



Identity Formation in Destination Branding – a perspective on Aalborg

A study concerned with the identity formation of Aalborg created through VisitAalborg from a marketing perspective, complimented by an analysis of outbound tourism in China on how to attract young Chinese tourists to Aalborg through the use of social media.

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Abstract

The following study is concerned with the identity-formation in a destination branding marketing perspective. The study revolves around the Destination Management Organisation (DMO), which in this case is VisitAalborg, and how this organisation markets itself. Furthermore, the study investigates whether it is beneficial to market a destination as having one clear image or whether adjusting the communications and hereby challenging simplicity in place branding is preferable in a highly digitalized world. The study also looks into how places are formed in terms of image formation and additionally how local people at destinations to a certain extent is an invaluable part of the destination. The study revolves around how VisitAalborg portrays itself in terms of marketing, especially on the social media platforms. But it is also concerned with how VisitAalborg builds brand equity among visitors order to attract young Chinese tourists. However, as it is the young Chinese people that the study intends to attract to Aalborg it needed to investigate how the Chinese travelling patterns look and how they have developed in order to fully understand the scale of the development within wanderlust among Chinese people. In order to recognize where the desired target group should be approached, an analysis of the Chinese social media platforms was carried out. This has helped the research in the understanding of the preferences and habits of the young Chinese tourists. In order to gain expert knowledge on the subject tourism in Aalborg an interview with a high-ranking member of staff from VisitAalborg was conducted, which provided the study with much information it would not have found elsewhere. Additionally a second interview with the CEO of the Chinese department of VisitDenmark was also conducted in order to gain expert knowledge on the Chinese travellers and the challenges and opportunities related to this. The study found that VisitAalborg branded Aalborg through a differentiated marketing strategy where they cater their destination branding to suit the segment they are trying to reach. The differentiated marketing strategy was also present on their social media accounts. The study furthermore found that the strongest traits of Aalborg as a destination were found to be intangible elements such as the way of life and the experiences beyond attractions. In order for VisitAalborg to attract young Chinese tourists to Aalborg, the study found that VisitAalborg should emphasize their marketing activities on Youku Tudou, as the social media platform was found to be the most suitable in order to showcase the positive traits of Aalborg.

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1. Introduction

The travel and tourism industry is widely known as being one of the largest industries in the world. According to numbers from Statista, the industry contributed with 7.6 trillion US dollars to the global economy in 2016 (Statista 2018). This number is continuously growing as more and more tourists seek to explore the world. The number of international tourist arrivals has increased from 528 million in 2005 to 1.19 billion in 2015, according to Statista (Statista 2018). The numbers of international arrivals are furthermore estimated to exceed 1.8 billion in 2030 (Statista 2018).

The travel and tourism industry is therefore a lucrative market, which many countries and cities wish to be a part of. This is also seen in the amount of expenditures on international tourism worldwide which has risen from \$772 billion in 2005 to \$1.362 trillion dollars in 2016 (Bank 2018). If looking at Denmark alone, it's amount of expenditures on international tourism has risen from \$6.85 billion in 2005 to \$9.15 billion in 2016. This underlines the importance and the rise of one of the largest industries in the world. But how do you attract tourists to your country in order to benefit from this large industry?

Attracting tourists has developed into almost being a science in itself. Aalborg University has designed a specific education for tourism purposes only (University 2018). Attracting tourists are therefore not considered an easy task, why companies are investing lots of resources and manpower into investigating strategies on how tourists can be lured into visiting your country/city.

This master thesis will be concerned with the identity making of Aalborg in relation to destination branding. The thesis will have its premises in how Aalborg can attract young Chinese tourists to Aalborg via online marketing, more specifically via social media. The master thesis will therefore not be concerned with the image formation of the Chinese tourists, and how they perceive the intended identity that VisitAalborg attempts to create, but merely an analysis on the obstacles and complexities of creating a proper destination identity

through social media. The master thesis will be centered around the following research questions.

1.1 Research question

In order for us to understand and correlate the attractiveness of Aalborg in terms of attracting tourists to the city, we find it interesting to investigate how VisitAalborg portray Aalborg through the interview with Jeppe Stricker and their online media channels. The online media channels we have investigated are Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and VisitAalborg.dk. The research questions are solely based on the identity-formation of VisitAalborg and do therefore not include an analysis of the image-formation among potential tourists. The terms differ in the sense that the identity of the destination is concerned with how the values and experiences of a destination are branded from a DMO perspective whereas the image of the city is concerned with how it is understood and interpreted from the tourist's point of view. Our first research question is therefore considered with:

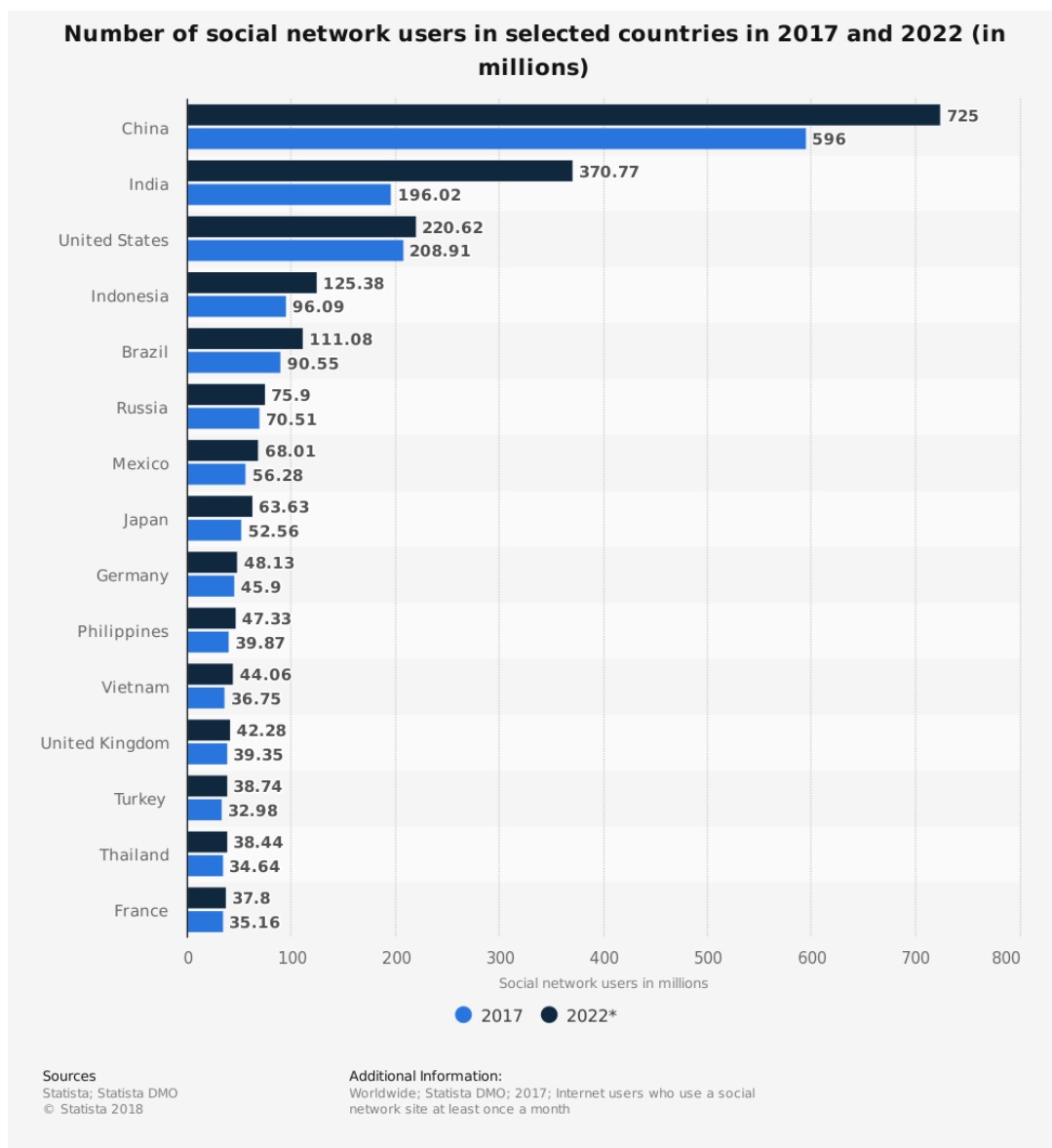
R1. How does VisitAalborg portray Aalborg in terms of attracting more tourists to the city?

We would hereafter like to investigate how the identity-formation of VisitAalborg correlates with attracting young Chinese tourists to the city. The segment of the young Chinese in China is the Generation Y from the tier 1 cities in China. The Generation Y was born in the 1980s and 1990s, and are typically well-educated and experienced travellers compared to the elder generations. They are furthermore heavily present on the Chinese social media platforms, which in this master thesis are WeChat, Weibo, Youku Tudou and QQ. The second research question of the master thesis furthermore aims to provide an analysis of the Chinese outbound tourism culture, which ultimately should aid in answering our second research question that is considered with:

R2. How does the identity that VisitAalborg portray correlate with attracting young Chinese tourists to the city and how does VisitAalborg approach this segment through the use of specific social media channels?

2. Clarification of social media usage in China

China has, according to Statista, the largest number of social network users of any country in the world with more than double the users compared to India, which have the second largest amount of network users of any country:



(Statista 2017)

It can therefore be a very lucrative market for organizations to operate their marketing activities on, as the social media platforms can provide a large reach in China.

In order to analyze and utilize social media in order to attract Chinese tourists, it is important to understand how the Chinese people use social media and to grasp the extent of the social media usage in China. Due to governmental censorship, also known as the Great Firewall of China, social media such as Facebook and Twitter are censored and thus unavailable for the inhabitants of China. The social media usage of China therefore differs from what we traditionally know in the West where we most commonly use Facebook and Twitter (Chaffey 2018). Instead, the Chinese people are using the Chinese pendants to Facebook and Twitter, which in some ways are the same but still differ in possibilities. This section will provide insight into the social media sites of China in order to provide an overview of the amount of Chinese using social media and furthermore to clarify how they use social media in China. It will cover a description of the 4 biggest and most important social media sites in China with the biggest user database of young Chinese, which therefore are the websites that we intend to focus on in our master thesis.

WeChat

WeChat started out as being the Chinese pendant to WhatsApp, which is an instant messaging app that facilitated communication between people in China. It is owned by Tencent who also owns other major social media websites such as QQ and Tencent Weibo (Tencent 2018). It is considered as the largest social media platform in China with over 900 million active users per day (Thai 2017). However, WeChat has grown into being much more than just an instant messaging app and now draws some parallels with Facebook. Users of WeChat can now share moments on their profiles. It is considered a mix of WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Skype, why it is considered as an all-in-one app. However, WeChat offers far more possibilities as you can also schedule a doctor's appointment via WeChat, pay your bills, shop, make investments or transfer money (Thai 2017).

WeChat is a very interesting platform, due to WeChat also offering the possibility to book flights or book restaurants, why you can combine your advertisements with a link directly to the site where you can book flights on. It furthermore allows companies to create official

accounts, much like already known from Facebook pages, which enables one-to-one personalized interaction between brands and users. Furthermore are you able to advertise via ad banners, KOL advertisements or advertisements in the moments section. Furthermore does the Chinese spend 70 minutes a day in average on WeChat (Thai 2017)

Weibo

Weibo is considered to be the Twitter of the Chinese (Tech 2017). Two different Weibo's exist; Sina Weibo and Tencent Weibo. Tencent Weibo is owned by the same company that owns WeChat, which is Tencent, whereas the Sina Corporation owns Sina Weibo. However, when talking about Weibo in China it is commonly known as being Sina Weibo, which has the largest amount of active daily users. Weibo is a micro-blogging platform, like Twitter, and it is the largest micro-blogging site in China. It is considered to be a combination of Twitter and Facebook where users are able to upload videos images while liking and sharing others posts.

Sina Weibo has 340 million monthly active users. The majority of those active users are young white-collar workers and the urban online population (Thai 2017). Whereas WeChat was more of an all-in-one app, Weibo is considered to be more of a social media app where users are able to discuss and commend things to other users. Chinese people tend to come to Weibo for information sharing and to engage with other users, why it creates a possibility for companies to increase the level of communication with their users, as companies can create an official account for their brand (Tech 2017).

QQ

QQ is another instant messaging app, which was developed for the sole purpose of being an instant messaging app. It is owned by Tencent and has the second largest user base of all the social media in China. It is connected with QZone, which is highly associated with Facebook. Whereas Weibo was considered as a micro-blogging platform, only allowing 140 keystrokes per message, QQ offers unlimited keystrokes.

As QQ is the second largest social media platform in China, a DMO has the possibility to reach a large audience. It is a giant market which allows companies to advertise in many different ways ranging from traditional ad banners to paid marketing programs created by Tencent.

The paid marketing program allows Tencent to create content for you and have them publish it on QZone as games, pop-up windows and so on (Thai 2017). QQ has 869 million users.

Youku Tudou

Youku is the top video sharing app in China and is the Chinese pendant to Youtube. It offers the same possibilities as Youtube where users can create and upload their own videos or watch others user's videos. The content of Youku ranges from user-generated content to professional videos similar to Youtube.

Youku has 580 million active users (Thai 2017). Companies are able to advertise themselves via traditional banner ads, in-stream advertisements, branded viral videos and pause ads much like is known from Youtube (Thai 2017). However, Youku also offers analytical tools to identify user information such as demographics and location thereby providing insight to their audience.

3. Literature review

3.1 Destination branding: The definition from Bill Baker

In order to understand how to conduct a successful promotional strategy for your destination, it is important to differ between the terms of branding and destination branding.

Branding is becoming increasingly important in the globalized world nowadays, where it can be hard for your product to stand out from the others. In order to do so, companies try to differ themselves through branding. Baker defines brands as:

- *“The totality of thoughts, feelings, and expectations that form a distinctive and compelling promise and enables people to easily choose one product or service over another”* (Baker 2012, 14)

This definition applies to all products ranging from dairy products to the branding of destinations. A brand is successful when, according to Baker, a consumer thinks of your brand without much thought, as a brand only exists in the mind of the consumers, rather than being a physical entity (Baker 2012). Baker furthermore states that there are two aspects of branding, as it is (1) determined by the value of the promises it makes and (2) determined by the promises that it keeps. A true brand must therefore make and keep a clear single-minded promised and consistently deliver on it in order to keep the promises and distinguish itself as a recognizable brand in the mind of the consumer you are attempting to reach through your branding.

There is, however, a distinction between traditional branding and destination branding. Whereas the traditional definition, which also applies to the general definition of branding that is cited above, is the overall general definition of branding, Baker distinguishes between the traditional branding and place branding as there are elements of place branding that does

not apply to traditional branding and vice versa. Baker furthermore distinguishes between a place brand which is:

- *“the totality of thoughts, feelings, and expectations that people hold about a location. It’s the reputation of the place and represents its distinctive promise of value, providing it with a competitive edge”* (Baker 2012, 48)

and place branding which:

- *“provides a framework and toolkit for differentiating, focusing and organizing around the location’s competitive and distinctive identity”* (Baker 2012, 48)

Within the definition there are specific essential elements that needs to be considered and included in the destination branding theory. Those elements are *identity*, *image* and *communication* (Baker 2012). The element of *identity* consists of factors such as the culture of the destination or elements such as the environment, society and history. Those are all elements that contribute to creating the identity of the destination and are elements that make the destination stand out from other destinations around the world. The element of *image* is concerned with how others perceive and understand the brand. It is an important element, as the marketer attempting to brand a destination needs to understand the standpoint of the audience he is trying to reach. Baker furthermore underlines the importance of coherence between the *brand identity* and the *brand image* as the perceived identity that a marketer attempts to create should also be how the recipient perceives the identity. If there is no coherence between those, a *reality problem* arises (Baker 2012). The last element is *communication*, which are considered to be the communicative channels that a marketer attempts to utilize in order to message the *identity* in a destination-branding context (Baker 2012).

To understand destination branding, it is important to distinguish the differences between traditional branding and destination branding. Although the objective can be considered as being similar, to potentially achieve an increase in sales, the method and elements within the two fields are different.

Baker are internationally recognized for his success destination marketing and place branding strategies for more than hundred cities, regions and nations worldwide (Total Destination Marketing 2018). His definition of destination branding, concerning that a place brand holds the totality of thoughts, feeling and expectations that people have towards a location, aligns well with the definition of the American Marketing Association, stating that

“Marketing designed to influence target audiences to behave in some positive manner with respect to the products or services associated with a specific place.” (Anholt 2010)

The distinction between destination branding and typical place branding is typically therefore the end product that the totality of thoughts, feelings and expectations towards a location provides the destination with a competitive edge and thereby promises value. The definition of totalities of thoughts and expectations are similar to that of other theoreticians such as Simon Anholt (Anholt 2010) and Morgan, Pritchard and Pride (Morgan, Pritchard and Pride 2004). The book for Morgan, Pritchard and Pride has used a similar addition to that of Bakers, where theorists such as David Gertner, Fiona Gilmore, Philip Kotler, Wally Olins, Graham and more all agree with the definition of destination branding being concerned with the totality of thoughts and expectations towards a destination. We have chosen to work with Bill Bakers definition of destination branding as we believe that Bakers definition is precise and provides thoughtful argumentation towards the difference between traditional branding and destination branding.

This project will only be concerned with the identity making of destination branding. Elements such as *brand image* will only be superficially discussed, as the main focus will be on the identity making of destination branding and the hurdles to overcome through destination branding on social media. However, it is important to include, to some extent, values such as *brand image* in order to understand the standpoint of the recipients. The *brand image* in this project will be based on the interview with Flemming Bruhn, the head of Beijing department of VisitDenmark, along with articles regarding the Chinese people's view on Denmark in general.

3.2 Ren & Blichfeldt – Challenging simplicity in Place Branding

As a mean of assisting us in our investigation of Aalborg as a destination we have taken a starting point in Ren & Blichfeldt's *"One Clear Image? Challenging Simplicity in Place Branding"*, which as the name implies deals with how destinations should be marketed and communicated to desired consumers. The literature deals with simplicity, which is the more traditional way of place branding, but also complexity, which is more nuanced and adaptable in terms of tailoring the marketing strategies, based on the preferences of the desired target group. The literature revolves around a study carried out in the Polish town of Zakopane and is concerned with how the Destination Management Organisation (DMO) wants the destination to be seen as, while brand image relates to how the consumer sees the brand. According to Blain et al. if the intended image communicated by the DMO is clear and simple, the communication will ease the vacation decision-making process for the individual (Blain, Stuart & Ritchie 2005).

However, Ren and Blichfeldt argues that in the digitalized world we are currently living in we are faced with impressions and marketing all the time, hence a more complex image of the brand is desired. They argue that most people within a destination will have a different perception of the destination which emphasizes the need for more complex marketing strategies where the communication is tailored to the specific target group.

Throughout the years numerous approaches of place branding strategies have been applied and tested as a mean of marketing. The objective is to turn places into tourist destinations and hereby making the destination attractive to foreign visitors (Morgan, Pritchard & Pride 2004). The organisation behind a destination's marketing organisation is also referred to as the DMO. The objective of the DMO is to make a certain destination stand out from other and hereby attracting more tourists to the destination. According to Temporal brand identity is the identity that the company or, in this context a destination, ideally wishes the brand/place to be seen as, while brand image covers how the brand is actually identified by the consumers hereof (Temporal 2002).

This means that a DMO, for example, if the communication strategy to target audiences is successful, and even though the brand identity and the brand image may not be exactly the

same, the brand identity will still have had a large influence on the image perceived. As a result hereof the most common idea within normative theory is that if the DMO successfully communicates its brand identity then the consumers are more inclined to see what the DMO desires. This means that creating one, clear image of the destination that will make tourists choose one desired location over another when deciding where to vacate. Ren and Blichfeldt challenges this thinking and looks into whether the developing of a single clear image is actually the only way to attract tourists or if there are other options, perhaps a more multi-faceted approach to place branding (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011).

Within marketing, product differentiation has always been crucial. As well as Liverpool wishes to differentiate from Manchester, Aalborg also wishes to differentiate itself from Aarhus. So product differentiation is good in terms of standing out from other products in the same area of business.

In terms of place branding this means that the DMO tries to provide an identity of the city where focus is on what this specific destination has to offer that other destinations do not have. This means focusing on the points of difference instead of focusing on the points of parity. Points of parity deals with the associations connected to the brand that are not unique to the brand, while points of difference focuses on where the specific brand/destination has similarities with the unique selling propositions (USP) and is defined as:

“Attributes or benefits that consumers strongly associate with a brand, positively evaluate, and believe that they could not find to the same extent with a competitive brand.” (K. L. Keller 2003, p. 132)

In relation to place branding, according to Keller’s statement, the destination must offer something extraordinary as beautiful beaches and tall buildings can be experienced more or less all over the world. Therefore the destination should possess points-of-differences from other similar tourists destinations.

On the contrary if a destination focuses on creating one *clear* image there must be correspondence between the identity that the DMO communicates and the image the

customers form of the brand. So the overall theme in question that is assessed here is to whether a focus on differentiation or simplicity or eventually a mix of both is the most appropriate way to brand Aalborg to successfully attract younger Chinese tourists. To achieve this the communication to the desired target group must remain unperturbed and controlled to make sure it is perceived as intended by the DMO (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011).

The communication established by the DMO to the receiver is transmitted through various channels of communication and this is where the appreciation of communicating “one clear identity” origins. As a clear identity, in a world where you are constantly exposed to marketing strategies and advertisements, can stand out and not just blend in among all other commercials and types of advertising as this will make the receiver of the message more inclined to remember the brand (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011). Accordingly this mantra was preferably applied as a catchy slogan or a tag-line for a brand and this view is according to Ren and Blichfeldt still predominant within destination branding (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011).

As the following quote from the journal describes:

“Blurred and/or multifaceted brand identities will thus not draw visitors to the place and in order to avoid this situation, traditional normative branding theories prescribe that destination images should be kept simple, emphasising a few strong points-of-difference. (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011, p. 419)”

According to this quote it is beneficial to focus on creating a clear image to attract customers and therefore the company should emphasize the most positive brand associations and points of difference to the target audience.

In terms of the organisational structure, DMO's might be a bit more challenged in terms of satisfying all stakeholders and board members as the branding audience does not solely consist of customers but also includes all stakeholders. Therefore, the branding may become an emotional bond between the DMO and the different stakeholders as well as the public (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011).

3.2.1 Clearness and Uniqueness of Images

Despite the literature within the field of destination branding being quite extensive – the exact meaning of “clear” in a destination context has not been defined. According to Blain et al. (Blain, Stuart & Ritchie 2005) destination branding is comprised of various marketing activities with the intent of creating an *image* that influences consumers’ decisions to come visit this particular destination as opposed to an alternative one (Blain, Stuart & Ritchie 2005)

The concept of identity and image is important to understand in order to grasp the subject we are dealing with, as both these terms are crucial for a DMO to manage. As we speak about destination identity or destination image, none of these are defined in plural which adds to the function that the branding should be clear and stick to “an” identity and thus creating “an” image. The reason for this being that the image ideally makes the product stand out from other products within the same category – a strategy that has been proven successful in the sale of tangible goods as this is the underlying premise of unique selling propositions (USP). This relates to keeping it simple and emphasizing simply one or only a few attributes of the product as this has proven to be a very viable strategy within the world of intangible goods, from which branding theory originates (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011)

However, tangible products like Coca-Cola or pizza is very unlike intangible products as destinations. One of the main differences being that a destination per se has more “layers” than a tangible product has. Furthermore, the image the visitors form of the destination is not exclusively shaped or created by marketing activities (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011). As referred to in the journal, referring to the image formation, Papadopoulos and Heslop states:

“(..) whether positive or negative, focused or diffuse, held widely or by only a few, developed deliberately or by default, and formed from education, the media, travel, immigration, product purchases, business experiences or any combination of sources, every place has an image
(Papadopoulos and Heslop 2002, p. 295).”

This relates to how tourists will have had an image of a destination already before the first time they visit it, whether the image perceived is positive or negative depends on the DMO’s ability to portray the desired identity of the destination. However the second time the visitor

comes to visit the destination one will be more inclined to experience the city through one's own perception and hereby creating a more personal relation to the destination.

Papadopoulos and Heslop also discusses the differences between place images and images of "simpler products" and end up agreeing that every place has an image in tourists minds. They also acknowledge that the information the recipient of the marketing receives comes from various sources regarding a certain place, and all these various sources will help the recipient in forming a singular image (Papadopoulos and Heslop 2002)

Communicating an identity, however, is not a one-way transmission. Rather is it a process that involves multiple actors, artefacts and technologies as well as individual and social competencies (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011). Furthermore, the identity that the brand wishes to portray can never be judged accessible nor understandable for all, despite being exposed to the same communication as the communication may be perceived different across cultures and continents and as a consequence hereof there can never be *one* image (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011). Therefore, the idea of having "one clear identity" must be challenged.

One of the researchers who has challenged the before mentioned approach is John Urry, who defines tourism marketing as:

"(...) a practice in which tourism marketers and operators provide tourists with a range of representational images of what places are like, and tourists begin their attempts to understand those places through the imaginary construction of reality contained within those texts (Goss 1993, p. 671)

By speaking of a range of representational images, Urry states that the identities that are presented are the identities chosen by the DMO, so he is aware that the simplified identities are emphasized through the branding, and that this is still the most common use of place branding, as he also believes that tourists need this kind of simplification in order to understand the place in question (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011).

