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# Blogs and destinations

How Gothenburg is portrayed in blogs



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# Abstract

This thesis concerns the topic of destination branding and blogs. The Web 2.0 has shifted the power where content generated by users, online word of mouth and blogs have opened up a two-way communication between consumers and destination marketing organizations (DMO). This means that consumers are co-creators of a destination's image. Blogs, as agents in destination image formation, can impact consumer decisions and have power to communicate a different picture than the DMO desire. This can create incongruence between the image and identity of a destination. The purpose of this thesis is to describe how bloggers present a destination they have visited and to compare how this presentation correspond to what the DMO wish to communicate. To reach this purpose, bloggers who had visited and written about the city of Gothenburg were examined. The part of Gothenburg's identity as a combination of city & nature was investigated. The method chosen was a content analysis where keywords were collected and categorized. The results from the analysis show that the identity is not being contradicted, although it is not being very strongly portrayed.

**Keywords:** Destination branding, brand identity, brand image, blog, Gothenburg, City & nature.

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# 1. Introduction

*This chapter starts with an introduction and an overview of the chosen subject. The background is described to give an understanding of the identified problem of this thesis. In the end of the chapter the purpose and research questions are presented.*

The global travelling had a positive growth in 2013 and was expected to rise by 3 to 4 percent in 2014 (World Tourism Organization, [unwto.org](http://unwto.org), 2014). During 2013 Sweden's total turnover of tourism was 284,4 billion SEK and the industry employed 173 000 people in the whole country. This equals an 89,5 respectively 32 percent increase in the two measures compared to year 2000. Since the beginning of the new millennium the consumption of leisure travels have increased by 84 percent, compared to a 24 percent increase for business travels. According to international forecasts, the global tourism and travel will continue to grow with an annual 3 percent until 2030. Sweden has a great opportunity to take share in this increase since Swedish destinations, attractions, nature and culture are within the spectrum of demand from both leisure and business travellers (Tillväxtverket, Fakta om svensk turism, 2013).

With the increased mobility of today, the competition between tourist destinations is greater than ever. As a result, destination marketing organizations (DMO) face a critical need to create a unique identity that differentiates themselves from competitors (Morgan, Pritchard and Pride 2005). Before the bust of the dot-com bubble in 2001, DMOs could use the Internet to spread information without much disturbance. Back then, the main use of the Web was information gathering, an era commonly called "Web 1.0" characterized by the consumption of information (Han, 2011). After 2001 the Web was reborn into Web 2.0, with a number of differences; the Web was instead seen as a platform, search engine optimization replaced domain name speculation and participation instead of publishing. This new era is said to have started along with the creation of Wikipedia, which paved the way for user generated content (UGC) and social media. (Han, 2011). Digital information available through the Internet that is uploaded by users is called UGC (Munar, 2011). Web logs, or blogs as they are commonly recognized as, can be seen as the most known form of the Web 2.0.

According to Lovink (2007) a blog is defined as

*“A frequently updated Web-based chronological publication, a log of personal thoughts and Web links, a mixture of comments on what is happening on the Web and the world out there”*

(Han, 2011).

On blogs and social media platforms, the content is uploaded by users (Schmallegger and Carson, 2007) and the frequent comment function allows a discussion with others to be a central part of the content (Han, 2011). In the area of travel, the majority of blogs are online personal diaries that consist of individual entries with the purpose to update family and friends about the experiences during travel (Banyai and Glover, 2012). Other motives of keeping a blog are the need of self-expression and sharing of experiences as well as social interaction (Schmallegger and Carson, 2007). A report from Technorati in 2009 stated that there were more than 100 million blogs in the whole world and that 20 percent of them were categorized as travel blogs (Banyai and Glover, 2012). The blog activities and the bloggers together create the “blogosphere” (Akehurst, 2008).

## **1.1 Problem background**

Traditionally, travel marketing or the marketing of a destination has been a one-way form of communication mainly controlled by DMOs. However, web 2.0 has opened up a new two-way communication between the customer and the DMOs, where customers are involved in the creation of a destination’s brand through social media and blogs (Lim, Chung and Weaver, 2012). Online reviews and recommendations are becoming a new digital form of word of mouth (Schmallegger and Carson, 2007). In this sense, Internet has changed traditional word of mouth communication since customers can now exchange opinions online and their posts and comments have the potential to reach millions of readers (Mack, Blose and Pan, 2007). A study, done by Munar and Jacobsen (2013), showed that tourists found travel blogs almost as trustworthy as information from online Spanish tourism organizations. Tourist and travel blog sites such as TravelBlog.org and TravelPost.com are steadily growing in popularity and they hold a powerful discussion, which has the ability to impact a destination’s image as well as consumer decision. There is a power shift in the network of communication from suppliers to customers (Banyai and Glover, 2012). For a DMO, social media in general and blogs in particular can be used for developing business strategies as well as for several management

activities such as; monitoring the destination's image and observe visitors' opinions. A proper management of blogs can also generate positive publicity that is beneficial for the marketing and image creation of a destination (Schmallegger and Carson, 2007).

With the availability of Web 2.0, consumers have the opportunity to give a different view of destinations than the DMOs aim to convey. What are the consequences for a destination if the city's brand identity isn't consistent with its image? The literature on tourism and destination branding agree that image is an important factor that can affect consumer behavior (Ghazali and Cai, 2013). The target group's view of a brand can differ from the identity the DMO wants to build up. They are constantly exposed to the competitor's advertising, what independent stakeholders, such as journalists, believe and the target group itself often has experiences of its own about the destination. This means that the brand's image needs to be monitored to see how it changes over time so that any negative development can be counteracted (Mårtenson, 2013). If destination marketers can identify inconsistency between image and promotion of a destination, it is possible to alter the marketing strategies and improve them to make them fit the image, demand and expectations tourists have on the destination (Banyai and Glover, 2012).

