

When the sky lights up

Exploring the Northern lights experience in Tromsø

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Abstract

The thesis is a case study investigation, taking point of departure in the Northern lights experience at the specific destination of Tromsø, thereby looking at the aspect of the experience from different perspectives. This is done in order to create a more holistic understanding of the branding of such an experience and the experience that tourists expect and get at the destination. The aim of the thesis is to see how the satisfaction of the Northern lights experience in Tromsø compares to the possible gap that might exist between tourists' expectations and the promise of the Northern lights brand Tromsø. The promise of Northern lights brand is investigated through interviews with the Destination Marketing Organization VisitTromsø and four local stakeholders in Tromsø. Insight into tourists' expectations were gained through interviews with tourists at the destination and interviews with potential tourists in Denmark. Furthermore, how the satisfaction of the Northern lights experience compared to the expectations and brand promise was investigated through observations and tourist interviews. The researcher of the thesis participated in three Northern lights tours at the destination of Tromsø to conduct observations of the experiences that tourists had on these tours.

The conclusion to the investigation revealed tourists' expectations of the Northern lights experience to be of a visual nature, expecting to see the same as is illustrated in photographs found on the internet and destination marketing. The brand promise made use of such photographs in their marketing of Tromsø as one of the best chances to see the Northern lights as well as getting the experience of the Arctic capital with many different activities available. From the investigation, it became clear that some inconsistencies existed between the brand promise and tourist's expectations, the main ones concerning the visual experience of the Northern lights and the understanding of the experience to be had in Tromsø. However, these gaps did not appear to influence tourists' positive perception of the Northern lights experience in Tromsø. The thesis looks at the concept of justification and motivation bias in connection to the tourists' evaluation of the experience. It concludes that because the experience did not live up to tourists' expectations, tourists may be driven by a need to portray their experiences in a more positive way in order to justify the experience to themselves and others.

The DMO would seem to be able to successfully communicate a promise that is able to create realistic expectations of the experience, leaving tourists to communicate the nature of the experience to their network. This would influence future tourists expectations of the experience making these correspond to the brand promise. Yet, it is concluded that there might still be a gap between the experience that is communicated by tourists and the experience to be had at the destination, which could be attributed to the process of justification involved in the tourist experience.

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1. Introduction

“[I]t was magical, I liked it. I was out of my thoughts. For 4-5 seconds I was in deep meditation.”

- Ravi, 2016

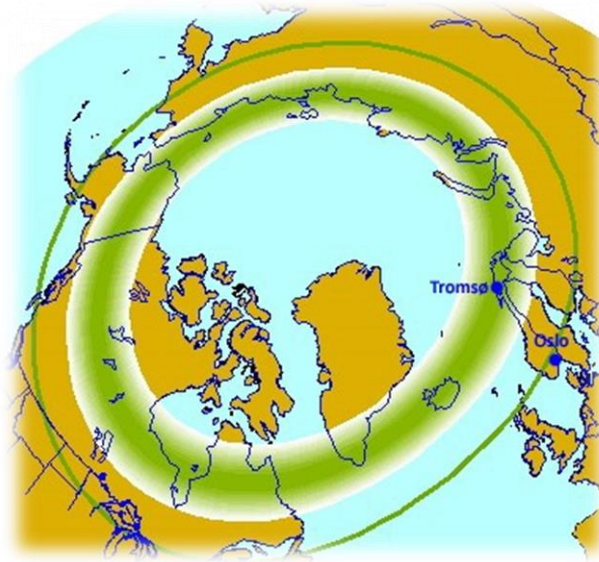
The quote above embodies the experience that many tourists are hoping for when travelling in search of the Northern lights in the Arctic, also known as the Aurora Borealis. However, as much as it portrays the sense of wonder that tourists are looking to experience, it also attests to the unpredictable nature of the Northern lights experience.

Characteristic for tourism in the Arctic is that it is directly affected by harsh environmental conditions, especially the weather (Snyder & Stonehouse, 2007), and the Northern lights are a prime example thereof. The Northern lights are a natural phenomenon that occurs at latitudes usually between 60 and 75 degrees north. The phenomenon occurs when particles emitted by the Sun collide with the Earth's atmosphere, resulting in a chemical reaction that releases light. Earth's magnetic field guides the particles in to the atmosphere to form the aurora ovals, which are centered on the magnetic poles but can expand during geomagnetic storms. Therefore, the best locations for seeing the Northern lights are located under the oval. In order to see the aurora, the skies must be clear and dark as natural and artificial light sources will make it more difficult to see (SWPC, 2016). The Northern lights can be seen in different forms and moving across the night sky, the most common colors are pale green and pink whereas red is rarer (NLC, 2016). The phenomenon is characterized as being sporadic, perhaps lasting for periods as long as up to 30 minutes occurring every two hours, randomly for short periods or perhaps not even at all (UAF, 2016). Furthermore, the intensity with which the Northern lights can be seen is dependent on space weather activity i.e. storms in space, which is also connected to the increased movement of the aurora. The higher the activity, the stronger the lights (SWPC, 2016). The Northern lights are thus characterized as being unpredictable and dependent on a variety of factors that have to align, such as weather, darkness and space weather activity in order to be visible.

The Northern lights are a common sight in Arctic areas under the oval and thus it would seem only natural that the icon of the Northern lights would become a national icon of the Northern countries (Friedman, 2010). Norway in particular has a long tradition of polar exploration and science discoveries, and during the late 1890's the Northern lights emerged as a national icon (ibid.). The Arctic is often surrounded by myths that influence people's perception of a tourist experience (Hall, Müller & Saarinen, 2009). There is a focus on providing tourists with a different kind of experience (Grenier, 2007). Although not much research related to the Northern lights tourist experience has been conducted, it is clear that the Northern

lights constitute an important motivational factor for tourists in connection to travel to Arctic regions (Bertella, 2013a).

The destination of Tromsø in Northern Norway has received increased media attention in the last decade regarding the Northern lights experience that can be had at the destination (Bertella, 2013). The city is the largest in Northern Norway and is located in the middle of the aurora oval, 350 km north of the Arctic Circle at 69 degrees north (VisitNorway, 2016) as can be seen from the image below (source: VisitTromsø, 2016).



The city has a population of around 72.000 and boast a variety of tourism offerings the most prominent being the Midnight Sun and the Northern lights (ibid.). The Northern lights season stretches from November throughout March and the most skilled tourist guides have a success rate of 75 % of seeing the Northern lights (Leithe, 2013). The destination has seen an increase in tourists coming to see the Northern lights, which is attributed to the increased media attention as well as photographs and videos going viral on social media (ibid.). Photographs are communicated to tourists and are part of shaping tourists expectations of a Northern lights experience (Jenkins, 2003). Tourists form expectations of an experience based on marketing communication as well as from word-of-mouth (Horrigan, 2009).

The Destination Marketing Organization VisitTromsø is focused on branding the Northern lights experience that tourists can expect to have in Tromsø. However, whether tourists will be able to see the Northern lights in Tromsø is completely out of the hands of the DMO and local stakeholders because of the nature of the phenomenon. The challenge is thus for the DMO to develop a brand that will not leave tourists disappointed because of the unpredictable nature of the experience but provide them with an experience that will fulfill their expectations of a Northern lights experience in the Arctic.

1.1. Problem formulation

The investigation of the thesis is aimed at investigating the Northern lights experience that is branded and experienced at the destination of Tromsø. With that in mind and a desire to acquire new knowledge of the Northern lights in relation to tourism, the thesis is guided by and aims to answer the following problem formulation:

How does the satisfaction of the tourist experience in Tromsø, which is in fact an uncontrollable experience, compare to a possible gap between tourists' expectations and the promise of the Northern lights brand Tromsø?

The problem formulation seeks to investigate three interrelated aspects connected to the Northern lights experience in Tromsø. The first aspect relates to the branding of the destination and the brand promise that is being communicated to tourists. It becomes relevant to investigate the brand identity, which the promise is based on. The second aspect is tourists' expectations of the experience. In this connection, it becomes relevant to look at image formation and motivation. Because of the unpredictable nature of the Northern lights experience, it is relevant to investigate how the brand promise and expectations compare to ensure the future success of the destination. The last aspect is how the experience corresponds to both the expectations and the brand promise in order to understand the actual experience tourists have at the destination and whether it is successful.

In order to answer the problem formulation, fieldwork in the form of observations and interviews were conducted in Tromsø. The researcher of the thesis participated in three observations with Northern lights tours and four interviews were conducted with five tourists at the destination. Furthermore, the DMO VisitTromsø was interviewed along with four tour operators conducting tours connected to the Northern lights. Finally, four interviews were conducted in Denmark with individuals who had a keen interest in seeing the Northern lights.

2. Methodology

The section will clarify the methodological standpoints and choices that formed the base for the research, starting out with a clarification of the research paradigm that have guided the research. What follows is an explanation of how the research of the thesis has been conducted using the hermeneutic spiral. Furthermore, the choice of methods that have been used for the data collection will be explained and why they have been chosen will be discussed.

2.1. Philosophy of Science

According to Creswell (2013), a researcher will always have certain beliefs and philosophical assumptions about research. These philosophical assumptions guide the research and “the selection of tools, instruments, participants, and methods used in the study” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2006 in Ponterotto, 2006, p.128). Therefore, it is important that the researcher is aware of the influence of the philosophical position, which is known as a paradigm (Ponterotto, 2005). Understanding the position of the researcher in this study (Creswell, 2013) and the subsequent philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality, will be helpful to the reader when evaluating the research and understanding the overall perspective from which the thesis is designed and investigated (Krauss, 2005).

A paradigm, according to Guba and Lincoln (1994), “represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the ‘world’, the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts” (p.107). It is constituted of ontological, epistemological, methodological and axiological perspectives (Jennings, 2005). Constructivism is the paradigm forming the base of the thesis, which aims to achieve an understanding of the meaning of the phenomenon of the Northern lights experience in Tromsø and the lived experience of those tourists who have lived it (Ponterotto, 2005). This makes constructivism suitable for this study, because investigating the topic from a constructivist perspective will provide deeper insight into the meaning that tourists construct of the experience, and the meaning that the stakeholders attempt to make of the brand, tourists’ experiences and expectations. The constructivist view on meanings is that they are not latent and discoverable but constructed (Hollingshead, 2006). Various positions exist within constructivism and according to Hacking (1999), many elements can be seen as socially constructed (in Kukla, 2000). Kukla (2000) states that meaning or phenomena can said to be constructed if it is produced by intentional human activity. However, he emphasizes that although the concept of a phenomenon is constructed that is not the same as saying that the phenomenon itself is constructed. In the context of the thesis, it means the meaning attached to the experience of seeing the Northern lights can be a human construct, however, the phenomenon that is the Northern lights is socially constructed. According to Bowen

(2002), “tourism is a product partly constituted by the dreams and fantasies of consumers” (p.8), therefore the tourist experience must be understood as unique to each tourist.

Ontology refers to the nature of reality and within constructivism, it is the belief “that multiple social constructions of reality exist, as opposed to one true reality” and truth is seen as relative (Mollard, 2005, p.381). It entails that the researcher of the thesis is not attempting to reach one true reality about the tourist experience and branding relating to the Northern lights in Tromsø. However, the interviewees and observation participants create their own realities of the research topic because reality is seen as intangible mental constructions made up in the minds of the individual (ibid.). The constructivist *epistemology* i.e. knowledge construction is subjectivist, meaning that the researcher and the object of investigation interact and though this interaction and reality is thus constructed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Reality is “influenced by the context of the situation, namely the individual’s experience and perceptions, the social environment, and the interaction between the individual and the researcher” (Ponterotto, 2005, p.130). The nature of social constructions would then suggest that eliciting and refining the individual constructions can only happen “through interaction *between and among* investigator and respondents” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.111). Therefore, the epistemology of constructivism can be said to be hermeneutic. It emphasizes that meaning is hidden and the meaning from human experiences is found through deep reflection and interactive dialogue (Mollard, 2005) and interaction stimulates reflection (Ponterotto, 2005). Having this perspective of reality means that the reality about the Northern lights experience and branding is different for each individual. The meaning of such experience is shaped through the interaction between researcher and the interviewees and partly with the observation participants. Epistemology is the key to assessing the quality of data and subsequent analysis because “[i]t is the basis for explaining the rightness or wrongness, the admissibility or inadmissibility, of types of knowledge and sources of justification of that knowledge” (Carter & Little, 2007, p.1321). The researcher of the thesis considers the social interaction and dialogue to be the most appropriate way to gain deeper insight into the phenomenon of Northern lights tourism experience (Ponterotto, 2005). Therefore, the data gathered through interviews and observations are considered to be justified as admissible knowledge. For added perspective, had the topic been researched from a postpositive perspective, the data gathered would be considered poor because the researcher should remain detached and objective (ibid.). Because knowledge is created between the researcher and the participant, value biases cannot be eliminated. This connects to *axiology*, which refers to the values of the researcher and ethical considerations (Jennings, 2005). Axiology is related to epistemology in the sense that what is considered valid research and trustworthy knowledge by each researcher, is determined by the values that they hold (Carter & Little, 2007). The constructivist view on axiology is that the values, expectations and experience cannot be separated from the research process. Instead, they should be describe and can be used by the researcher in the investigation (Ponterotto, 2005). The researcher had previously

worked with Northern lights tourism during an internship in Yellowknife Canada. A research project carried out at that destination pointed to a gap existing between the branding of the Northern lights experience and the tourists' expectations and subsequent experiences. The understanding of prior work have in this case shaped the researcher's preunderstandings of the topic, entering with the notion that this might also be the case in Tromsø (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010). *Methodology* is the guidelines of conducting research and methods are the tools for data collection and analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

2.2. Research design

This section will provide insight into how the research is designed. It will contain a section on hermeneutics explaining the influence it have had on the research, how the research is designed as a case study and the aspect of qualitative research.

2.2.1. Hermeneutics

As mentioned above the knowledge creation i.e. epistemology of constructivism can be said to hermeneutic. Hermeneutic philosophy "is concerned with the process of the creation of interpretive understanding" (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010, p.132). When researching topics that revolve around human activity, in this case the tourist experience seen from different individuals or groups' perspectives, there is a need to be able to interpret the intentions of those individuals. For that reason, all understanding must take point of departure in the individual's self-understanding (Debesay, Nåden & Slettebø, 2008). Individuals all belong to a cultural world, meaning that the researcher and the researched are linked to a context of traditions, which consists of beliefs, theories, myths, events etc. These form the basis of an individual's preunderstandings or prejudice (Arnold & Fisher, 1994). According to Koch (2006), from a hermeneutical perspective our "[p]rejudices are the conditions by which we encounter the world as we experience something" (p.92). An individual never faces the world without prejudice, but with expectations of the world that are based on previous experience (Debesay et al., 2008) and they are the base for recognition and comparison (Arnold & Fisher, 1994). The researcher of the thesis had previously been to Tromsø and from that visit already had a preunderstanding of the city. This meant that the researcher did not experience the city exactly in the same way as tourists would because there was already an understanding regarding the layout of the city and activities to be had. Another factor that should be mentioned is the author's knowledge of the Northern lights and specifically in regards to photography, which is an important element of the investigation. The author was already aware of the challenges connected to seeing the Northern lights and how photographs often do not represent reality. Having this preunderstanding, made the researcher somewhat skeptical of the Northern lights tours. However, also this preunderstanding changed as

interviews were conducted and the researcher participated on observations, which provided the author with the actual experience as tourist were experiencing it.

At the base of hermeneutics as a strategy for knowledge creation, are three philosophical assumptions or constructs. The first is based on the Gadamerian metaphor of the fusion of horizons. When different interpretations of a topic of investigation exist, a fusion happens through dialogue that produce a shared understanding. The second is based on the notion that knowledge is constructed through dialogue, which entails that meaning emerges through the dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee. What is unique about hermeneutics is the constant return to the object of investigation again and again. Every time one returns to the object, an increased understanding is achieved along with a more complete interpretive account (Paterson & Higgs, 2005). This means that through the research process, when the individual acquire new knowledge their understanding of reality can change (Mollard, 2005). The third is the concept of the hermeneutic circle, which describes the “experience of moving dialectically between the parts and the whole (Koch, 1996 in Paterson & Higgs, 2005, p.343).

Together these elements are combined to create the hermeneutical spiral. During this process, the researcher attempts to understand the whole by understanding its parts and comprehending the meaning of the parts by contemplating the whole. When the researcher moves between the parts and the whole, new understanding of both the parts and the whole is achieved (Paterson & Higgs, 2005). In this case, the whole refers to the understanding of the experience with the Northern lights brand Tromsø. The parts can then be seen as the various elements that make up the experience i.e. branding and expectations. By gathering data from different sources, there is a constant process going from the parts to the whole. The understanding of the whole is thus constantly redefined, as are the different parts as new knowledge is gained. The practical implications for researching the thesis based on this approach, is that the research focus changed throughout the process and was constantly being defined and redefined (Cole, 2004). A practical example of how the hermeneutic approach to research affected the thesis connects to the choice to incorporate the potential tourist interviews more actively and conduct more interviews than initially planned. It is characteristic for the hermeneutical spiral that one never remains at the same place or returns to it, because new knowledge is constantly acquired. The understanding of the topic is not considered to become better but it is understood differently the more knowledge one gains of the topic. For that reason, there is not a final objective solution to reach, which is consistent with the constructivist ontology. What the researcher presents in the end, is a co-constructed version of reality, which the researcher is ultimately responsible for interpreting (Debesay et al., 2008). Furthermore, according to Gadamer (1975, 1981), the circle is ongoing and never closes (in Paterson & Higgs, 2005). However, at some point, the research must end, yet it should be understood that the understanding of the topic is not final. According to Arnold & Fisher (1994), the

aim is to achieve an understanding that is free of contradictions or as close to that as possible. There is a need for the researcher to acknowledge their prejudice of the topic, which is part of the interpretive process of hermeneutics (Paterson & Higgs, 2005). The research was entered with clear understanding that a gap would be found between the brand promise and the experience had in Tromsø. However, as new knowledge was acquired in the context of the specific study, this preunderstanding was constantly redefined to match the new interpretation of the research situation. “The goal in hermeneutic research is to fuse the horizons of past, present, and future understanding using the hermeneutic circle” (ibid., p.346). This occurred when the previous understanding of the researcher, which was prone to expect the tourists at the destination to meet challenges that would influence their experience in a negative way.