3.2.2 Challenging Simplicity

In extension to the previous section, as mentioned DMO's in general hold an assumption that communicating one identity will increase the chance of the target group seeing and understanding the destination as the DMO desire them to. This relates to choices of purchase and consumption and in this context it is the tourists' habits and preferences. However, research within the receiver of the DMO's communication is scarce. As a result hereof Ren and Blichfeldt are not able to conclude whether tourists prefer simplified images when faced with advertising (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011).

Having a clear image has been considered a competitive advantage and it implies that tourist prefer simplicity and uniformity above diversity and complexity as the DMO should not confuse the tourist (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011). However, this seems to rely on the tourist as a mass tourist. People today travel quite frequently both on short-breaks and sometimes more than one extensive holiday per year. Many of these people are what Ren and Blichfeldt refers to as experienced travellers (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011). Therefore, the assumption that tourists should be confronted with simplified images and unique selling propositions in order to attract tourists seems a bit out-dated. (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011)

3.2.3 A new kind of tourist

As time has changed and the world has become more interconnected the consumers too have changed. The literature describes these tourists as the post-mass tourists. These tourists are furthermore described as searching for different tourism experiences within a postmodern world. Instead of searching for homogeneity and simplicity this group seeks complex destinations. This means that DMO's will have more opportunities of communicating several perspectives on what to experience at the destination to different target groups, instead of focusing on creating *one clear image*, that targets everyone (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011). Instead it should be seen as an opportunity to enrich and diversify the place branding, as this will also develop points-of-interest that differentiate themselves from other. This theory has inspired Ren and Blichfeldt because of the researchers' focus:

“(...) On the relational and performative nature of practises of everyday life and their stressing of the lack of singularity when exploring the enactments and multi-discursive orderings of objects or realities (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011, p. 423). “

In terms of destination branding this relates to the destination not having one fixed identity but rather as being constantly constructed, negotiated and enacted (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011). The idea of the Actor Network Theory is that the researcher can collect and apply data that is very diverse from what you otherwise would collect. The concept in short terms deals with all involved within the destination and how everyone within the destination, from the consumers to the food producers to the local residents, plays a part in and hereby become actors in relation to how the destination is constructed (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011).

The whole gist of the thing is to try and create a version of the destination that tourists wish to explore. Therefore, different ways of imagining and talking of the destination, both oral and written, assists in creating a *discourse* of the place in question (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011). In this context stakeholders also play a big part as they get the chance to have their say on the positives or traits that they believe should define the destination. This can be identified in various ways. An example is by looking at the DMO's written marketing both online and printed (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011). Observing *performances* of the local actors dealing with tourism will also assist one in the understanding of the DMO's desired identity (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011). Furthermore, how the stakeholders make use of the *materiality* available is seen through how the landscape, the infrastructure, regional/local food is developed which points to how the destination is constructed and communicated (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011).

Looking into these three aspects of the destination, *discourses*, *performances* and *materiality* should enable the researcher to understand the constant and on-going construction of the destination. All these aspects were not necessarily a part of a deliberate strategic act of destination branding. However, all these aspects somehow take part in the shaping of the destination, which briefly put means that the understanding of the destination is a result of an on-going, contingent and socio-material process (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011).

3.3 Actor Network Theory – Bruno Latour

Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, as a mean of looking into social networks and the actors within these in 1991, developed actor Network Theory also referred to as ANT. The theory has been developed further and updated since the original publication hence we have chosen a publication from 2005 as our primary source of information for this section.

When Latour explains about the belonging to a group he speaks of an ongoing process made up of uncertainty that happens within the individual. If we read the newspapers we will see that the newspaper has a central intuition of sociology that actors are made to fit to a group, and often more than one group (Latour 2005). However, as we read these articles and other pieces in the newspaper it seems that the real question is whether one grouping is more *preferable* than others (Latour 2005).

First Source of Uncertainty: No Group, Only Group Formation – deals with the actors within the destination and how the people involved become part of the destination.

ANT does not claim that the researcher will ever know whether society is made of individual calculative agents or of huge macro-actors, nor does it claim that since anything goes one can pick a favorite candidate as they please. Instead it actually claims that once the individuals have accustomed to the constantly shifting frames of reference, a grasp on how the social is generated as a relativist connection between frames of reference, which offers a more objective judgement than the settings suggested by common sense (Latour 2005).

Group formations also leave more traces than already established connections that, by definition might remain mute and invisible. If an ensemble is static then it is invisible and nothing can be said about it. Therefore, it generates no traces and no information whatsoever is produced. However, if it is visible then it is being performed and it will generate new data. The solution is to substitute the list of groupings composed of social aggregates with the list of the elements always present in controversies about groups (Latour 2005)

In order to delineate a group no matter if it is a brand new or a refreshing of an existing group you need a spokesperson to speak for the group's existence. No matter what group it is,

whether it is single mothers or dog-owners from Copenhagen, they need someone (a spokesperson) to describe and define who they are, what they should be and what they have been (Latour 2005).

Groups are neither silent nor static; on the contrary it is in fact a product of the constant uproar made by the many contradicting voices about what a group is. For example all groups have what Latour describes as a recruiting officer, and compares it to how a shepherd must lead his flock of sheep, there would not have been a flock without the shepherd, but he cannot do it without having his dog, his walking stick, numerous vaccination certificates, etc. Which goes to show that groups can be both very diverse but even more importantly that they are constructed by the actors (Latour 2005).

Groups exist of a rather significant entourage of group makers, group talkers, and group holders. Furthermore, it is always when comparing the group to other competing ties that any tie is emphasized. Therefore, it is important to recognize the anti-groups as well (Latour 2005). For observers this is very convenient as it means that the actors are constantly engaged in the business of mapping the social context in which they are placed (Latour 2005).

In terms of group delineation this is not only something the social scientists deal with, but also the actors themselves participate. In fact the actors do the sociology for the sociologists who learn from the actors what makes up their associations. Which is actually in opposition to the basic wisdom of critical sociologists (Latour 2005). For them, the actors do not understand the full picture and therefore they remain informants. In order for the actors to understand the context in which they are situated, and of which they just see a tiny part, while the social scientist sees the whole thing from a bird's eye view, the actors need to be taught that what the scientists are doing reflexively is something that is being done by the informants unwittingly (Latour 2005).

However, this is still doubtful as the little awareness that social scientist may gather is extracted from the reflexive group formation of those, who at this point of the inquiry, is being used like a parasite for the benefits of the researcher (Latour 2005). What passes for reflexivity in most social sciences is the sheer irrelevancy of questions raised by the analyst

about some actors' serious concerns, so as a rule it is much better to set up in a default position where the inquirer is always one reflexive loop *behind* those being studied (Latour 2005).

In terms of forming or distributing of groups the spokesperson will immediately seek for ways to *de-fine* them. Their boundaries are marked, delineated and rendered fixed and durable (Latour 2005). The following quotation from the book clearly indicates how the nature of a group is visible:

"Every group, no matter how small or how big, requires a limes, which is most convenient for the analyst as every group formation will be accompanied by the digging out of a wide range of features, mobilized to make the group boundary hold against the contradictory pressures of all the competing anti-groups that threaten to dissolve it" (Latour 2005, p. 33)

In extension hereof, among the spokespersons that make possible the durable definition of groups, what must be included is social scientists, social sciences, social statistics and social journalism. However, this is one of the significant differences between the two schools of sociology. For the sociologists of the social, sociology should strive to become a science in the traditional sense of a gaze directed to a world outside, which allows for a description somewhat independent of the groups being materialized by the actors (Latour 2005).

For the sociologists of associations, any study of any given group by any social scientist is part and parcel of what makes the group exist, last, decay or disappear. In the developed world we live in, there is no group that does not have at least some social science instrument attached to it. However, this is not due to inherent limitation of the discipline as sociologists as well as the actors are social members and may have difficulties in withdrawing themselves from their own social categories. Rather they are on par with the people they study, as they carry out the same job and participate in the same tasks of tracing social bonds despite applying different instruments for different professional callings (Latour 2005).

So although there is a difference in approach in the examples with the first one having the actors in one boat and the scholars in another, and the other example of having both scholars

and the actors in the same boat playing the same role, namely group formation. If the social is to be assembled all aspects need to be taken into account (Latour 2005).

There are infinite ways of defining a group as a finite and sure thing. You may appeal to tradition or law, you may entrench the boundary in 'nature' or associate it with 'blood and soil', make it a 'folk tradition' or sinking it into customs or habits (Latour 2005). On the contrary you may tie it to freedom, emancipation, fashion or history. But in the end it will have become unquestionable to an extent where it will be taken for granted and thus no longer producing any trace, spark or information, and hereby deeming this ensemble *out* of the social world – in terms of ANT – though it is now in the usual sense, a *bona fide* member of the social (Latour 2005).

As we, the researchers have not had sufficient resources to carry out this kind of study ourselves we find it important to stress that the reason we have chosen this theory is to show from a theoretical view how this theory should be applied as a mean of clarifying the culture at the destination in question, in this context Aalborg. The theory is applied in order to emphasize the dynamics that exists within a destination. Because of this we have also chosen to focus on how the group formation takes place within the destination, hence the elaborative explanation of the *First Source of Uncertainty*, which deals with the group formation.

The Actor Network Theory deals with the agency of non-humans. However, critics believe that properties such as intentionality fundamentally distinguish humans from animals and tangible items. The part we have dealt with is concerned with how the local people at destination sites participate in the experience that visitors may have when visiting the place. We have only dealt with the first part of the theory, that concerns with the group formation, as we believe that it is important to understand the local cultures embedded to the destination and the local people, or as the theory call them, the actors.

Other critics also argue that ANT implies that all actors are equally important in the network and others have criticized the theory as being too descriptive and not explanatory enough. We, however, believe that this theory is very fitting to serve the purpose intended, which is to

understand and describe the feeling that that these agents, intentionally or not is participating in creating.

Other chapters of ANT has not been included as it deals with different aspects of the ANT that are not as important to us as researchers hence a more in-depth explanation of these chapters will not be provided. As we have not carried out the study itself, and that the ANT functions as a theoretical tool rather than a complete study, we have only included the first chapter of the ANT concerning group formation.

3.4 Imagining places: Image Formation of Tourists and its Consequences for Destination Promotion by Anette Therkelsen

Anette Therkelsen in 2010 published her further development of her differentiated tourism theory, which she developed in 1999. Her theory of Image Formation of Tourists is based on her differentiated strategy of tourists seeking different experiences based on their cultural and social background (Therkelsen 2010). The theory argues that tourism destinations is a culture-bound product, which is highly influenced by the cultural background of the tourists along with general associations and meanings (Therkelsen 2010).

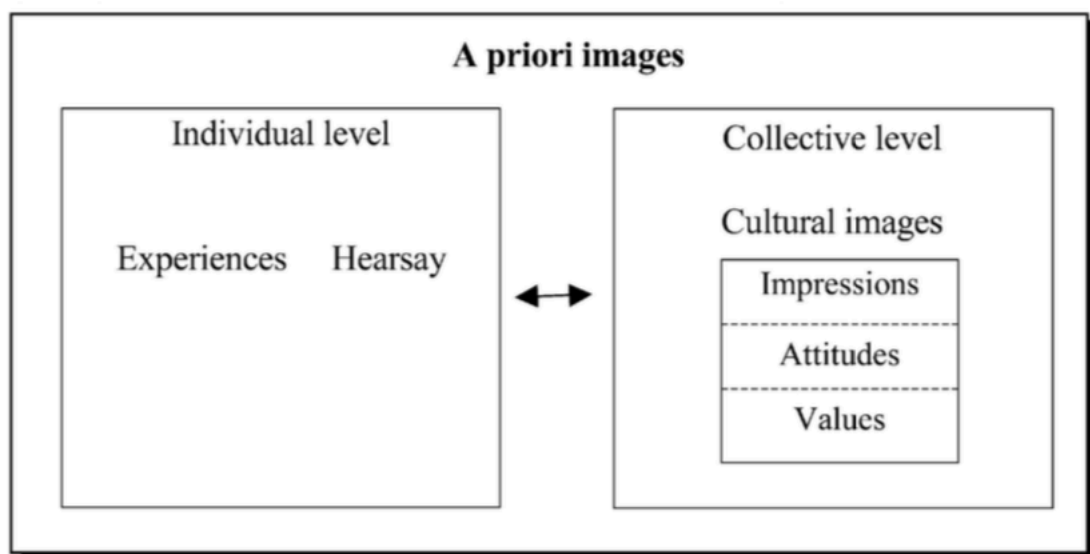
Her framework of Image Formation is based on a *glocal* approach of image formation, stating that it is essential for tourism destinations to be aware and tailor the frame of reference in which their promotional efforts are interpreted (Therkelsen 2010). That is due to her framework including cultural factors and furthermore includes that no person are the same hence different people will react to different promotional offers in different ways. A promotional strategy tailored for England might therefore not work in China, as there are cultural differences as to why the image formation of tourists from China and England will not be the same despite receiving identical promotional offers. Creating a standardized promotion strategy is therefore not beneficial for any locations trying to attract tourists. Tourists, aside from traditional consumers, do therefore not have a standardized need and frame of mind, according to Therkelsen as she cites Urry:

- “(...) tourism basically entails a search of what is extraordinary compared to one’s everyday life and environment” (Urry 1990, 11)

Therkelsen does, however, also cite that creating an image for a destination should not be based solely on the consumer pattern of the tourists you target your promotion strategy to, as the inherent resources of the destination also plays a role in the image formation. This underlines the *glocal* approach of Therkelsen, as her theory accounts for the cultural differences in a global world but also includes local factors such as the destination’s resources (Therkelsen 2010). There should therefore exist certain internationally, and not only culturally, bound elements in a promotional strategy of a destination as these are shaping the internationally shared meaning that the destination wishes to promote.

The differentiated promotional strategy should therefore tailor and adapt to the different cultural markets in order for the strategy to be potentially considered as a success. Even small details such as slogans, which in general will be characterized and created for international purposes, should be tailored to the different cultural markets, as tourists within different markets interpret the message differently, thereby avoiding a mismatch between the sender and the receiver.

In 1999, Therkelsen conceptualized the image formation of potential tourists as shown in the following image:



(Therkelsen 1999)

Where the individual level is based on personal experiences and hearsay of friends and relatives, it is difficult for the marketer to analyze and conclude anything based on those, according to Therkelsen (Therkelsen 1999). However, it is still a highly important factor, as the individual level is considered to be the WOM (Word of Mouth), which is essential in any viral and successful marketing campaign. However, analyzing on the individual level is difficult why the main focus of Therkelsen is on the collective level.

The collective level is based on a three-split structure based on cultural images. It should furthermore be understood, according to Therkelsen, as a hierarchy where the further one moves down towards *values*, the more subconscious and unchangeable it is. *Impressions* are “based on the actual events and actions in a given culture which transient and consequently over time may be forgotten by the image holder” (Therkelsen 2010, 141). *Impressions* may turn into *attitudes* if they become more permanent and reflective and deeply felt towards a place. *Attitudes* can be based on if an event occurs repeatedly and it agrees/disagrees with the norms and values of the image holder (Therkelsen 2010, 141). Contrary, *values* have an affective basis as they are unconsciously held within the collective level and are furthermore not subject to reflections. It is in relation with the Other and represents a taken-for-grantedness in relation to it. It is heavily based on the imagined Self, where the Other becomes the backdrop of which the self-identity is obtained and connected with emotional values. It is, according to Therkelsen, only “in cases when the other constitutes a signification alterity to the self that the value level is activated” (Therkelsen 2010, 141).

The three layers are not easily separated and are even somehow intertwined as one layer influences the other. An *impression* can, in time, become a value held in relation to the Other, but also the other way around where a value can influence an *attitude*. The new cultural images should therefore be understood as they are being incorporated into an existing meaning system in which they reflect. Therkelsen furthermore notices that a cultural image does not necessarily consist of all three layers. However, the more layers that are included in the cultural image, the stronger the image. If *values* also form a part, their cultural and image

and thereby the destination becomes a significant other to the image holder, and thereby a place that can be considered as a counterpart and something extraordinary to the cultural self.

The three layers are all-decisive in achieving a successful promotion strategy, and are all elements that should be considered and included when planning and executing a promotional strategy. More elements can be included in order to add meaning and value. An example hereof is, according to Therkelsen, utilizing well-known image components and mediating something that could be possibly unknown to the target audience. This well-known image should be placed within a well-known reference of the target audience in order to constitute a more nuanced and firm 'product' of the potential tourist (Therkelsen 2010).

In order to strategize the identity formation, it is important to understand how the image formation of potential tourists functions. This is important for the DMO's in order for them to understand and include elements that are important among new tourists in order to achieve the best results possible. Therkelsen developed her theory in 1999 and based her theory on the definition by Urry as previously cited in this chapter.

Her work challenges the standardized approach of theorists like Kragh and Djursaa, stating that a standardized approach would seem to be most palatable to marketers (Kragh and Djursaa 2001). Her theory furthermore challenges the perception of more classical theories of e.g. Levitt (1983) stating that people think they want locally adapted products but will instead choose cheaper standardized products (Therkelsen 2010). Instead, Therkelsen's theory of image formation among tourists has a larger emphasis on culture and the role that culture has in the image formation among tourists. Instead, Therkelsen has based her theory on theoreticians such as Douglas and Wind (1987) and Usunier (1993) who are concerned with differentiated marketing strategies. We have chosen to use Therkelsen's theory of image formation as it substantiates the challenge of Ren and Blichfeldt's discussion on whether having one clear image is profitable or not. Furthermore, since she conducted her theory in 1999, updated the theory so that it takes more present implications into account, so that her framework is to be considered as more up-to-date than more classic theoreticians such as Usunier.

3.5 Building Brand Equity – Kevin Lane Keller

The definition of brand equity according to Phil Kotler and Kevin Lane Keller in 2006 is described as *“a bridge between the marketing investments in the company’s products to create the brands and the customers’ brand knowledge* (Farjam and Hongyi 2015, p. 16).” In order to facilitate and understand the processes that are on-going when marketing it is important to understand how an organisation build brand equity among consumers. There are many ways of approaching marketing in order to build brand trust and brand resonance as for example David Aaker’s “Brand Equity Model” that also deals with brand equity. However, we believe that the six brand elements that Keller talks about in the literature is more relevant to us in terms of understanding how and if VisitAalborg apply their brand elements in terms of creating brand equity among consumers. We could very likely have used David Aaker’s Brand Equity Model in order to analyse on the brand equity created by the brand from a consumer-based view, however we found Keller’s theory more applicable to the current situation we are investigating.

As well as looking into the destination and the actors mentioned in Actor Network Theory it is also important to investigate how customers perceive the brand in question, in this context Aalborg. When people are exposed with a brand there are certain things that plays a role for the consumer when faced with your product. These different elements, often referred to as brand elements or brand identities, are the special trademarks that serve to identify and differentiate the brand. Examples hereof are the brand name, URL’s, logos, spokespeople, slogans, jingles, package, signage etc. (K. L. Keller 2013).

In terms of choosing the right brand elements it is important that the brand and the organisation behind has taken the six criteria for choosing brand elements into consideration. According to Keller the six criteria for choosing brand elements are as listed below:

1. Memorable
2. Meaningful
3. Likable
4. Transferable
5. Adaptable
6. Protectable

Source: (K. L. Keller 2013, p. 142)

Starting at the first element memorability, the most important thing is that the marketer achieves a high level of brand awareness. The goal is to gain attention and becoming recognisable to the consumers, therefore it is important that the consumers easily recognize the brand (Keller 2013). This can be done through a clever or memorable brand name, ideally having captured the key associations of the brand. Furthermore, in order to make the most of the brand name it should be easy to pronounce or spell, familiar and meaningful and at the same time different and distinctive (K. L. Keller 2013). Simplicity in the brand name reduces the effort consumers must make to comprehend and process the brand name hence it is easier to remember. In terms of familiarity and meaningfulness this relates to products or brand names that relates to other meanings either abstract or concrete as for example names of people, objects, animals, and inanimate objects already existent in the mind of the consumers (Keller 2013). While choosing a simple name may be beneficial in terms of describing the brand, having a distinctive name may make it easier for consumers to distinguish between brands (Keller 2013).

The second element meaningfulness deals with the general information of the product or service provided hereby becoming a descriptive mean as it assists in convincing the consumer to buy the product or service provided by the brand. This could for example be specific attributes or benefits that the brand provides, and should point to the points-of-difference between the brand in question and competing brands (Keller 2013).

The third element likability deals with how the brand is perceived. Whether customers find the brand element aesthetically appealing, both in terms of visual and verbal aspects. When a set of brand elements is memorable and likable customers will be more inclined not to

investigate the product, because the descriptive and persuasive elements have been carried out successfully. However, if the descriptive and persuasive elements are not sufficient for the customers, the brand behind must hope for creative marketing initiatives that can convince customers to invest in the product. As Keller states in the book:

“Often, the less concrete the possible product benefits are, the more important is the creative potential of the brand name and other brand elements to capture intangible characteristics of a brand” (K. L. Keller 2013, 143)

Moving on from the first three elements to the final three. Starting with transferability, which deals with measuring the extent of the brand elements for new products or in new markets for the brand. Generally a less specific name is easier to transfer across markets, hence brand elements are dependent on cultural and linguistic qualities of the brand elements (Keller 2013). Therefore, having a brand name that is easy to pronounce or in English as e.g. VisitAalborg, as the organisation does not have to deal with translating the brand name, which also clearly indicates the intentions of the organisation, namely to get people to visit Aalborg.

One could also argue that because transferability relates to how the image is perceived across borders that simplicity in some cases may be beneficial, however the brand logo can also be used as a mean of illustrating some of the attractions available at the destination. This will add more value to the brand as people that notice the brand logo may also take note of the illustrations and hereby become more intrigued by the brand than before when only faced with the brand name (Dyakovskaya 2017). According to Tony Hardy, CEO and founder of Canny-Creative which is a graphic design and web design agency, abstracting logos trigger curiosity with the people faced to it, and abstract logos furthermore provides the individual the freedom of interpretation meaning that the customer can form his/her own opinion of the brand based on the logo which is more intriguing than a plain text logo (Hardy 2018). Furthermore, having a unique logo will also make for a higher level of protect ability of the brand as it will be more difficult to copy (Hardy 2018).

The fifth element adaptability deals with how a brand adapts over time. As time go, consumers may change values and opinions or there may be a need for an update of brand

logo, brand name or even strategy in order for the brand to appear as modern and relevant (Keller 2013). As VisitAalborg presently only focuses on Germany and Scandinavia instead of utilizing the vast marketing opportunities available through social media platforms and potentially gaining access to people from countries all over the world, they are thereby missing out on adjusting their marketing program to specific customer groups. In this context it is very important that the marketer is very aware of national or regional customs that may need to be taken in to account before the communication is carried out. People today are also very selective in the information we choose to process and exactly because of that the brand logo should also to some extent add value to the customer (K.L. Keller 2013). This can be done with an appealing logo that looks aesthetically nice, or adds value through illustrations as mentioned in the paragraph about transferability above.

The sixth and final element deals with the protect ability of the brand both legally and in terms of competition. Marketers should choose brand elements, that can be protected legally both domestically and on international markets (Keller 2013). As Aalborg is not packed with attractions of high reputation like e.g. The Little Mermaid in Copenhagen, VisitAalborg must make sure that the attractions present, despite not being as profiled as The Little Mermaid, are protected in terms of patents, trademarks and copyrights. By doing so the people targeted through the marketing strategy will connect e.g. the Cimbria Bull, The Tower of Aalborg or The House of Music to Aalborg when confronted with the brand logo.

3.5.1 Integrating Marketing

There are many ways of building brand equity when it comes to marketing programs. Channel strategies, communication strategies and pricing strategies can all enhance or detract from brand equity. There are different ways of communicating a brand and product to the consumers. Various channels are available to assist companies in building brand equity. Therefore, it is important that companies choose an appropriate channel strategy where designing and managing direct and indirect channels in order to build brand awareness and improve the brand image (Keller 2013). Marketers need to match the brand image in order to maximize the leverage of secondary associations, integrate push strategies and shopper

marketing activities, for retailers with pull strategies for consumers, and consider a range of direct and indirect distribution options (Keller 2013).

Successful brands often create strong, favourable and unique brand associations to both functional and symbolic benefits. Perceived quality is often at the central of the aspect when talking about brand equity, as consumers will bring a range of associations to the brand (Keller 2013). There exist different ways of marketing, where experiential marketing deals with communicating the features of the product as well as connecting it with unique and interesting experiences for the consumers (Keller 2013), which is most relevant in terms of destination branding.

Furthermore, there is also relationship marketing that deals with the way customers become actively engaged with the product or service through e.g. mass customization of products or input from consumers to a new product-launch as this might deepen and broaden the way the consumers think and feel towards the brand. In relation to this after marketing and other forms of loyalty programs are also ways of creating personalized buying experiences (Keller 2013). Accordingly pricing strategies are also relevant in terms of creating value for the customer on a level, which is in accordance to the consumer's perceived quality of the product or service. Value-based pricing strategies attempt to properly balance the product design and product costs with product prices.

3.5.2 Integrating Marketing Communications to Build Brand Equity

There are numerous ways of marketing communications, however, choosing the appropriate one for a company should be carefully considered before implementation.

Designing the communication programs is a complex task that begins by describing the ever-changing media landscape and the new realities in marketing communications. What channels the organisation chooses to focus on depends on the desired target group as some channels are more relevant in terms of reaching one desired target group (Keller 2013). The traditional advertising media as TV, radio, magazines and newspapers have lost their grip on consumers due to increased competition especially from the digital revolution, which offers

new ways for consumers to learn and talk about brands both with the company and with each other.