This problematization leads us to our research questions:

- 1. How do tourists portray destinations they have visited in their blogs?*
- 2. How does this portrait correspond to what the DMO wish to communicate?*

The purpose of this thesis is to describe how bloggers present a destination they have visited and to compare how this presentation correspond to what the DMO wish to communicate.

## 2. Theoretical frameworks

*In this chapter, theories and models used for understanding the subject are presented.*

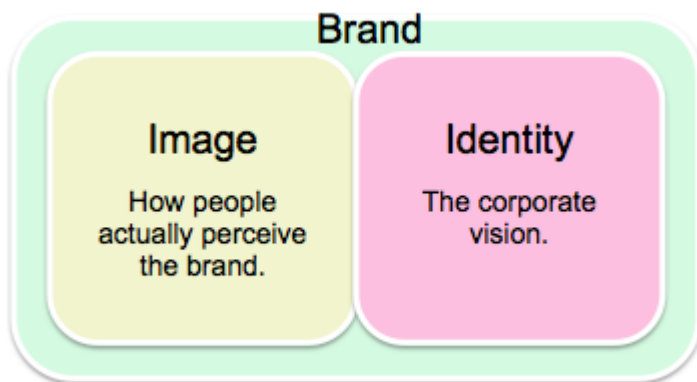
*As the theoretical framework books, models, articles and previous studies that involve the subjects; destination brand, image and identity, web 2.0 and blogs have been used.*

### 2.1 Brand and destination brands

Brands are considered to be a marketer's major tool for differentiating products and services from competitors (Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2005). A brand is also described as a name, symbol, logo or a sign used to improve identification (Lim, Chung and Weaver, 2012). Brands can be perceived from different points of view and have traditionally been divided into two parts; the *brand identity* and the *brand image*. The *brand identity* is described as the company's vision of how the brand should be perceived by the target group, i.e. a brand's identity is the picture the company is striving to convey to the target group and the basis of all communication. The brand identity's task is to guide and inspire the work meant to build up strong brands. A *brand's image* is how people actually perceive the brand, i.e. what associations they get when a brand's name is mentioned. An image is also suggested to be a whole set of beliefs about a product and a more personal perception that can vary from one person to another. The goal is that the identity and image should overlap as much as possible (Mårtenson, 2013). Brand image and identity can also be seen as the *communication* between the company and the consumer. The company creates and sends a message to the consumer who receives the message and, by his or her own frame of reference, decodes it. In other words, the brand message is wrapped by the brand identity and then unwrapped by consumers in terms of brand image. The consumer's response to that message is a form of feedback, which is a crucial component in determining how well the message has been received. If the feedback works ideally, it is supposed to complete the communication circle from the company to the consumer and then back again to the company. The congruence between the identity and image is to a large extent dependent on how effective the company reacts to the feedback from consumers. Since consumers are surrounded by options, inconsistency between image and identity will make the consumer move on and look for other choices (Nandan, 2004).



A tourism destination can be seen as a product or perceived as a brand due to the fact that it consist of tangible and intangible assets, like traditional brands do. The branding of tourism destinations is quite a new phenomenon and it is popular for destinations to adopt identification and differentiation strategies from big and successful product brands, for example Coca-Cola (Usakli and Baloglu, 2011). Like traditional brands, destination brands also consist of image and identity that are concepts in mutual relation. The DMO sends a unique and differentiated identity of the destination to the consumers, which forms an image of the destination dependent on the identity that has been projected. The DMO should observe the image and base their identity of what they know about the consumer's brand image of the destination (Qu, Hyunjung Kim and Hyunjung Im, 2011). Therefore, as mentioned in the problem background and in accordance with Schmallegger and Carson (2007), DMOs can use blogs to monitor the destination's image and observe visitors' opinion and thereby complete the communication circle.



**Figure 1. Brand, image and identity, based on Mårtenson, 2013.**  
Made by the authors.

## 2.2 The formation of destination image

The literature on tourism and destination branding agree that image is an important factor that can affect consumer behavior (Ghazali and Cai, 2013) in forms of intention to revisit and recommend (Qu, Hyunjung Kim and Hyunjung Im, 2011). Gartner (1993) identified eight image formation agents providing destination images to consumers. The eight agents are:

1. Overt Induced I: Traditional advertising, for example TV-commercials.
2. Overt Induced II: Intermediators, for example travel agents.
3. Covert Induced I: An influential person, for example celebrities.
4. Covert Induced II: Also an influential person, but here the public might not know that the person is a promoter, for example travel writers.
5. Autonomous: Independent production of reports, news articles and movies.
6. Unsolicited Organic: Unrequested information from external sources, for example conversations.
7. Solicited Organic: Requested and Reliable information from knowing sources.
8. Organic: Information from personal experiences.

(Gartner 1993 see Ghazali and Cai, 2013).