2.2.2. Case study research

The topic of investigation of this thesis is the nature of the Northern lights experience at the destination of Tromsø. It has a specific focus on the branding and expectations of the Northern lights experience as well as the experience that tourists have at the destination. For that reason, the investigation takes the shape of a case study because it is relying on a particular case in order to understand its complexity (Bailey, 2010). Case study research can be defined as an inquiry that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Yin, 2003a in Xiao & Smith, 2006, p.739). Case studies demonstrate flexibility and it is possible to take into consideration different foci by involving several groups of individuals or aspects (Hudson & Richie, 2009). By provide multiple sources of data, the case study can be seen as more convincing and accurate (Houghton, Casey, Shaw & Murphy, 2013). The thesis collects data from a variety of sources such as local stakeholders, a DMO, tourists at the destination, observations from the destination as well as the perspective of potential tourists in order to provide a more holistic understanding of the topic.

According to Hudson and Richie (2009), “[c]ase studies offer depth and comprehensiveness for understanding a specific phenomenon, enabling inductive and rich description” (p.223). Case study research is often grounded in the emic perspective i.e. the insider’s perspective (Beeton, 2005), which is characteristic for the investigation of the thesis. The aim of case study research is not to generalize the findings to other populations (Bailey, 2010), however, the nature of case study research means that the research does not need to be specific to the point where it cannot be applied to other situations (Beeton, 2005). A noteworthy limitation to case study research is the bias of the researcher. The researcher is the main instrument in both data collection and analysis. Therefore, the value system of the researcher influences the presentation of the data and the analysis. However, Stake (1995) sees the bias if considered and documented as a positive aspect because the reader may gain information that they would not otherwise gain (in Beeton, 2005).

2.2.3. Qualitative research

The purpose of the thesis is to investigate the perspectives of different groups of individuals to gain insight into the Northern lights experience to be had at Tromsø. The approach chosen to gather data for this thesis combines two qualitative approaches, semi-structure interviews and observations. The reason for doing qualitative research is not only determined by the paradigm underlying the research because qualitative data can spring from different paradigms. The more important factor is the research topic (Ponterotto, 2006). In this case, the topic is connected to the tourism experience, which is individual in nature as well as how branding is perceived by stakeholders, DMO and tourists. A qualitative approach allows the researcher to “understand the complex world of human experience and behavior from the point-of-view of those involved in the situation of interest” (Krauss, 2005, p.764). According to Cleary, Horsfall and Hayter (2014), qualitative research aims to explore phenomena connected to the human experience to shed an interpretive light onto it in order to make it understandable to those not participating in the research. Furthermore, qualitative methods are believed to provide a more profound and deeper understanding of social phenomena (Gill et al., 2008). Because of the nature of the research, dealing with human behavior this cannot be understood without the reference to the meanings that human actors attach to their activities. Therefore, qualitative data can provide rich insight as well as provide a contextual information (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). One of the strengths of qualitative research is the engagement with the subjectivity of individuals. Furthermore, by providing insight into the subjectivity of the researcher, the researcher is able to make judgements based on it (Carter & Little, 2007). The method of qualitative research is predominantly inductive meaning the research is not directed entirely from theory but that the research questions might be modified in the process to better reflect, “the types of questions needed to understand the research problem” (Creswell, 2013, p.22). The thesis had a theoretical basis but as data was gathered, it provided new knowledge and led to changes in the direction of the thesis. The data gathered from qualitative research can be characterized as “typically suggestive, rarely if ever conclusive” (Sofaer, 2002, p.334).

2.3. Rigor of Data

Rigor is essential to assure validity of all research and is often referred to as trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Lincoln and Guba (1989) proposed to establish trustworthiness of qualitative data and analysis by using the four following criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (in Coker et al., 2013).

Credibility relates to the confidence in the truth of the findings by conducting the research in a believable manner and the ability to demonstrate credibility (Houghton et al., 2013). Within the constructivist paradigm, this means making the bias and preunderstandings of the author explicit. Patton (1999) proposes,

“the researcher’s own credibility affects the way findings are judged” (in Coker et al., 2013, p.2). Therefore, the researcher of the thesis has attempted to be self-aware while conducting the research by providing the reader with insight into the researcher’s personal connection to the study, involvement in data collection and the pre-understandings of the researcher. This is what Houghton et al. (2013) refer to as reflexivity.

It is necessary that the researcher provide the reader with the data in a way that it is possible to see it both within its original context and outside of it (Sofaer, 2002). According to Koch (2006), this context is necessary for the reader to be able to judge the transferability of the research. *Transferability* refers to whether or not the findings can be transferred to another similar context or situation, while still preserving the meanings and implications of the completed study (Houghton et al., 2013). However, the aim is not for the research to be generalizable to any given context but only to a similar one (Jennings, 2005). For that reason, the reader needs to be able to understand the original context. This has been attempted by way of providing an audit trail that can be followed which consists of transcriptions of interviews and ethnographies that were written after the observations and these are attached as appendices (5-20). The audio recordings of the interviews and recordings of the field notes can be obtained by contacting the researcher of the thesis. In the analysis, the researcher attempts to provide the reader with context regarding the different quotes used. More important, when data is used from the observations, the data is accompanied with the context in which it should be understood, as it can otherwise be difficult for the reader to follow the argument.

Dependability is the “stability of the data over time and conditions” (Coker et al., 2013, p.14) and *confirmability* deals with the accuracy of the data (Houghton et al., 2013). Triangulation has been used in the thesis in order to confirm the data from different sources. More importantly, it has been used to provide different perspectives to the investigation, this is also connected to the case study aspect of the research. The process of confirming the data is about gathering data from multiple sources and to which extent the data compares (ibid.). Completeness is “concerned with gathering multiple perspectives from a variety of sources so that as complete a picture as possible of phenomena can be portrayed” (ibid., p.13). In this thesis, data was collected from observations, interviews with stakeholders, DMO, tourists and potential tourists to have data from different sources in order to portray a more holistic view of the Northern lights expectations, branding and experiences of tourists visiting Tromsø. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), “confirmability is established when credibility, transferability and dependability are achieved” (in Koch, 2006, pp.92-93).

2.4. Data Collection

Qualitative data was collected using a combination of the method of observation conducted at the destination of Tromsø, as well as semi-structured interviews conducted in Tromsø and in Denmark.

2.4.1. Observation

The thesis employs the method of observation to investigate the experience tourists have while being on different Northern lights tours in Tromsø. The researcher was participating in three tours with three different operators all with products in some way connected to the Northern lights.

Objective	Observations will allow the researcher insight into the immediate experience that tourists have while participating in the various tours.
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Table 1: Observation objectives

Operator	Northern lights relation	Participants	Setting	Appendix
Tromsø Wilderness Center (TWC)	Dogsledding in the evening. Image of Northern lights and textual indications	Six directly involved with the activity. Around 20 other people were present during the observations	Set location 25 min outside of town. Dogsledding in the surrounding area	18
Arctic Trip (AT)	Mini bus tour – main purpose finding the lights and photography	Five + guide	Driving to different locations	19
Arctic Guide Service (AGS)	Bus tour – main purpose finding the lights	Around 40	Bus tour driving around to different locations	20

Table 2: Overview of observations

According to Coker et al. (2013), the method of observation springs from anthropology and it is often being used interchangeably with the term participant observation. Observation is used to “provide factual, accurate, and thorough descriptions of the observed setting, the activities that took place there, the people involved in the activities” (Patton, 2002 in Coker et al., 2013, p.1). It captures the data under circumstances that are more natural and it captures the whole social setting in which experiences are created which is one of the advantages of observation (Mulhall, 2003). The method was chosen to shed light on the experience that tourists had with seeing the Northern lights in Tromsø, as they were participation in the experience. According to Larsen (2007), investigating the tourist experience as it is unfolding will provide the researcher with a more valid insight into the experience in the sense that it captures the immediate experience, as opposed to waiting to inquire until after the experience has ended. He states that tourists are more likely to evaluate the effects of the experience to be more negative or positive than what they experience while on tour. Therefore, tourists have a tendency to overestimate the intensity of effect both

negatively and positively (ibid). It allowed the researcher insight into the activities that took place and the interactions between the participants, guide, setting and nature. According to Bell (2010), this is a beneficial characteristic of the method of observation. It captures the context and process of a specific situation and it provides information about the influence of the physical environment (ibid.). The physical environment is an essential element within the thesis because the aim of the tours is to engage with the physical environment i.e. seeing the Northern lights. Therefore, the method is particularly appropriate for this study because it deals with tourism services that takes place within a certain context, which should not be ignored or disregarded (Bowen, 2002).

Observation focus on the insider's standpoint and the methodology provides a direct experiential and observational access into the insiders' world of meaning. According to Jorgensen (1989), people make sense of the world around them by giving it meaning and subsequently interact based on these. For this particular study, the researcher argues that the tourists going on specific tours are insiders of the particular experience. By participating, the researcher had the opportunity to observe and experience the meanings and interactions from the tourists' perspective of seeing the Northern lights as the experience unfolded. It was possible to observe what actually happened, which could be useful in order to investigate whether people do as they say they do or experience (Bell, 2010), which Mulhall (2003) also state to be the primary reason for using observational methods. In this context, it is connected to satisfaction because the meaning of the experience might change between the different phases of the experience. Doing observations will give the author insight into the immediate experience. In comparison, Nisbet and Watt (1980) state that interviews reveal how people perceive things before or after an experience and not what is actually happening in the moment of the experience (in Bell, 2010). Doing observation, the researcher will be able to link tourists' expectations to the immediate experience through casual conversation and observation to a certain extent. The data obtained from observations is subject to the researcher's interpretation even more so than is the case with interviews. This is because, according to Mulhall (2003), the researcher has a degree of freedom and autonomy to choose what to observe, how the information is filtered and how it is analyzed. In relation to interviews, the interviewees have a part in leading the conversation by telling their stories. In the case of observations, the researcher is in complete control of what is chosen as the focus and, therefore, what information is collected and mediated to the reader.

For the purpose of this project, an unstructured approach to observations has been chosen because it "acknowledges the importance of context and the coconstruction of knowledge between researcher and 'researched'" (Mulhall, 2003, p.306). According to Mulhall (2003), it can be misleading to use the term unstructured observation because this type of observation should not be seen as unsystematic. The researcher of the thesis entered the field with preunderstandings of what might be observed but with no

predetermined schedule. As more knowledge and experience was gained in the setting, the preunderstandings changed, which for example meant that more attention was paid to the role of the guide his/her role in creating the memorable experience. The researcher took on the concealed role of the complete participant in all three observations, by interacting with the social situation while not informing the participants of the researcher's role (Mulhall, 2003). However, it should be noted that during the observation with AT, the guide/owner was aware of the researcher's position. Here the observer effect might signify that people may behave differently in the presence of the observer, which the researcher was mindful of and it was considered what impact it might have on the findings (Coker et al., 2013). The researcher argues that the impact was not significant because the aim of the thesis was only discussed briefly in an email and no further information was given until several days later during an interview. The approach of complete participant is also beneficial in order to create trust by blending in with the other members of the group and becoming fully engaged in the events and the conversations that took place (Bowen, 2002). Acting as a tourist was appropriate because of the setting of the observations. In order to avoid any issues related to covert research, which according to Mulhall (2003), requires considerable justification, the researcher chose to inform the participants of the researcher's purpose at the very end of the tours. According to Coker et al. (2013), fully disclosing the researcher's role and purpose of observation is recommended by giving a simple and honest explanation of the observation. Furthermore, the participants were asked if they had any objections to the researcher using the information in the thesis, which there were no objections to. However, during the observation at TWC, it was challenging to obtain consent because the setting was larger and not limited to the people participating in the specific activity. For that reason, not all individuals were aware of the research being conducted. However, it is argued by the researcher that the people were part of an open tourist setting and no sensitive information was disclosed. What was being observed was information, which was openly discussed by the people at the location. Therefore, none of the people involved suffered by being observed and according to Denscombe (2007), the researcher can argue that "certain ethical standards were maintained" (in Bell, 2010, p.194).

Access to the observation settings was granted in advance by officials within each company. As the setting was not unfamiliar to the researcher, having participated in Northern lights tour previously in Yellowknife Canada, it was not difficult to integrate quickly with the participants. The different operators were chosen based on certain features: characterized as a Northern lights product/experience on the VisitTromsø website, images and text related to the Northern lights and a variety in the products offerings. However, most importantly there was a logistical reasoning behind the choices as well because these were the operators interested in a collaboration. Tromsø has a great number of tours but only a small amount are represented in this research. Furthermore, it could be implied that the operators participating in the research had ulterior motives, which could be connected to a desire to be marketed.

2.4.1.1. Data processing

Data recording is a vital part of the observation and should be systematically recorded (Jorgensen, 1989a). As Patton (2002) describes, “the basic criterion for judging a recorded observation is whether that observation permits the reader to enter into the situation described” (in Coker, 2013, p.14). The field is considered an entity constructed through personal transactions and activities of data collection and from the activity of writing field notes (Mulhall, 2003). Therefore, what is considered interesting and important to write down into the field notes will be affected by professional and personal worldview of the individual researcher (ibid.). The field notes were written during the observation in the form of short notes, which were then recorded as an audio impression after the observation had ended, providing an expanded account with further details (Coker et al., 2013). Analytic thoughts were also included to help the researcher move between theory and analysis (Coker et al., 2013). It is stated by Mulhall (2003) that any writing regardless of when it is written is “a representation or a construction of events by the author” (p.311). Only a small part of what is observed is written down and what is selected is the most important and meaningful based on the judgement of the researcher (Cole, 2004.).

The next step in the process after the observation and the writing of field notes is to write a more detailed account of the observation referred to as an ethnography. According to Van Maanen’s (1988) classification, the genre used is the impressionist tales where the researcher attempts to provide the reader with an account of the observation that the reader is pulled into as in a story (in Mulhall, 2003). The first person is used in experimental ethnographies because it projects the personal experience of the researcher. Emerson et al. (1995) make the distinction between descriptions that portray the physical environment, people and actions, and dialogue (in ibid.). “Dialogue is a very powerful way of presenting data and its use may make a more lasting impression on the reader than descriptive accounts by the researcher” (Mulhall, 2003, p.312). The data processing of the ethnographies is based on the framework proposed by Richie and Spencer, which will be discussed further in section 2.3.3.4. data processing of interviews (1994, in Rabiee, 2004).

2.4.2. Interviews

In addition to observations, the method of semi-structured interviews have been used to gather data. Interviews were conducted with tourists on vacation in Tromsø, stakeholders in Tromsø both the local DMO and tour operators, and finally interviews were conducted in Denmark with tourists who had not been to Tromsø but had an interested in seeing the Northern lights.

Interview groups	Objectives
Stakeholders & DMO	Interviews with local stakeholders provide insight into their perception of the tourist experience as well as branding. The DMO is interviewed in order to gain insight into the brand identity of the Northern lights experience in Tromsø and their perception of tourists' expectations and satisfaction.
Tourists	The purpose is to gain knowledge of the experience that tourists have seeing the Northern lights in Tromsø and the experience that surrounds it. It also provides insight into the expectations tourists have of the experience.
Potential Tourists	These interviewees reveal expectations of the experience that were not influenced by the characteristics of a specific destination and providing insight into what the perceived as being essential to the experience and what it might mean to them.

Table 3: Objectives of various interview groups

According to Gill et al. (2008), the aim of conducting interviews is to “explore the views, experiences, beliefs and/or motivations of individuals on specific matters” (p.292). By interviewing tourists and stakeholders, the researcher was able to gain in-depth knowledge and insight into the perspectives of seeing Northern lights in Tromsø from different perspectives and seeing the Northern lights in general. Kvale (1996) sees the qualitative research interview as a “construction site for knowledge. An interview is literally an *inter view*, an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest” (in Jennings, 2005, p.102). It is a social interaction/exchange where knowledge, understanding and learning is the aim (ibid.).

The semi-structured interview approach was chosen and it is based on an interview guide, which is a schematic presentation of questions or topics (Jamshed, 2014). It is prepared based on relevant theory and knowledge of the topic (Gill et al, 2008). The purpose of the interview guide is to achieve optimum use of the interview time and keeping the interview focused on the research topic as well as allow exploring, probing and follow-up questions during the interview (Jamshed, 2014). It is subject to change as new information is gained. It should help the researcher develop the social interaction in the interview and make on-the-spot decisions about how to word questions (Mason, 2004). Furthermore, it should be constructed in a way to allow for natural flow between the topics (ibid) and the discovery or elaboration of new themes (Gill et al., 2008). The questions were designed as open-ended allowing the interviewees provide elaborate answers (ibid.). Several interview guides were prepared for this project, one for each group of interviewees (app.1-4). The interviews initiated by informing the interviewees about the aim of the project and that the interviews would be recorded. In terms of confidentiality, all tourists and potential tourists allowed their first names to be used in the thesis. Stakeholders agreed that their names and company could be named as well.

The semi-structured interview is conversation-like in style and have a flexible agenda used to focus the interview “although between interviews with different participants the order of discussion will vary” (Jennings, 2005, p.104). According to Rosaline (2008), it is best to begin the interview by asking questions that are easy to answer and will build the base for the conversation. Gradually, the interview will move to questions that require more thought and probing. The first questions in all interview guides were focused on establishing rapport, build confidence and getting the interviewees talking about their experiences from either a stakeholder or tourist perspective (Gill et al., 2008). This allowed the interviewees to select what they find most important (Rosaline, 2008).