In order for a person to be persuaded by any form of communication it is important that all six steps occur.

1: *Exposure* – the person must either see or hear the communication.

2: *Attention* – The person must notice the communication.

3: *Comprehension* – The person must understand the intended message or arguments of the communication.

4: *Yielding* – The person must respond favourably to the intended message or arguments of the communication.

5: *Intentions* – The person must plan to act in the desired manner of the communication.

6: *Behaviour* – A person must actually act in the desired manner of the communication

Source: (K. L. Keller 2013, p. 220)

If any of these steps are not fulfilled the communication will have failed. This means that the process and the action of communicating is very fragile as there in reality is only a 50 per cent chance/risk that the consumer will fulfil each of the six above mentioned steps (Keller 2013). Therefore, it is important that marketers find the right channel where the consumer is exposed to the right message at the right place at the right time.

As mentioned earlier there are many ways of advertising a product. However, we do not find it necessary to elaborate on each and every possible advertising opportunity, instead we will turn our focus to advertising through online marketing communications as this is how we believe the young Chinese tourists are approached most appropriately. One of the best-established forms of online marketing communications is company-created websites. A company website should allow consumers to get a glimpse of what the company behind the brand actually work with, how they do it, why they do it, in general just adding value to the brand and providing the consumer with all kind of information e.g. press releases, happenings,

product portfolio, company-strategy, CSR-initiatives or whatever the company engages in. By monitoring the traffic on the site as well, the company will become aware of who visit the web-site and hereby get a concept of who their visitors are and ultimately who the company's customers are (Keller 2013). Obviously the information provided on the company website must be up to date, reliable and not least eye-catching and easy to navigate in, so that the browsers interest is sustained and the overall brand message is effectively communicated to the recipient (Keller 2013).

There are many types of online marketing channels. Besides having a company website, advertisements can be posted in forms of, banner ads, rich-media ads, and other types of ads. Advertising through the Internet comes with many advantages as you can track which ads led to which sales, furthermore, it is non-disruptive and can be targeted to the prospects most interesting for the company, who then have the choice of receiving the brand-message or ignoring it. However, one of the disadvantages of this advertising is that many people ignore banner ads or even screen them out with pop-up filters (Keller 2013).

3.6 Honeycomb of Social Media by J.H. Kietzmann et al.

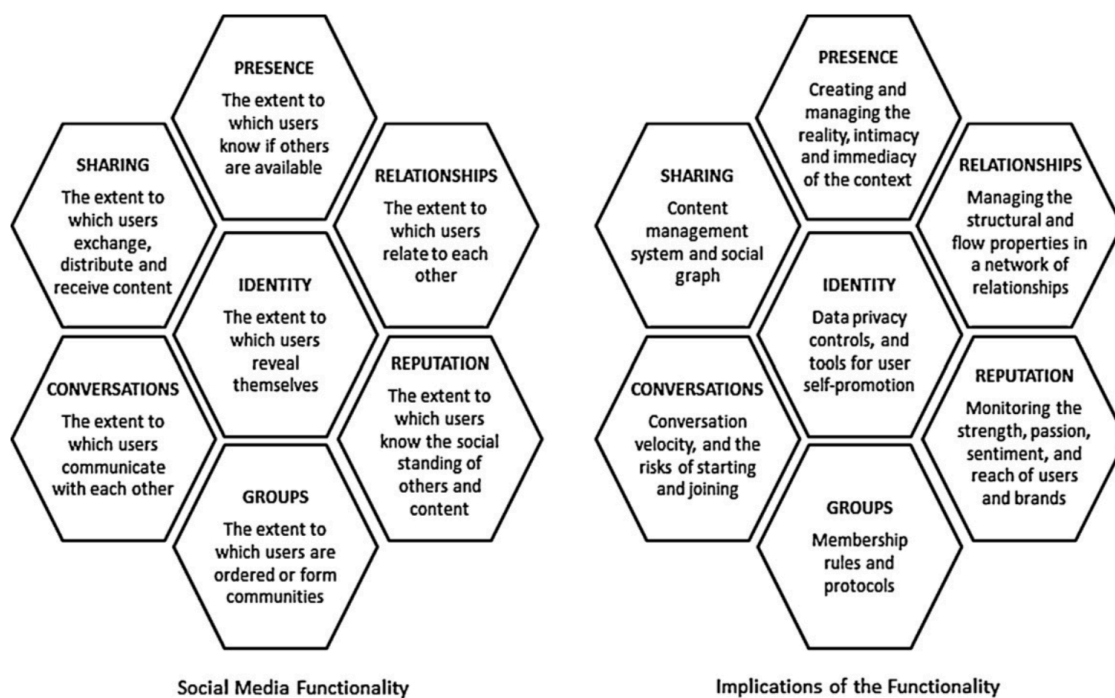
As one of the research questions are concerned with how it is possible to attract young Chinese to Aalborg via social media, it is important to get an understanding of the social media platforms that exists and to categorize these in order to implement a possible destination strategy on the correct platform. Kietzmann et al. developed a framework with the purpose of easily categorizing social media platforms. Kietzmann et. al, has based the honeycomb model on previous work of theoreticians such as Gene Smith (2007), Matt Webb (2004), Stewart Butterfield (2003) and Peter Morville (2004) which all were concerned with mapping the internet in the early days of Web 2.0.

In order to understand how and why people use social media, Kietzmann et. al. developed a framework (Kietzmann, et al. 2011). The framework is intended to provide an overview of the seven elements that characterize the social media and the emphasis that each social media has on the seven elements. Understanding social media is a crucial part, according to Kietzmann et. al., in order to be successful as the corporate communication has been

democratized (Kietzmann, et al. 2011). Instead, the power has now shifted towards the consumers as they argue that:

“The power has been taken from those in marketing and public relations by the individuals and communities by the individuals and communities that create, share, and consume blogs, tweets, Facebook entries, movies, pictures, and so forth. Communication about brands happens with or without permission of the firms in question” (Kietzmann, et al. 2011, 242)

Social media has therefore gained increasingly power when planning and executing marketing strategies. Each social media contributes in that sense with different elements, as different social media emphasizes and utilizes different elements (Kietzmann, et al. 2011). Kietzmann et. al. therefore developed the framework known as *the honeycomb of social media* in order to analyze different social media with the purpose of investigating what the social media contributes with in terms of value making. The honeycomb of social media consists of seven elements that are *presence, sharing, relationships, identity, conversations, groups* and *reputation* as shown below:



The honeycomb of social media (Kietzmann, et al. 2011, 243)

3.6.1 The blocks of the honeycomb

Starting with the *identity* block, it represents the extent to which users reveal their identities in a social media setting (Kietzmann, et al. 2011). Whether or not people share their true identity on social media differs a lot depending on the purpose of the social media. Media such as Facebook encourages you to reveal your identity with photos and information regarding yourself in order to provide a more personal touch to the social media, whereas other social media such as 4chan prefers to acquaint each other only by their 'handles'. The extent to which users reveal themselves has an effect on the social media as e.g. story-sharing becomes more personal when the identity of the sender is revealed (Kietzmann, et al. 2011).

The block of *conversations* is concerned with the extent to which users communicate with other users in the social media setting (Kietzmann, et al. 2011). Whereas some social media are designed primarily to facilitate conversations others are designed for other purposes. The purpose of conversations on social media sites differ, but is often due to the desire to meet new people, to find true love, to build their self-esteem or to be on the cutting edge of new ideas (Kietzmann, et al. 2011).

Sharing is concerned with the extent to which users are able to exchange, distribute or receive content (Kietzmann, et al. 2011). What people want to share on different social media sites differ, as many social media sites are designed to facilitate different elements in the lives of people. An example hereof is LinkedIn, which has career as the objective of sociality, whereas Flickr focuses on sharing pictures. Some social media offers greater possibilities for sharing than others, where social media such as Facebook allows people to share messages, status updates, videos, pictures etc., whereas YouTube only allows people to share their videos.

The *presence* block is concerned with the extent that users of a social media are able to know whether other users are online and accessible (Kietzmann, et al. 2011). It can include knowing where other users are located, whether they are sitting at home or is on the run. Features such as the 'check-in' on some social media sites allows other people to know where you are, as you share your location yourself, whereas other features will simply provide your location with others without you actively doing something yourself. *Presence* is linked to the other

traits and blocks such as *conversations* and *relationships* as it facilitates information regarding whether you are able to converse or are available (Kietzmann, et al. 2011).

Relationships represent the extent to which users can be related to other users (Kietzmann, et al. 2011). 'Relate' refers to how two or more users can create some form of association with each other that leads them to share things, converse, meet up or whether or not they can be 'friends' on the social media. Where some social media allows people to gain relationships without being 'friends', other social media allows you to contact and create a relationship with people that you are not 'friends' with. It is also related to privacy, where some social media allows others to see whom you are 'related' to in the sense of showing who you are 'friends' with. The more relations that one has on a social media platform, the more influential the person typically is why it also signals power (Kietzmann, et al. 2011).

The block of *reputation* refers to the extent which users can identify the standing of others or themselves in a social media setting. Reputation on social media differs depending on which social media is discussed. For example, if a person has a lot of followers on e.g. Twitter, it signals that this person is famous or interesting, whereas on LinkedIn the reputation is based on the amount of endorsements from others. However, despite having a high reputation due to having a lot of followers on Twitter, it does not necessarily show the power of the person. A person can have a lot of followers, thereby having a high reputation, but has little power due to the active engagements on the person's profile (Kietzmann, et al. 2011)

The last block is *groups*. It highlights the extent to which it is possible for users to form communities and sub-communities on the social media (Kietzmann, et al. 2011). Social media that allows people to form groups where people can communicate, share content or to get familiar with other people despite not knowing each other beforehand. It furthermore allows circles of friends to 'meet up' online, thereby facilitating communication between friends. The groups can either be private, secret or open for anyone, where each form of group allows different possibilities.

3.6.2 Utilizing the honeycomb

Kietzmann et. al. furthermore developed a guideline for firms attempting to navigate and utilize social media platforms in order to develop strategies for their social media, which they called the 4 Cs: Cognize, congruity, curate and chase.

The first step of the 4Cs is cognize, which is concerned with how a firm should recognize and understand the landscape of the social media. Typically, social media will emphasize on 3-4 blocks of the honeycomb, why it is important for a firm to recognize these depending on the social media. This will unveil the social media functionality and engagement implications for understanding your customers (Kietzmann, et al. 2011). While reviewing the landscape of the social media, it is also important to landscape competitors and their strategies within the social media in order for the firm to situate and benefit properly from the social media.

The next step, congruity, is concerned with the firms needs to develop strategies that are congruent and designed to the specific social media. Within this step is also discovering the aim of your social media strategy; is it to increase sales or is it to increase the notion of a brand etc., why the social media strategy should suit the social media platform.

A firm furthermore needs to be the curator of the message and the strategy that they wish to implement. It is therefore not enough to only implement a strategy via a bought ad banner, if the general tone of the firm differs from the message of the ad banner. The key is therefore to be consistent in the messages, so that the firm will be a curator of the specific value or message that they attempt to communicate.

The last element in the guideline is chase, which is concerned with the constant chase of information about the social media activity and the trends within (Kietzmann, et al. 2011). The honeycomb provides, according to Kietzmann et. al. a framework that includes the seven factors of all social media, however, the elements within the factors might change despite the block staying the same. A new form of group formation can suddenly be present on a social media that the firm needs to be aware of and utilize to gain an advantage. Chase is furthermore related to the monitoring of messages regarding the company, as they need to react to negativity towards the brand in an attempt to nip it in the bud.

4. Methodology

The following chapter will cover a description of the methodological considerations along with a description of the theory of science applied in this project. It will include an explanation of the paradigms, covering ontology and epistemology, while including the methodological approach, covering our methods of data collection and data analysis.

4.1 Philosophy of science

This section will cover the theory of science applied to this master thesis. It will outline the considerations that we have made throughout conducting this master thesis along with a description of how the research will be conducted.

4.1.1 Paradigms

According to Arbnor and Bjerke, scientific paradigms refer and explains to how researcher view and solve problems (Arbnor & Bjerke 2009). The paradigms consists of methods, theories and dominant thoughts that lay the foundation for the choices that the researcher has made throughout solving the eventual problem (Arbnor & Bjerke 2009). Bryman defines paradigms as

"A term deriving from the history of science, where it was used to describe a cluster of beliefs and dictates that for scientists in a particular discipline influence what should be studied, how research should be done, and how how results should be interpreted" (Kuhn 1970: Cited from Bryman 2016, 636)

Paradigms are therefore considered as a way of understanding how a researcher has come to his/her final conclusion and furthermore to understand the process of thoughts made throughout the research. The concepts and thoughts made throughout the composure of this project will be described in the following sections of our ontological and epistemological considerations.

4.1.1.1 Epistemological considerations

Epistemology is a theory of knowledge that refers to a stance on what should pass as acceptable knowledge (Bryman 2016). What should be considered as acceptable is, however, something that is to be understood from the receiving end why it is the individual that considers what he/she assumes to be true (Burrell & Morgan 1979). This consideration is based on the idea of every researcher has different opinion on what is important from a specific research and that individual preferences plays a role in this discussion. Burrell & Morgan divides the consideration of individual preferences into two categories: external observers and internal observers, where external observers should be considered as knowing the truth independently from personal preferences whereas internal observers adopts a more anti-positivistic approach where social and individual factors plays a role (Burrell og Morgan 1979).

As this master thesis is concerned with social factors and individual preferences, the epistemological considerations are biased towards an anti-positivistic approach. Within this anti-positivistic approach there are further categories divided into different perceptions of elements that should be considered in terms of gaining 'true' knowledge. The epistemological standpoint taken within this master thesis is an interpretive standpoint that is regulative and subjective according to the four paradigms figure by Burrell & Morgan (Burrell & Morgan 1979, 22). Interpretivism is concerned with the subjective meaning of social actions and that, in this master thesis, that consumers act accordingly to their own personal experiences, interpretations and beliefs (Bryman 2016, 26). Putting this in a context of attracting tourists, the interpretivism standpoint in this master thesis is present throughout the analysis of the social factors and actions of tourists choosing their destination and furthermore on the analysis regarding the young Chinese tourists use of social media. It is furthermore seen in the identity making of a marketing campaign, which this master thesis is centralized on. The identity formation of a destination has a great emphasis on value making, which are to be interpreted by the recipients, which in this master thesis are young Chinese who utilizes social media.

4.1.1.2 Ontological considerations

Using the definition of Bryman, ontology is concerned with the nature of social identities (Bryman 2016). This means that it is focused on whether the central point of orientations should be considered as objective entities that are external from social actors or whether the central point of orientation is a result of social construction that consist of perceptions and actors (Bryman 2016, 28). The points of orientations that Bryman refers to are *constructionism*, which is considered to be the point of social constructions, and *objectivism*, which are focused on the objective entities.

Relating the ontological standpoints to this master thesis, the master thesis are concerned with attracting Chinese tourists to Aalborg, and should therefore consider whether or not it is related to social actors and phenomenon. Tourism in general is to be considered as a social phenomenon, as it is an industry highly affected by culture and social entities. People travel to explore new worlds, new cultures and to meet new people. The social relations conducted through travelling is often bound on social interaction with locals, thereby adding a social element into travelling. However, taking it into an ontological standpoint, people tend to travel based of social interactions and recommendations of others, thereby adding a social element into the central point of orientation. In other words, by taking an *objectivistim* standpoint, one would argue that travelling is a result of natural increased notions in society where the natural results would be an increase in outbound tourism in China. As this might play a role in the increased outbound tourism in China, elements such as increased Internet access where people are able to share experiences, stories and recommendations would point towards an increased role of social interactions. Adding, as mentioned before, the role that social media plays in this master thesis, the ontological standpoint in this master thesis is *constructionism*, as the nature of social identities are affected by perceptions and actions of social actors. Our emphasized focus on a qualitative research design further substantiates the ontological standpoint, as the analysis of the qualitative data will be considered with meaning and values, which are results of social entities. The researchers are aware that not only one truth of reality exists, why you can't expand a general marketing campaign towards the whole population of China, as the recipients are affected by their own reality, which in the end is a results of social actions, thereby further enhancing the *constructionism* standpoint.

4.2 Empirical considerations

This chapter aims to provide a clarification of our empirical considerations. Furthermore does it aim to provide an understanding of the gathered empirical data for the construction of this research. As the project is based on qualitative as well as quantitative data, both methodologies will be included and accounted for in this section.

4.2.1 Qualitative methodology

Qualitative research is a research strategy that emphasizes meaning and words rather than numbers and statistics (Bryman 2016). It is therefore regarded as being the opposite to quantitative data which emphasizes statistics and numbers. Our master thesis is primarily based on interviews with Flemming Bruhn from VisitDenmark along with Jeppe Stricker from VisitAalborg. The interviews will be complimented with qualitative data regarding the Chinese culture and furthermore with a report for the European Commission by Valeria Croce regarding young Chinese people's social media usage.

In order to get a comprehensive insight in Chinese culture, it is important to look at meanings and values in texts, as culture in general is very much value-based. It is therefore relevant for us to get an insight in the values of the Chinese culture, as consumption in tourism is in general value-based, according to Therkelsen (Therkelsen, *Imagining Places: Image Formation of Tourists and its Consequences for Destination Promotion* 2010). The qualitative interviews we have conducted with Flemming Bruhn and Jeppe Stricker will provide insight into Chinese culture from a Danish perspective and explain some differences between the Chinese and Danes, which will work as our premise in our analysis. It is important to note that our master thesis is concerned with the identity making of a destination branding strategy, why our focus is to get as much knowledge concerning the Chinese culture as possible in order to create a successful destination branding strategy. It is therefore relevant to look into how two important companies such as VisitDenmark and VisitAalborg see Chinese culture and how the Chinese culture is defined elsewhere.

The qualitative data in our master thesis will enable us to, perhaps, find differences in the perceptions from the companies along with how the Chinese understand themselves, which

plays a big role in attracting Chinese tourists. The values that we extract from Bruhn and Stricker will be upheld with other qualitative data, such as the report from Croce, and thereby provide a profound insight into the Chinese tourists and their culture, which ultimately will affect their consumption pattern.

As the project is concerned with how it is possible to attract young Chinese tourists to Aalborg through social media it is important, besides looking into culture differences, to look at how the young Chinese tourists use social media and the values they attach to those. In the West, social media can be associated with the promotion of their own lives in order for them to create value to others. These values are important from a marketer's perspective, as those values are core elements in attracting people via social media. Qualitative data does therefore contribute with much information regarding values and meanings, which are crucial for us if we are to find an answer to our research question.

Qualitative data can be categorized into different kinds of data: Primary data, secondary data and tertiary data (Bryman 2016). The interviews we conducted with Flemming Bruhn and Jeppe Stricker are to be conducted as primary data, as we have conducted the interviews ourselves (Bryman 2016). Our list of secondary data exists of the remaining articles that we have not written ourselves, and has an explanatory purpose in this master thesis. The analysis will be based on a mix of our conducted primary data and the secondary data collected from elsewhere. The qualitative data will, besides the primary and secondary data, be complimented by quantitative data from Statista, which has statistic purposes and enables us to create an overview of the statistical data concerning the industry and the social media usage of the Chinese tourists.

4.2.1.1 Interviews

In order to get a wholesome insight into existing destination branding processes and the effect hereof from already existing companies, we sought to interview people who work with destination branding in their everyday life. As the research question is concerned with how it is possible to attract Chinese tourists to Aalborg, we scheduled an interview with Jeppe Stricker, who is the head of communications in VisitAalborg (Appendix 3, p. I, line 10-12), in

order for us to get an insight to the everyday practices that VisitAalborg conducts in order to attract tourists in general and furthermore to know if they differentiate their marketing towards Chinese tourists. By conducting an interview with Stricker, and thereby with VisitAalborg, we got to know how VisitAalborg operates and the values that they have branded Aalborg with. As the main focus is on identity making, it is important to include already existing branding strategies in order to get an overview of how Aalborg is presented.

We furthermore scheduled an interview with Flemming Bruhn, who is the CFO of VisitDenmark along with being the head of VisitDenmark's Chinese department (Appendix 4, p. I, line 10-13), in order for us to get an insight into how VisitDenmark perceives Chinese culture and Chinese tourists. Bruhn provided us with a lot of knowhow and knowledge as he has been a part of the Chinese department since 2004 and has therefore been a part of the Chinese tourism boom all the way from the beginning, hence is extensive knowledge has been beneficial for this study.

By conducting these interviews, we gained knowledge from two important departments in terms of attracting tourists. It has laid the foundation for our analysis and helped us understand destination branding and tourists from a marketer's perspective. The interviews are, as stated in the chapter above, being substantiated with secondary data that compliments and adds further value to our analysis.

4.2.1.2 Contacting our respondents

From the beginning of our master thesis, our hope and goal was to get in contact with people who had experience with tourism in Aalborg and especially with Chinese tourism. Our aim was to get information relating to how VisitAalborg has been branding Aalborg and the results hereof. We therefore contacted Jeppe Stricker, as he is the head of communications in VisitAalborg and is participating in planning marketing strategies for branding Aalborg, via mail in order to hear whether he was interested in collaborating with us in order to get his point of view on the subject. Due to him being away on holiday, we were not getting responds from him, why we in the end chose to show up at his offices in hopes of getting an a respond, as we were not aware at the time that he was on holiday. When Stricker returned from

holiday, he replied to our e-mail and we set up time, date and place to conduct our interview at VisitAalborg's office. The time span from contacting Stricker until the interview was conducted was approximately three weeks later, why we had sufficient time to plan our interview.

Our aim was furthermore to get in contact with a person who has experience with Chinese tourism and furthermore has insight into the Chinese tourism culture. Through research on the Internet we found that VisitDenmark, as the only tourism company in Denmark, had a Chinese department, why we wrote an e-mail to the head of the Chinese department. His name is Flemming Bruhn, who happens to be the only Dane in the Chinese department, why we hoped he would be interested in collaborating with us. As Flemming was on a business trip to India, our e-mail was forwarded to his secretary Charlotte Øllegaard. She facilitated the contact between Flemming Bruhn and us while he was on his business trip, where he agreed through Charlotte to be interviewed by us. When Bruhn returned from his business trip we were in contact directly with each other, where we agreed time, date and communication channel for the interview. We agreed to a Skype interview, however, at the time of the scheduled interview there were some technical issues, why the interview ended up being via telephone. The time span from contacting Bruhn until the interview was conducted was approximately two weeks later.

4.2.1.3 Interview technique

Both of our interviews have been carried out as semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are, according to Bryman, an interview where the interviewer has a series of questions (we have attached our questions for the interviews in appendix 2 along with transcriptions of the interviews as appendixes 3 and 4) that are in general form and where the interviewer has the possibility to vary the sequence of the questions in relation to the answer provided by the person being interviewed (Bryman 2016, 201). Furthermore the questions are regarded as being more general in frame, which enables the interviewers to ask follow-up questions to what are regarded as significant replies in order to get a more wholesome and profound answer to the general framed question (Bryman 2016)

Our interview with Jeppe Stricker was conducted at VisitAalborg's office in Aalborg. We therefore sat down face-to-face with Stricker while our interview with Flemming Bruhn was conducted via the telephone. Interviews of this kind, according to Bryman & Bell, create an enhanced possibility for a dynamic and interactive interview (Bryman & Bell, 2011). It correlates well with the interpretivist paradigm of the master thesis, which allows the researcher to adapt and adjust the interview situation to the research topic and the answers provided by the interviewee. Our face-to-face interview with Stricker provided us with the ability to establish a common and relaxed atmosphere, which can have a positive effect on the chemistry and thereby the interview, as it allowed us to decode postures and the gesticulations of Stricker. This decoding enabled us to adjust the interview and to fit the interviewee better and furthermore allowed us to decode whenever we hit a topic which Stricker was passionate to explain about. Our interview with Bruhn was conducted, as explained prior, via the telephone, why we were not able to decode gesticulations and postures.

Whereas our interview with Stricker were to get a profound insight to the strategies of VisitAalborg, as one of our research questions of our master thesis is concerned with attracting tourists to Aalborg, we were interested in the specific details and elements that VisitAalborg attempts to brand Aalborg with through their destination branding. Therefore, by conducting the face-to-face interview with Stricker we were able to, due to the decoding process, ask more specific follow-up questions and thereby getting Stricker to elaborate on their strategy even further whenever we decoded an element that he was passionate about. Our interview with Bruhn is, besides providing information about the strategies of VisitDenmark, more explanatory and has the purpose of providing us with insight towards the Chinese tourists. The decoding process of our semi-structured interview with Bruhn was therefore not as important as it was with Stricker, however, ideally we would have like to conduct the interview with Flemming Bruhn as a face-to-face interview as well.

4.2.1.4 Processing of interviews

According to Kvale & Brinkmann, the analysis of an interview begins beforehand the interviews has been conducted (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). This is due to them arguing that

the researchers must consider the execution of the interview beforehand, thereby preparing their sequence of questions so that the answers and meaning of the responds are understood in a coherent way (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). Our execution of questions was planned so that the most general questions came first, whereas the further we got into the interview the more specific our questions became. However, despite our initiating questions was more general than the following, we were still able to ask follow-up questions to get a more profound response to our general question. The more specific our questions became, the harder it was for us to ask follow-up questions. Our questions were arranged so that the general questions towards tourism in general was asked in the beginning of the interview, in order to get insight into this, which enabled us to ask follow-up questions further into the interview that were based on the responds provided to the general questions. By doing so we ensured that the meaning of our specific questions were understood in a coherent way, as the general questions asked in the beginning of the interview laid the foundation to our specific and follow-up questions.

