Co-creating the tourist experience with the digital tourists...

– a case study of VisitSydsjælland-Møn

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Tourism – Master's Thesis

Number of keystrokes: 180.570

Submission date: May 31, 2016

Aalborg University Copenhagen

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Abstract

The digital nature of today's tourism empowers tourists and allows them to construct their own experiences at the destination. However, the digital proliferation can also be utilised by the tourist destinations to co-create valuable experiences with the tourists and ensure a competitive advantage for the destination. Moreover, the destination can use technology to develop a smart tourism destination, which focuses on enhancing the tourist experience through information and communications technologies, and collects the tourists' digital footprints for strategic usage. Accordingly, this thesis is concerned with a case study of the destination management organisation, VisitSydsjælland-Møn (VISM), and examines how it is possible for VISM to influence the tourist experience at the destination through a digital co-creation process, as a means of accommodating the digital tourists and at the same time offer outstanding tourist service. In particular, this thesis focuses on the enablement of the co-creation process and the tourists' involvement within the process, as well as the development of a smart tourism destination to further support the co-creation of tourist experiences.

This thesis is based on a moderate social constructivistic approach and develops knowledge primarily through written and spoken language in terms of VISM's masterplan and semi-structured life world interviews with employees from VISM and tourists holidaying at South Zealand.

Reviewing the literature within the areas of tourist experience, co-creation, and smart tourism destination, it becomes evident that there is currently not any theoretical framework, which combines all three areas. Accordingly, this thesis develops a new theoretical framework by refining and extending Neuhofer et al.'s (2012) framework, by means of Neuhofer's (2016) division of co-creation into to the consumer involvement processes of crowdsourcing, co-production and co-creation as well as the concept of smart tourism destination.

With the newly developed framework serving as the foundation for analysing the case study of VISM, the main findings in this thesis suggest that VISM can influence the tourist experience through a digital co-creation process by facilitating an experience space in which a digital co-creation process can occur. Moreover, VISM can increase the involvement within this process by emphasising how the engagement can benefit the

tourists and by ensuring a high degree of transparency as well, as including the issue of privacy in its initiatives. Additionally, adopting the concept of smart tourism destination to a larger degree and collecting the tourists' digital footprints can enable the digital co-creation process. The enablement can also happen by identifying the tourists' needs and demands at the destination on the basis of the digital footprints, and strategically utilise this knowledge to increase the involvement of tourists in the co-creation process. Finally, VISM should ensure adequate physical arrangements, in order to influence the tourist experience through a digital co-creation process at the destination.

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1 Introduction

One of the most extensive impacts on the tourism sector in the 21st century is information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Buhalis & Law, 2008: 609; Morrison, 2013: 369; Neuhofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin 2012: 38). ICTs is the overall term for communication devices such as computers, mobile phones, televisions, cameras etc. as well as the associated networks and software such as the Internet, WiFi networks, satellite systems, applications (apps), and social networks, among other things (Morrison, 2013: 369). Moreover, the Internet is no longer merely a place for information retrieval, it has become a multi faceted space, which facilitates and enhances social interaction (Munar & Gyimóthy, 2014: 72).

Correspondingly, the digital proliferation is to a great extend evident in the Danish tourism market, where the number of visitors entering through a mobile phone on VisitDenmark's website, and the adjoining local- and regional websites, has increased by 150 % from 2014 to 2015 (Det Nationale Turismeforum, 2016: 61). And tourists are increasingly making use of on-site planning, with the mobile devices serving as the key tool for this purpose (Partnerskabet Det Digitale Turisme Danmark, 2015: 13).

Accordingly, ICTs support interaction between tourists and the destination, which can effect the development, management, and marketing of these destinations (Buhalis & Law, 2008: 619), and furthermore influence the tourist experience at the destination (Xiang, Tussyadiah, & Buhalis, 2015: 143).

Interaction between consumers and the company is likewise the cornerstone of the concept of co-creation, which has emerged during the last decade on the basis of a gradually shift from a company-centric focus towards an acknowledgement of the empowered consumers and a view on consumers as co-creators of value and experiences (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Co-creation is thus seen as a process through which tourists can interact with the destination and generate their own experiences (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009: 313). Similarly, co-creating experiences with the tourists, also provides the destination with valuable insights of the tourists' needs and demands and accordingly a competitive advantage for the destination (Neuhofer, 2016: 19, 30).

Another way for destinations to increase their competiveness and make use of the technological development is through the emerging concept of smart tourism destination, in which 'smart' is another word for intelligent, and emphasises the smart use of things that are embedded or enhanced by technology (Boes, Buhalis, & Inversini, 2015: 391). The concept is derived from the development of smart cities, in which the citizens are involved in the co-creation process of products and services as a means of designing innovative living and engagement with all stakeholders (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2013: 556).

Smart tourism destination is especially concerned with the importance of enhancing the tourist experience at the destination enabled by the integration of ICTs (Boes et al., 2015: 401). The concept moreover emphasises that the data that are produced by the tourists through ICTs can enable destination management organisations (DMOs) to make strategic decisions and develop the destination and its offerings accordingly (Lamsfus, Martín, Alzua-Sorzabal, & Torres-Manzanera, 2015: 367).

Experiences are regarded as the essence of the tourism industry (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009: 315; Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015: 381), and while the digital proliferation empowers the tourists and allows them to construct their own tourist experience (Buhalis & Law, 2008: 619); the destinations now more than ever have to enter into a dialogue with the tourists in order to be a part of the process and stay competitive (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009: 313). Hence, engaging the tourists within a co-creation process is valuable for a tourist destination. It is however interesting to examine how the destination can enable this process and identify what determines the tourists' involvement within the co-creation of experiences.

Based on the above considerations, this thesis has the tourist experience and the digital reality of today's tourism as the focal point, and examines co-creation and smart tourism destination, as a means for tourism destinations to accommodate the digital tourists and develop a competitive advantage through the co-creation of valuable experiences.

Examining these matters, this thesis encompasses a case study of the DMO, VisitSydsjælland-Møn (VISM), which is currently highly engaged in developing and increasing tourism at the destination of South Zealand[2].

In particular, this thesis offers a theoretical contribution to tourism research; based on a review of the current literature a gap is identified, as there is no research combining the areas of tourist experience, co-creation, and smart tourism destination. Accordingly, this thesis presents a new theoretical framework encompassing these areas. This framework additionally serves as the foundation of analysing the case study of VISM

1.1 <u>Research Question</u>

How can VisitSydsjælland-Møn influence the tourist experience at the destination through a digital co-creation process?

The **aim** of this thesis is to explore how it is possible for VISM to accommodate the digital tourists at the destination and at the same time reach its own strategic goal of providing outstanding tourist service, by the means of involving the tourists in the creation of experiences and developing a smart tourism destination.

The following **objectives** have been set to reach this aim:

- Clarify the literature within the field of tourist experience, co-creation, and the emerging field of smart tourism destination, as well as the linkage between these areas.

- Identify and discuss VISM's digital initiatives, and then critically assess how VISM can increase the involvement of tourists in a co-creation process, and discuss to what extent VISM utilises the concept of smart tourism destination.

- Provide recommendations to how VISM can influence the tourist experience as well as suggest further research within the field of co-creating tourist experiences.

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[2] Chapter 2 presents a case description of VISM

1.2 Chapter Outline

Current chapter presents an introduction to the research topic within this thesis and the relevancy of the research matters. Moreover, this chapter presents the research question in correlation with the aims and objectives of this thesis.

Chapter 2 encompasses a brief description of VISM, as a means to introduce the case study and provide fundamental knowledge of this DMO in relation to this thesis.

Chapter 3 presents the methodological approach and the chosen research design as well as the research methods that have been chosen to explore the matters in this thesis. Moreover, this chapter clarifies the quality of this thesis in terms of validity, reliability and ethics.

Chapter 4 relates to the first objective of this thesis and accordingly presents a review and discussion of the literature within the areas of tourist experience, co-creation, and smart tourism destination. Subsequently, this chapter furthermore presents a new theoretical framework.

Chapter 5 relates to the second objective of this thesis and presents an analysis and discussion of the research matters, on the basis of data from VISM's masterplan and the interviews, in correlation with the newly developed theoretical framework.

Chapter 6 presents a brief description of the areas of the theoretical framework that have not been addressed in the analysis. Moreover, this chapter presents an additional area to the theoretical framework.

Chapter 7 relates to the third, and last, objective within this thesis and accordingly presents a conclusion of this thesis and, additionally, provides recommendations to VISM. Moreover, this chapter includes suggestion to further research.

2 Case Description

The case in this thesis is based on VisitSydsjælland-Møn (VISM), which is the DMO at South Zealand, located in the southeast part of Denmark (picture 2). The majority of tourists travelling to South Zealand are Danish or from the neighbouring countries of Denmark, and they mainly visit this destination because of the many coasts and the great opportunities for nature experience. In 2015, the total number of tourists, in terms of overnight stays, was approx. 749.000[3] (VisitDenmark, 2016: 21).

Picture 2: The destination of South Zealand, Denmark (Picture clipped from VisitSydsjælland-Møn, 2016a)

VISM is an amalgamation of former DMOs in the municipalities of Vordingborg, Næstved, Faxe and Stevns, and was established in April 2015.

As a part of the establishment, VISM made a masterplan[4] for the development of tourism at the destination, which was published in September 2015.

The vision stated in this masterplan runs as follows; *"South Zealand must be a new strong brand for coastal- and nature tourism in Denmark. In the year of 2020, South Zealand's tourism must be 30 % bigger than today"* (MP: 2). And additionally, VISM's

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[3] The figures only account for tourists staying in hotels, holiday resorts, hostels, marinas, or camp sites (VisitDenmark, 2016: 21).

[4] The masterplan is enclosed in appendix 1 and the source reference throughout the thesis appears as the following example: *(MP: 2)*

mission is to be; *"South Zealand's new incubator for efficient communication and ideas, which can develop and inspire tourism, quality of life, and settlement in South Zealand* (Ibid.: 4).

VISM's strategic efforts are primarily a response to the decrease in tourism, which South Zealand has experienced for a longer period of time, and as means of ensuring and creating jobs within the tourism industry at the destination (Ibid.: 3-4).

VISM especially compares the destination's probabilities of growth to the destination of North Zealand, which also has an amalgamation of municipalities, however, established five years before VISM. The tourism at North Zealand has within the last five years increased by 26 % (MP: 5). In comparison to VISM, North Zealand had approx. 996.000 tourists, in terms of overnight stays, in 2015 (VisitDenmark, 2016: 18).

The overall pivot of the masterplan is accordingly growth, and the three focus areas for VISM are destination development, tourist service, and marketing (VisitSydsjælland-Møn, 2015). In relation to the focus area of tourist service, one of the main objectives for VISM is that the tourist service should be more extensive and reach more tourists, by means of digital initiatives and through the establishment of several 'tourist informations' located at the tourism operators across the destination (Ibid.). Correspondingly, VISM's aim is to provide outstanding service and hosting, personally as well as digitally (MP: 19).

Especially VISM's digital initiatives are relevant for the context of this thesis, and VISM's digital focus is mainly based on an acknowledgement of the tourists' increasing use of the Internet and their mobile phones before and during their travel and, accordingly, the intention of being present wherever the tourists are (VisitSydsjælland-Møn, 2015).

Additionally, as a part of developing the destination, VISM has recently presented a new visual style and brand identity, which is based on the new name for the destination; SydkystDanmark (VisitSydsjælland-Møn, 2016b). Thus, this is the term VISM will be using forward in its marketing and overall communication with tourists.

3 Methodology and Methods

In order to clarify how this thesis will proceed to explore the matters brought forward in the research question, this chapter describes the methodological approach, the chosen research design, and the research methods underlying this thesis.

Initially, this chapter includes a brief description of knowledge creation within tourism and subsequently presents the ontological- and epistemological position of this thesis, which is social constructivism. With a great focus on language, hermeneutics is presented as a supporting interpretative approach and, thereafter, the position of the researcher is clarified. The chosen research design of a case study approach is described and, following, the chapter presents the different methods of data collection, which includes the strategic document as well as semi-structured life world interviews. Moreover, this chapter clarifies how this data will be used in the analysis chapter. The quality of this research is presented trough an assessment of validity, reliability and ethics, and, finally, the chapter ends with a summative sub-conclusion.

3.1 <u>Methodology</u>

3.1.1 Knowledge creation within tourism

Among other things, this thesis examines, explores, clarifies, and analyses in order to reach adequate answers to the proposed research question and thereby create new knowledge within this particular field of tourism.

In order to create knowledge trough research, it is necessary to know what to research, thus it is necessary to have concepts or theories, which can serve as a guide for the research (Wenneberg, 2000: 35). This notion was also Kuhn's (1962) fundamental basis for his pioneering work on *paradigms*, which roughly can be exemplified as the frames in which the study of knowledge must occur within (Wenneberg, 2000: 35). More specifically, a paradigm encompasses theory, application, and instrumentation, and it is described as a concrete scientific achievement with the twofold function of establishing, inspiring, and fostering a specific coherent scientific tradition as well as generating patterns and models of scientific research (Kindi, 1995: 77).

In terms of knowledge creation within tourism research, Cohen (1979) advocates that tourism is multidisciplinary and states, *"the complexity and heterogeneity of the field of*

tourism suggests that there is no point in searching for <u>the</u> theoretical approach to the study of tourism" (Cohen, 1979: 31). Thus, a set way to do and think does not apply to tourism research; rather a combination of various theories and disciplines seems appropriate.

This view is supported by Tribe (2004, 2006), who similarly asserts that tourism research cannot be situated in a restrictive paradigm (Tribe, 2006: 376). Furthermore, he argues that tourism studies are a field rather than a discipline because the concepts within tourism studies are rarely particular to tourism and because tourism studies apply criteria, which are found in contributory disciplines, among other things (Tribe, 2004: 47-48). Tribe is not the only one with this understanding. Gradually, researchers have had different perspectives in terms of which position they took regarding the scientific state of tourism as a discipline; some argue that tourism is purely an economic activity; some argue that tourism can be viewed only as a research tradition; some lean on the work of Kuhn (1962) and argue that tourism is in the process of becoming a scientific discipline and it is therefore considered a pre-paradigm; and, finally, some do argue that it is already a scientific discipline (Barca, 2011: 428-430).

Regardless of the disciplinary stance, tourism is seen as a complex cultural phenomenon that is based on complex relationships and has social, cultural, political, economic, and environmental impacts (Hannam & Knox, 2010: 176-177). Accordingly, it seems reasonable to approach tourism research from many different arenas.

Similarly, this thesis takes the view that the field of tourism is multidisciplinary, and it purposely encompasses a combination of tourism, marketing, management, service, and experience economy. Connecting various disciplines with the field of tourism is considered beneficial for this thesis as it enables a broad approach to knowledge creation and, all things being equal, a combination of various disciplines is to a great extent a reflection of the reality within the tourism industry, where, for example, the work of a DMO covers many areas even though the overall turf is tourism.

3.1.2 Social constructivism

Knowledge can be assessed in many ways, and knowledge creation within this thesis is based on the philosophical position of social constructivism, in which the meaning of

the social world is not something that is discovered; however, it is constructed by history and society as well as ideas and language (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012: 25).

The ontological position of social constructivism views the world as constituted of multiple realities and hence considers the world to be constructed by the people who are included in the research -both the people under study as well as the researcher- on the basis of their understanding of the research matter (Bryman, 2008: 19-20).

There are, however, various forms of social constructivism, and the critics against this worldview are primarily opposing towards the extreme idealistic ontological position, where the reality is believed to exist only because of our perception of it (Wenneberg, 2000: 143). Moreover, as *everything* is considered to be constructed within the extreme position, this means that everything is relative and thus nothing is able to bring us closer to, or further away from, the reality (Jacobsen, 2001: 123).

Similarly, constructing the world while being a part of it causes the allegation that it is not possible to distinguish between the world and the findings of it (Andersen, 2008: 29).

However, it is not relevant for the aim of this thesis to apply social construction as a way to question the existence of the physical universe. Instead, this thesis makes use of a more pragmatic form and applies *moderate* social constructivism, which involves; "…[a] *commonsense understanding that there is a reality existing outside of us that is independent of how we perceive it and of our knowledge of it. What is constructed is only our understanding of reality*" (Closet-Crane, 2015: 28).

In order to reach this understanding of reality, the epistemological position within social constructivism emphasises that the focus of what there is to be known and how this knowledge are obtained is socially constructed (Small, 2004: 256). Within this position, language is seen as something deeply embedded in the social process of creating knowledge, as language is an important way to assign meanings to the world (Best, 2008: 42). Language, both written and spoken, is assumed to contain built-in social constructions and a worldview that affects how people see and experience the world (Neuman, 2006: 89).

With language serving as a key contributor to the creation of knowledge, a qualitative research design as well as methods is chosen for this thesis, as the qualitative approach entails interpretation (Hannam & Knox, 2010: 180) and exploration of the *how* and

why's within the research matter (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004: 20), based on the written and spoken language.

The use of an interpretative approach like social constructivism prevents the research within this thesis to rely on facts and numbers, and identify one single truth for the prosed research question (Andersen, 2008: 29). Furthermore, this approach causes knowledge creation to happen on the basis of subjective opinions of the people involved in the research (Wenneberg, 2000: 201), which inevitably requires a very deliberate selection process of the respondents included in the research and the data collected, in order to ensure the relevancy. Moreover, as this approach brings the researcher into a position of co-constructing the reality, it necessitates commitment to researcher reflexivity and openness towards the research matters (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012: 26).

Nevertheless, the use of social constructivism also allows the exploration of what the different matters in question mean to the people who engage in these matters (Neuman, 2006: 90). Hence, it offers a way to *understand* the circumstances, the underlying thoughts, the relationships, the experiences, the motives, and the reasons, among other things, instead of merely *describing* these. All of this provides a nuanced view of the reality, which is considered to be useful when applying the empirical findings with the theory developed in the theoretical chapter of this thesis, and it furthermore offers a comprehensive answer to the research question.

3.1.3 Hermeneutics

In order to fully understand the language that constructs the knowledge, hermeneutics is furthermore applied to this thesis. This offers a supplementary interpretative approach to the research, where the meaning of people's statements are viewed in relation to the context, as these statements are dependent on the elements of the social world we wish to understand (Weinberg, 2008: 29). Moreover, hermeneutics is particularly useful for interpreting the written language, as the hermeneutical analysis of text involves attention to the social and historical context, and emphasises the author's point of view (Bryman, 2008: 532-533).

The more we know about the context the easier it will be to reach an understanding and, accordingly, the act of interpreting happens in a iterative process, where referring to the whole is necessary to understand the parts as well as referring to the parts is essential to understand the whole; this is known as the *hermeneutic circle* (Scott & Marshall, 2009). Within the hermeneutic circle, interpretations are continually revised as more text, and more data, is grasped by the researcher, and the focus for interpretation therefore changes on the basis of this (Goulding, 1999: 865).

Accordingly, this thesis utilises the hermeneutic circle as a means of interpreting the data and additionally categorising it to be applied in the analysis. This is further explained and illustrated in section 3.3.3.

The hermeneutics and social constructivism are in particular related by the subjective position of the researcher and, especially within the hermeneutic circle, the interpretation happens mainly on the basis of the researcher; thus, it would not make sense if an objective position was undertaken within this kind of research (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012: 116).

Accordingly, the role of the social constructivistic researcher and my position within this thesis will be elaborated in the following section.

3.1.4   The position of the researcher

Within social constructivism the researcher is not only deemed to observe and report on the findings, instead it is important for the researcher to play a part in the creation of knowledge by deconstructing the reality and, furthermore, taking a stance on the matter, as a way to create knowledge and take responsibility of the research (Wenneberg, 2000: 203). Likewise, within the qualitative approach, the process of the research requires that the researcher takes a subjective position and makes interpretations of the meaning of the collected data (Creswell, 2013: 4; Jennings, 2005: 108).

Accordingly, the opinions and explanations from the people participating in this research are presented in the analysis chapter on the basis of my assessment of its meanings, its value, and its relevancy.

Combined with the knowledge gained from the literature reviewed in the theoretical chapter, I have based my assessments on my previous study within business management and marketing and my current study of tourism on a master's level, as well as on my previous work experience from the DMO, VisitAarhus, and from the national DMO, VisitDenmark, among other places. Furthermore, I have travelled to many places, both nationally and internationally and, hence, had the role as a tourist many times. Moreover, as I am a part of the Millennials generation, which is especially characterised by the excessive use of technology (DeMaria, 2013: 1654), the use of mobile devices for communication, information search and inspiration is a natural part of my everyday life. Interpreting the social world within the researchers own frame of reference (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012: 29) means that the research would turn out differently if it was carried out by another researcher (the question of validity and reliability are addressed in section 3.4). However, it is somewhat impossible not to take a subjective position as a researcher (Haraway, 1988), as the process of co-constructing the knowledge is not only related to the analysis; it starts initially when deciding which matters to study, which methodology and methods to base the research on, and which academic disciplines and specific theories to include, and further develop.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Case study

This thesis is based on a case study of VisitSydsjælland-Møn and how it is possible for this DMO to influence the tourist experience while the tourists are at the destination, through a digital co-creation process, as an effect of VISM's efforts of accommodating the digital tourists and providing outstanding tourist service at the destination.