2.4.2.1. Stakeholder interviews

Interviews with different stakeholders were conducted in order to gain insight into the nature of the Northern lights products in Tromsø, the subsequent branding and insight into the tourist experience from the providers’ perspective. The providers are involved in creating the experience when tourists are at the destination as well as managing the branding of their own operations. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in Tromsø and were conducted in English with the exception of the interview with AT, which was conducted in Norwegian/Danish and transcribed in Danish. When used in the analysis, quotes are translated by the researcher of the thesis.

The local DMO Visit Tromsø was interviewed because they are in charge of developing the branding of the Northern lights experience in Tromsø. Furthermore, they sell the various tours from the visitors’ centre and from their website. The organization functions as the link between tourists and the local operators for which reason they play a central role in the investigation of this thesis.

Organization	Position/ Name	Interview transcript Appendix
VisitTromsø - DMO	Lea Pinsard (Product coordinator) & Hijiri Takagi (Information & Booking)	5
Tromsø Wilderness Centre (TWC)	Alexander Sørensen (Marketing Manager)	6
Wondering Owl (WO)	Virginie Ramasco (Administrator & Marketing Manager) & Maarit Valkonen (Administrator & Day Tour Guide)	7
Arctic Trip (AC)	Roy Sætre (Owner & Guide)	8
Arctic Guide Service (AGC)	Simone Tomassini (Booking & Guide Coordinator)	9

Table 4: Stakeholder interviewees

2.4.2.2. Tourist interviews

Four interviews were conducted with tourists in Tromsø and most of whom were approached on the various observations that the researcher participated in. However, one interview was conducted via skype with an interviewee that had a connection another interviewee. The interviews were all conducted in English. It was chosen to interview tourists at the destination because the focus of the thesis is to learn more about the experience that tourists have with the Northern lights in Tromsø. Furthermore, it will provide insight into tourists' information search, image formation and the base on which they make the final decision about destination choice. The interviews will provide information about specific expectations of the experience in Tromsø and whether these have been fulfill. Understanding the tourists' experience and expectations will help answer if there indeed exists a gap between the promise of the Northern lights brand Tromsø and their expectations of the experience.

Name/s	Gender/Age	Country of residence	Interview transcription Appendix
Grace & Jenny	Female - 28/24	Singapore/Germany	10
Bruna	Female - 21	Brazil – studying in Germany	11
Ravi	Male - 27	India – studying in Norway	12
Eriko	Female - 33	Japan	13

Table 5: Tourists interviewees

2.4.2.3. Potential tourists

Furthermore, four interviews were conducted with potential tourists in Denmark, therefore, most interviews were conducted in Danish with the exception of the interview with Ana-Maria, which was conducted in English. The transcript are in Danish and when quotes are used in the analysis these have been translated into English by the researcher. The purpose of interviewing tourists who have a keen interest in seeing the Northern lights is to gain insight into their expectations of such an experience without them being influenced by the characteristics of a specific destination. This provides the researcher with raw insight into their expectations and the aspects that would have an influence on providing them with a satisfying experience. The potential tourist interviews provide insight into what such an experience might mean to them and what they characterize as important elements.

The interviewees were contacted through the researcher's personal network. According to Blichfeldt (2011), interviewing individuals from within the researcher's circle of acquaintances can be seen to

facilitate a flow in the conversation and provide information that has more depth. That is argued to be because the interviewee is already familiar with the researcher and a relationship will already have been established, therefore, there is no need to focus excessively on building trust in the interview.

Name/s	Gender/Age	Country of residence	Interview transcription Appendix
Susanne	Female - 56	Denmark	14
Lene	Female - 25	Denmark	15
Stine	Female - 26	Denmark	16
Ana-Maria	Female - 26	Romania – living in Denmark	17

Table 6: Potential tourist interviewees

2.4.2.4. Data processing

In order to ensure that the reader is able to follow the decisions and interpretations of the researcher, a number of steps have been taken in an attempt to ensure the rigor of the data. Pilot interviews were not conducted mainly due to time constraints. Instead, the questions were discussed with a fellow researcher with knowledge of the study. Furthermore, due to the hermeneutic research process, the interviews also developed as the researcher gain more knowledge of the particular context. This entailed that the interviews had slight variations concerning the focus as the study progressed.

According to Rabiee (2004), the aim of analysis is to reduce the data because especially qualitative research methods generate large amounts of data. The analysis of data begins already at the stage of data collection. It does not take a linear form because it is a process that constantly overlaps as new knowledge is gained, because of the hermeneutic approach to research that is adopted in the thesis (ibid.). In order to minimize potential bias, the analysis of the data should “be systematic, sequential, verifiable, and continuous” (ibid., p.658). Analysis is an interplay between the researcher and the data, which means that reflexivity is essential because the researcher assumes a subjective position when conducting qualitative research. The researcher realized that preunderstandings of the topic influenced the data collection process. Initially the researcher assumed that tourists would be dissatisfied to some extent based on previous research experience. For that reason, the questions were initially focused on why dissatisfaction might be felt. However, this changed when data expressed an inclination towards tourists feeling satisfied with their experience. Transcriptions allows the researcher to display an audit trail and protects against bias by having a permanent record (Gill et al., 2008). By recording and transcribing the interviews, the researcher is able to provide a superior account of the natural interaction within the interview (Jennings, 2005). When doing

the transcriptions the researcher paid attention to the emphasis and tone of the statements in the interviews because this can alter the meaning of an utterance along with the punctuation (Rosaline, 2008). Within this thesis, the data will be analyzed using the framework analysis proposed by Richie and Spencer (1994, in Rabiee, 2004) for both the interview data and observation data. After the completion of the transcriptions and ethnographies, the framework consists of five stages. The first stage is *familiarization* where the researcher listens to the recordings and read the transcriptions and ethnographies. This is done in order to get a sense of the whole before breaking it into parts. Next comes *identifying a thematic framework* which focuses on developing categories. This can be compared to what Rosaline (2008a) refers to as early coding categories. The researcher created a number of coding categories that relied on both interview questions and theoretical elements. The categories were divided into sub categories based on where the data came from e.g. tourist interviews, stakeholder interviews. Subsequently, categories were then further developed into themes e.g. expectations, brand identity/promise, satisfaction, experience, communication and images. As the coding progressed, the categories were recoded into the themes that can be seen guiding the analysis. Do to the nature of the research, many aspects are overlapping it became difficult to have clearly divided categories. *Indexing* is the stage where the data is sifted through, the quotes are sorted and essential entries are highlighted. *Charting* is when quotes and other information is taken from their original context and rearranged under new appropriate themes. This happens in the analysis where quotes are taken from their original context and used to demonstrate a particular argument. Indexing and charting is part of data reduction and data management (Rabiee, 2004). The final stage is *mapping and interpretation*. The important element in this stage is to find the connection between the quotes and the data as a whole.

3. Theoretical framework

The framework of the thesis will consist of two main themes: branding and tourist experiences. The first section will focus on the concept of branding, as it will be used to investigate the promise of the Northern lights brand Tromsø and the nature of brand identity and brand image. It will create a basis for comparing the actual experience had at the destination with the Northern lights brand. The focus of the second section is the tourist experience, as it will form the basis for investigating tourists' expectations as well as the satisfaction of their experience with the Northern lights brand Tromsø.

3.1. Branding

The concept of a brand takes point of departure in the product, and it “represents a unique combination of product characteristics and functional and non-functional added values, which, taken together, have taken on a relevant meaning linked to that brand” in order to promote the product (Hall et al., 2009, p.35). In order to properly understand branding, the relationship between the brand and the product should be clarified and Dahlén, Lange and Smith (2010) explain that “the product is part of the brand; it is not the brand” (p.195). According to Kapferer (1994), the brand is a contract between a company and a consumer (in Dahlén et al., 2010). Pike (2008) further states that a brand is more than a symbol or name connected to a product but it is a promise to the consumers. “Therefore, it must stand for something and it must be valued” (in Wheeler, Frost & Weiler, 2011, p.15). When developed successfully, a brand can have different functions; identifying the product, offer consumers confidence or security and add value while also offering an indication of price, quality and physiological benefits (Hall et al., 2009). In order to discuss brands, it is necessary to understand the nature of the tourism product that the brand represents. There is no consensus on how to define a tourism product. According to Vassiliadis (2008), a tourism product is not a simple tangible object but it is a combination of tangible and intangible elements. Similarly, the tourism product is described by Gunn (1988) as “fundamentally a complex human experience (not a simple, objective commodity)” (in Smith, 1994, p.586). Xu (2010) expressed that “[f]or tourists, the product is a complete experience that fulfills multiple tourism needs, and provides corresponding benefits” (p.608). Therefore, the tourism product should be seen as amalgam of factors that can help create the tourist experience when brought together. These factors can be physical resources, people, services etc. (Hall et al., 2009). The various definitions demonstrate that the tourism product is a complex entity consisting of different elements. Hall (2005) argues that the tourism product consists of four embedded products that are being consumed by tourists. The service product refers to individual service encounters and many of these are not provided directly by a firm (in Hall et al., 2009). The tourism business product is supplied by the individual tourism supplier or firm. The destination product is the sum of all the experiences had at the

destination, both provided by firms but also those provided by social interaction with e.g. peoples and places. The last is the tourist trip product, which entails all of the above-mentioned products from initial decision to purchase to return home (ibid.).

3.1.1. Destination brands

Due to the complex nature of the tourism product, a distinction between a product brand and a destination brand exists. A product brand is more market oriented, designed to suit the market's needs (Pike, 2005). López-Bonilla and López-Bonilla (2010) see tourist destinations as a “conglomeration of individual tourist products, both tangible and intangible, located at a particular geographical area and offering tourists an integrated experience” (p.1823). According to Pike (2005), it is much more complex to brand a destination than other goods or services. One reason is that destinations are more multidimensional than tangible products. When dealing with destination brands, there is an element of unpredictability because the consumers cannot be certain of what they are purchasing. At least, not in the same way they can when buying a generic product brand. Destinations are dynamic places and change based on the season and change in the resident population (Gartner, 2015). When dealing with a product as a place, the challenge can be a double meaning because a place can refer to a whole, which is the nuclear product but also to specific services, attributes that occur at this place i.e. contributory elements (Warnaby & Medway, 2015).

The focus of this investigation is the experience tourists have at the destination of Tromsø with the Northern lights. Pike (2005) stated that “destinations are arguably the travel industry's biggest brands” (p.258) and it is what creates the first idea in the tourist's mind about that particular destination (Ren & Blichfeldt, 2011). The destination brand is described by Olins (2000) as something meant to help tourists develop a coherent, consistent and meaningful sense of place (in Wheeler et al., 2011). The increased choice among travel destinations makes it imperative that destinations differentiate themselves (Pike, 2005). The branding of destinations has different purposes and Ooi (2004) deals with four main functions that are essential for the destination brand. The first function is to “shape public perceptions of the place” (ibid., p.110). The brand is part of identifying the destination and differentiating it from other similar destinations in the minds of the tourists (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Branding and marketing campaigns aim to shapes people's perceptions of the destination by becoming a source of information, and be able to change the stories that come from other sources (Ooi, 2004). The second purpose of destination branding is to frame and package the destination into a relatively well-defined and coherent product. The third function is to assert the uniqueness of the place through the brand. The fourth and final function is to shape the tourist experiences to be had at the destination (ibid.). The brand is part of creating a frame from which the tourists can imagine the destination before they visit, because it offers a story that the tourists can use to build their own stories around thereby influence their expectations. The brand also have an influence after the travel has ended, by

playing a part in “consolidation and reinforcing the post-travel recollections of a memorable destination experience” (Ooi, 2004, p.165). Hudson and Richie (2009) argue that destinations are increasingly focusing their branding on the tourist experience to be had at a destination as opposed to physical attributes of the destination. This is based on experimental marketing, which “is about taking the essence of a product and amplifying it into a set of tangible, physical, interactive experiences that reinforce the offer” (Williams, 2006, in Hudson & Richie, 2009, p.227). According to Hudson and Richie (2009), it has been acknowledged in recent years that successful destinations need “to convey the expectations, or promise, of a memorable travel experience that is distinctively associated with that destination” (p.219). This works to strengthen the emotional connection between the tourists and the brand and it reduces the perceived risk and uncertainty felt by the consumers.

3.1.1.1. Brand promise

The brand is the promise of what the consumer can expect of the brand, a promise made by the destination i.e. the DMO and brand marketing is about making that promise real (Mallik, 2009). According to Richie and Crouch (2003), there is a distinction between a destination brand promise and a traditional brand promise. The destination brand should convey “the *promise* of the essence of leisure travel – *a memorable experience*” (p.165). Whereas, a product brand promise is of a more functional nature. The fulfilment of the promise made to the consumers is essential for the success of the brand. Morgan et al. (2011) emphasize that it is important that there is consistency between what is being offered and what is being delivered. Information is freely available to everyone, therefore, no one can hide which is also true for brands. “Destination brands can’t pretend to be something they aren’t and promise something they can’t deliver” (ibid., p.174). Therefore, in order to create an emotional connection to the consumers, the brand must be credible and deliverable (Hall et al., 2009). The brand promise must communicate the benefits and experiences that can be expected at the destination. Hudson and Richie (2009) state that the brand promise should move beyond defining the physical attributes of a destination and create an expectation of experience in the minds of the tourists. When it comes to the delivery of the brand promise, the local community is ultimately responsible for this. However, in the case of the brand of the Northern lights it is more complicated because the brand is heavily relying on nature to deliver a show of the Northern lights. The local businesses are also part of delivering the brand promise but ultimately, nature is in charge of delivering the Northern lights brand promise to some extent. This makes the case in question complex because Tromsø is selling the Northern lights as part of the Arctic experience but it is not controllable e.g. it is not like the snow and the cold that is expected because that is easier to assure but not the lights (Wheeler et al., 2011).

According to Ren and Blichfeldt (2011), the brand identity is the total promise a destination makes to the consumers. Morgan et al. (2011) state, “brands represent a promise of value and performance” (p.35). The brand personality has both logical features and emotional benefits and associations. There is an increased focus on the latter but both can be used to be the base of the brand communication and propositions. The brand promise springs from these emotional and functional attributes and the emotional attributes can be seen as the values of the brand (Hudson & Richie, 2009). Value can both be perceived or actual of or above the “utilitarian function of products” (Dahlén et al., 2010, p.195). The core values of a brand “are the guiding principles for all internal and external brand building, and therefore must be built into the product, expressed in behavior, and reflected in communication” (Urde, 2003 in Wheeler et al., 2011, p.15). If there is agreement on the nature of these values among the stakeholders, they will be integrated in the way of thinking, behaving and working over time (Wheeler et al., 2011). According to Morgan et al. (2004), the brand essence and values and the commitment to these is required for the successful brand.

3.1.1.2. Brand identity

The brand identity can be seen as what the company or destination wants the product or destination brand to be seen as (Ren & Blichfeldt, 2011). An effective brand identity establishes the destination’s character and value proposition, conveys the character in a distinctive way, and delivers emotional power beyond a mental image” (Wheeler et al., 2011, p.16.). According to Johnston (2011), Arctic destinations are often connected to the representation of a last great wilderness. This strong theme is used by operators in their marketing and by tourists as a search parameter. “The Arctic is a place of beauty, challenge, pristine but vulnerable nature, and difference permeates much of the promotional material for tourism” (in Grimwood, 2015, p.5). Similarly, according to Medvedev (2001), “the north turns out to be marketable precisely because of its remoteness, relative obscurity and anonymity” (in Hall & Saarinen, 2010, p.11). Based on this it becomes clear that destinations in the Arctic are relying heavily on nature as the main attraction, which provides tourists with the chance to experience the unique characteristics of the Arctic (Smed, 2014). Weidenfeld (2010) speaks of major attractions of destinations being either flagship or icon attractions of the destination. The flagship is the most important attraction at the destination whether produced or owned. It is attributed with distinct qualities such as uniqueness or location that characterizes it as a must-see attraction and has a large economic impact at the destination. The iconic attraction “is focused on symbolic representations of the place in which it is situated” (Smed, 2014). It is recognized as a representation of the location and it invokes a positive image amongst both stakeholders and tourists (Weidenfeld, 2010). Similar to an iconic brand, it can “carry extraordinary identity value when conferred in the form of a story or a myth” (Holt, 2004 in Weidenfeld, 2010, p.852) by casting a halo on the other elements and attractions of destination (ibid.). Pennington and Thomsen (2010) agree that by using a recognizable icon it will create a

sense of familiarity and shape the expectations of the tourists. The icon is thus preparing tourists for understand what the experience will mean. However, as much as the icon can be a powerful pull to the destination there is also the risk that it can become generic, thereby losing the individuality and the appeal (ibid.).

3.1.1.3. Brand image

Wheeler et al. (2011) points to a challenge when dealing with destination branding which is that “in many cases the destination brand is determined as it relates to the quality and values as perceived by the consumer (brand image), as opposed to the values of the destination community itself (brand identity)” (p.14). In this statement, it becomes clear that there is a distinction between brand identity and brand image. The brand image is concerned with how the consumers actually see the brand “i.e. the total sum of perceptions the target audiences have about the brand” (Ren & Blichfeldt, 2011, p.417). Ren and Blichfeldt (2011) argue that the destination image “is not exclusively shaped or created by marketing activities and considerations” (p.420). Tourists often rely on their own perceptions when deciding on a travel destination, and these perceptions are affected by different sources of information, which are also based on previous experience (Ooi, 2004). According to Grenier (2007), the images that people construct about a destination is based on reality and myths. With specific regards to the Arctic, Hall et al. (2009) argue that the Arctic for centuries have constituted a mythological space. Furthermore, Roth (2005) described how it is not science articulating the idea of the North but “it is our own mythical notions of ‘The North’ that circumscribe our views” (in Hall & Saarinen, 2010, p.11). What is characteristic about Arctic destination images is that the region is “usually portrayed as white and cold, with extreme climates” (ibid. p.5). However, the Arctic region is much more diverse and show a great variety and much warmer temperature than many people believe (ibid.).