Both of our conducted interviews were recorded and afterwards transcribed. The transcription aimed to transfer the audio as direct and precise as possible, why there are only a few distinctions in the transcription compared to the audio. Only spoken words has been transcribed into formal written language where words such as “uhs” has not been included in the transcription if they did not contribute with meaning in the spoken sentence. Furthermore pauses and elements such as laughter and sighs have not been included in the transcription unless they carried value to the analysis of the interview. By doing so, we, according to Kvale & Brinkmann, did not lose value in our transcription and were left with a precise transcription for us to analyze on (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). Further interpretations reflecting why and how the interviewee has responded has therefore not been included in the transcription in any way.

4.2.1.5 Analysis of interviews

We have analyzed our interview data by extracting the sayings and meanings of Jeppe Stricker and Flemming Bruhn and uphold their responds to literature and other empirical data within the field. We have entrusted the information provided by the interviewees 1) Stricker with the

information concerning VisitAalborgs strategy and the way they portray Aalborg with literature within the field of destination branding and 2) Bruhn by his knowledge towards Chinese outbound tourism with existing literature on outbound tourism and identity formation. The responds from the interviews has throughout the master thesis therefore been uphold with existing literature and followed with a discussion towards bridging the gap between the identity of Aalborg and the young Chinese tourists. The topics we have focused on are shown in the table in appendix 1.

4.2.2 Quantitative methodology

Quantitative methodology is concerned with statistics and numbers rather than meaning and values such as qualitative methodology (Bryman 2016). We have not conducted and gathered any quantitative data ourselves as we found reliable statistical data via Statista. Statista Inc. is a company from Germany, which provides statistics for a wide array of areas. Some of the data comes from sources such as the World Bank, the US Census Bureau and the Pew Research Center, however we find Statista easier to navigate in than any of these mentioned databases. We have used Statista as a mean of finding relevant data to investigate the travel tendencies among Chinese tourists and hereby strengthening our case study. Statista acts as a database, providing statistics from categories varying from advertising, tele-communications, energy, education, consumer goods, banking, health care, demographics, tourism and much more and is in general considered as being a reliable database (Swoger 2012).

5. Analytical findings

The following chapter contains the analytical framework based on the attributes extracted from the literature. The framework has the purpose of being an analytical tool to investigate the identity formation of VisitAalborg in order to present the identity that VisitAalborg portrays of Aalborg. It will furthermore contain a discussion of the identity that VisitAalborg intends to portray, alongside an analysis covering how it is possible to attract more Chinese tourists via social media.

5.1 VisitAalborg – Having one clear image or challenge simplicity?

As mentioned in theory section 3.2 regarding Ren and Blichfeldt's theory of image-formation, there has been applied various approaches and efforts in terms of place branding strategies as a mean of attracting more tourists to the destination. Often the advertising and marketing of the destination is carried out by the DMO, which in this case is VisitAalborg as this is the organisation that deals with advertising of Aalborg to tourists abroad. Therefore, in order to become wiser on the role VisitAalborg play as an organization, we chose to arrange a meeting with the head of market communication Stricker. Though we had some trouble getting in touch with VisitAalborg in the beginning, our persistence has proven to be extremely beneficial for our data collection as the interview provided us with information and thoughts we would, most likely, not have considered before the interview, as well as creating a thorough understanding of the DMO and its work.

During the interview we touched various subjects including which identity VisitAalborg wishes to portray of Aalborg and we received some very interesting responses to this, which will also be covered in the following section. Ren and Blichfeldt explains about two perceptions of place branding strategies. Therefore, in accordance to our interview with Stricker we focused on what kind of identity VisitAalborg ideally wish portray of the destination and whether the focus is on creating one clear image or whether the DMO in this

context challenges simplicity in terms of place branding, by for example focusing on creating a more complex identity of the destination. When asked what VisitAalborg emphasizes through their marketing, Stricker responds:

“Ehm, a little bit of everything. No, but it really depends on the audience. At the moment and towards the end of last year we picked up quite a lot of permissions for e-mail marketing, and we then break down those groups and then mature them if you will and make the segmentation even better so when we talk about arts for instance, fine arts. We tend to direct that to those people who have a preference for that. Ehm, so we communicate broadly, but not to everyone about the same. And likewise if we talk to couples looking for a romantic getaway, we have one type of products of communication we go to market with as opposed to families. So it depends on a lot of things (Appendix 3, p. VI, lines 240-247).”

Which very clearly indicates that VisitAalborg adapts the marketing to the intended customer and hereby that the DMO does not solely focus on creating one clear image of the destination, but rather focusing on the various opportunities and assessing these to different customer segments. Here VisitAalborg, according to Ren and Blichfeldt ought to focus on the product differentiation, or in other words the points-of-differences between Aalborg and other second tier cities in order to convince the tourist of the opportunities available in Aalborg. For example, as Stricker also mentions there is a segmentation process where desired customers are picked and specific marketing concerning e.g. fine arts is directed to people who has a preference for this kind of experience marketing, but without bothering tourists who prefer other kind of experiences with market communication irrelevant to those.

In order for VisitAalborg to succeed in this they ought to focus on the unique selling propositions that is related to the city of Aalborg. Staying within the area of art and fine culture, in Aalborg there is Kunsten Museum of Modern Art as well as for instance the Musikkens Hus (House of Music), which both consists of interesting architectural structures and both having multiple purposes related to cultural experiences such as concerts etc. Furthermore, Aalborg is rapidly developing and more of these so-called USP's appear over the city. For example the internationally renown Argentinian artists Tomas Saraceno who is

building a 30 meters tall sculpture near the harbour in the West of Aalborg, which will most likely attract more cultural interested tourists in the forthcoming years.

Communication from the DMO to the desired customers, as mentioned in the theory section as well, can happen through various channels of communication. Having one clear identity has been considered an advantage, as this is easier to communicate through all channels as well as it will not confuse the tourists with too much information. However, the digitalization of media has changed as consumers are constantly exposed to advertising, meaning that in order for the communication to be successful it is understood that a destination must offer intangible values as much as tangible items. This correlates to what Stricker responded when asked what he thought of as being the biggest draw in terms of attracting tourists to Aalborg:

“Not that’s very difficult, because you can either, I think as a destination, you can either pursue a sort of strategy where you say we have these and these attractions that in and by themselves are so interesting that people want to come here. But of course, we don’t have Legoland or Disney World or something on that scale, Taj Mahal, so I don’t think that it is necessarily a reason to go in itself that we have attractions. I think it is more the sum of the experiences you get, that we have certain attractions that are good enough, but we also have, shall we say, the quality of life and the values that you can experience as a tourists when you are here (Appendix 3,p. IV, lines 145-152).

As the quote states, according to Stricker, as a DMO you can either choose a strategy where focus is on the attractions and sights within the destination, but as stated above Jeppe believes it is rather the sum of experiences experienced in Aalborg than it is the tangible items that convince visitors to come back more than the specific attractions.

However, according to Ren and Blichfeldt the predominant thinking within destination branding is still that destination images should be kept simple and only emphasizing a few strong points-of-difference. This is also interesting in terms of the strategy that VisitAalborg applies, as this emphasizing on personal marketing with focus on attracting specific tourists to see specific sights as the example with arts-interested consumers mentioned previously.

When communicating the identity of the DMO the receiver of the message will create an image of the brand. The objective for VisitAalborg is to communicate an identity that will give the recipients a positive image of Aalborg as a destination hence convincing consumers to visit Aalborg instead of an alternative destination. However, this is not something that is done overnight, rather it takes time for the consumers to notice the communication as mentioned in the theory section 4.5 concerning Keller's brand equity building. As before mentioned, the desired target group of VisitAalborg is approached through adaption of communication to the consumer rather than creating one clear image, which may assist to the brand becoming blurred and hereby possibly not interesting for the consumer.

However, we the researchers, are aware of the fact that marketing and selling tangible goods is very different from selling intangible goods like a vacation or other kinds of experience marketing. As described in the theory, one of the main differences between selling tangible and intangible products is that an intangible product, as for example a destination, consists of more layers than a tangible product does. This means that every time the consumer visits the destination (s)he will learn more and new things concerning the destination as (s)he will become aware of more factors and layers e.g. new places to see, new places to eat, new people to meet, new experiences to be experienced etc. Additionally when visiting a destination the consumer will also shape a more nuanced image of the destination than the one already formed by the marketing activities of the DMO which also assists in creating a favourable image of the brand for the consumer. This is unlike most tangible products that more or less stay the same as consumers will expect, recognize and treasure the product as it is, which emphasizes that tangible products are not as dynamic and fluid as places.

Turning our attention to the communication again, it is also important to state that no matter how well a brand identity is communicated to consumers it can never be judged accessible nor understandable for all, as the communication may not be understood the same way in Denmark as in China hence the reason for communication of a product/place targeted to specific nationalities may differ across countries and regions. This is also something that VisitAalborg is aware of when communicating towards possible future tourists as they are aware that:

"(...) well it depends on if you come from Brazil you may see Aalborg in another way than if you are from Norway" (Appendix 3, p. VII, lines 303-304)

VisitAalborg are therefore also challenging the notion of having one-clear image as they differentiate their marketing for different markets. Additionally VisitAalborg also differentiate their marketing strategy for the different segments of a different market as:

"(...) We try to attract tourists with a sort of broad scale market communication, but we also do more in-depth interest based marketing" (Appendix 3, p .II, lines 55-56)

VisitAalborg is therefore aware that when branding Aalborg, they are branding Aalborg as an intangible product with more layers. According to Ren and Blichfeldt, tourists do already have a perceived image of a destination before they visit it. It is therefore VisitAalborg's responsibility to add more 'layers' to that perceived image of Aalborg. One layer could for instance be the possibility for mountain bikers to come to Aalborg as Aalborg provides, besides visiting a new city and getting new cultural experiences, exciting mountain bike trails that e.g. mountain bikers can explore. When visiting the English version of VisitAalborg's front-page, visitors are greeted with the slogan *"Welcome to Aalborg – Enjoy your stay in Europe's happiest city!"* (VisitAalborg 2018), so when mountain bikers are lured into VisitAalborg's webpage they are greeted with another layer in their image formation before even arriving at the destination.

The idea of having one clear image as a DMO is based on the assumption that tourists prefer simplicity and uniformity to diversity and complexity, as too much information will confuse the tourist. However, we believe that this is out-dated and that tourists today are more informed than ever before because of the digital time we find ourselves living in. People all over the world today have access to the Internet and can find information regarding any place or product within a matter of seconds. Therefore, it is important for the DMO that most information related to the place in question, in this context Aalborg, promotes a brand image that is relatable and desirable among consumers exposed to the communication in order for them to form an image of the destination as desired by VisitAalborg. Furthermore, many people today are what Ren and Blichfeldt refer to as experienced travellers which also

emphasizes the assumption that tourists ought to be confronted with simplified images in order to understand the image desired by the DMO, we believe is invalid.

Instead, focus should be on attracting what John Urry describes as the post-mass tourists, who search for different experiences within a postmodern world. This means that VisitAalborg should be able to focus more on specialized communication strategies targeted to specific markets emphasizing subjects or sights interesting for the group targeted by the communication, as it is already the case with the Norwegian, Swedish and German consumers. In relation to this Stricker, in the interview when asked of the biggest obstacles for Aalborg in terms of attracting new customers to the destination responded:

"There are great many obstacles. Some of the major ones are finding and communicating that edge Aalborg has, or wants to have. It can be infrastructure, it can be hotel room occupation. I mean it can all kinds of obstacles, it depends on the viewpoints you take on it. I would say probably if we look at attracting, lets say tourists from, to return to those markets Norway and Germany, it would be competition right? If we go to Norway for instance, why should a Norwegian family stop in Aalborg and not race through and stop in Aarhus or even Germany. And the other way around, if we have German going on skiing holiday in Norway, how do we stop them. How can we be attractive to those audiences. Of course, that becomes increasingly difficult in a world that expands and has all kinds of developments going on(Appendix 3, p.III-IV, lines 175-183).

As stated in the quote above it is visible that VisitAalborg does have obstacles when it comes to communicating the image of Aalborg and making it desirable to international consumers. However, the interview also revealed that the focus of VisitAalborg is more or less only concerned with the markets in close proximity to Denmark with Norway, Sweden and Germany being the primary markets for advertising, but as the quote also obviously states it is still a challenge for Aalborg to attract tourists, also from these markets.

When asked whether he believed this to be due to the lack of attractions as an example Stricker responded:

"I think that is very difficult to answer, because that would also depend on the quality and the level of attraction. If we build another Summerland (edit. Amusement park) or if we build another museum, I'm not sure it would make a difference. If we had Louvre, maybe it would make a difference and maybe the Saraceno glasswork will make a difference. So I think more attractions is not necessarily the answer, but I think if you have high quality and unique attractions, that could give an edge in the marketplace (Appendix 3, p. V, lines 187-192)"

Which proves a valid point. Imagine if Paris had been a small suburban city with nothing else in it but the Eiffel Tower and the local café. Attractions are not the only reason for people's wanderlust, more likely is it that the individual travels as a sort of intrinsic award for working all year and thus wanting to go to a destination unlike home in the search of different culture, different food, different climate, different experiences or whatever value the individual appreciates.

Besides branding Aalborg, VisitAalborg also has what we would deem as being a laissez fair approach to identity creation on social media and online media in general. They acknowledge that the power of value creation is fading away from the DMO's and moving towards the individuals on social media as the quote implies;

"(...) I think the whole sender-receiver relationship is being problematized in the industry now because you have so many other actors than just the official DMO. With social media you can have, I don't know, someone in Aalborg who lives here and who has a large following on Instagram even attracting tourists so I think we need to gradually look away from us having sort of "the official voice" of what Aalborg is, it is a multitude of voices and experiences and other things (...)" (Appendix 3, p. VIII, lines 325-330)

As this is not an element within the identity-formation of VisitAalborg, it is an important factor of attracting tourists to Aalborg. The values and expectations that are associated with pictures on social media should somewhat align to the identity that VisitAalborg portray of Aalborg, however, as of now VisitAalborg does not 'moderate' the identity that is being created of Aalborg on social media, which adds to the complex identity of VisitAalborg that is created of Aalborg:

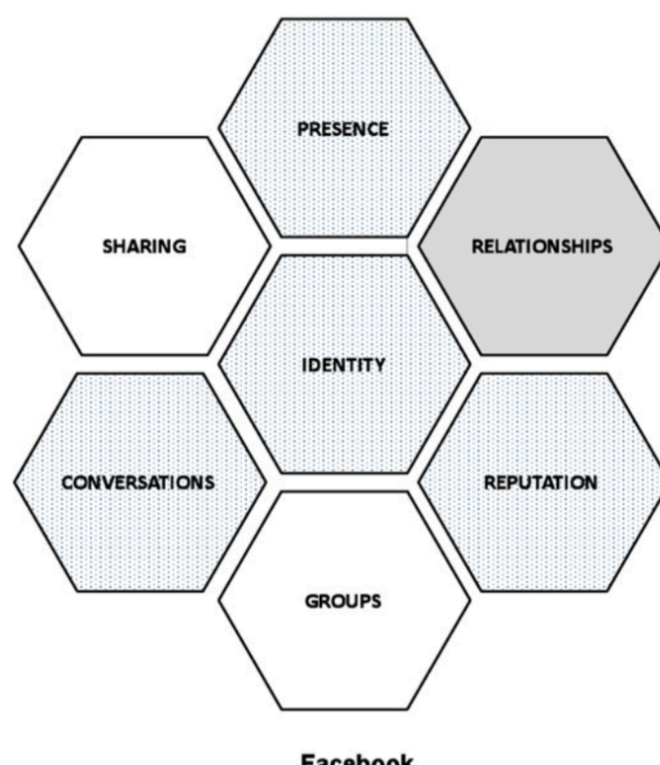
“(…) but maybe we should in the future be more sort of a moderator than a facilitator and someone who has the one and only truth about what Aalborg is and should be” (Appendix 3, p. VIII, lines 332-334)

5.1.1 VisitAalborg on the Social Media Platforms

As the master thesis is concerned with attracting Chinese tourists on social media, it is relevant to look at how VisitAalborg portrays itself on social media and on online media in general. VisitAalborg has a social media profile on three different platforms, which are Facebook, YouTube and Instagram.

5.1.1.1 Facebook

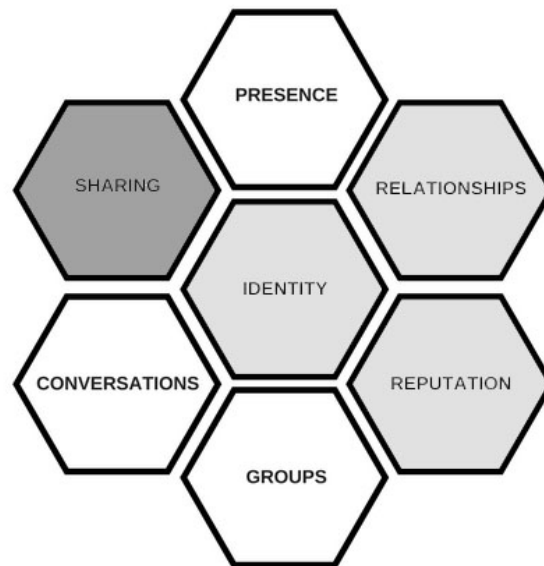
Starting with their Facebook profile, they have approximately 22.000 followers (Facebook 2018). All their posts on their Facebook profile are written in Danish. The last post of their Facebook profile was November 20th, 2017. Their posts are usually concerned with the news covering the city and the different possibilities that Aalborg has to offer. Those possibilities range from Kunsten to gastronomy. The content on the webpage differs between own videos and photos to the sharing of articles from various newspapers. According to Kietzmann et. al. Facebook is identified as being mainly a relationship platform:



Why the purpose of a social media profile on Facebook is to create relationships with the users. As Facebook is mainly a relationship platform, the goal of VisitAalborg's Facebook profile is to create relationships with the users that enter their Facebook profile. The way that VisitAalborg utilizes their Facebook profile is to share news covering the city, which people can read for informative purposes. There is no actual interaction between the profile and its followers, why VisitAalborg do not utilize their Facebook platform to create relations with the ones actually visiting their social media platform. Furthermore is their profile written in purely Danish, why tourists that do not understand Danish has no chance of creating a relationship with the profile and hence will leave the Facebook profile without creating an impression. Their Facebook profile is therefore to be considered as an informative platform for Danish tourists that wish to learn about the initiatives in Aalborg, however, it has no purpose of attracting foreign tourists.

5.1.1.2 Instagram

VisitAalborg's Instagram profile has approximately 9.400 followers (Instagram 2018). As opposed to their Facebook profile, their Instagram profile and their posts are all written in English thereby catering more to foreign tourists. They post more frequently on their Instagram profile compared to their Facebook profile, where they post approximately once per week, which they have done since the opening of their Instagram profile. Their posts have the purpose of showing Aalborg from its best side with photos from around the city. The photos range from photos of the harbor, the Utzon Center, Tall Ship Race, to Klokkestøbergade (old street in Aalborg) to the Graffiti Street Art around the city.



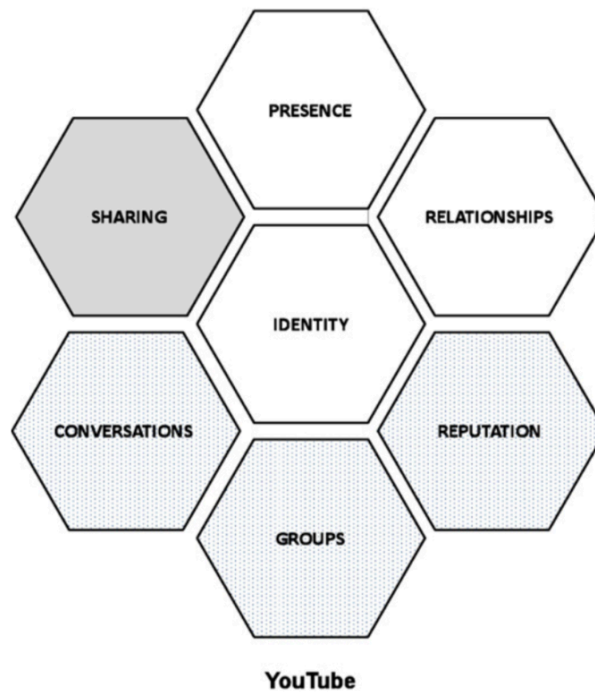
Source: Self-made

As Instagram is highly concerned with sharing, hereby meant the sharing of photos and videos, it is pivotal for VisitAalborg to share the beautiful sides of Aalborg if they are to attract future foreign tourists, and that is exactly what VisitAalborg practices on their Instagram profile. The presentation of Aalborg via VisitAalborg's Instagram profile can be considered as rather complex, as they intend to portray Aalborg with a clear image of being a beautiful city with a lot of beautiful sights, however, VisitAalborg also portrays the different sides of Aalborg such as the Graffiti street art versus the beautiful and clean parks that Aalborg has, alongside the modern architecture of Musikkens Hus versus Klokkestøbergade. The Instagram profile therefore has the purpose of presenting Aalborg as a diverse city that offers different sightseeing experiences. The Instagram profile therefore caters to a wide audience with, alongside their profile being in English, caters to tourists in many different countries.

5.1.1.3 YouTube

The YouTube channel of VisitAalborg has 102 subscribers with 62 videos, where the most watched video has 25.000 views (YouTube 2018). The videos are consisting of different material, where some videos are ad movies to attract tourists to Aalborg whereas other videos are showcasing what different attractions that are located in or surrounding Aalborg. The YouTube channel consists of both videos in Danish along with videos in English designed

for foreign tourists. The channel does furthermore have videos designed for the B2B market showing the different opportunities Aalborg has to offer in terms of hosting conferences and the like along with videos for leisure tourists only. According to Kietzmann et. al. YouTube is primarily a sharing platform:



(Kietzmann, et al. 2011, 248)

As YouTube is also categorized as a sharing platform, it differs from Instagram as you do not engage relationships on YouTube in the same way as Instagram. It has the sole purpose of showcasing Aalborg through living pictures and emotions. It furthermore enhances the possibility of making the content more personal as videos have the possibility of showcasing emotions more than still pictures. VisitAalborg are utilizing this in most of their videos as real people are always involved in their videos as a difference to the still pictures of Instagram. Through YouTube, VisitAalborg is therefore trying to attempt to present values rather than landscapes.

5.1.1.4 VisitAalborg.com

When visiting VisitAalborg's website, the visitor is greeted with an edited photo of Aalborg with many of its major attractions such as Aalborg Tårnet (The Tower of Aalborg), the Utzon

Center, Hotel Hvide Hus, and the Budolfi Church. The visitors are also, as mentioned prior, furthermore greeted with a 'Welcome to Aalborg – Enjoy your stay in Europe's happiest city', which substantiates with the identity-formation of attracting tourists to Aalborg due to values rather than attractions (VisitAalborg.com 2018). The website is organized in sections covering a list of the attractions of Aalborg, the restaurants in Aalborg, how to meet the Vikings of Aalborg and the We Share program. The We Share program is a program that highlights the people of Aalborg as being the main attraction of tourists in Aalborg rather than the attractions.

5.1.1.5 Summary

VisitAalborg are utilizing their different online media for different purposes. Facebook is concerned with domestic tourists and has informative purposes of telling what is happening in Aalborg. It has little to no intentions to create relationships with their followers and merely functions as a news provider. Their Instagram profile is internationally concerned as the profile and posts are in English. It has the purpose of showing the beautiful sides of Aalborg through still landscape photos of attractions in Aalborg. The posts shows the diverse sides of Aalborg as it attempts to show the many different 'layers' that Aalborg has as a city and tourist destination. Their YouTube channel is concerned with personal videos that aims to present Aalborg through the values of the people through interviews with people and by showing videos of what Aalborg has to offer besides landscapes. The website VisitAalborg.com serves the purpose of being informative on Aalborg with listings of the different attractions and restaurants that Aalborg has. It furthermore attempts to explain the values of the city and that people should be visiting Aalborg due to other factors than attractions and that the people around the city is an attraction in itself.

5.2 Actor Network in Aalborg

As clarified through section 4.3, Actor Network Theory is a theory that is concerned with the investigation of how social groups within society are formed and what kind of patterns, if any, that relates to this group. When Latour speaks of belonging to a group he actually speaks of a process where the individual is either attracted to a group because of its e.g. appearance,

political stance, common interest, - or on the contrary not interested if the group has a position you disagree with you may not be interested any longer.

However, the actors Latour speaks of are often part of more than one group in society. In order to investigate whether the group formation that Latour speaks of is present in Aalborg we would ideally have infiltrated a group if such were found present. As we have not had the resources to do so, we have based the analysis of this section on the theoretical perspective of how ANT is applied to investigate whether it is feasible that these groups and actors are present and hereby add to the experience tourists have when they visit Aalborg.

This is interesting to us because Stricker, in the interview we carried out, talked of the experience that tourists have when they visit Aalborg and he also talks about the returning customers. In this context he mentions how he believes that the local actors are participating in creating a good experience for the tourists while they are visiting the destination.

“(...) as I said before I don’t think we have any sort of unique attractions, we do have a lot of tourists that are very happy to be in Aalborg and are returning customers, so people come back. So I think the atmosphere and the general welcoming approach people are met with in the city is something that persuades people to come back, much more than a single attraction (Appendix 3, p. VII, lines 304-308).”

Whether these actors Stricker mentions are deliberately part of a group must remain unsaid, but the fact is that the general behaviour of the local people at the destination play an important role in terms of making the tourists feel welcome and comfortable in the city, which will contribute positively to the visitors’ overall experience of the destination visited.