There has been some opposition towards case studies as a research method, because of the fact that a case study is an exploration of a single example, which impacts the ability to generalise the research findings, since the analysis in a case study cannot produce consistent and replicable results (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012: 23). However, Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that this way of generalising does not apply to case studies, because social science is concerned with the production of concrete, context-dependent knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 223). Furthermore, he states that, *"formal generalization is*

overvalued as a source of scientific development, whereas "the force of example" is underestimated" (Ibid.: 228). This view is also supported by Yin (2014) who further emphasises that case studies are generalisable to theoretical propositions and instead of statistical generalisation they can be used as a means of expanding theory (Yin, 2014: 21).

Based on the above, the use of a case study is highly relevant in this thesis, as the purpose is to explore *how* VISM can influence the tourist experience at the destination through a digital co-creation process. Not only for the purpose of knowledge creation within this field for managerial purposes, but also to a greater extend to be able to expand the existing theories within co-creation, tourist experience, and smart tourism destinations.

Another noticeable criticism against the case study approach is the claim that the bias of the researcher is predominating within case study research (Beeton, 2005: 39). The opposing argument towards this contention is that subjectivity and the question of researcher independence are a matter of issue in any other research strategy as well (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 237; Verschuren, 2003: 34), and it all comes down to the researchers own ethics and sense of responsibility towards scholarship (Yin, 2014: 76). As earlier described, the researcher plays an important part in the knowledge construction within social constructivism and is therefore required to take a subjective position within the research.

3.3 **Methods**

3.3.1 **Strategic document**

As a point of departure for this thesis, VISM's masterplan was carefully read and because of its relevance in terms of strategically addressing several matters within this research, it has become a pivotal piece of data collection. Because of its overall value, and ability to offer insight, a strategic document, like the masterplan, is viewed to be of great importance in the data collection when doing case study research (Yin, 2014: 107).

Looking at the information that can be extracted from the masterplan, it is important to remember that such a strategic document is produced with a certain purpose in mind,

for a specific audience, and under specific conditions (Linders, 2008: 468). In relation to this, the role of the case study researcher is to be a vicarious observer, who tries to make sense of the communication between the sender and the receiver of the document, which is based on other objectives than the researchers (Yin, 2014: 108). Thus, the masterplan has been approached with these considerations in mind when making sense of the social constructions of the strategic document within the analysis chapter.

In order ensure that the masterplan is scientifically treated within this thesis, Scott's (1990) quality control criteria for handling documentary sources have also been reviewed. These include *authenticity*, which refers to whether the document is genuine and of unquestionable origin; *credibility*, which refers to whether the document is free from error and misrepresentation; *representativeness*, which refers to whether or not the document are typical of its kind; and *meaning*, which refers to whether the document is clear and comprehensible (Scott, 1990: 6).

Considerations of the *authenticity* of the utilised data are fundamental in any research (Mogalakwe, 2006: 225), and ensuring that the documents used within research are what they purports to be is, is just as important as ensuring the identity of the informants in an interview (Ibid.). Thus, assessing if the documents are original or copies, and, in the latter case, the reason for the unoriginal edition, is an important part of the quality control. Moreover, checking if there are different versions of the same document can help considering the authenticity (Flick, 2009: 258).

Assessing the *credibility* concerns the evaluation of the author's representation of reality; whether or not the chosen point of view is sincere and if the content are free from distortion (Scott, 1990: 22). And, as previously specified, credibility of a document also concerns considering the purpose of the document in relation to the audience (Linders, 2008: 468).

The question of *representativeness* concerns whether or not the documents used in the research are representative of its totality of documents of its type (Punch, 2013: 159). This implies that the researcher needs to be aware of other documents of this type in order to make this assessment.

The *meanin*g of documents concerns the ultimate purpose of examining documents, namely to get an understanding of the meaning and significance of what the documents

encompasses (Scott, 1990: 28). Besides the assessment of the document being clear and comprehensible, this also refers to the intended meaning of the author, the meaning of the reader of the document, as well as the social meaning for the people involved in the matters that the document is addressing (Flick, 2009: 258).

Overall, the masterplan is a strategic document that provides an overview of the initiatives VISM is concerned with in the coming years. Therefore, this document is relevant to include in this thesis, as it provides a source of evidence on how VISM addresses the challenges of the tourists' digital behaviour and demands as well as how VISM prospectively plan to configure the tourist service and possibly enhance the tourist experience at the destination.

Moreover, the masterplan is relevant to include, as it encompasses several strategic issues for this DMO, besides the matters relevant for the aim of this thesis, and hence provides an overview of VISM's general focus and identified challenges.

3.3.2 Interviews

With such a great focus on the spoken language, interviews was an obvious choice of method for this research, and interviews are also viewed as one of the most important sources of data for a case study (Yin, 2014: 110).

The chosen approach for the interviews are life world interviews because the purpose within this approach is to understand the world of the participant's own perspectives (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015: 27). This approach is suitable within this thesis because life world interviews seek to get descriptions of the participant's lived world with respect to interpretations of the matters brought forward in the interview (Kvale, 2007: 11). Furthermore, this is appropriate in terms of the social constructivistic position of this thesis.

Hence, interviews are chosen mainly for the purpose of *further* understanding the drivers behind VISM's digital development matters addressed in the masterplan, as well as clarify VISM's current development in terms of a smart tourism destination. Moreover, interviews are utilised to identify the needs and digital consumption habits of tourists from VISM's market segment.

<u>Interviews participants</u>[5]

Interviews have been conducted with head of tourism service at VISM, Vibeke Tejlmand, head of development at VISM, Ida L. Winther, and marketing assistant at VISM, Anders Jakobsen.

Initially, interviews were arranged with Vibeke Tejlmand and Ida L Winther. However, during the interviews, the latter proved not to be as relevant for all of the research areas as expected. In terms of their organisational division, many of the issues brought forward in the interview turned out to be more related to the marketing department than the development department. Fortunately, the marketing assistant, Anders Jakobsen, was able to participate in an interview despite short notice, and thus supplemented with information on some of the matters that were marketing related.

The environment is conducive to the participants' concentration within an interview (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013: 207), and all of the participants from VISM were interviewed at the organisation's office in Vordingborg, which meant that they were in their accustomed environment and seemed highly focused during the interview.

Additionally, four interviews have been conducted with six different tourists (two of the interviews were conducted in pairs). The selection of these tourists was made on the basis of the destination's current tourism constitution (MP: 7). Thus, the participating tourists were self-organised Danish families with children, holidaying at a campsite or in a summer cottage in the destination of South Zealand.

Five of the six tourists were interviewed at Feddet Camping where they had a seasonal pitch. These tourists were regular visitors at the campsite and were all interviewed at/in their own caravan. The last one of the six tourists was interviewed at a summer cottage in Faxe Ladeplads where she stayed with her family on a short weekend holiday, and she had been to this summer cottage before.

Thus, the setting for all of the tourist interviews was somewhat familiar to the tourists, and despite minor interruptions from kids and other tourists, the participants appeared to be focused and moreover comfortable during the interviews.

In appreciation of their time, all of the tourists were given complimentary tickets to the nearby-situated amusement park, BonBon-Land, after the interviews.

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[5] A detailed overview of all the participants can be found in appendix 2

It turned out that all of the tourists were repeat visitors, and this could entail that they are not as investigative as tourists who had never visited the destination before might be. However, this does not change the fact that they were holidaying at South Zealand and do have an opinion about their digital habits and the digital development as well as views on information search and tourist information, among other things.

The interview procedure

The configuration of the interviews was semi-structured due to the profound description it offers and because of the dynamic dialogue in these type of interviews, which is somewhat controlled by the research purpose and at the same time open for deviations (Brinkmann, 2014: 39). Furthermore, this format enables follow-up questions to be asked as the interview unfolds and possibly shift focus (Hannam & Knox, 2010: 182). Moreover, as the interviewer and the participants create meanings and understandings during the interview, semi-structured interviews result in the social construction of knowledge (Ibid.).

In order to operationalise the research question, and thus be able to combine the data from the interviews with the theoretical framework in the forthcoming analysis, the interview questions for both VISM and the tourists were divided in the categories of; general (personal) information; general about the destination; co-creation and technology; and smart tourism destination.

The various questions within these categories were, however, different for VISM compared to the ones for the tourists. The two interview guides are enclosed in appendix 3 and 4.

Transcriptions are translations from the spoken language to the written language (Kvale, 2007: 93), and the interviews have therefore been transcribed verbatim in order to depict what the participants have said with as little interpretation as possible within the transcription process. However, it is a slightly modified verbatim transcription in order to make the interviews easier to comprehend when reading through the transcripts. Thus, coughing, clearing of throats, laughter, and the ordinary use of 'er' before speaking are not included. Neither are background noises of dogs barking and children talking.

As the interviews were conducted in Danish, quotes from the transcripts have been translated into English when applied in the analysis (see appendix 5). Moreover, in order to minimise the risk of misinterpreting the quotes when translating, a person who is impartial from this thesis has reviewed all of the quotes.

The participants from VISM are quoted by their first name when applied in the analysis[6]. The tourists, on the other hand, are designated *tourist 1, tourist 2* etc. when quoted, in order to minimise potential confusion and to ensure their privacy (cf. ethics in section 3.4).

3.3.3 Data analysis

Focusing on language, the data in this research has been conceptualised in a way that allows the analysis of the data, from both the masterplan and the interview transcripts, to happen trough a process of coding in order to get the meanings, the similarities, the differences, and overall topics of the data (Andersen, 2008: 201-203; Hannam & Knox, 2010: 185). Coding is a method used for organising large amounts of raw data into small, manageable categories and it allows the researcher to quickly retrieve relevant parts of the data (Neuman, 2006: 460).

Coding is often used as an analysis method for interview transcripts (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015: 226; Hannam & Knox, 2010: 185), however in this thesis it has also been applied as a method for analysing the masterplan, as the categorisation of the written language and the subsequent emerging themes are likewise considered to be relevant in this relation.

As this is a theory-developing thesis, the data has been compared to the new theoretical framework as a means of examining whether or not the proposed theory is applicable. Thus, the coding process has been mainly concept-driven (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015: 227). This is not to be confused with theory testing, as it is the case within deductive research; however, this is an inductive research where theory provides a focus and a domain of relevance (Thomas, 2006: 239). Thus, the coding process was commenced

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[6] The source reference of interview participants appears as the following:
Name, appendix number: page. *Example: (Vibeke, a5: 8) / (Tourist 2, a8: 12)*

with the newly developed theoretical framework as a point of departure, providing central categories for the data coding.

Following, the subcategories was developed on the basis of what themes, statements and opinions recurred in the masterplan as well as in the interviews. A selection of what was important to incorporate in the analysis was derived through the hermeneutic circle, as it is illustrated in figure 1.
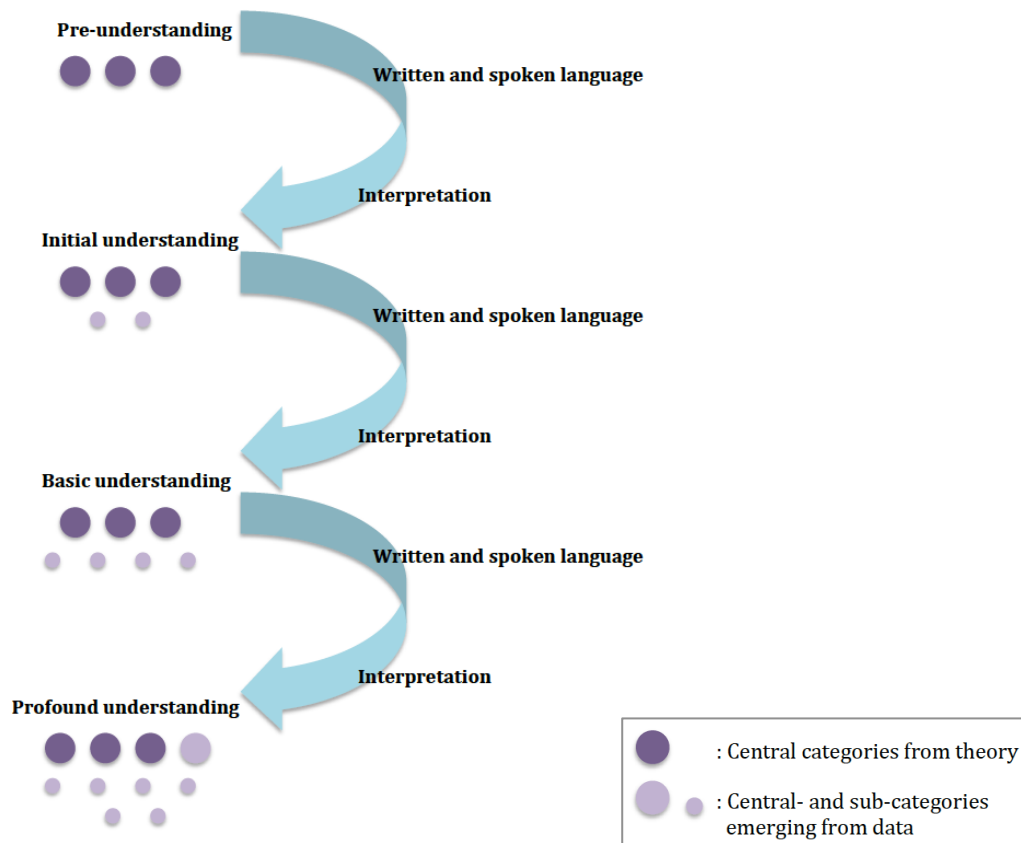
Figure 1: The formation of categories and data analysis within the hermeneutic circle (Self-made, 2016)

Within this hermeneutic circle, the theoretical framework provides central categories as a point of departure along with the pre-understanding of the research matter. My pre-understanding is partially based on the theoretical preparatory work I have conducted. Through the reading of the masterplan and the interview transcripts, interpretation happened on the basis of these pre-understanding and the central categories. And based on this, new subcategories emerged and further understanding was established for proceeding with the text, or re-reading. This process continued and in the end a

profound understanding of the matter was achieved and all the relevant categories from the data became evident.

As figure 1 illustrates, this interpretation process disclosed that important themes emerged within the data, thus creating another central category for coding and further analysis, and not merely sub-categories.

3.3.4 Secondary data

The interviews are conducted for this thesis and are therefore primary data (Andersen, 2008: 151), and as the masterplan is not data collected by me, this document can be categorised as secondary data. However, the analysis of the masterplan will become primary data.

Additionally, VISM's website and related articles are included in the research as it provides valuable information of VISM. Other articles and publications relating to the field of Danish tourism destinations, and especially digital development, are also utilised as a means of assessing the relevance of VISM's initiatives and to provide a general idea of the development within this area on a national level.

3.4 Quality of the research

3.4.1 Validity, reliability and ethics

According to Kvale (2007: 128), the validity of research developed on the basis of interviews is determined by the ability of the researcher to continually check, question, and theorise the data from the interviews. It is assumed that the same matters apply to research developed on the basis of documents. Correspondingly, the data collected from the interviews as well as the masterplan are treated in accordance with the theoretical foundation, which is derived from the review of literature in chapter 4. Thus, the theories serve as a guide in critically reviewing the data collection.

Within the question of validity, the concern of whether or not the data collection, and the following research, is in agreement with the proposed research question is also essential (Andersen, 2008: 83). Accordingly, the objectives in the introductory chapter have been made in order to ensure that this thesis incorporates the research aim throughout the thesis.

The reliability of this thesis can be seen in the attachment of the document under study, namely VISM's masterplan, and the verbatim transcripts from the interviews as well as the associated audio recordings. Transcripts are a way of bringing immediacy and transparency to the research, and the reader gains access to inspect the data that are utilised within the analysis (Nikander, 2008: 423). Hannam and Knox (2010) argue that the research within interviews is always influenced by who the researcher is as well as whom the research subjects are (Hannam & Knox, 2010: 180). Thus, in terms of whether the findings in this research are reproducible at other times by other researchers (Kvale, 2007: 122), the assessment is that the exact same findings are impossible to extract due to my subjective role in the construction of knowledge, as well as the possibility of the interview participants providing different replies if other interviewers asked the same questions. Besides, as Flyvbjerg (2006) states; *"good studies should be read as narratives in their entirety"* (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 241).

In the context of tourism research, Ryan (2005) states that, *"to be acting ethically might be said to act with integrity, with honesty, but also to act in a manner sensitive to the concerns of others"* (Ryan, 2005: 12). Similarly, common ethical guidelines for social science research include; [1] the informed consent; [2] confidentiality of the people involved in the research; [3] the consequences of participating in the research as well as; [4] the researcher's role within the study (Kvale, 2007: 26).

In accordance with the above, the people participating in the interviews have been informed about the overall purpose of the research. Due to the social constructivistic approach as well as the hermeneutics applied in this thesis, it was not possible to inform the participants on the exact content of this thesis beforehand. However, main topics were provided to the participants in order to give an idea of the context.

In terms of the participants' privacy within the research (Ibid.: 27), the employees from VISM, who were interviewed for this thesis, represents VISM and, thus, had a professional role within the interviews. Accordingly, their names are disclosed in the thesis, however, on the basis of each individuals consent to this disclosure. On the contrary, the tourists participated in the interviews as private people and provided information about their personal habits, demands, opinions and needs, among other things. Because of this private engagement, and as their full identities are not important

for the research matter of this thesis, these participants are not mentioned by name in the thesis.

As the semi-structured interviews often lead to a dynamic dialogue (Brinkmann, 2014: 39), the disclosure of information might not always be deliberate (Kvale, 2007: 28). However, after reviewing the interviews thoroughly, there was no information that, within my assessment, was controversial or inappropriate, considering this thesis will be public accessible upon completion. All of the participants were, however, also informed about the public accessibility of the thesis.

The position of the researcher has been clarified in section 3.1.4. Additionally, Ryan's (2005) statement of acting with integrity, honesty and with concern for the people participating in the research has been a matter of course throughout the entire thesis process.

3.5 **Sub-conclusion**

This chapter initially clarifies that tourism can be viewed as multidisciplinary, and creating knowledge within tourism thus involves a combination of various theories and disciplines, which are also in evidence within this thesis. Moreover, the ontological- and epistemological position of this thesis was presented to be moderate social constructivism, which means that the understanding of the reality is constructed, and knowledge about the realty is to a great extent obtained through written and spoken language. Additionally, the interpretative approach of hermeneutics is applied in this thesis in order to get a comprehensive understanding of the language that constructs the knowledge. Based on the above choices, it was clarified that my position as a researcher is subjective, as I am likewise part of the knowledge creation.

Following, the chosen research design of a case study of VISM was described, and this approach is considered as a means of providing an example of the research matters and to expand existing theories. Furthermore, the strategic document of VISM's masterplan and semi-structured life world interviews was presented as the methods of data collection, due to the great focus on the written and spoken language as well as the insights that can be derived by the use of these methods. With regard to the interviews, the head of tourist service, Vibeke Tejlmand, head of development, Ida L. Winther, and marketing assistant, Anders Jakobsen, have been interviewed from VISM. Additionally, 6

tourists, who were in accordance with the destination's tourism constitution, have been interviewed.

It was subsequently clarified that the data from both the masterplan and interviews has been conceptualised through a process of coding with the proposed theoretical framework providing central categories of focus. The selection of which specific data was important to incorporate in the analysis was derived through a hermeneutic circle, in which interpretations are continually revised, as the researcher comprehends more data. Finally, the quality of this research was established through an assessment of validity, reliability, and ethics and, among other things, ethical guidelines for social science research were covered in relation to the research within this thesis.

4 Theory

In order to examine ***how VISM can influence the tourist experience at the destination through a digital co-creation process***, this chapter covers the theoretical grounds encompassing this research question.

In particular, this chapter addresses the first objective within this thesis:
Clarify the literature within the field of tourist experience, co-creation, and the emerging field of smart tourism destination, as well as the linkage between these areas.
First of all, the case study in this thesis is based on VISM, and a DMO can be defined as a cooperation between several public and private actors which has the dual role of *internal* destination development and membership management as well as *external* destination marketing and visitor management (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003: 185-186). Having this established, the first part of this chapter clarifies the notion of a *tourist experience* and this further serves as the principal context of this chapter. Subsequently, the concept of *co-creation* is described with an emphasis on its origins from a service perspective and on the impact of technology. Focusing on technology, the concept of *smart tourism destinations* is presented as a means of empowering the destination to influence the tourist experience within the co-creation process. Following, various co-creation frameworks are presented and, based on an assessment of these, the new theoretical framework, *'Technology facilitated consumer involvement within the experience space,'* is developed. An explanation of this framework in relation to the forthcoming analysis is presented, and, finally, the chapter ends with a summative sub-conclusion.

It should be noted that even though the concepts covered in this theoretical chapter have been studied within several academic disciplines, time and resources prevents an extensive outline across various disciplines to be presented. Thus, only when considered relevant within the scope of this thesis, other disciplines and fields than tourism are included[7].

