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The application of experiential marketing in destination management – Recommendations for an integrated e-marketing strategy designed to promote Europe on the Canadian outbound market

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Master Dissertation

The application of experiential marketing in destination management – Recommendations for an integrated e-marketing strategy designed to promote Europe on the Canadian outbound market

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I hereby declare that this dissertation is wholly the work of Bernadett Papp. Any other contributors or sources have been referenced in the prescribed manner.

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Preface

In the last phase of my master degree program, Tourism Destination Management, at the NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences, in the framework of my university dissertation I conducted a research on the Canadian citizens' destination choice process, information search behaviour and brand awareness of destination Europe with the aim of providing recommendations for an innovative e-marketing strategy based on the principles of experiential marketing. Throughout the overall project I intended to deliver an in-depth analysis of the specific elements of the chosen topic followed by the analysis of the theoretical aspects in context (Canadian outbound market). The main goal of the project was to provide recommendations for an integrated e-marketing strategy that is not superficial but can be implemented and used.

My overall goal with the dissertation project was to contribute towards the work of an international tourism organization. My desire to put my theoretical knowledge into practice and to work on a project that allows me to research a topic that requires attention and practical solutions got me in touch with the European Travel Commission (ETC). Hereby I would like to thank Ms. Stefanie Gallob for her in-depth support and for giving me the opportunity to work on this extremely interesting topic in cooperation with the Travel Commission. The access to ETC's library has largely contributed towards the finalization of the research project.

Furthermore, I would like to thank my university supervisor Dr. Ondrej Mitas for his continuous support, guidance and advice. The feedback and ideas provided by Dr. Mitas have been truly invaluable. Dr. Mitas granted me his full support throughout this process why allowing me to work with my own ideas and initiatives.

I would also like to thank those who have participated in the research by filling in the online surveys. I really appreciate the time and energy spent by the respondents on answering the questions and giving me their personal opinion and perceptions on the researched topic. Their contribution towards the project was extremely important.

Last but not least, I especially would like to thank my wonderful family, particularly my parents and my brother for their constant encouragement, endless support and love they have given me over the master program and the previous years. They have always been there for me, motivated and inspired me and without their help and support I undoubtedly could not have gotten this far.

Executive summary

The dissertation research project has been written with the aim of developing ideas for an integrated e-marketing strategy based on the principles of experiential marketing to promote Europe on the Canadian market. The research was conducted in cooperation with the European Travel Commission and it intends to contribute towards the activities of ETC on the Canadian market.

Europe, as one of the leading destinations in the world is considered to be a traditional all-time favourite. However, the emerging countries and the increasing global competition have put great pressure on the continent in terms of increasing visitor numbers and gaining new source markets. The traditional image of Europe needs to be refreshed and communicated in an interactive and innovative way so that the Destination Europe brand can be renewed in the mind of potential visitors.

The current study is focusing on the outbound market of Canada. Canada is one of the main over-sees source markets of Europe, however in the past decade the number of overnight trips was continuously declining and Europe was losing Canadian visitors to destinations like Mexico, China, the USA and the Dominican Republic. In order to stay competitive and to regain visitation from the Canadian market this study is focusing on the design of an integrated e-marketing strategy and explores the application of experiential marketing in destination management.

The research consists of three parts based on the method of Triangulation (Denzin, 1970). The first part of the paper introduces the existing, relevant literature and explores the theoretical background of experiential marketing, e-marketing, destination image, destination choice process and the current tourism statistics of Europe and the Canadian outbound market. The second part, named study 1, is a netnographic study. This part contains the in-depth analysis of Canadian online travel blogs with the aim of examining the perceptions, opinions, motivations and travel habits of those Canadians who have visited European destinations before. The third part of the project, named study2, applies the method of online-self completion questionnaires. A sample of 372 respondents were analysed focusing on the information search behaviour, brand awareness, destination image and perceptions of the respondents.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods has led to a complex analysis that formed the basis of the proposed ideas for an e-marketing strategy. Based on the results, despite of the initiatives of previous years, a new target market is suggested. Focus should be shifted to Canadian young adults between the age of 22 and 35. They represent the new generation of travellers and are the ones who are the most active online thus the most receptive to internet marketing. The blog analysis showed that backpacking is very popular amongst young Canadians. They are the ones with sufficient discretional income to cover their travel costs; they prefer multi-country itineraries and are eager to broaden their horizons. The main goal of experiential marketing is to stimulate the senses and touch the heart of the customers thus an experiential marketing campaign has great potentials in this target group.

The final conclusion and recommendations made for a marketing strategy integrates the five strategic experiential modules (SEMs), the main motivational factors, the most important image elements and tourism products, and proposes potential e-marketing tools and channels to reach and inspire these potential visitors in the pre-organization stage and to enhance the awareness of the Destination Europe brand.

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List of abbreviations

CRM – customer relationship marketing

CVB – conventions and visitors bureau

E-CRM – electronic customer relationship marketing

EM – electronic marketing

ETC – European Travel Commission

E-WOM – electronic word of mouth

ExPros – experience providers

GPS – global positioning system

HAC – Hotel Association of Canada

ICT – Information and communication technology

IMS – internet protocol multimedia subsystem

UNWTO – United Nations World Tourism Organization

SEM – strategic experiential module

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1. Introduction

"Travelling is not just an activity; it's the art of broadening your vision through the priceless experience."

(Chirisa, n.d.)

As suggested by Wind and Mahajan (2001), mass markets are the past and interactive markets are the future. Europe needs to renew itself in the eyes of its visitors and provide unique and outstanding experiences. The 'Destination Europe' brand and the image of European destinations need constant monitoring and visitor perceptions need to be analysed on a regular basis in order to provide outstanding visitor experiences. Image and perceptions have great impact on actual purchase decisions. The ability to adjust to the changing travel trends and the use of innovative marketing and sales techniques has vital importance in keeping a destination competitive on the market.

The dissertation paper has been written in cooperation with the European Travel Commission and aims to assist and provide help with the strengthening of the 'Destination Europe' brand on the Canadian market.

There is a need for improvement in order to keep up with the changing trends and upcoming destinations thus the research paper has a unique approach towards destination marketing using the concept of experiential marketing as a basis. The understanding of what motivates and inspires actual and potential visitors to take steps, instead of leaving the idea of a European holiday on their wish lists, is a vital point in formulating a strategy. The main goal of the dissertation is to provide recommendations for an integrated e-marketing strategy based on the principles of experiential marketing designed to promote European destinations on the Canadian market.

The theoretical framework of the research paper is applied in context thus the analysis of the Canadian outbound market forms an important part of the research. The current tourism statistics of Europe as a destination and existing studies on the Canadian outbound market have been studied in-depth in order to get an overall understanding of the past and current trends as well as present and future challenges.

Experiential marketing is a new form of marketing that stimulates all senses of the customers and brings the brand to life (Widdis, 2001). In order to strengthen the Destination Europe brand on the Canadian market 'experience making' and the ability to transform a tourism product into an experience will form the core of the new marketing strategy recommended in the final chapter of the dissertation paper.

The methodological framework follows the concept of triangulation (Denzin, 1970) and applies a mixed technique. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques have been used in order to support the reliability of the collected data. The main line of data collection methods consist of three parts: desk research/document analysis, netnographic analysis and online self-completion questionnaires. The information and data collected via the above mentioned methods formed the core of the proposed e-marketing strategy.

2. Literature review

2.1 Destination Europe

From a tourism marketing point of view, a destination is assumed to be a geographical place or location. Nonetheless, it can also refer to a specific set of activities that create a tourism experience. (Pearce, 2014)

According to recent statistics on visitor numbers, Europe is the world's leading tourism destination (ETC, 2015). Its diversity, longstanding traditions, rich cultural and historical heritage as well as its natural beauty makes the continent a very attractive destination. Based on the UNWTO's (2015) statistics, the number of international tourist arrivals has increased from 25 million (globally) in 1950 to 1133 million in 2014. In the past decades the tourism industry has experienced diversification and continuous growth. This continuous expansion has led to increased competition on the world tourism market. Traditional all-time favourites, such as Europe itself are facing challenges raised by new and emerging destinations. As it is forecasted by the UNWTO (2015), emerging economies as tourism destinations will gain 57% market share by 2030.

Figure 1. International Tourism 2014 (UNWTO, 2015).

ITA: International Tourism arrivals, ITR: International Tourism Receipts

Despite of the growing competition, in 2014 the number of international arrivals to Europe grew by 3% resulting 582 million international arrivals. In 2015 this growth rate is expected to be steady. (UNWTO, 2015) In terms of international tourism receipts worldwide, Europe experienced the largest growth reaching US$ 509 billion. As the worlds most visited region the statistics and growth rates are robust, although there are discrepancies between the different regions of Europe. Southern Europe and the Mediterranean together with Northern Europe have led the growth accounting for +7 % and +6% followed by Western Europe (+2%). Central and Eastern Europe experienced a decline (-5%) in terms of international arrivals. The sharp decline in the central and eastern sub-regions was a result of the weakening Russian outbound market and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. (UNWTO, 2015)
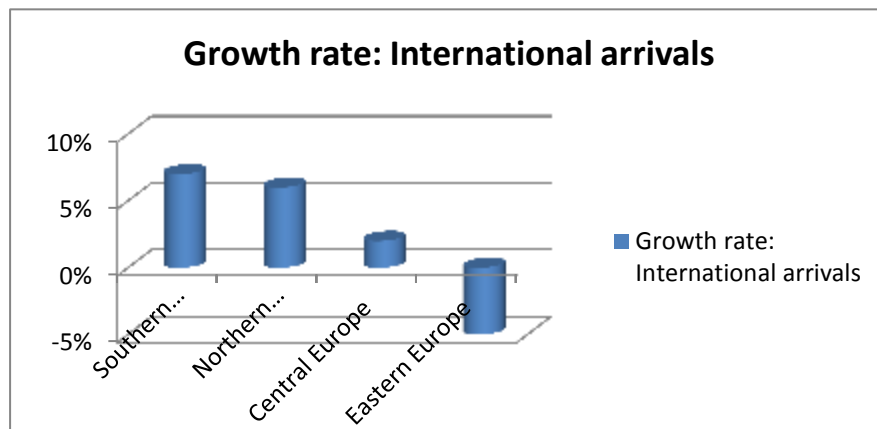
Figure 2. Growth rate in Europe: International arrivals

As forecasted by ETC (2015), long haul markets will remain important sources of international arrivals in 2015. The strengthening US outbound market has numerous positive impacts on European tourism as it contributes to an attractive destination image in terms of favourable exchange rate, the Schengen area, numerous cultural offers and safety and security.

Despite of the growing numbers, half of Europe's international arrivals are generated by just a few source markets. As communicated by ETC (2015), European destinations are continuously seeking public-private partnerships and cooperation with other European countries in order to strengthen and enhance their position on the global market. Traditional destinations need to reposition themselves in order to adapt to the new conditions and to stay competitive. (UNWTO, 2015) According to a document published by the UNWTO and ETC (2002), European countries have the ability to leverage on long experiences as tourism destinations and rewarding destination development models. European countries with cities holding worldwide recognition can more easily benefit from tourism while countries in transition still need to work on their tourism brand. With the European integration Europe is becoming a significant brand on the world tourism market presenting the image of a safe, exciting and interesting multi-country destination. (UNWTO-ETC, 2002)

2.2   The Canadian outbound travel market

Undoubtedly, Canada is an important player on the world tourism market (ETC, 2014). On the list of the top 10 spending countries in the world, Canada is ranked 7th in terms of international tourism expenditure (US$ 34 billion in 2014) (UNWTO, 2015). The volume of outbound travel from Canada has nearly doubled in the last 10 years and reached 32 million in 2012. However, only one third of Canadian outbound travel is overseas and more than two third is trans-border tourism to the United States. Respectively, Canadian tourism expenditure in the United States is more significant than travel money spent oversees. Amongst the preferred overseas destinations Europe is the largest target destination with the highest number of overnight trips. However, despite of the popularity of European destinations amongst Canadian visitors, in terms of overnight trips to overseas destinations, Europe's share has significantly decreased between 2000 and 2012 (from45% to 31%). When looking at growth rates in terms of outbound tourism, it clearly shows that destinations such as Mexico, Cuba, mainland China, the Dominican Republic and the USA are showing outstanding results and driving visitation away from Europe (See Figure 4). (ETC, 2015)
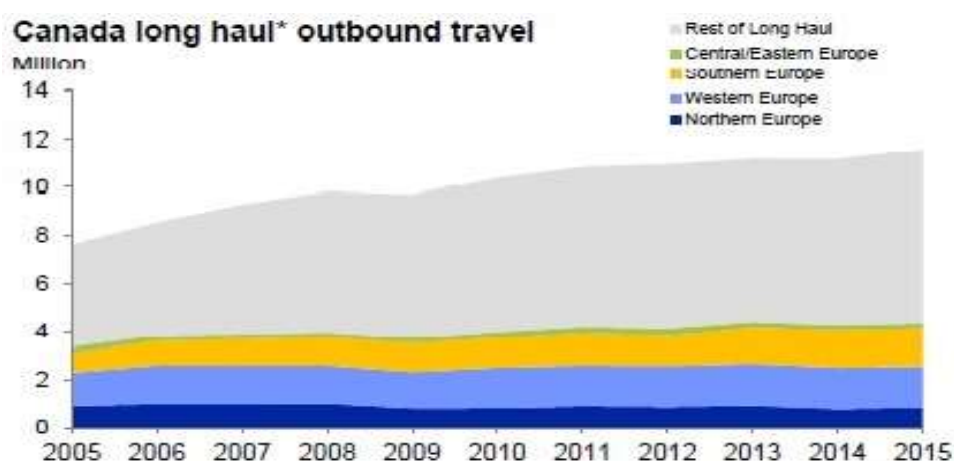
Figure 3. Number of tourist arrivals. Source market: Canada. (ETC, 2015)

Figure 4. Outbound Canadian residents travel growth trends 2003-2012 (ETC, 2012)

According to ETC's (2014) measures, within Europe the most popular region is Western Europe with arrivals reaching 1.6 million (2012). Western Europe is followed by Southern and Northern Europe (1-1.2 million arrivals in 2012). Central and Eastern Europe are the least visited European destinations by Canadians (0.4 million arrivals in 2012).

Figure 5. Europe's share of Canadian market (ETC, 2015)

Regarding the profile of Canadian travellers a market study conducted by ETC (2014) showed that based on their sample the majority of the Canadian travellers who visit overseas destinations are mainly from British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec and Alberta. Most Canadian international travellers have an older age profile and the group of elderly travellers (+65) is growing rapidly. More than 50% of the Canadians travel frequently and opt for overseas destinations approximately 3 times a year. When visiting Europe, leisure and VFR are the leading travel motivations and they spend an average of 11 nights on the continent. A study conducted by Transat (2015) has recently revealed that 87% of Canadian citizens dream about visiting Europe. Based on the study Paris is the first choice (57%) then comes Rome(53%) and London (51%) followed by Athens (41%) and Barcelona (37%). As for interests and motivations, most of the Canadian travellers visit or plan to visit Europe because of the rich history (74%) or the local cuisine (68%). However, the report also revealed that 88% of Canadian citizens believe that travelling to Europe is a big investment in both time and money. Despite these negative perceptions regarding distance and costs, direct flights to Europe started to reduce the barriers. (Transat, 2015)

The importance of information communication technologies and social media in regard of information sources has been widely acknowledged. Canadian travellers are also very well connected and spend more and more time on the internet and social media while seeking travel information. A study published by the Hotel Association of Canada (HAC) (2014) has shown that 58% of Canadians look at online testimonials when selecting accommodation. Furthermore, 72% of leisure travellers said that rankings on booking sites have big influence on their final choice. Social media is also widely used amongst Canadian travellers for uploading travel videos, posting photos and sharing travel experiences with others. The use of smartphones when travelling is also very common. Seventy percent of the respondents said they use their phones to check the weather or for navigation purposes (GPS). (HAC, 2014)

2.3   E-marketing in the travel industry

Due to the rise of the present-day information society modern information technology receives more and more attention (Borzyszkovsky, 2014). According to Mastorakis et al. (2015), tourism is one of the fastest developing industries on the field of information and communication technologies (ICT). The continuous developments on the field of ICT are altering every segment of tourism marketing. E-marketing (EM) is a relatively new form of marketing. According to Strauss and Frost (2001, p. 454), EM is "the use of electronic data and applications for planning and executing the conception, distribution and pricing of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals". A well-designed communications strategy enables the destinations to increase awareness, to create global reputation and publicity, to enhance destination image, to reach specific target markets, to inform the target customers about what the destination does, to change perceptions, behaviour and prejudice where necessary, to engage with stakeholders, to strengthen the destination brand and to increase visitation (Királová & Pavlíceka, 2015). As it is emphasized by the UNWTO, internet and tourism is an ideal combination (Bendito &Ramirez, 2011). Barnet and Standing (2001) argue that to keep up with the changing business environment, the tourism industry needs to adopt a creative marketing approach.

The ongoing ICT developments impact various marketing functions (Soteriades et al., 2004). Undoubtedly, ICT reduces marketing costs, redefines and renews marketing relationships and removes intermediaries (Rayport & Jaworski, 2001). As suggested by Wind and Mahajan (2001), the new knowledge economy demands customization and communication thus mass markets are the past and interactive markets represent the future. According to Soteriades et al. (2004) a strategic approach is needed to exploit the benefits and to overcome the challenges of ICT.

Internet can be seen as a platform of interactive communication and offers various opportunities for marketing e.g.: market research, customer relationship marketing (CRM), networking and strategic planning, advertising and PR, information materials, sales promotion, distribution and access as well as consumer behaviour research (Soteriades et al., 2004). However, there are authors who do not believe that the internet and the new ways of marketing can replace the traditional marketing techniques. For instance, Gretzel et al. (2006) argue that in several cases the websites do not fulfil the requirements of tourists and do not satisfy them. In order to overcome this problem, nowadays online platforms contain enormous amount of information but as it is stated by Borzyszkovsky (2014), this leads to information saturation, and it is a growing problem. The internet provides

endless possibilities for information sharing however; information overload leads to confusion and over-choice (Correia et al., 2011).