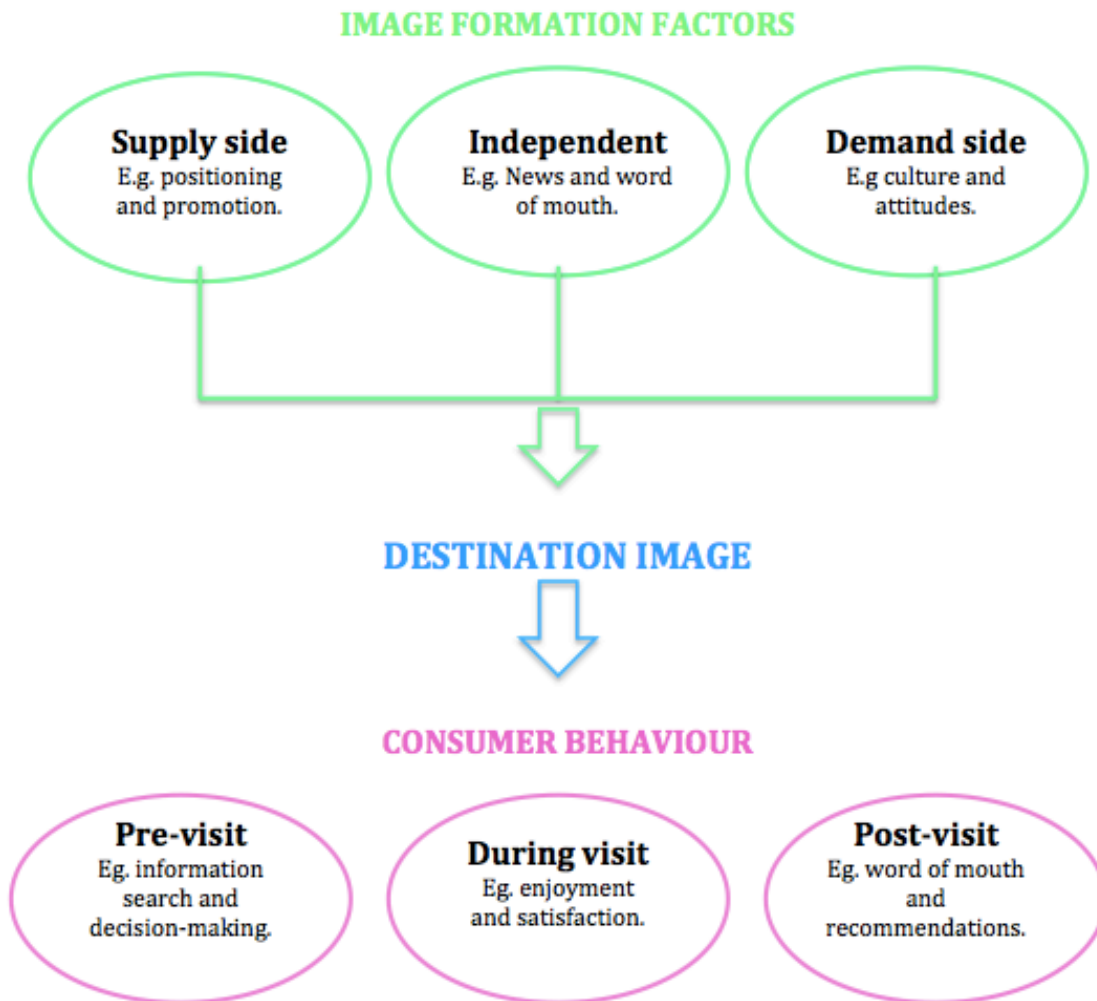
In this theory, blogs could be placed within three different agents: Covert Induced II, Autonomous and Solicited Organic. Schmallegger and Carson (2007) declare that sponsoring bloggers to visit and blog about a destination is not uncommon which explains the placement in the fourth category. The second placement in, Autonomous, was chosen because a blog post come from independent sources and can be seen as a form of report or article. Finally, bloggers are placed in the seventh agent because when a prospect visitor looks for information, which nowadays happens mainly online (Mack, Blose and Pan, 2007), he or she might find information on a blog. The article by Munar and Jacobsen (2013) supports the placement in the seventh agent where blogs are reliable sources. As a conclusion, blogs can take the role of three different agents and provide potential tourists with destination images and thereby, according to this model, have an effect on consumer behavior.

Gartner (1993) also made a structure of three interrelated components in *destination image formation*. These three components are: cognitive, affective and conative and are affected by the eight agents mentioned above.

- Cognitive is the understanding and evaluation of a destination.
- Affective is the feeling and motives related to the destination selection.
- Conative is the action component. The images and feelings developed in the two previous components together form this action component, i.e. the intention to revisit and/or recommend.

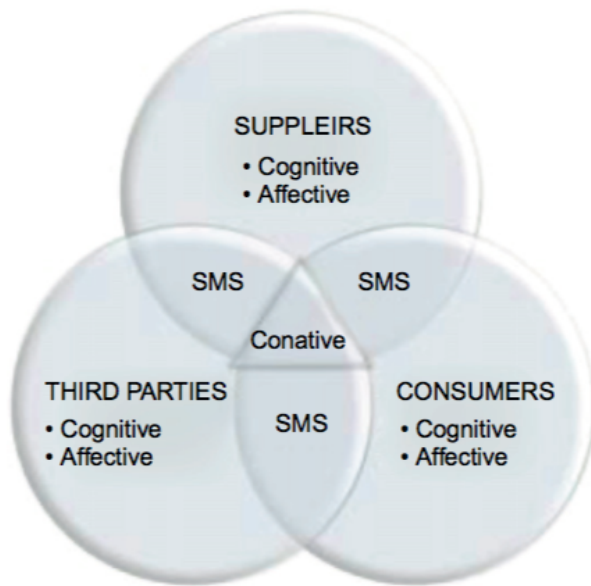
(Gartner 1993 see Ghazali and Cai, 2013)

These two frameworks by Gartner (1993), mentioned above, were later complemented by Tasci and Gartner (2007) to highlight that there are two ends of the information transmission, the sender and the receiver. Supply side, independent side and demand side all impact destination image (Tasci and Gartner, 2007). The destination's image in turn influences consumer behavior. In this model, blogs could fit under the headline "independent" due to the word of mouth characteristic presented by Schmallegger and Carson (2007). Figure 2 shows how word of mouth in form of blogs impact destination image which in turn has an impact on consumer behavior. The second area wherein blogs could be placed is the pre-visit category. This placement is motivated by the fact that blogs are a source of information for tourists who search for information before visiting a destination. The two articles by Munar and Jacobsen (2013) and Mack, Blose and Pan (2007) justifies the placement of blogs in the pre-visit category since they show that tourists use blogs as a source to find information online about a destination. The third and final placement is in the post-visit category, which is similar to the independent category. During and after a visit to a destination, bloggers are consumers before they portray a destination on their blogs, in form of digital word of mouth. As a result, the impact of word of mouth make the blogger return to the first placement as independent image creators.