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[7] As a great amount of literature originates from- or is within the area of marketing and management, the destination/DMO and the tourist are also presented as *company* and *consumer/customer* within this chapter.

4.1 Tourist Experience

Due to the significance of experiences within tourism (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009: 315; Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015: 381) and as the focal point of this thesis, the notion of a *tourist experience* is important to clarify. Accordingly, this is the focus of this section.

Despite a lack of a general agreement within literature when it comes to defining a tourist experience (Neuhofer et al., 2012: 37, Jennings et al., 2009: 295), many scholars have proposed definitions to describe and understand the meaning of this notion (see Adhikari & Bhattacharya, 2015; Walls, Okumus, Wang, & Kwun, 2011). This section presents some of these descriptions, in order to reach an understanding of a tourist experience in the context of this thesis.

4.1.1 Defining a tourist experience

The increased focus on experiences within tourism has been linked to Pine and Gilmore's (1998) notions of the *experience economy* (Shaw, Bailey, & Williams, 2011: 207). They argue for a shift from the service economy towards an experience economy and emphasise that in order for companies to differentiate themselves from its competitors, creating and staging experiences in line with the consumers' needs are essential. More specifically, they define experiences as, *"events that engage individuals in a personal way"* (Pine & Gilmore, 1999: 12), and argue that, "*an experience occurs 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, 1998: 98). Hence, they emphasise that an experience is individual and something personal for the consumer and, at the same time, they argue that it is the company who can stage this experience.

This notion of staging and furthermore delivering experiences has however been revised throughout the years, as this is a one directed business orientation which do not seem to correlate with the emerging empowered consumers (Neuhofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin, 2014: 341).

While Ek, Larsen, Hornskov, & Mansfeldt (2008) do acknowledge Pine and Gilmore's (1998) notion of the experience economy, as a means of challenging the conventional

understanding of economy by incorporating humanistic thinking and introducing theatre metaphors, they also argue that general writings and studies within this area has predominantly focused on the company rather on the consumers (Ek et al., 2008: 123). Accordingly, Ek et al. (2008) present a more dynamic view on tourist experiences in which they emphasise that the main difference in *experience* is to be found in the shift from a noun to a verb; whereas the former defines experience as *"the observation and spatial participation in an event"*, the latter defines it as *"live through an emotional sensation"* (Ibid.: 128). Thus, they emphasise the active participation of the tourist and, furthermore, extend the tourist experience to be undefined in terms of space and time (Ibid.).

Oh, Fiore and Jeoung (2007) likewise adopt- and further extend Pine and Gilmore's (1998) view of the experience economy and define experiences from a consumer perspective to be *"…enjoyable, engaging, memorable, encounters for those consuming these events"* (Oh et al., 2007: 120).

The aspect of including enjoyment and fun are also incorporated in both Arnould and Price's- (1993) and Celsi, Rose and Leigh's (1993) research, in which they study tourism experiences based on respectively river rafting and skydiving. Although specific thrill-seeking tourism activities are not relevant within the context of this thesis, these studies do present *other tourists* and the inevitable influence from these as an important aspect of the tourist experience (Arnould & Price, 1993: 34; Celsi et al., 1993: 12), unlike the preceding descriptions within this section.

Mossberg (2007) likewise presents other tourists as one of the influencing factors of the tourist experience along with the physical environment, personnel, products and souvenirs, and a theme or a story of the company/the destination. She describes an experience to be *"…made up inside a person and the outcome depends on how an individual, in a specific mood and state of mind, reacts to the interaction with the staged event"* (Mossberg, 2007: 60). Hence, she also draws on Pine and Gilmore's (1998) theatre metaphor and their idea of experiences being individual. However, Mossberg (2007) further emphasises that a company is not able to *give* an experience to the tourists; instead it must create the circumstances and the environment in which tourists could have an experience (Ibid.).

As Mossberg (2007) fundamentally sees an experience as a blend of many elements coming together, she extends Bitner's (1992) concept of the *servicescape,* which is described as a complex mix of environmental features that influence internal responses and behaviours (Bitner, 1992: 65), to the concept of *experiencescape.* This concept is explained to be a space of pleasure and entertainment, as well as a meeting ground where various people can move about and interact (O'Dell, 2005: 16). And Mossberg (2007) argues that tourist experiences take place within this experiencescape in which the previously mentioned factors influence the experience (Mossberg, 2007: 71).

While the work of Mossberg (2007) identifies the factors that influence the tourist experience, it does not emphasise the value the tourist place on an experience to the same extend as Prebensen, Vittersø, and Dahl (2013) do. Prebensen et al. (2013) argue that it is important to acknowledge that tourists should be involved in the co-creation of tourist experiences and that this involvement induces *experience value,* which they define; *"Experience value is comprised of the benefits the tourist perceives from a journey and stay in a destination, including those assets or resources that the tourist, other tourists and the host bring to the process of co-creating experiences"* (Prebensen et al., 2013: 244). Similarly, Jensen and Prebensen (2015) argue that the perceived experience value can be seen when the consumer is a part of creating the experiences (Jensen & Prebensen, 2015: 2), which is in line with the general attention on creating experiences with a focus on co-creation and, thus, the individual as a starting point (Binkhorst and Den Dekker, 2009: 314).

Based on the above clarifications and the context of this study, this thesis adopts mainly a combination of Ek et al., (2008), Mossberg (2007), and Prebensen et al.'s (2013) work within this area and defines a tourist experience as;
An emotional sensation occurring in an experience space in which value is co-created based on the assets and resources the tourist, the host, and other tourists bring to the experience.

The tourist experience serves as the principal context of this theory chapter and the following sections will be developed with the above definition in mind.

4.2 Co-creation

Following the notion that the value within experience is co-created, this section describes the concept of co-creation. In particular, this section presents the meaning of co-creation experiences, and clarifies its origins from scholars within the discipline of services and the impacts of technology on co-creation Additionally, the concept of smart tourism destination is presented, with a focus on its meaning and the collection of the tourists' digital footprints as a means to influence the tourist experience at the destination.

4.2.1 The meaning of co-creation experiences

Contradicting the traditional approach of experiences being a one-way approach where the company had the role of creating the experience for the consumer (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a) were among the first to present the concept of co-creation. They argue that value is created in the interaction between the company and the consumers through co-created experiences, and that co-creation is about letting the customer co-construct the service to suit his/her context (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a: 8). Likewise, Neuhofer (2016: 22) presents co-creation to be a customer centric approach in which experiences and value are created jointly with the customer.

Furthermore, in line with Mossberg's (2007) experiencescape, Morgan (2007) states that, "*true co-creation occurs when firms create 'experience spaces' where dialogue, transparency and access to information allow customers to develop experiences that suit their own needs and levels of involvement*" (Morgan, 2007: 366). Thus, emphasising that co-creation occurs because of the active participation of the tourists, and that a company cannot stage experiences, instead it should facilitate co-creation.

4.2.2 Originating from the service perspective

Interaction

In their work on value co-creation within a service perspective, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a) argue that the *interaction* between the company and the consumer is the most essential part of creating value. On this basis, they proposed the

DART model, which features four key building blocks of interaction; namely *dialogue*, *access*, *risk-benefits*, and *transparency* (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004a: 9).

In relation to the model, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004b) argue that it is important to have a forum in which the *dialogue* can occur and clearly defined rules of engagement are required, in order to have a decent and productive interaction (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004b: 23). Moreover, having *access* is also about offering the right information and tools for communication in order to facilitate co-creation (Ibid.: 25).

The component of *transparency* represents an openness of information, and as information about products and services becomes easier accessible for the consumers, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004b) argue that transparency becomes more desirable for the company and can even facilitate collaborative dialogue with the consumers (Ibid.: 30-31). These preceding building blocks of interaction enable the customer to make a clear assessment about the *risks* and *benefits* of a course of action or a decision (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a: 9).

In terms of conceptualising and guiding implementation of customer value co-creation, the DART model has served as a very popular framework within literature (Mazur & Zaborek, 2014; 108; Schiavone, Metallo & Agrifoglio, 2014: 272). However, the model does not clearly address the important role of technology within the interaction. Although Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a: 13) do mention that companies need to create infrastructure for dialogue through technology, other scholars propose that the model should be further developed to include *technology* as a fifth building block, and hence a revision of the name to DARTT (Coussement & Teague, 2013: 185; Schiavone et al., 2014: 275).

Service-dominant logic

As clarified, co-creation is a customer centric approach in which the company and the consumer jointly create experiences and value (Neuhofer, 2016: 22), and this is also the underlying premise within the *service-dominant logic* (S-D logic) of marketing.

The S-D logic has been widely utilised over the last decade, acknowledging the tourists' role in creating experience value (Prebensen, 2014: 157). It was Vargo and Lusch (2004) who developed the comprehensive foundation of the S-D logic, and the cornerstone within this approach is that service is exchanged for service, meaning that a company provide value propositions to its customers, which create experiences

(Blazquez-Resino, Molina, & Esteban-Talaya, 2015: 707; Prebensen, 2014: 157). Initially, Vargo and Lusch (2004) presented the S-D logic through eight foundational premises to clarify their position, and a few years later, on the basis of discussion and elaboration on its content, these premises were modified and further foundational premises were added (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). One of the premises states, *"The customer is always a co-creator of value"* (Ibid.: 7); meaning that the S-D logic emphasises the value creating process that involves the customer as a co-creator of value. And as the S-D logic offers a new way of thinking in terms of marketing, this is one of the most relevant propositions (Payne, Storbacka, & Frow, 2008: 83; Blazquez-Resino et al., 2015: 707).

The traditional view of marketing was based on a *goods-dominant logic* (G-D logic) in which there was a focus on mainly tangible resources, embedded value, and transactions (Vargo & Lusch, 2004: 1). In terms of value and value creation, the G-D logic is based on the meaning of 'value-in-exchange', and on the view that value is created by the company, usually by an exchange of goods and money (Prebensen, 2014: 157). On the contrary, the S-D logic relates to the meaning of 'value-in-use', and within this view, the roles of the producers and consumers are not separated, as value is co-created (Ibid.: 158).

It should be emphasised that both Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) and Vargo and Lusch (2004) work within a *service* perspective. However, even though this thesis takes an *experience* perspective, their contributions are so fundamental for the understanding of co-creation and have accordingly served as a theoretical departure within much of the existing literature within co-creation of tourism experiences (see literature review in Campos, Mendes, Valle, & Scott, 2015). Moreover, in relation to the definition of tourist experiences presented in this thesis (section 4.1.1), the understanding of co-creation is also highly relevant within an experience perspective.

4.2.3   Technology facilitates co-creation

According to Shaw et al. (2011: 209), consumer experiences have been increasingly transformed by the growing importance of the Internet. Likewise, Neuhofer et al (2012) argues that the proliferation of ICTs is one of the most extensive changes to society in

the 21st century (Neuhofer et al, 2012: 38). Inevitably, this proliferation of ICTs also impacts the interaction between the company and the consumer and, thus, the co-creation process (Ibid.: 39; Ind & Coates, 2013: 87).

For many tourists it has become a natural part of travelling to bring along a mobile device that can connect to the Internet (Magasic, 2016: 174; Munar, Gyimóthy & Cai, 2013: 2). Moreover, with the technological development of mobile devices, tourists become active and participating consumers who receive and share information online and form virtual communities, which contributes to- and extends the travel experience (Munar & Gyimóthy, 2014: 72).

Due to this development and because of the mainstream adoption of IC'Ts, co-creation has emerged even more recently (Ind & Coates, 2013: 91).

As it has been presented in this chapter, co-creation is seen as a consumer oriented approach (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Neuhofer 2016). And Binkhorst and Den Dekker (2009) furthermore argue that technology will empower tourists even more to co-create their own experiences (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009: 324).

However, the interactions between the company and the consumer are also seen as contributing to new sources of competitive advantage for the company because of the consumer insight that can be derived from the interactions (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a: 7; Ind & Coates, 2013: 92). And due to the extensive use by tourists, technology thus becomes a strategic asset for the company in relation to the co-creation process (Schiavone et al., 2014: 276).

4.2.4 Influencing co-creation through Smart Tourism Destination

Smart tourism destination

Utilising the technological development and possibly strengthening its role within the co-creation process, the destination could make use of the digital traces left behind by the tourists from online interaction, networks, censors etc.; also known as *digital footprints* (Girardin, Calabrese, Fiore, Ratti, & Blat, 2008; 36).

Using these digital footprints strategically is the essence of the emerging concept of smart tourism destination, which focus on enhancing the tourists' experience at the destination through an identification of the tourists' needs as well as a provision of information through ICT's (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2013: 562).

Accordingly, Boes et al. (2015) present smart tourism destinations as; *"…places utilising the available technological tools and techniques to enable demand and supply to co-create value, pleasure, and experiences for the tourist and wealth, profit, and benefits for the organisations and the destination"* (Boes et al., 2015: 394).

Likewise, Lamsfus et al. (2015) takes the two-sided approach and emphasises that from a tourist perspective, the destination is smart when it makes intensive use of the technological infrastructure as a means of enhancing the tourism experience by providing personalised tourism service and -information on the products available at the destination (Lamsfus et al., 2015: 367). And from the managerial and governance perspective, a smart destination can enable the DMO as well as the tourist companies to make strategic decisions and take actions based on the data that is produced by the tourists at the destination (Ibid.).

Additionally, Ren, Petersen, Nielsen, and Halkier (2016) argue that smart tourism is more than a technological- and data driven means of developing tourism at the destination, as it also involves a new way of thinking, collaborating, and organising tourism at the destination (Ren et al., 2016: 5).

The concept of smart tourism destination should, however, not be confused with e-tourism, which is about e-commerce, and implementing and applying IT solutions to make information electronically available (Werthner et al., 2015: 1). Smart tourism destination is especially distinct from general e-tourism in its use of technologies; where e-tourism focuses mainly on websites, smart tourism destination makes use of sensors and smartphones to obtain valuable data and disseminate information (Gretzel, Sigala, Xiang, & Koo, 2015: 182, 186). Moreover, whereas e-tourism focuses on the pre- and post phase of the tourists' travel, smart tourism destination concentrates on creating enhanced experiences for the tourists *at* the destination (Ibid.).

Smart cities

The concept of smart tourism destination is derived from the concept of smart cities, which can broadly be described as a representation of smart governance, smart human

capital, smart environment, smart living, and smart economy (Lombardi, Giordano, Farouh, & Yousef, 2012: 139). In this context, *smart* is a user-friendly description for intelligent (Nam & Pardo, 2011). A city can be viewed as intelligent when investments in human and social capital as well as in ICTs and traditional infrastructure are a driving force for sustainable economic growth and a high quality of life through participatory governance (Caragliu, Del Bo, & Nijkamp, 2011: 70). Furthermore, smart cities are considered as innovative ecosystems, engaging all stakeholders to co-create ways of designing innovative living (Schaffers et al., 2011: 2).

While the focus within the concept of smart cities is on the citizens at the destination, the focus of smart tourism destinations concerns the tourists and the enhancement of the tourist experience, which is enabled through the integration of ICTs (Boes et al., 2015: 401).

Capturing and using the digital footprints

The digital footprints can roughly be divided into *active* and *passive* tracks (Girardin et al., 2008: 37). The *active* tracks refer to the intentional online exposure in which tourists upload photos, post reviews, expose location etc. (Ibid.; Önder, Koerbitz & Hubmann-Haidvogel, 2016: 567). The *passive* tracks, on the other hand, relate to the ones that are left through interaction with a technological infrastructure (Girardin et al., 2008: 36). Such an infrastructure could, for example, be a wireless network provided at the destination, which can disclose where the tourists are and when they were there, once the tourists connect to the network (Calabrese, Di Lorenzo, Liu, & Ratti, 2011: 36).

A smart tourism destination is characterised by the ability of capturing and processing these digital footprints, both active and passive, and to recognise, extract, and analyse the patterns emerging from the great amounts of data (Tussyadiah, 2015). Moreover, it is important for the destination to consider access into real-time information, ensuring instant feedback, and having dynamic platforms in order to be able to offer personalised service to the tourists (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015: 387), and as a means of transforming the data into value propositions (Gretzel et al., 2015: 179).

Additionally, if destinations manage to capture, process, and strategically use the valuable data, it might be possible to accommodate the needs of the *silent travellers,* who visits the destination without contacting tourist offices, only using their own

devices in search for information (Tussyadiah, 2015), and thus enhance their tourist experience.

Privacy

When collecting the tourists' digital footprints at a destination, the issue of privacy should be taken into consideration (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2013: 561; Tussyadiah, 2015; Wozniak, Liebrich, Senn, & Zemp, 2016: 282). In this connection, Gretzel et al. (2015) argue that it is vital to consider the privacy of the tourists, and emphasise that the relationship between the tourists and the tourism providers is often short-lived, and as this limits trust building, the disclosed data should be handled considerately (Gretzel et al., 2015: 184). According to Buhalis and Foerste, (2015) one way to create trust between the company and the consumers within the notion of smart tourism destination is by letting the customers have a choice in terms of which personal information that can be accessed by the company and which cannot (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015: 158). Furthermore, providing options for the tourists to choose levels of privacy could also enhance the success of co-creation at the destination (Wozniak et al., 2016: 282).

4.3 Frameworks for analysing co-creation in tourist experiences

Having defined a tourist experience suitable for this theses and reviewed the concept of co-creation, as well as the technological aspect of this concept and the opportunities within the smart tourism destination concept, this section accordingly reviews some of the theoretical frameworks in which co-creation exists. Thus arriving at the most suitable framework for this thesis to apply in the forthcoming analysis.

4.3.1 Co-creation frameworks

Although Pine and Gilmore's (1998) work takes a company centric view, as presented previously in this chapter, it is noticeable that they do incorporate consumer participation within their theoretical framework in which they present *four realms of an experience* (figure 2).

This framework illustrates that experiences can be sorted into four broad categories according to where these experiences fall along the spectra of the two dimensions of participation and connection (Pine & Gilmore, 1998: 102). However, even though they generally do emphasise that staging experiences is about engaging the consumers (Pine & Gilmore, 1999: 30) and thus presents participation as one of the two dimensions within the framework, it is not a useful framework within this thesis. This is because Pine and Gilmore's (1998) notion of consumer involvement can be seen as relating more to partaking in the experience than actually being a co-creator of the experience.
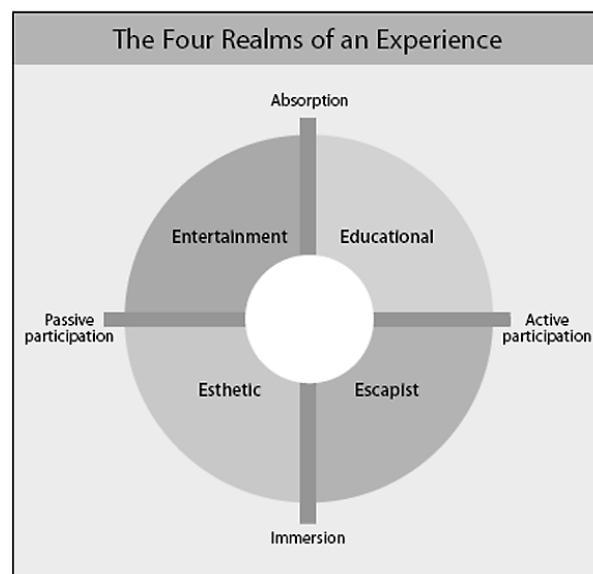
Figure 2: The four realms of an experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1998: 102)

As previously presented Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004a) provides a theoretical basis for the field of co-creation with their DART model. Furthermore, in their emphasis on the interaction between the company and the consumer, Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004a: 11) have developed a theoretical framework (figure 3) in which they present the notion of *the market* as having developed from being a target for the company's offerings to a forum for co-creation experiences..

As other scholars have addressed, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a) do not include the important aspect of technology (Coussement & Teague, 2013: 185; Schiavone et al., 2014: 275), which makes the framework less useful in the context of this thesis.
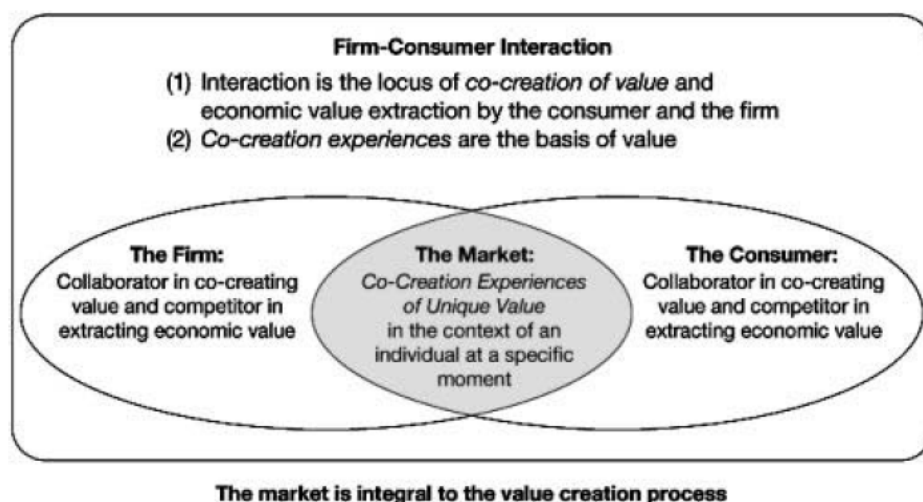
Figure 3: The emerging concept of the market (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a: 11)

Moreover, Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004a: 11-12) do argue that interaction within this forum takes place not only between the consumer and the company, but also between consumer groups and networks of firms (Ibid.: 11-12). However, the interaction between consumers is not incorporated in the framework, even though consumer-to-consumer interaction is an integral part of experiences (Arnould & Price, 1993: 34; Celsi et al., 1993: 12) and especially of co-creating experiences (Baron & Harris, 2010: 525; Mossberg, 2007: 65; Prebensen et al., 2013: 244).