In relation to interactive communications, Wu and Lu (2012) argue that CRM has vital role in tourism. CRM helps to establish interactive relationships and to provide improved services (Wu & Lu, 2012). The concept of e-CRM is relatively new and is applied when internet based media is used to deliver CRM activities (Sigala, 2011). Innovative techniques such as iDTV is used to boost CRM and to motivate TV viewers to visit internet based applications and web sites. To connect traditional networks with web based technologies evolutionary IMS systems are used. The internet protocol multimedia subsystems (IMS) support the collection of customers' personal data and support the delivery of more efficient CRM activities. (Mastorakis et al., 2015)

There is a further point that needs to be considered in relation to e-marketing; the role of social media. The increasing role of social media has raised the question whether it can be used to deliver e-CRM activities. Bygstad and Presthus (2012) found that although social media does resolve some problems related to traditional CRM, it can only serve as complimentary solution and cannot completely replace the traditional systems. On the other hand, electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) is considered more credible and reliable than advertising as it is perceived as information that derives from 'people like me' (Allsop, Bassett, & Hoskins, 2007). Keller (2007) also argues that E-WOM is the most persuasive communication channel. According to Graham (2005) social media includes everything that allows the users to create, participate and share content such as: photographs, stories, visitor reviews and recommendations. Using social media to market destinations is widely recognized as an excellent and successful tool. (Králová & Pavlíceka, 2014) According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media provides the opportunity for destinations to reach their potential visitors at a lower cost and at a higher efficiency rate. They distinguish between the following social media: content communities, blogs, social networking sites, virtual social worlds and virtual game worlds. Furthermore, social media also includes reviews, forums, ratings, micro blogging sites, social networking sites, pod-casts, photo sharing sites and video-casts (FPRM, 2009).

2.4   Experiential marketing in tourism destination management

There is a tight link between tourism and experiential marketing (Cuellar et al., 2015). In most cases, besides a couple of souvenirs, the most significant benefit of a holiday is the experience itself (Yuan & Wu, 2008). Lewis and Chambers (2000, pp. 46) state that consumption experience is "the total outcome to the customer from the combination of environment, goods and services purchased." According to Schmitt (1999), nowadays consumers are in search of unique and memorable experiences that 'touch their hearts' and 'stimulate their senses and minds'. Similarly, Yelkur (2000) highlights the importance of memorable experiences to customer retention and attracting new customers.

As Cuellar et el. (2015, p. 501) state "experience is the core element of experiential marketing". Experience advertising requires more creativity and out of the box thinking (Hudson & Ritchie, 2009). Experiential marketing is considered to be an innovative form of marketing. In contrast to traditional marketing, it views the customers as emotional beings instead of rationally thinking decision makers (Williams, 2006). According to Schmitt (1999), experiential marketing represents the point of engagement between the consumer and the brand. It constructs emotional links and results short-

term changes in customer behaviour (Robertson, 2007). However, Petkus (2004) argues that experiential marketing is more than just an experiential offering. Widdis (2001) says that marketing campaigns need to stimulate the customers' senses and need to bring the brand to life. Similarly, Akyildiz (2012) states, that the goal of experiential marketing is to create several stimulus such as atmosphere, new settings and unique areas. In response to these stimuli the consumers are expected to show active purchasing behaviour and experience feelings like entertainment and pleasure (Akyildiz, 2012).

When examining the dimensions of experience, according to Schmitt (1999), there are five types of experiences, in other words strategic experiential modules (SEMs) that marketers can offer: affective experiences (FEEL), sensory experiences (SENSE), cognitive experiences (THINK), lifestyles, behaviours and physical experiences (ACT) and social identity experiences (RELATE). As suggested by Schmitt (1999), these experiences are implemented via experience providers (ExPros) such as electronic media, communications, product presence etc. In order to successfully create an experience ExPros need to be managed in the following way: 1. coherently, 2. consistently over time and 3. with special focus on details.
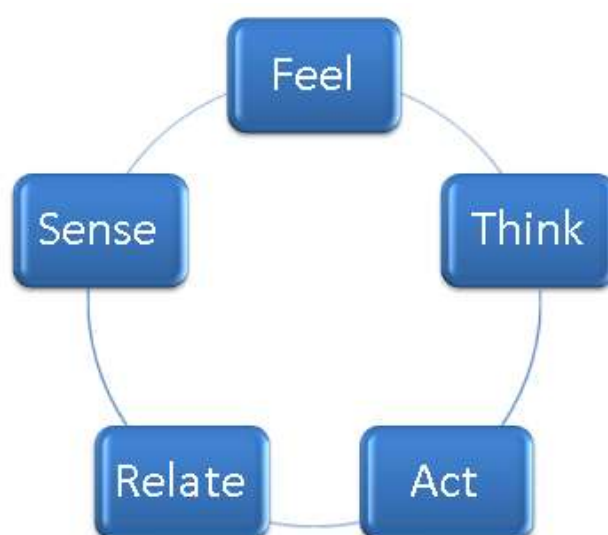
Figure 6. Strategic experiential modules (Schmitt, 1999)

Besides having a good understanding of what type of experiences can be offered, marketers also need to be able to measure and understand customer experience. Pine and Gilmore (1998) have created four experience categories. The categories have been placed on two axes: passive or active and immersion or absorption. The four categories are educational, entertainment, escapist and esthetic experiences. Educational experience is considered very active and absorptive and targets the need to 'learn and discover something new'. Vacations provide escapes from the daily routine (Uriely, 2005) Escapist experiences also require active participation and are based on the desire to find self-centre away from the everyday life (Cohen, 1979). The entertainment experience is a vital part of the tourism product that does not require active involvement (Benn & Hughes, 1995). The esthetic experience is the way the physical environment is perceived (Gahramamy & Zare, 2013):

ambiance, layout, functionality, symbols, signs and artifacts (Bitner, 1992). Experiential marketing highlights that customer interest is not limited to functional benefits only but to the consumption experience as a whole (Leighton, 2007). However, as stated by Ghahramani and Zare (2013) academic research on the topic of tourist experiences and their measurements are very recent. Despite of the positive aspects of this modern form of marketing some players of the tourism industry are still reluctant to apply these new techniques and to view the tourism industry in terms of experiences (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

2.5   Destination image

Destination image has been widely recognized as the most important aspect of tourist choices and its influential role in destination marketing and consumer behaviour has been acknowledged by many researchers (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Bigné et al., 2001; Birgit, 2001; Castro, Armario, & Ruiz, 2007; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Gallarza et al., 2002).   Destination image has been extensively researched in the past years and has significantly contributed to the deeper understanding of tourist behaviour (Beerli & Martín, 2004). A range of studies discuss the importance of destination image and its role in the tourist decision making process (Baloglu and McCleary 1999a; Chen and Kerstetter 1999; Goodrich 1978; Hunt 1975; Milman and Pizan 1995; Pearce 1982; Woodside and Lysonsky 1989).However, a precise definition of destination image is often missing and is a term with vague meanings (Pearce, 1988). Beerli and Martín (2004) also agree that despite of the significant interest in measuring destination image the majority of the studies are lacking solid conceptualization.

According to George (2011), a tourist destination image is the result of ideas, feelings; personal believes and impressions of a destination. Destination image is generally described as perceptions or impressions of a place. Most researchers consider only a list of attributes when measuring destination image while the holistic impressions are often overlooked. (Ritchie & Ecthner, 2003) Nevertheless, there have been a couple of mentions of the holistic components of the image of a destination. According to Um and Crompton (1990), destination image is a holistic construct. As opposed to the single-item method, Echtner and Ritchie (2003) suggest that a destination image should be a mix of both holistic and functional attributes. Image of a destination could be based on directly observable characteristics such as accommodation facilities, transportation facilities, attractions, price level and quality standards and on more intangible characteristics such as the overall atmosphere of a place and friendliness of its people. The multi-attribute approach towards destination image assessment has been applied by several researchers. (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Birgit, 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Court & Lupton, 1997; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Lin et al., 2003)

According to Pike and Ryan (2004) and White (2004), based on the multi-item approach, the image of a destination is multifaceted and consists of three main elements: affective, cognitive and behavioural.

Figure 7. Destination image formation

As suggested by Smith (2005), beliefs and knowledge form the core of the cognitive components referring to the more tangible aspects. On the other hand, the affective components represent feelings and emotions (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997). The behavioural component is the indication of a tourist's intention to visit a certain place (Lee, 2009).

The destination image is usually constructed based on previous experience, narrations of fellow travellers, family or friends, advertising, press releases, common beliefs. (Abdullah et al. 2000; Assaker, Vinzi, and O'Connor 2011; Cai, Wu, & Bai 2003; Castro, Armario, & Ruiz 2007; Chi & Qu 2008; Churchill and Surprenant 1982; Han 1990; Joppe, Martin, & Waalen 2001; Kandampully and Suharatanto 2000; Lee, Lee, and Lee 2005; O'Leary and Deegan 2003; Prayag and Ryan 2012; Stepchenkova and Eales 2011; Tse and Wilton 1988) A wide range of academic literature reveals that the formation of destination image is influenced by specific factors. As suggested by Gould and White (1974), a set of impressions form our perceptions and views of a place. These impressions are highly filtered. The filters are closely related to the source of information (Berry, 1970) as well as to psychological (Metton, 1974) and cultural (Doherty, 1969) factors. Accordingly, the image an individual has of a destination is affected by the filtered information he/she receives. (Gould & White, 1974) A destination image formation model formulated by Stern and Krakover (1993) is based on influencing factors such as source of information and individual characteristics. A theoretical model developed by Baloglu and McCleary (1999a) also differentiates between personal factors (social and psychological) and stimulus factors such as information sources, distribution and previous experience.   It is widely agreed that a positive image in the mind of the traveller leads to destination choice, high tourist satisfaction, pleasant on-site experience and customer loyalty (Lee, Lee &Lee, 2013).

Consequently, understanding and measuring destination image has vital importance in developing effective marketing strategies for tourism destinations (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003).

2.6   The destination choice process

Choosing a destination is a complex procedure and understanding this procedure is a key step (Karl et. al, 2015). There have been numerous studies investigating why and how an individual chooses a holiday destination. Besides the above mentioned influence of destination image there are a range of other aspects that have impact on a tourist's destination choice. Destination attributes (Ewing & Haider, 1999; Huybers, 2003; Morley, 1994), behavioural intentions (Lam & Hsu, 2006), the role of fantasy and hedonic experience (Bello & Etzel, 1985; King, 2002) and loyalty and attachment (Alegre

& Cladera, 2006; Hong, Lee, Lee, & Jang, 2009) are all key aspects of a destination choice. As stated by Karl et. al (2015), most of the existing studies on destination choice process concentrate on the outcome of the decision making process by focusing on the input-output or internal – external factors.

According to Crompton and Ankomah (1993), the destination selection process goes through three major steps: formulation of an awareness set (the list of destinations considered at an early stage of the planning process), development of an evoked set (excluding destinations in order to form a smaller set) and the final destination choice. However, the reasons why a destination is rejected before a final destination choice is made is still unexplored.

Given the specific characteristics of a tourism product, the tourist decision making process is a more complex and multifaceted procedure than any other decision making process (Correia, Kozak & Ferradeira, 2011). As it has been indicated by Pan and Fesenmaier (2006), that information source is a dynamic and complex procedure. As proposed by Scarpino (2008), personal characteristics such as age, gender, level of education result differences in the travel related information search process.

Tourists need to evaluate a range of information sources before making their decisions. As suggested by Bonera (2008,) individuals are only able to assess the quality of a destination's attributes, therefore they tend to base their decisions on tangible elements, such as price and avoid intangible components as they represent higher risk. Fodness and Murray (1997) also argue the importance of information search prior to departure. Nishimura et al. (2006) state that tourists do not depend on one single source but make use of a great variety of information.

A paper written by Correia, Kozak and Ferradeira (2011) has highlighted a gap in the existing literature on tourism decision making. Decision making of tourists has been mostly explained by psychological features rather than cultural background (Woodside & McDonald, 1994). However it is arguable whether culture is important for the understanding of customer behaviour (Reisinger & Turner, 2003). Correia et al. (2011) stated that national culture has direct impact on holiday decision patterns. This point is also sustained by the work of Murphy (2007), who also asserted that culture has significant impact on tourism information search. Besides that, he also demonstrated that stage in the family life cycle, previous experience; motivation and socio-economic status all play a key role in the destination choice process.

Based on the above mentioned approach, research on information search behaviour was applied in the context of Canadian citizens in order to discover the specific characteristics and patterns. Undoubtedly, understanding the complex procedure of destination choice and travel decision making is a key for successful marketing management and destination promotion.

2.7   Conclusion

It is clearly stated by studies of UNWTO and ETC that Europe is a key player on the world tourism market. Its long standing traditions, history and unique cultures make Europe an ideal destination for overseas visitors. However, it has also been reported that emerging destinations are driving away visitation from European countries resulting decreasing market share. (UNWTO, 2015) The increasing competition and the newly developed, undiscovered destinations represent huge threat to traditional destinations like Europe. As communicated by the UNWTO (2015) Europe needs to reposition itself and adjust to the changing visitor economy in order to stay competitive on the long run. The question is how can Europe be re-positioned as a fresh and new destination in the mind of the customers and how can this be communicated towards the target markets. Innovative online techniques and multimedia strategies can be the solution.

In the present context, the repositioning and marketing problem of Europe is examined in the case of Canadian visitors. As it has been reported the number of overnight trips of Canadian travellers in European destinations is decreasing (ETC, 2015). Although the problem is well-known the solution is still missing. The literature clearly says that in order to keep a destination competitive, to re-gain visitation, to generate repeat visitation and to attract first-time visitors a well-defined communication strategy (Királová & Pavlíceka, 2015) and several communication mediums need to be applied (Mastorakis et al., 2015).

Extensive literature has been found on the topic of innovative marketing listing a range of e-marketing tools, experiential marketing, E-CRM, iDTV, IMS and platforms like social media. However, the ideal combination of these tools in an integrated e-marketing strategy is still undiscovered. Furthermore, the application of such strategy in the context of the Canadian outbound market, based on the destination choice process and the destination image held by this specific target market is also lacking. The following chapter will deal with the problem at hand in more details.

3. Problem analysis

Tourism is one of today's fastest growing industries. The entry of emerging, new markets into the global competition (Riege et al. 2001 cited by Bakri, Soliman & Al Bohairy, 2010) has forced all the destinations to compete at a higher level and to distinguish themselves from one and other in order to gain a bigger share on the market (Konecnik 2002 cited by Bakri, Soliman & Al Bohairy, 2010).

As reported by the UNWTO (2015), Europe has always had a strong position on the world tourism market and the arrival numbers show steady growth year by year. However, the emerging markets are putting enormous pressure on traditional destinations such as Europe. As stated by Basan, Bagaric and Loncaric (2013), the only way for tourist destinations to remain competitive is to offer unique experiences and integrated products.

In addition to the growing competition, ETC (2002) has stated, that despite of the growing number of long-haul tourist arrivals to Europe, half of these visitors arrive from just a small number of source markets (e.g.: USA, China and Japan).

An equally significant aspect is the decreasing number of overnight trips made by Canadian travellers to European destinations (-14% between 2000 and 2012 (ETC, 2015)). Canada itself is one of the top 10 highest spending countries in the world in terms of international tourism expenditure making it a key player on the world tourism market (UNWTO, 2015). Consequently, the Canadian outbound market shows great potentials, although this opportunity has not been fully exploited till now. ETC (2014) has reported that Europe's share has significantly decreased in terms of overnight trips of Canadian visitors between 2002 and 2012. It dropped from 45% to 31% while destinations like Mexico, Cuba, mainland China, the Dominican Republic and the USA are enjoying ever increasing growth rates in terms of Canadian arrivals (see Figure 4.)

Furthermore, based on a report issued by Transat (2015), 87% of Canadians dream of visiting Europe at least once in their life; however in many cases this dream remains on their wish lists. Negative perceptions mostly associated with European holidays are the long travel distance and high travel costs. However, as mentioned by Transat (2015), the increasing number of direct flights to Europe might provide a solution to this problem making a trip to Europe more affordable.

"In an increasingly vibrant landscape, marked by new players, technological innovation and rapidly changing consumers, the need arises to challenge traditionally-held perceptions of Destination Europe. In key long-haul markets, where the largest potential for growth is, the match is won by those who can truly inspire, excite and engage potential travellers to experience their destination."

(Santander, 2014)

3.1 Reasons for developing an innovative e-marketing strategy for Europe targeting the Canadian market

It can be seen from the above mentioned facts, that there are several problems that need to be tackled in relation to the specific market of Canada. Canadian outbound tourism has great potentials and matching the needs of this blooming market would bring higher economic benefits for European destinations.

Besides the economic aspects, enhanced brand awareness and a renewed destination image would have positive impacts on the overall perception of Destination Europe. Canada is one of the key long-haul markets of Europe, however compared to other key source markets such as the USA it receives significantly less attention. Thus there is a need to boost activities, to tackle the problem of potential negative perceptions, to raise brand awareness and to increase visitation from this key market. However, in order to successfully increase visitor numbers, the destinations need to be accessible at an affordable price and the travel time needs to be reduced as much as possible.

In order to justify the need for an innovative destination marketing approach on the Canadian outbound market, besides the statistical facts, a number of theoretical aspects have been taken into consideration.