**Figure 2. A Model of Destination Image and its Relationships.**  
Adopted from Tasci and Gartner (2007) and modified by the authors.

Despite the new approaches in Figure 2, compared to the first two frameworks, this model above still shows a one-way information transmission. To give a more holistic view on information transmission, Figure 3 shows the effect that web 2.0 and social media has on the three image formation components (cognitive, affective and conative) and it also shows that social media connects suppliers, consumers and third parties (Ghazali and Cai, 2013).



**Figure 3. Effects of Social Media Sites on Destination Image Formation**  
(Ghazali and Cai, 2013)

Figure 3 show how the suppliers (destination), consumers (demand) and third parties (independent) are connected via social media sites (SMS) and how the use of social media in these groups influence the three destination image components (cognitive, affective and conative). Marketing activities are created by suppliers who aim to form positive images for consumers. Today many suppliers use social media as a marketing tool, which can have an impact on both the cognitive and the affective components. The message from suppliers is received and interpreted by both consumers and third parties. Consumers then act as both receivers and senders since the interpretation leads to responses and reactions from suppliers and third parties. Third parties (e.g. news and word of mouth) are independent and only controllable to a certain extent. Third parties can both strengthen and weaken the supplier’s desired image. Third parties in social media play an important role in a destination’s image, which explains the interrelation between consumers and suppliers and third parties. In the middle the conative part is placed to show the action component of a destination’s image. This is where the destination image is created. (Ghazali and Cai, 2013).

In the case of blogs, the bloggers can be seen as third parties who create independent content which can strengthen or weaken the desired image of the suppliers. The suppliers would in this case be the DMOs. The entries on the blogs can in this case be seen as equal to social media content. This conclusion is drawn because of the similar characteristics presented by Han (2011) that are important in this case. For example; the act as a source of digital word of mouth, the ability to influence and also the possibility to keep a discussion through the commentary field. In accordance to this, bloggers have an impact via their blog entries on the conative component, which here means action or the inaction of potential tourists to visit a destination. (Ghazali and Cai, 2013).

### **2.3 The impact on marketing activities on consumer experiences**

It is proposed by Mårtenson (2013) that marketing activities are supposed to transform the consumer experience. The transformation occurs in the interaction between the marketing activities and the product and the marketing activities should help the consumer to understand the product. These activities give promises about the product and these affect what is noticed and thought about it when it is seen or experienced. The consumer should receive clues and become aware of how to appreciate and interpret the feelings that the product awakes (Mårtenson, 2013). This theory of transformation applies to the subject of image and blogs, because what has been communicated through marketing activities can have an impact on how the bloggers interpret the destination. In the transformation, an idea of what tourists can expect when they visit a destination is created. This is then reflected in which picture they choose to further communicate via the blog entries. If positive statements are made about a product or service, it's easier to have positive expectations when using this product or service. The same goes for destinations.

## 3. Method

*In this chapter, the method that has been used in the study and the chosen approach to the investigation of the problem are presented. The chapter starts with a presentation of the investigated destination. Then, a description of how the selection of data has been done follows. A critical reflection of the chosen method is discussed before the limitations are presented.*

### 3.1 Gothenburg as a destination

In order to investigate the problem, we have chosen to view how bloggers portray the city of Gothenburg. Gothenburg is Sweden's second largest city with around 540 000 inhabitants (Ekonomifakta, 2014), which makes it an interesting and important city to investigate. Göteborg & Co is the main DMO of the city of Gothenburg with the mission to market and develop Gothenburg as an attractive destination for tourism, meetings and events (goteborg, business idea). The core values used by Göteborg & Co in their communication, on which Gothenburg's brand profile is based, are humane, pluralistic and inspiring (goteborg, one voice). Gothenburg as a destination is divided into three different branches; city of tourism, city of meetings and city of events. Göteborg & Co's purpose is to develop the city of Gothenburg in all three areas, but we will look at Gothenburg from a city of tourism point of view. On behalf of the city of Gothenburg, this DMO wishes to profile and communicate the tourist city as innovative, sustainable and as a combination of city & nature (Göteborg & Co business plan for 2015-2017).

### 3.2 Practical implementation

The method used in this study is a *content analysis* of blogs. After comparing different methods for gathering information about our topic, a content analysis was the best suitable research method for this thesis. Our approach has been to gather primary data directly from blog entries since no secondary data is available. A content analysis is an approach to the analysis of documents and texts in a systematic and replicable way intended to quantify the content based on topics determined in advance. The content analysis provides opportunities to take various units of analysis in regard and units such as words, sentences, pictures, major subjects and themes are among the most common to analyze.

Berelson (1952) describes a content analysis as

*“a research technique involving an objective, systematic and quantitative description of the concrete or the manifest content of communication”*.