The same deficiencies is in evidence within Grönroos and Voima's (2013) theoretical framework (figure 4) in which they present value creation and co-creation within the spheres of, respectively; provider, consumer and joint.

Grönroos and Voima's (2013) framework includes different perspectives of value creation and furthermore outlines the consumers' role as well as the providers' role within this interaction. However, with the lack of other consumers as an element within Grönroos and Voima's (2013) co-creation process, as well as within the one of Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a), these theoretical frameworks are not useful for this thesis, as other tourists have been identified to be affecting the value of the tourist experience (see definition in section 4.1.1).
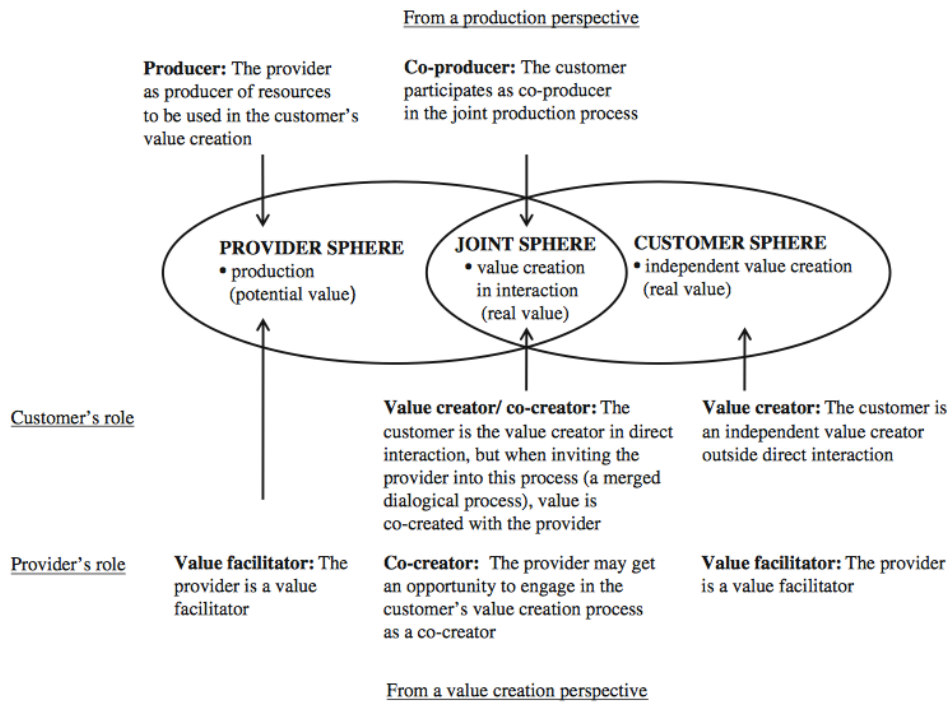
Figure 4: Value creation spheres (Grönroos & Voima, 2013: 141)

Mossberg (2007) on the other hand, does take other tourists into account within her research on tourist experiences. Furthermore, the idea of tourist experiences occurring within the market/a forum or a co-creation space is also what Mossberg (2007) emphasises in her idea of experiencescapes, as previously explained. She has made a theoretical framework (figure 5), which depicts the tourist experience to take place within this experiencescape and furthermore presents the various factors influencing the tourist experience.
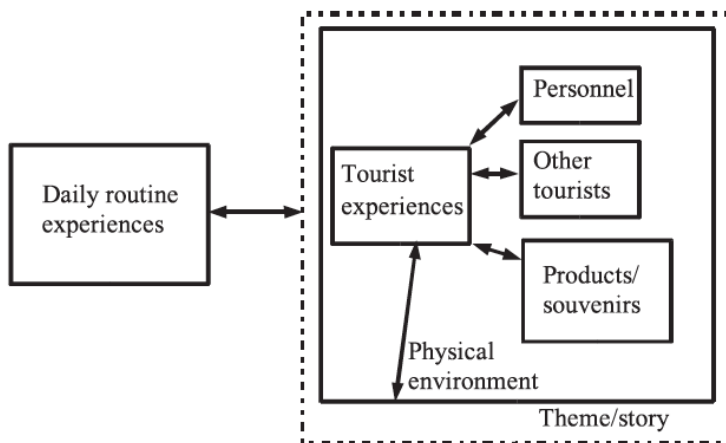
Figure 5: Proposed factors influencing the consumer experience within the context of tourism (Mossberg, 2007: 65)

Mossberg (2007) argues that the process of constructing this space, in which the experience occurs, should be seen as a co-creating process where the tourist plays a great part along with the influencing factors (Mossberg, 2007: 63).

Even though Mossberg (2007) provides a useful tool for analysing co-creation in which consumer-to-consumer interaction is included, the framework is insufficient in correlation with this thesis as it only encompasses the physical environment and not a digital aspect.

The lack of technology

None of the theoretical frameworks presented so far in this section incorporate an element of technology despite the acknowledgement on its great significance on the tourist experience (Lamsfus et al., 2015: 363; Tussyadiah & Zach, 2012: 794; Xiang et al., 2015: 143). The lack of including a digital element within the frameworks might be because the dissemination of technology was not as common when these were made (although Grönroos and Voima's (2013) theoretical framework was published only a few years ago). Nonetheless, it is highly relevant to include technology nowadays when addressing the matter of tourist experiences, as most tourists travel with mobile devices and use these to a great extend when they are at the destination (Magasic, 2016: 174; Munar et al., 2013: 2; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2013: 58) and, thus, influence the nature of the overall experience.

4.3.2 Co-creation framework incorporating technology

A more relevant theoretical framework for this thesis that does recognise the impact of technology is Neuhofer et al.'s (2012) *conceptual model of technology enhanced destination experiences* (figure 6)*.*

They argue that the tourists' active part in co-creating their own experiences and the technology-mediated nature of the co-creation changes the tourist experience and transforms how destinations will create experiences (Neuhofer et al., 2012: 37). Based on this view, they have proposed the framework as a means of conceptualising a new experience creation paradigm (Ibid.: 36).

The framework is adapted from Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2004a) notion of a market as a forum in which co-creation takes place through interaction (figure 3). Neuhofer et al. (2012) further extent this experience co-creation space, by recognising the pre-, during-, and post travel phases of an experience and by integrating technology at all stages. Thus, emphasising the interaction that takes place among the tourist, the tourism suppliers, and networks of consumer communities both in a physical (on-site only) and a virtual co-creation space (Neuhofer et al., 2012: 41).
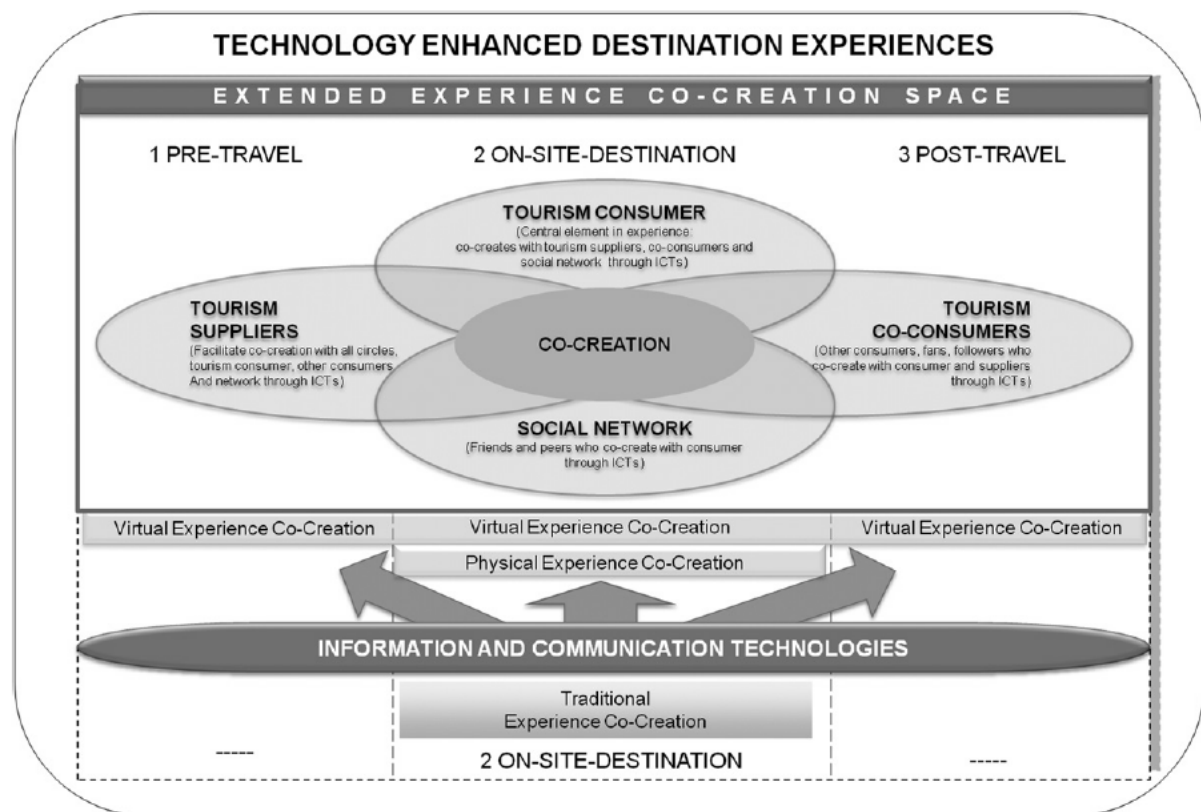
Figure 6: Conceptual model of technology enhanced destination experiences
(Neuhofer et al., 2012: 42)

Neuhofer et al. (2012) argue that in order for destinations to succeed it is essential to understand *who* is involved in the co-creation process and *where* co-creation occurs as well as *where* and *how* technology comes into play in the co-creation of experiences (Ibid.: 44). Within this framework, the tourist is the central element in the experience, and as the tourist does not experience the destination in isolation, the tourism companies, friends and family in the social network, and other co-consumers interacts with the tourist and lead to a dynamic co-creation space (Ibid.: 39).

Co-creation occurs both physical and virtual at the destination when the tourist travel with a mobile device and are connected to virtual channels, as the destination can inspire, assist, and engage with the tourist online (Green, 2002). And the tourist can furthermore virtually interact with other co-consumers and their social network (Neuhofer et al, 2012: 42).

Elaborating co-creation

Since Neuhofer et al. (2012) published their framework, Neuhofer (2016) has elaborated on the concept of co-creation, and she presents a holistic appraisal of consumer involvement by accentuating differences and similarities of three co-creation processes in relation to the impact of technology (see table 1).

Notion	Crowdsourcing	Co-production	Co-creation
Consumer Involvement	Active participation in idea generation, content generation, voting, funding	Active company-driven product or service exchange participation	Active consumer-centric experience and value co-creation
Role of the Consumer	One in many (Consumer in a crowd)	Two-way company-led involvement (Company and consumer)	Multi-level involvement (Company, consumer and consumer communities)
Role of the Company	Company defines crowdsourcing goal and leads activities	Company develops product/services and gives consumer a choice	Company facilitates co-creation of experiences and value
Experience Outcome	Crowd-generated, participatory experience	Customised, personalised co-creation experience	Rich, personalised, connected, co-constructed experience and value
Value for the Consumer	Value through participation in process, value through contribution to outcome	Value through customisation and personalisation of product and service	Value through co-created experiences and the co-creation process itself
Innovation through ICTs	Crowdsourcing activities through technology platforms and open calls	Co-production through technology-supported devices for personalisation	Co-creation of rich, meaningful experiences through social and mobile tools in the travel process

Table 1: Classification of technology-facilitated co-creation processes (Neuhofer, 2016: 28)

Neuhofer (2016) divides consumer involvement into the co-creation processes of; *crowdsourcing*, *co-production*, and *co-creation*.

Crowdsourcing is defined as an activity that is outsourced from the company to a wider crowd, thus enabling inputs from outside the traditional boundaries (Geiger, Rosemann, & Fielt, 2011). This type of consumer involvement allows the company to define the crowdsourcing goal and lead the activities, and the consumer value are created through participating in the process and contributing to the outcome (Neuhofer, 2016: 28). Within this process, the technological development has provided great opportunities by bundling consumers through e.g. social media and networking channels online (Ibid.: 26). A good example of technology-facilitated crowdsourcing can be seen at AirBnB, which is a peer-to-peer platform in which private people rent out their homes to tourists, with more than 60 million users and rental offerings in more than 190 countries worldwide (AirBnB, 2016).

Co-production is widely used as the notion of involving the consumer within the development of a company's product or service, by listening to the consumers and adapting the (pre-defined) product or service accordingly (Chathoth, Altinay, Harrington, Okumus, & Chan, 2013: 15). Thus, consumer value is created through the customisation and personalisation of the product or service (Neuhofer, 2016: 28). Within this process, the technological development offers easy access to personalised offerings based on the consumers preferred choices, such as it is the case with applications for mobile phones, offering location based- and context based services (Ibid.: 27).

Adding to the already described notion of *co-creation* (see section 4.2), Neuhofer (2016: 22) argues that technology have developed the notion of co-creation to be a more collective and dynamic process that occurs between the consumer and connected consumer communities and social networks, and not merely between the consumer and the company. Examples of social media tools in which experiences can be co-created within the online space are Facebook, Twitter, and TripAdvisor (Ibid.: 27).

The three processes presented in table 1 are very diverse approaches to the creation of tourism experiences and Neuhofer (2016) argues that; "*customer involvement can take many different forms under the umbrella of co-creation*" (Neuhofer, 2016: 28). However, to denominate all three of them, *co-creation* processes might be misleading.

Stressing the difference between co-production and co-creation, Chathoth et al. (2013) argue that there is a continuum from co-production to co-creation. They advocate that

companies should work towards the adoption of co-creation, because co-production puts the company at the centre of value creation and does not recognise the mutual dependence of the company and the consumers in the creation of service (Chathoth et al., 2013: 13). And, returning to Vargo and Lusch (2004), the foundational premise of the S-D logic stating that, *"the customer is always a co-creator of value"* (Vargo & Lusch, 2008: 7) was originally formulated, as *"the customer is always a co-producer"* (Vargo & Lusch, 2004: 10). It was modified in order to clarify that they assess value as always being co-created by the consumer because it cannot be created solely by the company; as appose to co-production, which refers to the consumers' optional participation in the development of the core offering itself (Vargo & Lush, 2008: 8).

Consumer involvement is central within co-creation and thus within this thesis, and Neuhofer's (2016) elaboration on co-creation is therefore relevant to incorporate in a theoretical framework. Due to the obvious differences between the processes in table 1, this thesis distinguishes between whether a destination makes use of crowdsourcing, co-production, or co-creation in its creation of tourism experiences.

Adding smart tourism destination to the tourist experience

Neuhofer et al.'s (2012) framework provides a comprehensive view of the various influencers involved in the co-creation process and significantly emphasises the technological importance within the co-creation of experiences. Accordingly, the framework is highly relevant to use as the theoretical focal point within the analysis chapter of this thesis.

However, the framework does not present the opportunities technology provides for the destination in terms of collecting the digital footprints from the tourists and utilising this valuable data strategically when further developing experiences, as it is the case within the concept of smart tourism destination (Boes et al., 2015; Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2013; Wang, Li, & Li, 2013).

Moreover, Grönroos (2011) argue that through the engagement of the consumers' usage process, it is possible for the company to move beyond solely being value facilitators and also become co-creators of value with the customers (Grönroos, 2011: 296). Hence, utilising the data on how the tourists behave at the destination in terms of where they

are, what information they search for, or what they express online about the experience could enhance the destinations role within the co-creation process.

Thus, in order to further address the matter of *influence* within the research question, the addition of smart tourism destination to Neuhofer et al.'s (2012) framework would make it a more suitable framework for this thesis.

4.4 <u>New theoretical framework</u>

On the basis of Neuhofer's (2016) recent elaboration on co-creation in terms of the three processes of consumer involvement, and the importance of the concept of smart tourism destination in regards to the opportunities of influencing the tourist experience (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2013: 562), Neuhofer et al.'s (2012) theoretical framework has been adjusted accordingly for this thesis, and a new theoretical framework is developed and hereby presented in figure 7:
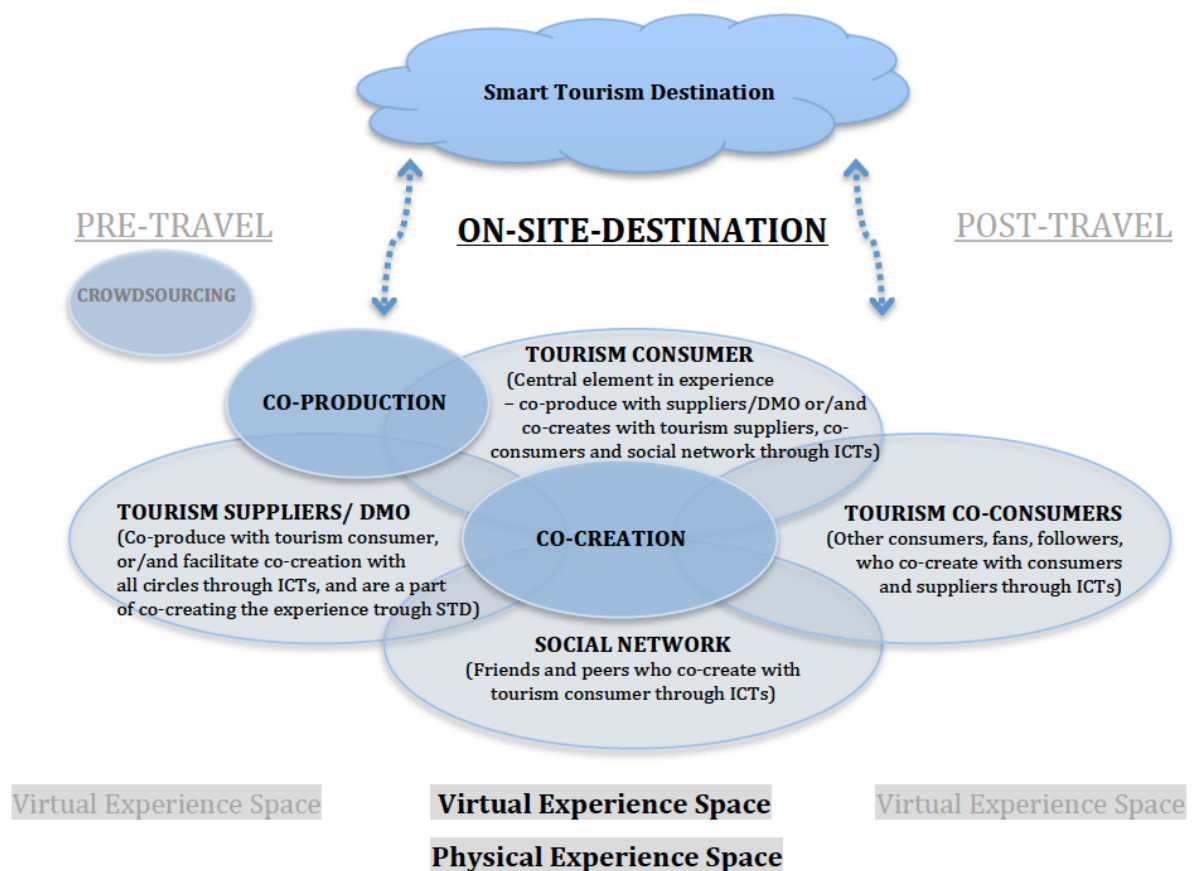

Figure 7: Technology facilitated consumer involvement within the experience space (adapted from Neuhofer et al., 2012: 42)

Neuhofer et al. (2012) include the pre-, during-, and post travel phases of an experience, arguing that an experience is not only limited to occur on-site; it begins long before the tourist visits the destination and continues upon return to the home environment (Neuhofer et al., 2012: 41). Moreover, they argue that ICTs are present in in the pre- and post-travel phase by means of preliminary information search, travel planning, decision-making, and post-sharing of experiences etc. (Ibid.). Based on this, all of the travel phases are also included in the newly developed framework. However, the forthcoming analysis will only address the on-site phase, as this is the focus of the research question.