In order for these groups to exist, as mentioned in the theory section, the group needs a spokesperson to describe who and what this group is and does. According to Latour, groups consist of group makers, group talkers and group holders, but the group is first recognized when compared to other competing groups, which is why the recognition of so-called anti-groups is vital. This is in order for the individuals within the groups to create a ‘us versus them’ so it is easier for the individuals within the group to identify themselves and at the

same time differentiate from “Them”. This also makes it easier for bystanders to separate the two different groupings from each other in the social context.

Applying this theory to Aalborg, there are many groupings present but not all are equally important to the visitor in order to have a good experience. The primary group that deals with the tourists are people within the service business e.g. people who work in shops, kiosks, hotels, restaurants, cafés, and in general any place where the visitor expect at least some level of service. However, for an experience to be extraordinary other actors must also act according to or exceeding the expectations of the tourists.

However, as we have not been to carry out this specific kind of study ourselves we have had to rely our analyses on the theoretical aspects mentioned in the literature and relate it to the study of Ren and Blichfeldt which concerned with the Polish town Zakopane. It is allowing us to apply a theoretical perspective to Aalborg based on the interview conducted with Stricker.

One of the things Stricker mentioned multiple times during the interview was “experience”, which indicates that he has a certain belief that Aalborg has something exciting that can provide a good experience for visitors. As mentioned in Appendix 3, when asked of the desired target group of VisitAalborg:

“I do not think there is any one group, I think that the mix is interesting for the tourists and for the local development of Aalborg as well, because they can do different things. Families tend to seek one type of experiences while they are here and one type of food products and so on, and if you are in a romantic getaway you do different things. So I think the mix is quite interesting, but one thing I like to add to that, if I may, is that I think one of the interesting groups that we don’t really look at, is singles. And I think that that is not only Aalborg, but I think that is an industry problem or challenge, that so many people are singles that we don’t really cater to single tourism. Although singles are more than 50% of the population in most countries, so that is a bit strange, as an industry, that we don’t have that focus(Appendix 3, p.II-III, lines 87-95).”

In this example Stricker actually also mentions a potential market to target in the future, being the singles. However, this would also demand a shift in corporate strategy from

VisitAalborg, which we believe is very unlikely as we are not of the impression that the tourists that VisitAalborg ideally wish to attract are the same type of people who go to, Magaluf, Ibiza, or Sunny Beach where singles can really cut loose. VisitAalborg, instead ought to keep focus on attracting visitors that will appreciate Aalborg for what it is in terms of experiences, culture, art, and architecture, instead of trying to brand the destination as something it is not. A study from VisitAalborg's stakeholder report shows that only around 70 of the 256 respondents believe that VisitAalborg does a good job in terms of hosting the visitors during the time they visit Aalborg (VisitAalborg 2016, p.9), which also indicates that the stakeholders feel that more could be done in terms of attracting and hosting international visitors. Furthermore, the report also clearly states that the DMO ought to focus more on benefitting from social media and other digital platforms as VisitAalborg's use hereof is very scarce, which is also addressed in the report (VisitAalborg 2016, p. 15)

The actor network theory is used as a mean of explaining the complexities and dynamics within the destination. All the persons who the traveller meet during his/her stay at the destination will to some extent, willingly or unwillingly have contributed to the experience of the destination from the travellers point of view, as the image the individual create of the destination is formed through the actions experienced in the environment, which in this case is Aalborg as a destination.

Having the predicament as being the happiest people in the world, it is also important to VisitAalborg that the local actors participate in the action of generating a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere for the visitors during their stay in town. This also correlates to what is mentioned in our characteristic of the Chinese tourists, section 5.2.1, who are increasingly travelling to Europe in the search of new travel experiences. Furthermore, Aalborg can also tick many of the boxes in terms of what demands and desires the Chinese tourists possess. In general the Chinese connects Scandinavia with beautiful scenery, safety, peacefulness, freedom and many more, however the ability to separate the Scandinavian countries is more of a problem for the Chinese, hence making aware of the possibilities and experiences available in Aalborg is important to the DMO VisitAalborg in terms of attracting this new segment of visitors.

However, the main criteria for attracting the Chinese should be the one of making them feel comfortable and cosy without them having to fear for their personal belongings and safety, instead of focusing on making the visitors visit all attractions in and around Aalborg, which will most likely be very stressful if the visitor only has one or two days stay in the city. This also means that VisitAalborg as a DMO has a job to do in terms of explaining to visitors, this kind of buzz and feeling in and around the city, which is a combination of a vibrant study life, thriving business life, and ever expanding line of service industry with something for all, which all play a role in what they will experience when visiting Aalborg.

In historical terms Aalborg is the working mans city. However, as time has gone the city has developed into a regional capital for Northern Jutland, where focus today is on educating young people for the future and developing the city to a lively place rather than the working mans city. Changing the image of a city though, is not easy. As the city has changed, we must also expect people to change with time. This means that through the development of the city the local people (actors) will most definitely have an opinion on most projects taking place around Aalborg. Furthermore, his/her perception of the project in question, take for example the Tomás Saraceno sculpture to be built at the old distillery in the West end of Aalborg, will also affect how the actor interacts with and feel about the new initiatives. If the actor dislike it one will become less inclined to tell other people about it, or even worse for VisitAalborg find other people likeminded who also dislike it and hereby to some extent oppose this type of city development.

However, if the individual actually likes the ideas and project being carried out by, among others, the DMO, one will be more inclined to speak positively hereof and lead more people to see it than otherwise. The individual perception, in general relates to the overall satisfaction with the city that the actors live within, so it is quite natural that if the individual is content with the place one lives and the possibilities available in and around the destination are many, one is more inclined to stay. What one might also assume is that when you have lived in Aalborg, for more or less your entire life, one may feel a kind of pride as a citizen of Aalborg because of what the city has become, because one still remember how it looked before the modernization of Aalborg began. This also plays a role in the way the local people act towards visitors, with pride and pleasure to tell about the city or help anyone find way if that is the

case, in general being welcoming towards visitors. While it may be harder for newcomers to find the same pride over a new city, and additionally their knowledge regarding Aalborg is most likely very scarce in contradiction to a local, hence the reason for a possible change of attitude depending on whom the visitor encounters at the destination.

As previously mentioned, Aalborg is a city with a vibrant study life hence there is many young people in Aalborg. This also means that there are lots of activities available for young people, why attracting young Chinese tourist to here should not be deemed as unrealistic. Furthermore, Aalborg also has several teachers and students from China who study here (Anderson 2018)., which also aids in the foundation of spreading knowledge and the image of Aalborg to markets not focused on before, here including China Hopefully these Chinese have a pleasant stay while studying in Aalborg and will tell their friends and families to go visit Aalborg in the future, as word of mouth is one of the strongest endorsements available, seeing as there is no one, one would trust more than a good friend or a family member. Despite these people not being visitors in Aalborg as tourists in the traditional sense, we still believe that the cooperation between education institutions in Aalborg and Chinese students will assist in providing more knowledge of Denmark in general and Aalborg specifically to the Chinese people, you could even argue that these people at some point becomes local actors to some extent, as they will pass on their information and experiences regarding the destination. However, this requires that the Chinese will have taken part in some sort of action during his/her period in Aalborg in order to become considered a local actor, and furthermore that the individual has been here for a certain amount of time in order to be considered as a part of the local actors.

It is important to carry in mind when dealing with the local actors, that there are several meanings of social, and that we in this context are referring to the social as being used to describe phenomena like the movement between non-social elements more than an actual substance hence it is only visible briefly when these movements are assembling or dissembling. It is furthermore important to keep in mind that the identity that VisitAalborg portray of Aalborg should be considered as the sum of several local actors, as VisitAalborg are to be considered as an umbrella organization for tourism in Aalborg. The identity that VisitAalborg portray are therefore affected by the many different local actors of Aalborg,

hence the analysis of the local actors are contributing to analysing the identity of Aalborg that VisitAalborg portray.

5.3 Discussion of VisitAalborg's identity formation

Through Ren and Blichfeldt, it was found that VisitAalborg wishes to portray themselves differently depending on the target group it attempts to reach. The differentiated marketing strategy is, according to Therkelsen, a necessity as the image formation of tourists differ whether they are from Asia or Australia, whether they are young or old, have families or are singles and so on. This chapter aims to provide a discussion towards whether VisitAalborg's identity formation is suitable to Chinese tourists and whether it can be applied to that segment with an intense focus on young Chinese tourists, and how they can possibly adapt their identity formation to be suitable to that specific target group. The discussion will add a cultural perspective to the attraction process of tourists, thereby adding a cultural dimension to the discussion.

Therkelsen uses Urry's definition of tourism as something that entails a search of what is extraordinary compared to one's everyday life and environment (Urry 1990). It is therefore important for VisitAalborg to understand the everyday life of a young Chinese target group in order for them to apply a successful marketing strategy. It is important to state that VisitAalborg has not included a strategy of attracting Chinese tourists in the marketing strategy, according to Stricker, why the identity that VisitAalborg portray of Aalborg might not be tailored for the Chinese market (Appendix 3, p. IX, lines 378-390). This discussion is therefore concerned with the cultural factors that play a role, should VisitAalborg attempt to target Chinese tourists in the future. The discussion will therefore be based on the values and findings of Ren and Blichfeldt, which will then be perspectivated to Therkelsens Image Formation of Tourists.

Therkelsen underlines the importance of a *glocal* approach, meaning that VisitAalborg should not only base their destination branding towards suiting the consumer patterns of the tourists, but should also consider the resources available of the destination. According to the interview with Flemming Bruhn (Appendix 4, p. III, lines 89-99), the Chinese have very little

to none knowledge of Denmark, which obviously includes Aalborg. The resources available in Aalborg in terms of attracting Chinese tourists, attractions such as Kunsten, is therefore not sufficient to attract Chinese tourists to Aalborg. The resources available for attracting Chinese tourists are therefore limited, as Stricker states that Aalborg does not have major attractions like Legoland or H.C. Andersen. However, that does not necessarily play a large role, according to Therkelsen, as the image formation of a destination is not necessarily due to the destinations resources, as the image formation is based on a priori images on an individual- and collective level. As stated in theoretical framework, the marketer has little to none influence regarding the individual level, why the marketing strategy should be tailored towards influencing the collective level.

The image formation was based on three layers of *impressions*, *attitudes* and *values*. It can be argued that, as of now, Chinese tourists know very little of Denmark and Aalborg, according to Bruhn, why their impression of the cultural level of Denmark is rather limited. As Stricker states, he thinks that the marketing strategy of Aalborg should be rather value based rather than attractions and furthermore states that the tourists that come to Aalborg likes the welcoming approach of visiting Aalborg. The *impressions* level might therefore not only be attractions, but can also be value based.

As argued in the analysis of the identity-analysis that VisitAalborg portray of Aalborg, Aalborg is challenged in terms of attractions:

"(...)we don't have Legoland or Disney World or something on that scale, Taj Mahal, so I don't think that it is necessarily a reason to go in itself that we have attractions" (Appendix 3, p. V, lines 191-192).

Having the competitive edge of a world-known attraction such as the Eiffel Tower has a large impact on the image-formation of tourists, as the Eiffel tower creates an *impression* of Paris, which is a prerequisite of creating a *attitude* or *values* towards the city. In order for Aalborg to create an *impression* among Chinese tourists, they are to be recognized as having something unique whether it being tangible attractions or intangible elements. Stricker mentions Regan Vest, which is applying for UNESCO's World Heritage list, can play a role in putting Northern

Jutland, and thereby Aalborg, on the world map (Appendix 3, p.IV, lines 161-167). As of now, the only UNESCO World Heritage sites that are located on Zealand or southern Jutland, which creates little to no attention towards Northern Jutland. However, whether having a UNESCO World Heritage site in Northern Jutland will be successful in attracting more Chinese tourists is doubtful, as Stricker also mentions that Regan Vest caters to a specific target audience (Appendix 3, p.IV, lines 161-167) and furthermore as it still has little impact compared to larger and unique sites such as the Eiffel Tower in Paris and The Vatican State in Rome. Other elements, such as intangible values can therefore accompany attractions, which also aligns with the strategy of VisitAalborg as Stricker states that Aalborg has its biggest draw in terms of:

“(...) the sum of the experiences you get, that we have certain attractions that are good enough, but we also have, shall we say, the quality of life and the values that you can experience as a tourist when you are here” (Appendix 3, p. IV, lines 149-152).

VisitAalborg are also aware that they are to present Aalborg as a sum of values and social experiences rather than focusing on major attractions in order for Aalborg to make an *impression* towards possible future tourists.

Aalborg was awarded as being the happiest city throughout 2015 (Martin 2016) and Denmark in general known for the term ‘hygge’ throughout the world. Happiness and values such as happiness can therefore be values that can be associated with Aalborg and Denmark in general in order to create an *impression* among the Chinese. The term ‘hygge’ is becoming increasingly known among the Chinese, where especially tier two cities already somewhat do ‘hygge’ things (Lin 2017), where some larger companies in China are encouraging people to live ‘the hygge way’ (Lin 2017). However, despite living the ‘hygge way’ many Chinese do not, according to Lin, know what ‘hygge’ actually means or origins from. VisitAalborg could therefore benefit from emphasizing that ‘hygge’ is easy experienceable in Aalborg, as Aalborg has been the happiest city in Europe and those two terms are somewhat interrelated.

According to Bruhn, the main thing that Chinese people tend to compare Denmark with is H.C. Andersen, why values such as fairytales make an *impression* towards the Chinese tourists

(Appendix 4, p. III, lines 89-99). However, as Bruhn also states the *impression* does not go as deep so that it turns into an *attitude*, as Chinese do not necessarily know that H.C Andersen is from Denmark. The image formation among the Chinese people should therefore be considered as bad, as the more layers that are included in the Chinese perception of Denmark, the stronger an image exists within the Chinese people.

Therkelsen argues that an *impression* over time can become an attitude or a value, so that Denmark has the possibility to create a stronger perception of Denmark. However, as this master thesis is focused on Aalborg, a stronger image of Denmark in general will ultimately enable a larger opportunity for VisitAalborg to attract tourists to Aalborg. As the culture throughout Denmark is more or less similar, the *values* and *attitudes* toward Denmark are easier related to Aalborg in a destination branding context.

If VisitAalborg was to succeed, in practice, they are to understand the cultural background of the Chinese people, and furthermore investigate whether or not there are cultural differences in the different geographical areas of China. An example hereof is that the people from the Sichuan area are, although not familiar with the term 'hygge', already practicing 'hygge' activities which are very much related to what we see all over Denmark (Lin 2017). Summarizing the Sichuanese people with the definition of Urry, which stated that tourism entails searching for something that is extraordinary compared to one's everyday life and environment, the Sichuanese people are already 'practicing' 'hygge', without knowing, why the Danish 'hygge' might not be seen as extraordinary compared to their everyday life. This underlines the importance of a differentiated marketing strategy for the different geographical areas of China and furthermore of a *glocal* approach, which VisitAalborg has not yet conducted in China according to Stricker (Appendix 3, p.IX, lines 386-390).

Therefore, according to Therkelsen's image-formation theory, it is important for a DMO to investigate the cultural and social background of a targeted audience in order for the DMO to tailor its destination branding for it to be as successful as possible. As the latter part of our research question is concerned with how it is possible to attract young Chinese tourists via social media, a prerequisite for attracting young Chinese tourists is to understand that there might be a difference in the social and cultural background of the target group on social

media. This will be elaborated further in the analysis in 5.4.2, covering the analysis of young Chinese tourists.

However, as the second research questions of this master thesis is concerned with the identity-formation of the DMO's, and how they can possibly attract young Chinese tourists, the thesis will not further elaborate on the image formation of the Chinese tourists. The image-formation theory of Therkelsen has been used in order to analyze the identity that VisitAalborg portrays of Aalborg from a recipient's point of view and to discuss the possible barriers that exist when attempting to brand Aalborg to Chinese tourists. The theory furthermore substantiated the need of a *glocal* approach and the importance of a differentiated destination branding, as the image-formation of possible future tourists are different depending on the social and cultural background they have.

5.4 Analysis of Chinese Outbound Tourism

The following chapter will account for Chinese outbound tourism, and hereunder a special focus on young Chinese tourists. The analysis of the Chinese outbound tourism is important from a DMO perspective, as it is important to understand the target group when creating a destination branding strategy.

5.4.1 Characteristic of the Chinese tourist

As a mean of assisting us in our information search of data on the Chinese travellers we have applied the literature China's Outbound Tourism by Wolfgang Georg Arlt. He has more than 25 years of experience in Chinese-European business and tourism relations. He is professor of Leisure and Tourism Economy at the University of Applied Sciences in Stralsund, Germany. Furthermore, he is also the president of the China Outbound Tourism Research Association which every year present the European Chinese Tourists' Welcoming Award to a destination or a company who has done something extraordinary in terms of breaking down barriers between Chinese and European/western culture (Arlt 2006). We believe he has an extensive knowledge of the Chinese consumers that we can apply to our study. Furthermore, the characteristics will be based on an interview with Director and CFO of VisitDenmark Flemming Bruhn who has worked with Chinese relations since 2004.

In terms of history it is important to note that the Chinese tourists are relatively new to travelling in terms of history as the country first opened the borders for outbound travels in 1983 – 7 years after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 (Arlt 2006, p. 9-11).

According to Arlt, outbound tourism at the time of the publishing was a minor phenomenon in China with about only about 4 per cent of the population, roughly 50 million people, at the time having even travelled outside of China, without including travels to Hong Kong or Macao. However, the “Reform and Opening” paradigm of 1978, which originally was intended to attract foreign investors and technologies in to the country was not intended to let the Chinese tourists out, however this is what happened as a consequence hereof. At the same time the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Soviet Union also played a role in the opening for Chinese travellers. Though it was first in 1997 that Chinese tourists were allowed to travel to other regions than Southeast Asia (Arlt 2006, p. 20).

In order to understand the Chinese tourists better we asked Flemming Bruhn to characterize them in his own words:

(...) so in the beginning they were travelling always in groups, always with a guide, they were not very good at speaking English, so by travelling a group it gave them some security on how to behave and where to go and so on. That also meant that the travel guide had an enormous power to these groups. In some ways that changed a lot, because now they are more experienced travellers. They have been traveling for the last 10-15 years from the bigger cities, what we normally call tier 1 cities. So now they travel more and more like individuals. Maybe they still team up as a group because it's easier or it's cheaper or something like that, or the visa process being taken care of. They are more and more independent now. But not to make this question too long, but at the same time there are from the secondary and third tier cities, there are coming new groups – group travellers, because they are just starting travellers. So they kind of behave the same as the other ones did 10 years ago (Appendix 4, p. II, lines 52-62)."

For many years the travels were organised by China International Travel Service and China Travel Service so that the government organizations were able to control both the incoming

visitors but also the Chinese travelling overseas (Arlt 2006), as Flemming Bruhn also mentions. The quote also states that there is a difference between the more experienced travellers and the new travellers. What it also implies is that the experienced travellers resides in or around tier 1 cities in China and that these people are more inclined and experienced in travelling than people from rural areas with less access and exposure to marketing activities and perhaps therefore they are less informed of travelling. We furthermore asked Flemming Bruhn whether there is a difference between tourists in China based on their demographics where to the response was:

"That goes very much with what I said before, that from the bigger cities they are more experienced travellers nowadays, so they behave more like in a educated way or they learned how we want to see them. So we think they behave better in the western countries, while those in the secondary and third tier cities they are new to this travel and sometimes they don't really know or they have not learned how the western culture is. So they sometimes can seem rude when they are travelling around (Appendix 4, p. II, lines 80-85).

Flemming furthermore mentions a reason to why Westerners sometimes perceive Chinese tourists as being rude by explaining that it is grounded in lack of knowledge of Western cultures.

Going back to the literature, the table in appendix 5 from China's Outbound Tourism looks into the outbound destinations that Chinese tourists travelled to in the period 2000-2004, where it is explicitly visible that the number of tourists is growing rapidly every year, as well as it is quite visible that the Chinese tourists at this point felt most comfortable with travelling in the Asian region (Arlt 2006, p. 71-72). Here Hong Kong is the preferred travel destination with 45.1% of the Chinese travellers going here, while the preferred European travel destination at the time was Russia with 2.8 per cent of the Chinese travellers visiting the old Chinese ally (Arlt 2006).

Despite China opening up the borders for Chinese people to travel abroad, this is not something new within the two SAR's Taiwan and Hong Kong where people are more used to travel than in China as two-thirds of the 7.5 million citizens of Hong Kong travelled to

destinations other than mainland China or Macao in 2004, and even 20% of these travelled to destinations outside Asia (Arlt 2006, p. 75). This may be due to the fact that citizens in possession of a SAR Hong Kong passport do not need a visa for most countries which allows the people to travel freely to most Asian destinations and the Schengen area. In terms of travel patterns most of these visitors travel in the Asian region, followed by Europe, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand in the same order (Arlt 2006).

There are many incitements for travelling abroad for example visiting historical places, local food sampling, experiencing new cultures etc., that are taken into account when making a decision regarding where to travel to. However, what the individual wishes to see is subjective but it is evident that travellers from Hong Kong are more interested in eating non-Chinese food when travelling than the mainland Chinese and the Taiwanese travellers (Arlt 2006, p. 77).

Turning the attention to the Taiwanese travellers who, as many other Chinese/Asian people are deeply rooted in traditional customs and habits, for example, it is custom that Taiwanese travellers bring back gifts to friends or relatives, in similar fashion to the omiyage customs as seen in colonial power Japan (Arlt 2006). Shopping for branded goods in this context should therefore be deemed an important activity for these travellers. As many as three-quarters of the Taiwanese travellers prefer to travel in groups, however the younger generations prefer independent travelling. Europe was named as the favoured destination of travel by the Taiwanese travellers. In spite of that only about 1 per cent of travellers go there, with China and Hong Kong being the most visited followed by Japan, USA and Southeast Asia (Arlt 2006).

Turning the attention to the Chinese travellers it is obvious that a country which has such a large number of people living there will be very diverse:

"Nationality is only one variable that should be considered in predicting variation in tourist behaviour and should never be used as a sole explanatory variable. Certainly, not all tourists of the same nationality, regardless of demographic category, motivation, and life-style, behave the same" (Pizam og Sussman 1995, 917)

However the data regarding Chinese tourists available is scarce so despite the Chinese being one of the largest actors within the tourism industry and it is still growing as more people become aware of the travel opportunities that includes the entire world. This is in contradiction to previously when the Chinese tourists more or less only travelled within Southeast Asia, whereas the interest for non-Asian cultures is still increasing (Arlt 2006). However, as the Chinese tourists are quite new and diverse compared to other types of tourists from Western cultures, there are still many challenges in terms of how to adapt marketing and service to this group of consumers, not to mention cultural differences that may influence the travel both positively if addressed but potentially also negatively if faced with behaviour not accustomed or accepted in Chinese culture (Arlt 2006).

The concept of spending money and not receiving anything tangible in return is quite new in China. Tourism as a concept has existed longer than the concept of modernity. However, as a consequence of the late modernity people are being 'pulled' away from their homes in the search of experiences in other places due to advances in technology, living standards, social-welfare and international relations. From the opposite point of view you could say that modernity 'pushes' people away from their original homes to tourist destinations for experiencing change, relaxation, recreation, novelty, fantasy and freedom (Arlt 2006, p. 83)

In traditional sense travelling in China was only for the ruling, wealthy or educated people, as an expression says: *"He who travels far knows much."* Which proves that Chinese in traditional sense have been used to travelling. Despite it being travels to cities or religious sites, it proves that travelling has been used in China for many years as a mean of expanding the mind of the individual (Arlt 2006).

According to WTO when speaking of income there are certain stages of desires at different levels of income. For example when it reaches US\$ 300-400 people will be inclined to travel within their own countries, when it reaches US\$ 800-1,000 they will wish to go to neighbouring countries, and when it is more than US\$ 3,000 they will have the desire of travelling to destinations far away. In 2000 the per capita disposable income among residents in Beijing was US\$ 1,253 which according to WTO enabled the Chinese tourists to travel

neighbouring countries (Arlt 2006, p. 87), which also goes in accordance to previously mentioned travel patterns.

In terms of experience tourism Eastern cultures in general tend to favour human manipulation of nature in order to enhance its appeal in contrast to preservation of nature in a state (Arlt 2006). Examples hereof are for example the Zhangjiajie Glass Bridge in the Hunan Province. The bridge is 430 meters long and floats 300 meters above ground (China Highlights 2018) and is an example of the preference of enhancing the nature to enhance the appeal as mentioned before.

Earlier we mentioned that China as a country is so large that it could also be deemed a continent, why it is obvious that differences between inhabitants in one rural area is different from another as well as it being completely different to the inhabitants of the cities. Depending on where the individual resides, works, and acts accordingly will vary greatly as the country is so vast and diverse.

However, there are some traits to the Chinese tourist that are important to acknowledge. For example the concept of status in China is rather different to what is known from the Western cultures. The Chinese are very conscious with status however it is unlike the Western admiration of the outsider. Rather it is gained through the views of a person to whom the individual feel connected, and through purchases of travels and tangible items to prove it will assist the individual in creating a status that implies wealth for the individual. Therefore, it is important for the Chinese customers to make status oriented purchases despite the individual potentially not even liking the product, but solely investing in it in order to achieve equal status with one's group (Arlt 2006)

The Chinese have a term for the Scandinavian countries; Bei Ou, which covers Denmark, Sweden, Norway & Finland, as Director and CFO of VisitDenmark Flemming Bruhn also mentioned in his interview (Appendix 4).