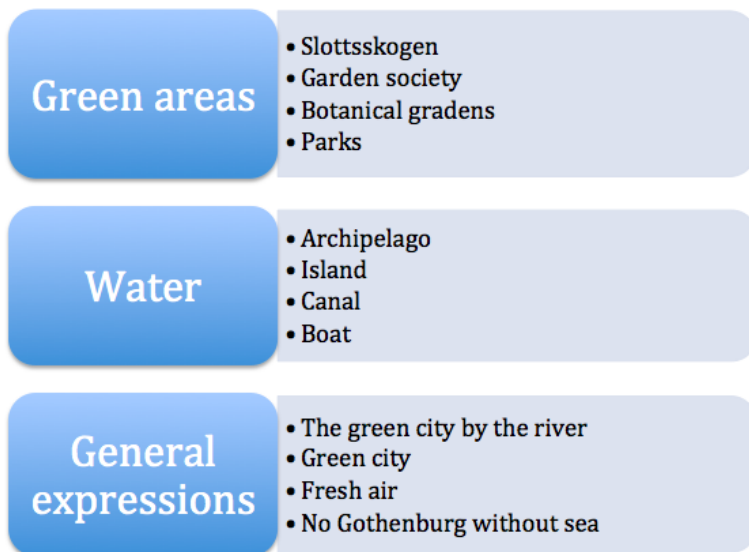
A crucial term for our analysis is the word ‘*objective*’. Objectivity is based on the fact that it clearly shows how one should proceed in order to categorize the raw material content so that the researcher's personal values affect the process to as little as possible. (Berelson 1952 see Bryman and Bell 2013). The focus of the content analysis in this thesis was a mixed method of *qualitative and quantitative* kind. The main part of this content analysis was to count words in each blog entry. To find out how to practically conduct a content analysis, the article by Lim, Chung and Weaver (2012) was used as a template. Looking at Lim, Chung and Weaver (2012), frequency- and categorization tables were used as inspiration to know how the data from a content analysis can be arranged. To structure our content analysis, a categorization of keywords, like in the article by Lim, Chung and Weaver (2012) reflecting the topic of the city & nature combination, was conducted. Since the bloggers have visited the actual city of Gothenburg, we were looking for words associated with nature in each blog entry. These words, in relation with the bloggers visiting the city center, form the combination of city & nature that was the focus in this thesis. The study has been concentrated on these keywords, but also sentences reflecting experiences regarding this combination and we wished to see in how many blog posts and how often these were used or mentioned. In cases where the same word has been mentioned several times in a blog entry, even in the same context, it was still used and counted each time it was mentioned. An example of the keywords used is stated below in Figure 4: *Categorization of nature keywords*.

Before going through with this categorization, we scanned blogs that had visited Gothenburg to find what keywords could be of relevance for our study. With this stated, a clear direction on what words and content to look for when scanning the blogs was set. The concept systematic that Berelson (1952) mentioned was of relevance here (Berelson 1952 see Bryman and Bell 2013). To avoid any type of bias to as great extent as possible, we set what types of word to look for and what words to leave out. In order to reduce the subjective opinions in the selection of keywords, both authors took part in the decision of what words that should be used. No other words than the ones categorized were analyzed. After the scan for keywords, two major categories reflecting the



nature image of Gothenburg were identified. The identified categories were named '*Water*' and '*Green areas*' and they both include all words used by the chosen bloggers in their reflection of Gothenburg as the combination of city & nature that were found as relevant for this study. Words, such as harbor, port and docks, have been excluded. Even though they are associated with '*Water*', they are seen as a more constructed and industrialized part of this category and not as a nature concept when viewed in Gothenburg's context and environment. In order to see if the picture of Gothenburg as a combination of city & nature was being portrayed by the bloggers, we made a comparison with the picture of Gothenburg as a city of restaurants, cafés and culinary experiences. In line with Akehurst (2008), a reason for this comparison is since both the environment, nature in this case, and food are common and natural topics to blog about when touring in a city. Gothenburg as a culinary city is not an explicit point of differentiation for Göteborg & Co and we therefore wished to see if the bloggers portray the city as the DMO desired. Words as these were chosen in a similar way as the ones with a nature connection. The blogs were first scanned for words reflecting the food experiences in order to know what words to look for. To be able to make a comparison of how often the words associated with food are mentioned, in relation to the nature words, a head count of these words was conducted. Some examples of words of the culinary view of Gothenburg that have been used during the scan of blogs are; names of restaurants and cafés, different types of "fika", food and delicacies, Fish church and Saluhallen.

This part of the approach can be seen as quantitative due to the quantification and counting of words corresponding to Gothenburg as a combination of city & nature as well as a culinary city. Since counting keywords do not include subjective meanings to such a great extent as sentences do, a more qualitative approach has also been used. The qualitative part of the methodological approach has been to try to understand the underlying themes and meanings of certain expressions used in the blog entries. This qualitative part gave us our last and final category. In addition to the two already stated categories, *Water* and *Green areas*, the category '*General expressions*' was formed. This category includes sentences and expressions that mention the nature experience in a way where it cannot be taken out of their context. The figure below shows an example of the nature keywords and expressions found and how they were categorized.



**Figure 4: Categorization of nature keywords**

Pictures as content were, however, left out in this analysis in order to make a just comparison of what was actually being said and due to the fact that several blogs didn't use pictures as content to share their experiences. This qualitative part of the method can be said to be based on the concept '*hermeneutic*'. The word is, more or less, a synonym to what Weber called '*Verstehen*', which refers to the understanding of actions viewed from the writer's perspective. The '*hermeneutic research process*' is a research approach built on the interpretation and understanding of texts and documents. The central idea that is the basis of the hermeneutic approach is that we, as authors, who analyzed the texts should try to extract the texts' meanings and see it from the bloggers' perspective. The approach included the context in which the text, and blog entries in our case, was produced (Bryman and Bell 2013).

### **3.3 Selection of blogs**

To classify the blogs as either British or German, the blogger's current country of residence was the deciding factor. Based on where the bloggers are settled, blogs written in English and German were all seen as relevant. In cases where the blogs were written in German, the blog was classified as a German blog since the information was then directed to the German speaking market. However, German-speaking bloggers from Austria and Switzerland are not included in this thesis since they aren't seen as prioritized markets of the DMO in this sense.