Since the co-creation process of crowdsourcing relates to idea generation and content generation within a crowd (Neuhofer, 2016: 28), it is presumed within this framework to be less likely to fit into the on-site experience space. As a means of illustrating this, crowdsourcing has been placed in the pre-travel phase. Accordingly, the main focus of the analysis will be on the co-production- and co-creation process. And following Chathoth et al.'s (2013) view of a continuum from co-production to co-creation, as well as Neuhofer's (2016) classification of these processes, the framework should be viewed as an assessment of which type of consumer involvement is in evidence. Hence, is it co-production, which only involves the tourism suppliers/DMO or is it co-creation, which involves all of the circles in the creation of tourism experiences.

As the concept of smart tourism destination involves creating enhanced experiences for the tourists while they are at the destination (Gretzel et al, 2015: 186), the smart tourism destination 'cloud' is placed above, and thus as a part of, the experience space in the on-site phase. The arrows between the cloud and the circles emphasise the tourism suppliers/DMOs smart usage of ICTs to enhance the on-site experience, as well as the arrows illustrate how the digital footprints that are produced on-site can be collected and used strategically by the tourism suppliers/DMO.

Since co-creation has been divided according to Neuhofer's (2016) three processes of consumer involvement, the area of virtual- and physical *experience co-creation* in the bottom of Neuhofer et al.'s (2012) original framework has been adjusted to virtual- and physical *experience space.* This modification also emphasises that the tourist experience

takes place within an experience space, as it has been defined in the beginning of this chapter.

Overall, the theoretical framework shows who is involved in the digital co-creation process of the tourist's experience. Additionally, as the main extension to Neuhofer et al.'s (2012) framework, this new framework incorporates Neuhofer's (2016) elaboration on co-creation to emphasise different types of consumer involvement and to illustrate who is involved in, respectively, co-production and co-creation. Furthermore, the concept of smart tourism destination extends the original framework in order to exemplify that the smart use of technology on-site can enhance the tourist experience and the digital footprints created onsite can be used strategically in the consumer involvement processes.

Although the framework is entitled "Technology facilitated *consumer involvement* within the experience space", it should be clarified that the main pivot is still co-creation. However, within this framework the important aspect is the degree of consumer involvement, as this might contribute to an understanding of the possibilities of influencing the tourist experience.

4.5 <u>Sub-conclusion</u>

Addressing the first objective of this thesis, this chapter initially reviews some of the literature within tourist experience and, in relation to this thesis, presents the following definition; *An emotional sensation occurring in an experience space in which value is co-created based on the assets and resources the tourist, the host, and other tourists bring to the experience.*

Following, the concept of co-creation was discussed, especially emphasising that co-creation is a consumer-centric approach in which value is created in the interaction between the consumer and the company through co-created experiences. Moreover, instead of staging an experience, like Pine and Gilmore (1998) originally argued in their work on creating experiences, the company should create an experience space, and thus enable co-creation. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a) were among the first to present the concept of co-creation, and they also proposed the DART model, in which they

emphasise the importance of interaction between the company and the consumer. Additionally, the S-D Logic presented by Vargo and Lusch (2004) also emphasise that the company and the consumer jointly create experiences and value.

In relation to co-creation, it was clarified that due to the proliferation of ICTs and because many tourist travel nowadays with a mobile device, technology can be viewed as a great facilitator of co-creation. Following this notion, the concept of smart tourism destination was presented, with its two-sided approach of enhancing the tourist experience at the destination through ICTs as well as capturing the tourists' digital footprints, in order for the tourism companies to make strategic decisions based on this data.

Subsequently, the chapter reviews various theoretical frameworks for analysing co-creation, and ascertains that there is generally a lack of incorporating technology within these. An applicable framework for this thesis is then presented to be Neuhofer et al.'s (2012) '*Conceptual model of technology enhanced destination experiences*', which includes technology and presents co-creation to happen between the tourist, the tourism suppliers, tourism co-consumers, and the tourist's social network. Additionally, on the basis of Neuhofer's (2016) elaboration on co-creation, where consumer involvement is classified in the processes of crowdsourcing, co-production, and co-creation, as well as on the basis of the influential factor of the smart tourism destination concept; Neuhofer et al.'s (2012) framework has been revised, and the theoretical framework of '*Technology facilitated consumer involvement within the experience space*' has been developed. Thus, establishing the missing linkage between tourist experience, co-creation, and smart tourism destination, as well a providing the foundation for the forthcoming analysis in this thesis.

5   Analysis

Based on VISM's masterplan, interviews with employees from VISM and with tourists, who were holidaying at South Zealand, this chapter mainly offers an analysis and discussion of relevant areas of the theoretical framework, '*Technology facilitated consumer involvement within the experience space'* (Figure 7), in order to be able to answer the research question.

This chapter addresses in particularly the second objective within this thesis:

Identify and discuss VISM's digital initiatives, and then critically assess how VISM can increase the involvement of tourists in a co-creation process, and discuss to what extent VISM utilises the concept of smart tourism destination.

Focusing on the first part of this objective, this chapter initially identifies VISM's digital initiatives as well as reviews the tourists' digital usage in the section of **digitalised tourist information**. In order to address the other part of this objective, this chapter then incorporates the theoretical framework. As time and resources do not allow an exposition of all the elements of this framework, this chapter focuses specifically on three relevant areas, which is highlighted in figure 8.

Accordingly, the section of **co-production and co-creation** clarifies the relevancy for VISM to adopt a co-creation approach, and assesses the consumer involvement within VISM'S initiatives in terms of co-production and co-creation. The section furthermore discusses the tourists' digital engagement in order to consider the enablement of a digital co-creation process. Following, the section of **smart tourism destination** clarifies VISM's smart utilisation of technology within its initiatives as well as VISM's collection of digital footprints and discusses how VISM can move towards being a more smart tourism destination. Moreover, this section assesses the enablement of co-creation based on the tourists' views on the collection and usage of digital footprints. The last area included in this chapter is the **virtual experience space and the physical experience space**, and this section addresses the network coverage at the destination as well as the need for physical tourist information, and accordingly discusses the relationship- and dependence between the virtual experience space and the physical experience space. Finally, this chapter recapitulates the findings from the above sections in a sub-conclusion.
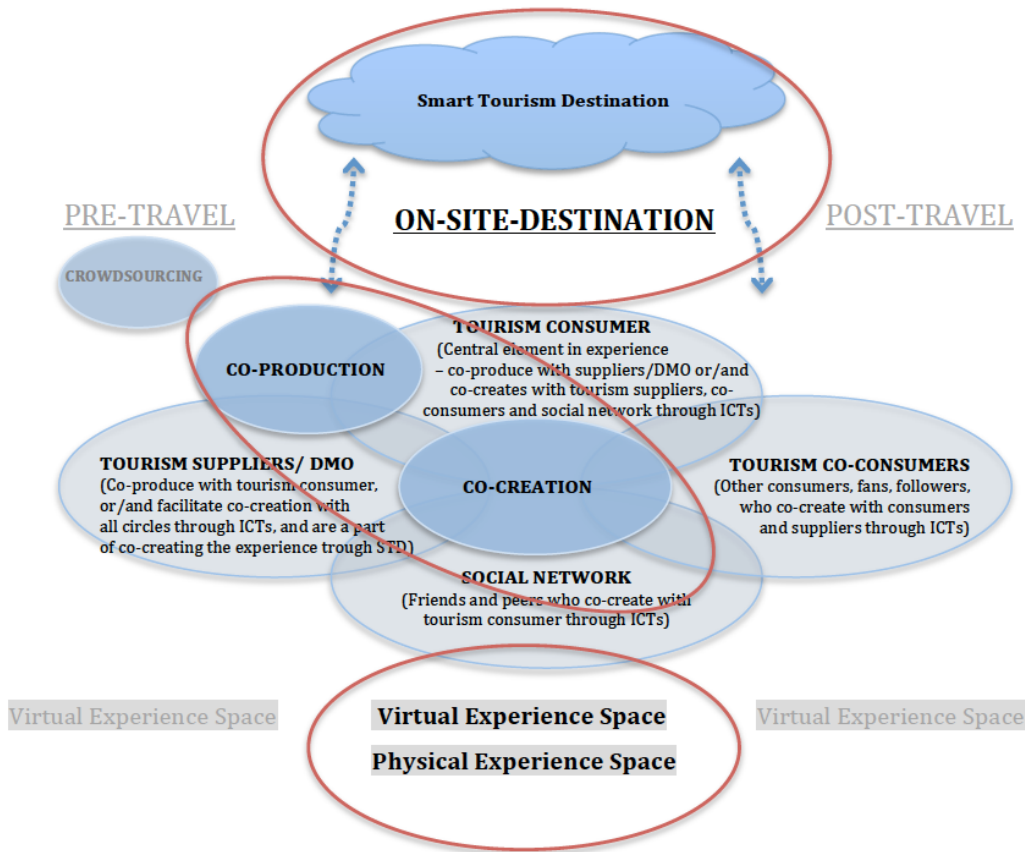
Figure 8: Focus areas of *'Technology facilitated consumer involvement within the experience space'* (Figure 7).

5.1 <u>Digitalised tourist information</u>

This section reviews VISM's overall employment of digital initiatives as well as the tourists' general use of mobile devices at the destination, in order to clarify the opportunities for digitally involving the tourists at the destination and possibly influencing the tourist experience through this involvement.

5.1.1 VISM's digital initiatives

In relation to working innovatively, VISM states in the masterplan; *"In acknowledging that the tourism market the last decades has experienced a digital revolution of the tourism market, completely new travel patterns and soaring competition, it is necessary that not just South Zealand, however also great parts of Denmark change course and takes*

other paths" (MP: 10). And one of VISM's strategic ethos is accordingly; *"Our marketing should be near 100 percent digital, and we primarily want to work with social media like Facebook, Google and Instagram"* (MP: 10). These statements highly emphasise VISM's acknowledgement of the digital reality of todays' tourists and, moreover, clarify that technology will have a great impact on the way VISM will work in the future, at least in terms of their marketing activities.

Looking beyond marketing and focusing on the tourist service at the destination, VISM runs the project "Mere for flere", which roughly means *being more for more people*. VISM describes this project in the masterplan; *"With the project 'Mere for flere' we decide to disseminate and strengthen our tourist information and service both regionally and digitally. We want to reach far more visitors than we do today, and we want to deliver a consistent high service experience across the municipalities. We must be present with relevant information, when and where the tourists gather, and we must always be in the pockets of the tourists, who want to be serviced mobile digital"* (MP: 25). Moreover, VISM states in the masterplan; *"...'Mere for flere' is also a qualitative aim of VisitSydsjælland-Møn's service and tourist information to be a really good experience"* (MP: 26). From these statements, it is clear that VISM puts great focus on creating a good tourist experience through its initiatives and efforts. Moreover, the digital objective in VISM's project, of always being in the pockets of the tourists, corresponds well with Neuhofer et al.'s (2012) view of the tourists being connected to virtual channels and there is thus the opportunity to add that extra layer of a virtual experience to the physical aspect of being at the destination (Neuhofer et al., 2012: 42).

Digital tourist information is one of the main activities in the project and VISM outlines this activity in the masterplan as follows; *"Numerous studies show that today, the Internet and mobile medias are the predominant sources to information for the tourists both before and during the trip. Today, print media has marginal significance. VisitSydsjælland's future website must be mobile friendly (responsive) and always relevant with event calendar, updated offers, basis information, recommendations etc."* (MP: 26).
In relation to this statement, Vibeke, who is head of tourism service at VISM, described some of their digital efforts by saying; *"...now it is just about us being completely upbeat with our website...and then it will be primarily Facebook, which we will be using"* (Vibeke, a8: 5-6). Furthermore, Anders, who is marketing assistant at VISM, said; *"...we also have*

Instagram, where we encourage people to use our hashtag 'SydkystDanmark'. And...they are more than welcome to share their experiences in that way" (Anders, a7: 3). Moreover, Anders added; *"For the time being, we do not have any definite strategy so that they, on the website, can do anything about it [share experiences], but that is definitely a possibility that we think about and work on, because it could be exciting, and then involve the tourists differently than what we have done so far"* (Ibid.).

Hence, even though VISM does not have a clear strategy yet for consumer involvement trough the website, VISM assigns a high priority to its website as well as social media in its efforts to accommodate the digital tourists.

In terms of developing service and information, one of the project activities VISM outlines in the masterplan is; *"Digital Hosting (web and app)..."* (MP: 19). And when Vibeke was asked about this activity, she said; *"...Well, web that is our website...it is about...we shall be able to meet the, yes the silent traveller, we shall be able to meet with them online and be completely up to date...with regards to the app, then this is not something we have ready yet. It is a thing that...we would really really like to have"* (Vibeke, a8: 12). In relation to the idea of developing an app, Anders also said; *"...it is of course a larger project and an expensive project as well. So it is something we need to acquaint ourselves more with before we just venture into it"* (Anders, a7: 4). In the same context, Ida, who is head of development at VISM, also explained; *"...our first, primary, is that we need to gather the operators, we need to gather what we have of all the suppliers in this destination. And...that is step one. Before you sort of star to...do too many, how can you put it, initiatives towards the tourist when we are not ready"* (Ida, a6: 5).

From these statements, it is clear that VISM would like to be able to offer an app to the tourists in the future; however it is currently not a reality as other things have higher priority and due to the fact that developing an app is expensive.

In this regard, Neuhofer et al. (2012) argue that ICTs are generally viewed as empowering co-creation and thus changing the nature of the tourism experience (Neuhofer et al., 2012: 42). Hence, it might be beneficial for VISM to add an app to its digital initiatives in order to enhance the opportunity to digitally co-create the tourists' experience at the destination.

5.1.2 Tourists' digital usage

From the tourist interviews, it became clear that everyone of the tourists had brought their mobile phones to the destination (Tourist 1-2, a9: 3; Tourist 3-4, a10: 5; Tourist 5, a11: 8; Tourist 6, a12: 3). The usage of these however varies; when asked if the mobile phone was used for information- and inspiration search while being at the destination, one tourist said that he could do that, however emphasising that his mobile phone usage *"… is more like a, a social information concerning Facebook and concerning the news"* (Tourist 5, a11: 8). Another tourist also confirmed that she could use her phone for information- and inspiration search, and elaborated that she would search for *"…which experiences are nearby… some nature experiences or yes, something else interesting"* (Tourist 6, a12: 3).

Another tourist stressed that he and his wife do not access tourist information digitally (Tourist 4, a10: 6). However, his wife said; *"…well, I use, I do actually have that app. They have such an app at the campsite…I use that…to sort of keep up with… what happens, so you do not miss out on something. That you only realise it [what happens] afterwards"* (Tourist 3, a10: 6-7). Thus, these tourists might not view the information on the app specifically as tourist information, or perhaps, the tourists do not think about the usage of their phones, which might relate to Munar et al.'s (2013) statement, that mobile phones has become such a natural part of tourists' travel (Munar et al., 2013: 2).

One tourist emphasised that he did not search for information while being at the destination *"because… we are here. And if we are going anywhere well then we have done it [searched] from home"* (Tourist 1, a9: 3). Moreover, when talking about booking overseas travel online, his wife said; *"Well, I do not think that, that digitally are we not at all there. However, we were not born with it [the digital]…Well, we were after all very grown-up when it came, right. Where we can see, daughter and son-in-law, they just race around in it, right"* (Tourist 2, a9: 21,22).

On the contrary the first tourist said; *"Lone [Tourist 2] use it a lot, the digital, right…well that is both for, for school…"* (Tourist 1, a9: 18), and his wife responded; *"yes, it is almost impossible for you to avoid…"* (Tourist 2, a9: 18). Moreover, when asked if the tourist (1) shares information with his neighbour-campers he said; *"…well we share in the sense that we have made our own little group [on Facebook]"* (Tourist 1, a9: 5). Likewise, when asked if he had any apps on his phone, he said; *"we have one where we can look for*

treasures here…where it is hidden, where you can go after it. Then you will find them around…" (Ibid.: 7), thus referring to the geocaching[8] app on his phone.

Hence, even though these two tourists do not see themselves as being digitally skilled because they are from an older generation, the above statements emphasise that they do make use of technology when they are at the destination in terms of an app and social media, among other things. The digital engagement might depend on the risk they attach to the online activity; whereas booking overseas travel online is too insecure for them, they might be more comfortable with navigating in a location based app or sharing things on Facebook.

Based on the above statements from the tourists it is apparent that the tourists are using their mobile phones when they are at the destination. As tourists are a central co-creator of the experience (Neuhofer, 2016; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a; Vargo & Lusch, 2004), it is obviously important that they are using their mobile devises while being at the destination, in order for the likelihood of co-creation of tourist experiences to happen through ICTs (Neuhofer et al., 2012). The usage of the mobile devices varies and if VISM wants the tourists to interact in a digital co-creation process, one can argue that it is important for VISM to know how to increase the involvement of these tourists and in this way enable the co-creation process. Accordingly, these matters will be examined in the succeeding sections.

5.2 Co-production and Co-creation

This section focuses on the co-production– and the co-creation process of the theoretical framework (illustrated in figure 9). More specifically, this section looks at VISM's overall vision and intentions in order to assess the relevancy of adopting a co-creation approach. Moreover, this section clarifies to what extend VISM involves the tourists in its initiatives in terms of co-production and co-creation and, furthermore, discusses the tourists' digital engagement as a means of assessing the enablement of co-creation.

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[8] Geocaching is a GPS-enabled treasure hunt, which is about hiding things and publishing the latitude and longitude coordinates of the location for other 'geocachers' to find using a GPS device (O'Hara, 2008: 1177).
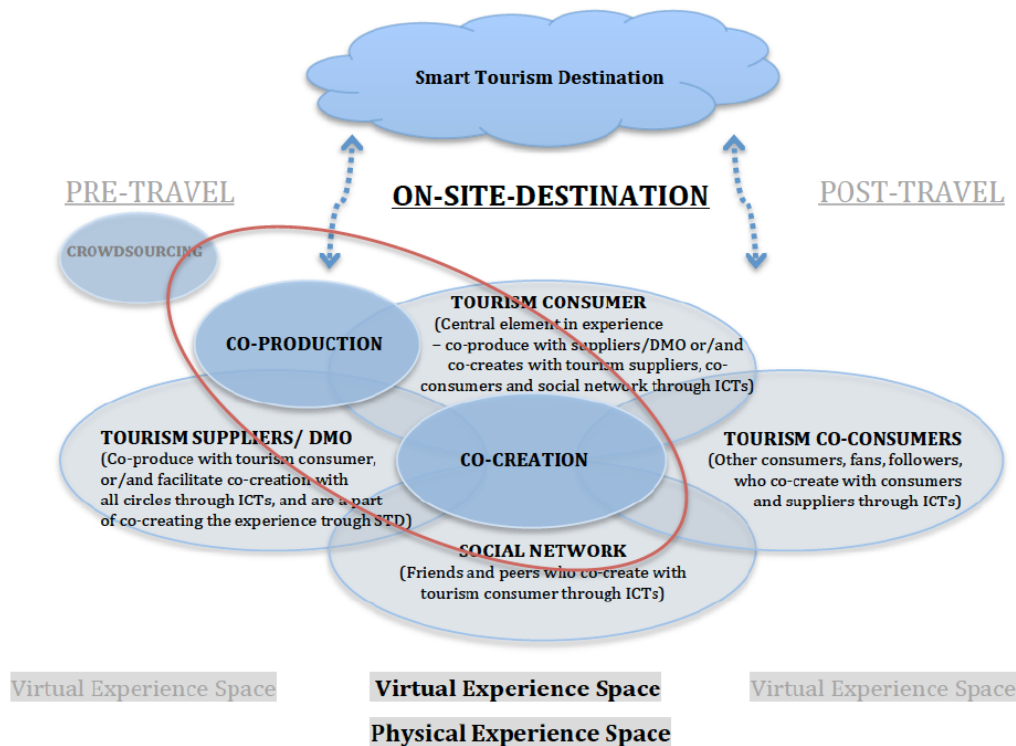
Figure 9: Focusing on co-production and co-creation within *'Technology facilitated consumer involvement within the experience space'* (Figure 7).

5.2.1 Relevancy of co-creation for VISM

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, VISM presents the following vision in the masterplan; *"South Zealand must be a new strong brand for coastal- and nature tourism in Denmark. In the year of 2020, South Zealand's tourism must be 30 % bigger than today"* (MP: 2) and, in this relation, VISM moreover states; *"South Zealand has really good potentials to mark itself as one of the most attractive holiday destinations in Scandinavia. However, it entails that all public- and private operators join together in a focused and strategic effort and dares to try new paths to turn the development"* (Ibid.). This vision and the following statement emphasises that VISM has great focus on increasing tourism at the destination and, besides a joint effort with the operators, the means to this increase should be by positioning VISM as an attractive destination, and through innovative initiatives that challenges conventional thinking. Correspondingly, engaging tourists in a co-creation process could, according to Neuhofer (2016), generate *growth*, *competitive advantage* and *innovation* (Neuhofer, 2016: 19). Thus, working towards co-creating experiences with the tourists could be beneficial for VISM and a way to get closer to achieving its vision.

While the process of co-production also focuses on involving the tourists, it is not to the same degree as co-creation, and co-production only involves interaction between the destination and the tourist, whereas co-creation also includes interaction among the tourists and the tourist's social networks (Neuhofer, 2016: 28). Accordingly, VISM would be able to get insights from the multi-level involvement the co-creation process entails, which could be useful in reaching its ambitious goal of increasing tourism at South Zealand with 30 per cent within the next four years.