As it has been identified by Pine and Gilmore (1999), the attention has moved from commodities, to services and finally to experiences. The factors of demand have shifted from characteristics to benefits and to sensations. Based on this concept, marketing needs to adopt accordingly. Focus needs to be shifted from the functional aspects and benefits towards the sensory, creative and affective elements of both relations and actions. (Prentice 2001; Schmitt 1999)

In today's experience economy brands are seen as experience providers thus marketing must be based on consumer reality (Tom, 2001). Adapting or designing Europe's marketing strategy based on the changing trends is vital in order to gain a competitive edge and to drive away visitation from competitive destinations on the market. As the overall conclusion of the delegates of the Destination Europe 2020 conference (ETC, 2014) also confirms, Europe needs to be present more dominantly in the key oversees target markets, such as Canada, due to the increased competition (ETC, 2014).

Currently there is no strategic e-marketing campaign based on the principles of innovative experiential marketing running in Canada. Marketing is a powerful tool to motivate and inspire potential customers. It connects the consumers to the destination and stimulates them to make informed purchase decisions. Thus an innovative marketing strategy is needed to cover the gap in existing efforts taken on the Canadian market in order to gain higher visitation and to raise brand awareness and enhance the destination image of Europe.

3.2 Research objective

The overall goal of the dissertation paper is to contribute towards the success of ETC's current activities on the Canadian market by providing recommendations for an innovative and integrated e-marketing strategy based on the principles of experiential marketing. The strategy focuses on the specific outbound travel market of Canada and promotes Europe to this potential source market.

3.3   Research questions

The main research question that needs to be answered focuses on the overall goal of the dissertation paper.

What are the elements of a successful e-marketing strategy based on the principles of experiential marketing that successfully reaches and inspires Canadian travellers to visit Europe?

In order to answer the main research question several research sub-questions have been formulated:

1. How do Canadians perceive Europe as a tourism destination? How are the cognitive and affective elements of the destination image of Europe perceived by this specific market?
2. What are the main pull factors that motivate and inspire Canadians to visit Europe?
3. What are the main online platforms Canadians use to gather travel information prior to departure? What type of travel information do they search for?
4. What are the main social media platforms used by Canadians?
5. How can the image and awareness of "Destination Europe" be enhanced on the Canadian market?

3.4   Dissertation structure

The study started off with the introduction of the dissertation paper and the literature review that discussed in-depth the underlying concepts and theoretical background providing a good basis for the formulation of an e-marketing strategy. The problem analysis that summarized and justified the need for an innovative e-marketing strategy was followed by the research objective together with the main and sub-research questions.

Following the desk research, in order to be consistent with the concept of Triangulation (Denzin, 1970), the method of netnography and online self-completion questionnaires have been used in order to gather primary data. Study 1 and study 2 will discuss the methodology and findings of these two research techniques and will eventually present an overall conclusion based on the results.

The research paper ends with recommendations for an integrated e-marketing strategy based on the principles of experiential marketing aiming to turn tourism products into unique visitor experiences in order to increase the number of Canadian visitors.

4. Methods

To gain greater confidence in the findings and results of the research project, a mixed methods approach has been applied. As conceptualized by Webb et al. (1966) the method of triangulation is an approach that operates across multiple research strategies. Using different sources reduces the possibility of methodological or personal biases and makes the study more generalizable.

Based on the academic literature the concept of triangulation has played a key role in formulating the methodological framework of this study. Different types of material have been collected for analysis. Both primary and secondary data has been used for the research. In line with the concept of triangulation, multiple research techniques have been applied. Both qualitative and quantitative methods have been used. Desk research provided background information on the related topics and knowledge of the existing literature. For primary data collection netnography and online self-completion questionnaires were chosen. The research process and the results of the netnographic analysis and the online questionnaires were discussed separately in study 1 and 2. The data interpretation and theoretical work led to the main research findings and conclusion.

4.1 Research design

Mixed-methods approach was used in order to gather different types of information.

In case of the qualitative part of the study, netnography allowed the author to gather information closely linked to the feelings, perceptions, emotions and opinion of the visitors. Petit (2010) says that the practice of understanding people and listening to people in their natural environment forms a larger portion of marketing research. According to Kozinets, (2010) netnography is "a specialized form of ethnography adapted to the unique computer-mediated contingencies of today's social world." Content analysis of online Canadian travel blogs allowed the researcher to understand this new way of social interaction. The structure of the netnographic analysis followed the concept of grounded theory and the model developed by Hoda et al. (2010). The process started with the formation of generic research questions followed by the selection of relevant sites (Canadian online travel blogs). The next step was the collection of relevant data. Open coding was applied as the first step followed by theoretical sampling and selective coding. Selective coding was followed by theoretical coding and conceptual work that eventually led to the main findings and theory. Constant comparison method and memoing was used throughout the process.
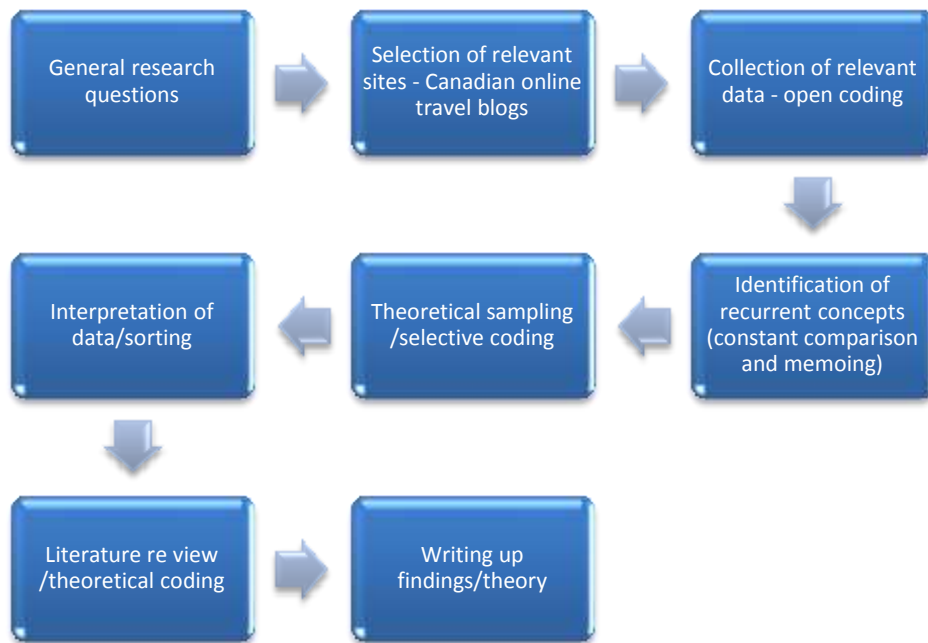
Figure 8. The main steps of the qualitative research technique applied using grounded theory

The second part of the study has a quantitative approach. The self-completion questionnaire besides providing data on perceptions and image also provided information on the use of social media, information search behaviour and the main elements of the destination choice process of the respondents.

The main steps of quantitative research suggested by Bryman (2012) were followed. The research process started with the analysis of the relevant academic literature on Canadian travel behaviour, destination choice process, destination image formation and information search behaviour. The hypotheses were formulated based on the above mentioned literature. The next step was the design of the survey and the application of appropriate measures in order to get the desired outcome. Qualtrics online survey software was used for the process. The survey design was followed by the selection of distribution channels and the determination of the sample. The surveys were distributed online mainly via Facebook, email and other online community platforms. The process was continued by data collection, data analysis and formulation of the final conclusion based on the main research findings. The data was analysed with the help of SPSS data analysis software.
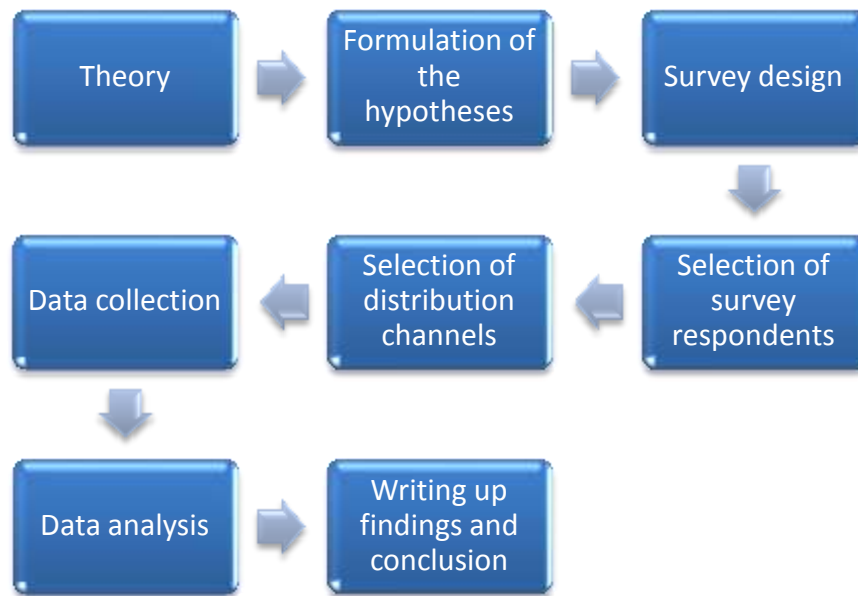
Figure 9. The main steps of the quantitative research technique applied

4.2 Research approach

In order to reach the main research goal, due to the application of mixed techniques both inductive and deductive approach have been applied.

In case of study 1, the netnographic analysis required Inductive reasoning due to the fact that it starts from specific observations and develops towards broader generalizations. The "bottom up" approach allowed the researcher to detect regularities and general patterns in the specific consumer behaviour, information search behaviour and destination choice process of Canadian citizens and eventually form general theories and conclusions. (Trochim, 2006).

Study 2 followed a deductive approach. The hypotheses tested via the self-completion questionnaires were formed based on theory found in academic literature and these were narrowed down during the data collection process. The specific information gained from the questionnaires was used to test the hypotheses. At the end of the research process the hypotheses were either rejected or supported. (Trochim, 2006)

4.3 Strengths and weaknesses of the chosen research methods

Netnography, the method of online content analysis, is an unobtrusive, flexible and relatively transparent method that allows the researcher to gain information about social groups that would otherwise be hard to approach. Due to the clear structure of the coding scheme follow up studies and replications are feasible. However, this method is often referred to as a very objective approach. Credibility, quality and authenticity of the analysed content have also critical importance in terms of reliability. (Bryman, 2012)

Online self-completion questionnaires allow the researcher to distribute the surveys on a large geographical area at a very low cost and to obtain fast responses at a relatively high response rate. However, there is a risk that some people might fill in the questionnaires multiple times or give false answers to questions resulting misleading information. (Bryman, 2012) Not asking the right questions is also a risk factor as the outcome of the survey largely depends on the initial design of the questionnaire.

In order to overcome the weaknesses of the above mentioned research techniques a mixed-technique approach was followed in order to ensure the reliability and validity of the research.

5. Study 1 – Methods

The following chapter will introduce the methodology and research findings of study 1 – netnographic analysis of Canadian online travel blogs.

5.1 Data collection

Netnographic analysis (online content analysis) is a tool that allows the researcher to make valid inferences from images or texts (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012). Content analysis allows the researcher to systematically analyse unstructured data in regards of symbolic qualities and meanings (Kripppendorff, 1980). In the current study content analysis has been applied in the form of online blog analysis. Blogs have been proved to have a very significant role in understanding customer behaviour (Trammell et al. 2006).

Online platforms provide new ways for potential or actual travellers to seek travel information and to learn about destinations through experiences of other consumers. Information and personal experience shared in blogs or on other social media platforms by other travellers often prove to be the most credible and important information source prior to purchase (Crotts, 1999, Pan et al., 2007).

Nowadays travel blogs represent a very common way of experience sharing and this habit has had a very significant impact on destination perceptions. In the present study the perceived destination image has been analysed and studied via Canadian travel blogs.

Data has been collected from travel blogs that have been mentioned in the list of the top 100 Canadian travel blogs. The list was generated by a Canadian travel blogger and was published on an internet website (Gibson, 2013). In order to put the list together 1000 Canadians were asked to recommend blogs and from the suggested travel blogs the best 100 were handpicked by the editor of the webpage. (Gibson, 2013) Descriptions were added to the blogs thus it made the research process a lot easier and less time consuming as travel blogs that did not fulfil the requirements were excluded already at the beginning of the procedure. Bloggers that have not visited Europe before could not participate in the research. Blogs that focused on one specific theme such as culinary, adventure or photography were also excluded. Furthermore, texts that were simply descriptive and did not include any personal opinion or perceptions or had only images and travel videos were also discarded. After having assessed the travel blogs a sample of 101 articles from 37 blogs were chosen for analysis. Articles were chosen based on their content (as mentioned above) and length. Only posts containing at least 400 words were selected for analysis. The blog entries that fulfilled the requirements were saved in a master file for detailed analysis.

5.2 Data analysis

The blog entries were analysed using content analysis. In order to study the dataset grounded theory was applied. It is an inductive approach and helps to construct insight from qualitative data. (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012) A coding system was used in order to categorize and classify the collected

information. The process of coding is one of the most significant procedures in grounded theory. It entails the labelling of parts of the text that has theoretical significance. (Bryman, 2012)

In the current study open coding was applied as the first step of the coding process. Open coding is "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp.61). Via this process, concepts are defined and later turned into categories. The researcher has manually coded the blog articles. Following the open coding procedure, after having identified recurrent concepts theoretical sampling and selective coding was applied. The interpretation of the collected data involved conceptualization and the formation of the main themes discovered in the text. The process ended with the discussion of the discovered themes and theory.

5.3   Blog profiles

The blogs that have been analysed for this study were written by well-travelled Canadians who have visited several parts of the world including Europe. All the travel bloggers have visited multiple countries during their visit to Europe. Most of them have visited the continent several times in different seasons and time of the year. In general various blog entries were produced during a visit grouping the activities by day or theme. Most of the travel bloggers have visited Europe as a couple or as individual travellers. Blogs written by families have also been included in the study due to the specific characteristics of a family trip. Most of the blog entries contained images and photos although the ones containing only visual items have been excluded. The list of blogs used for the research can be seen in table 2.

URL	Blog owner	Type of traveller	Purpose of blog
1. http://www.travelyourself.ca	Cailin O'Neil	solo traveller	info. for family promote travel videos
2. http://theplanetd.com	Dave & Deb	couple American express Canada Ambassadors	Inspiration for travel
3. http://breathedreamgo.com	Mariellen Ward	solo traveller professional travel writer	travel advice, information inspiration
4. http://www.hecktictravels.com	Dalene & Pete Hack	couple	sharing travel stories
5. http://toeuropeandbeyond.com	Marie-Eve Vallieres	solo traveller full time travel blogger amateur photographer	explore, learn, encourage
6. http://www.brendansadventures.com	Brendan Van Son	solo traveller travel photographer/journalist	travelogue and photography
7. http://www.calculatedtraveller.com	multiple writers	solo and couple	informative reviews inspiration, advice
8. http://www.candicedoestheworld.com	Candice Walsh	solo traveller freelance writer	documentation of the journeys inspiration

9.	http://cherylhoward.com	Cheryl Howard	solo traveller/ expat in Berlin travel blogger	sharing experiences
10.	http://www.chrystal-clear.com	Chrystal McKay	solo traveller	seeking knowledge
11.	http://www.curiousaroundtheworld.com	Andrea Charlotte	solo traveller artist	sharing travel stories
12.	http://edventureproject.com	The Miller Family	family (4 kids)	education and adventure for families
13.	http://www.gonewiththefamily.com	Lisa Goodmurphy	family (2kids)	inspiration to travel with kids
14.	http://www.gingernomads.com	Heather Carson	solo traveller	sharing travel stories
15.	http://iwilltravelblog.com	Will Castillo	travel blogger	sharing travel stories
16.	http://kandkadventures.com	Karin & Kieran	couple	story telling
17.	http://loveandpassport.com	Jeanette Kramer	solo traveller	sharing adventures
18.	http://manonthelam.com	Raymond Walsh	solo traveller	travel adventures destination profiles
19.	http://www.blog-jess.com	Jess & Mike	couple / expat in Malta	travel and lifestyle blog
20.	http://monkeysandmountains.com	Laurel Robbins	solo traveller professional travel blogger	promote meaningful way of travel
21.	http://www.nomadicchick.com	Jeannie Mark	solo traveller writer	share possibilities not defined by zip code
22.	http://www.passportandatoothbrush.com	Jaklien Van Melick	solo traveller travel and tourism professional	travel and lifestyle blog
23.	http://savoirfaireabroad.com	Pamela	solo traveller	travel and food
24.	http://seattlestravels.com	Seattle Dredge	solo traveller full time travel blogger	share adventures and inspire others
25.	http://seeyousoon.ca	Arienne Parzei	solo traveller	writing, videography, photography
26.	http://solotravelerblog.com	Janice Waugh Tracey Nesbitt	solo travellers writers	information on solo travel and solo travel destinations
27.	http://www.suitcaseandheels.com	Melissa	solo traveller web designer	inspiration
28.	http://thatbackpacker.com	Audrey	couple freelance travel writer photographer	document the places visited
29.	http://www.thatshamori.com	The Hamori Family	family/expats in France	family adventure journal
30.	http://traveldestinationbucketlist.com	Anita Mac	solo traveller	bucket list destinations
31.	http://www.travelyesplease.com	Rhonda	solo traveller teacher	share travel experiences and photos
32.	http://traveledearth.com	Mike & Ashley Lenzen	couple	budget travelling
33.	http://travelingcanucks.com	Cam & Nicole Wears	couple / family	share travel stories and tips
34.	http://thetravellerworldguide.com	Ross French & Kyle	friends	share travel tips and first hand experiences

35. http://www.thewanderfulltraveler.com	Murissa Shalapata	solo traveller writer	culinary, culture, history
36. http://wavejourney.com	Vivienna Chapleo Jill Hoelting	friends	women's adventures, vacations
37. http://waysofwanderers.com	Jess	couple	share travel experiences

Table 1. Blog profiles

6. Study 1 – Research findings

The netnographic analysis served different purposes: 1. to define how Canadian travellers perceive Europe after having visited the continent, 2. to identify information collection techniques Canadian travellers apply prior to departure as well as their motivations to visit European destinations and 3. to examine the feelings and expectations of the bloggers towards Europe. A total of 1341 comments were extracted for analysis. In this chapter the main themes emerged from the coding process will be discussed in-depth.