Since the blogosphere is a growing phenomenon, a clear criterion was set to sift out which blogs were conceived as more relevant than others in this thesis. The criterion from which the blogs were chosen was that the blogger had to have visited and written about the city of Gothenburg. The gathered data comes from travel sites, which we have found through articles, as well as blog top lists and travel- and lifestyle blogs, which were found in advanced Google search. The two travel blog sites, Travelblog.org and Travepod.org, were used to find blogs for this thesis. The selection of these travel blog websites, where 11 out of 40 bloggers were gathered, was natural since these sites are written about in several articles by notable authors on the area of destination marketing and blogs. Travelblog.org and Travepod.com are both mentioned in published articles written by Schmallegger and Carson (2007), Banyai and Glover (2012), Mack, Blose and Bing (2007), Munar and Jacobsen (2013) as well as Akehurst (2008). Since they all mention these websites, we see them as useful sources of information when it comes to scanning the blogosphere for travel blogs. As mentioned above, the content analysis includes a selection of 40 blogs, which were divided into four different categories. 32 of them are categorized as travel blogs, five as fashion and lifestyle blogs, two as travel and food blogs and one belongs to the travel and fashion blog segment. The division of bloggers is also presented in the result part in Chapter 4, Figure 6: *The different categories of blogs*. The motive for choosing 40 different blogs is rooted in the fact that during our search for blogs and top lists, we ended up finding the same blogs on both the German and British blog market over and over again. The perception was then that the quote of bloggers that had written about Gothenburg on these markets had reached a saturated state. The selection was also made on the basis that we chose to leave out commercial travel magazines and sponsored blogs to such a great extent as possible, due to the biased result they might give. For example, the sponsored blogs that have been read have had a more planned schedule on their journey and predetermined locations and activities to visit and write about. In order to still get as many opinions and views of Gothenburg as possible in how bloggers portray Gothenburg, we decided to use and categorize bloggers in ages varying from 20 to those above 60 years old. This selection also suited our study well due to the lack of blog posts about Gothenburg from bloggers in a specific age category. The age of the bloggers was either found on the blog or estimated depending on information found on the blog or the blogger's profile in other social media platforms. The different age categories chosen can be seen in Chapter 4 Figure 8: *Age of the bloggers*.

### **3.4 Critical reflection, reliability and validity**

Like other existing research methods, the content analysis have advocates and opponents. Some strengths of using a content analysis are that it is an “open” research method (Bryman and Bell, 2013). It was easy to describe how the selection of content was made in a concrete way. It was also simple to describe how the categorization of keywords was designed, which facilitates replications and follow-up studies. This type of analysis has a very flexible approach that can be applied to many different types of unstructured data, but also contextual meanings that are more difficult to quantify. This was also the case in our study.

If there are advantages, there are usually disadvantages or limitations. A content analysis is said to be only as good as the documents it is based on and it is very difficult to design categories that doesn't include a certain degree of interpretation from the researcher. In a quantitative content analysis, where words are extracted from phrases, there is a risk of losing the context in which the words were written (Banyai and Glover, 2012). To avoid this loss of context to a great extent as possible, a method of mixed method with both a quantitative and qualitative approach was used. When the categorizations of keywords were made, it was difficult to avoid including a subjective judgment, even though both authors examined the categorizations. There are words that have different meanings to different people and conducting a completely objective content analysis entirely free from subjective interpretations was clearly very difficult. This has been close to impossible in our study. What words to look for, which sentences that could be of interest and relevance have all, as previously mentioned, been subjectively selected by the authors. This fact that subjectivity is a part of the selection of keywords can cause a bias of words included in our content analysis. As mentioned before were some frequently used words associated with water excluded due to the fact that they were constructed and industrialized and seen more as urban than nature. This has also left us with other keywords that were on the borderline to not being classified as nature words. Canal was such a word that lies on this fine line. We asked ourselves if canals really were a part of the nature or if they are seen as constructions in the urban development. In this thesis, we chose to see them as a nature concept since the contexts in which they were written described the canals from a nature's perspective and as a nature concept. Another difficulty was to decide to what extent words should be classified as keywords and not as general expressions. Some words couldn't be taken out of their

context and classified as keywords due to their importance in that specific context, even though they could be seen as keywords in a different context. An example was the expression ‘*The green city by the river*’. This sentence could easily have been divided into keywords, but since the context in which it stood gave a vivid picture of Gothenburg, it was seen as a general expression.

Reliability was another methodological concept that has concerned our research. If this study is conducted again, will the outcome be the same as the first time? If the same 40 blogs will be investigated again, the same result will most likely be achieved. The potential differences lie in the fact that when others conduct the same study, they might categorize and classify the keywords in different ways. This can lead to a different approach when it comes to calculating the words and interpreting the general expressions. When looking at the validity criteria of this study, external validity is an interesting aspect. Since we only have looked at the problem from the city & nature combination of Gothenburg, it’s hard to generalize this result to the entire identity of Gothenburg and other tourist destinations. When the decision of using a content analysis as method for this thesis was made, other methods were also taken into consideration. To get a more personal picture of how bloggers portray the image of Gothenburg, personal interviews could have been carried out. This could have enabled a deeper understanding for the blogger and his or her blog entries. Due to our geographical and economical limitations, a content analysis was an easier approach to choose in this case.

### **3.5 Limitations**

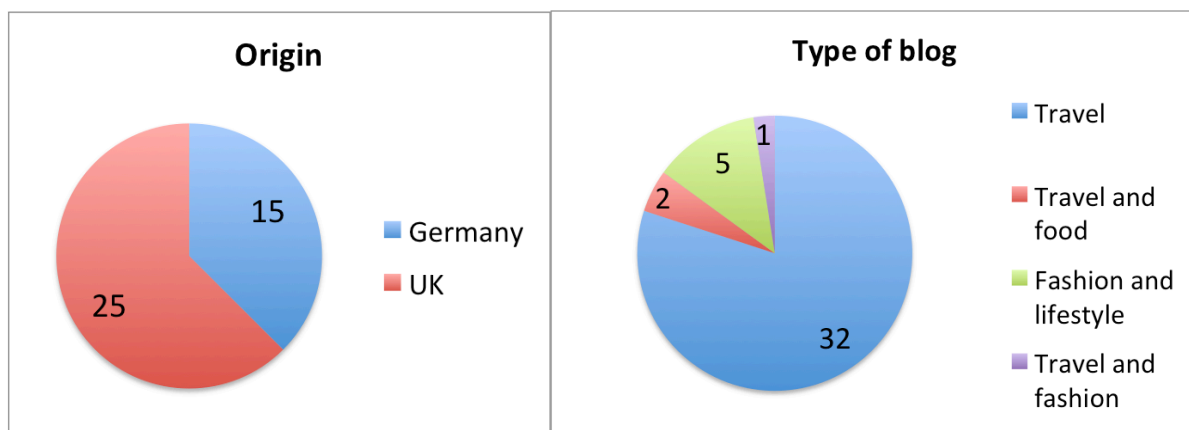
Our approach in this thesis was to view how bloggers from the *United Kingdom* and *Germany* portray the city of Gothenburg. The United Kingdom and Germany were chosen since tourism from these countries are prioritized markets for Göteborg & Co. The city of tourism, as a part of the Gothenburg brand, is promoted as a combination of both city & nature. This combination was our focus in this study. This area was chosen since it is a more concrete concept compared to the other profile attributes of Gothenburg as innovative and sustainable and it is therefore easier to observe. The blogs that have been analyzed are mainly *travel blogs*, even though other blog combinations also have been investigated in order to get a larger sample.