Moreover, VISM states in the masterplan; *"...since the beginning of the financial crisis in 2008, the total number of overnight stays have actually decreased with 6 per cent in the four municipalities Næstved, Faxe, Vordingborg and Stevns [VISM], while the tourism in Denmark in general has increased with 5 percent...Thus, the four municipalities have overall lost market shares to other comparable destinations in Denmark"* (MP: 3). This statement shows, that VISM face a great challenge in terms of being an attractive destination and compete for the tourists against other Danish destinations who, more or less, have some of the same things to offers. In this relation, Chathoth et al. (2013) argue that adopting the approach of co-creation can increase the company's ability to differentiate itself in a market that is characterised by easily substitutable' offerings (Chathoth et al., 2013: 18). Hence, VISM could get a competitive advantage by engaging various tourists in a co-creation process and try to improve the tourists experience through this interaction as well as derive valuable insights from the tourists, which could be used to different VISM from the competing destinations.

According to Neuhofer (2016), the more consumers are involved in the experience, the more positive they will be about the destination, which accordingly will lead to increased perceived value, loyalty towards the destination as well as recommendations to other people (Neuhofer, 2016: 30). While Neuhofer's (2016) assessment might seem as a great argument for any company to adopt the process of co-creation, the above statements from VISM, which emphasise its current market position as well as its strategies to overcome some of the challenges the destination face, underline that adopting the process of co-creation could be favourable for VISM.

5.2.2 Co-production initiatives

According to Chathoth et al. (2013), adopting the process of co-production entails listening to tourists and trying to accommodate their needs in terms of which offerings are available (Chathoth et al., 2013: 15). And in relation to VISM's tourist service, Vibeke said; *"...we would really like to be able to individualise our offers to them [the digital tourists]* (Vibeke, a8: 14)*, and she further emphasised this idea by shaping her hands like a funnel and explained; *"...here you get down, but then we adjust more and more to who you really are and what we think you should receive from us in terms of offerings"* (Ibid: 15).

Anders likewise said that they want to collect data as a way to *"...retrieve some information regarding our users and then adjust the newsletters they receive accordingly. So they [newsletters] suit their [tourists] needs and their demand"* (Anders, a7: 5).

From these statements it becomes clear that VISM wants to personalise its offerings, and the notion of co-production can thus be seen in these strategic considerations.

Vibeke furthermore emphasised; *"it is as such very characterising...in relation to the way we work. That you can probably believe a lot of things yourself and think a lot of things, however it is of no use if it is not the same as what people want"* (Vibeke, a8: 7). Thus, VISM listens to the tourists in order to adapt its offerings accordingly. However, as Vibeke did state, it is also about adjusting the tourist information in terms of what VISM thinks the tourists should receive. Hence, personalised offerings however within the agenda of VISM. This line of thinking is what characterises the co-production process; to *"suit needs of what is available"* (Neuhofer, 2016: 22).

When asked about consumer involvement, Vibeke said; *"well, we talk a lot about consumer involvement all the time. However, we also talk about that...we would of course like to be a company who is able to customise all the time and...able to issue those things that our customers after all needs, or that our operators need our customers to know"* (Vibeke, a8: 13). Moreover, Vibeke explained; *"...of course we have the role which obviously says tourist information and we also have the task to...get ourselves marketed outwardly. However, we...also have the internal task to raise our operators' standard and to lift their products over the ramp. That is also what we need to help facilitate"* (Ibid.). Thus, because of VISM's many roles where it has to focus on both the tourists and on the operators as well as on its own organisational purpose, it might not be that simple to involve consumers to such an extent as VISM would like to. Hence, no matter what the

tourists' request, it is important for VISM to accommodate these requests, however, it is also important to make sure that the operators' offerings are being promoted. So, even though co-creation is seen as a consumer oriented approach (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a; Vargo & Lusch, 2004), VISM's engagement in any consumer involvement process will inevitably have a great focus on promoting the operators at the destination and ensure that their needs are met.

Looking at co-production from a tourist perspective, in relation to digital tourist information one of the tourist stated in the interview that, *"...we do not go in [to the Internet] and start and search blindly"* and moreover said that, *"...it would be too difficult for us to figure out what is what"* (Tourist 5, a11: 8, 10). Thus, this tourist emphasised that it is important to know what the destination has to offer.

Similarly, when asked what should be included in a prospective app from VISM, another tourist said *"If you just like that could put a little pin where we are, and then put a tick at, yes some running route, playground, shopping facilities, and then you would get the, some pins to show where it was"* (Tourist 6, a12: 7). Hence, accentuating that she would prefer to get the ability to choose different things in terms of what is available nearby.

Although Chathoth et al. (2013: 13) advocate that companies should work towards adopting co-creation, because of the company-centric dominance of co-production, the above statements emphasise that some tourists prefer to have pre-defined options while they are at the destination. Thus, it might be beneficial to not only adopt co-creation however also incorporate the co-production approach in terms of involving consumers at the destination.

However, while the process of co-production might be important for some tourists in terms of receiving customised offers without the tourists having to actively participate in the creation of the tourist experience, VISM will, according to Neuhofer (2016), miss out on much of the potential of real consumer involvement that are in evidence within co-creation if it only adopts the process of co-production (Neuhofer, 2016: 22).

Moreover, as it has been clarified, VISM puts great focus on growth, competitive advantage and innovation (MP: 2), which is why incorporating a higher degree of consumer involvement in, at least, some of its initiatives could be beneficial for VISM.

5.2.3 Co-creation initiatives

For true co-creation to happen, the destination needs to create experience spaces where tourists can access information and active dialogue can occur (Morgan, 2007: 366). In this relation, when talking about digital tourist information Vibeke said; *"…we would like to, for example on Facebook, to ask the followers…about, what do you think is our best ice-cream house, for example. Or where did you experience the greatest view to have a picnic from"* (Vibeke, a8: 7). Moreover, she stated that; *"…we really really want to have, on Facebook…that we sort of have this interaction with people so it won't just be a speech from us"* (Ibid.). Furthermore, when talking about Facebook, Anders also said; *"…we have about 1100-1200 followers and there is a small core group who are active, and the rest just follows I think"* (Anders, a7: 5).

From these statements it becomes clear that VISM does incorporate a large degree of consumer involvement in one of its initiatives, and the enablement of co-creation can be seen in VISM's intentions to create an experience space on Facebook. However, while VISM's efforts on engaging tourists on Facebook can be seen as a strategic instrument to positively enhance the tourism experience (Neuhofer et al., 2014: 342), Anders' statement emphasises that the interaction on this social platform may not be as straightforward as one would presume. Thus, it may not be enough to create a space for dialogue to happen, VISM needs to actively encourage the tourists to engage, in order to keep an ongoing dialogue, which is important in co-creating experiences (Chathoth et al., 2013: 15).

<u>Tourist-generated content</u>

Another initiative from VISM is an online photo campaign, which took place last autumn. When Vibeke described the campaign, she said; *"…we had a cooperation with a large attraction in every municipality which we encouraged the tourists to visit and from there make a, take a photo, family photo or something, whatever they thought was the greatest photo. And then hashtag it with 'fang øjeblikket' [catch the moment]"* (Vibeke, a8: 17). Moreover, she stated, the advantage of this kind of campaign was that; *"…it was not a commercial photo from somewhere. It was ordinary people who were out and experiencing something in our destination"* (Ibid.).

Besides the intentions of asking questions to the followers on Facebook, this campaign can also be seen as an example of VISM's previous efforts of encouraging interaction and

thus co-creating the tourist experience. Moreover, Vibeke's statements emphasise that besides creating a competition in which the tourists were engaged, VISM made the tourists a part of producing the content of what the destination has to offer.

VISM also address this way of promoting the destination in the masterplan; *"the idea is that it is, to a great extent, the tourists themselves who shall produce and develop the content in the future campaigns for coastal- and nature tourism in South Zealand"* (MP: 23). This kind of consumer involvement, where the tourists are intentionally generators of content, is to a larger degree possible due to the proliferation of social media platforms (Neuhofer, 2016: 27). However, while the tourist-generated content on these platforms can substantiate a destination's strategic marketing message and promote its offerings, the content might also contradict these (Munar & Gyimóthy, 2014: 73).

In relation to the risk of tourists uploading or writing anything contradicting, Vibeke said that *"It has to do with consumer involvement… and it might be the case that some get a bad experience…however we believe after all that we have a product that is so good, that even if there is one bad experience among them, then there might be 30 good"* (Vibeke, a8: 17). On the other hand, Anders did however say, in relation to the photo campaign last autumn, that *"…it was a thought we had, that if anyone posted a photo of something we could not use, because it pictured…something that might not be related to us, or something that other people would be offended by, then we would probably remove it"* (Anders, a7: 6). While removing offensive photos makes sense in order not to outrage anyone, the removal of tourist-generated content, on the basis of VISM's assessment of the relevancy, contradicts the underlying basis of co-creation being *consumer-centric* (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a; Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

However, looking at VISM's role within the co-creation process, as the facilitator of the experience space and the one who partly enables the co-creation process, like in the case of the photo campaign, VISM are to a certain extent able to control the process by the possibility of using censorship. Even though Vibeke did emphasise that consumer involvement is about presenting all of the consumer generated content, Anders' statement shows that VISM are able to use censorship if the relevancy of the content does no match with VISM's overall objective.

Conversely, one can argue that even if VISM made use of censorship in a campaign or on its social media platforms, it would be difficult for VISM to get absolute control of the

co-creation process, as VISM would not be able to control the content shared in other forums and directly between other tourists and within their social network.

5.2.4 Tourists' willingness to co-create the experience

When asked in the tourist interviews if anyone shares anything online, three of the tourists did generally upload pictures and share with their social network online (Tourist 1, a9: 6; Tourist 4, a10: 8; Tourist 5, a11: 12). However, one of these tourists said; *"…we actually do not tell anything before we are back home"*, and he adds; *"because it is after all a fine way to invite people to tell that you are out"* (Tourist 4, a10: 8). Hence, he was not keen on sharing anything online while being on holiday because he does not want to expose his absence to potential intruders in his home. Accordingly, if VISM would want to engage this tourist, for example in a photo competition on Facebook, it would be most likely to succeed in the pre- or post-travel phase (Neuhofer et al., 2012). However, even though this tourist does not share anything while being on-site, it does not mean that he does not look at any social media platforms and hence has the opportunity to get influenced by other tourists or his social network through these.

At least, another tourist said; *"I am on social media, so I would not be able to deny if I saw an update about something, and think, well that sounds exciting, or this would be nearby, then it might occur that I would be inspired to search a little more knowledge after all"* (Tourist 6, a12: 5). Which indicates that her social network or other tourists might inspire her to search for things and perhaps visit places she would not otherwise have thought of, and accordingly enhance her tourist experience at the destination.

In relation to online interaction another tourist said; *"…there is a chance that you over-sell your story. That is when you are on Facebook. It is over-sold. And therefore people get a little more immune"* (Tourist 5, a11: 15). Moreover, he adds; *"you do want to see it [the Facebook update]…you are interested sceptically"* (Ibid.: 16). This statement indicates that even though interaction happens in a non-commercial environment, like private Facebook pages, there could be an issue of trustworthiness in terms of how reliable a certain message is, as there might be a tendency to exaggerate an experience on social media. Thus, while tourism co-consumers and social networks are part of creating the overall experience through ICTs (Neuhofer et al., 2012), their inputs could to a certain extent be viewed with scepticism.

Chathoth et al. (2013) argue that the process of co-creation can be hindered if consumers are not willing to share information and content in relation to their experience (Chathoth et al., 2013: 15). And when talking to Vibeke about whether or not the tourists are a part of creating their own experience through the use of ICTs, she said; "*I would, of course, really wish that they where. That is, we would really really like to…have this involvement from our tourists. Both before they leave and while they are here, and also when they get home…our challenge is…how do we get them motivated as much as possible to do it. But…we would really really like them to use us, both before, under and after. As much as possible. On the digital media.*" (Vibeke, a8: 20). Hence, there is not doubt that VISM does want the tourists to get involved in the virtual experience space, however, as Vibeke emphasises, one of the challenges VISM face are how to get them involved.

From the tourists' statements it does, however, seem as if the issues of willingness and trustworthiness are important for the tourists if they should get involved in any digital interaction. Correspondingly, Wozniak et al.'s (2016) argue that the tourists' willingness to engage in co-creating the experience at the destination, depends on whether or not they perceive a benefit or added value of engaging (Wozniak et al., 2016: 291). Thus, VISM could focus on communicating which advantages the tourists would gain from the digital interaction as a means of making them willing to engage.

Moreover, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004b) argue that transparency is one of the key components for interaction and can even facilitate a collaborative dialogue between the company and the consumers (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004b: 30-31). Hence, VISM could address the issue of trustworthiness by ensuring an openness of information within their activities, in order to increase the likelihood of engaging tourist and to enable a digital co-creation process.

5.3 <u>Smart Tourism Destination</u>

This section concentrates on the concept of smart tourism destination within the theoretical framework (illustrated in figure 10). In particular, on the arrows between the on-site interaction and the 'cloud', which have a dual representation of a smart utilisation of technology at the destination as well as a collection of the traces that are left behind from any on-site digital interaction, also known as the digital footprints

(Girardin et al., 2008; 36). Accordingly, this section clarifies VISM's smart employment of technology in its initiatives as well as VISM's current collection of digital footprints, in order to examine any untapped potential and discuss how VISM can move towards being a more smart tourism destination. Moreover, this section addresses the tourists' views on collecting digital footprints and the possible impact for VISM in terms of the enablement of a digital co-creation process.
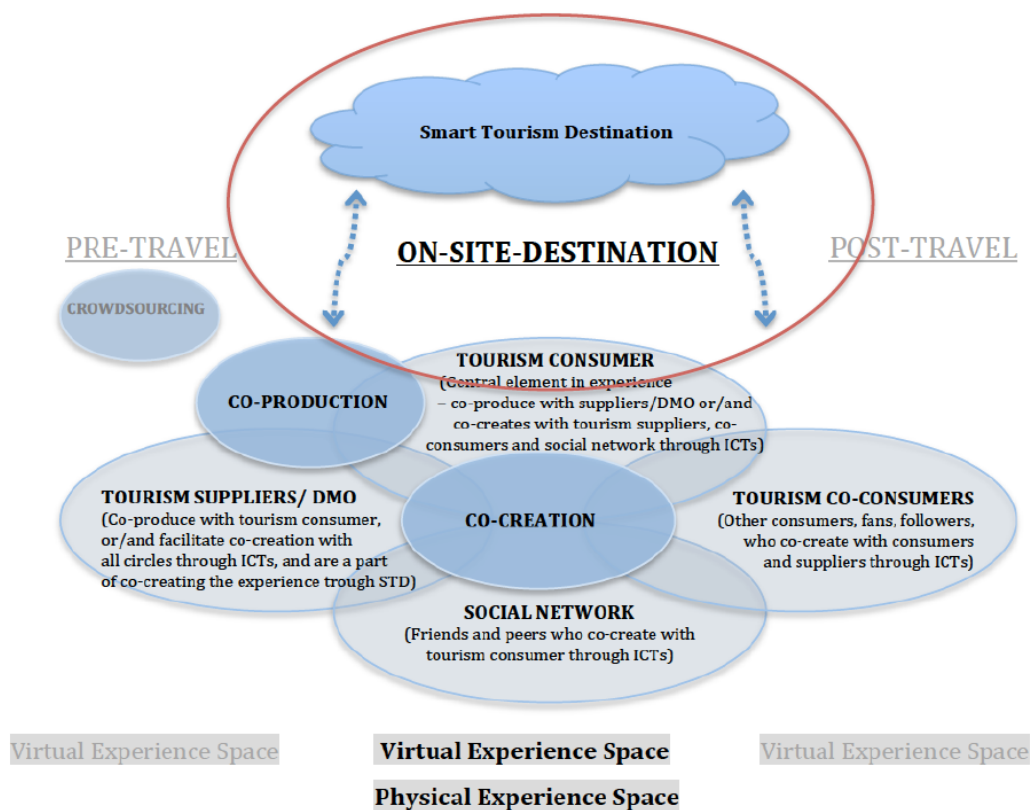
Figure 10: Focusing on smart tourism destination within *'Technology facilitated consumer involvement within the experience space'* (Figure 7).

5.3.1 Smart utilisation of technology

According to Boes et al. (2015), a destination can be regarded as a smart tourism destination when it incorporates technology to enhance the tourist experience and likewise utilises the digital footprints to make strategic decisions (Boes et al., 2015: 394). Looking at VISM's use of technology in its initiatives, it has been clarified throughout this chapter that VISM has a great focus on its website and on its Facebook page. Moreover, it has been stated that VISM aims at offering its marketing material nearly 100 % digital. However, according to Gretzel et al. (2015), a website and the

digitalised marketing material is more related to e-tourism than it is to smart tourism destination, and e-tourism focuses largely on the tourist experience in the pre- and post- travel phases (Gretzel et al., 2015: 182, 186).

When talking about offering digital tourist information, Vibeke said; *"It is meant as our website…and then a future app, for example…It is not the intention that we will have monitors out and stand everywhere or something, because we have heard from many of our colleagues, that the thing about having a monitor that suddenly does not work, then it quickly becomes really bad hosting"* (Vibeke, a8: 14). Furthermore, Vibeke explained; *"…people are anyway walking around, actually almost everyone, with their own phone or their own iPad, which they know 100 percent. We would rather say, well then we are accessible on their own tools. And this we can simply do best through a website, or with an app."* (Ibid.). Hence, VISM does not want to incorporate technology in the cityscape by providing monitors to the tourists, instead it aims at making its website assessable for tourists while they are at the destination through their own mobile devices. Whether or not VISM's website can be categorised as e-tourism or smart tourism, as Gretzel et al. (2015) argues, might be questionable. However, VISM tries to improve the accessibility to its tourist service on the website and in this way enhance the tourist experience at the destination.

In terms of increasing the likelihood of the tourists engaging in a digital co-creation process, the choice of focusing on the tourists' own mobile devices rather than a monitor seems as a smart choice, as the latter assumably does not allow much interaction. However, Vibeke said that; *"right now…there is not really any opportunity to comment yet on our website…so, in terms of that, they [the tourists] have not had the greatest influence you can say"* (Vibeke, a8: 7). Hence, if there are no opportunity for tourists to interact with VISM and/or other tourists, the website does not enable co-creation merely by making it compatible to mobile devices.

In relation to digitally developing the destination, VISM states in the masterplan; *"we want to establish "DDA – Det Digitale Akademi" [The Digital Academy] – as an inspiration- and learning group for the attractions and accommodation places…"Det Digitale Akademi" is the working title to a business network, in which experts from home and abroad will inspire the companies marketing on social media, booking platforms etc. The goal is 25 members in 2016"* (MP: 18). Vibeke also explained this network by saying;

"...simply, some workshops and some seminars for the operators we have out there, who can make out how do they use these digital media...it is an intention about improving the level and the quality in terms of digital tourist communication, really" (Vibeke, a8: 9-10). And Vibeke also emphasised; *"...our intention is after all that we will be nearly 100 percent digital, and it is of no use if the operators we represent are not"* (Ibid.: 10).

Moreover, Ida said; *"currently we work with the website and with the Facebook page, and then we also make an extra net for the operators, who sort of can...exchange ideas also in relation to network and so on, maybe make some offers together and so on"* (Ida, a6: 5). From these statements it is obvious that VISM tries to incorporate the employment of technology throughout the destination and moreover, tries to enhance the collaboration between VISM and the operators, as well as among these.

Since Ren et al. (2016) argue that the concept of smart tourism is not only about a technological- and data driven means of developing tourism at the destination; however it moreover encompasses a new way of thinking, collaborating, and organising tourism (Ren et al., 2016: 5), VISM's efforts among the operators can accordingly be characterised as smart tourism initiatives.

<u>A prospective App</u>

As clarified earlier in this chapter, VISM would like to develop an app for the tourists, and in connection to this, Anders emphasised that a prospective app would feature consumer involvement and said; *"it should be inspiration when they are on-location and then it should be the opportunity to share pictures and small reviews and such"* (Anders, a7: 4). Moreover, Vibeke said; *"we actually have an idea about also making such an extra net in relation to our operators who could submit an offer, which we then could push out through an app"* (Vibeke, a8: 12). Hence, even though the app currently is not a reality, VISM has thought about how the tourists could get involved as well as how the operators cold be included in such an app.

According to Buhalis and Amaranggana (2015: 387), enhancing the tourist experience through ICTs within the smart tourism destination concept involves the incorporation of access into real-time information or a dynamic platform in which the destination could offer personalised service to the tourists (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015: 387). Thus, one way for VISM to adopt the concept of smart tourism destination to a larger

extent than what is the case today could be by the means of VISM's own idea of developing an app that also featured these elements.