According to Gunn (1988), the image formation process can be divided into three segments: the organic, the induced and the modified induced (in Hübner, 2009). The organic refers to information that is non-tourist targeted and it is developed through the assimilation of everyday information e.g. word-of-mouth and different media (Ye & Tussyadiah, 2011). The induced image is generated from commercial information and the image is enhanced with emotions. The modified induced image is related to the tourist’s post-visit experience (Hübner, 2009). The internet is both a source of overt and covert information that attempts to influence tourists’ image formation (Bowen & Clarke, 2009). Another interesting feature of the internet is that tourists are not in direct contact with the marketers. There are many different platforms e.g. fora, blogs, social media where tourists can find information about their destination. However, information overload and disorientation can contribute to the tourists’ forming a more negative destination image because they are not able to sort through the large amounts of information. It does have the advantage that

tourists can more easily process pictures and these are abundant on the internet (ibid.). Govers and Go (2003) state that with the interactive nature of the internet, a new dimension can be added to destination marketing. It is difficult for tourists to “form a clear image of a destination without the actual experience” (p. 13). However, this is where the internet plays an increasingly important role in the image creation process, because tourists can thereby “experience” the destination prior to visiting by creating an image based on information found online. The images created through the information search becomes more important than reality, because tourism services are intangible (ibid.). In the study by Molina and Esteban (2006), they concluded that the destination image is mainly predicted using the visual format and the sense of wonder that is created in brochures (in Bowen & Clark, 2009). The image that is created in the minds of the tourists before going to a destination is one aspect of image formation but there is also the post-visit image to consider. According to Chon (1991), this image is “likely to be more realistic, complex and differentiated” (in Bowen & Clarke, 2009, p.121). Therefore, it can be concluded that the brand image is not solely created by the destination marketers or through media channels. However, it is the combination of an individual’s experiences with the brand or product. In the case of destination image, it is also affected by word-of-mouth communication and visits to the destination in addition to all information encountered (Horrigan, 2009).

3.1.1.4. Communication

Traditional branding is based on the notion that it is better to have one identity to communication to tourists. It will make tourists more likely to see what the destinations wish them to see. It is assumed that tourists prefer, expect and choose “simplicity and uniformity over diversity and complexity” (Ren & Blichfeldt, 2011, p. 422). The brand should focus on the core experience provided by a destination, however, there is a risk that the necessary singular focus is diverted by the other experience attributes or activities available at the destination in order to encompass everything (Richie & Crouch, 2003). It can be necessary to form a message that only focuses on one or a few brand associations, in order not to create confusion for the tourists (Gartner, 2015). However, as the modern tourist is becoming more experience in travelling and does this more frequently, it would be generalizing to assume that all tourists are looking for and preferring simplicity in destination brands (Ren & Blichfeldt, 2011). Ren and Blichfeldt (2011) challenge the notion of simplicity and a single destination image in destination branding and propose to look at a destination as having multiple identities. They see a destination as being constructed, negotiated and enacted in a constant process, as opposed to a fixed identity. Similarly, Campelo (2015) states that the sense of place is constructed socially because it is mediated by others and it may be reproduced and sustained through contact with other people. Other approaches challenge the notion that a singular image is created in the mind of the tourist when information is coming from different sources. According to Askehave and Norlyk

(2006), these approaches claim, “the image formation is context related and subject to subjective or cultural ‘translation’” (in Ren & Blichfeldt, 2011, p.421). This entails that identity is not communicated in a one-way transmission but influenced by many factors. Therefore, tourists receiving the same information marketing communication will create different images of a destination, and as argued by Ren and Blichfeldt (2011), one image can never form collectively. Similarly, in their review Gallarza, Saura and Garcia (2002), conceptualize image as complex, multiple, relativistic and dynamic (in Bowen & Clarke, 2009). When they speak of the image as complex, it refers to the image having more than one interpretation of meaning connected to it. The image is multiple because the final composite image comes from multiple attributes and because images differ from person to person, it is relativistic. Finally, they describe image as dynamic because it changes according to time and space (ibid.).

The destination can communicate the brand promise through various media e.g. images, promotional campaigns, advertisements and the internet is increasingly being used as a platform to launch destination brands (Hudson & Richie, 2009). The visual identity of the destination is an important element in creating and communication the experience and the image of the destination (ibid.). This is because according to Ye and Tussyadiah (2011), that tourism is uniquely visual. Visual images function not only as a means of attracting tourists to the destination but they also “act as signifiers to stimulate the imagination and to communicate with tourists in a personal way” (ibid., p.129). In Ren and Blichfeldt (2011), they state that within destination branding the concept of one, clear identity still predominates. However, “[c]onversations [...] drive the informal exchange of thoughts, opinions and feelings between customers who are increasingly listening to each other” (p.144). The brand is being molded by these conversations because these are about their real brand experiences. The world is dominated by social media and for the DMOs, it now becomes increasingly important to consider communication in terms of conversations instead of campaigns (Morgan et al., 2011). The consumers are increasingly becoming involved in the value creation process, for which reason more active involvement should be integrated by the organizations (Warnaby & Medway, 2015).

3.2. Tourist experiences

The section will start out with a discussion of the relationship between the tourism product and the tourist experience. Through the literature review, it became clear that when dealing with tourism products, the concepts of product and experience are closely linked and are often used interchangeably. Benur and Bramwell (2015) speak of destinations as environments where “tourism product experiences are co-produced or co-created” by the product producers and the product consumers (p.216). They found that

“[r]esearchers increasingly suggest that tourists are interested in the opportunities that destination products offer them to help create their own experiences [...] albeit within the context of the product offering” (ibid., p.216). The concept of the tourist experience is a widely discussed topic in the tourism literature, therefore, it is defined differently by researchers. Quan and Wang (2004) propose combining the concepts of the peak experience and supporting experiences. The peak experience often refers to elements that constitute the major motivation for the tourist. The supporting experiences refer to elements that gratify the basic consumer needs on a vacation e.g., accommodation, hospitality and transportation. In the case of the Northern lights experience in Tromsø, it is argued that the supporting experiences can also refer to the specific elements of the tours and activities. The relationship between the peak and supporting experience is explained in two points. The first point is that the peak experience should be differentiated from the supporting elements in the way that it should not be equated to the latter. Furthermore, the peak experience cannot substitute the supporting elements. Therefore, “the total quality of the tourists experience relies on the mutual support and reinforcement between these dimensions” (ibid., p.300). According to Ryan (1994), each component contributes to the tourist satisfaction based on the degree and type of expectations of the tourist and it depends on “the tourist’s own adaptability through which the importance of that which is disappointing is down valued and tourists find compensatory aspects of the holiday to enjoy” (in Quan & Wang, 2004, p.300). The second point refers to the peak and supporting experiences being interchangeable depending on the conditions. It entails that the supporting elements can turn into the peak element as well as the peak element might turn out to be a supporting element (ibid.). Quan and Wang (2004) focus on how the peak experiences and supporting experiences should be considered together in unison as a part of the tourist experience. The notion that they are intertwined to form an experience from different elements is supported by Shaw and Ivens’ (2002) argument that “[a]n experience is a blend of many elements coming together” (in Mossberg, 2007, p.62).

According to Mossberg (2003), the aspect of time plays an important element in the concept of the tourist experience from a marketing perspective. Mossberg (2003) speaks of the tourist experience as consisting of three phases that the tourist moves through both timewise and physically; before, during and after. Similarly, Larsen (2007) also states that the tourism experience is comprised of three aspects which can be intertwined with Mossberg’s (2003) concepts to provide a more holistic understanding of the tourism experience. Larsen (2007) sees the tourism experience as accumulating memories as a function of undertaking a tourist trip. According to Lindberg, Hansen and Eide (2014), time can be understood as a “dynamic experiential phenomenon that continually influences the experience and meaning before, during, and after the tourist activity” (p.497). The tourist often incorporate both the past and the future into their experiences due to the dynamic aspect of time.

3.2.1. Before going on vacation

Mossberg (2003) states that the majority of experiences require the action of movement from the ordinary to the non-ordinary and potentially extraordinary. The tourist goes through a transformation as s/he moves through the different phases of the experience. The first phase *before the experience* is characterized as the time where the tourists is still in the home environment. During this phase, the tourist might be fantasizing about escaping everyday life searching for something that cannot be found in the home environment. How different the non-ordinary is from the ordinary depends on factors such as distance e.g. how familiar is it, have one experienced something similar previously (ibid). Grenier (2007) states that in order for an experience to have a special meaning it has to be experience in opposition to the concept of normality. This study focuses on a destination in the Arctic, and Grenier (2007) states that there is a “lack of consensus on the nature of the experience” in relation to Arctic tourism (p.57). However, tourism in these areas “aim at offering travelers a different travel experience, either by the means of travel [...] or through the type of environment” (ibid., p.59). By difference, a degree of exoticism should be understood to be perceived by the tourist about the destination, and Giddens (2001) spoke of exotic experiences as “those that violate our everyday expectations about how social interaction and interaction with the physical environments are supposed to proceed” (in Grenier, 2007). This strangeness of exotic experiences is an important component of the pleasure that the tourists perceives in a tourism situation (ibid.).

3.2.1.1 Expectations and Motivations

According to Larsen (2007), this stage before the tourist goes on vacation is the aspect of the tourism experience connected to expectations. The tourist anticipates and predicts future events and it relates to motivations of tourists. “Tourists can have expectations about the experiences they want to gain connected with the legacy of environment and socio-cultural characteristics of the specific destination” (Benur & Bramwell, 2015, p.213). del Bosque et al. (2009) state that the main factors in forming expectations are past experiences, external communication, word-of-mouth communication and image, which are the factors that also form the brand image that tourists create. Past experiences can influence expectations in the way that the tourist’s expectations of a future encounter is dependent on previous levels of satisfaction. The external communication refers to the information being communicated by the destination marketer and word-of-mouth is information that comes from relatives, friends, network and peers. Both types of communication is essential because the tourism experiences and services are characterized by being intangible and uncertain to tourists. The aim of gathering information from other sources is to form their expectations in a more reliable way (ibid.).

The core notion of tourists’ motivations is that motivations change with their travel experience (Pearce & Lee, 2005). Each tourist will have a pattern of travel motivations and this is connected to their travel career

i.e. their accumulated travel experiences and the life situation (ibid.). Wright (2006) sees motivation as a process that starts with a need and then a drive or action to satisfy that need and finally the fulfillment of it (in Bowen & Clarke, 2009). Therefore, tourists visit destinations in order to fulfill and satisfy specific needs or desires (Arabatzis & Grigoroudis, 2010). Kozak (2002) describes the push and pull factors that are characteristic for determining motivation. The push factor relates to the intangible, intrinsic desire of the individual tourist and the pull factor is connected to the attractiveness of a particular destination (in Bowen & Clarke, 2009). However, it should be emphasized that these two factors do not need to be at the opposite end of the scale. Tourists create their own balance between push and pull, therefore, they are not “two separate decisions made at two separate points in time” (ibid., p.92). Tourism to Arctic destinations are challenged by the difficulties connected to accessing these destinations and the often high cost of travelling to them. However, the uniqueness of the Arctic destinations helps to overcome the distance (Müller & Jansson, 2007). Furthermore, “[t]he numerous activities encompassed in polar tourism are attracting much interest” (Grenier, 2007, p.60). Polar destinations often see the tourism peak coincide with natural phenomena (ibid.) and the physical features of destination often represents the primary motive for travel (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). According to Lemelin (2010), the Arctic, with its unique polar landscapes, mega-fauna, natural phenomena and unique indigenous cultures, has been attracting visitors to the area for centuries. Polar tourism offers an environment where the tourist can go through a rite of passage and according to Grenier (2007), this can give meaning to the individual by providing them with a sense of accomplishment. Furthermore, polar tourism allows the “identity seeker present in every individual to establish or re-establish a part of that identity which one thinks is their own” (ibid., p.59). Cutler and Carmichael (2010) also describe the tourism experience as transitional, which can shape the way tourists view their own identity. “For visitors from most of the world, it is this imagined place with its associated images and history that acts as a major driver for the desire to travel to the far north and south” (Hall and Saarinen, 2010, p.32). The destination of Tromsø can be seen as a unique-exotic-exclusive destination, which is regarded to offer a unique and precious experience. It is often promoted as an one-in-a-lifetime experience (Buhalis, 2000).

3.2.1.2. Circle of representation & visual images

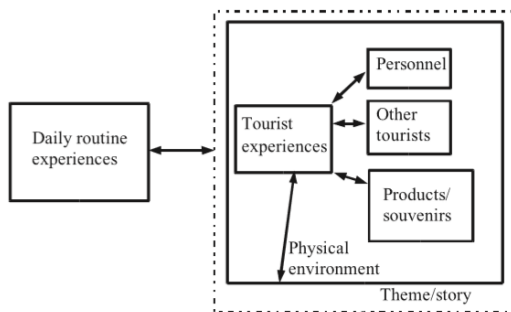
According to Garrod (2009), images are a fundamental motivation for tourists (in Ye & Tussyadiah, 2011). Visual images have a pulling power that affects tourists’ behavior and is an important part of the promotion of a tourist destination (Jenkins, 2003). Lee and Gretzel (2012) state that the use of images in destination marketing can help stimulate tourists’ mental image of the destination and pictures influence the tourists’ perception of the vacation experience. However, Goossens (1995) states that the use of images in marketing may smother the tourists’ imagination “as they become over-reliant on the featured images as an

information source rather than elaborating on their own mentally created images” (In Lee & Gretzel, 2012, p.1272). Jenkins (2003) uses the concept of circles of representation in order to explain tourists’ behavior. The notion is that images and information circulating within a culture is part of sharing meaning within that culture, therefore, the individual is influenced by these circulating images and place myths. Images and information can inspire an individual to travel to the destination. The circle of representation is thus initiated when images and information of a destination is mediated collectively to people through mass media. The tourist may then travel to the destination and visit the features or attractions seen on the projected images, which are then often recorded as part of the experience. Related to the circle of representation is Bruner’s (1986) distinction between experience and expression (in Picard, 2012). The experience refers to the actual experience that tourists have at the destination and the expressions is the specific way that the experience is articulated and communicated. Thus, the expressions have the ability to re-generate the lived experience, which forms a circle, “an image or expression informs experience, and experience, in turn, informs an image or expression” (ibid., p.11). According to Bertella (2013), tourists are searching for the images that they associate with the destination, which they could have seen in tourist guides, brochures and documentaries. The personal photographs and perceptions of the destination are then mediated back to the tourist’s network as a way of sharing the experience but also partly as proof of the visit (Jenkins, 2003). Similarly, Picard (2012) argue that tourists search for images, expressions or metaphors that best describe the personal emotion or experience. “Coincidentally, tourists usually use here precisely those words or images that are used in public and commercial culture to promise or anticipate the same experience” (p.13). What occurs is that tourists would seem to portray the experience or image in the same manner as they had encountered. Therefore, although they have a personal experience, tourists reproduce the images or information that they have encountered when they make sense of their experience, thereby continuously communication to other people to expect the same experience (ibid.). Images that are being communicated by the individual tourist is often a reproduction of the previous images, which could have been seen on postcards, personal photographs, marketing promotions etc. (Jenkins, 2003). The circle of representation is thus present in all of the stages of the tourism experience. In this specific case, the images of the Northern lights are seen to be the icon of the Arctic, therefore, they have significant relevance for the Arctic tourism experience (Bertella, 2013).

3.2.2. During the experience

At this stage, the tourist has travelled to a different environment and perceptions are formed during the stay (Larsen, 2007). A strong bond is often created between the tourist and the product or brand and a feeling of togetherness between the tourist, the product and other tourists is created (Mossberg, 2003). From a tourism perspective, the destination is seen as an experience environment and the experiencescape

is the specific space that the experience takes place in (Mossberg, 2007). It is important to consider tourists not simply as an element of the environment but as co-constructors of the space (ibid.). In Mossberg (2007) the experience is “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” (p.60). Therefore, the tourism providers cannot create the experience but they can provide an environment in which the tourist can create the experience for themselves. For that reason, it is necessary that the tourism providers understand how they can provide circumstances that can enhance the experience. The model presented by Mossberg (2007), focuses on the different elements of interactions during the experience.



The physical environment can be seen as the destination image, which was discussed previously (Mossberg, 2007). Bitner (1992) states that perceptions of the physical environment can influence beliefs and attributions of the destination both positively and negatively (in Mossberg, 2007). In terms of the effects of the personnel, the service meeting is seen as a performance and the concepts of communication and conduct are added to the mix (Mossberg, 2003). Ap and Wong (2001) state that the tour guide is one of the key frontline players in the tourism industry and their performance affects the tourist’s level of satisfaction with both the tour and the tour operator (in Mossberg, 2007). According to Arnould and Price (1993), the extraordinary experience is connected to the relationship that is created between the consumer and the service provider (in Mossberg, 2007). Therefore, in order to understand the tourism experience to be had at the destination of Tromsø, it is essential to look at the relationship between tourists and guides during the experience. The role of the tour guide is to help tourists understand the places they visit and the experiences they have (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). By providing the tourists with information, the guide is part of interpreting the tourist experience, giving new insight and understanding to tourists about their experience (ibid.). The effects of other tourists also play a part in the tourist experience because often the service encounter takes place in the presence of other consumers (Mossberg, 2007). These encounters can have an effect on the tourist satisfaction and the perception of the service quality. The positive aspects of togetherness with the other tourists is found to influence the tourist’s willingness to be co-producers of the

experience. When investigating the influence of other tourists there is also the concept of community to consider.