## 4. Analysis

*In the first part of the chapter the results are presented and this section contains 3 parts: information about the bloggers, city & nature and food. Data collected from the content analysis will be presented in form of text and figures. This gives an overview and a better understanding for the analysis in the following section where the results are analyzed.*

### 4.1 Information about the bloggers

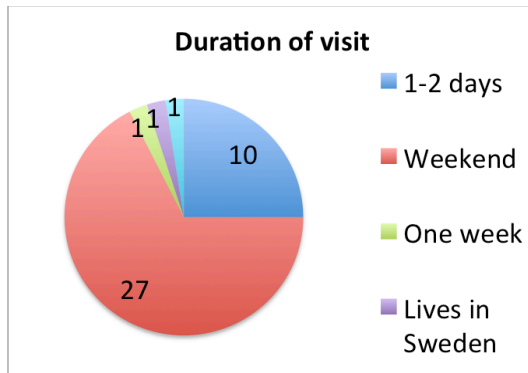
For the analyses we examined 40 different blogs from Germany and the United Kingdom. Blogs written in both German and English were analyzed. This resulted in 25 blogs from the United Kingdom and 15 blogs from Germany in our sample. As mentioned earlier the majority of the blogs were classified as travel blogs. These blogs represented 32 out of the total of 40 blogs investigated.



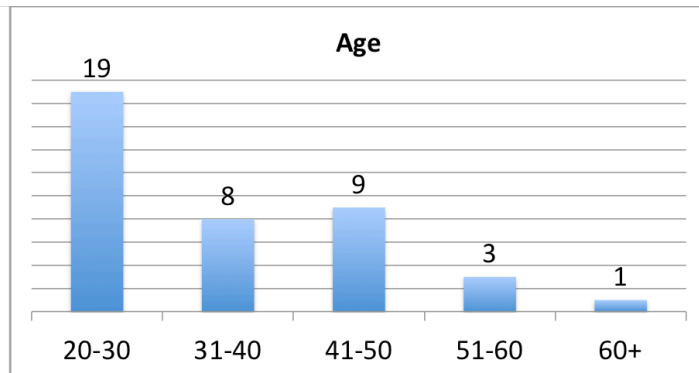
**Figure 5: Origin of the examined blogs**

**Figure 6: The different categories of blogs**

Even though we did not try to reach one particular age group of bloggers, most of the bloggers in our sample were between 20 and 30 years old. The most common duration of a visit to Gothenburg was a weekend.

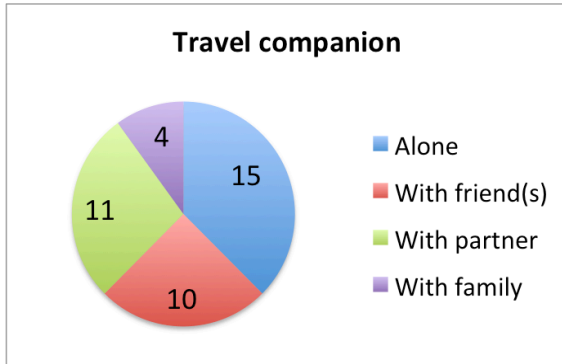


**Figure 7: Duration of the visit**

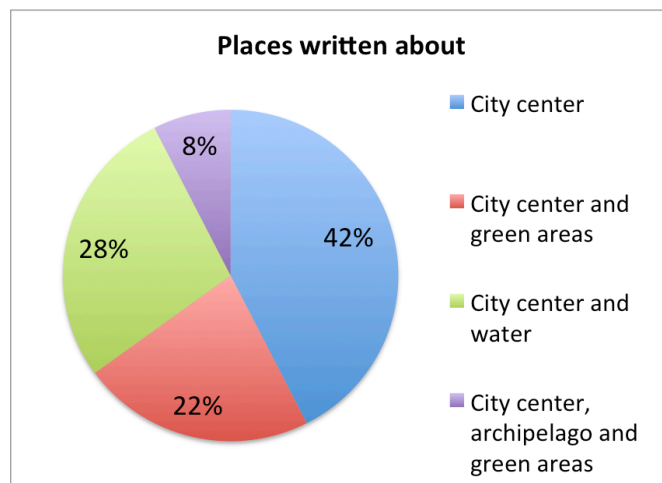


**Figure 8: Age of the bloggers**

The largest part of the blogger’s travelled to Gothenburg alone, but the company of a partner or a friend was also a common choice. Only four of the bloggers travelled together with their families.



**Figure 9: Type of companion(s)**



**Figure 10: Places written about**

From analyzing the blogs, Figure 10 was made to display which places the bloggers had written that they had visited during their trip to Gothenburg. 17 of 40 bloggers wrote that they had only visited the central parts of the city.

## 4.2 Combination of city & nature

This table displays the mentioned water related keywords together with their frequency, percentage of the water related words and the percentage of all the words. The total frequency is 113 keywords and a total 17 different water-related words were identified. The words island and boat have almost the same frequency since they were often mentioned in the same context.

