interesting.” C8 “It was a great place.....Totally worth a visit.”	D4 Enjoyment of visiting
C9 “We love the touch pools where little fish tickled and nibbled my son’s fingers.” C10 “The lemurs were very cheeky and playful. I was surprised they dared to get very close.”	D5 Close interactions with animals
C11 “I went to Tropikariet in November, the place is really worth visiting in cold winter when you don’t have much to do in Skåne.”	D6 Constraints of Weather conditions

C12 “It’s Christmas holidays, nothing else is open, we have family access...sure go for it.”	
C13 “It’s a well maintained modern zoo with many exhibits, compared to other zoos I have visited before, it is indeed very special.” C14 “The rainforest part was actually unexpected and great.....”	D7 Unique experience
C15 “The staff were friendly and helpful; they can talk both in Swedish and English.” C16 “.....also want to give a thankyou to the shop assistant in the gift shop and café.”	D8 Social interaction with staff
C17 “After whole week’s deadline and exam, it’s nice to let my hair down a bit there” C18 “When I look at the beautiful fish in the aquarium, I always fall in meditation, it works like my special mind palace, to empty my tiredness”	D9 Release from daily pressure
C19 “When I look at the beautiful fish in the aquarium, I always fall in meditation, it works like my special mind palace, to empty my tiredness” C20 “.....and actually a very diverting way to spend a couple of hours relaxing and lost in thought.”	D10 Spiritual experience
C21 “I found myself appreciating the engineering and aesthetic design of the place as much as the creatures on display.” C22 “Probably the best place to observe the life of the animals in tropical climates.”	D11 Enjoy natural habitat design
C23 “Still I’m concerned about the animals’ health. People are constantly taking pictures with flash. Visitors are loud as hell.” C24 “People should wash their hands first when they touch the shrimp.”	D12 Concerns for animals’ welfare
C25 “Visited on a rainy day with my 9 years old and a 3 years old - both were greatly entertained and we learned a little as well.”	D13 Educational experience

<p>C26 “It’s such an interactive place for me and my children.”</p> <p>C27 “They offer a lot of activities for children.”</p>	<p>D14 Social interaction with children</p>
<p>C28 “It’s fairly small. They need more space to store luggage or bags.”</p> <p>C29 “The café is great with really good food.”</p>	<p>D15 Standards of facilities</p>
<p>C30 “I don’t like the night rainforest area, it was so dark, and full of scary disgusting insects.”</p> <p>C31 “I like insects, it is shit to see they have been trapped in such small tanks.”</p>	<p>D16 Negative feelings</p>

## Appendix 3

### *Netnography focused coding process*

Categories	Correspond initial codes	Directions meaning
Entertainment	B1 Enjoyment of visiting B2 Worth visiting experience	Tourists think the whole experience is recreational and entertaining.
Social interactions	B3 Close interactions with animals B9 Social interaction with kids B15 Social interaction with friends B16 Social interaction with staff	Tourists have different levels of interactions in three key areas: animals, companies (kids & friends), staff.
Aesthetic	B4 Enjoy natural environment B5 Beauty of exotic tropical world B6 Beauty of aquarium	Tourists are amazed by the beauty of nature and animals.
Educational meaning	B7 Concerns for animals' welfare B17 Educational experiences	Tourists learn knowledge from visiting Tropikariet and an awareness of animals' welfare and conservation.
Unique experience	B8 An abundant animal species B11 Unique experience	Tourists consider visiting Tropikariet a unique experience.
Ease of facilities	B10 Standards of facilities B13 Constraints of Weather conditions	Tourists gain experience through physical environment and weather conditions.
Negative feelings	B12 Negative voices	Tourists feel disappointed about the tourist experience.
Subjective well-being	B14 Subjective well-being	Tourists gain experience to help enhance their wellbeing.

*Semi-structured focused coding process*

Categories	Correspond initial codes
Social interactions	D1 Companies with friends D5 Close interactions with animals D8 Social interaction with staff D14 Social interaction with children
Unique experience	D2 An abundance of animal types D7 Unique experience
Aesthetic	D3 Beauty of the zoo D11 Enjoy natural habitat design
Entertainment	D4 Enjoyment of visiting
Ease of facilities	D6 Constraints of weather conditions D15 Standards of facilities
Subjective well-being	D9 Release from daily pressure D10 Spiritual experience

Educational experience	D12 Concerns for animals' welfare D13 Educational experience
Negative feelings	D16 Negative feelings