Some products can be seen to enhance the sense of community that the tourist belongs to by engaging in different activities (ibid.). “Products and souvenirs are seen as a tangible symbol in the tourists’ consumption” (Mossberg, 2007, p.68) and these also influence the tourist experience. However, not only the tangible aspects have to be considered but also intangible such as the atmosphere. Furthermore, souvenirs is a tangible reminder of the experience, which would otherwise had remained intangible. Images and photographs can be seen as souvenirs. Finally, the effects of a theme or story is part of the experience and can be used to promote the brand, products, destination to the tourist. Pine and Gilmore (2002) argue, “a service turns into an experience automatically when using a theme” (in Mossberg, 2007, p.69). The framework designed by Mossberg (2007) can be combined with that of Lindberg et al. (2014) in order to provide a more detailed framework for understanding the stages of the experience that takes place. Where Mossberg’s (2007) model is based on the interactions of the different elements, Lindberg et al. (2014) emphasize the importance of including the processes involved in creating the experience. They propose a multirelational approach to understanding the consumer experience as situated, multirelational and dynamic (ibid.). Lindberg et al. (2014) deals with the *in interaction* dimension, comparable to Mossberg’s (2007) model but it adds the concept of orientation to the interactions, which can be externally and internally oriented. Internally oriented interaction is focused around the self-reflection. It is “a process of self-discovery resulting from our relationship to the world” (Lindberg et al., 2014, p.500). During this process, the experience can intertwine experiences from both previous experiences and expectations. The external interaction refers to the social interaction between family, other tourists or people at the destination.

Lindberg et al. (2014) state that the tourist’s *context* is important to understand the tourist experience as a whole and it is a combination of the physical, cultural and social context. The physical surroundings can both be the natural and man-made environments and the relationship to the environment affects the way the tourist feels. It is important to note that tourists interpret the physical context differently, therefore, the physical context is argued to be constructed by the tourist as the experience occurs. According to Hall and Saarinen (2010), different people experience polar landscapes in various ways. Tourists’ cultural context influences the experience and tourists will always view “phenomena through a cultural ‘lens’ that provides initial meaning” (McCracken, 1986, in Lindberg et al., 2014, p.498). How tourists relate to other people sharing in the experience might also affect it. It is argued that the social context can occur with or without direct social interaction. According to Lehn (2006), the tourist’s own experience might be influenced by

observing how other tourists engage, act and respond during the experience (in Lindberg et al. 2014). The experience can thus be undermined or enhanced by the presence of other people in a social context.

3.2.3. After the experience

The last phase *after the experience* is where the tourist has returned to the ordinary environment and is reflecting on the experience and safeguard it in memory (Mossberg, 2007). The visual element is very prominent during this phase where especially photographs work to memorize and shape the experience. Tourists evaluate the experience and their perception will influence reflect how they see the product and the destination i.e. the destination image is modified. Furthermore, how the tourist perceives the experience will have an effect on how they communicate the experience within their network (Mosberg, 2003). Similarly, Larsen (2007) states that this phase is connected to the memories obtained at the destination, which according to Cutler and Carmichael (2010) is the outcome of the experience. Memories play a part in linking the actual experience to its emotional outcome. The emotions that tourists connect to the experience can affect their perceptions and memories of the experience, especially in the case of extraordinary experience, which often involve intense emotions (ibid.). In Larsen (2007), a study showed that the best indicator of whether tourists were satisfied and wanted to repeat the holiday was the remembered experience. It showed that there could be a difference between how tourists evaluated the experience while being immersed in it i.e. the on line experience and how it was remembered afterwards. The remembered experience is strongly related to the on line experience but not necessarily affected by it. How the experience was evaluated in the tourism moment i.e. positive and negative elements, is not necessarily connected to what people remember about it. This connects to the argument by Cutler and Carmichael (2010) that when tourists are evaluating the event there is a tendency for the negative aspects to fade “while positive events are recalled with more accuracy” (p.18). Similarly, Kelley and Michela (1980) state that the element of motivation bias is especially relevant in tourism because tourists may feel particularly disposed to portray the tourism experience in a favorable manner. From this perspective, motivation is divided into two classes: “motivation for self-enhancement and self-protection” and “motivation for the positive presentation of the self to others” (in Bowen & Clarke, 2009, p.145). Furthermore, Bowen and Clarke (2009) state that tourists do not like to be proven wrong, meaning that the difference between the pre-visit naivety of expectations and the post-visit reevaluation is often resisted.

3.2.3.1. Satisfaction

It is essential for the destination to understand the needs and expectations of tourists in order to design the tourist experience, because according Ye and Tussyadiah (2011), tourists’ perception of satisfaction with the experiences depends on the relationship between expectations and the actual experience and images that they come into contact with. However, the reality would seem not to be as simple. According to Cutler

and Carmichael (2010), the notion is being challenged because it assumes that expectations are the basis for satisfaction. Yet, as Bowen and Clarke (2009) argue, the goal of travel is not to achieve satisfaction but to experience something new, escape etc. The prediction of performance can be vague because of the unpredictable and intangible nature of the tourist experience, however, the actual performance can recall memories of past experience, and provide a comparative baseline (Bowen & Clarke, 2009). These expectations are then overridden by the reality of the experience. According to Ashworth, Kavaratzis & Warnaby (2015), tourists' expectations can be shaped by the destination brand, which subsequently shapes their experience with it, which is believed to increase satisfaction in what people derived from the experience. Past experiences influence expectations of future experiences, however, to which degree is not agreed upon in the academic literature (ibid.).

The satisfactory experience can be perceived as the matching of tourists' needs and performance and dissatisfaction can be expressed as the gap between tourists' expectations and their actual experience (Tung & Richie, 2011). However, it can be insufficient to have a one-dimensional concept of satisfaction, which entails that a single factor can create both satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Therefore, Alegre and Garau (2010) argue that satisfaction and dissatisfaction are two different dimension and not opposite ends of a scale. A product or service can be divided into three categories and the performance of each category can influence satisfaction. The "basic factors are those that only lead to consumer dissatisfaction" (ibid., p.55). If not present or meet by tourists' expectations, these will generate extreme dissatisfaction, however, they do not increase satisfaction if they should be met. Excitement factors have the ability to increase satisfaction when they are offered but do not create dissatisfaction when absent. Lastly, performance factors work in both directions generating satisfaction when working well and dissatisfaction when not working well. The higher a tourist motivation is towards certain attributes, the tourist would tend to rate it positively (ibid.). Furthermore, the emotions connected to the experience are amplified when they are "subjected to intense pre-travel anticipation" (Picard, 2012, p.3). The categories demonstrate that elements that have the potential of creating dissatisfaction are not the necessarily the ones that creates satisfaction (Alegre & Garau, 2010). Cutler and Carmichael (2010) state that when the expectations are not met, tourists are able to adapt as satisfaction can be created from other influential factors. Even failed aspects can be turned into stories of overcoming challenges. Smed (2009) demonstrates how a level of justification can be attached to tourists' representation of their expectations based on practical circumstances. According to Smed (2009), justification entails portraying a particular identity and the tourists taking a more positive position that it is accordance with a desirable identity. This "suggests that admitting that something was missing in a particular tourist experience would be a sign of failure" (p.136).

4. Analysis

The problem formulation has three interconnected aspects and these elements guide the analysis. The analysis will begin with investigating the brand promise of Tromsø from the perspective of the DMO and local stakeholders. This will be followed by the expectations that tourists have of the experience seeing the Northern lights both in Tromsø and in general. Having investigated both these aspects, they will be compared to see if there is any inconsistencies between what can be expected and what is expected. The insight will thus lead to an investigation of how the experience is then actually perceived by tourists in Tromsø. Then the investigation will compare the experience to the perception of the experience, which will yield knowledge of the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the experience to be had in Tromsø. Finally, the analysis will investigate how the experience is evaluated and what that might entail for Tromsø. Table 7 is an overview of the various data sources and their corresponding appendix number.

Stakeholder interviews	App.	Tourist interviews	App.	Potential tourist interviews	App.	Observations	App.
DMO VisitTromsø Pinsard & Takagi	5	Grace & Jenny	10	Susanne	14	Tromsø Wilderness Centre	18
Tromsø Wilderness Centre –Alexander Sørensen	6	Bruna	11	Lene	15	Arctic Trip	19
Wondering Owl – Virginie Ramasco & Maarit Valkonen	7	Ravi	12	Stine	16	Arctic Guide Service	20
Arctic Guide Service – Simone Tomassini	8	Eriko	13	Ana-Maria	17		

Table 7: Overview of interviewees & observations

4.1. The promise of the Northern lights in Tromsø

The focus of the investigation is the Northern lights experience in Tromsø. For that reason, the promise investigated will take point of departure in the part of the destination brand of Tromsø that focuses on the Northern lights aspect of the brand. When discussing the brand in the analysis, it will be referred to as the Northern lights brand Tromsø. As Dahlén et al. (2010) argue, the product is part of the brand but it is not the brand, thus in order to understand the brand there needs to be an understanding of the product. Tourists are looking to have an experience with the Northern lights and based on the argument by López-Bonilla and López-Bonilla (2010), Tromsø's various tourism products at the destination will offer tourists an integrated experience because all the product elements brought together create the experience not just one

product (Hall et al., 2009). The main product of Tromsø during the season from September through March is the Northern lights. As expressed by VisitTromsø representative Pinsard: *“Northern lights is the reason to go to Tromsø. Of course, we use the Northern lights to promote the destination. That is the main product, our star, kind of ‘fyrtårn’”* (app.5). The quote demonstrates how the Northern lights are indeed the major attraction, which, in Weidenfeld’s (2010) terminology makes them the flagship attraction of Tromsø. This entails that the DMO is relying on the Northern lights to make Tromsø appear unique and give the destination a certain character. The Northern lights are also an iconic attraction because of their iconic status of the Arctic (Smed, 2014). It can be said to emphasize the other elements of the destination in relation to the Northern lights. This means that the other products or attracts are seen through a Northern lights “lens”, described by Holt (2004) as casting a halo onto the other products (in Weidenfeld, 2010). This can be seen when the DMO states on the website, *“Discover more than 70 Northern Lights activities to book online and find out why Tromsø is one of the best places in the world to see the Aurora Borealis”* (VisitTromsø, 2016b). The statement shows that Tromsø is relying on the Northern lights as the main pull factor and as the peak experience to be had (Quan & Wang, 2004). The other elements of the destination product is seen as a supporting element to be had in connection with the Northern lights experience.

Because the Northern lights product is made up of individual products, it is important to realize that these will have their own characteristics and foci as four stakeholders interviews demonstrated. AC, AGS and WO were focusing on driving tourists by busses around the area to find clear skies to be able to give their guests the experience of seeing the Northern lights but also experience the nature in and around Tromsø, yet each with their individual touch. For example, AGS specialize in larger bus tours designed for the price-oriented tourists, which is expressed by Tomassini. *“We take the core of the mainstream tourists coming to Tromsø”* (app.5). On the other hand, TWC has activities with dogs as the main element of their products and then the core of their brand is *“trying to sell what you actually can guarantee, which is dogsledding and then it might be that the Northern lights show up and then it is really amazing to sit in a dogsled”* (app.6). Therefore, their individual brand is connected to the Northern lights experience but it is focused around another element. In this case, the peak experience would be the dog-related activities and then the Northern lights is seen as a supporting experience (Quan & Wang, 2004). One of the purposes of destination branding is, according to Ooi (2004), to create a frame and package that demonstrates a relatively coherent product, but because the individual operators have their own unique identity that can be a challenge to create a well-defined product related to the Northern lights in Tromsø.

4.1.1. Brand identity

According to Ren and Blichfeldt (2011), the destination identity is how the DMO desires the tourists to perceive the destination. As stated above in Tromsø, the focus is the Northern lights. However, there are

more aspects of the brand identity and according to the DMO, the Northern lights brand Tromsø has several important features. The Northern lights is the core of the brand, however, the Northern lights is not unique to the destination. Therefore, the elements of the brand identity are what aids the destination to differentiate themselves from others (Richie & Crouch, 2003). In the case of Tromsø, the DMO representatives both stated that in Tromsø, the chances for seeing the Northern lights are the best. *“Our argument is that Tromsø is one of the best places in the world to see the Northern lights because of our situation in the Northern lights oval”* (Pinsard, app.5). This shows that the geographical position of Tromsø is part of making it one of the best places, furthermore, there is one more element connected to the position of the city and that is the weather conditions. Valkonen from WO stated:

“The chances of seeing the Northern lights are so high here. It is also lucky that we can drive- if it is cloudy weather then you can go to the other side of a big mountain range and the weather can be completely different. Or drive all the Finland. It is a big area” (app.7).

The quote attests to the importance of the infrastructure in the brand identity. Because of the infrastructure in the area, it is possible to drive to many different locations e.g. Sweden or Finland in search of the Northern lights and clear weather. The area has a coastal climate and the weather is very changeable but because of the possibilities of driving to different areas, operators at the destination have many different weather systems to work with.. By focusing on these aspects, the destination is emphasizing the beneficial features of Tromsø, which is what Ooi (2004) argue is with the purpose of setting the stage for the tourist experience. Here the destination refers to both the DMO and local stakeholders taking part of marketing the experience. On the website, VisitTromsø have developed a theme page that provides the tourists with information about the unpredictable nature of the phenomenon. It offers an explanation about the conditions and chances of seeing the Northern lights. *“We try to be quite realistic, not too negative but not too much expectations”* (Takagi, app.5). Because the brand represents the performance that tourists can expect from the destination products (Morgan et al., 2011), it is essential that the DMO and stakeholders ensure that the unpredictable nature of the Northern lights product is apparent in the brand. The VisitTromsø website explains it in the following way,

“Like with many natural phenomena, the Northern Lights are changeable and unpredictable: When and where you can experience them is a question that all aurora dreamers and aurora lovers want answers to. Turning your dream of seeing the Northern Lights into reality requires a combination of knowledge, time and patience” (2016a).

This statement is intended to shape tourists’ expectations of their Northern lights experience in Tromsø in order to make it clear that the Northern lights is an uncontrollable phenomenon, which according to

Ashworth et al. (2015) is an important element of the destination brand. This is to ensure that the tourists are given realistic expectations and understanding of the experience. As stated by Tomassini, “*you are selling a lot of expectation*” (app.9) and it is important that these expectations are managed in a way that they shape a notion of an experience that will live up to the expectations as stated by Morgan et al. (2011). The destination can be said to focus on a destination identity that focuses on the different experiences to be had at the destination.

“You can also combine the Northern lights with dogsledding, Northern lights with snowmobile safari, reindeer with is also quite exotic to see the Northern lights when you are doing different activities as well. We have many provides and many activities that we can combine with the Northern lights” (app.5).

The statement by Takagi demonstrates, that the destination is emphasizing the various different opportunities and products available at the destination to demonstrate to tourists the uniqueness of the destination (Ooi, 2004). Because the destination is relying on a product that is unpredictable and cannot be guaranteed by the destination, focusing on the Northern lights in connection to other activities would demonstrate that the destination has more to offer, thereby diversifying the destination identity. The brand is focusing on the different elements to create a multiple destination image, which is what Ren and Blichfeldt (2011) are arguing could be beneficial in order to attract tourists to the destination. This multiple identity choice is further demonstrated in the next element of the destination brand identity of Tromsø, which is focusing on Tromsø as the Arctic capital. According to Takagi, what makes Tromsø unique is that, “*You can feel the city atmosphere and also nature surrounding you*” (app.5). Besides the Northern lights and the nature surround the city e.g. the fjords and mountains, the city has many restaurants, shopping opportunities, a range of different accommodation and many cultural events. This way the DMO is branding the destination in a manner that encapsulates the Northern lights but also the many other products available at the destination. However, according to Gartner (2015), the approach of intentionally moving the focus away from the core experience, could risk creating confusion for tourists. It will move away from the singular focus of Tromsø as the place to experience the Northern lights, which is argued by Richie and Crouch (2003) to be necessary.

4.1.2. Values

Discussing the values communicated by VisitTromsø, three clear values were emphasized. “*[T]he high-end service is really important on how you welcome your guests and how you take care of them*” (app.5). In the statement, Pinsard clarifies that one of the brand values is delivering high-end service and the other is the concern for the welfare of the tourists, insuring that they are comfortable and prepared for the different climate and challenges of an Arctic adventure. According to Pinsard, it is also about being a good host to

the guests coming to the destination in order to ensure that they have a good experience. The DMO expresses that they are in the process of creating an official document containing these values, however, Pinsard expressed that *“It is some values that I think everyone share but they are not official on paper”* (app.5). This would imply that there is agreement amongst the stakeholders concerning the values (Wheeler et al., 2011), which is essential because commitment to the values are necessary to build a successful brand, according to Morgan et al. (2004, in Wheeler et al., 2011). However, it could be considered a challenge for the destination that these values are mostly service products that are being delivered in individual service encounters, which are not under the control of the DMO or even the individual stakeholders. These values are being created through direct interaction between the tourist and the stakeholders at the destination, which makes them intangible because they are experiences. Therefore, it is important, as stated in Wheeler et al. (2011), that the values need to be built into the product in order to guide the brand. However, because the Northern lights products are being delivered to the tourists by a large number of individual operators, these values needs to be incorporated into their products as well. Pike (2005) argues that the destination brand is more complex because it consists of many individual products, and these products have their own identities and therefore values. Through interviews with stakeholders, it became clear that the values of the destination brand are shared. Sætre stated, *“It is also that you can make it cozy on the trip. That they feel that they are being valued, they are part of the group and that you take good care of them”* (app.8). Here describing values consistent with those of the destination. However, because of the individual nature of the different products, it can be somewhat of a challenge for the stakeholders to embrace the values. This can be seen in the statement by Tomassini, when he explained that the company specializes in bus tours with bigger groups and cater to the price-oriented segment. *“The downside of it is that we work with a number of guests and a number of bookings that doesn’t really allow us to give that personalized service that some people may expect”* (app.9). However, the company is dedicated to providing the best service that is possible within the frames of their offerings.

4.1.3. Brand promise

“Do you dream of seeing the Northern Lights? The destination is Tromsø!”