6.1 Key themes identified

After having analysed the text, during the coding procedure 11 categories were formulated. The 11 categories were the followings: accommodation, activities, expectations, feelings, information source prior to departure, interest, internet usage, motivations, perceptions, price, and transportation. These categories were further elaborated, tentative linkages between the different categories were explored and more meaningful units were formulated that led to the five context specific themes.

Theme 1

Theme 1 has evolved around the concept of expectations. Bloggers experienced Europe in a positive way and in many cases reality exceeded expectations. Reality exceeded expectations in many different parts of the trip resulting in more positive first impression, on-holiday experience and after-trip perceptions. It was discovered that expectations were closely linked to awareness and knowledge a blogger had prior to departure and perceptions were also closely related to expectations. What the bloggers expected prior to arrival often defined their perceptions and first impressions of a place. In most cases bloggers perceived the visited European destinations as bustling places with unique atmosphere, rich traditions, beautiful architecture and stunning nature.

Within the theme of expectations two sub-themes could be formed: positive and negative expectations. Most of the times the expectations were positive based on travel photos or recommendations of fellow travellers, friends or family members. The positive expectations were mostly related to the atmosphere of the place visited, the beauty of nature and unique architecture of certain places.

"I imagined that absolutely everywhere in Europe must be absolutely fascinating."

<div align="right">(Ways of wanderers, 2012)</div>

"First impression was that it was such a cute little town."

<div align="right">(Travel yes please, 2015)</div>

"When I first saw photos, I thought there's no way one country can really look like that. When I arrived, I realized that it most certainly can, and Finland does."

<div align="right">(Seattle's Travels, 2012)</div>

Although in most cases bloggers stated that what they found after arrival well exceeded their expectations and the places did not disappoint them at all, bloggers had not only positive expectations but they also prepared themselves for negative experiences and disappointment. Negative expectations were mostly related to high costs, mainly in the Scandinavian countries and poverty and remaining of the communist era in Eastern European countries. As expectations were discovered to be closely related to perceptions in many cases bloggers perceived very negatively the large crowds of tourists and presence of pickpockets and thieves in some of the touristic places, the often extreme summer weather conditions and the tiring circumstances of long haul travel as well as the sometimes challenging language barriers. Having expected these extreme situations might have reduced the level of negativity and would have resulted in a slightly more positive first impression.

"I was expecting to see more ramshackle, communist era buildings."

<div align="right">(Travel yes please, 2014)</div>

"Would we feel any Soviet influence, lingering from when Hungary was behind the Iron Curtain? Or would Budapest feel similar to the western European countries we were used to?"

<div align="right">(Travel yes please, 2014)</div>

"I was at the top and started taking photos when suddenly there were tons of other people trying to edge their way outside to enjoy the views."

<div align="right">(Cheryl Howard, 2015)</div>

"Tired and worn down from overseas travel, the usual dreamy thought permeated our first day: the desire for a warm, comfortable place in which to retreat and recover."

<div align="right">(Hectic Travels, 2014)</div>

It was discovered that in most cases travellers had no or limited knowledge of the destination they were visiting. Interestingly, many of the travellers visiting certain parts of Europe have stated that they had no information at all about the place or the activities available prior to their departure. They either have never heard of it, or intentionally did not do any research.

As mentioned in the previous section, expectations were discovered to be closely linked to awareness and knowledge. Travellers who had more in-depth knowledge of the destination were better prepared for possible obstacles such as language barriers, higher money exchange rates or bigger crowds around iconic places. These travellers had more realistic expectations resulting in less negative first impression and perceptions.

The information search behaviour of the bloggers was different in many cases and the information on specific destinations often served as an inspiration or motivation in the destination choice process. In most cases the motivation to visit a specific place came from narrations of friends or fellow travellers. TripAdvisor reviews and personal experience served as information source for many of the bloggers. Travel photos were also amongst the top information source such as the search engine of Google. Internet was the major source of information while travelling. Travellers have used internet during their trip for three reasons: to plan the journey and to search for places of interest, to book accommodation and to share their experiences through social media. The most common social media platforms for sharing travel photos were Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest. Google maps and google search were used to plan itineraries during the trip. Hotel booking sites such as Booking.com, Venere.com and Expedia.com were used for accommodation bookings. It can be seen that internet had multiple roles and played a key part in the pre-departure, on-trip and post-holiday phases.

"Anyone who knows me can attest to the fact that I waste so much time looking at travel photos. In this case though, I'm glad I didn't do a lot of image searching. I walked into Prague with no preconceived notions, no expectations for what it should look like."

(Travel yes please, 2014)

"I practically knew nothing about the country I was visiting."

(The wonderful traveller, 2014)

"My sister made what I suppose could be termed a pilgrimage to the town of Lenzen and returned home to tell us all about it. Ever since, I've been mildly obsessed with visiting for myself. It even made it onto our Bucket List"

(Traveled Earth, 2012)

Theme 3

It has been revealed that in most cases the uniqueness factor defined most aspects of the holiday be it public transportation, activities or events. People mostly visited Europe for its unique combination of cultures, history, culinary arts, architecture, life style and to discover something new and different in each aspect of life. In general bloggers found the choice of activities vast and described the experiences as unusual, unique, challenging, extraordinary, special and fascinating.

During the analysis it has been discovered that the unique circumstances generated strong feelings and emotions. Bloggers wrote extensively about how they felt when doing something new or experiencing something different for the first time. The main groups that generated the most comments regarding feelings and unique experiences were history, human interactions and culinary arts.

History and places with historical significance have generated the most grandiose feelings. Being able to touch the remaining of old times, the ones one have heard so much about had a predominant role.

Interacting with the locals, being welcomed and the ability to share personal stories and to gain advices from real insiders created warm feelings and happiness. Learning about new, un-known traditions and customs played a key role in many cases and generated the feeling of excitement and curiosity. .

The cuisine of the specific countries including all local dishes and beverages had very high uniqueness factor. Bloggers were generally excited about trying new and unknown flavours or sampling dishes they have heard so much about.

Furthermore, strong linkages were discovered between the unique, special characteristics of European destinations and the motivations of the bloggers. In many cases motivations to visit Europe were closely linked to the differences between Europe and Canada and the desire to discover and experience something new and un-known. The quest for gaining unique experiences often provided a reason for repeat visitation. The lack of time and too many interesting things to see and do often inspired the bloggers to return. Most of the bloggers mentioned that there were many places that remained on their bucket list even after finishing their trip.

"No matter how many places we visited, there were always many more than I wanted to see."

(Ways of wanderers, 2012)

"Endless outdoor activities."

(Traveling Canucks, 2011)

"Unique and unusual places to visit."

(Monkeys and mountains, 2011)

"It's both curiosity and quest for deeper understanding."

<div align="right">(Suitcase and heels, 2012)</div>

„It's an eerie feeling to see the evidence of the war slapping you in the face so many years later."

<div align="right">(Suitcase and heels, 2012)</div>

"We ate our picnic of Greek bread, homemade salami and the crispiest apples we have ever tasted."

<div align="right">(Edventure project, 2008)</div>

Theme 4

A separate theme could be formed around the grandeur of European history and its ancient roots. Places with historical significance were mostly defined as fascinating and impressive and played a key role in the travel itineraries. As mentioned above European history and historical places were one of the main elements with the highest level of stimulus to feelings and emotions of the bloggers. Learning about history and gaining a deeper understanding of what happened in the past was a very important motivational factor in many cases. As an area of interest the discovery of historical places was mentioned in numerous blog articles.

Besides the historical importance of Europe, family roots and history of Canadian citizens can also be traced back to Europe in many cases. This fact forms an important link between Canadian visitors and Europe. The desire to visit, discover and see the places where their ancestors and families come form has vital importance as a motivational factor. Knowing and understanding one's family roots is a big inspiration for a visit.

"We could feel the town's rich history as we wandered the streets, imagining people from medieval times milling about the same picturesque streets."

<div align="right">(Travel yes please, 2014)</div>

"As part of the former Ottoman and Austrian empires, Hungary's historical value is mind blowing."

<div align="right">(Nomadic chic, 2013)</div>

"London has a rich history that spans countless centuries. I think it's one of the reasons Hollywood always employs a British accent in historical pieces. That, or we just really prefer the sound of them…"

<div align="right">(Seattle's travels, 2014)</div>

"Each year, millions of visitors will visit Dublin, searching for their Irish roots – and maybe a chance to root around the pubs!"

(Calculated Traveller, 2014)

"I don't know much about my family history, but I do know that I come from primarily German stock (on my dad's side) and British stock (on my mother's side). Today, it was that German heritage that I was most interested in."

(Travelled Earth, 2012)

Theme 5

The last theme was formulated based on the high value bloggers attached to exchanging thoughts with the locals, learning about different traditions and customs. The opportunity to interact with local people was highlighted in many of the blogs. Exchanging thoughts, learning about different traditions and customs represented an outstanding value and had a great contribution to the overall evaluation of the trips. As many of the bloggers visited Europe with the goal of broadening their horizons and developing their knowledge, human interactions played a key role in gaining deeper understanding of life on the European continent.

The interaction occurred on different levels. In some cases the bloggers asked for help in finding directions in other cases visitors followed the recommendations of locals and found extraordinary hidden gems that wouldn't have been possible without the insights and help of the local community. In some cases the tourists used homestays and spent a couple of days with a local family being able to get a real insight into the everyday life of a European family. One thing was common; interacting with the locals, being welcomed and the ability to share personal stories, traditions and to gain advices from real insiders created warm feelings and happiness. The hospitality of the locals was often highlighted in the blogs.

In terms of areas of interest, local lifestyles including customs, new traditions and meeting new friends, possibly locals, was highlighted in many of the blog entries. Fashion of the locals was closely linked to this category as numerous positive comments were made about the dressing habits of Europeans. Bloggers were also eager to try out local things, including local transportation. In most cases travellers were very adventurous and were willing to try local transportation, most of the times with high satisfaction. Local cuisine as mentioned earlier was one of the main elements of the travel itineraries. Bloggers were eager to try out the local dishes and meals they have heard so much about. Homemade meals and beverages had a really high experience value as it made the visitors feel like they are part of something special. The new flavours and textures generated the feelings of uniqueness, excitement and curiosity.

"There was one artist on Charles Bridge whose photography I just loved. Every day we walked across the bridge and would stop to talk to him. He told me stories about his photographs and let me in on his secrets about how he shot and edited them."

(Travel yes please, 2014)

"In some cases, we lucked out and found ourselves in many undiscovered European towns, welcomed into small communities by people eager to share their language and culture with us."

(Ways of wanderers, 2012)

"It was seeing the locals though, so stylish they easily rival Parisian fashionistas, and their morning routine that made me so happy to be in Reykjavik."

(Passport and toothbrush, n.d.)

6.2 Discussion

Based on the narrations of the bloggers participating in the research, the netnographic analysis has revealed five main themes. It can be concluded that in general the bloggers experienced Europe in a positive way and in many cases reality exceeded expectations. However, it has also been discovered that in most cases travellers had no or limited knowledge of the destination they were visiting. From behavioural perspective it is believed that the source of information used by an individual determines the specific destinations that are seen as alternative choices ((Fakeye and Crompton, 1991; Gartner, 1993; Um and Crompton, 1990; Woodside and Lysonski, 1989). Gartner (1993) referred to information sources as 'image forming agents' that affect perceptions of a destination. It has been identified during the analysis that expectations (theme 1), knowledge and awareness (theme 2) and perceptions (sub-theme) are closely linked and influence each other. Visitors with prior knowledge of the destination had more realistic expectations thus their first impressions and perceptions were less negative than that of those who visited the place without any preparations.

People mostly visited Europe for its uniqueness and to discover something new and different in each aspect of life including culinary arts, history, architecture, life style etc. The uniqueness factor (theme 3) defined most aspects of the holiday be it public transportation, activities, events. It is widely acknowledged that motivations (sub-theme) affect both the destination image formation process and the destination choice process (Baloglu and McCleary 1999a; Um and Crompton 1990). It has been suggested by various authors that motivations have direct impact on the affective components of the perceived image (Baloglu & Brinberg 1997, Dann, 1996 and Gartner, 1993). Gartner (1993) also

noted that individuals attach the affective component to the destination image based on their motivations to visit the place. The study revealed that many of the bloggers had the motivation to visit unique places, to learn about new cultures and to taste un-known dishes. These experiences due to the high level of uniqueness in most cases led to outstanding emotions such as excitement, happiness and the feeling of being special. Thus it can be said that motivations and feelings are closely linked and they influence each other.

The bloggers were very open about their feelings and in most cases wrote extensively about their emotions. As proposed by Lee and Lin (2001), in order to understand the relationship between motivations of travellers and the perceived destination image not only the functional attributes of a place need to be taken into consideration but also the emotional and psychological attributes such as feelings. The main emotion generator motivational factors were history and historical places (theme 4) and human interactions (theme 5). The grandeur of European history and its ancient roots were mostly defined as fascinating and impressive. Interacting with local people were also highlights of the blogs. Exchanging thoughts, learning about different traditions and customs represented an outstanding value and had a great contribution to the overall evaluation of the trips.

The way knowledge, perceptions, expectations, motivations and feelings influence each other before, during and after the holiday is less explored in its complexity. The netnographic analysis revealed meaningful linkages between these concepts in the present context.

7   Study 2 – Methods

The following chapters will introduce the methodology, research findings and conclusion of study 2 – online-self completion questionnaires.

7.1   Data collection

According to Botterill and Platenkamp (2012, pp. 170) „social surveys collect data in a standardised way from a sample of respondents enabling the data to be codified and analysed". The rapid development of web-based applications and internet usage provides excellent ways of administering surveys in a time and cost efficient way. In order to distribute the survey online platforms were used. Amongst the online platforms social media played a key role for distributing the survey. In order to reach the target audience Facebook served as the primary platform. Any travel related Canadian Facebook groups and pages were approached in the initial phase of the data collection process. Groups of Canadian travellers were targeted on the first hand and then at a later stage other online communities were involved in the research in order to get valid and reliable data from people with different backgrounds, interests, age, and occupation. A total of 372 surveys were collected and analysed however out of the 372 surveys started 370 were completely finished by the respondents resulting a completion rate of 99%. Regarding the response rate, the researcher aimed at collecting 600 responses but out of this 600, 370 (completed only) were collected providing a response rate of 62%.

7.2   Sample

Non-probability sampling approach was used in the present study. Amongst the non-probability sampling methods, purposive sampling has proved to be the most appropriate for this research. According to Bryman (2012), by applying a purposive sampling approach the researcher choses participants in a strategic way with the aim of sampling participants who are relevant to the research objectives. The sampling criteria was defined as any Canadian citizens be it past or potential future visitors. Respondents with different gender, age, interest and occupation were targeted in order to get a complex picture of the travel habits of the Canadian society.

7.3   Measures

The survey was designed in a way that allows the researcher to collect data that helps to generate answers to the relevant research questions. The research objectives were the followings: to define the perceptions Canadian travellers hold of Europe as a destination, to measure the brand image and awareness and to define the key elements of the decision making process (key motivation factors,

online information sources prior to departure, etc.) In order to reach these objectives a set of 10 questions was designed based on academic literature. The questions were grouped into 5 sections. Section one (question 1 and 2) aimed to investigate what type of travel information Canadian travellers look for prior to departure and which online platforms they use to gather that information. Based on the variables developed by Lehto et al. (2006), the type of information has been clustered into 3 groups: experiential, logistics and transportation online content. Besides examining the type of information content, question 1 was further combined with the type of information source. According to Gartner's theory (1993) the following information source categories were used: (1) overt induced (information obtained from mass media advertising or through relevant institutions of the destination or via tour operators); (2) covert induced (information presented in destination reports and articles as well as information communicated by celebrities in promotion activities); (3) autonomous (information obtained from movies, documentaries and TV programmes presenting the destination) and (4) organic which refers to information delivered by relatives and friends and is based on personal experiences. A 4-point Likert type scale was used to measure how likely the respondents would use the different type of information sources. The respondents could choose between 'probably not', 'quite likely', 'maybe' and 'probably not'. Questions 2 was focusing on the use of social media and aimed at investigating which platforms are used the most often in general. A 5-point Likert type scale was developed to measure the frequency of use. Respondents could rate how often they use the platforms on the following scale: 'very rarely, 'rarely, 'sometimes', 'often, 'very often. Respondents also had the option to mention platforms that were not on the provided list.

Section two contained one question (question 3) and it was related to brand image and aimed to investigate the most significant pull factors. The variables were defined based on the work of Beerli & Martín (2004). In order to measure how strong certain motivational factors are a 7-point Likert scale was applied. The response anchors were developed based on the work of Vagias (2006). The respondents could rate the motivational variables on the following scale: 'not at all important', 'low importance', 'slightly important', 'neutral', 'moderately important', 'very important', and 'extremely important'.

Section three contained questions 4 and 5 and was focusing on brand perceptions. The affective and cognitive image of Europe held by Canadian travellers was studied in this section. The affective components were defined based on the theory developed by Russell and Pratt (1980). The respondents could choose how accurately each adjective describes Europe. The following 5-point Likert type scale was used for measurement: 'very inaccurate', 'somewhat inaccurate', 'neither', 'somewhat accurate', 'very accurate'. The cognitive image element variables were developed based on the study of Beerli and Martín (2004) and were measured on a 4-point scale. The respondents were asked to decide how likely they would do the specific activities. They could rate the activities on the following scale: 'definitely not', 'probably not', 'probably', and 'definitely'.