"(...). So its that storytelling, the nice stories about Denmark and Danes being the happiest people, and why is that – that is because we have a good society, that is because we are doing the

bicycling which is good for both health and environment and all these things goes into the branding. Then we did last year, no the last two years we have had a Nordic branding project. Where we had a payoff saying “Bei Ou” which means of course in the Nordic countries, “Bei Ou” – more surprises per square meter. And that is a way of telling that maybe we don’t have the big icons like the Eiffel tower or the Taj Mahal and so on, but we have a lot of smaller very nice surprises if you come and visit us” (Appendix 4, p. V, lines 204-211)

Most Chinese connect the perception of the Scandinavian countries as having a relatively high price level and high standard of living. Therefore, the Scandinavian countries can be a prestigious destination to which to travel. Besides judging the country prestigious, people also connect features related to Northern Europe with beautiful scenery, safety, peacefulness, high levels of freedom, social welfare and economic development, and history (Arlt 2006, p. 189-192). However, historical events like the Vikings were not mentioned in the study, rather the tales of H.C. Andersen is well known to many Chinese people and therefore seeing and photographing e.g. the little mermaid is an interesting sight to the Chinese (Arlt 2006). However, the attractions/sights available in Denmark are not as attractive as other within the same proximity of travelling, meaning that we in Denmark should focus on creating a nice experience for the visitors, as Flemming Bruhn describes it when asked whether he believe this identity as being communicated successfully:

“Yes I think so because our last goals actually with all the countries that VisitDenmark do marketing in, that we don’t have the money and we don’t have the icons to attract them like the bigger countries that we are sometimes competing against, but if we can get people to travel here to see what is Denmark, what is Copenhagen, how beautiful it is, how nice it is to sit in a café and just enjoy life, then they have another feeling about Denmark, and it is that feeling that we try to tell them of in front before they go and that hopefully also that we can see on the social media also the impression they have when they are here so they tell on the social media again the tell all their friends and family about the good experiences they have. So I think it is successful in that way” (Appendix 4, p.V, lines 215-223)

This quote also correlates to what is mentioned in Artl’s literature regarding what the Chinese tourists look for when travelling abroad. This also correlates to what Stricker said in terms of

attracting customers, that focus should not be on the sights/attractions available besides the most interesting, rather focus should be on creating a feeling of safety and comfort among the tourist in order for them to really experience what Denmark is.

In order to attract more visitors from China to Denmark, VisitDenmark operates on various social media platforms, and the organisation markets itself to the Chinese through these platforms and in cooperation with local Chinese travel agencies as Flemming Bruhn explained when questioned about how they reach out to the Chinese customers;

“Yes, that is what we are doing all the time, we try to attract them. We do it in mainly two ways: One is very important still to this day and even more important 10 years ago, but it is still very important to educate the travel trade in China. That means the bigger tour operators so they know what Denmark is and what the Nordic countries are, so they can include it in their programs and maybe have more days in the program about Denmark and so on. So that is a very important part of it” (Appendix 4, p. III, lines 122-127)

Flemming mentions the importance of educating the Chinese travellers through the assistance of the local Chinese tour operators and the experienced travellers to pass on information to the less experienced travellers. He then continues to the social media platforms where VisitDenmark operates in order to attract the Chinese.

“We also have, kind of a, online educational tool for the travel trade, where, if I remember right, have 11.000 followers taken part of our online tool. So that is very important. Also, we sometimes invite the biggest tour operators to come to Denmark and we take them around in Denmark to show all the best we have to offer. So that is one way. The other part is, as you say, social media, our website and so on. Also, we are very active on the social media, especially WeChat and Weibo. It is very important to be active there. On Weibo we have, I think, like 250.000 followers and on WeChat, which is different from Weibo, because on WeChat we don’t have so many followers, we have like 15.000 followers on WeChat so we do a lot of posting there. We regularly post on these platforms, but we also invite what we call digital influencers to come to Denmark. Maybe you read about last year, we had a very famous Chinese popstar, Jackson Yi” (Appendix 4, p.III, lines 127-137)

Flemming Bruhn continues to explain how they attracted Jackson Yi and had him come to Odense in the hope of attracting more Chinese tourists;

“And he is, yeah, they are crazy with him apparently. So in total we got 2.2 billion views on the social media about Denmark and Jackson Yi. So that is of course a good way to showcase Denmark as a popular place to go. We have also had a blogger who is mainly into foods and gastronomy, which is called UK Sister, and she has like, I think, 14 million followers from the social media, so that was very popular. We had the big TV show called Flowers on Trip that has, I think, 115 million viewers with two episodes from Denmark, so we try really to go out in that way, because VisitDenmark don’t have a lot of money for the Chinese market, so we have to try and do it a little smarter than just advertising (Appendix 4, p.IV, lines 141-148).”

As a follow-up question we asked Flemming whether VisitDenmark tailors the communication to the specific channel of communication or whether the strategy is fixed and the same for all channels to which Flemming responded:

“Ehm, we normally don’t advertise on social media because we are a little poor country (laughs), no but we try to do it as I said before through having for example, it is a good example actually, videos if we have some good videos – we for example had Victor Axelsen going around in Odense and telling about his hometown Odense and that was a good thing to post on the social media of course. We also had when we had our digital influencers Jackson Yi or UK Sister and so on in Denmark we had some videos that we posted on our social media, but also we tried to have them come to our border so these megastars posted it themselves which was much more efficient actually. So videos are a very good way of doing it, nice pictures and videos are very important these days (Appendix 4, p.IV, lines 169-177).”

Flemming states that VisitDenmark has experienced these happenings as a having a positive effect on the Chinese customers in terms of spreading the message of Denmark to more of the Chinese population. In order to assess which channels are the most affective and suitable, an assessment of the online media channels in China will be investigated in section 5.5.

5.4.2 Analysis of Young Chinese Outbound Tourists

Following the account of Chinese tourism, the following chapter will further elaborate on Chinese tourists and especially young Chinese tourists.

The target group that this master thesis is concerned on attracting to Aalborg is what is being considered, as the Generation Y. Generation Y is the generation in China whom was born in the 1980s and 1990s. The Generation Y is characterized as being the backdrop of China's rapid economic growth as they are more economically affluent, more politically open-minded, more culturally diversified and better educated compared to the older generations of China (Ying 2015). Generation Y consists of approximately 300 million people in China, where more than 25% of those are well-educated and are working in bigger cities where they are paid higher salaries (Ying 2015). The millennial are furthermore known as being tech-crazy and savvy and are spending more time playing games, using apps and time on the internet in general compared to other generations, while prioritizing travel as being an important factor. They are furthermore more willing to pay more for international travels while preferring to travel to destinations further away from the Chinese mainland (Ying 2015).

The Generation Y of China are very much similar to younger generations that we know from the western world today, as they are much more internationalized and are generally better English speaker than their parents. They are therefore also more capable of travelling alone, which is something that aligns with Bruhns statement:

"(...) young Chinese from the bigger cities, they have been travelling quite a lot already a lot of them with their families or maybe also educated and is better at English, so they are more confident that they can actually travel as more individual." (Appendix 4, p. II, lines 67-69)

The Generation Y segment of China, which is being referred to as young Chinese tourists throughout this master thesis, are furthermore interested in different things compared to the older generation according to Bruhn:

"(...) They are also in many ways try to seek some other things when they travel that the older ones don't. The older ones are more like they want to take pictures of the icons, for example The

Little Mermaid or the Eiffel Tower and so on, while the younger ones are more into maybe go a little deeper in the 'behind' of the icons and see how our people are living, 'why is it so good in Denmark'" (Appendix 4, p.II, lines 69-73)

According to the report on Chinese outbound tourism in Europe for the European Commission, Chinese tourists highly value the safe environment, clean air and blue sky of countries in Europe (Croce 2016). However, whereas attractions and icons are preferred among the elder generation, the young Chinese tourists are typically travelling differently than their parents. They value other elements than attractions and are, also according to Bruhn, seeking unique experiences and value freedom on their journeys (Croce 2016). The segment of the young Chinese tourists are also known as the Wenyi Youth, who typically travels alone or with friends, are valuing freedom and have notebooks, smartphones and internet devices as a must-have on their vacation (Croce 2016). They seek to explore and experience what is 'behind' the icons as Bruhn explained it, why this segment is the interesting and suitable segment to attract to Aalborg.

Outbound tourism in China to Denmark and Europe in general are rather limited as only 8% of the 25.000 travel agencies in China are allowed to operate in outbound tourism, and as these agencies are mainly gathered in the tier 1 cities (Croce 2016), it is relevant to attract young Chinese tourists from these cities. It does align well with the segment of the Wenyi Youth and the Generation Y are typically living and working in the tier 1 cities and are, according to Bruhn, also the segment who is typically accustomed with travelling as they have been travelling a lot already with their families in their youth.

Convincing young Chinese tourists to visit Denmark can be a difficult task, as Bruhn explained in the interview, Denmark is not really known amongst the Chinese and has not made an *impression* in the young Chinese travellers image-formation. Bruhn also described one of the main challenges for VisitDenmark is to convince Chinese travellers to take a 10-hour trip to Denmark rather than a 10-hour trip to Australia:

"So that is one thing of course that is difficult for us. It is also, when Chinese are looking at the whole world if you take, if you are going to travel 9-10 hours to go to Denmark, you could also go

to New Zealand or Australia or the United States or Sri Lanka, so the whole world is open to you so why should they pick little Denmark?" (Appendix 4, p.VI, lines 230-234)

However, as the Generation Y travellers are typically considered as being Wenyi Youth travellers who are typically backpacking and seeking freedom and experiences beside attractions more than attraction, an pivotal objective for Aalborg in order to differentiate themselves and attract that segment is to be considered as a 'getaway' for that segment. Hereby is meant that as the segment are less interested in attractions, Aalborg has the opportunity to focus on experience marketing in forms of emotional experiences rather than landscapes and attractions. As mentioned in the analysis of VisitAalborg's social media presence, VisitAalborg focuses on different elements on the different social media platforms. Where their Instagram profile showed the landscapes and attractions of Aalborg, which can be an interesting factor among backpackers, it is their YouTube content that is more interesting in terms of presenting values and experiences besides attractions. Presenting and showing Aalborg as the happiest city in Europe through videos can therefore have a positive effect on attracting especially the young Chinese travellers. However, as mentioned in the report for the European Commission, one of the biggest threats of Chinese travellers coming to Europe is the lack of information and content on Chinese, despite increasing competencies in English, as Chinese travellers still prefer their information in Chinese (Croce 2016).

As mentioned prior in the section of the account of the Chinese outbound tourism, the Chinese value information from their peers higher than from institutions. This also applies to the Generation Y of China, despite their increased notion on internationality and them typically working in larger companies operating in many countries (Ying 2015). This further substantiates that fact that the Chinese prefer their information from their peers, preferably in Chinese, why it is important for destinations, hereby meant Aalborg, to have information in Chinese and furthermore to have agents in China sharing information in Aalborg. Their increased notion on reliable information from their peers, included with the fact that the segment are spending more time on the internet than other segments of China (Ying 2015), makes it important for DMO's to be present and noticed on social media where conversations, sharing and groups are important factors.

As it is only 8% of the travel agencies in China that are allowed to operate within outbound international tourism in China, it is relevant to collaborate with these travel agencies in order to send the Chinese tourists towards Aalborg. This is also an important factor of VisitDenmark as Bruhn states:

“(...) One is very important still to this day and even more important 10 years ago, but it is still very important to educate the travel trade in China. That means the bigger tour operators so they know what Denmark is and what the Nordic countries are, so they can include it in their programs and maybe have more days in the program about Denmark and so on (...)” (Appendix 4, p.III, lines 123-126).

However, the general tendency among the experienced travellers is that they see the package tours as inferior and that they are planning their tours more independently (Croce 2016). That is especially seen within the experienced travellers, which the Generation Y are considered to be a part of. They are furthermore an interesting segment as the younger Chinese tourists are typically staying a bit longer, which is important as 85% of the Chinese going to Europe are typically only visiting major cities due to their limited time in Europe (Croce 2016). It is therefore interesting to attract the younger segment, as they are able to stay for a longer period of time and thereby enabling them to visit more cities. This means that the Chinese that typically are visiting Copenhagen also has the opportunity to travel to tier two cities in Denmark such as Aalborg.

Apart from shopping, which historically was the incentive for Chinese tourists to travel to Europe, they now more than ever crave lifestyle and experiences while travelling abroad (Weinswig 2017). As the Generation Y is typically more experienced travellers, they seek experiences that stand out from typical travels, and furthermore seeks something extraordinary that can be shared on their social media profile. As Aalborg does not have high-end shopping possibilities as in Copenhagen (e.g. Louis Vuitton, Gucci), the city will therefore have to base its marketing on experiences and values in order to attract the young Chinese tourists.

5.5 Analysis of social media in China

As the second research question is concerned with attracting young Chinese tourists to Aalborg via social media, it is important to analyze how and why the segment spent time on the social media in China. As explained in the clarification of social media in China, the social media in China differs in many ways from the traditional social media that we know in the Western World such as Facebook and Instagram. The clarification of the social media in China chapter served as an informative clarification of the largest social media in China, whereas this chapter will investigate the opportunities that are present on the Chinese social media site. This investigation will be the foundation of how it is possible from a DMO perspective, to attract young Chinese tourists to Aalborg. The social media platforms included in this analysis are the platforms that are perceived as suitable in order to provide a profound solution to the research questions. Other social media platforms exist, however, the social media platforms included in this analysis do all target and contain young Chinese users.

As mentioned in section 5.4.2, the segment that this master thesis is concerned with is the Generation Y of China. This generation is the segment in China that uses the most time on social media and is furthermore the segment that, according to Bruhn, is the most suited to travel alone as they are typically experienced travellers who furthermore speak English very well (Appendix 4, p. V, lines 183-194). The following analysis will therefore look into the trends and the consumption of this generation on social media.

As mentioned in the clarification of social media in China, the social media differs in terms of usage and purpose, why the possibilities of benefitting from social media therefore also differ. In the chapter of the analysis of VisitAalborg's social media it was found that VisitAalborg does not have accounts on any Chinese social media as they are only present on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Furthermore it was found that the different social media were targeting different segments, as only the Instagram was in English whereas the YouTube was partly English. The various social media of VisitAalborg are therefore not in any way designed to target and attract Chinese tourists. Additionally, does VisitAalborg's website not contain the option to view the sight in Chinese, why it is in no way designed to attract Chinese tourists, as it was found that the tourists of China prefer their information in their native

language (Ying 2015). However, VisitAalborg strategy as of now is not concerned with attracting Chinese tourists as of now:

“(...) China is a hugely interesting market of course for many nations and even cities in Denmark. But as of yet, we are not really on board, if you will, in the Chinese market.” (Appendix 3, p. VI, lines 258-260)

As discussed in the chapter of outbound tourism in China, the tourists of China prefer to gain information of destinations from their peers, as they trust information from peers more than institutions. It is therefore important for DMO's that attempt to brand their destination to create some sort of E-WOM on social media in order for the destination to differentiate themselves from other destinations and furthermore to create some 'buzz' towards the destination on e.g. social media (Kietzmann, et al. 2011). It is therefore important that the users of e.g. social media are aware of the destination even existing and that it is possible to visit while travelling around Scandinavia. It is therefore problematic that VisitAalborg do not have social media profiles set up on Chinese social media if they were to attract Chinese tourists. The first step of attracting Chinese tourists via social media is therefore to create social media profiles on the Chinese social media, as it was found in the analysis of young Chinese outbound tourism that the Generation Y, which this master thesis is concerned with attracting, is highly present on social media.

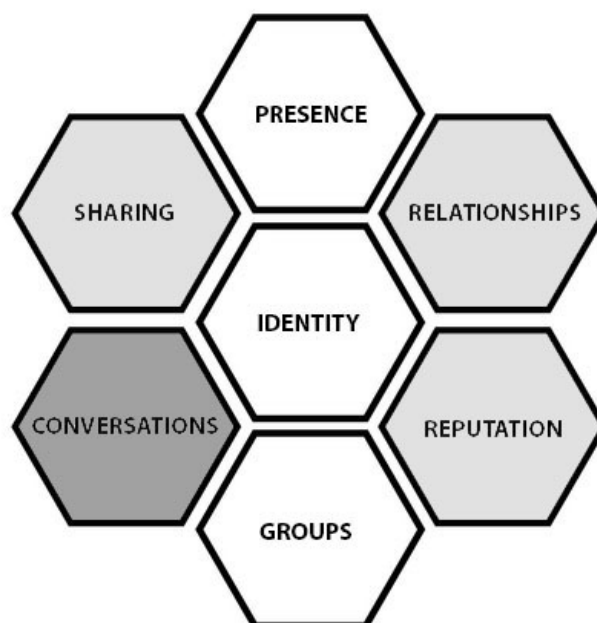
The importance of being known among young Chinese tourists is an objective that VisitDenmark has acknowledged, as VisitDenmark do have Chinese social media profiles:

“(...) Also, we sometimes invite the biggest tour operators to come to Denmark and we take them around in Denmark to show all the best we have to offer. So that is one way. The other part is, as you say, social media, our website and so on. Also, we are very active on the social media, especially WeChat and Weibo. It is very important to be active there. On Weibo we have, I think, like 250.000 followers and on WeChat, which is different from Weibo, because on WeChat we don't have so many followers, we have like 15.000 followers on WeChat so we do a lot of posting there. We regularly post on these platforms, but we also invite what we call digital influencers to

come to Denmark. Maybe you read about last year, we had a very famous Chinese popstar, Jackson Yi.” (Appendix 4, p. III, lines 129-137)

5.5.1 Weibo

Where Weibo is considered to be the largest social media account of VisitDenmark with it's 250.000 followers. Considering the fact that Weibo has 340 million monthly active users, the numbers is not impressive comparing it with the total number of users, however, other important factors also plays a role as the destinations in Denmark needs to have host accommodation for all the tourists visiting Denmark, hereunder Aalborg. As stated in the clarification of social media in China, the majority of the users on Weibo are young white-collar workers and the urban online population, why the social media platform is very well suited to attract young Chinese tourists. Furthermore Weibo provides the possibility to share information and engage with other users, why Weibo provides the possibility to share E-WOM of destinations, why it is a very attractive to be present on from a DMO perspective. Comparing Weibo with known social media from the Western world such as Facebook, Weibo is more concerned with conversations than having actual relationships as Facebook. Utilizing Kietzmann et. al. honeycomb framework, Weibo are to be classified as being concerned with the following elements:



The personal updates from Weibo are limited to 140 keystrokes, why the messages often has to short and precise. It might therefore not be the appropriate social media platform to tell and recommend fellow users of experiences. However, as the social media is concerned with primarily having conversations with fellow users of Weibo, it is an appropriate platform for Aalborg to be shared on, as the information regarding Aalborg are considered as being more trustworthy than if the information was passed on from travel trade agencies. Trending on Weibo is, however, easier said than done, as all companies wish for their brand to be trending on larger social media such as Weibo. However, Weibo provides an opportunity for Aalborg as a city to create an account and from here on interact with other users on Weibo, which will create some attention towards Aalborg. Furthermore companies are allowed to advertise on Weibo, which provides another opportunity for Aalborg to be seen. However, as Stricker mentioned that VisitAalborg are working with a limited budget, spending large amounts of money on advertising might not yield the results that VisitAalborg wants. An important factor of the effectiveness of advertising nowadays, is that it is important for DMO's to take into account that 36% of the Chinese mobile browsers has ad-blockers activated (BlockAdBlock 2017), thereby filtering out advertisements from websites why the effectiveness of banner ads and the likes hereof are very questionable and might therefore not yield satisfactory results. Furthermore Alibaba, a large Chinese pendant to eBay, has developed a browser which has an ad-blocker installed directly into the browser, which filters out any advertisements, that 65,9% of the Chinese uses for browsing (BlockAdBlock 2017). VisitAalborg might therefore have to look other ways than spending the budget on advertisements, as these might yield limited results.

One of the biggest challenges towards creating 'buzz' towards Aalborg is that the Chinese do not know that the city of Aalborg might even exist, which is pivotal according to Therkelsen in order for the city to create an *impression*. However, other methods of creating 'buzz' towards destinations exist besides advertising. As mentioned prior, it is an important factor that people know Aalborg but more importantly that people begin to share knowledge and experiences of Aalborg in order for Aalborg to succeed in attracting young Chinese tourists.

Bruhn also mentioned this factor as being one of the most important factors in terms of attracting tourists but also the complications:

“(...)you have to be close to the digital influencers in the market to attract them (tourists, ed.) because we don’t have the money to do it, we cannot go to lets say Jackson Yi and say “Okay we give you 500.000 DKK if you go to Denmark”. We actually got him for free, we only paid him two business class tickets to go to Denmark so things like that is very important to be in the market”

(Appendix 4, p.VI, lines 257-261)

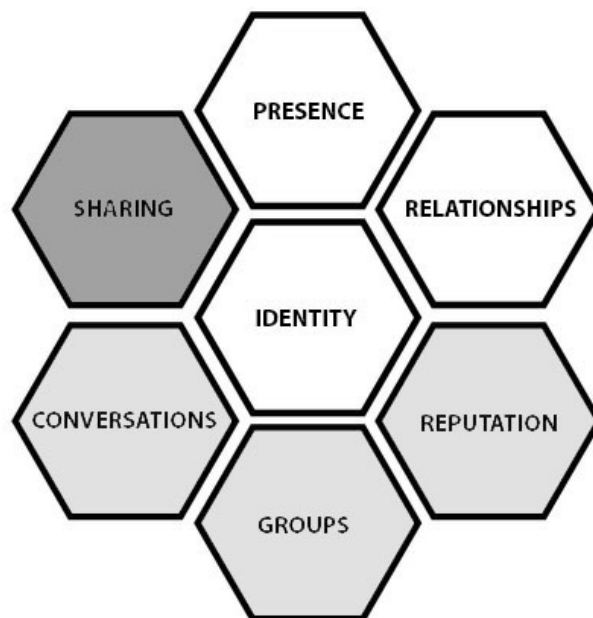
Digital influencers can therefore be considered as being an effective method of passing on information of Aalborg and can force their followers to take a standpoint towards Aalborg as a destination. The information is furthermore passed on in their native language, if the influencer chosen is Chinese, which may aid in breaking down the barrier of the Chinese trusting the information. It is furthermore considered as effective as the followers has chosen to follow the influencer personally, why it is assumed that the majority of the influencers followers are trusting the information that the influencers passes on. However, there are also negative connotations to trusting an influencer to spread the word of Aalborg, as the posts shared from the influencer might quickly become out-dated as new posts on e.g. Weibo are being shared, thereby the post disappearing on the profile feed. As Stricker mentioned that VisitAalborg operates with a limited budget, it might therefore be considered as a risk if they are to spend their budget on one influencer in hopes of attracting young Chinese tourists via social media. However, it should be considered as being an effective way of creating ‘buzz’ towards Aalborg, which is the premises of attracting young Chinese tourists, as the influencer can aid in creating an *impression* among the young Chinese tourists, which according to Therkelsen is a prerequisite in order for them to consider visiting Aalborg.

Weibo can be considered as being the most suitable social media platform for Aalborg to be branded on due to the amount of users of Weibo, if they are to attract young Chinese tourists, thereby being the exact segment that this master thesis is concerned with. It can furthermore contribute with creating conversations of Aalborg where short limited experiences of Aalborg can be shared on in order for Aalborg to be ‘discovered’ and thereby create an *impression* among the young Chinese tourists. Being successful in terms of creating ‘buzz’ towards

Aalborg might, however, not be as easy as paying a digital influencer, why it will be important for VisitAalborg to create positive connotations of Aalborg and to create a competitive edge of Aalborg in order to differentiate itself from other European or even Nordic cities. How Aalborg can create brand equity towards itself will be elaborated and discussed in section 5.7.

5.5.2 Youku Tudou

As Weibo are mainly concerned with the conversation element of the honeycomb of social media, other social media platforms than Weibo can contribute to revealing the possibilities and experiences that Aalborg has to offer. Social media platforms such as Youku Tudou, which is similar to YouTube, can contribute with sharing experiences and values.



Honeycomb of Youku Tudou

VisitAalborg already has a YouTube account, where it was found that their videos were emphasized on showing values and the experiences of what Aalborg has to offer. The same can be applied to Youku Tudou, as YouTube and Youku Tudou are very much alike. By conducting videos of Aalborg and hereby showing the values that Aalborg as a city has to offer rather than the major attractions. As mentioned prior in the master thesis, Aalborg needs to focus on other elements than major attractions in order to gain a competitive advantage. The

WenYi Youth that VisitAalborg are to attract values experiences more than attractions, why focusing on showing what Aalborg has to offer besides attractions via videos on Youku Tudou can be beneficial for VisitAalborg. However, the same problem, as was found on Weibo, exists on Youku Tudou as the problem of getting 'discovered' might be problematic, as other destinations might opt to focus on showing experiences and values as Aalborg.

The general trend on Youku Tudou is concerned on user-generated content rather than corporate content from e.g. DMO's (Clover 2015). This is due to the younger generation of China are more interested in participating, editing and interacting themselves, why the locus of power has shifted towards the users more than the information passed from companies. This aligns well with the fact that the tourists of China prefer information from peers rather companies. As the master thesis is concerned with attracting young Chinese tourists, it is relevant to look at the tendencies of those. As the general development on Youku, much like YouTube, is concerned with user-generated content, why users rather than DMO's share the values and experiences of destinations. Influencers, as mentioned prior, are also present on Youku Tudou, as on Weibo, why the same possibilities apply for influencers on Youku Tudou as on Weibo, as the influencers are typically seen as users rather than official accounts. However, where Weibo was considered with conversations why the experiences and values shared are in words, Youku Tudou can visually conceptualize the values and experiences of a city. Both elements are, however, desired from a DMO perspective and typically cater to different consumer segments, as some people tend to prefer their information coming from a specific communication channel. The same restrictions of influencers apply to the influencers of Youku Tudou as on Weibo, as VisitAalborg operates with a limited budget it may not be the preferred strategy.