This statement taken from VisitTromsø’s, (2016b) website expresses the essence of the promise of the Northern lights brand Tromsø. According to Hudson and Richie (2009), the brand promise is based on the brand identity. From the above discussion of the identity and values of the Northern lights brand Tromsø, the brand promise that becomes clear is the following: In Tromsø, tourists will have the best possible chances of seeing the Northern lights and get a combined nature and Arctic Capital city experience with many activities and amenities available. The experience will be surrounded by high quality service experiences and an attention to the tourist’s personal wellbeing and experience. According to Morgan et al.

(2011), the brand is representing values and performances that the tourists can expect from it and the interviews showed that the Northern lights brand promise of Tromsø is that it is one of the best place to see the Northern lights. The DMO also attempts to incorporate the element of uncertainty into the brand promise. *“There are no guarantees that you will see the Northern Lights, and that makes it even more exciting”* (VisitTromsø, 2016b). This is an attempt to shape the expectations of the tourists and make them better understand that seeing the Northern lights is a natural experience, which makes it an experience whether you see it or not. The Northern lights brand Tromsø is promising tourists a spectacular nature experience and at the same time experience the atmosphere of a big city in the Arctic capital complete with restaurants experiences, cultural events and the comforts of a city experience. All of these elements are part of communicating the kind of experience tourists can expect to have at the destination, and according to Ooi (2004) this is shaping their expectations of the experience.

4.1.3.1. Communicating the brand promise

In order for the brand to shape the tourists' expectations and make the destination stand out from others, it needs to be communicated. The image that VisitTromsø and stakeholders are communicating through commercial tourist-oriented information and images is known as an induced image (Hübner, 2009). One of the ways in which a brand is communicated is through a slogan and in the case of Tromsø, VisitTromsø uses the slogan, *“Tromsø: where your Arctic adventure begins”* (Pinsard, app.5). This is intended to create certain images in the minds of the tourists by relying on the notion of the Arctic and Hall et al. (2009) describes how the Arctic is based on mythical notions of wilderness and incredible nature. By relying on the Arctic as a theme, the destination is creating a story tourists can create their expectations around before coming, which can enrich the experience (Ooi, 2004). The experience being created in the case of Tromsø is connected to nature as well as an urban experience. The element of the nature experience is in accordance with Smed (2014), stating that the Arctic experience is often imagined as a unique nature experience. Ren and Blichfeldt (2011) argue that the using a slogan or tag-line is often connected to a single branding identity. However, the DMO stated that they wanted to focus more on the Arctic aspect of Tromsø because they felt tourists did not necessarily see Tromsø as an Arctic destination. In terms of communicating the brand of Tromsø, the DMO explained that Tromsø was part of a larger marketing system. The role of VisitTromsø is of course to market and develop the destination but other levels such as VisitNorway are involved in the overall marketing process. All of these entities are part of marketing Norway, the Northern lights and Tromsø.

Hudson & Richie (2009) emphasizes the visual identity of a destination and its importance in the communication process. This is an element that VisitTromsø is extremely aware of and use images

extensively in their branding and marketing efforts, which can be seen in the statement made by Pinsard. *“On our website, we use them of course and we insist on using good pictures”* (app.5).



The photograph is taken from VisitTromsø's website (2016) where it is the home page banner during the Northern lights season, illustrating the Northern lights in the sky above Tromsø.

By using images, the destination is creating a frame that the tourists would be able to envision themselves in and their experience with greater ease, according to Govers and Go (2003). The images used by the destination is also part of initiating the concept that Jenkins (2003) refer to as the circles of representation. This is especially the case with the Northern lights because it is a visual experience Bertella (2013). Thereby, the images used by the DMO and stakeholders are part of the brand promise and, therefore, part of influencing the expectations of tourists. However, Goossens (1995) states that by relying heavily on images in branding and marketing it can dull the tourists' imagination. This makes the tourists unable to imagine the experience in a different manner. In the case of the Northern lights brand Tromsø, this can result in tourists expecting to get the exactly visual experience that they see in the photographs. Nevertheless, this is not always the case with the Northern lights, which the statement by Takagi cooperates, *“They do ask because they see the fantastic pictures of Northern lights with all the different colors and maybe angels. We don't see Northern lights with the red, orange or purple every night”* (app.5). The quote shows that the images seen of the Northern lights are not a true representation of how the Northern lights can be seen every night.

4.2. Tourists' expectations of the Northern lights experience

The aim of this section is to investigate the expectations that tourists have of a Northern lights experience and specifically the experience to be had at the destination of Tromsø.

4.2.1. Image of the Northern lights brand Tromsø

The brand image of the destination or experience is, according to Wheeler et al. (2011), not only determined based on the values and identity of the brand as it is communicated by the destination. It is also developed based on information that tourists get from other sources.

"I went to their website, but I didn't deeply research. I knew people that had already come here, I asked them a lot about here, for tips, and if it was nice. I googled it just a little to see which is better, Tromsø or Iceland to see the Northern lights. This was probably just it" (app.11).

This quote by Bruna demonstrates that although she had used the VisitTromsø website as a source of information, she also relied on word-of-mouth from people within her personal network to collect information about the experience. The image she had of the destination is thus organic because she is not only basing her image on information targeted at tourists (Hübner, 2009). According to del Bosque et al. (2009), the manner in which Bruna has developed her image of Tromsø, searching for different sources of information, is aimed at developing her expectations in a more reliable way. Bowen and Clarke (2009) stated that the internet is an important element in creating the tourist's image and this becomes apparent from Bruna's statement. From the interviews with both tourists in Tromsø and potential tourists, it became clear that the experiences of others whether known to them or not, influenced their image of an experience or destination. The potential tourist Susanne emphasized that she would look for what other people had written about their experiences in order to make a decision about where to travel to see the Northern lights or get advice on how to go about it. Nevertheless, she stated that the problem was actually to sort through all the information that was available, which is what Bowen and Clarke (2009) describes as one of the dangers when relying on information found on the internet. It can lead to disorientation of tourists' perceptions. Based on the interviews with tourists, the Northern lights brand Tromsø is seen differently by tourists. The reason why Jenny decided on Tromsø as the place to go see the Northern lights is explained in the following quote: *"So I was looking quite a lot on the internet about where to go and it always said Tromsø. If you look for Norway, it always says Tromsø. You think, 'Well that is the place to be'. So that's why Tromsø"* (app.10). Based on information found online, Jenny developed the image of Tromsø as the best place to get the experience of seeing the Northern lights, and that is what Govers and Go (2003) state is an element the internet brings to destination branding. Similarly, Ravi, Bruna and Grace shared similar

expectations of the Northern lights brand Tromsø being the best place to experience the Northern lights. These tourists have developed a clear image of the Northern lights brand Tromsø in regards to the characteristics of the destination, which according to Benur & Bramwell (2015), will have a strong influence on their expectations about their experience. However, concerning their image of the destination's offerings, the interviewees had different expectations. Bruna stated that her expectations of the destination's offerings were not how she had expected them. She explained her image of the destination in the following way.

"[...] everybody told me that it was a fishermen's village, and I thought of something very very small. I was actually impressed by the size of it. [...] I was also concerned with, what could I do here during daylight because the Northern lights are only at night. I found really that there is something to do. It is not boring and it is not only Northern lights. It is mainly, but it is not only Northern light" (app.10)

Her comment shows that she was expecting Tromsø to be a small town, which is very much in contrast to the destination wanted it to be seen as the Arctic capital. The Northern lights brand Tromsø in this case is mediated by others, which is in line with Campelo's (2015) argument that a brand is communicated by others entities than the DMO. Furthermore, Bruna's image is one reproduced by people she states have been to the city before, and therefore, her impression and expectations are shaped by other people's perception of their experience with the brand, which in this case did not seem to match with her own actual experience. This supports the argument of Ren and Blichfeldt (2011) that the image is not a fixed identity but negotiated and constructed. Furthermore, Grace stated that she had spent time reading about the destination before coming. *"I knew what Tromsø was, and I knew that it was a city and that I had to take tours out to see the Northern lights or drive out"* (app.10). Her image of the destination is more similar to that of the brand identity. It would seem that the interviewed tourists had different images of the Northern lights brand Tromsø and this relates to what the tourists expect from the experience with the Northern lights brand at a destination but also in general.

4.2.1.1. Expectations and understanding of the Northern lights brand experience

Based on the perspective of Grenier (2007), the image that tourists develop about a destination can be founded in both truth and myths. All of the potential tourists connected the experience of seeing the Northern lights with a sense of being in the wilderness and in remote locations, which is consistent with the Arctic being argued to be a place constituted of a mythical place of remoteness and wilderness. Eriko specifically states her interest in the North, in the following quote, *"I was very curious about going up north. I found Tromsø city, and it seemed kind of interesting, I googled it and then I saw beautiful mountains, landscape, fjords and then Northern lights of course"* (app.13). Her description is in line with

Grimwood's (2015) description of the Arctic as a place of rare beauty and nature. In her statement, it becomes clear that the images that she found online had an impact on her perception of the destination. Therefore, according to Govers and Go (2003), these played a part in forming an experience in her head about what she could expect in Tromsø. The influence of photographs is an important element in the formation of the image of the destination. It is argued by Molina and Esteban (2006) that the visual format is the main base for the destination image. It is what the tourists expect and this can be seen from the statement made by Jenny. *"Well I expected to see the Northern lights but like you see it in the pictures"* (app.10). This clearly shows how the use of images had shaped her mental image of the experience and thus her expectations, as is argued by Lee and Gretzel (2012). Tourists and potential tourists were expecting to see the Northern lights as they were portrayed in popular images found through online searches and marketing. It is consistent with Bertella's (2013) argument that tourists are searching for the images that they associate with the destination. It also the importance of images in the development of travel motivation for tourists exposed to such, as is argued in Ye and Tussyadiah (2011). Susanne described her expectations of seeing the lights as:

"Magnificent, colorful, but mostly that it is magnificent, because it is as big as it is. I have this idea that it is the entire sky, that the entire horizon is cover with it. This element of it being something that happens rarely and that it is rare that people get to see it. And then it is this color spectacle. I think this must be extremely exciting" (app.14).

Most of the interviewees expected seeing an array of colors and some described it as moving across the sky. The quote by Susanne both emphasizes the element of the experience being exciting to see something that nature has created but there is also another important aspect of the experience that becomes apparent. That is the element of the understanding of the phenomenon. Susanne's understanding of the Northern lights is evident when she said that it was a rare thing to see the Northern lights. This element of uncertainty about the characteristics of the phenomenon is evident in several of the interviews. Grace on the other hand stated, *"So I'm pretty sure that they are there most of the times only you can't see them because of the clouds. That is what I think or that is the impression that I got"* (app.10). The two quotes demonstrate how there is not a clear understanding among tourists what is important when attempting to see the Northern lights. Grace hints at the weather being a factor that needs to be taken into consideration because seeing the Northern lights is weather dependent. Most of the interviewees whether tourists or potential tourists are not aware of the challenges, which can affect the experience and in reality hinder them seeing the Northern lights.

4.2.1.2. Motivations

All of interviewed stakeholders were of the opinion that tourists come to Tromsø with the specific motivation of seeing the Northern lights, which becomes clear when Ramasco, WO expressed the following: *“Our clients. Yes, most of them just wants to see the Northern lights. It is once in a lifetime bucket list thing ‘I want to see the lights, and I can tick that off’”* (app.7). It is consistent with Grenier (2007) statements that this is often the case with Arctic destinations that the peaks of tourism coincides with natural phenomena. From the statement, the sense of accomplishment can also be detected, which is connected to the Arctic representing a rite of passage. This desire to experience something unique as the Northern lights can be said to be the drive that motives tourists, which is what Kozak (2002) describes as the push factor (in Bowen & Clarke, 2009). This motive is also visible in the statement by Ravi. *“So I had this in my mind, ‘it is quite different’. I should witness it, at least once in a lifetime”* (app.12). From the statement, it becomes evident that what had motivated him to travel to Tromsø was seeing the Northern lights. According to Giddens (2001), this experience would constitute an exotic experience for him, because it would be something completely different from his every day life experiences, as Ravi himself points to (in Grenier, 2007). The potential tourist Lene also talked about her motivation. *“Perhaps it is the mystery connected to it. That it is not a completely normal thing and that you need to be lucky to see it. I think it is the mysterious part of it, and that it moves and changes colors”* (app. 15). Her statement makes it clear that the exotic nature of the phenomenon and the experience is what makes her want to see it. It appeals to the sense of wonder and excitement that most of the interviewees express about experiencing seeing the Northern lights. However, the motivation is also created based on other sources of information portraying the Northern lights. Stine made the following comment when explaining where her interest in seeing the Northern lights.

“Well I think that it is something that you have seen in movies. It is something that is difficult to define, it just seems extremely exciting to go and see. And then I have a friend who put up a lot of picture (on Facebook) and it just seemed fantastic” (app.16).

The core element of the comment is that her motivation is based on different visual images also from people in her personal network. Her comment supports the argument by Jenkins (2003) that visual images constitute an important pulling power and can have the ability to affect tourists’ behavior. Furthermore, the quote demonstrates the importance of the circle of representation because Stine’s potential travel behavior could be said to be influenced by the projected images that she was exposed to on social media.

One element stood out regarding the potential tourists’ motivations of seeing the Northern lights and that is the focus of there being other experiences available at a destination.

“I would like to go to these places to experience nature and life more lively more raw. And the Northern lights is part of the process of the experience. So no. I would not expect, I would not travel to these places only for that” (app.17).

This statement by Ana-Maria demonstrates that the Northern lights are an important part of her motivation for potentially travelling to an Arctic destination. However, she makes it clear that her main motivation would be the experience of nature and she would look for something else in addition to the Northern lights. This is a sentiment that is shared by most of the potential tourists who state that they would choose a destination based on its other characteristics and offerings. This would be to ensure that they would feel confident that they would have something in addition to the Northern lights.

4.3. Brand promise living up to expectations

Based on the investigation, certain aspects arose that indicated that gaps might exist between tourists' expectations and the brand promise. These gaps could have implications for the satisfaction felt by tourists. The following section will be a discussion on the inconsistencies pertaining to the visual experience and understanding of the experience.

An aspect, which points to a gap between the brand promise and expectations relates to the visuals experience. Both tourists and potential tourists have clear expectations of what it means to see the Northern lights, which could be connected to the Northern lights being a recognizable icon for the Arctic. Tourists appear to be familiar with the images whether having traveled to the Arctic or not. This would support the notion that an icon can shape their expectations about the experience of this particular phenomenon (Pennington & Thomsen, 2010) without necessarily connecting it to a specific destination. Most of the interviewees explained having a particularly prominent visual image of what they were expecting the Northern lights to look like.

“I need to see the stripes in sky. It's all or nothing. It can't just be a little splash. It has to be like what you see in the images, it has to be all over the sky, because then there is Northern lights and otherwise then it is not completely Northern lights” (app.16).

This statement made by Stine demonstrates how if there were inconsistencies between her expectation and the actual visual experience would leave her feeling disappointed. According to Ryan (1997), the correspondence between her expectations and experience needs to match in order for her to have the satisfactory experience that she desires (in Tung & Richie, 2011). This perspective is shared by most of the interviewees. They see it as part of a larger experience but the peak experience as coined by Quan and

Wang (2004) is not properly fulfilled if the Northern lights are not seen in a particular way as imagined by the interviewees. Stine's statement shows that, as argued by Govers and Go (2003), the visuals that she has encountered have become more important than reality, which is also expressed by Pinsard. *"People seeing pictures of Northern lights and they are wanting to see absolutely the same and that is not necessary the same. That is something. But people ask usually, 'is it really like that?'"* (app.5). The destination acknowledges that tourists are expecting to see what the photographs illustrate. However, as can be seen from the quote and previous statements, it is not necessarily the same to see the Northern light in real life as it is seen in pictures. Yet, part of the brand promise is communicated through the visual photographs that shows these colorful pictures, which would leave a gap in the actual experience. The reason why the images do not always live up to expectations for that is explained by Sætre.

"They have seen all of these amazing photos. The majority of the images are over exposed. They are lighter than the original visual. [...] A lot of the images that you see are better than what you can see with your eyes, and some of the images are worse than what you can see with your eyes" (app.8).

The camera is able to capture light better thus photographs are clearer and brighter in color. From the interviews, it was apparent that both stakeholders and the DMO were aware of the challenges regarding visual images. The variety of images present on the VisitTromsø website, show different night landscapes but all with clear visible Northern lights (VisitTromsø, 2016c). However, there does not appear to be any clarification on the website concerning the nature of Northern lights photography and how the images can appear brighter and capture more than the human eye. The destination is of the opinion that the tourists are aware of the reality and that tourists have made themselves acquainted with the specific nature of the Northern lights and what they can expect from Tromsø. *"Most of the people or a lot of people, I think, think that the pictures they see are photo shopped to the unimaginable. Therefore, I think they have lower expectations on average"* (app.7). From Ramasco's point of view, the tourists are aware that images of the Northern lights may not portray the experience, but is of the opinion that tourists actually have lower expectations. Grace stated that she was aware before coming that seeing the Northern lights would not be the same as seeing it in photos and that she was happy about what she had seen. *"I'm quite happy. Or maybe I was expecting too little"* (app.10). Her statement highlights that her expectations were lower in the sense that she believed that it would perhaps not be possible to get the same experience that the images lead one to believe. During the AT observation, the Northern lights grew bright green, clearly visible with the naked eye for one a few moments. A woman from South Africa was occupied looking in the other direction while her partner and all of the members of the tour took pictures and told her to hurry and look.

However, she missed it and as she was looking at the pictures her partner had taken, she was amazed at what it looked like and was stunned that we had been able to see it with our naked eyes (app.19).

What becomes apparent from the following section is that there seems to be differences between the visual expectations of the experience and what the brand is attempting to communicate. However, from the interviews with tourists, it can be argued that the tourists were not all aware of the fact that the photographs were not always depicting the real experience. *“Yeah and I can see that the pictures can be completely different from reality. They really mislead you”* (app.11). Bruna expressed that her visual experience of seeing the Northern lights did not live up to her expectations. Furthermore, during the observation with TWC, there was one particular situation where the Northern lights were faintly visible in the sky yet more resembling meek green clouds. While observing this, a woman commented that this was not like seeing it in the pictures and her confusion with what she saw was evident (app.18).