Section four contained two questions as well. Question 6 was aiming to define whether the respondent has visited Europe before or not. Based on the work of Prentice (2004), Question 7 was an open ended question and was closely related to own imaginings and asked the respondents to write down in a couple of words what they mostly associate with Europe.

The last section contained three questions. The purpose of questions 8, 9 and 10 was to gather demographic data. The respondents were asked to indicate their gender, age and level of education.

7.4   Data analysis

The hypotheses formulated in the this chapter are based on the theoretical concepts of destination image formation, information search behaviour and destination choice process discussed in the literature review section and investigates how the personal factors and stimulus factors influence each other and the image Canadians hold of Europe as a tourism destination. The hypotheses formulated in this chapter will either be rejected or approved in the next chapter where the research findings will be discussed in-depth.

The source of information

The first line of the data analysis process investigates the relationship between secondary information sources and the cognitive elements of the destination image formation process of the Canadian citizens. Consequently, two hypotheses have been formulated:

Hypothesis 1: The induced secondary information sources Canadian citizens use to gather travel information prior to departure has significant influence on the cognitive component of their perceived image of Europe.

Hypothesis 2: The organic and autonomous secondary information sources Canadian citizens use to gather travel information prior to departure has significant influence on the cognitive component of their perceived image of Europe.

The study will also investigate the type of information Canadians search for prior to departure. The aim of the analysis of the different types of travel information is to understand the information needs of Canadian travellers when planning a holiday and eventually successfully satisfy and target these needs with an innovative e-marketing strategy.

Hypothesis 3: Personal factors significantly influence the type of travel information Canadians search for prior to departure.

Experience and motivations

The second line of data analysis will focus on the relationship between the affective component of the perceived image and previous experience with the destination.

Hypothesis 4: There is a significant difference between the affective components of the perceived image in case of those Canadians who have visited Europe before and those who have never been to the continent.

The third line of data analysis investigates the links between motivations of Canadian citizens to visit Europe and the affective component of their perceived image. Correspondingly, the below hypothesis has been set.

Hypothesis 5: The motivations of Canadian travellers to visit Europe have significant impact on the affective components of the destination image.

<u>Personal factors</u>

The final line of data analysis will deal with the impacts of sociodemographic factors on the cognitive and affective components of the image of Europe perceived by Canadians. For this reason, a set of three hypotheses have been developed.

Hypothesis 6: The cognitive and affective elements of the perceived image Canadians hold of Europe is significantly influenced by their age.

Hypothesis 7: The cognitive and affective elements of the perceived image Canadians hold of Europe is significantly influenced by their gender.

Hypothesis 8: The cognitive and affective elements of the perceived image Canadians hold of Europe is significantly influenced by their level of education.

8 Study 2 – Research findings

SPSS data analytics software was used to analyse the collected data and to investigate interrelationships between the different questions.

In order to get an overall understanding of the results and to have a first overview frequency tables were produced examining the mean, mode, median and standard deviation. In case of the relevant questions bar or pie charts were created in order to provide visual representation of the results. Linkages between the different questions and variables have been discovered via correlation tests and one-way ANOVA tests. In case of the open ended question word frequency analysis was carried out. Throughout the data analysis only the statistically significant results were selected and further analysed.

Sample

The survey was targeting solely Canadian citizens and was distributed via social media between June 2015 and July 2015. A total of 372 responses were collected. There is an uneven distribution between female and male respondents. The number of female respondents (n=265) well exceeded the number of male respondents (n=83; SD=0.427). Regarding the age structure (M=27.33; SD=10.649) the mode age was 18 referring to a very high response rate from young Canadians. The minimum and maximum age was between 17 and 63 and the average age was 27 years. The respondents were also asked to indicate their level of education. Most respondents reported that they had Bachelor's degree (n=142; SD=1.148). Every respondent had at least high school degree. The group of Ph. D was excluded from further analysis due to the low number of respondents (n=4).
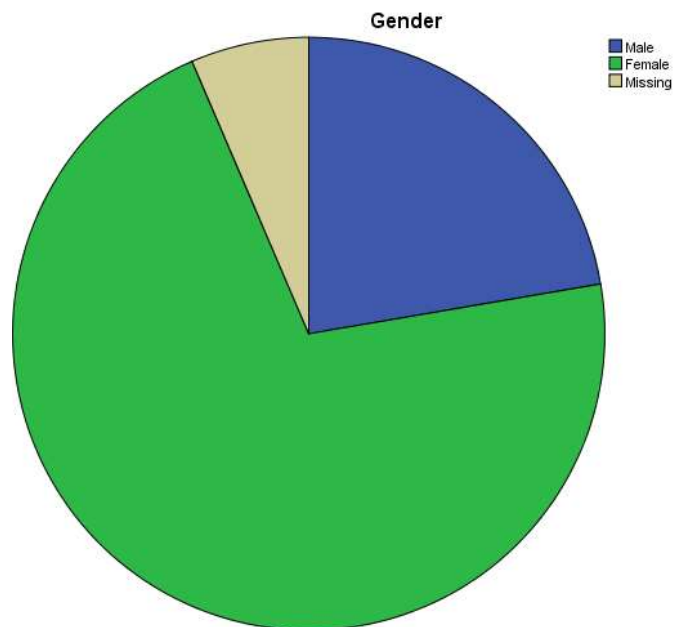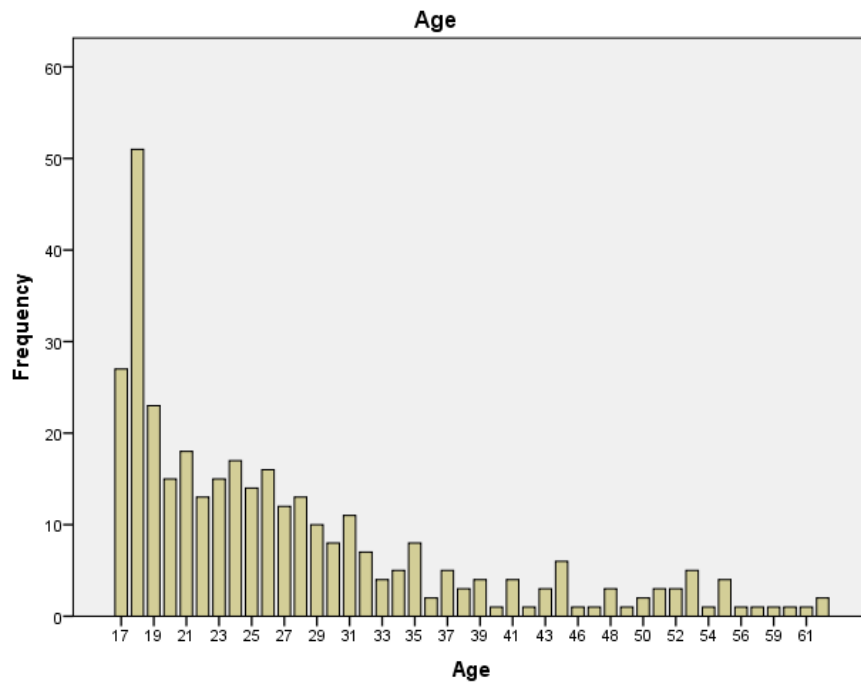

Figure 10. Gender of the respondents
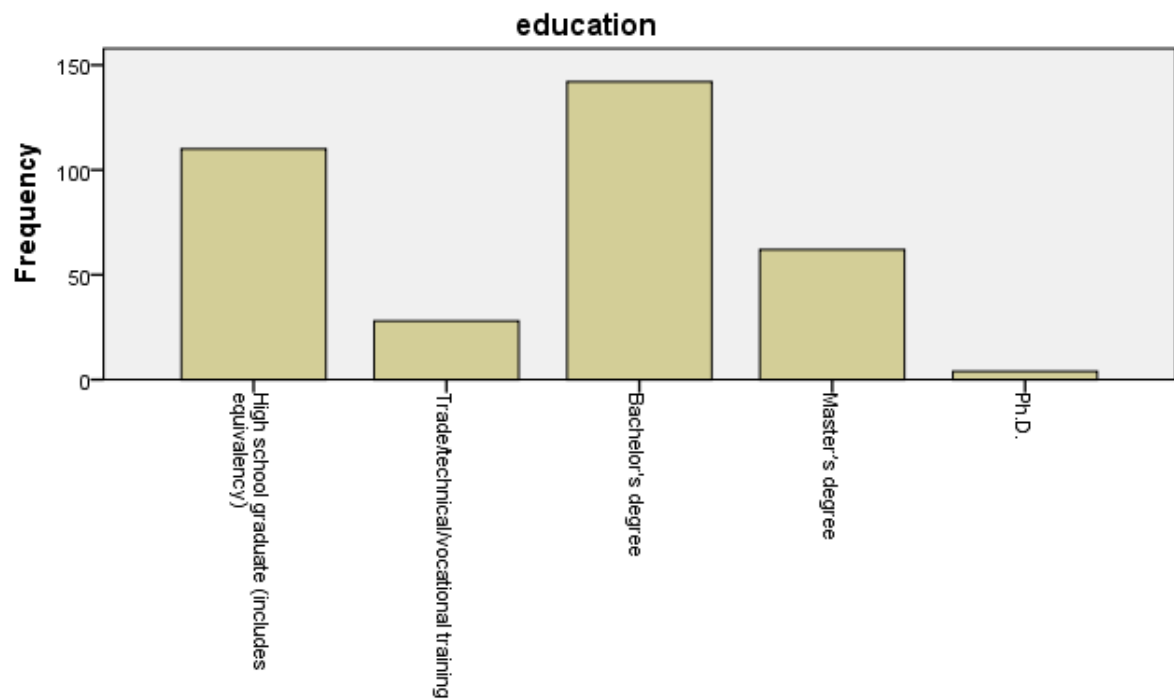
Figure 11. Age distribution

Figure 12. Education level of the respondents

<u>Source and type of information</u>

Frequency analysis has been carried out in order to detect what type of travel information Canadians mostly look for prior to departure. Based on Gartner's theory (1993), information sources can be categorized as induced or organic and autonomous. The analysis showed that when planning a holiday most people would definitely look at the following online platforms: destination specific sites (n=149), map sites (n=122), accommodation sites (n=174) and airline sites (n=165). These information sources all belong to the category of induced information meaning that the role of organic/autonomous information sources is less significant at the planning stage of the holiday.

Induced information sources:

- travel magazine sties
- travel agents/tour operators
- Visit Europe website
- Destination specific sites
- Local CVB sites
- map sites
- accommodation sites
- car rental sites
- airline sites

Autonomous/organic information sources:

- personal travel sites
- special interest sites
- travel guide sites

Furthermore, the content of information search could also be identified. Three categories have been tested according to the indicator variables developed by Lehto, Kim and Morrison (2006): logistic arrangement, experiential and transportation information. Based on the statistics, in the first category, experiential information content, most people would quite likely look at travel guide sites (n=148), special interest sites (n=137) and personal travel sites (n=119). Information sources such as tour operator's sites and travel magazine sites were less popular amongst the respondents. Based on the answers, the majority of respondents would might or would probably not look at these sources for travel information. In the second category: logistics information content, destination specific sites (n=149), map sites (n=122) and accommodation sites (n=174) are definitely the main information sources of the respondents. The survey has also revealed that VisitEurope website and other local CVB (convention and visitors bureau) sites are not amongst the preferred information sources of the respondents. In the last category, transportation arrangement information content, airlines sites (n=165) are definitely looked at when planning a holiday. Car rental sites are less frequently visited in the planning phase, but this is a consequence of personal preferences and needs.

Experiential online content	Logistics online content	Transportation o. cont.
• Travel guide sites • Persona travel sites • Travel magazine sites • Travel agents/tour operators' sites • Special Interest sites • VisitEurope website	• Destination Specific sites • Local CVB sites • Map sites • Accommodation sites	• Car rental sites • Airline sites

Social media formed an important part of the survey. The frequency analysis revealed that Facebook (n=240 respondents reported they use it 'very often') and Instagram (used 'very often' n= 139) are the mostly visited platforms in general amongst the respondents. Based on the answers YouTube is also a platform that is often visited (n=106). Surprisingly, the popularity of TripAdvisor shows a very varied picture. It appears to be less frequently visited by the respondents.
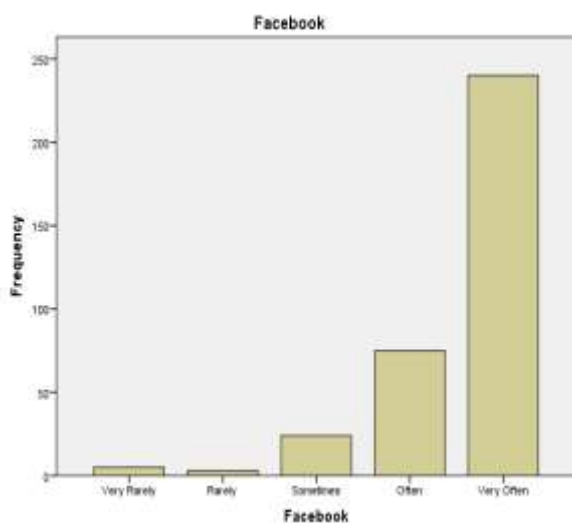
Figure 13. Facebook popularity
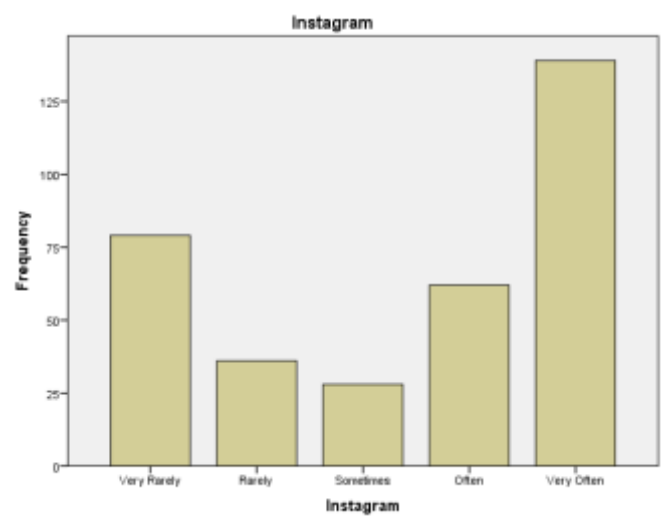
Figure 14. Instagram popularity
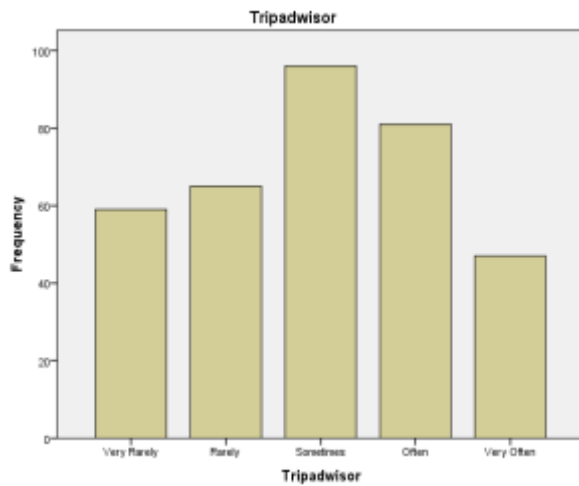
Figure 15. TripAdvisor popularity
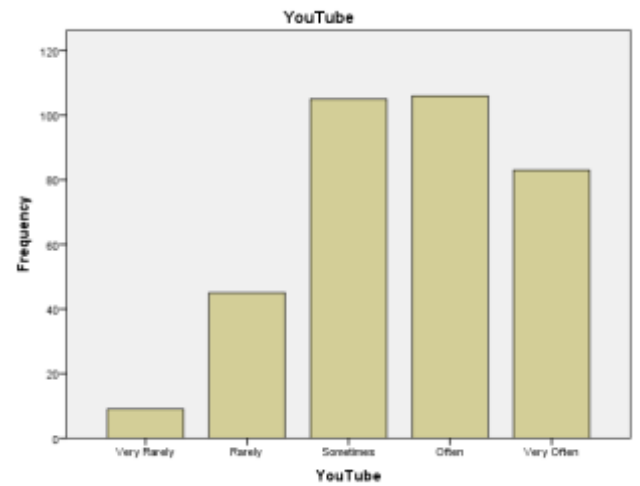
Figure 16. YouTube popularity

Experience and motivations

Most of the respondents (n=268) had previous experience with Europe. Most of them have already visited the continent. Based on a simple frequency analysis, the respondents found enjoyment and relaxation (n=103), the discovery of different new places (n=202) as well as new cultures and ways of life (n=151) and the idea of a once in a lifetime experience (n=145) "extremely important" as motivational factors. In contrasts, intellectual improvement and getting out of the comfort zone are only moderately important for the majority of the respondents while reconnecting with loved ones was not at all important in most cases.
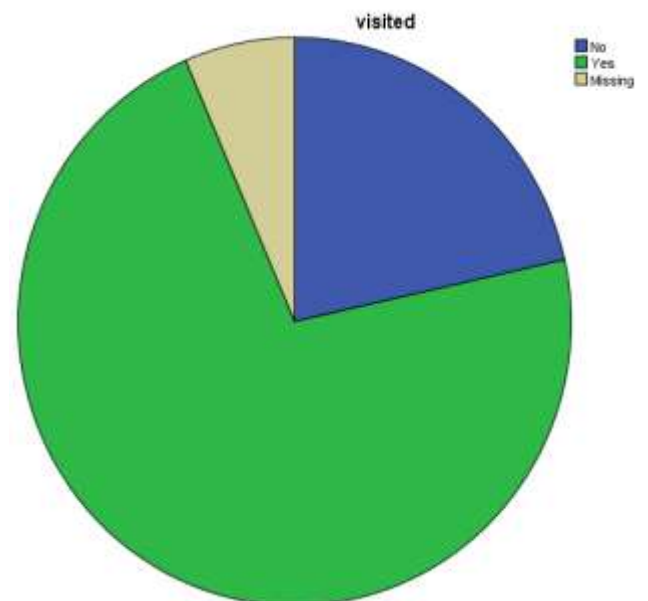
Figure 17. Visitation

<u>Destination image</u>

Two questions were formulated in order to measure the affective and cognitive elements of the destination image of Europe. As the frequency analysis revealed, people mostly associate positive feelings with Europe as a destination. Negative expressions such unpleasant ('very inaccurate: n=199), gloomy ('very inaccurate: n=133), sleepy ('very inaccurate: n=128) and distressing ('very inaccurate: n=141) were considered inaccurate in most cases.