Setting up a dynamic platform within an app could also virtually connect the tourist to VISM, as well as to other tourists and the operators at the destination, and thereby enhance the likelihood of co-creation of tourist experiences (Neuhofer et al., 2012: 42). In comparison to a dynamic virtual platform like VISM's Facebook page, the app might also accommodate the tourists who are not active on social media or are sceptical about the content on social media, like it was the case with one of the interviewed tourists (Tourist 5, a11: 16).

Additionally, as previously mentioned, Vibeke stated that VISM would like to accommodate the silent traveller by being up to date with their website. Likewise, an app could furthermore be a possibility to digitally co-create the tourist experience with the silent travellers, who do not turn to a physical tourist information when they are at a destination (Tussyadiah, 2015).

5.3.2 Collection of digital footprints

Besides making the website compatible with mobile devices, VISM wants the website to encompass *"…a high degree of integration with social media and be able to function with the most applied tools for search optimisation, analysis and data employment"* (MP: 24). Additionally, Vibeke stated; *"…we are in such a phase where we would like to use the digital much more towards the tourists we do catch into our universe"* (Vibeke, a8: 5).

Likewise, VISM outlines main activities in the 'Mere for flere' project and states among other things in the masterplan; *"Evaluation of season 2015: On the basis of research and data gathered during the season, the direction towards the future tourist information and service in South Zealand must be set"* (MP: 25). In this relation, Anders explained the data they had gathered; *"…generally, of course who they are, where they go online, that is which media they enter from and which language settings they have, so that we have something to go by…and adjust our website. And then of course the experiences they search for"* (Anders, a7: 8). And Anders furthermore said; *"…we have biking and fishing and hiking and that sort of thing, as great themes down here. And we can see that people also search for it, so it is obvious that these are themes we should spend much more time*

on...however still be conscious that there are smaller segments who search for other things than those specific three, which we also have to satisfy" (Ibid.: 9).

From these statements, it is obvious that VISM considers how it is possible to collect and furthermore utilise the tourists' digital footprints, which is to a great extend what characterises a smart tourism destination (Lamsfus et al., 2015: 367; Tussyadiah, 2015). Moreover, Anders' statement shows that VISM does collect data from the website. However, this data concerns which mobile device the tourists' use to enter the website and other things related to activities on the website. Thus, it relates to any activity at the website and not specific data on the tourists' digital interaction while they are at the destination, which is a primary constituent in the concept of a smart tourism destination, in order to address the tourists' needs at the destination (Gretzel et at, 2015: 182).

Moreover, when talking about research and data, Ida also explained; *"...there are challenges in regards to Danmarks Statistik given that we are a destination with many small accommodation places, and there is no requirement that you have to report if you have less than 40 beds. So we...have some factors of uncertainty in relation to the statistics that we have...one of the things you measure are, of course, statistics of overnight stays...we would very much like to know much more about how we can also measure one-day guests"* (Ida, a6: 8). Hence, there are some issues for VISM in regards to the public available statistics and it is therefore not possible for VISM to identify how many tourists visit the destination. In order for VISM to be able to work towards increasing the tourism at the destination, like it was stated in VISM's vision, one can argue that the lack of statistics is problematic, as it precludes VISM from having specific numbers to relate to and be guided by. It would moreover be difficult for VISM to adjust its offerings according to the inflow of tourists if one-day guests and tourists staying at small accommodation places are not taken into account.

Collecting passive tracks

Besides capturing the data from the tourists' online engagement on VISM's website, VISM could also collect the *passive tracks*, which Girardin et al. (2008) describes as traces that are left behind whenever a consumer uses a technological infrastructure, such as a WiFi network (Girardin et al., 2008: 36). Thus, it is opportunities for VISM to

see where the tourists are situated at the destination when they go online, which nationality they have, what they search for and so on.

When asked if anyone of the operators at the destination collects data from their WiFi networks, Vibeke said; *"…I do not know how much they each work with it. Because right there…we are…not included…and it is very much different, that is, some places it is municipalities and other places it is harbours and then it is a private company who does something…the great thing would be if we had access to all the data that are located here…it is more like a dream scenario, right"* (Vibeke, a8: 24). And she further added, *"whether or not they try to work with some of it [the data] themselves, I have not heard anything about that"* (Ibid.). Hence, VISM does not collaborate with any of the operators in terms of collecting data, however, there might be an untapped potential for VISM to encourage- and join in on the collection of digital footprints. Already, VISM tries to mediate the importance of the digital development when talking to the operators and especially through the business network, 'Det Digitale Akademi'. And as a network of operators is established already, the collaboration on data collection could possibly take place within this network. Assumably, the tourism operators also have an interest in the knowledge that can be extracted from the digital footprints as well as an interest in enhancing the tourists' experience at the destination.

Since the digital footprints can be used to identify the tourists' needs (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2013: 562), VISM could further use the concept of smart tourism destination to enhance the likelihood of tourists engaging in a digital co-creation process. Like it was clarified in section 5.2.4, for tourists to be willing to engage in digital co-creation it is important to make them perceive the online interaction as something beneficial to them. Thus, by collecting the digital footprints, both from the direct online interaction however also from the passive tracks, it is possible for VISM to identify which parts of the destination the tourists visit as well as what the tourists search for and pays attention to, and accordingly make sure to offer something related to this and make its initiatives relevant for the tourists.

5.3.3 Using the digital footprints

In the interviews, the tourists were asked about their opinion on the collection of the tourists' digital footprints and the utilisation of these to suggest offerings to the tourists.

In relation to this question, one of the tourists said; *"there is nothing worse than if you have been in and searched for something, which you maybe consider to buy. And then you enter Ekstra Bladet's [Danish newspaper] website, and then you are just flooded with advertisements from the last place you have been to and had a look…It is bloody irritating, to put it nicely…It is too much"* (Tourist 4, a10: 12). When the question was elaborated, and the same tourist was asked, if searching for a tourist attraction and additionally receiving other suggestions within the same area of the destination was okay, he said; *"yes, yes, but that is of course something else…there you search for the things…you do not search for things when you are on Facebook or are going in to read the news* (Ibid.:13)*.* Based on his statements, it is important for VISM to be aware that advertisements appearing on the basis of previous website visits and other re-marketing initiatives, which initially has the purpose of enhancing the tourist experience, are not exaggerated due to the risk of having the opposite affect. Moreover, this tourist expressed that if the suggested offers are related to his specific demand, it does not bother him that his search preferences are utilised to offer him something additional. This viewpoint emphasises the previous argument that tourists need to perceive the online activities as being relevant in order for them to engage.

To the same question, another tourist said; *"Well, I think it is fine enough. Well, I just want to…I am not good enough in terms of…if only you can turn it off…in terms of that they keep on offering…If you can do that. I do not know if you can do that. But if you are able to do that, then it would have been really nice…However I still think, well, that the idea is good"* (Tourist 5, a11: 20). The same tourist further added; *"It does obviously get a little one-track minded in the end, right…if you from the beginning search very narrow. Then it will only be square dance and motor cycles and, and nude women, right"* (Ibid.: 21). Hence, this tourist would prefer to be able to turn suggested offerings on and off, presumably in terms of when he finds the offerings relevant or not. However, he also emphasises that suggesting things on the basis of previous search might not allow new experiences, which the tourist did not think of himself. Thus, it might be a balance between suggesting something relevant for the tourist as well as opening his horizon and presenting something more of what the destination has to offer.

In relation to the same question of digital footprints and the usage of these, one of the other tourists said; *I think that is a good idea. Because it, it after all opens our world bigger too"* and he added, *"as long as it is personal information which are not being distributed"* (Tourist 1, a9: 10). In line with the issue of privacy, one of the other tourists said; *"well, it is a little bit, well it is frightening in some way"* (Tourist 2, a9: 19), and another tourist also said; *"In a way I find it a little bit frightening…but in reverse, it inspirers me after all to… I could easily click on some of the things that are suggested"* (Tourist 6, a12: 8). In order to address these privacy concerns, it is, according to Wozniak et al. (2016: 292), important to clearly state which information is being collected and what the information is being used for. Thus, VISM should clearly communicate which data are collected when using VISM's website, the prospective app and other digital initiatives in order to assure the tourists that none of their data are being misused. Another option is to let the tourists have a choice, in terms of which personal information that can be accessed and which cannot, as this could, according to Buhalis and Foerste (2015: 158), create trust between VISM and the tourists. Correspondingly, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004b) also argue that an active dialogue of the risks and benefits involved in using a certain product or service can create trust between the company and the consumer (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004b: 30).

Based on the above statements from the tourists, it is evident that the issues of privacy as well as relevancy are important in terms of online engagement. Thus, VISM should have these issues in mind when making and running its digital initiatives, as they are decisive for the enablement of a digital co-creation process.

Overall, the adoption of the smart tourism destination concept could be viewed as a means for VISM to move from the consumer involvement process of co-production towards co-creation. While the collection of digital footprints is highly useful within a co-production process, in which personalisation of offerings is essential (Neuhofer, 2016: 28), this collection can further be utilised to enhance the likelihood of tourists engaging online and thus enhance the probability of interaction among the tourists, VISM, the operators, tourism co-consumers and social networks, and thereby allow for a co-creation process to happen.

5.4 Virtual- and Physical Experience Space

This section focuses on the virtual experience space and the physical experience space within the theoretical framework (illustrated in figure 11). Particularly, this section clarifies the network coverage at the destination as well as the need for physical tourist information, as a means of discussing the relation- and the dependence between the virtual- and physical experience space in connection with VISM's enablement of co-creation.
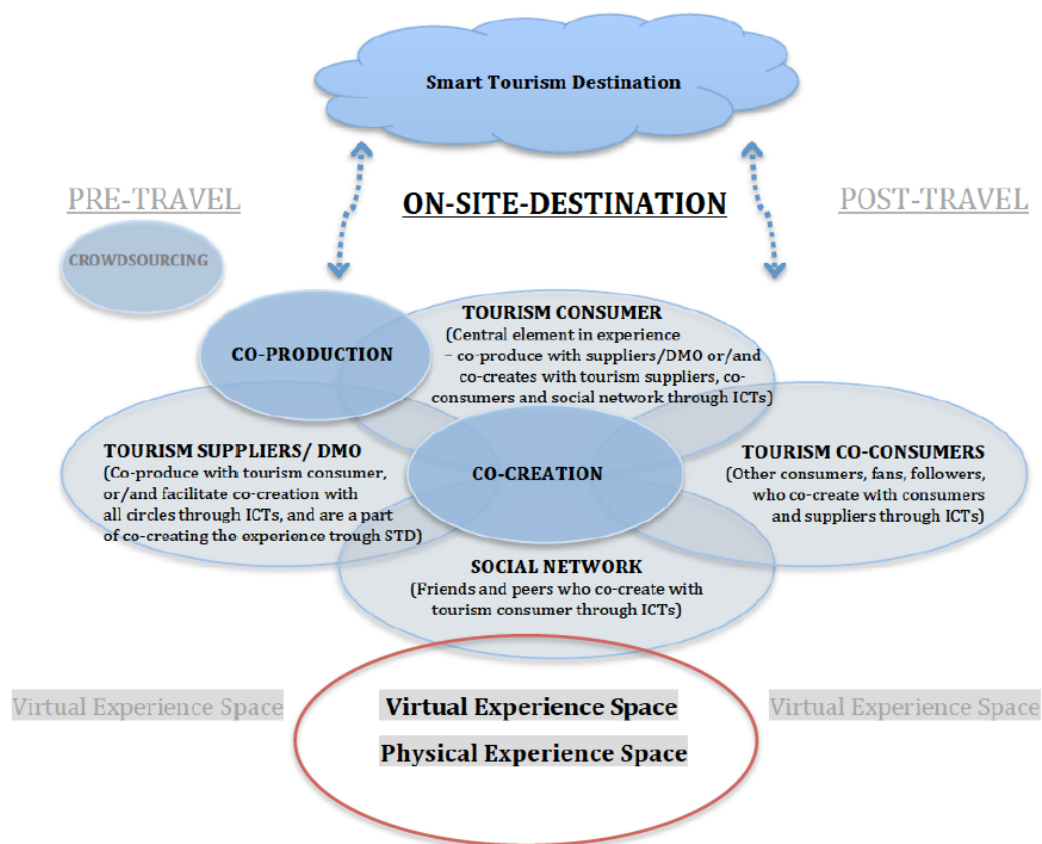
Figure 11: Focusing on the virtual- and physical experience space within *'Technology facilitated consumer involvement within the experience space'* (Figure 7).

5.4.1 Adequate network coverage

In terms of network coverage at the destination, VISM states in the masterplan; *"today, our analyses shows that there are several areas completely without mobile coverage, which is unacceptable and a thread towards our digital strategy"* (MP: 19). In this relation, Anders also said; *"…it is really a shame if we develop the app or would want*

them [the tourists] to visit our website, but then they are left without being able to connect with anything" (Anders, a7: 7). Hence, the lack of coverage at the destination is a great challenge if VISM wants to realise its digital initiatives. This challenge inevitably also means that the co-creation of tourism experiences within a virtual experience space would be less likely to occur on-site.

Moreover, Buhalis and Amaranggana (2013) argue that the key driving force behind ICTs is proper connectivity and it is therefore important to secure adequate network coverage at all areas of the destination (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2013: 558). Thus, without network coverage it is neither possible to enhance the tourist experience at the destination through ICTs nor is it possible to gather any data from the online interaction, as this is not produced. Likewise, Paris, Berger, Rubin, and Casson (2015: 814) argue that tourists expect that they are able to connect while travelling and not being able to do so would, besides a poor experience, cause negative reactions.

In relation to this challenge of network coverage, Vibeke explains; *"…it is after all purely political that something needs to be done…we would definitely also prefer that there was this optimal mobile coverage, however, we have to face the fact that there is not"* (Vibeke, a8: 23). However, when asked about the disposal of free WiFi anywhere around the destination, Vibeke said; *"There are many who have taken it in and do it [provide free WiFi]…and we encourage it of course very much. That it simply has to bee a must that there are various places where it is possible to access [a network]…it is absolutely crucial that you, as an attraction or as a place for accommodation, offers this as a completely natural thing. It should not be something that is an extra charge"* (Ibid.: 24). Thus, VISM is a dedicated advocate for the significance of WiFi at the operators around the destination and furthermore urge them to provide free WiFi to the tourists.

Moreover, in terms of the 'Mere for flere' project, VISM states in the masterplan; *"In order to create a more visible and relevant tourist information, we want to develop a mobile tourist service, which can be repositioned between localities and events…for example a veteran car, an electric car or a classic Air Stream caravan or the like, which can be staffed and activated during peak season"* (MP: 25). Vibeke further explains this idea of a mobile tourist information; *"…it will contain a WiFi hotspot… and the possibility to charge mobile phones and things like that. So it will sort of be a different type where we focus likewise on the digital tourist"* (Vibeke, a8: 21-22). Hence, with this initiative, VISM

tries to address the challenge of the missing network coverage at the destination and in this way enhance the likelihood of tourists accessing VISM's digital available information material and interacts online.

However, a transportable tourist service, which can only be at one place at the time, is obviously not enough to ensure that all the tourists at the destination are able to access the experience space facilitated by VISM, such as VISM's Facebook page or a prospective app. Therefore, it is also essential for VISM to continue the encouragement of establishing WiFi at the operators to expand the digital possibilities across the destination.

Neuhofer et al. (2012) include the elements of virtual experience co-creation and physical experience co-creation in their original framework (figure 6) to emphasise that the on-site destination experience is not only limited to engagement with the physical surroundings: however, it also involves interaction with the virtual environment due to the proliferation of ICTs (Neuhofer et al., 2012: 42). Additionally, these two elements are included as a means of highlighting that the engagement of tourists through virtual platforms are likely to enhance the tourists' physical destination experience (Ibid.). However, from VISM's statements relating to the challenge of the lacking network coverage, it becomes apparent that the virtual experience space and physical experience space (which these elements are renamed in the new framework – cf. section 4.4), are furthermore related to each other in the sense that the virtual experience space is highly depended on the physical experience space. VISM's initiative of making a mobile tourist information which incorporates a WiFi hotspot is an example of the two spaces overlapping; the physical experience space is changed in order for the virtual experience space to occur at all. Thus, the physical arrangements are crucial in order for VISM to enable the digital co-creation process while the tourists are at the destination.

5.4.2 Physical tourist information

When talking about digital tourist information, Vibeke also raised another subject by saying, *"…we also have to acknowledge that…it is just not everyone who is there [technological abilities]. We also have a generation of elderly who, there are really really many elderly who are very digital, however there are also still some that are not"* (Vibeke,

a8: 15-16). Thus, even though it has become a natural part for many tourists to travel with a mobile device (Magasic, 2016: 174; Munar et al. 2013: 2), it is however important to keep in mind that not every tourist travels with a mobile device or necessarily uses it while they are on holiday.

According to Buhalis and Amaranggana (2013), within today's destinations there is only little room for technologically illiterate, like the elderly tourist Vibeke mentions, and tourists themselves are responsible for their own ability to adapt to the technological development (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2013: 561). However, VISM states in the masterplan; *"Our tourist information must be accessible where the tourists go. We will therefore establish a fine mesh net of 'tourist inspirations' in South Zealand's tourism landscape – that is at attractions, sights, accommodation places and junctions"* (MP: 25). Moreover, in relation to physical- and digital tourist information Vibeke explained; *"I do not think you can have only one thing or the other"* (Vibeke, a8: 15), and she further states that; *"...we have to meet people where they are"* (Ibid.: 16). Thus, VISM tries to accommodate the tourists that do not have the technological abilities by continuing to offer physical tourist information, despite VISM's acknowledgement of the digital revolution changing the tourism market (MP: 10).

Additionally, in relation to VISM's delegation of tourist information to the destinations tourism operators, Anders explained; *"We of course groom the 'tourist informations' with some material and the possibility to guide these tourists who then arrives here"* (Anders, a7: 2). Moreover, when asked about the possibility of interaction between VISM and the tourists, Anders said; *"...you can say that the first dialogue are created at the 'tourist informations' with the partners [tourism operators] we have"* (Ibid.: 4). Thus, the tourists at South Zealand can physically turn to the operators for tourist information and the operators are able to guide the tourists, not only in terms of where to go and what to see at the destination; however, VISM could also enable the operators to guide the tourists to use VISM's website, social media sites or a prospective app. While this guidance would not be relevant for the tourists who does not use mobile devices at all while travelling, it could help the tourists who would like to use their devises but do not exactly know how to access the website or download the app, or the tourists who were not aware of the digital possibilities.

From the tourist interviews, it became clear that none of the tourists had been to VISM's website before (Tourist 1, a9: 3; Tourist 4, a10: 5; Tourist 6, a12: 3). And Vibeke also stated that; *"…it is, you see, our greatest focus, it is to tell them [the tourists] who are we and that we exist at all"* (Vibeke, a8: 25). Maybe the interviewed tourists had not been to VISM's website before because VISM is a fairly new organisation (cf. chapter 2), or because many of the tourists did not come from far away, thus not seeking information as if it was a new and unknown destination. Nonetheless, it does not change the fact that the operators who are also 'tourist inspirations' could suggest tourists to get more information and interact through VISM's digital initiatives.

In relation to this, when asked in the tourist interview if the physical tourist information was important, one of the tourists said; *"Yes, it has to be there…well we attach greater importance to this [physical tourist information] than the other [digital], so the other would be a supplement to then be able to say, and if you are to go into something in depth, then you can go into this and this and this page"* (Tourist 5, a11: 10). Another tourist also said; *"…when people hear, well where are you situated [campsite], well there is this and that, try and go in and look at their site [Facebook]… because one thing is that we tell about it, but something else is that they are then able to see, because there is after all something picture-wise…there it is the personal [recommendation] who comes first, right, and then the digital"* (Tourist 1, a9: 12). Hence, some of the tourists attach great importance to the physical information or recommendation and use the digital possibilities to underpin this. And the physical interaction can lead to digital actions.

Based on these tourist statements as well as VISM's opportunity to suggest digital interaction through the tourism operators, it, once again, becomes clear that the virtual experience space can be made possible by actions within the physical experience space.

The 'unplugged' tourists

When talking to Vibeke about the lack of network coverage, she moreover said; *"…for some, this we have heard of, it is a part of the charm [of being at the destination]. And it might also be one of the things that we can focus on, that this is the place where you can completely relax. You can completely unwind, because you may not be able to connect"* (Vibeke, a8: 23). Promoting the lack of connectedness would obviously not enhance the probability of engaging tourists in a digital co-creation process while being at the destination. However, Vibeke's statement is particular interesting as it signifies that

there are tourists at the destination that prefer to be disconnected and thus may not want to use the digital tourist service. Correspondingly, Gretzel et al. (2015) emphasise that there are tourists who will not utilise any ICTs when travelling, because they whish to escape technology when they are on holiday (Gretzel et al., 2015: 185). Likewise, Paris et al. (2015) emphasise that some tourists try to get away from the 'connectedness' their daily lives entails and, hence, chooses to be 'unplugged' when they are on holiday (Paris et al., 2015: 804).

Based on these assertions, it is important for VISM to keep in mind that it is not possible to engage neither the tourists who unplugs from technology when they travel nor the technological illiterate in a digital co-creation process, and in this way influence their tourist experience. Other measures, such as the physical tourist information, must be utilised in order to influence their tourist experience at the destination. Moreover, VISM must be aware that the data derived from the digital footprints only account for some of the tourists at the destination and VISM's strategic decisions must thus be made accordingly.