Other opportunities arise, as there exists alternatives to influencers. Recent surveys concluded that the more relationships that are present, the less personal and affective it becomes (Dunbar 2016). Furthermore is information from those from the 'inner tribe' perceived as being trust worthier than information from outside the 'inner tribe'. Micro-influencing are trending on the Chinese social platforms, as information received from people who are not necessarily promoting destinations out of the sole purpose of making money but more to share the stories and experiences of a destination. Micro-influencers do come in

different sizes and can vary ranging from being industry experts to everyday consumers providing longtail influencing. Bruhn already mentioned the importance of being in the online Chinese market hereunder especially the social media but also mentions educating the travel trade of China:

“(…) One is very important still to this day and even more important 10 years ago, but it is still very important to educate the travel trade in China. That means the bigger tour operators so they know what Denmark is and what the Nordic countries are, so they can include it in their programs and maybe have more days in the program about Denmark and so on” (Appendix 4, p. III lines 123-126)

(…) Also, we sometimes invite the biggest tour operators to come to Denmark and we take them around in Denmark to show all the best we have to offer” (Appendix 4, p. III, lines 129-130)

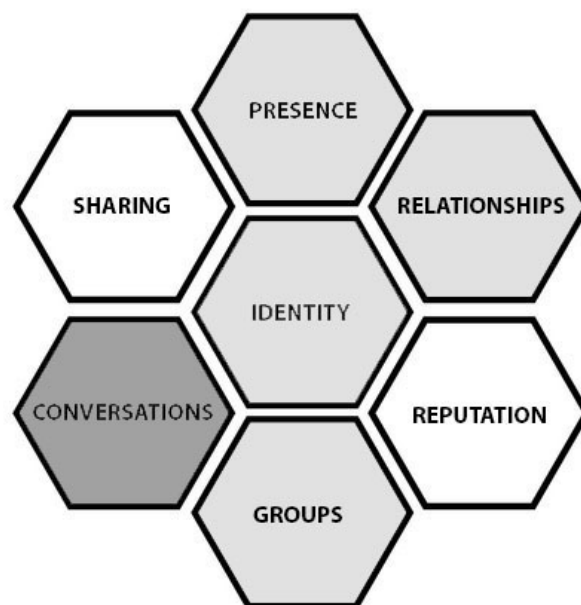
Educating the travel trade can be beneficial in both ways as the primary objective of educating the travel trade is so the travel agencies know what Denmark has to offer so they can include it in their travel programs. However, a secondary objective can be to educate industry experts whom themselves can share experiences of Denmark in their own everyday life when conversing with families, friends etc. on e.g. social media. VisitDenmark has therefore in some sort already been involved in micro-influencing whether it being intentional or not, as they have invited tour operators to Denmark in order for them to share their knowledge and experiences to their followers. This can be an entry point for VisitAalborg as well as recent surveys do conclude that micro-influencing on social media in China delivers better ROI than investing in larger KOL (Key Opinion Leaders) (Insights 2017).

The user-generated trend on Youku Tudou can therefore be considered as a suitable platform for VisitAalborg to focus on, as the user-generated content matches the tendencies of micro-influencing. Youku Tudou is furthermore considered as being a more suitable platform to show the values that Aalborg has to offer, as videos can better express emotions and lifestyles than text conversations. However, penetrating the barrier of reaching the young Chinese tourists that are present on Youku Tudou can be difficult. Micro-influencing provides an opportunity, but the direct results of micro-influencers can be difficult to measure on the long

run, as it has the same limitations as influencers that the posts and videos might become outdated. It is therefore pivotal to find micro-influencers that can be convinced into the image of Aalborg as a must-go destination in order for a consistent flow of tourists coming to Aalborg.

5.5.3 WeChat

The largest social media app in China, WeChat, facilitates instant messaging for over 900 million users per day (Thai 2017). However, as the social media platform is mainly concerned with instant messaging, it is difficult for DMO's to affect and influence potential tourists to travel to their destinations. Despite WeChat being mainly concerned with instant messaging and therefore having the main emphasis on the conversations segment of the honeycomb, it differs from Weibo, which also was mainly emphasized on conversations. This is due to WeChat not being concerned with the sharing factor as Weibo has, and therefore mainly facilitates conversations with the added contacts.



Honeycomb of WeChat

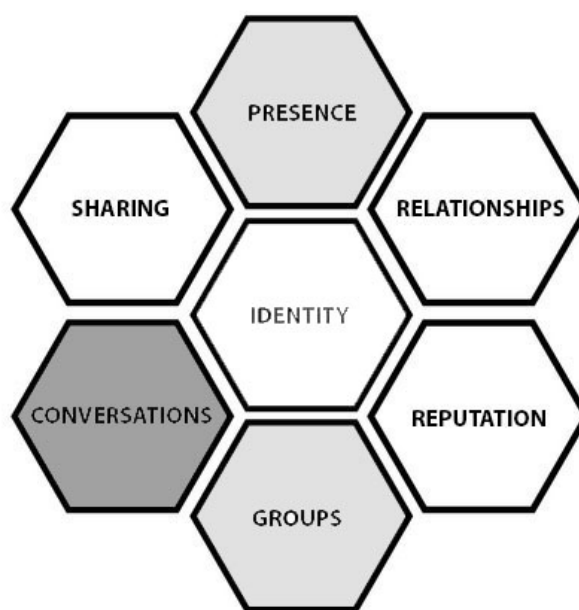
WeChat do, however, offer different opportunities compared to Weibo. WeChat do have a lot of different built-in apps which facilitates a lot of opportunities for the user of the platform. As

mentioned in the clarification of social media in China, users of WeChat can book flights, why there is a short way from visiting e.g. VisitDenmark official account to actually scheduling a flight to Denmark. This is a great opportunity for VisitAalborg to achieve more Chinese visitors, as users do not need to schedule appointments with the travel agencies that operates in Chinese outbound tourism, as the travel is scheduled and booked via the app. It furthermore differs as WeChat is only available on tablets and smartphones and therefore not via a computer, so the users of WeChat are typically mobile. This aligns well with the Wenyi Youth segment, explained in the section of young Chinese outbound tourism, which values notebooks and smartphones as their must-have belongings when travelling. WeChat do therefore offer opportunities for VisitAalborg in terms of attracting young Chinese tourists, however, finding VisitAalborg's official account can be difficult. This is due to the navigation mechanics of WeChat, where users will have to manually search for e.g. VisitAalborg if they are to find the official account of VisitAalborg, as users cannot share links to official accounts. WeChat do offer the opportunity of ad banners and the like, however, the benefit of those has been questioned prior in the analysis due to the large extent of ad-blocking apps used by the Chinese. The advertisement segment is therefore limited to being shown in the moment section only, as the advertisements in the moment section is an integrated part of the app.

Furthermore does the platform provide little to no power to the DMO's, as people cannot directly schedule a flight to Aalborg through VisitAalborg's official account. This is due to WeChat only providing the flight- and travel companies to schedule flights via the App, as mentioned in the analysis of Chinese outbound tourism, it is only 8% of the Chinese travel agencies that are allowed to facilitate travels outside of China. Official accounts such as VisitAalborg will therefore have to convince the larger travel agencies to promote Aalborg so that users can easily find and schedule travels to Aalborg through the travel agencies accounts rather than VisitAalborg's and therefore convince them to rate Aalborg higher than cities such as Copenhagen. This is found to be difficult for Aalborg due to the discussed lack of familiar attractions in Aalborg compared to other Danish cities along with VisitAalborg operating with a limited budget, as promoting a city on the larger travel agencies can be expensive. So despite WeChat offering a lot of possibilities for the Chinese users, it limits the DMO's effect and capabilities of scheduling travels to Aalborg fairly easily.

5.5.4 QQ

QQ is very much alike the Messenger app or Whatsapp known from the Western World. It is solely concerned with facilitating instant messaging. The biggest parallel that can be drawn to any Western-world app is MSN, which was an app that was one of the first-movers of providing instant messaging in the Western world. QQ is connected with QZone, which draws parallels to Facebook where users can share videos and play games.



Honeycomb of QQ

Despite operating within the same field of WeChat, being mainly concerned with instant messaging, QQ differs from WeChat in the sense that QQ comes in both a desktop version along with a mobile version. Furthermore the age of the user segment is lower than that at WeChat, which is due to QQ not requiring an active mobile phone for users to create an account (Law 2017). The users of QQ are typically therefore teens or pre-teens of China (Law 2017). QQ might therefore not be considered as an appropriate platform of VisitAalborg as they the Wenyi Youth of the Generation Y are born within the 80's and 90's. An opportunity for VisitAalborg in the future could be to focus on QQ, thereby creating attention towards Aalborg on younger generations of China and wait for that segment to grow older and

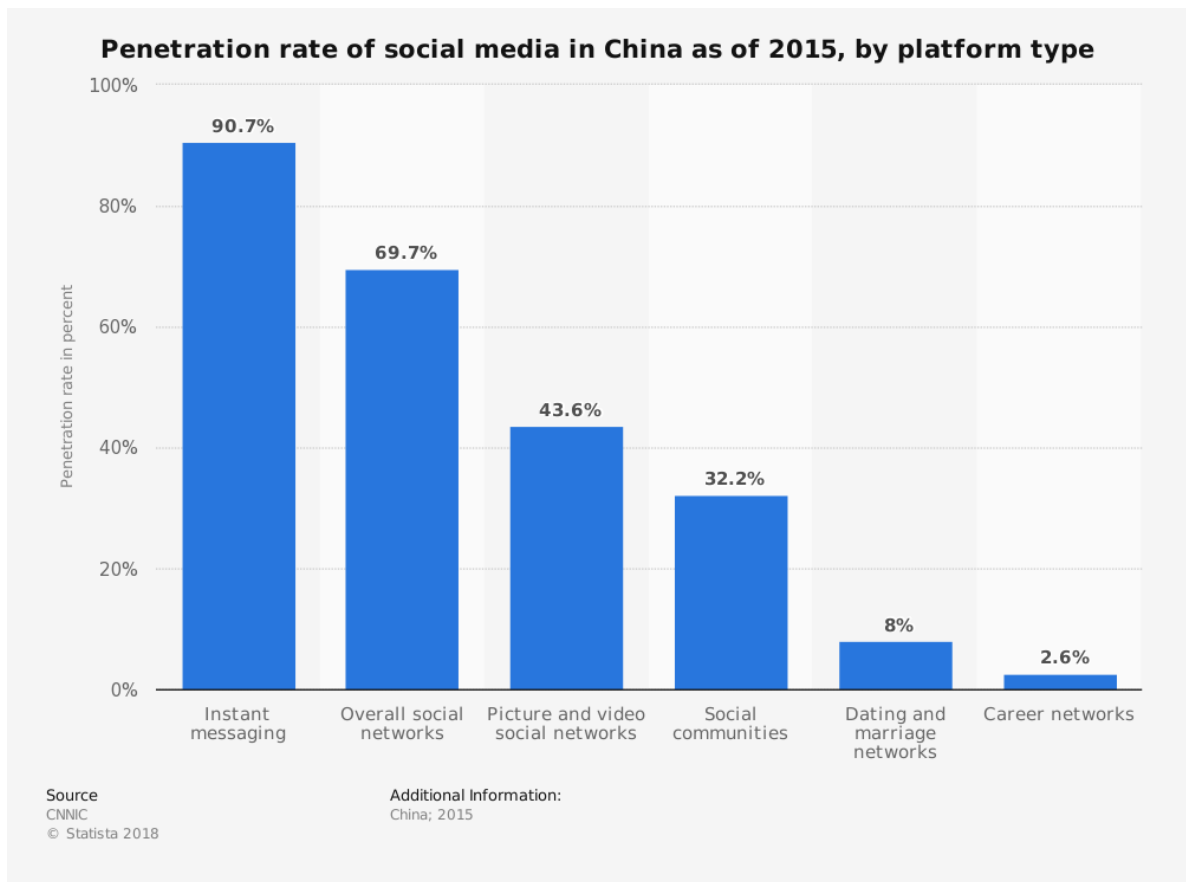
thereafter hope to reap the rewards of that generation travelling to Aalborg. However, it might be a stretch despite educating and creating attention towards Aalborg at a younger age might create an advantage in comparison with other cities.

A way of penetrating the segment of the younger generation could be connecting Denmark with H.C. Andersen, as H.C. Andersen stories are typically told to the younger generations. Bruhn stated that:

“(...) If you go in a street in China and ask somebody if somebody knows the fairytales of Hans Christian Andersen, 9 out of 10 would say yes and actually they know quite a lot of fairytales and probably deeper than Danes do. But they actually might not know that he is coming from Denmark. It is just someone from abroad.” (Appendix 4, p. III, lines 89-92)

Associating H.C. Andersen with Denmark can therefore be a way of educating younger generations of Denmark. Instead of focusing on H.C. Andersen stories being told to the Chinese children, educating younger generations via games on e.g. QZone about Denmark via games can therefore generate more tourists towards Denmark in the future. Despite H.C. Andersen is from Odense, a better knowledge of Denmark in general is a prerequisite of getting more tourists to Aalborg. It could therefore be interesting for a DMO like VisitDenmark to focus a part of their strategy on associating H.C. Andersen with Denmark through educating game towards younger generations. However, as H.C. Andersen was not concerned with Aalborg, the platform is partly therefore not considered to be the most optimal platform for VisitAalborg and partly not relevant as the master thesis is concerned with attracting the Generation Y of China.

When discussing the effectiveness and thereby the penetration rate of the different social media platforms that exist, Statista carried out a survey in 2015 that found that instant messaging apps had the highest penetration rate of all:



(Statista 2015)

With a penetration rate of 90,7% instant messaging clearly had the highest penetration rate of any, which substantiates the fact that the Chinese favour information from peers rather than organizations. This is found as the instant messaging apps, such as QQ, typically facilitated communication between friends and families, why the information shared between those peers are considered more trustworthy and thereby leading to a higher penetration rate. However, it was also found that the picture and video social networks, such as Youku Tudou, had a higher penetration rate than other social communities, such as Weibo and WeChat, why it can be considered as more effective to brand Aalborg via Youku Tudou than other traditional social communities.

The analysis has up until now been focused on the positive traits that VisitAalborg can extract from creating a social media account on the social media platforms. There is, however, some negative connotations to having a social media profile, where elements such as the lack of

consistency can lead to a negative image of Aalborg if the reality between the DMO and the recipient, which in the end will lead to negative results according to Kietzmann et al. (Kietzmann, et al. 2011). As well as having a social media profile can lead to sharing of positive experiences it also enables the contrary, that former tourists of Aalborg can share their negative stories directly on Aalborg's social media profile, thereby associating negative experiences with the social media profile. Aalborg will therefore have to allocate resources to minimize these negative stories and furthermore handle and attempt to overturn the negative experience with the former tourists to something positive. However, the analysis find that there are more positive connotations associated with having a social media account in China than negative in terms of attracting young Chinese tourists, as the platforms provide the VisitAalborg with a reach towards the Generation Y as they are heavily present on the social media platforms along with the possibility of creating attention towards Aalborg with a limited budget.

5.5.5 Conclusion of social media

The most suitable social media platforms for VisitAalborg to consider are Weibo and Youku Tudou. Those platforms are selected as they are the most suitable candidates to redistribute the values and experiences that Aalborg has to offer. Furthermore does these social media platforms contain a larger user base of the Generation Y, which this master thesis is concerned with, than other social media platforms. Branding via Youku Tudou was found to be the most suitable platform as it enables Aalborg to brand the destination with values and experiences through videos, which also enabled micro-influencers to redistribute information and experiences that are more suitable to VisitAalborg's budget. A further discussion of how VisitAalborg can differentiate itself through videos will be discussed in section 5.7 in the master thesis.

5.6 Brand equity of Aalborg

In order to look into the brand of Aalborg we must look at the different brand elements of Aalborg as carried out by VisitAalborg.

The first brand element we look into is concerned with whether the brand is *memorable*. In order to do so people must know of the brand in question, here being Aalborg and what you can expect from this brand. However, making a place re-known based on a party street, e.g. Jomfru Ane Gade, may put Aalborg in a category with destinations such as Magaluf, Ibiza and Sunny Beach despite not having sandy white beaches in Aalborg. Rather VisitAalborg ought to make themselves known, heard and seen through their marketing strategies. How the customers are approached obviously depends on the specific market and culture hence the importance of understanding and taking into account the local and cultural differences there may be present when marketing in a foreign culture. This stresses the importance of investigating the markets where the DMO wishes to attract visitors from, in this context China.

First of all we believe that the brand to some extent should include some of the most prestigious sights of Aalborg in the brand logo if possible, as this will help people create the right associations of Aalborg just by looking at the brand logo. As for example having The Aalborg Tower as part of a letter or the Cimbrian Bull as part of another letter, as people will form images faster and more efficient than if only exposed to a brand name and then having to look it up if it is unfamiliar, but still caught the attention of the consumer. This also correlates to what was emphasized by marketing expert Tony Hardy in section 4.5, regarding abstract images being more interesting to consumers as illustrations or unique logo assets may assist in creating a stronger image of the brand which the consumer will notice and think about. Whether creating a logo that is more appealing and unique than the present one is actually possible in terms of VisitDenmark allowing it is uncertain, however we are most certain that if they did apply all of these brand elements, Aalborg would increase its numbers of annual visitors as differentiation is key in terms of place branding. Especially in this context where we focus on Denmark, one could argue that the differentiation is needed as VisitDenmark more or less has standardized the layout and appearance of all its subdivisions.

In terms of spelling and meaningfulness, the VisitAalborg brand is very easy applicable and descriptive in terms of the intentions of the organisation. This adds to the simplicity of the brand and assists in the brand name being easy recognizable for the consumer. However, in terms of being distinctive the name is very normal as all sub-organisations of VisitDenmark is named Visit and then the city in question, which proves that there is very little difference

between the departments. Furthermore, all the local branches of VisitDenmark's websites have the same layout hence it may be difficult for the consumer to differentiate the different DMO's from each other hence the suggestion to make the brand logos more specific based on the destination and the opportunities available there, as this will assist the consumer in creating a more nuanced image of the destination in question. This also correlates well with the idea of not having one clear image of tourist destinations in Denmark, where Aalborg will thereby easier differentiate themselves from other cities in Denmark.

The second element that Keller mentions deals with is the *meaningfulness* provided by the brand. As mentioned before, an example of creating this could be through the brand logo by adding value to this through illustrations that points to the points-of-differences between VisitAalborg and other national departments. Initiatives within place branding have been developed over many years and there are many ways for a company to create meaningfulness with the consumer. However, in terms of place branding it is quite difficult to create meaningfulness with the consumer before (s)he has visited the destination as this is where the real meaning is discovered. However, if VisitAalborg can successfully transmit the identity of Aalborg as being an exciting and comfortable place to stay it is more likely that more people will visit the destination, however this is obviously dependant on the recipient receiving and transmitting the communication as intended by the DMO.

If the abovementioned is carried out to perfection, there is a chance that customers will add more meaning to the brand if the brand elements are appealing, both visually and verbally. The more brand elements that are memorable and *likable* the greater the chance for the customer to look in to the product. However, if this not the case then the brand must focus on creating value for the customer through other initiatives, as Odense for example did when they invited Jackson Yi to come visit and share a couple of videos and photos on his social media profiles, which turned out very successful, as Bruhn also mentioned in the interview.

The fourth brand element is concerned with the *transferability* and deals with how the brand is being perceived across borders. This is based on the brand name, as it should be easy to pronounce across most languages hence an international name like VisitAalborg in this context is a positive as the brand name clearly indicates the intentions of the organisation.

This also relates to the fifth element *adaptability* which is concerned with how the brand follow the trends and time in terms of values and opinions which we believe to be quite up to date in terms of VisitAalborg. However, as suggested before we believe that the DMO ought to update the logo in order to appear more modern and relevant. In terms of spelling the DMO should be careful when operating in for example China, however as mentioned in section 5.4.2 the younger Chinese tourists have a tendency of being more skilled in English than the previous Chinese generations which indicates a potential market for young Chinese tourists to come to Denmark.

The final element, *protect ability* deals with the protection of the brand both in legal context but also in terms of competition. However, as VisitAalborg is a sub-organisation of VisitDenmark and all other DMO's in Denmark are sub-organisations hereof, there are no specific legal concerns that VisitAalborg should be aware of. However, in terms of branding the destination it is important that VisitAalborg has patents, trademarks and copyrights on the attractions present, as these are all part of the visual illustration of Aalborg that is presented. Take for example Aalborg Zoo or The House of Music, if there were a zoo in every second city in Denmark there is no good in advertising it, instead VisitAalborg must focus on the attractions that makes Aalborg special and have become trademarks for the city as e.g. The Tower of Aalborg or the Cimbrian Bull as these are more or less synonyms with Aalborg.

Turning our attention to the communications, there are many ways of communicating and gaining the attention of consumers, but it is very important to be aware of the context and markets one moves within. When designing a communications program it is important that VisitAalborg first of all know whom they want to target. When we suggest the young Chinese travellers it is because we are aware of a huge market available. However, VisitAalborg has never operated in China before, hence the perfect assessment of the market and the target group is crucial for the communication strategy chosen. As we are dealing with young people we believe that the most appropriate and effective way of reaching these is through various social media platforms. In order for the target group to be affected by the communication, the individual must fulfil all six steps of the communication strategy, the first one being *Exposure*, where the individual either sees or hears the communication, which in this context would be on Chinese social media platforms. The second step is *Attention* meaning that the individual

must actively notice the communication. The third step *comprehension* implies that the individual must understand the intended message of the communication, which in this context would be for young Chinese travellers to try something different and come experience Aalborg. The fourth step *yielding* concerns with the individual, who must respond favourably to the message intended through the communication and hereby having *intentions* of acting accordingly as the communication implies. Before the individual finally act in accordance to the *behaviour* communicated by the organisation, which in this case would be VisitAalborg's intentions of attracting more young Chinese people to Aalborg through the means of social media.

Because of this it is crucial that we locate and assess the right channels of communication in order to get in touch with the desired target group at the right place at the right time. It is also crucial that all six steps are fulfilled as if the individual skips one of the steps the communication will have failed.

Often a company-created website is the best option in terms of providing basic information regarding the organisation to consumers. The website must be up to date, easy to navigate in and should in details describe who the organisation is and what the intentions of the organisation is. Furthermore, the company website acts as a base of the company, meaning that this is where people go if they want to know more about it, so all information on here must be correct and in correlation to the intended message of the organisation. No matter how the consumer found the website, whether it was through a banner ad or a rich-media ad, it is important that the organisation follow every lead in order to get to know their consumers and their preferences. The other way around it is also important that the consumers have a good feeling about the destination before and after the travel and this is where the job of VisitAalborg lies, where it is more up to the local actors, as mentioned in ANT, to act accordingly when the visitors are at the destination.

A mean of staying in touch with the consumers is through the communications where VisitAalborg has the opportunity of telling all its followers about upcoming events and the general developments that the destination is going through in order to convince more people to come in the future. As being DMO it is the job of VisitAalborg to post relevant information

regarding events and new developments taking place as this correlates to how the consumers experience the brand. Meaning that through the communications VisitAalborg should be emphasizing the key attributes of the brand along with other positive and relevant news that will make consumers more inclined to choose Aalborg as a destination when travelling over competing tier 2 cities. As stated in theory section 4.2, if the consumer has strong associations to a certain brand's attributes or benefits the consumer will be more inclined to act positively towards this brand and hereby becoming less positive of other brands in the same category, which in this context is other Scandinavian tier 2 cities. However, Aalborg as a destination has the advantage of being easily accessible by car from Germany or by boat from Sweden or Norway as the ferries to Oslo and Göteborg both sail from Frederikshavn, which is only short of an hours drive north from Aalborg. Additionally Aalborg Airport continues to develop and more and more people travel through the airport every year (Aalborg Lufthavn 2018), which indicates that there is an opportunity in terms of attracting people from new destinations than the usual ones (Sweden, Norway, Germany) as transport to the destination has become considerably easier.

Therefore, it is crucial for VisitAalborg that they as a DMO is being persistent and convincing in everything from internal and local communications to international marketing strategies in order to create an image that is desirable for the consumers whom they wish to attract. If this is done successfully by VisitAalborg, the organisation is more inclined to succeed in creating brand equity among the consumers who after visiting the destination to some extent, if having had a pleasant stay in Aalborg, becomes an actor of this destination as (s)he is very likely to tell others of the positive experience. However, one must have found the image portrayed of the brand in accordance with the actual identity of the destination in order for the brand building equity to be deemed successful, however, if this happens the individual is inclined to spread the word of Aalborg to his/her friends and family and hereby vouching for the destination, and thus acting accordingly to the *behaviour* intended by the DMO.

5.7 Attracting young Chinese via social media

Previous analysis found that the Generation Y of China was largely present on social media in China. The analysis of segment of young Chinese tourists were followed by an analysis of how

Aalborg as a destination can create brand equity towards the city in order for DMO's to attract young Chinese tourists to the city. The following section will cover a discussion towards how VisitAalborg can possibly attract young Chinese tourists via social media in order to provide a wholesome answer to the second research question that this master thesis is concerned with.