Moreover, the analysis of the cognitive elements of the destination image showed that uniqueness plays a key role in the cognitive part of the destination image of Europe. When planning a holiday to Europe most of the respondents definitely imagine situations, places and activities related to different customs (n=222), unique history and culture (n=242), knowledge and life experience (n=243), adventure (n=177), different environment (n=231) and culinary arts (n=198). Less salient parts of the cognitive element of the destination image of Europe were related to human interactions, wild nature, visiting romantic places, attending cultural events and enjoying sport and recreation activities. Most of the respondents reported that they would probably not associate gaining fashion ideas and experiencing wild nature with destination Europe.

<u>Affective destination image components</u>

- arousing
- pleasant
- relaxing
- exciting
- unpleasant
- gloomy
- sleepy
- distressing

<u>Cognitive destination image components</u>

- learning about different customs and ways of life
- learning about history and culture
- gaining fashion ideas
- meeting new people, making friends,
- gaining knowledge and life experiences
- looking for adventure
- experiencing real wild nature
- immersing myself in different environment
- visiting romantic places
- experiencing culinary arts
- attending cultural events
- enjoying sport and recreating activities

8.1 Results of the correlation tests

First of all, it is important to mention that In order to overcome the problem of multiple inferences the method of Bonferroni correction was applied in case of each hypothesis. To get more reliable and valid results a stricter standard was set for the significance level with the help of the above mentioned method. In most cases results were considered statistically significant at the p<0.001 level. Correlations tests were ran for hypotheses 1, 2, 3a, 5 and 6.

Hypothesis 1 and 2
Based on the theoretical approach that the type of information sources used by a traveller determines the choice of destination ((Fakeye and Crompton, 1991; Gartner, 1993; Um and Crompton, 1990; Woodside and Lysonski, 1989) meaning that it plays a key role in the pre-visit destination image formation process, a Pearson correlation coefficient was computed. The test was divided into two parts. First the relationship between induced information sources and the cognitive image components was assessed followed by the relationship between the autonomous/organic information sources and the cognitive image elements.

The first test proved that there was significant positive correlation between several elements of the induced information sources and the cognitive image components. Positive significant correlation (p<0.001) was discovered between Visit Europe website and cognitive element 1 (learning about different customs) (r=.18), local CVB sites and cognitive element 11 (attending cultural events) (r=.24) and the accommodation sites and cognitive element 2 (learning about history and culture) (r=.18), although the strength of the relationship is considered weak in each case. The positive correlation between the above mentioned elements mean that the stronger the given cognitive element is the visitation of the specific sites for travel information is more likely. Other variables did not show statistically significant results. A summary correlation table below shows the results of the test.

	CE1	CE2	CE3	CE4	CE5	CE6	CE7	CE8	CE9	CE10	CE11	CE12
travel magazine sites	,108	,118	,117	,091	,091	,080	,092	-,012	,156	,105	,137	,116
tour operators' sites	,108	,015	,142	,006	-,014	,087	,156	-,015	,090	,065	,120	,147
VisitEurope website	**,188***	,115	,163	,127	,019	,124	,125	,134	,155	,063	,106	,099
local CVB sites	,123	,163	,064	,009	,132	-,047	,088	,057	,069	,071	**,244***	,116
map sites	,076	,164	,026	-,026	,124	-,013	-,041	,065	,014	,012	,026	-,046

	CE1	CE2	CE3	CE4	CE5	CE6	CE7	CE8	CE9	CE10	CE11	CE12
accommodation sites	,158	**,184***	,071	-,006	,106	,087	,097	,085	,064	,056	,013	-,031
car rental sites	,040	-,037	,096	,005	-,001	,071	,049	,092	,027	,074	,006	,07
airline sites	,083	,053	,042	,055	,100	,080	,025	,070	,042	,033	,031	,035

Table 2. Correlations between induced info. sources and cognitive components

*Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).
CE1: learning about different customs CE2: learning about history and culture CE3: gaining fashion ideas CE4: meeting new people, making friends CE5: gaining knowledge and life experiences CE6: looking for adventure CE7: experiencing real wild nature CE8: immersing myself in different environments CE9: visiting romantic places CE10: experiencing culinary arts CE11: attending cultural events CE12: enjoying sport and recreation activities

The second correlation test was conducted in order to assess the relationship between the organic and autonomous information sources and the cognitive destination image components. The test revealed that special interest sites positively correlated at the $p<0.001$ level with two of the cognitive elements, however the strength of the relationship between the variables is considered weak ($r=.19$; $r=.17$). The tour guide sites showed statistically significant correlations with the cognitive image elements at the $p<0.001$ level in three cases, although the strength of the relations is weak ($r=.18$; $r=.17$, $r=.17$). Positive weak correlation means that the average value of the organic autonomous information sources changes only slightly (occasionally) in response to changes in the cognitive image variable, meaning that the stronger the specific cognitive image element is the more likely that the given information sources are used during the destination choice process.

	CE1	CE2	CE3	CE4	CE5	CE6	CE7	CE8	CE9	CE10	CE11	CE12
personal travel sites	,036	,101	,091	,107	,012	,046	-,017	-,069	,027	,024	,117	,021
special interest sites	**,195***	,044	,086	**,174***	,148	,107	,115	,073	,063	,115	,067	,156
tour guide sites	,167	**,185***	,117	,058	**,177***	,101	,103	,023	,111	**,177***	,087	,046

Table 3. Correlations between organic/aut. info. sources and cognitive components

*Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).
CE1: learning about different customs CE2: learning about history and culture CE3: gaining fashion ideas CE4: meeting new people, making friends CE5: gaining knowledge and life experiences CE6: looking for adventure CE7: experiencing real wild nature CE8: immersing myself in different environments CE9: visiting romantic places CE10: experiencing culinary arts CE11: attending cultural events CE12: enjoying sport and recreation activities

Hypothesis 3a

A test to compute Pearson correlation coefficient was conducted in order to determine the relationship between age and the type of information Canadians look for prior to departure.
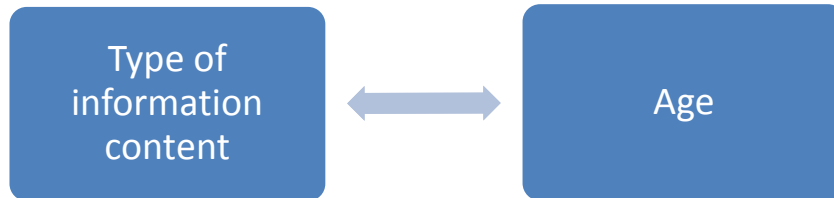
Three information type categories were used in the survey in order to measure information search behaviour of the respondents. Experiential, logistics and transportation online content formed the three main groups of information types. Based on the results it can be said that age does not have significant impact on type of information content searched during the planning process. Correlations between age and type of information content showed statistically significant results at the p<0.004 level only in case of tour operator's content, but just like in the previous cases the strength of the relationship between the variables was weak (r=-.18) meaning that change in the average value of one variable will only affect slightly the value of the other variable.

	IT1[+]	IT2[+]	IT3[+]	IT4[+]	IT5[+]	IT6[+]	IT7[++]	IT8[++]	IT9[++]	IT10[++]	IT11[+++]	IT12[+++]
Age	,007	-,137	,102	-,182*	-,019	-,032	,037	,120	,089	-,033	-,059	-,144

Table 4. Correlations between type of information content and age

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).
+.Experiential online content
++.Logistics online content
+++.Transportation online content
IT1: travel guide sites, IT2: personal travel sites, IT3: travel magazine sites, IT4: tour operators' sites, IT5: special interest sites, IT6: Visit Europe website, IT7: destination specific sites, IT8: local cvb sites, IT9: map sites, IT10: accommodation sites, IT11: car rental sites, IT12: airline sites

Hypothesis 5

The next series of correlation tests examined the relationship between the affective destination image components and the respondents' motivations to visit Europe.
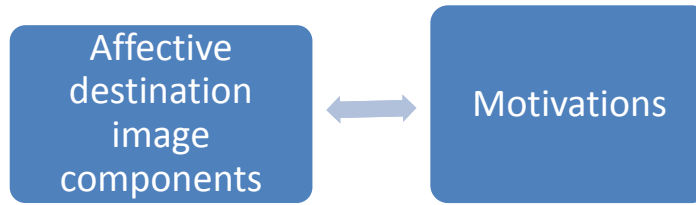
The correlation test revealed that there is no significant correlation between the negative affective components of the destination image of Europe and motivational factors (Hypothesis 5a). On the other hand, statistically significant correlation was discovered between the positive affective elements of the destination image and the motivation factors (Hypothesis 5b). Motivation factor 1 (relaxation and enjoyment) is positively correlated at a moderate level with positive affective component relaxing: (r= .336, p= .000). Motivation factor 2 (intellectual improvement) is positively correlated with affective component arousing (r=.241, p=.000). Motivation factor 3 (discovering different new places) shows statistically significant relationship with affective element exciting: (r=.243, p=.000). Motivation factor 4 (getting out of my comfort zone) and 5 (reconnecting with loved ones) did not show any significant relationship with the positive affective elements of the destination image. Motivation factor 6 (discovering new cultures and ways of life) showed significant relationships with two image elements: arousing (r=,228; p=,000) + exciting (r=.195, p=.000). There is positive correlation between motivation factor 7 (realizing a dream) and two affective image components 'arousing '(r=.228, p=.000) and 'exciting' (r=.173, p=.001)), however the strength of the relationship between the variables was weak in both cases. Motivation factor 8 (once in a lifetime experience) showed significant results in case of two of the affective components. Apart of affective component 'arousing' and 'relaxing', MF 8 showed positive significant correlation with affective components 'pleasant' (r=.175, p=.001) and 'exciting' (r=.259, p=.000).

As explained above the variables showed statistically significant weak positive correlation meaning that when the average value of the motivation factor increases it results slight increase in the value of the specific affective image component. For instance, when a respondent's motivation for intellectual improvement is stronger it's likely that he/she will have slightly stronger 'arousing' feelings attached to Europe as a destination.

	MF1	MF2	MF3	MF4	MF5	MF6	MF7	MF8
arousing	,116	**,241***	,169	,137	,118	**,218***	**,228***	,169
pleasant	,126	,150	,148	,067	,169	,115	,089	**,175***
relaxing	**,336***	,005	,073	-,026	,096	-,053	,070	,117
exciting	,107	,049	**,243***	,106	,109	**,195***	**,173***	**,259***

Table 5. Correlations between motivational factors and positive affective components

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).
MF1: relaxation and enjoyment, MF2: intellectual improvement, MF3: discovering different new places, MF4: getting out of my comfort zone, MF5: reconnecting with loved ones, MF6: discovering new cultures and ways of life MF7: realizing a dream, MF8: once in a lifetime experience

<u>Hypothesis 6</u>

The interrelationships between age and the cognitive and affective elements of the destination image were also investigated via Pearson's correlation test.
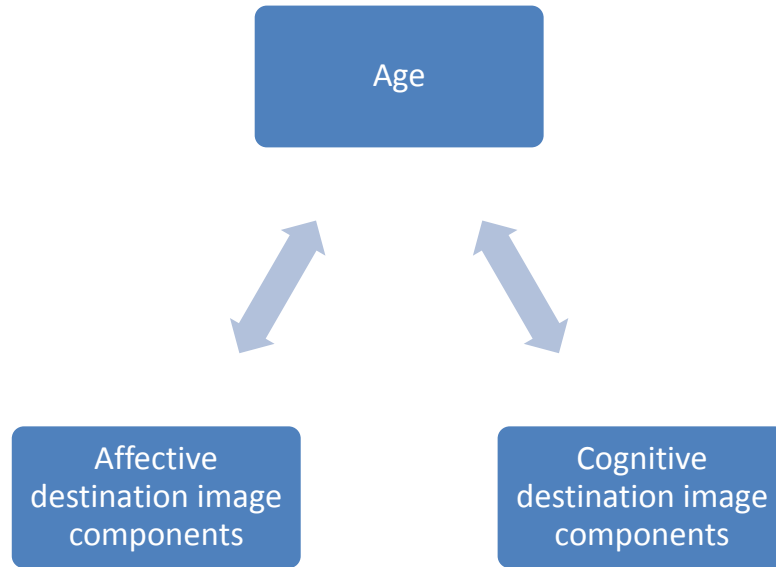
Based on the test, significant results could be seen in two cases. Age is negatively correlated with two of the cognitive elements of the destination image. Age and cognitive element 6 (looking for adventure) is negatively correlated (r= -.248; p= 0.000). Statistically significant but weak negative correlation was discovered between age and cognitive element 7 (experiencing real wild nature) (r= -.153; p= .004) meaning that as in case of nature related images, older respondents do not imagine adventures and nature activities when thinking of Europe. In case of non-significant results the variables do not influence each other in any ways.

	CE1	CE2	CE3	CE4	CE5	CE6	CE7	CE8	CE9	CE10	CE11	CE12
Age	,022	,101	-,140	-,039	,031	**-,248****	**-,153***	,071	,022	,042	,004	-,069

Table 6. Correlations between cognitive elements and age

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.004 level (2-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).
CE1: learning about different customs CE2: learning about history and culture CE3: gaining fashion ideas CE4: meeting new people, making friends CE5: gaining knowledge and life experiences CE6: looking for adventure CE7: experiencing real wild nature CE8: immersing myself in different environments CE9: visiting romantic places CE10: experiencing culinary arts CE11: attending cultural events CE12: enjoying sport and recreation activities

There is statistically significant relationship between age and two affective elements of the destination image. There is negative correlation between 'age' and 'gloomy' (r=-.163, p= .002) and 'age' and 'distressing' (r=-.223, p= .000) however, the variables are not strongly correlated. Respondents with a higher age perceive Europe less gloomy and less distressing thus it can be said that increase in age has significant impact on the affective element of the destination image.

	unpleasant	gloomy	sleepy	distressing
Age	,006	**-,163***	,098	**-,223***

Table 7. Correlations between age and negative affective components

*Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).

8.2   Results of the one-way ANOVA tests

One-way ANOVA tests were run for hypothesis 3bc, 4, 7 and 8. In case of three groups or more, when statistically significant results were found post hoc tests were run in order to provide a more complex understanding of the differences between the groups and which groups differ from one and other in a statistically significant way. Due to the unequal group sizes (small) Gabriel's test was chosen to further analyse the data.

Hypothesis 3bc
The impact of demographic factors such as gender and level of education on the different types of information Canadian travellers look for was also tested.

Type of information content

Gender

Level of education
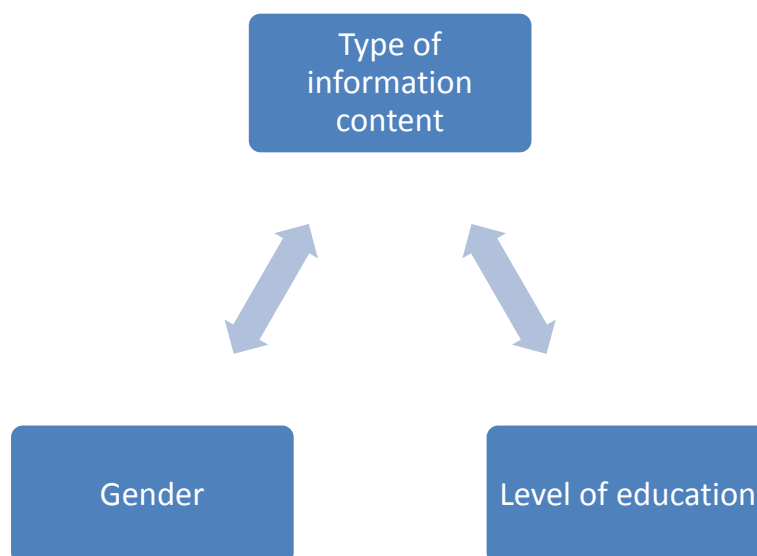
After carrying out a one-way ANOVA test the results showed that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female respondents information search behaviour. However, significant differences could be seen in the type of information such as experiential, logistics and transportation content based on the level of education. One element of the group of transportation online content showed statistically significant results. On average respondents with higher education level look at car rental sites more often at the p<.02 level [(F=4.338)=3.54, p=.008). Gabriel's test revealed that in case of the use of car rental sites, the following groups showed statistically significant differences at the p<.05 level: high school graduate and bachelor's degree and high school graduate and master's degree. The responses of those having vocational training certificate did not differ significantly from other groups.