The section above demonstrates that there seems to be some differences between the promise of the Northern lights brand Tromsø and tourists expectations related to the visual experience. This is essentially founded in the in understanding of the brand and the phenomenon. The promise of the Northern lights brand Tromsø is based on tourists understanding the challenging nature of the Northern lights experience and how seeing them is dependent on different factors that are not controlled by the DMO or the local stakeholders.

“Most of the guests are smart and know this that they cannot predict the weather. But we do have some incidents where people get really angry, and I understand that because they have been saving maybe most of their lives to go see the Northern lights and they come here, and it is like nothing” (app.6)

Sørensen from TWC explains that despite there being an understanding of the phenomenon, tourists might still leave feeling disappointed. It can depend on the motivation and desire they have of seeing the Northern lights. Similarly, one of the participants of an observation, a British woman, said that a tourist would still be disappointed if they were not able to see them even if they knew that this might not happen (app.18). It was apparent that the other tourists and potential tourists all demonstrated a lack of understanding of the nature of the Northern lights experience. Tourists would appear to have a variety of expectations about the promise of the Northern lights brand Tromsø. Some aspects related to the specific situation with the characteristics of the city and the activities available, where the DMO is promoting the city as the Arctic capital, yet Jenny and Bruna both had expectations of it being a smaller town, which influenced the way they had envisioned the experience of seeing the lights at the destination. The DMO and stakeholders expressed that they believed that tourists were to some extent informed about the Northern lights brand

Tromsø and the subsequent experience. However, the data showed inconsistencies between what tourists were expecting from the brand, indicating a gap between the understanding of the experience and the brand promise. The following section will investigate how the gaps between the visual experience and the understanding of the brand might influence tourists experiences in Tromsø.

4.4. The Northern lights experience in Tromsø

“[...] it was a pretty good night for the Northern lights. So the people on tours saw them really bright and we saw them kind of a little bit. It was not too bad. That was my first night and I was not really impressed with the Northern lights. [...] everyone said they would be green and they were just white, I was so upset. I thought that is was going to be a horrible trip. But I saw them, and I thought ‘Well I saw them, how lucky am I, whatever’ (said in sarcastic tone). Because I thought that it was really not that good. It wasn’t amazing at all” (app.10).

The quote by Jenny is taken from her account of her first night seeing the Northern lights in Tromsø. She had chosen to try to see the lights on her own and the statement shows that her experience did not live up to her expectations. She was searching for the same visual experience that she had seen in pictures with the visible bright colors, which is characteristic behavior for tourists according to Bertella (2013). When she did not experience this, she felt disappointed. Jenny later went on a Northern lights tour only to experience similar results where she again only saw the lights very briefly.

“So I was just sitting on the bus and I was really sad because I had paid so much [...] I was really really sad to be honest that I didn’t see them and I spend so much money and you don’t get any refunds” (app.10).

Her statements are an indication that her main expectation was seeing the Northern lights and only this would make for a satisfying experience in her opinion. Her basis for judging satisfaction is what Alegre and Garau (2010) would characterize as one-dimensional, where only seeing the Northern lights would give her a sense of satisfaction in the experience. However, Jenny did contemplate going back to Tromsø again. This indicates that her impression with the experience was not dissatisfactory to the extent that she would not return.

The interview with Ravi brings an interesting aspect to the discussion. He had participated in the same tour along with Jenny. Although he expressed that he was perhaps only 20-30 % satisfied with his experience seeing the Northern lights, he described it as an *“awesome experience”* and *“it was magical”* (app.12).

“So even though I was not able to see the aurora in its maximum it was a good experience, because you had a long dream of 15 years and you are coming here and you are getting disappointed a bit. That is also an experience” (app.12).

Despite not seeing the Northern lights in the way that he had imaged, he still considered the experience valuable to him, yet not completely satisfying. This would seem consistent with tourists’ ability to adapt to the situation, where the expectations of the trip are overridden by the actual experience as described by Bowen and Clarke (2009). Ravi turned the aspect of not seeing the Northern lights at its strongest, which he also to some extent expressed as a failure, into what Cutler and Carmichael (2010) refer to as a story of overcoming challenges connected to the experience.

4.4.1. Individual experience

Comparing experiences from two different tourists’ perspectives is a clear indication of how the experience is not interpreted or understood in the same way by two individuals. This is connected to Mossberg’s (2007) view that the tourist experience is created in the minds of the tourists. Jenny and Ravi are individuals with different pre-understandings and expectations of the experience. Furthermore, it is also related to Askehave and Norlyk’s (2006) argument that Jenny and Ravi will have different cultural and subjective identities that play a part in how they individually translated the experience. Jenny and Ravi had different expectations going into the experience. Ravi seemed to have a more accurate understanding of the Northern lights phenomenon. He was informed about the science that lies behind the lights and he understood the importance of weather conditions. This could have affected him in the sense that his expectations of what the experience would look like were more attuned to the characteristics of the actual experience. Ravi had been dreaming of seeing the Northern lights for 15 years. Therefore, it can be argued that he was highly motivated and emotionally invested in the experience. According to Alegre and Garau (2010), it could mean that Ravi was inclined to rate the experience in a more positive way. On the other hand, Jenny was also motivated to see the Northern lights, but her expectations of the Northern lights brand Tromsø was not consistent with the characteristics of the actual brand. Jenny had shaped her expectations of the experience around a brand image that did not match its identity, therefore, the brand worked counterproductively. According to Ashworth et al. (2015), the brand works to increase the satisfaction by providing a story for tourists to build their experience around. Yet, it would seem that in Jenny’s case, the story she had built her experience around did not correspond to reality. Her image was more similar to the perception of an Arctic destination as a place of nature and remoteness, which is how the Arctic is characteristically promoted (Hall & Saarinen, 2010). However, the Northern lights brand Tromsø focuses on the aspect of the Arctic capital, which does contain the elements of closeness to nature but also the element of a city experience.

Jenny's perception can be argued to be reliant on myths of the Arctic, which are described by Johnston (2011), as embodying the last great wilderness experience.

4.4.2. Setting

Jenny and Ravi were subject to the same physical factors and setting, yet, they did not perceive the experience in the same way. This clearly shows how the destination is a scene in which tourists can experience, yet the tourists are not simple elements but also responsible for co-creation the experience as argued by Mossberg (2007). The two had very different perceptions of that particular shared experience, which could indicate that the state of mind of the tourist is essential in order to lay the basis for the good experience. As previously mentioned, Jenny had attempted to see the Northern lights before going on the tour, during which time she had seen the Northern lights but not as she had envisioned. She had not been impressed with the Northern lights and she approached the tour with a certain sense of apprehension. This is connected to the specific state of mind that she was in when initiating the tour, which could have affected the experience that she described.

The tour that provided the frame for Jenny and Ravi's experience was a tour with a large. The setting as a bus tour is part of created the context in which the tourists' experiences take place. According to Lindberg et al. (2014), tourists interpret the physical context in different ways, which also became apparent from the interviews as well as the various observations. This could be related to the importance of the other participants. The impression the researcher had from the observations was that from the smaller mini-van tour tourists had a more intimate experience, which seemed to give the impression of receiving a more valuable experience. It is connected to Mossberg's (2007) argument that different products can enhance the sense of community to which the tourists belong. By engaging in a tour with a smaller number of other tourists, it would seem that the participants form a stronger sense of community, which is part of enhancing the experience. Other tourists have an essential effect on the experience, because as stated by Mossberg (2007), the service encounter takes place in the presence of others. During the tour with AGS (app.20), the effect of a negative attitude of another participant was observed. After having left the first location on the tour with no luck seeing the Northern lights, the big tour bus drove to a different location. While standing outside waiting in minus 15 temperatures, a German participant, part of a larger group of people, was pacing back and forth to keep warm and was looking up at the dark sky, which showed no signs of the Northern lights. After a while, the participant looked at the members of his group and firmly said, "see you later" and walked demonstratively back to the bus. His leaving created a ripple effect because another couple from Australia join him (app.20).

4.4.3. Guidance

Besides other tourists influencing the experience, another essential element for creating the experience is the guide. *“I could say that I was really lucky that I had a guide like him. He told so much stories. It was a small van tour so I actually joined two days in a row with him because I really liked the tour”*(app.13). Eriko’s statement clearly shows how the guide had an essential role in her experience and hence satisfaction of the experience. According to Arnould and Price (1993), her experience was extraordinary and this is because of the bond that formed between Eriko and the guide (in Mossberg, 2007). In the case of Northern lights tours, the guide is responsible for creating the experience. This also entails providing the tourists with the right expectations of the experience.

“My guide was really nice but he made it sound from the start like we wouldn’t see it. He would tell us where we would go and I really liked that. [...] But if he would just show a map for where we were going, where we were heading that would be really nice. What I didn’t like was from the first start like, ‘It is going to be very difficult today, the clouds are really thick. Maybe we will see them, maybe we are lucky’. He kept saying that. So my expectations were like for the first 10 min, ‘Why did we go on this tour then if there is so little chance?’”(app.10).

From Jenny’s point of view, the way the guide communicated the expectations of the trip had her feeling disappointed before the trip had even begun. This attests to how the guide’s way of communication the experience is of great importance as argued by Mossberg (2007). At the beginning of the AT observation, the guide started out with information the tourists about that night’s weather conditions, the structure and different elements of the tour (app.19). By providing information, the guide helped the tourists imagine the experience before starting the tour, which according to Reisinger and Steiner (2006) helped the tourists to understand the upcoming tour. During the observation, the participants had a conversation about the importance of the guide. A couple from South Africa was particularly adamant that it made their experience better when they went on a tour with a guide who has a passion for nature and sharing the experience with others. They had been very impressed with their guide because they could feel his passion and that made the experience worthwhile for them (app.19). Therefore, it can be argued that the guide is also part of influencing the tourists’ willingness to be co-producers of the experiences, which is a quality that Mossberg (2007) attributes to other tourists. That is because when the guide is interacting with tourists and working to get them engaged in activities, the guide is creating a relationship with the participants. From all of the observations, one particular element was observed: the guide’s role of providing information during the tours. While on the observations with especially AT and AGS, it became clear that the tourists who seemed to be the most invested and motivated to see the Northern lights would also be those who expressed the most frustration and discouragement. An Australian couple had come a long way to see the Northern lights

because that was the childhood dream of the man in particular. As time went by, he became more frustrated and he sought out the guide to ask questions (app.20). The guides would use information about the Northern lights and science to explain what was happening at the time. According to Reisinger and Steiner (2006), this is the guides interpreting the experience for the tourists. They are helping the tourists understand the experience by providing them with information. Thereby, they are essential to the experience, especially in this case where the peak experience of the tour is to see something, which might turn out to not be impossible.

4.4.4. Satisfaction

The observation with AT resulted in a very limited show of Northern lights. It was possible to see a few streaks of light with low color intensity (app.19). The participant Bruna was interviewed the day after the tour. *“I found that pretty good actually because it was not only about the Northern lights and the landscape was pretty beautiful”* (app.11). In her statement, Bruna explained that the tour had incorporated different elements, which had enriched her experience. These elements can be seen as supporting experiences as defined by Quan and Wang (2004). She talked about the experience of going snowshoeing and having a meal cooked over a campfire. The peak experiences had not completely lived up to her expectations as she stated, *“We saw a little. I still wanted to see more”* (app.11). From Bruna’s experience, the importance of the balance between peak and supporting experience can be seen, which in this case demonstrates that the satisfaction of her experience was made up of a combination of the different types of experience as it is also argued by Quan and Wang (2004). Bruna had high expectations of seeing the Northern lights but she was able to find compensatory elements to her experience, ensuring that she still had an enjoyable experience. Furthermore, it supports their argument that the supporting experiences may be interchangeable with the peak experience, which seems to be case in this instance. For Bruna, it could be argued that because the Northern lights were not matching up to her expectations, she focused on the supporting elements to ensure the success of her tour. However, the supporting experiences also become important when the peak experience is fulfilled.

“A little bit before 20:00 and then the show started immediately after. Then it just was just growing and growing non-stop. [...]it was just amazing. But it was just too much just non-stop, and everyone were so excited in the beginning and then they were like ‘yeah, yeah, okay’ (expressing boredom)” (app.13).

Eriko explained in her interview that during one of her tours they had been successful to the extent that the other tourists had started to go back to the bus by themselves after about two hours. Even getting the peak experience would not seem to keep the tourists entertained for the duration of the trip. She explained that under these circumstances the cultural element had been an important supporting experience. *“This Lavvu*

was owned but Sami reindeer herders. It was pretty nice. They had the fire outside the Lavvu as well as inside” (app.13). It indicates that the experience is intertwined by many elements and not simply relying on the peak experience.

The nature of this investigation allowed the researcher of thesis to gain insight into perspectives of tourists during different stages of their experience. Having this insight gave an indication of how the experience is initially experienced and then interpreted later in the process. The tourist Bruna participated (referred to as the Brazilian woman in app.19) in the AT observation and she was interviewed the next day about her experience. Comparing the two different stages of her experience provided some essential insights into the nature of the tourist experience at Tromsø.

During the observation, Bruna mentioned having seen the Northern lights on a different tour but explained that she did not feel like she had seen it at all (app.19). The Northern lights were visible during the evening of the AT observation but were faint and hard to distinguish. As the Northern lights had disappeared and the guide started encouraging the participants to do different activities, Bruna expressed that she now felt satisfied that she had seen them (app.19). During the interview the next day, she states about the first tour, *“I saw a little bit”* (app.11) and similarly described what she saw during the AT observation as *“We saw a little. I still wanted to see more. But it was satisfying to see because that I wouldn’t have thought that I would be able to see something like this”* (app.11). Using the same descriptions of both sightings could indicate that when the first tour did not make her feel satisfied with her experience, then neither would the second due to their similarities. None of the tours provided her with the experience of seeing the Northern lights in accordance with her expectations, therefore, according to Tung and Richie (2011), this gap should result in Bruna feeling dissatisfied. However, this seemed not to be the case and her feeling satisfied with the experience could be a result of different factors. She previously stated that the AT tour had a focus on more than the peak experience of seeing the Northern lights. Feeling a sense of satisfaction after the second time seeing the Northern lights could be attributed to Cutler and Carmichael’s (2010) argument that she was adapting to the experience and created satisfaction from the supporting experiences of the trip.

However, her sense of satisfaction could also be related to her motivation for seeing the Northern lights. *“And I really really wanted to come here since I left Brazil. I just wouldn’t like to go back without coming here, even if I didn’t see the lights as they can be, I’m not regretting coming here”* (app.11). In this quote, she is referring to seeing the Northern lights as an experience and not the destination of Tromsø in particular because she had mentioned in the interview that she had only recently discovered Tromsø. It can be said that her motivation was seeing the Northern lights in the Arctic. This would provide her with an experience that she would only be able to experience in the Arctic, which is, according to Hall and Saarinen (2010), the main driver behind the desire to go to the Arctic. According to Grenier (2007), this is the kind of

experience that the Arctic offers, because of its unique environment and features such as the Northern lights. In Bruna's mind, seeing the Northern lights would give her a sense of accomplishment and redefine her identity as someone who has seen the Northern lights. Similarly, Susanne explained her motivation for wanting to see the lights as "[...]you want to be part of the club" (app.14). The way the desire and motivation is explained by Susanne could perhaps also be said to apply to Bruna. This desire for identity creation is connected to what Kelley and Michela (1980) refer to as a motivational bias (Bowen & Clarke, 2009). For Bruna, her motivation could be said to make her bias thus evaluating the experience more positively as argued by Bowen and Clarke (2009). The emotions she has invested into the experience could have influenced her perception of the experience as argued by Cutler and Carmichael (2010).

"I was really really scared – first off I booked the trip that we made yesterday, Saturday and then I got scared that I wouldn't see the lights and then I booked the dogsledding for today, because it is at night too. And then I was still scared" (app.11).

The strong emotional attachment to the experience is expressed in the quote. Furthermore, her evaluation of the experience in a more positive manner could be connected to the motivation for self-protection. This is because she is invested in the experience to the point where it would leave her very disappointed and with a sense of failure, because she not able have this enriching experience that would further develop her identity.

4.5. Success in Tromsø?

It was noticeable that there were inconsistencies regarding the visual experience connected to the Northern lights as well as the understanding of the Northern lights brand Tromsø. The reality is that the Northern lights are not always visible in the way that tourists expect. Therefore, the expectations of the tourists in Tromsø and on the observations were not always met. Regarding the nature of the city itself, the DMO is marketing Tromsø as the Arctic capital with many activities, facilities and amenities. However, the destination image perceived by the different tourists showed that some were aware of this feature of the destination yet others had very different images of Tromsø. Because of the existence of these inconsistencies between the expectations and the brand promise, satisfaction would not be achieved by tourists, according to Ye and Tussyadiah (2011). However, the investigation into the experience in Tromsø revealed that although the tourists' expectations were not always fulfilled, tourists' evaluation of their experiences were not characterized by dissatisfaction overall. This would indicate that the Northern lights brand Tromsø have different aspects connected to it that would make the experience be perceived as

satisfactory. It also supports the notion that the concept of satisfaction is not simply based on whether expectations and performance match as argued by Alegre and Garau (2010).

As discussed earlier, the role of the guide in understanding of the Northern lights experience is crucial for the success of the tour, whether the lights are visible or not. Seeing the Northern lights is an experience that is surrounded by uncertainty and intangibility because of the nature of the experience. What came apparent was that the guides in Tromsø appear to provide the tourists with an understanding of the experience, which according to Arnould and Price (1993) results in them creating a valuable relationship with the tourists (in Mossberg, 2007). Furthermore, the guides can be said to bridge the gap between the expectations and the experience by providing tourists with information and interpretation of the experience.