5.5 <u>Sub-conclusion</u>

Addressing the second objective of this thesis, this analysis chapter initially identified VISM's digital initiatives, and on the basis of this, it is clear that VISM recognises a digital revolution in the tourism market and accordingly puts a great focus on its website and social media, and digitalises nearly all of its marketing material. Moreover, VISM would like to develop an app to further accommodate the digital tourists. As a decisive factor for co-creation of tourist experiences to happen through ICTs, it was furthermore established that the interviewed tourists travel with- and use their mobile phones at the destination.

Following, this chapter focused on the other part of the objective by incorporating relevant areas of the theoretical framework, '*Technology facilitated consumer involvement within the experience space*':

<u>Co-production and co-creation</u>
Based on VISM's vision and general intentions, the adoption of a co-creation approach could be favourable for VISM. Looking at statements from VISM, it is apparent that the

process of co-production is in evidence within VISM's strategic considerations, as VISM does want to personalise the destination offerings, however with the operators' interests in view. In this relation, it was clarified that some tourists do like to have pre-defined offerings when they are travelling and merely adopting a co-creation approach might not be beneficial – or even possible, considering VISM's many roles. Generally, VISM wants to involve the tourists, and co-creation is in evidence in VISM's initiatives of its Facebook page and a former photo campaign. As VISM is the facilitator of the experience space in which the process of co-creation occurs, it is possible for VISM to use censorship in terms of the content that is generated, and thus to a certain extend control the co-creation process.

Additionally, it became evident from the tourist interviews, that issues of willingness and trustworthiness are important for the tourists in relation to digital engagement. Hence, in order for VISM to enable a co-creation process, communicating the advantages of engaging as well as ensuring a high degree of transparency in its initiatives is important.

Smart tourism destination

VISM can be seen to work towards a smart tourism destination in terms of its efforts towards collaborating with the operators at the destination and through that enhancing the digital development. It was furthermore clarified that VISM tries to accommodate the digital tourists by making its website compatible with mobile devices. However, as the website does not allow any interaction from the tourists, this initiative does not increase the probability of a digital co-creation process to occur at the destination. On the contrary, VISM's own idea of developing an app could serve as an opportunity to allow access to real-time information and interaction within a dynamic platform, and thus facilitate a co-creation process.

In relation to the collection of the tourists' digital footprints it became clear that VISM collects data from its website, however, this data is not specifically related to the tourists *at* the destination. Moreover, VISM has difficulties with the public available statistics, as these cannot provide the exact number of tourists at the destination. Accordingly, it would be beneficial for VISM to collect digital footprints in terms of passive tracks from WiFi networks across the destination. A more extensive collection of the tourists' digital footprints could also allow VISM to identify the tourists' needs

and demands, and this knowledge could be used by VISM to engage the tourists in a digital co-creation process.

Additionally, it became apparent from the tourist interviews that the issues of privacy and relevancy are important in relation to the collection and usage of digital footprints. Thus, VISM should keep these issues in mind, as they are decisive for the enablement of a digital co-creation process. Overall, adopting the smart tourism destination concept could be viewed as a means for VISM to move from the process of co-production towards co-creation, as the collection of digital footprints can be used to enhance the likelihood of tourists engaging online and interacting with VISM, the operators, tourism co-consumer and social networks.

Virtual- and physical experience space

From VISM's statements, it became evident that the network coverage at the destination is not adequate, which affects the possibilities of co-creating tourism experiences within a virtual experience space. In this relation, it was clarified that VISM tries to encourage the operators to provide WiFi to the tourists and VISM, moreover, incorporates a WiFi spot in the coming mobile tourist service. These efforts highlight that the virtual- and the physical experience space overlap, and that the virtual experience space is highly dependent on the physical arrangements. Thus, the physical experience space needs to be changed in order for the virtual experience space to occur at all. Likewise, VISM offers its tourist information physically through several operators across the destination, and these 'tourist informations' could also be used to guide tourists to use VISM's website, social media sites or a prospective app. And, it became clear from some of the tourist interviews that physical interaction can lead to digital actions. Thus, the virtual experience space can be made possible by actions within the physical experience space.

Moreover, it was clarified that some tourists travel without mobile devices or prefer to be disconnected while travelling. Hence, these tourists will not have a tourist experience in the virtual experience space, and it is not possible for VISM to engage these tourists in a digital co-creation process, as well as digital footprints cannot be collected from these tourists at the destination.

6 Reflections on the theoretical framework

In terms of the theoretical framework, '*Technology facilitated consumer involvement within the experience space*', the preceding analysis focused solely on the areas of co-production and co-creation, smart tourism destination, and the virtual- and physical experience space. As an addition to the analysis, this chapter briefly describes some of the other areas in the framework in relation to potential analysis contributions and, moreover, presents a new area of '*Locals*', which emerged from the interviews with VISM and the tourists. Accordingly, this chapter ends with a revised theoretical framework.

The various groups

The centre of the theoretical framework outlines who is involved in respectively the process of co-production and the process of co-creation. Besides establishing which process is in evidence at the destination and looking at the movement towards enabling co-creation, like it was the case in the analysis, it could also be beneficial to look at the various groups who are involved the processes. For example, analysing exactly how the tourism co-consumers or the social network are a part of digitally co-creating the experience with the individual tourist and how much influence these groups have on the experience compared to the DMO.

Pre- and Post-travel phases

The concept of smart tourism destination focuses on enhancing the tourist experience on-site, however, it could also be valuable for the DMO to collect digital footprints in the pre- and post-travel phase in order to know, for example, what the tourists demand before they travel and what they communicate about the destination on social media upon return, as Neuhofer et al. (2012) also emphasise. It would, however, only be the *active* tracks, which include intentional online exposure such as engaging on social media, uploading photos and post reviews (Girardin et al., 2008: 37) that are possible to collect data from, as the *passive* tracks are related to data from on-site sensors and WiFi networks at the destination (Ibid.: 36).

An analysis encompassing all three travel phases could, moreover, focus on the issues the tourists bring forward in terms of digital engagement and usage of the collected digital footprints, as a means of identifying if the enablement of the digital co-creation process varies depending on whether the tourist are at the destination or at home.

Crowdsourcing

As a part of rebranding the destination, VISM described one of the project activities in the masterplan as following; *"Creative competition; In the fall 2015 a creative competition is launched among invited communication agencies to identify and express South Zealand's core values and attraction as a holiday destination. The agencies' suggestions must be able to work in campaigns on social media. As a supplement to the competition we will consider crowdsourcing in the search for South Zealand's new identity and narratives"* (MP: 23). This statement clearly emphasises that VISM considered using crowdsourcing in this particular project. If the consumer involvement process of crowdsourcing was incorporated within an analysis, the focus could be on the possible impact on the on-site destination experience, if the tourist had been involved within a crowdsourcing process prior to visiting the destination.

Virtual- and Physical experience space

While the area of the virtual- and physical experience space is included in the analysis, the focus has been on the relationship- and dependence between these two spaces. Following Neuhofer et al.'s (2012) original intention of including these areas in the framework, it could also be interesting to examine how the consumer involvement processes within the virtual experience space affects co-creation within the physical experience space and thus the overall tourist experience. An analysis adopting this focus could possibly incorporate Mossberg's (2007) theoretical framework (Figure 5), with the virtual experience space serving as an additional *factor* influencing the tourist experience.

The Locals

While the theoretical framework does include the tourist, the DMO and the tourism suppliers, the social network, and the tourism co-consumers, it does not take the *locals* at the destination into consideration (aside from the local tourism suppliers).

When Vibeke was asked if there are currently any opportunities for the tourists and the locals at the destination to interact, she said no (Vibeke, a8: 20). However, Vibeke explained one of their ideas; *"…you could have some local who was passionate about his area, walking around, ask me, or something, whatever there might be on their t-shirt…well where you used the locals to tell about their own experiences and their own area in some sort of way"* (Ibid.: 21). Thus, VISM has thought of the possibility of including locals in their initiatives.

In another context Vibeke brought up the local aspect again and said; *"…storytelling and all of these little stories about the hidden places and treasures you have, it is often some storyteller from a local area who, who can pass it on"* (Ibid.: 22). Thus, emphasising the advantage of including locals in the tourist experience.

Likewise, the local aspect also emerged in the tourist interviews; one of the tourists said, *"…because you kind of in the local environment would ask if, you live here, you know something about the area, what is best, easiest, good, a day like today with two children…"* (Tourist 5, a11: 9). And when talking about digital tourist information another tourist said, *"…one thing is to read, but who is it that writes what is being written. Compared to, that there is someone who is passionate about it and thinks that this right here, this is something, and that sort of thing"* (Tourist 1, a9: 4). Thus, indicating that someone from the local environment would be able to provide valuable tourist information, which might have an influence on the tourist experience.

In this relation, Binkhorst and Den Dekker (2009) also emphasise that there might be a need to change the perspective on tourism, and argue that co-creation of tourism experiences also occurs between tourists and locals (Binkhorst and Den Dekker, 2009: 318). This argument is very much related to the physical experience, with regard to experiencing the local culture, local art, and the local specialties in terms of gastronomy, among other things (Ibid.).

However, when talking about digital interaction Anders said; *"…I would say there is a core group who shows a little more involvement than others. And that is primarily the locals who live here, who use our destination as a tourist destination. Primarily those who sort of does something to enhance the experiences"* (Anders, a7: 7).

Thus, while much of the interaction between locals and tourists might be likely to happen within the physical experience space, from Anders' statement above, it can be argued that this interaction to a large extend also can occur digitally. Even though the

locals Anders is referring to could be classified as *tourism co-consumers*, the locals are, all things being equal, contributing with something else within the interaction than other tourists who do not have the same knowledge about the destination as the locals do.

VISM's ideas about incorporating locals at the destination as well as the tourists' interest in local involvement substantiates Binkhorst and Den Dekker's (2009: 318) assertion that co-creation of tourist experiences also occurs between tourists and locals. Moreover, Anders' statement on the digitally active locals emphasises that co-creation with locals is also in evidence within the virtual experience space. Accordingly, the theoretical framework is extended in figure 12 to also include a circle with the locals as co-creators within the experience space:
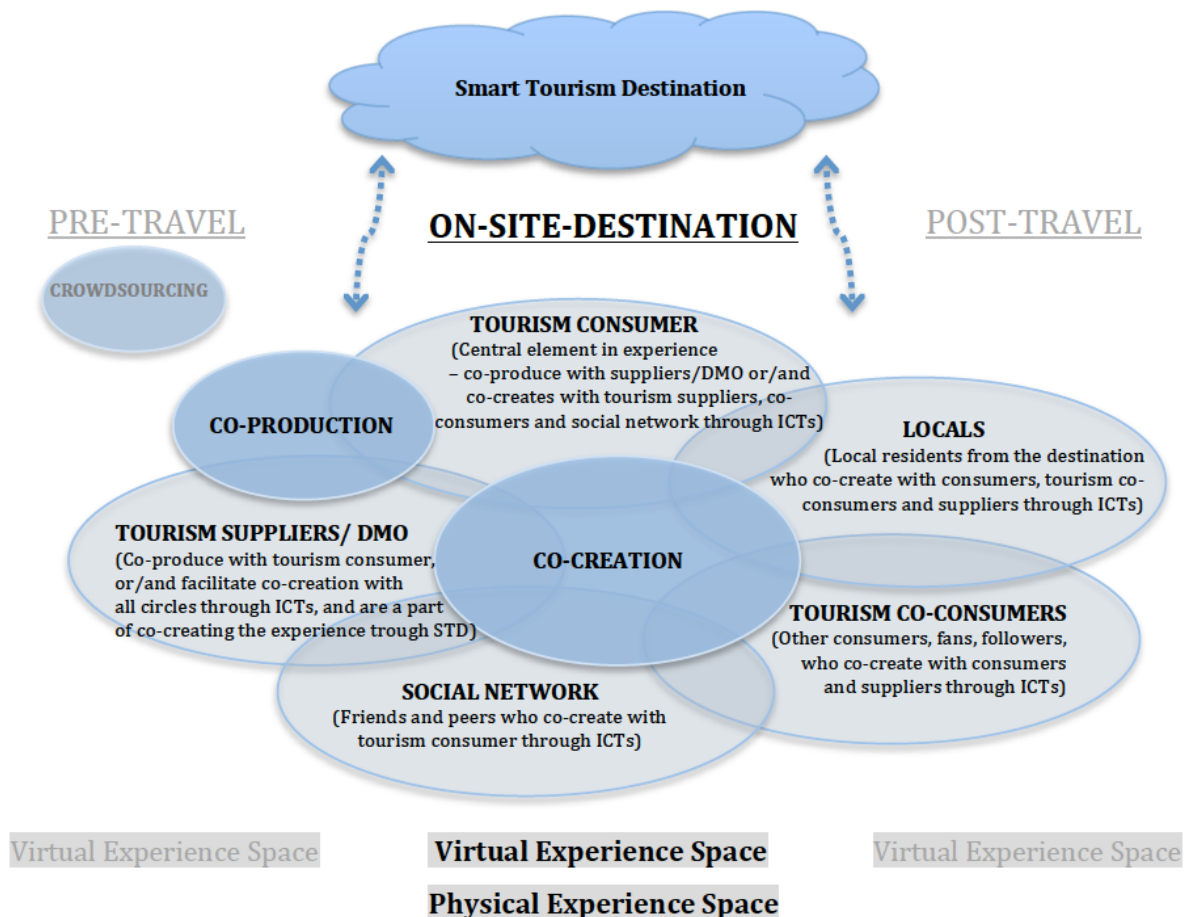

**Figure 12: Revised version of '*technology facilitated consumer involvement within the experience space'* (originally adapted from Neuhofer et al., 2012)

7 Conclusion

Through an assessment of the literature within the areas of tourist experience, co-creation, and smart tourism destination, it became evident that there is currently not any theoretical framework, which incorporates all three areas. However, Neuhofer et al. (2012) present a relevant framework, which emphasises the tourists' active part in co-creating their own experiences, as well as it highlights who is involved in the co-creation process and presents ICTs as an enabler of virtual experience co-creation within the three phases of travel. Refining Neuhofer et al.'s (2012) framework, Neuhofer's (2016) division of co-creation into to the processes of crowdsourcing, co-production and co-creation was added to the framework to specify these various consumer involvement processes. Furthermore, in order to make Neuhofer et al.'s (2012) framework more suitable for the context of this thesis, and as a means of connecting the theoretical areas, the concept of smart tourism destination was added, with an emphasis on the collection of the tourists' digital footprints at the destination, in order to enhance the destinations role within the co-creation process. As a result, this thesis presents the framework of '*Technology facilitated consumer involvement within the experience space',* which served as the foundation of analysing the case study of VISM.

First of all, VISM's digital initiatives have been identified and especially its website, social media platforms and digitalised marketing material are of great focus for VISM. Additionally, VISM would like to develop an app in the future to further accommodate the digital tourists.

With a focus on co-production and co-creation, it then became clear that adopting a co-creation approach would be favourable for VISM in terms of its vision and overall strategic focus on growth. The process of co-production are nevertheless evident in VISM's current strategic considerations, and based on some of the tourists' demand and VISM's many roles as a DMO, it might not be beneficial or even possible, for VISM to focus solely on adopting a co-creation approach. Already, co-creation is evident in VISM's initiatives of interaction on Facebook as well as former and future campaigns in which tourists can engage and create content. Thus, VISM increases the involvement of tourist in a co-creation process, and even enables this process, by facilitating a space for

interaction. At the same time, having the role as facilitators of the co-creation process, allows VISM to decrease the tourists' involvement in the process, because it is possible for VISM to use censorship in terms of the tourist-generated content and, hence, to a certain degree, control the co-creation process.

Another way for VISM to increase the involvement of tourists in a co-creation process is by the means of emphasising how the engagement can benefit the tourists as well as ensuring a high degree of transparency in its initiatives, because the issues of willingness and trustworthiness are important issues for the tourist in relation to digital engagement.

Focusing on smart tourism destination, it became obvious that the concept is evident in VISM's collaboration with the operators and the destination in which digital development is enhanced. Furthermore, VISM tries to enhance the tourists' experience at the destination by making its website compatible with mobile devices. VISM moreover collects data from its website, however, this data is not specifically related to the tourist *at* the destination.

However, VISM could adopt the smart tourism destination concept to a larger degree by developing the proposed app, as this could allow access to real-time information and interaction within a dynamic platform, which could further enhance the enablement of a digital co-creation process. Moreover, VISM could become a 'smarter destination' by collecting the tourists' digital footprints from WiFi networks across the destination, which could enable VISM to identify the tourists' needs and demands at the destination and strategically utilise this knowledge to increase the involvement of tourists in a co-creation process.

Enabling a digital co-creation process on the basis of the tourists' digital footprints does however require that VISM considers the issues of privacy and the perceived benefits for tourists, as this is important for some tourists and, thus, for the probability of active involvement.

Examining the virtual- and physical experience space in relation to VISM moreover clarified that these two spaces overlap, and that the virtual experience space is highly dependent on the physical experience space. This assessment is based on the fact that VISM encourages the operators to provide WiFi to the tourists, and incorporates a WiFi

spot within its own mobile tourist service, in order to accommodate the lack of network coverage at the destination. Additionally, the physical 'tourist informations' can also be used to guide the tourists in terms of the digital tourist service provided on the website, through social media and within a prospective app, and some tourists also emphasised that physical engagement lead to digital engagement. Thus, the virtual experience space is enabled by actions within the physical experience space and, accordingly, the digital co-creation process is depended on physical matters.

However, involving all tourists at the destination in a digital co-creation process is not possible for VISM, as there will be some tourists who does not travel with mobile devices or simply prefer to be disconnected while travelling. Obviously, other measures must be taken into consideration in order to influence the tourist experience for these tourists while they are at the destination, and accordingly VISM cannot base its strategic initiatives and efforts solely on the interaction and digital footprints created within the virtual experience space.

Based on the above findings, the more concise answers, and recommendations, to how VISM can influence the tourist experience at the destination through a digital co-creation process can be outlined as follows:

- Facilitate an experience space in which the digital co-creation process can occur, for example by the means of more social media initiatives or the prospective app.

- Increase involvement within this process by emphasising how the engagement can benefit the tourists, and by ensuring a high degree of transparency as well as including the issue of privacy in its initiatives.

- Adopt the concept of smart tourism destination to a larger degree and collect the tourists' digital footprints from e.g. WiFi networks across the destination.

- Identify the tourists' needs and demands at the destination on the basis of the digital footprints, and strategically utilise this knowledge to increase the involvement of tourists in the co-creation process.

- Ensure that the physical arrangements are in order, such as adequate network coverage as well as digital guidance through the physical 'tourist informations'.

Further Research

As presented in the preceding reflections chapter, there are other areas within the theoretical framework than the ones included in this thesis, which could be interesting to examine in order to extend the knowledge within the field of co-creating tourist experiences. These areas include; research on the various groups involved in the co-creation process and the specific influence they have on the experience, co-creation within the pre- and post-travel phases, the impact on the on-site experience if tourists had been involved in the process of crowdsourcing prior to the visit, and the impact of digital co-creation within the virtual experience space on co-creation within the physical experience space.

Furthermore, future research could also include the proposed area of '*Locals'* and their impact on the tourist experience, as well as an examination of the DMOs strategic utilisation of locals within its initiatives versus the impact of independent locals in the co-creation process and thus the tourist experience.

Additionally, for the specific case of VISM, it might be valuable to extend this study to include German tourists who account for 75 % of the destination's foreign tourists, and this segment is further expected to increase when the Fehmarnbelt tunnel opens in 2020 and provides a fixed link between Denmark and Germany (MP: 8, 14). Including other nationalities in a research could be a means to examine if foreign tourists are concerned with the same issues as the Danish tourists that were interviewed for this thesis, or if other things should be taken into consideration by VISM in order to enable a digital co-creation process.

Moreover, exploring other empirical examples of tourist destinations in terms of digital initiatives and co-created experiences could contribute with new knowledge within this field, and moreover provide valuable adjustments to the theoretical framework and, thus, make this theoretical contribution even more applicable in the future.

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9 Appendices[9]

Appendix 1   VISM's Masterplan

Appendix 2   Participant information

Appendix 3   Interview guide - VISM

Appendix 4   Interview guide - Tourists

Appendix 5   Translation of quotes

Appendix 6   Transcript of interview with Ida L. Winther, VISM

Appendix 7   Transcript of interview with Anders Jakobsen, VISM

Appendix 8   Transcript of interview with Vibeke Tejlmand, VISM

Appendix 9   Transcript of interview with Tourist 1 and Tourist 2

Appendix 10   Transcript of interview with Tourist 3 and Tourist 4

Appendix 11   Transcript of interview with Tourist 5

Appendix 12   Transcript of interview with Tourist 6

USB key   Audio files of all the interviews

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[9] As previously stated, the page numbers in the appendices indicates which appendix the page associates with: i.e. appendix number: page number. *Example*: *5:14*