Inform. content	Groups	M	F	p
travel guide sites*	EL1	2,86		
	EL2	3,00		
	EL3	2,91		
	EL4	2,87		
	Between Groups		1,075	,369
	Total			
personal travel sites*	EL1	2,62		
	EL2	2,64		
	EL3	2,52		
	EL4	2,66		
	Between Groups		0,483	,748
	Total			
travel magazine sites*	EL1	1,82		
	EL2	1,82		
	EL3	2,00		
	EL4	1,98		
	Between Groups		0,973	,422
	Total			
tour operators' sites*	EL1	2,15		
	EL2	2,11		
	EL3	1,94		
	EL4	1,75		
	Between Groups		2,203	,068
	Total			
special interest sites*	EL1	2,70		
	EL2	2,82		
	EL3	2,66		
	EL4	2,78		
	Between Groups		0,531	,713
	Total			
Visit Europe website*	EL1	2,39		
	EL2	2,32		

	EL3	2,34		
	EL4	2,11		
	Between Groups		1,817	,125
	Total			
destination specific sites**	EL1	3,16		
	EL2	3,39		
	EL3	3,18		
	EL4	3,31		
	Between Groups		0,705	,589
	Total			
local cvb sites**	EL1	1,82		
	EL2	1,82		
	EL3	1,82		
	EL4	2,18		
	Between Groups		2,19	,07
	Total			
map sites**	EL1	2,76		
	EL2	2,82		
	EL3	2,96		
	EL4	2,90		
	Between Groups		0,755	,555
	Total			
accommodation sites**	EL1	3,23		
	EL2	3,54		
	EL3	3,32		
	EL4	3,19		
	Between Groups		1,091	,361
	Total			
car rental sites***	EL1	2,12		
	EL2	1,89		
	EL3	1,78		
	EL4	1,69		
	Between Groups		3,535	**,008**
	Total			
airline sites***	EL1	3,33		
	EL2	3,11		
	EL3	3,05		
	EL4	2,85		
	Between Groups		2,408	,049
	Total			

Table 8. One-way ANOVA test: information content and level of education

*.Experiential online content
**.Logistics online content
***Transportation online content
 EL1: high school graduate (includes equivalency), EL2: trade/technical/vocational training, EL3: Bachelor's degree, EL4: Master's degree

Hypothesis 4

One-way ANOVA test was carried out in order to analyse whether previous experience at the destination has significant influence on the affective element of the destination image. The aim of the test was to identify whether Canadian respondents who have visited Europe before hold stronger positive or negative affective images.
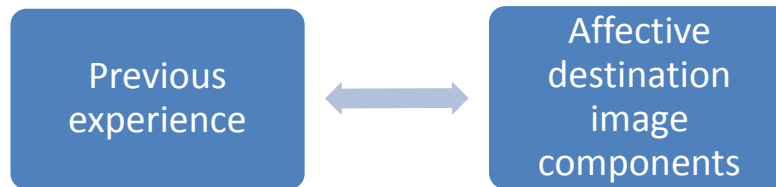
The test revealed that only two elements of the affective image were perceived differently by those who have visited and those who have not. These two elements both belong to the negative scale. At the p<.02 level and the p<.01 level those who have not visited Europe before had a stronger feeling that the destination is 'gloomy' [(F=1.345)=6.42, p=.012) and 'distressing' [(F=1.344)=8.63, p=.004).

Affective comp.	Groups	M	F	p
arousing	No	3,75		
	Yes	3,75		
	Between Groups		0,002	,969
	Total			
pleasant	No	4,29		
	Yes	4,36		
	Between Groups		0,578	,448
	Total			
relaxing	No	3,80		
	Yes	3,75		
	Between Groups		0,199	,656
	Total			
exciting	No	4,63		
	Yes	4,45		
	Between Groups		4,099	,044
	Total			
unpleasant	No	1,66		
	Yes	1,57		
	Between Groups		0,789	,375
	Total			
gloomy	No	2,29		
	Yes	1,96		
	Between Groups		6,415	**,012**
	Total			
sleepy	No	2,06		
	Yes	1,98		
	Between Groups		0,435	,51

		Total			
		No	2,43		
distressing		Yes	2,00		
		Between Groups		8,629	**,004**
		Total			

Table 9. One-way ANOVA test: affective components and visitation

Hypothesis 7 & 8

One-way ANOVA tests have been carried out in order to investigate the effect of gender and level of education of the respondents on the affective and cognitive components of the perceived destination image.
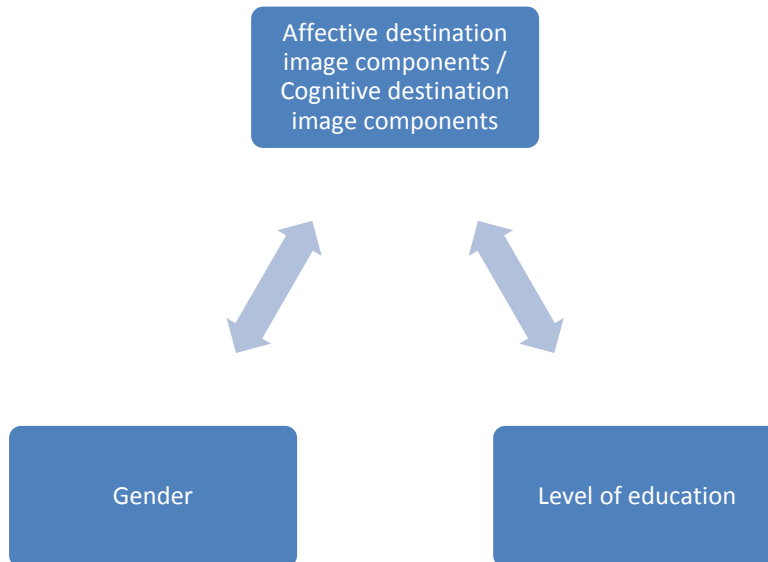
When examining the impact of gender on the perceived image of Europe (Hypothesis 7) , the test has revealed that statistically significant difference can be seen between the perceptions of female and male respondents in case of only one negative affective components of the destination image . On average male respondents perceive Europe 'unpleasant' at p<.02 level [(F1.342) =5.65, p=.018]) at a higher rate than female respondents. As Russell and Pratt (1980) say the word 'unpleasant' refers to displeasing, uncomfortable and dissatisfying.

Affective comp.	Groups	M	F	p
unpleasant	Male	1,77		
	Female	1,53		
	Between Groups		5,646	**,018**
	Total			
gloomy	Male	2,16		
	Female	2,00		
	Between Groups		1,533	,217
	Total			
sleepy	Male	2,18		
	Female	1,93		
	Between Groups		4,384	,037
	Total			
distressing	Male	2,18		
	Female	2,07		
	Between Groups		,581	,446
	Total			

Table 10. One-way ANOVA test: affective components and gender

When examining the cognitive elements based on the gender of the respondents, the ANOVA test showed significant results in two cases. The main cognitive elements of the destination image perceived in a significantly different way based on gender are: 'gaining fashion ideas' and 'meeting new people, making friends'. When the respondents were asked what they imagine doing when visiting Europe, there was significant difference between the mean responses of male and female Canadians to the option 'gaining fashion ideas' at the $p<.01$ level [(F=1.343)=7.88, p=.005). The perception that Europe is a stylish, chic and fashionable destination where people can get ideas of the latest fashion trends was significantly higher in case of female respondents. On the contrary, for male respondents 'meeting new people and making friends' referring to hospitality, openness and friendliness of Europeans, proved to be a more important element of the perceived image at the $p<.01$ level [(F=1.343)=7.0, p=.008). On average male respondents attached greater importance to this element of the cognitive destination image.

Cognitive components	Groups	M	F	p
CE1	Male	3,56		
	Female	3,60		
	Between Groups		0,249	,618
	Total			
CE2	Male	3,59		
	Female	3,66		
	Between Groups		0,983	,322
	Total			
CE3	Male	2,15		
	Female	2,50		
	Between Groups		7,875	**,005**
	Total			
CE4	Male	3,32		
	Female	3,05		
	Between Groups		7,007	**,008**
	Total			
CE5	Male	3,60		
	Female	3,69		
	Between Groups		1,748	,187
	Total			
CE6	Male	3,51		
	Female	3,42		
	Between Groups		1,437	,231
	Total			
CE7	Male	2,71		
	Female	2,57		
	Between Groups		1,288	,257
	Total			
CE8	Male	3,56		
	Female	3,67		
	Between Groups		2,66	,104
	Total			
CE9	Male	3,00		
	Female	3,15		
	Between Groups		2,367	,125
	Total			
CE10	Male	3,37		
	Female	3,48		
	Between Groups		1,602	,207
	Total			
CE11	Male	3,30		
	Female	3,36		
	Between Groups		0,419	,518
	Total			
CE12	Male	2,83		
	Female	2,59		
	Between Groups		4,787	,029
	Total			

Table 11. One-way ANOVA test: cognitive components and gender

CE1: learning about different customs CE2: learning about history and culture CE3: gaining fashion ideas CE4: meeting new people, making friends CE5: gaining knowledge and life experiences CE6: looking for adventure CE7: experiencing real wild nature CE8: immersing myself in different environments CE9: visiting romantic places CE10: experiencing culinary arts CE11: attending cultural events CE12: enjoying sport and recreation activities

When examining the differences between perceived affective elements of the destination image of Europe based on the education level of the respondents, no element showed significant findings (Hypothesis 8a).

The ANOVA test carried out in order to investigate whether the education level has significant impact on the cognitive elements of the perceived image of Europe (Hypothesis 8b) revealed that in case of two elements it does influence the way people perceive Europe. The main differences in mean

responses of people belonging to different education groups can be seen in the following cases: 'gaining knowledge and life experiences' at the p<.02 level [(F=4.340) =3.24, p=.012) and 'experiencing real wild nature' at the p<.02 level [(F=4.339)=3.18, p=.014). Visiting Europe in order to 'gain knowledge and life experience' was an extremely strong image in all education groups. However, people with higher education such as master's degree on average attached less importance to increased knowledge and experience while visiting Europe. At the p=.014 level Europe had a stronger image as a destination of real wild nature in case of respondents with lower than bachelor's degree.

Cognitive components	Groups	M	F	p
CE1	EL1	3,63		
	EL2	3,57		
	EL3	3,59		
	EL4	3,53		
	Between Groups		,281	,890
	Total			
CE2	EL1	3,55		
	EL2	3,50		
	EL3	3,74		
	EL4	3,65		
	Between Groups		2,284	,060
	Total			
CE3	EL1	2,52		
	EL2	2,14		
	EL3	2,50		
	EL4	2,21		
	Between Groups		2,605	,036
	Total			
CE4	EL1	3,13		
	EL2	3,36		
	EL3	3,08		
	EL4	3,11		
	Between Groups		1,939	,104
	Total			
CE5	EL1	3,66		
	EL2	3,68		
	EL3	3,68		
	EL4	3,73		
	Between Groups		3,242	**,012**
	Total			
CE6	EL1	3,53		
	EL2	3,46		
	EL3	3,45		

		Mean	F	Sig.
	EL4	3,25		
	Between Groups		2,107	,080
	Total			
	EL1	2,73		
	EL2	2,79		
	EL3	2,63		
CE7	EL4	2,26		
	Between Groups		3,184	**,014**
	Total			
	EL1	3,57		
	EL2	3,67		
	EL3	3,70		
CE8	EL4	3,62		
	Between Groups		,943	,439
	Total			
	EL1	2,95		
	EL2	3,29		
	EL3	3,24		
CE9	EL4	3,08		
	Between Groups		2,854	,024
	Total			
	EL1	3,36		
	EL2	3,46		
	EL3	3,51		
CE10	EL4	3,49		
	Between Groups		,844	,498
	Total			
	EL1	3,27		
	EL2	3,18		
	EL3	3,39		
CE11	EL4	3,47		
	Between Groups		1,771	,134
	Total			
	EL1	2,61		
	EL2	2,61		
	EL3	2,70		
CE12	EL4	2,58		
	Between Groups		,264	,901
	Total			

Table 12. One-way ANOVA test: cognitive components and level of education

CE1: learning about different customs CE2: learning about history and culture CE3: gaining fashion ideas CE4: meeting new people, making friends CE5: gaining knowledge and life experiences CE6: looking for adventure CE7: experiencing real wild nature CE8: immersing myself in different environments CE9: visiting romantic places CE10: experiencing culinary arts CE11: attending cultural events CE12: enjoying sport and recreation activities EL1: high school graduate (includes equivalency), EL2: trade/technical/vocational training, EL3: Bachelor's degree, EL4: Master's degre

8.3   Word Frequency Analysis

Question 8 was an open ended question giving the opportunity for the respondents to freely express their general impressions or perceptions of Europe in just a few words. The respondents were asked to write down words they most associate with Europe. The results were manually coded and analysed. Open coding was used as the first step. After being able to identify recurrent concepts, the coded words were grouped into categories. In total 13 categories were created (see figure 14). At the end of the coding process the results showed that most of the words were life style related (n=43). Most of the respondents associated Europe with words or expressions like 'high class living', 'high standard of living', 'work life balance', 'sophisticated', 'quality in all aspects of life' etc. The second biggest group of words mentioned contained words related to 'excitement', 'adventure' and 'exploration'. Furthermore, in many cases people used words describing the beauty of the continent or associated Europe with a place being 'different', 'unique', 'special', 'unknown', 'interesting' or 'intriguing'.
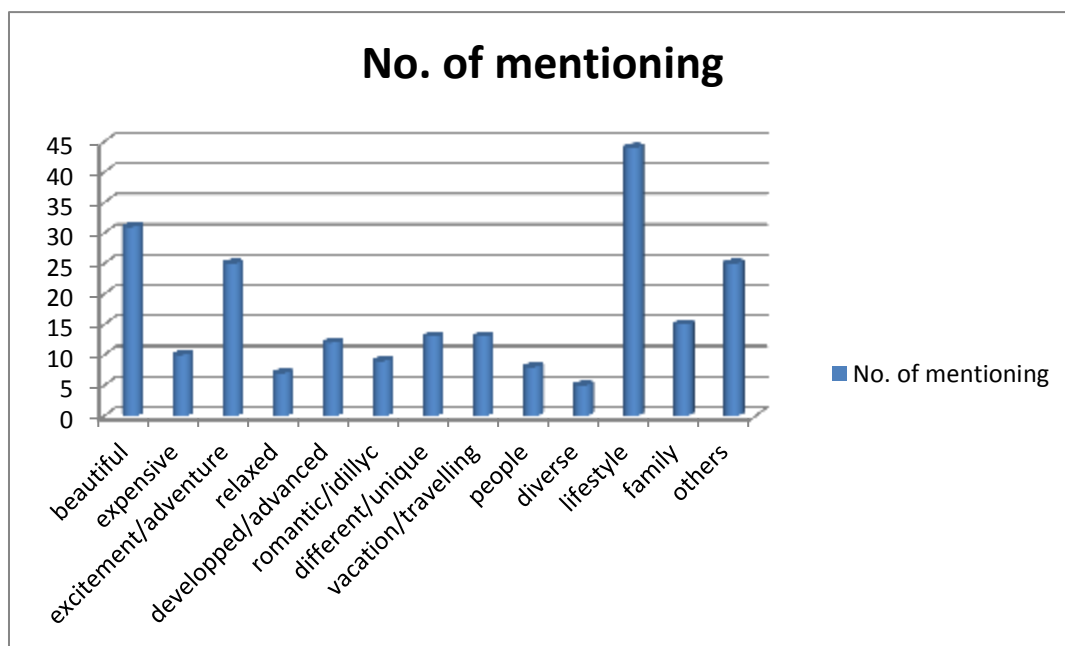
Figure 18. Word frequency analysis

8.4   Discussion

After having analysed the research findings it can be concluded that social media as a distribution channel proved to be more popular amongst the younger generation. As the frequency analysis showed as well, the number of younger respondents was significantly higher resulting a very skewed distribution. When designing an e-marketing strategy this aspect needs to be taken into consideration.

The frequency analysis revealed that respondents definitely look at destination specific sites, accommodation sites and airlines sites prior to departure. Based on the results specific information on transportation, accommodation facilities, possible activities, sites and events form the core of the travel information search. It can also be seen, that these information sources cover and provide sufficient information on the main elements of a successful tourism destination such as attractions, activities, accommodation, accessibility and amenities (Ramesh, 2013).

When approaching travel search behaviour from a different angle, the content of the information sources, the results show a very similar picture. Based on logistics and transportation online content, the most popular sources are the same: destination specific sites, accommodation sites and airline sites. However, when looking at experiential content, the respondents would quite likely look at travel guide sites, special interest sites and personal travel sites. The survey results also showed that VisitEurope website is currently not amongst the preferred information sources thus an innovative e-marketing strategy is needed in order to boost the visitation of this website.

When examining motivation factors and destination image, it can be said that the respondents hold positive images and perceptions of Europe. The uniqueness and differences in all aspects of life drive them in most cases to visit the continent.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 stating that information sources Canadian citizens use to gather travel information prior to departure has significant influence on the cognitive component of their perceived image of Europe were partially supported. It has been found that at least half of the information sources both induced and organic/autonomous positively correlated with at least one cognitive destination image component meaning that the type of information source has influence on the cognitive element of the perceived destination image.

Hypothesis 3 is rejected with the exception of one element that was partially supported. The test revealed that age has statistically significant impact on only one element of the experiential online content group. Respondents with higher age tend to focus less on tour operators' sites. No statistically significant relationship could be seen between gender and type of information thus this part of the hypothesis is also rejected. No significant differences could be seen between travel information search behaviour of female and male respondents. However, the third demographic factor, level of education, showed some significant linkages with the type of information searched although only elements of the group of travel information content showed significant differences between the groups.

Hypothesis 4 stated that there is a significant difference between the affective components of the perceived image in case of those Canadians who have visited Europe before and those who have never been to the continent. After having analysed the results, hypothesis 4 has been partially supported as only two components of the affective image showed differences in perceptions between the two groups (visited – not visited). Those who have never been to Europe had stronger feelings that the destination is 'gloomy' and 'distressing'.

In case of hypothesis 5 strong linkages were discovered between the motivational factors and the affective components of the perceived destination image. This hypothesis has been approved as statistically significant correlation was discovered between the positive affective components of the destination image and the motivation factors meaning that the motivation why Canadians visit Europe significantly influence the way they feel and the emotions they have towards the destination.

Hypothesis 6 stated that the cognitive and affective elements of the perceived image Canadians hold of Europe are significantly influenced by their age. Statistically significant negative correlation was discovered between age and two of the cognitive elements of the destination image. As the age increases interest in adventure and nature activities decreases. In case of the affective elements of the destination image, age influences two elements. As age increases the 'gloomy' and 'distressing' feelings towards Europe decrease.