As found in the analysis of social media in China, the social media platform with the highest penetration rate is the instant messaging apps. This is highly due to young tourists of China preferring their information from peers rather than organizations, as these are perceived as trust worthier combined with the assumption that the instant messaging apps facilitates instant messaging with friends and families. However, it was also found to be difficult to affect and influence the users on instant messaging directly via apps such as QQ, as the app does not facilitate public accounts for organizations to chat directly with the users. The penetration rate was therefore to be seen as a result of the communication between peers rather than the influence of DMO's. VisitAalborg are therefore to direct their focus on alternative social media sites in order for Aalborg as a destination for tourists to become a talking point.

In order for Aalborg to become a talking point of young Chinese tourists, Aalborg are to make an *impression* towards the segment, according to the theory of Therkelsen. This aligns well with the theory of Keller stating that a brand has to be *memorable* for the intended segment, which brands will become once they have made an *impression*. Creating an *impression* in a highly competitive market where Aalborg provides little competition in terms of attractions compared to cities such as Copenhagen with The Little Mermaid and The Royal Family and Odense with H.C. Andersen, Aalborg will need to pursue other opportunities in order for them to make an *impression*. Elements such as happiness and coziness are factors that can be decisive for VisitAalborg to brand Aalborg with, as Aalborg will most likely fall short if VisitAalborg attempts to attract tourists due to attractions such as Lindholm Høje or the Tower of Aalborg as, despite them being larger attractions for tourists coming to Nordjylland, will fall short of attractions around Denmark. It should furthermore be included in the process of planning a strategy to attract young Chinese tourists to Aalborg that, as Bruhn described, they would most likely visit Denmark for a limited time, as they are typically visiting Denmark as a part of a northern round-trip. They will therefore most likely spend 3-5 days in Denmark, where it should then be VisitAalborg's objective to convince the young

Chinese tourists to travel to Aalborg rather than other tier 2 cities in Denmark. Attempting to compete with Copenhagen will most likely lead to a bad result due to the larger attractions that Copenhagen has to offer along with the young Chinese tourists typically travelling to the capitols of the countries they visit, as found in the analysis of the Chinese outbound tourism. Aalborg are therefore to find it's competitive edge in comparison with other tier 2 cities such as Aarhus and Odense and communicate that competitive edge towards the Generation Y of China, so that Aalborg can make an *impression* towards the segment. Ideally, the *impression* would lead to *attitudes* and *values* among the young Chinese, however, as targeting a new market such as the Chinese, creating an *impression* among young Chinese will potentially lead to a large increase in Chinese tourists in Aalborg.

Branding Aalborg as a must-go-to destination is difficult, as Aalborg will pretty much have to start from nothing, as Stricker stated that VisitAalborg has not yet directed their focus towards China and did not have any intentions to do so (Appendix 3, p. VI). The Generation Y of China do therefore not have any premise of knowing Aalborg besides the information that VisitDenmark has forwarded on their Weibo and WeChat accounts concerning Aalborg. Furthermore is it debatable which impact that VisitDenmark has had towards Chinese tourism in China as the official account of VisitDenmark is an organizational account hence the effect of them sharing information has a more limited effect compared to E-WOM. Despite starting from nothing, it also has some positive connotations, as VisitAalborg will have the opportunity to brand Aalborg as they wish to portray it, as the young Chinese does not have a prefixed image of Aalborg based on what they have read in the news and from other organizations. VisitAalborg can therefore possibly tailor their destination branding to present something 'new' and 'unknown' to the young Chinese.

VisitAalborg will therefore have to decide on the elements that Aalborg wishes to be associated with. This has to be elements that are unique and attractive for Aalborg in comparison with other tier 2 cities in Denmark, but should also be elements that are attractive to the young Chinese segment. Therefore, and as mentioned in the brand assessment of Aalborg, branding Aalborg with having Jomfru Ane Gade, thereby associating Aalborg with party destinations such as Magaluf and Sunny Beach are not catering to the Generation Y and hereby the Wenyi Youth as, despite the Generation Y having more similar

drinking habits as many Western countries, are generally drinking less and are not partying the manner as we e.g. do in Northern Europe (Walulik 2012). The elements included in the destination branding strategy should therefore consider other alternatives than Jomfru Ane Gade, which perhaps is the best-known attraction of Aalborg among young Scandinavians.

As found in the analysis of the Generation Y, the Wenyi Youth travellers were typically backpacking and were searching for experiences beyond the typical attractions of places. This aligns well with Bruhns description of what young Chinese travellers search for today:

“(...) The older ones are more like they want to take pictures of the icons, for example The Little Mermaid or the Eiffel Tower and so on, while the younger ones are more into maybe go a little deeper in the ‘behind’ of the icons and see how our people are living, ‘why is it so good in Denmark’” (Appendix 4, p. II, lines 70-74)

Both the analysis of the Generation Y of China and Bruhns statement towards the young Chinese travellers are therefore pointing towards experiences beyond attractions, and that the young Chinese travellers are therefore travelling to gain emotional experiences, experiencing values and exploring other cultures. This also aligns with the analysis of the Generation Y, being more focused on internationality, speaking better English and in general having a larger emphasis on the Western World than the previous generations. It is furthermore important to consider the background of the young Chinese travellers and understanding where they come from. This master thesis is concerned with attracting the Generation Y of the tier 1 cities in China, which were found to be the segment with the largest understanding of the Western World and furthermore to be the ones most suitable for travelling to Aalborg, as they are typically experienced travellers. The Generation Y of China in tier 1 cities is typically exposed to pollution, crowdedness and in general not many green places and parks. Therkelsen explained that tourism is the search for something which is extraordinary in comparison with one's everyday life, why factors such as a healthy environment, recycling and lots of green areas are something that Aalborg can offer young Chinese if they choose to travel to Aalborg. This is also a factor where Aalborg and Denmark in general does not have to begin from scratch, as the Chinese do to some extent know of Denmark as being a green country according to Bruhn:

“(...) so we are more like just Scandinavians, but that is a very positive image they have. It is a green image that we take care of the environment, equality between genders and rich and poor (...)” (Appendix 4, p. II, lines 95-97)

Being green and taking care of the environment is, however, not a unique trait of Aalborg as other tier 2 cities, and Denmark in general, are also good at taking care for the environment. The factor of branding Aalborg as a ‘green destination’ could therefore to some extent contribute to creating awareness and interest among young Chinese of Aalborg, but might not solely convince them to travel to Aalborg based on that premise alone, as other cities in Denmark can also be defined as ‘green’. Aalborg can, however, benefit from being the first tier 2 city of Denmark on Chinese social media which brands the destination with a green environment, as it is only VisitDenmark and Wonderful Copenhagen who has social media profiles on Chinese social media platforms. Being the first-movers of all tier 2 cities in Denmark can therefore draw benefits towards Aalborg, as Aalborg will have a chance to explain what it has to offer before potential tourists see other social media profiles from destinations in Denmark.

Considering that the Chinese tourists are in Denmark for a limited time and are typically travelling to Denmark as a part of a Northern round-trip, it is interesting to look at Aalborg’s location in Scandinavia. When Stricker was asked how Aalborg differentiates itself from other tier 2 cities in Denmark he mentioned the geographical location of Aalborg and the infrastructure first:

“Ehm, well geography is certainly a factor that is relevant here. If you come from southern Norway for example it is a fairly long way to Odense for example than to Aalborg. So ehm, and in other should I say target markets you look at infrastructure as well, direct flights to Aalborg ehm, so logistics and infrastructure is one thing and something which must not be underestimated. I think we all know that when we travel we don’t like to spend more time than necessary.” (Appendix 3, p. VII, lines 295-300)

Aalborg therefore has a great capability for being a part of a Northern round-trip, as Chinese tourists can easily fly from Copenhagen to Aalborg, thereby minimizing a negative factor of travel time, while at the same time being close to Norway and the Norwegian Fjords that the Chinese tourists also were familiar with and were interested in seeing as a part of their round-trip in Scandinavia. The increased notion of the Wenyi Youth typically travelling on their own and plans their own trip, as found in the analysis of the young Chinese outbound tourism section, it is therefore important for Aalborg to target that segment on the Chinese social media platforms and providing information of the possibilities that Aalborg has to offer geographically besides the element of having a 'green' environment. These two factors can therefore be considered to be the most important factors in terms of creating awareness of Aalborg along with convincing the young Chinese travellers to include Aalborg in their round-trip.

Having a good geographical location in Denmark can still be considered as being insufficient in terms of convincing the travellers to visit Aalborg. If they are to visit Aalborg, and perhaps return to Aalborg in the future, Aalborg will have to provide more than being a pit stop on their round-trip, as they are here for a limited time and want to experience as much as they can while here. As Aalborg does not have H.C. Andersen's home or the Royal Family, which can draw tourists to the cities on their own, Aalborg are to offer different experiences besides attractions, as already mentioned in the analysis. Happiness and 'hygge' were found to be elements that Aalborg can brand the destination with and is something that need to be experienced rather than seen, according to the discussion of VisitAalborg's identity formation.

The mix of Aalborg's geographical location in Denmark and it's geographical position related to a Northern round-trip combined with being the happiest city in Denmark are traits that make Aalborg unique and can create a competitive advantage compared to other tier 2 cities in Denmark. Major attractions such as the upcoming Tomas Saraceno glasswork at the old Liqueur Company and Regan Vest, who applies for UNESCO's World Heritage List, can become attractions who can attract tourists to Aalborg according to Stricker (Appendix 3, p. IV, lines 158-167). However, following this analysis those attractions are found to attract a different segment than the young Chinese travellers that this master thesis is concerned with, as it was found that the young Chinese travellers were mainly looking for experiences beyond

attractions, whereas seeing attractions was on the to-do list on the elder travellers of China. Furthermore the analysis found that the Saraceno glasswork and Regan Vest were insufficient in terms of gaining the attention and interest of the young Chinese travellers, as they were typically unaware of what Denmark is and therefore also the attractions hereof, as well as the attractions being incomparable with attractions such as e.g. the Eiffel Tower. Once/if the young Chinese travellers decide to travel to Denmark, the attractions can play a role in terms of creating an *impression* among the Chinese and thereby make Aalborg *memorable* for them, which was a prerequisite in order for Aalborg to be remembered and shared once they return to their home countries according to Therkelsen and Keller. It would therefore also make sense to include the attractions in a brand logo of Aalborg, as argued in the analysis of brand equity of Aalborg, as it will help the young Chinese to form an image of Aalborg faster and more efficient. It can therefore be argued that the young Chinese travellers should travel and visit Aalborg for the experiences and values beyond attractions, but should remember Aalborg of having both experiences and attractions.

The positive intangible traits were therefore found to be the biggest draw of Aalborg in terms of attracting young Chinese tourists to Aalborg, where especially Youku Tudou was found to be an interesting social media platform for VisitAalborg to engage in due to its capability of telling a story while showcasing values. If VisitAalborg therefore were to attract young Chinese via Youku Tudou, they were to create values with people enjoying life in beautiful 'green' parks. It could furthermore include videos of the beaches in Blokhus and Løkken, where sandy beaches can contribute to something unique as they are not common in tier 1 cities in China and can therefore be considered extraordinary, and could possibly therefore create an *impression* among the young Chinese.

5.8 Branding on social media

One thing is to analyze and find factors and elements that are important to brand a destination with, whereas another thing is to find the correct platforms to communicate the brand on. As the research question is related to attracting young Chinese travellers via social media, the discussion will solely be based on how Aalborg can attract young Chinese

travellers on these platforms, why alternative branding strategies will not be included in the discussion despite them being other ways of attracting young Chinese travellers to Aalborg.

The traits of Aalborg which were found to be the most important in order to attract young Chinese travellers with Aalborg offering experiences beyond attractions as well as having an ideal geographical location as a pit-stop on a Northern round-trip. These are two important factors as other traits such as attractions were found to be better suited for young Chinese travellers in other cities in Denmark along with the 'green' environment being similar in other cities in Denmark. The platforms that were found to be the most suitable for VisitAalborg to brand Aalborg on were mainly Youku Tudou and Weibo based on the analysis of the Chinese social media platforms. Especially Youku Tudou were found to be a suitable platform due to its possibility of showcasing values and experiences beyond attractions due to the capability of showing the life and happiness of the inhabitants of Aalborg through videos. Happiness and the good way of life are, without a doubt, also traits that other cities will showcase their city with, however, as Aalborg has been awarded the happiest city in Europe, Aalborg does have ground to showcase Aalborg as being happy and friendly.

As found in the analysis of social media, the young Chinese preferred and trusted information more when it came from other peers rather than organizations. Therefore it can be argued that collaborating with official travel trade accounts of China on social media can to some extent be beneficial for Aalborg, however, the results hereof will most likely be unsatisfying and furthermore expensive compared to the limited budget of VisitAalborg. It was therefore argued that Aalborg collaborating with influencers were considered an option for Aalborg, where micro-influencers were found to be the most realistic for VisitAalborg when having VisitAalborg's limited budget in mind. Finding and inviting micro-influencers can be a difficult task as the micro-influencers found will need to have an interest in becoming ambassadors of Aalborg rather than only being interested in a free trip to Aalborg or the like. The method of finding the right influencer for VisitAalborg will not be analyzed and explained in this master thesis, as this master thesis is mainly concerned with the identity formation of VisitAalborg in terms of attracting young Chinese travellers on social media. The option of attracting and hiring micro-influencers has been included in the discussion as it will be important for VisitAalborg to have some extrinsic marketing of the city of Aalborg but also the social media

profile of Aalborg. This is due to VisitAalborg starting from scratch where it can be difficult, as a new player among established cities like Copenhagen or Paris, to be noticed on the social media. Therefore, gaining some attention from exterior marketing initiatives such as micro-influencing in order to be noticed on the social media are considered as being a prerequisite in order for VisitAalborg to achieve success with their own identity-formation of Aalborg via their own social media profile. Furthermore VisitAalborg might have limited effect on the factors and traits included in the influencers video/posts, why the traits found in the discussion and analysis of brand equity of Aalborg only be concerned with VisitAalborg's intrinsic marketing initiatives.

5.8.1 Applying the strategy

According to Stricker, VisitAalborg are tailoring their marketing strategies to suit the potential segment (Appendix 3, p. VI, lines 253-254). This also allows VisitAalborg to tailor their social media strategy on social media platforms in China to potentially suit young Chinese travellers. In order to conduct a strategy for VisitAalborg's social media account, the strategy should include Kietzmann model of utilizing the honeycomb. The first step is concerned with cognizing the social media platform in order to find the most suitable platforms for VisitAalborg to operate on. This step is the most important step of the 4Cs, as the traits of the destination, in this case Aalborg, will need to be showcased in the best possible way on the platform, and as the different social media platform emphasizes different blocks of the honeycomb, it is important to find the most suitable platform that can showcase the traits of the destination. The platform that was found to be the most suitable for VisitAalborg was Youku Tudou, as the platform offers the possibility to showcase the traits of Aalborg in the best way possible as argued prior in the discussion of brand equity of Aalborg.

The next step of the 4Cs are developing strategies that and congruent and designed to the specific social media while discovering the aim of the social media strategy (Kietzmann, et al. 2011). As the aim of the social media strategy is to showcase the traits of Aalborg that makes Aalborg gain a competitive advantage compared to other tier 2 cities in Denmark, Aalborg will need to create content that showcases the life of Aalborg. As it was found in the analysis of VisitAalborg's social media platforms, VisitAalborg's YouTube videos were showing the life of

Aalborg along with interviews with the different actors of Aalborg, both being inhabitants of Aalborg, shop-owners, restaurant-owners etc. which also shows the importance of the ANT of Aalborg. VisitAalborg's own videos showcasing Aalborg with positive traits such as the quality of life etc. is attracting tourists on its own is doubtful, hence the Chinese's lack of trustworthiness of official organizations, however, the videos should serve as a substantiation of the WOM that Aalborg will possibly have among potential micro-influencers. Bridging the gap between the trustworthiness of the organizational message from VisitAalborg and the Chinese travellers could be including content made by visiting young Chinese travellers on VisitAalborg's own account, thereby increasing the trustworthiness of VisitAalborg and their future messages on the platform. It will furthermore be self-perpetuating, as more young Chinese travellers will visit Aalborg, as it will substantiate the image that will potentially arise among the Wenyi Youth. The videos will furthermore showcase, to potential new travellers, why the tourists should include Aalborg on their Northern round-trip, as the social media platform offers the possibility to show what Aalborg has to offer besides attractions. By VisitAalborg creating their videos themselves, they are also already engaged with the third C which is concerned with a company needs to be the curator of the message communicated by all the actors. Therefore, if a potential micro-influencer is hired to spread the message of Aalborg as a 'hygge' city with a potential perfect geographical location, VisitAalborg will need to align with the message of that micro-influencer in order not to create a *reality problem*, as Baker defines the gap between the messages communicated and what to expect from the destination/DMO.

The analysis of how to create brand equity on the social media platforms of China has mainly been concerned with Youku Tudou. It could be beneficial for VisitAalborg to create social media accounts on the other social media platforms mentioned in the analysis of the Chinese social media. It is advisable from a theoretical perspective, as the message of VisitAalborg will potentially reach a larger audience if they are present on all platforms. However, a dilemma could arise for Aalborg as the responds from VisitAalborg needs to be consistent on all platforms, which potentially could lead to spending a lot of resources on replying and developing content that is consistent with the 'happy way of life'-message that VisitAalborg are focusing on communicating. Therefore, if VisitAalborg are not replying to all messages and videos concerning VisitAalborg, the friendly and happy way presented in the videos of Youku

Tudou might be considered as diametrical with the responds given on social media. VisitAalborg should therefore consider the amount of social media platforms that they wish to be present on in order for them to reach the maximum potential of their consistent messages in order to attract the Generation Y of China on social media.

6. Conclusion

Through the use of the theoretical tools we have applied to this study we have come to a conclusion that answers our research questions. First of all we found that VisitAalborg creates an identity of Aalborg as a “small big city” where there are numerous dining opportunities, shopping opportunities, old cozy streets and beautiful architecture, but also as a vibrant student city that consists of people from all over the world. As before mentioned Aalborg is rapidly growing in terms of new attractions, for example the entire waterfront that has been restored and packed with beautiful architectural buildings e.g. Musikkens Hus (The House of Music), The Utzon Center that has become a new rallying point for young people, and more projects like the Saraceno sculpture is on the way. All these sights may be beneficial in terms of the marketing strategies, however we believe that the real attraction of Aalborg is an intangible, as Stricker of VisitAalborg also expressed during the interview. Aalborg is more of a feeling, and this feeling is a mix of all the sights, experiences and actors that has contributed to the visitors’ experience of Aalborg. Therefore, having attractions such as the Kunsten Museum of Modern Art, The Aalborg Tower or any of the before mentioned, is nice in terms of marketing because it is quite difficult to market a feeling or experience through the traditional media.

This also correlates to Ren and Blichfeldts study of Zakopane, where it is made very clear that the actors at the destination actively play a part in the experience that visitors have. Stricker during the interview also said that VisitAalborg tailors its marketing based on who the recipient of the communication is (Appendix 3). This follows the example of Ren and Blichfeldt as this proves that it is possible to emphasize different things to the target group based on the demography, nationality, or travel preferences. This emphasizes that focusing on creating one simple image is not necessarily always beneficial as there will be differences in consumer preferences based on their personal background and therefore adapting the marketing to a certain market may sometimes be beneficial to an organisation.

The differentiated marketing strategy that Stricker explained and through the findings in the analysis of the intended identity that VisitAalborg wishes to portray are also present on VisitAalborg's social media accounts. VisitAalborg has designated their social media platforms to cater to different audiences and segment, as e.g. their Facebook account serves as a news facilitator for Danish target groups, as the account is solely written in Danish. Their Instagram account were found to be concerned with sharing the attractions and beautiful landscapes of Aalborg, which were targeting international segments as the posts were written in English. Their YouTube channel were found to be the most important social media platform of VisitAalborg as the content on their YouTube account were aiming to present the experiences beyond attractions and the intangible elements that were found to be Aalborg's strongest trait in terms of being unique and attractive. The analysis furthermore found that the identity that VisitAalborg portray through social media platforms aligns well with the theoretical framework of Kietzmann et al., as VisitAalborg's respective social media accounts were aligned with respective social media, e.g. that their Instagram profile were considered with sharing which is the most important block of Instagram according to Kietzmann et al.

In terms of building brand equity the abovementioned also emphasizes the need for differentiation as people today are exposed to advertising constantly. Even when using a phone you are exposed to advertising to an extent so high that many choose to ignore them. However, this is also the reason for why the marketing strategy applied by VisitAalborg ought to be noticeable, especially when it comes to the Chinese people. As mentioned earlier the Chinese are relatively new travellers why many of these wish to see many countries in rapid succession as Bruhn of VisitDenmark also stated in the interview (Appendix 4). Furthermore, the Chinese highly value safety when travelling and in this context Scandinavia is considered as a very safe area to travel in. As travelling as a concept is relatively new in China the trend for many years has been to travel in groups with travel agencies who not only decide what the travellers experience when travelling, but also for how long they stay at the destinations visited. However, more young Chinese tourists are starting to travel individually which indicates a positive future for attracting young Chinese tourists to Aalborg.

The analysis found that the Generation Y is the segment in China that is the most present segment on social media in China. Furthermore did the analysis find that it was the

Generation Y of China in the tier 1 cities that should be VisitAalborg's target group, as they would typically have travelling experiences from vacations with their family as well as being the target group that had the largest insight into Western culture and were the best English speakers. They are furthermore very attractive for DMO's as they typically earn higher salaries and therefore has a larger economical buying power than other segments of China. The segment of the Wenyi Youth among the young Chinese tourists were found to be the segment of the young Chinese that would be the easiest and most attractive for VisitAalborg to attract, as the Wenyi Youth typically travels independently and seeks to explore experiences beyond attractions.

Despite the Generation Y and hereby the Wenyi Youth being more familiar with Western culture and are considered as being more fluent English speakers, the analysis furthermore found that they prefer information in their native language and that information received from fellow peers were considered as being more trustworthy than information received from organizational companies. It is therefore pivotal for VisitAalborg to have information in Chinese on their website along with being present on Chinese social media in order to reach the segment.

As VisitAalborg has a limited budget and would have to start from scratch in terms of attracting Chinese tourists to Aalborg, it was found that Aalborg should decide to focus primarily on one social media platform in the start-up phase, as it is important to be congruent in the messages communicated from the DMO. Furthermore, in order to gain attention towards Aalborg, an entry point could be micro-influencers, as the messages communicated from those would be considered as being more trustworthy as it would come from fellow peers rather than a company.

In order to attract the Wenyi Youth via social media, it was found that Youku Tudou was the most suitable online social media platform to brand Aalborg on. This was based on the analysis of the four biggest social media platforms in China, where it was found that Youku Tudou were the social media platform had the best capability of branding and showing what Aalborg has to offer besides attractions. This is due to videos being more capable of showing quality of life, the intangible elements and the geographical location of Aalborg as a part of a

Northern round-trip that makes Aalborg competitive compared to other Danish cities, more than still pictures and text would. This is due to the analysis found that Aalborg would not be able to compete with cities such as Copenhagen and Odense in terms of attractions, meaning it was pivotal for Aalborg to find alternative elements that could lure the Wenyi Youth to Aalborg.

6.1 Practical implications

Our recommendation for VisitAalborg will be to create a social media account on Youku Tudou, as we found the social media platform to be the most appropriate platform for Aalborg to brand itself on. This is due to the positive traits and competitive advantage of Aalborg, which were found to be intangible elements, compared to other tier 2 cities in Denmark were easier to showcase through videos. The intangible elements that VisitAalborg are to communicate, through videos, are the green environment of Aalborg along with videos showcasing the high quality of life that Aalborg has been awarded for prior. However, as having a green environment was found to be insufficient alone, Aalborg should furthermore communicate its geographical location and the benefits that the young Chinese travellers will have during their round-trip in Scandinavia. These elements were found to be the most important for VisitAalborg to communicate in order for Aalborg to be gain a competitive advantage compared to other tier 2 cities in Denmark. In order for VisitAalborg to create awareness of the competitive advantage of Aalborg, we found micro-influencers to be the most suitable for Aalborg due to their limited budget and furthermore as the information of other peers on social media platforms were considered to be trust worthier than organizational information. By doing so, VisitAalborg would benefit of slow progress as it increases the consistency that is pivotal in order to create a lasting *impression* among the young Chinese. VisitAalborg could hereafter benefit from surveys of young Chinese who have travelled to Aalborg in order for them to optimize their social media campaign further.

6.2 Limitations and future research

The master thesis has solely had the focus on the identity-formation of Aalborg through VisitAalborg along with how VisitAalborg can possibly attract the Generation Y of China to Aalborg. Since the focus has been on the identity-formation, the master thesis has had, to

some extent, included image-formation literature in order to create a comprehensive analysis. However, the master thesis has not been concerned with how the young Generation Y of China actually sees Denmark and Aalborg, why future research towards the topic should include the image-formation process from the Generation Y of China in relation to outbound tourism in China. It should furthermore include their knowledge of e.g. Denmark or Aalborg instead of solely having the focus from a DMO perspective. This will possibly add a new dimension to how VisitAalborg can attract the Generation Y of China, however, as the master thesis has had the sole purpose of how VisitAalborg, from a theoretical perspective, could attract the young Chinese to Aalborg on social media through their own identity-formation, an analysis of the image-formation towards Aalborg among the Chinese has had little emphasis in this master thesis.

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