“The best thing about that trip, I don’t remember his name [...] he was explaining things in a very good manner. I like it a lot. [...] he was telling about the facts in a fact way. Not like blabber and with the details. He was talking about the Northern lights, how it was happening and the relation with the sun and everything. He talked about the myths about the Northern light. And he was talking about Roald Amundsen and the expeditions and he was talking about how to capture it with the cameras. It was quite nice. I really liked him. Trust me, if I’m coming to Tromsø the next time, I am really going to go with him” (app.12).

The guide was clearly a contributing factor in Ravi’s experience. The way the guide provided information about the experience made it more holistic. The guide acted in a way that made the experience and the location more understandable to Ravi, as argued by Reisinger and Steiner (2006). The guide functions as the storyteller as argued in Mossberg (2007), providing the tourists with the stage of the Arctic and its characteristics setting the scene for their Arctic adventure. The guides in Tromsø each provide this to the tourists during the tour, which according to Pine and Gilmore (2002), turns the service of driving tourists into the wilderness in Tromsø or take them dogsledding into an experience of a lifetime (in Mossberg, 2007).

Another key element that emerged from the data regarding satisfaction of the tourists’ experiences with the Northern lights brand Tromsø, is that although the peak experience of seeing the Northern lights does not live up to the expectations, the brand is offering supporting experiences that make the experience satisfying in the end. The South African couple who participated in the AT tour were observed expressing their satisfaction with experience to the tour guide as the participants were standing around the campfire. They told the guide that the tour had exceeded their expectations because of all attention paid to the participants on the tour and the extra elements they got besides seeing the Northern lights. They are very enthusiastic about the experiences they got and the information and stories that the guide provided them with (app.19).

The experience of seeing the Northern lights in Tromsø can be characterized as a performance factor according to Alegre and Garau (2010) because it can result in both satisfaction if seen but also dissatisfaction if it is not seen. However, the DMO is also focused on the brand encompassing more elements especially those connected to an Arctic experience and city experience. It became clear that some of the interviewed tourists for example Bruna were pleasantly surprised with the different products available in Tromsø. By providing the tourists with other Arctic related experience as supporting experiences, the experience is perceived to be more satisfying. This is consistent with Grenier's (2007) argument that the elements of Arctic tourism are attracting much interest amongst tourists, which is also the case in Tromsø. The supporting experiences in Tromsø would appear increase tourists satisfaction in connection with the peak experience, which is also argued by Quan and Wang (2004). That is also consistent with the perspective that was expressed in the interviews with the potential tourists.

"Of course I would be disappointed, but that is also why I would ensure that there would be something that I could replace that with. Or something else that I would be able to see that the location instead, and then be able to say that well I have seen something else" (app.14).

Susanne expressed that if she would not be able to see the Northern lights then it would be important to have other elements to create her experience around. Her comment also illustrates tourists' ability to adapt and find elements that can compensate and make an enjoyable experience, based on their type of expectations as argued by Ryan (1994, in Quan & Wang, 2004). This could be attributed to tourists' perceiving their experience in Tromsø as satisfactory, because their expectations are that they have other opportunities in case the Northern lights are not to be seen. This is related to the expectations that the tourists have of the overall brand experience at the destination.

Another element of the brand experience is also related to the expectations that tourists have, but it is closer related to the brand promise of the individual tour operators. During the TWC observation, some of the tourists going on the dogsledding tour in the evening had clear expectations about the nature of this experience, which became apparent when a conversation was observed between some of the participants. The conversation took place between a British couple and an American couple and it revealed that they were expecting only dogsledding. Seeing the Northern lights would be an added bonus but not part of their expectations (app.18). Although marked by VisitTromsø as a Northern lights experience, clear expectations about the nature of the experience would seemed to have formed in the minds of the participants. The product brand of the TWC have managed to create realistic expectations of the experience, which is an important factor for the development of the brand according to Hall et al. (2009). The individual brand products form part of the destination brand, therefore, it can be argued that if the individual products develop a consistent brand then this would reflect on the destination brand as well. According to Hudson

and Richie (2009), this is because it is the local operators who are delivering the brand promise. The DMO has developed different categories on their website, which aims to clarify the concept of the Northern lights experience. *"There is actually three concepts: Northern lights on your own, how you do that. And the guided tours: Northern lights chase and Northern lights experience which are quite different"* (app.5). As Pinsard expressed, the Northern lights products are divided into different categories. This approach has been chosen in order to help tourists plan their experience and thereby their expectations of the various tours.

It would appear that the experiences tourists have with Northern lights brand Tromsø are leaving them feeling satisfied. The section demonstrates that despite the peak experience i.e. seeing the Northern lights does not always live up to expectations, the destination provides tourists with an understanding of the experience as well as other supporting experiences that can be perceived as compensation. However, based on the complex nature of the tourist experience and satisfaction, other factors than those present at the destination can influence the perceived satisfaction. Perhaps the most essential factor has already been touched upon. Because the experience is based on the phenomenon of the Northern lights, which is an iconic attraction of the Arctic, the base for the experience is the motivation to see this phenomenon. According to Buhalis (2000), the unique and exotic element of seeing the Northern lights can characterize the experience as a once in a lifetime experience for many people. Furthermore, the expensive nature of Arctic tourist destinations is another factor to be considered. According to Müller and Jansson (2007), the price is often overcome by the uniqueness of the experience and tourists strong desire to experience the exotic environment. What can be seen from this is that experiences at Arctic destinations are often seen as something that tourists will only do once or twice. This connects to the strong motivation and high expectations of the Northern lights experience. For the majority of the tourists, their experience with seeing the lights in Tromsø did not match their expectations, yet still they stated that they were satisfied with their experience and/or considered returning. According to Cutler and Carmichael (2010), this would indicate that the tourists adapted their expectations and created satisfaction from other influential factors. Yet, it could be argued that this process was not because of the offerings at the destination. However, it could be connected to the argument that when tourists are highly motivated they are more likely to remember the positive aspects whereas the more negative elements fade away (ibid.). In Bruna's case, this is illustrated by her stating that her experience was satisfying because of the supporting experiences during the tour and the different activities to offer her in Tromsø. It could be said that the positive element was getting to see the Northern lights and experiencing other things and the more negative aspect of not seeing the Northern lights as she had expected was forgotten. It can be argued to be Bruna's way of justifying the experience to herself and potentially others as argued by Smed (2009). Bruna focuses on the fact that she did get to see the Northern lights although not in the way that she had imagined. Therefore, she is portraying her

identity as someone who was lucky enough to see the lights, which was ultimately her goal. Her expectations seemed change because it was not possible for her to see the lights as she had expected because of practical circumstances. Similarly, it is argued by Kelley and Michela (1980) that tourists might be more inclined to portray their experience in a more positive way depending on their level of motivation (in Bowen & Clarke, 2009).

“Maybe if I came in the first time and I saw it at the full maximum strength then I don’t know, I’m talking from another perspective, but maybe I would feel like, ‘oh only this much?’ (disappointment). Maybe I would expect more maybe because of that. But still I have a dream of seeing it. Then maybe the next time if I see it in full strength then I will be even more happy” (app.12).

This statement by Ravi shows how he turns the negative element of not seeing the lights as he had expected them into something positive by saying this might also have made him disappointed and now he has something to look forward too. It could indicate that he is motivated to protect himself from the realization that he did not manage to get the experience that he had dreamed about for 15 years.

The conclusion of this section is that because of the intricate nature of the tourist experience, it can be difficult to say with certainty whether the features of the Northern lights brand Tromsø is the reason for tourists’ satisfaction. The reason why tourists evaluate their experience in a positive manner despite not having their expectations fulfilled may be connected to their motivation and desire to get that unique experience. The satisfaction expressed in the data may point to the tourists’ need to justify the experience to themselves and others. By portraying their experience as satisfying, despite not living up to expectations, might suggest that the experience was missing this key component but admitting to this would be a sign of failure.

4.6. Communicating the experience promise

The research demonstrates that although tourists expressed dissatisfaction about some elements not living up to expectations, they expressed overall satisfaction with their experience. A satisfactory experience should be seen to rely on a combination of different factors. It became apparent that the DMO and stakeholders considered the destination successful and tourists’ evaluations would seem to support this. However, as it was argued in the sub section above, the reason for tourists’ sense of satisfaction could be connected to the process of justification. The overall satisfaction expressed by tourists would indicate that the existence of gaps between the brand promise and expectations is not an issue that influences the

satisfaction they felt regarding the experience at present. However, that is not to say these gaps might not have consequences for the destination in the future. The destination would seem to be promoting what can be coined as an experience promise as opposed to a brand promise. This entails that the DMO is marketing a multi-faceted experience that is focused around the Northern lights experience in Tromsø. The aspect of the Arctic capital experience is also incorporated into the brand. Furthermore, there is a focus on branding the Tromsø in terms of the different activities that can also be had creating a holistic experience. From the investigation, it would seem that the DMO and stakeholders are making an effort to ensure that they brand an entire experience to be had at the destination. That is consistent with the desires expressed by the potential tourists.

Previous statements from tourists interviewed in Tromsø, expressed that the satisfaction they felt was based on Tromsø being able to provide an experience, which included many activities and having both a city feel as well as a close connection to nature. The promise of the Northern lights brand Tromsø seems to be communicated by the DMO and stakeholders in a manner that would create expectations of the experience that can be fulfilled, which according to Morgan et al. (2011) is the basis for a successful destination. Yet, it also became clear from both potential tourists and tourist interviews that they would primarily rely on the accounts of other people whether in their personal network or information found online to form their image of the experience.

Through the combination of data and theory, this investigation therefore argues the following. Due to Tromsø offering a Northern lights experience, which encompasses a multitude of brand identities, the tourists would according to the data collected, evaluate their experience as satisfactory, have a new understanding of the experience and knowledge of the visual experience that can be expected. Therefore, it can be assumed that this is the image of the experience tourists would then be likely to communicate to their network. Relaying the nature of the experience with this new understanding should then form the expectations and images that future tourists will have if they rely on these accounts of the experience as argued by Ren & Blichfeldt (2011). The promise of the Northern lights experience Tromsø would thus be molded by this communication and as stated by Warnaby and Medway (2015), value would be created through this process because of their active involvement. This would work towards tourists communicating more realistic expectations of the experience for future tourists.

However, there appears to be a challenge ingrained within the communication process, which lies in the apparent inconsistency between the destination promise and the tourists' expectations of the promise. For some reason, the information that some of the tourists in Tromsø based their experience on did not match what is communicated by the DMO and stakeholders. One aspect in particular became clear from the investigation. The experience of seeing the Northern lights did not match up to the expectations that tourists

had prior to seeing them. This is argued by the researcher to be the biggest gap that exists because the Northern lights is determined to be the main motivation for coming to Tromsø. This is both expressed by the DMO, stakeholders, interviewees and several of the observation participants. The visual experience is the core of the experience and expectations are based on photographs that tourists encounter online, from the marketing of the DMO and other official tourism communication organizations as well as other sources. However, one aspects that needs mentioning is that although it became clear from the interview with the DMO realizes that the photographs used to market the destination may not always be a proper representation of the experience. Yet, it is not mentioned on the VisitTromsø's website that there is an element of cameras being able to capture the colors more vividly than what the human eye is capable of.

It would then be presumable that the tourists having visited Tromsø would communicate their newfound knowledge of what the visual experience is actually like, which would then in turn influence the expectations of future tourists. However, what became clear from the interviews and observations was that although tourists were not completely satisfied with that element of the experience, a process of justification was initiated. As has been described earlier, the tourists' focus would switch from the satisfaction only being derived from seeing the Northern lights as represented in photographs to focus on the fact that they at least had the chance to see glimpses of it. The strong emotions attached to the desire of seeing the Northern lights will according to Alegre and Garau (2010) make tourists be more likely to rate the experience more positively, which can also be seen in the interview with especially Ravi and Bruna. Furthermore, because most of the tourists expressed having had great expectations of seeing the Northern lights, their emotional experience is amplified as argued by Picard (2012). The importance of having visual proof of the experience as is argued Jenkins (2003) can be seen in the following dialogue between two interviewees, Jenny and Grace (app.10).

G: [...] she thinks I saw them very bright.[...]

J: You saw it much brighter.

G: Because I saw the pictures that she took. [...]

J: But you pictures were brighter.

G: Yeah but.

J: I know that it doesn't look like the picture.

G: The pictures she had were very bright.

The two are talking about having been on separate tours and not having the same visual experience. From their conversation, it becomes clear that much importance is put on the photographs and how these portray the actual experience. From Jenny's point of view, Grace's experience was more successful because she

had better pictures to show for the experience. This demonstrates how according to Picard (2012) and Bertella (2013) tourists are searching for what they have seen prior to their travels. The researcher argues that the reason why the visual experience is still dominated by often unrealistic expectations is that tourists are more prone to communicate the best photographs to their network. According to Picard (2012), this can be seen as tourists making sense of their experience and is connected to their motivation bias for portraying a more positive presentation of the experience to others as well as to themselves (Kelley & Michela, 1980 in Bowen & Clarke, 2009). There is another reason for which it could be argued that the expectations of the Northern lights experience in general might not be a realistic representation of the experience. This is connected to the Northern lights being an iconic attraction of the Arctic. According to various researchers (Hall & Saarinen, 2010; Grenier. 2007), the Arctic and the subsequent experiences connected to it are surrounded by certain myths and stereotypes. These could in fact be said to be stronger than the image of the experience that is being communicated, which would mean that tourists are often basing their expectations of the experiencing of the phenomenon on information that supports this preconceived notion.

The aim of this section was to show that the Northern lights experience in Tromsø seemed to be characterized as successful in providing tourists with a satisfying experience. However, it also illustrates that there seems to be a discrepancy between what the destination is attempting to communicate and the expectations that tourists have. This being despite tourists feeling satisfied with their experience, which would assume that they communicate the realistic image of the experience. In turn, this would indicate that the expectations of the experience should be changing.

5. Conclusion

The Northern lights are characterized as unpredictable and dependent on different factors in order to be visible. It can thus be said to be a challenging product for a destination to have as part of their destination experience and brand, not to mention having it as the core of a brand. The Northern lights are considered the main reason why people travel to Tromsø.

The aim of the thesis was to investigate the Northern lights experience in Tromsø in terms of the satisfaction that tourists experience in relation to their experience. Their evaluation of the experience was compared to expectations of the experience and the promise of the Northern lights brand Tromsø and the possible gap existing between the two. The thesis took point of departure in the part of Tromsø's destination brand that focuses on the experience tourists can expect when travelling to Tromsø for the Northern lights. Therefore, the term Northern lights brand of Tromsø was used to describe the brand related to that particular experience.

Through interviews with the DMO VisitTromsø and local stakeholders, the promise of the Northern lights brand Tromsø was identified as having the best possible conditions for seeing the Northern lights. Furthermore, the destination will provide the experience of the Arctic capital and incredible nature with many activities connected to the Northern lights. The communication of the experience is especially marketed using photographs of the Northern lights taken at Tromsø. By interviewing tourists in Tromsø and potential tourists in Denmark, insight into tourists' expectations of the experience demonstrated that a clear image existed of the visual experience connected to the Northern lights. Tromsø was essentially equated with the experience of the Northern lights. However, the experience surrounding the overall destination was more unclear and not all interviewees had expectations consistent with the brand promise. Furthermore, the understanding of the Northern lights experience and how photographs may not be representable of the experience seemed less clear. For that reason, it was determined that some inconsistencies or gaps exist between the brand promise and expectations in terms of the visual experience and the understanding of the Northern lights experience in Tromsø.

It was then investigated if these gaps had an influence on the experience that tourists had at the destination through observations and interviews. What became clear was that, although the inconsistencies concerning the visual experience and the understanding of the experience were indeed present during the experience, this did not seem to generate irreversible dissatisfaction and disappointment in the experience. The investigation revealed that tourists were satisfied with their Northern lights experience in Tromsø, which was attributed to the variety of supporting elements that were offered during the tours and while at the destination. Furthermore, the guides' ability to help tourists understand and interpret the experience had a

positive effect on tourists' satisfaction. The overall conclusion was that although some elements did not live up to expectations, the experience was evaluated by tourists as valuable and satisfying to them. This would seemingly suggest that although some inconsistencies exist, these would not influence the satisfaction that tourists felt regarding their experience. However, the investigation demonstrated that perhaps the satisfaction expressed by tourists could be connected to motivational bias and justification. This is connected to tourists being highly motivated and feeling a strong emotional desire to experience this unique phenomenon and be able to check it off their list of travel goals. It was argued that because of this, tourists would be more inclined to emphasize the positive elements of the experience whereas the more negative elements would fade in the evaluation. Therefore, not having seen the Northern lights as the visual experience that had been expected was justified with the notion that they had seen it if only a little and now they had a better understanding of the unpredictable nature of the Northern lights.

The investigation concludes that the Northern lights experience in Tromsø leaves tourists feeling satisfied about their experience, because it is able to communicate a promise of a holistic experience that would create expectations that the experience can fulfill. These tales of satisfaction and understanding of the Northern lights experience in Tromsø would be expected to be communicated through word-of-mouth to future tourists. This would ensure that the expectations of the Northern lights experience in Tromsø would be the base for realistic expectations of the experience. Yet, based on the expectations expressed in the data collected, it would seem that this has yet to occur in the case of Tromsø. It would seem that expectations communicated by tourists are not consistent with those communicated by the DMO.

5.1. Future research

Due to the importance of the process of communication of the Northern light experience, a deeper insight into how the experience is marketed by other agencies involved in the branding of the Northern lights experience in Tromsø could prove beneficial. A content analysis of DMOs websites could be conducted for this purpose.

The concept of justification appeared to have a large impact on the satisfaction felt by tourists regarding the Northern lights experience. For that reason, it could prove beneficial to conduct further research with the purpose of understanding the role it has in the evaluation of the Northern lights experience in Tromsø as well as its influence on how the experience is communicated by tourist to their network.

6. References

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