In case of hypothesis 7 influences could be seen between gender and two cognitive elements. Significant influence of gender on the affective elements of the destination image could also be seen in two cases only.

Hypothesis 8 can be partially approved as the tests revealed that there is no statistically significant linkage between education level and the affective components of the destination image. However, it has been found that education level does influence two of the cognitive elements of the perceived destination image.

All in all, the tests have revealed some important findings in relation to demographics, destination image, motivation and information search behaviour. Logistics and transportation information is looked up by most of the respondents when preparing for a holiday highlighting the importance of accurate travel information that increases the knowledge and awareness of the visitors. Experiential travel content was not amongst the mostly searched items in the planning phase which leads to a conclusion that experiential content is mostly searched when forming the awareness set at the very beginning of the destination choice process. It has also been revealed that the type of information source used has significant impact on the cognitive destination image as it clearly forms the knowledge and awareness one has of the available activities of a destination. Feelings and motivations are also closely linked to each other. Targeting the feelings of groups of potential visitors based on their motivations might result in a more focused and successful experiential marketing strategy.

9   Study 1 & Study 2 Conclusion – Recommendations for an integrated e-marketing strategy

The qualitative and quantitative research techniques applied in this study aimed at developing a good overall understanding of the Canadian visitors' perceptions, feelings, and images attached to Europe. Furthermore, information search behaviour, motivations and elements of the destination choice process were also studied. The outcomes of the desk research, netnographic analysis and the online self-completion questionnaires served as a basis for this chapter, and played a key role in the formulation of recommendations and ideas for an integrated e-marketing strategy based on the principles of experiential marketing.

Based on the results of study 1 and study 2 it can be concluded that knowledge and awareness of the destination is closely linked to expectations. Increasing the knowledge leads to more realistic expectations that results less negative first impressions and perceptions. The uniqueness factor in each aspect of life played a key role in the destination choice process. It motivated and inspired the visitors to visit European destinations. The high uniqueness factor in most cases was linked to extraordinary feelings and emotions. Being part of something special, something new and different had huge power and often played a key role in the image formation process as well. The grandeur of European history had a great role in inspiring visitors and in most cases formed one of the major areas of interest. Strong feelings were attached to places with historical importance referring to the long awaited opportunity to see something that one has heard so much about for the first time. Human interactions were another area highlighted in many cases. Human interactions involved communications with members of the local community, experiencing their life style, learning about new traditions and customs and trying local flavours and dishes. High uniqueness factor was attached to this experience in many cases.

As revealed in study 2 gathering practical information play the key role in the information search process during the planning phase. Experiential content has a vital role in forming an awareness set at the very beginning of the procedure thus finding the right market at the right time with the right content has vital role in the destination choice process. The type of information source has a key role in the development of an evoked set and the final destination choice. Providing the right content in the right form makes a big difference in the perception of potential visitors. Providing the right product with the right activities and highlights of the destination based on the motivations of the target group can increase the likelihood of choosing that specific place. It was also discovered that feelings and motivations are closely linked together thus targeting the feelings of potential visitors based on their area of interest and motivations would have a big impact on the final destination choice. Negative perceptions attached to distance, travel costs and language barriers can also be tackled by providing appropriate travel information, for instance on new direct flights between Canada and Europe.

The following chapter will provide ideas and recommendations, however it does not present a complete integrated e-marketing strategy as it would be out of the scope of this paper. Based on the structure suggested by Belch & Belch (2003), the SWOT analysis is followed by a mission statement, clear objectives of the new e-marketing strategy, recommendations for a specific market segment and possible elements of a new marketing strategy based on a newly defined unique selling proposition.

9.1   SWOT Analysis

As it is stated by Ferrell and Hartline (2014), SWOT analysis is a great tool for representing and analysing marketing information and data collected during the situation analysis. Furthermore, SWOT is also widely used to uncover competitive advantage that a marketing strategy can be built on. (Ferrell & Hartline, 2014) The analysis below represents the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of destination Europe on the Canadian market. The analysis is based on the results of the desk research as well as study 1 and 2.

Strenghts

- High uniqueness factor
- Rich history, culture, cuisine
- Strong position on the world tourism market
- Once in a lifetime destination - a must see
- Positive perceived image in general
- Great transportation links allowing easy movement between countries
- Diversity

Weaknesses

- Long travel distance
- High travel expenses
- Communication difficulties - language barriers in some regions
- Possible negative perceptions in case of Eastern Europe
- Decreasing number of overnight trips
- No or limited knowledge of the destinationn prior to departure

Opportunities

- Growing number of direct flights from Canada
- Increased pre-visit awareness (information, motivation, inspiration)
- Unique experiences and integrated products
- Enhanced destination image, brand awareness
- Increased visitation of VisitEurope websie
- Shift from functional aspects towards sensory, creative and affective elements

Threats

- Growing trans-border tourism to the USA
- Attractiveness of the emergning countries
- Increasing global competition (USA, Mexico, China, Dominican Republic)

Figure 19. SWOT analysis

9.2 Mission statement

Mission statements play a vital role in the marketing efforts (Ferrell & Hartline, 2014).

'The integrated e-marketing strategy intends to provide a competitive edge for Europe on the Canadian market. The marketing strategy aims to increase visitation, enhance brand awareness and destination image by stimulating the senses of potential Canadian visitors and shifting focus towards the experience side of Europe's tourism supply.'

9.3 Objectives

Based on Ferrell's and Hartline's (2014) work on marketing strategy having clear functional goals has vital importance. The ability to measure the accomplishment of these objectives is also crucial. The objectives have been formulated based on the situation analysis of the current travel behaviour of Canadians and intends to tackle the problem of decreasing overnight trips. The newly developed e-marketing strategy is expected to meet the below objectives.

- Motivate and inspire potential Canadian visitors to visit European destinations
- Provide travel information and ideas in a creative unique way in order to enhance pre-visit knowledge of Canadians of European destinations
- Actively engage existing and potential visitors in communications as well as in knowledge and experience sharing
- Utilization of interactive social media communication channels
- Gain visibility, enhance brand reputation and destination image

9.4 Target market

On the contrary to previous studies and marketing initiatives that were targeting the elder generation of Canadian travellers, based on the results of the current research project, the target group suggested for the e-marketing strategy is the group of young adults between the age of 22 and 35. As the results of the frequency tests showed, the most responses for the surveys distributed via social media came from respondents with an average age of 27. This result explains that young adults are the ones that are the most active online and the ones most responsive to online activities. HAC (2014) has also confirmed in a report that Canadians between the age of 22-34 are most influenced by social media besides the group of younger generations.

Furthermore, the type of traveller targeted should also change. By reducing the age limits of the potential market segment new ways of travelling must be considered. The blog analysis revealed that backpacking is a very popular form of travelling for young Canadian adults. This group of travellers represent adventurous, curious travellers with sufficient discretional income to cover the cost of travelling. They are the new generation of travellers with a budget conscious mind but with

the aim of broadening their horizons and generating life-long experiences. Based on their travel habits stimulating the sense of experiencing something unique and different has great potentials. According to Ooi and Laing (2010), these are the travellers who are in search of alternative experiences instead of the mainstream.

9.5   Unique Selling Proposition

In order to capture the attention of the above mentioned target group, the core of the message and the new image elements of the strategy needs to be built around a unique selling point that inspires the younger backpacker generation. Europe is one of the most traditional destinations in the world. It's diversity, old history, excellent culinary arts, extensive artistic and cultural palette makes it an ideal destination for adventure hungry travellers to discover the old continent and to evoke their inner curiosity in a safe environment. The contrast between the old continent and the new generations and the idea how well these two can work together needs to be communicated efficiently.

9.6   Elements of the proposed e-marketing strategy – the integration of the strategic experiential modules

After having assessed the internal and external environment in the SWOT analysis, setting out clear and measureable objectives, creating a clear mission, specifying a potential target market and defining a unique selling point based on the characteristics of the target market this section will provide recommendations on the elements of a successful e-marketing strategy and the possible integration of the strategic experiential modules.

In order to successfully apply experiential marketing in destination management it is suggested to build the marketing strategy around the five strategic experiential modules developed by (Schmitt, 1999):

- Sense
- Feel
- Think
- Act
- Relate

In order to construct marketing messages with high convincing power the most highly rated motivation factors need to be combined with the above mentioned strategic experiential modules. The feelings deriving from the actualization of those dreams and motivations need to be emphasized and the message needs to be built around this concept. Based on the research findings the most highly rated motivation factors to visit Europe were the followings:

- enjoyment and relaxation
- discovery of different new places
- discovery of new cultures and ways of life
- idea of a once in a lifetime experience

Furthermore, as it has been previously highlighted in the research findings, that uniqueness in all aspects of life plays a key role in the destination image hold by Canadians. Besides that, the importance of European history and experiences related to interactions with the local community has also a vital role. Exploiting these themes and introducing the new generation of travellers to something new, unknown, unique and different is expected to stimulate their inner curiosity and generate the feeling of excitement.

The below table represents possible integration of the experiential modules, motivation factors, image elements and the tourism products used for the promotion of the specific experiences and the formation of a strong message.

| Strategy | Elements of the integrated e-marketing strategy – the message | | | |
	SEMs	Pull factors	Image elements	Tourism products
1. →	Sense *(sight, sound, touch, taste, smell)*	• enjoyment • discovery of new cultures • experiencing culinary arts	• different • unknown • interesting • exploration • quality	• culinary tourism • festival tourism • cultural tourism
2. →	Feel *(affective experiences)*	• once in a lifetime experience • relaxation • discovery of new places	• excitement • special • work life balance • sophisticated	• heritage tourism • city tourism
3. →	Think *(cognitive experiences)*	• activities related to: customs, history and culture • knowledge and life experience	• adventure • unique • intriguing • excitement • exploration	• active tourism • adventure tourism • heritage tourism
4. →	Act *(physical experiences, alternative ways of doing something -> changes in lifestyle and behaviour)*	• discovery of new cultures and ways of life • a must see destination • discovery of different new places	• high standard of living • sophisticated • unique • special • different	• rural tourism (live like a local) • city tourism • (interacting with the local communities) /sharing personal stories, traditions, local habits/
5. →	Relate *(self-improvement, to be part of a community)*	• discovery of different new places • once in a lifetime experience	• adventure • exploration • special	• backpacker tourism (backpacker community)

Table 13. Integration of SEMs

The proposed 5 strategies should be implemented as a whole and not separately. Marketing the five experiential modules together would create the feel of a complex experience set that potential travellers can live through while travelling in Europe. This strategy suits well the usual itinerary of young adults and backpackers where the aim is to experience as much as possible and to absorb the real feel of heritage and local lifestyle (Pearce, 1990). Young adults often view backpacking as a once in a lifetime experience (Jarvis, 1994; O'Reilly, 2006) which suits very well the image of Europe as a "must-see, once in a life time destination".

9.7   Proposed e-marketing tools and channels

According to Duncan (2000), integrated marketing communications is seen as more efficiently managing the range of marketing tools available and to find the ideal combination of choices. The table below represents some of the potential e-marketing tools available and the channels (Drell & Davis, 2014) that can be used to develop strong relationships between the target consumers and Europe as a brand.

Tools	Social media marketing	E-WOM	Display advertising	SEO	Affiliate marketing
Channels	• Facebook: Targeted Facebook advertisements • Snapchat: 3V (vertical video views) advertising	• Personal travel sites	• High traffic Canadian travel related websites	•Google search engine	• Online travel magazines • Online retail travel agencies
Objectives	• To reach and inspire young Canadian adults to visit Europe • To distribute creative visual contents to the right audience and stimulate their senses	• To actively engage potential visitors in communicating and sharing their experiences • To create a real backpacker community experience	• To increase the visitation of ETC operated websites and social media platforms	• To increase visibility of ETC operated websites and spread the Destination Europe brand	• To leverage on the network and customer base of local organizations

Table 14. Tools and channels of the integrated strategy

To maximise the exposure of the Destination Europe brand and to generate traffic to all ETC operated websites and online platforms cross referencing is suggested. Linkages between TastingEurope website, VisitEurope website, VisitEurope Facebook page, VisitEurope App and the following social media platforms: Pinterest, Twitter, Google+ and YouTube are a must in order to engage, motivate and inspire young Canadian adults to use these platforms for inspiration, information source and experience sharing.

9.8   Evaluation and control

In order to keep the planned activities under control and on target with objectives it is important to apply accurate measures in order to assess the success of the strategy (Ferrell & Hartline, 2014). As it is highlighted in the work of Drell and Davis (2014) about success metrics, it is easy to track your followers and fans and count shares, retweets and likes. However, having a lot of followers on Facebook doesn't necessarily mean that you are attracting new customers. These numbers can be misleading and it can be hard to translate them into terms that represent real impact. (Drell & Davis, 2014)

In the present context it is not so easy to measure the success of an e-marketing campaign as we are not trying to sell the specific products of a company. However, the success of the "Destination Europe" brand and the increased visitation of VisitEurope website and other related apps can be measured efficiently on the short-term. Long term measures would include visitor numbers, visitor nights and per capita spending of Canadian travellers in European destinations.

In the short term, rather than tracking the number of followers online it is better to measure which channels led consumers to the VisitEurope website and related apps and in what way did they interact with the site. This way the efficiency of the chosen e-marketing channels can be measured effectively. (Drell & Davis, 2014)

9.9   Recommendations for future research

Due to the limitations of the present dissertation research project certain research areas fell beyond the scope of the paper thus recommendations are made for future research. In order to efficiently overcome the huge competition targeting the potential market of Canada, an in-depth competitor analysis is suggested. Comparison between the specific tourism products of competitor destinations and 'Destination Europe' is recommended. Researching the destination image of European regions amongst Canadian citizens separately is also highly recommended as it shows a very varied picture. Available tourism products, cultures and traditions vary by country and regions. To be able to tackle negative perceptions and images and to promote the regions successfully and in-depth analysis is needed.

Besides that, the cultural background of people plays a key role in how they see or perceive a certain destination. The Canadian society is built up of people with a very varied background. Many of the Canadian citizens have European ancestors or even themselves grew up in Europe and moved to Canada at a later stage, thus generalization of Canadian citizens might be misleading. A study based on the actual cultural background is suggested. Furthermore, the current study contains only recommendations and ideas for a possible integrated e-marketing strategy thus based on the presented ideas further work is needed to design the complete strategy.

10.   References

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11.   Appendices

<u>Online self-completion questionnaire</u>

Destination Europe - E-marketing and brand image on the Canadian outbound market

Dear Respondent, Thank you for participating in this research study. This survey is part of a university dissertation project conducted for the NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences, Tourism Destination Management Master Degree Program in the Netherlands in collaboration with the European Travel Commission. Your responses will help me finish my graduation project and are much appreciated. The questionnaire will take about 10 minutes to complete and all responses are anonymous. Thank you for your assistance.

Q1. When planning a holiday, how likely are you to use the following on-line platforms to gather travel information prior to your departure?

	Probably not	Maybe	Quite likely	Definitely
Travel guide sites	❍	❍	❍	❍
Personal travel sites	❍	❍	❍	❍
Travel magazine sites	❍	❍	❍	❍
Travel agents / Tour operators' sites	❍	❍	❍	❍
Special interest sites	❍	❍	❍	❍
Visit Europe website	❍	❍	❍	❍
Destination specific sites	❍	❍	❍	❍
Local CVB sites (convention & visitor bureau)	❍	❍	❍	❍
Map sites	❍	❍	❍	❍
Accommodation sites	❍	❍	❍	❍
Car rental sites	❍	❍	❍	❍
Airline sites	❍	❍	❍	❍

Q2. In general, how often do you look at the following social media?

	Very Rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
Facebook	○	○	○	○	○
Twitter	○	○	○	○	○
YouTube	○	○	○	○	○
TripAdvisor	○	○	○	○	○
Instagram	○	○	○	○	○
Pinterest	○	○	○	○	○
Other	○	○	○	○	○

Q3. Please rate how important each of the following are as potential motivations to visit Europe.

	Not at all important	Low Importance	Slightly Important	Neutral	Moderately Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
Relaxation and enjoyment	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Intellectual improvement	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Discovering different new places	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Getting out of my comfort zone	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Reconnecting with loved ones who live in Europe	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Discovering new cultures and ways of life	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Realizing a dream	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Once in a lifetime experience - a must see	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q4. Below is a list of words that can be used to describe places. Please rate how accurately each word below describes Europe.

	Very Inaccurate	Somewhat Inaccurate	Neither	Somewhat Accurate	Very Accurate
Arousing	○	○	○	○	○

Pleasant	○	○	○	○	○
Relaxing	○	○	○	○	○
Exciting	○	○	○	○	○
Unpleasant	○	○	○	○	○
Gloomy	○	○	○	○	○
Sleepy	○	○	○	○	○
Distressing	○	○	○	○	○

Q5. When I think of Europe I imagine doing the following things during a visit:

	Definitely Not	Probably Not	Probably	Definitely
Learning about different customs and ways of life	○	○	○	○
Learning about history and culture	○	○	○	○
Gaining fashion ideas	○	○	○	○
Meeting new people, making friends	○	○	○	○
Gaining knowledge and life experiences	○	○	○	○
Looking for adventure	○	○	○	○
Experiencing real wild nature	○	○	○	○
Immersing myself in different environment	○	○	○	○
Visiting romantic places	○	○	○	○
Experiencing culinary arts	○	○	○	○
Attending cultural events	○	○	○	○
Enjoying sport and recreation activities (12)	○	○	○	○

Q6. Have you visited Europe before?

○ Yes
○ No

Q7. In a few words what do you most associate with Europe?

 Last but not least, a few questions about you.

Q8. What is your gender?

○ Male
○ Female

Q9. What is your age?

Q10. What is your highest level of education?

○ Less than high school
○ High school graduate (includes equivalency)
○ Trade/technical/vocational training
○ Bachelor's degree
○ Master's degree
○ Ph.D.