<b>Water related keywords</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>% of water words</b>	<b>% of all keywords</b>
Island(s)	26	23,0%	17,8%
Boat(s)	25	22,1%	17,1%
Ferry	10	8,8%	6,8%
Canal(s)	9	8,0%	6,2%
Archipelago	8	7,1%	5,5%
Coast	8	7,1%	5,5%
River	5	4,4%	3,4%
Sea	5	4,4%	3,4%
Water	5	4,4%	3,4%
Waterfront area	3	2,7%	2,1%
Beach	2	1,8%	1,4%
Paddling	2	1,8%	1,4%
Göta Älv	1	0,9%	0,7%
Lake	1	0,9%	0,7%
Saltholmen	1	0,9%	0,7%
Styrsö	1	0,9%	0,7%
Vinga	1	0,9%	0,7%
<b>Total frequency: 113</b>		<b>Different words: 17</b>	

**Table 1: Water related keywords**



In the table below, the mentioned keywords related to green areas are displayed together with their frequency, percentage of the green area related words and also the percentage of all the words. The total frequency is 33 mentioned keywords and a total of 16 different words related to green areas were identified.

<b>Keywords related to green areas</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>% of Green area words</b>	<b>% of all keywords</b>
Park(s)	8	24,2%	5,5%
Botanical Gardens	4	12,1%	2,7%
Slottsskogen	4	12,1%	2,7%
Garden Society	3	9,1%	2,1%
Garden(s)	2	6,1%	1,4%
Rose garden	2	6,1%	1,4%
City gardens	1	3,0%	0,7%
Countryside	1	3,0%	0,7%
Delsjön	1	3,0%	0,7%
Forest	1	3,0%	0,7%
Green	1	3,0%	0,7%
Hike	1	3,0%	0,7%
King's Park	1	3,0%	0,7%
Rock climbing	1	3,0%	0,7%
Rose	1	3,0%	0,7%
Trees	1	3,0%	0,7%
<b>Total frequency: 33</b>		<b>Different words: 16</b>	

**Table 2: Keywords related to green areas**

The blogs were also scanned for general expressions empowering the combination of city & nature or expressions stating the opposite. In this table, the expressions are mentioned as positive respectively negative statements. There was a clear majority of positive statements.

<b>Positive statements</b>	<b>Negative statements</b>
The scenery from the boat and on the island is beautiful.	A very busy city.
A beautiful tree lined path that would probably look gorgeous in the fall.	Lacks natural feel.
Gothenburg seems like a nice, spacious city, one that it would be a pleasure to live in, especially as the sea and islands are just on the doorstep.	The town was busy and bustling for a Thursday.
Pools of water swim in and out of the mainland with a variety of sizes and shapes of islands nestling sporadically.	
Fresh air.	
Offers miles of coastline dotted with thousands of islands.	
Known for their sculptured rocks, quaint fishing villages and seafaring lifestyles.	
Hike up wild hills for spectacular sea-view.	
Trees light up the day.	
Amazing tree colors.	
Forget easy that you're in a big city when you walk in parks.	
Thousands of roses.	
No Gothenburg without sea.	
Endless ever-green covered backdrop and pockets of water.	
The green city by the river.	

Create a stronger connection to the nature.	
No big city hassle.	
Gothenburg is one of the green cities of Sweden with its parks & grass areas.	
Gothenburg will never be urban, too much prettiness & pureness.	
Its combination of an urban atmosphere and unique coastline amazes all.	
Nice canals and streets decorated with flowers won my heart.	

**Table 3: City & nature general expressions**

### 4.3 Food

In the content analysis about food a total of 254 keywords were found. The table below, Table 4, is based on the calculations of keywords related to food and it shows the five most frequently used words. The by far most mentioned word, café, was often used in a context where the bloggers had visited the district Haga or gone for a coffee break.

<b>Keywords related to food</b>	<b>f</b>
Café(s)	37
Restaurant(s)	17
Cinnamon bun	11
Feskekörka (Fish church)	11
Seafood	9

**Table 4: Keywords related to food**

In order to make a comparison of the differences between the city & nature and the culinary view of Gothenburg, general expressions related to food were also searched for. A total of nine general expressions related to food were identified in the blog entries and these nine all gave a positive picture of Gothenburg as a culinary city.

I ate my way round the city, Swedish food is really good.
The white cake was literally the best thing I've ever eaten.
Like Michelin star kind of incredible.
Da Matteo has the rumor of one of the best cafés in Sweden.
Don't want to miss out on all the food .
Some stalls offer goods to take away, while others have perch-up bars for eating in the midst of the bustle.
Well-regarded gallery restaurant.
If you don't eat fish, you're missing out on Gothenburg.
Dishes on the menu had my mouth watering just reading them.

**Table 5: General food expressions**

#### 4.4 City & Nature versus Food

In total, the city & nature keywords reached a total frequency of 146 in the 40 blogs included in the analysis. This equaled a median of three keywords per blog entry. The median amount of words in the blog entries written about Gothenburg was 577 words. By first computing the percentage amount of keywords per entry for all the blogs, the median percentage amount of keywords per entry could be calculated to 0,67%. This number shows how many of the total amount of words in an entry that were keywords. The median of the percentages, 0,67%, was used as a limit. Those 20 above 0,67% can be seen as bloggers that have portrayed the identity of city & nature that Göteborg & Co has and they communicate more of Gothenburg as a city & nature combination than the median. Those below the median are perceived to portray this image in a weaker way or not at all compared to those above.

A content analysis of words reflecting the food experience was also conducted to be able to make a comparison of how often, and in how many blogs, keywords reflecting city & nature compared to food were used and mentioned. From this analysis of the 40 blogs, we found out that the keywords associated with food that we found were used in a relevant context, resulted in a total frequency of 254 words. This means that words associated with food experiences, restaurants and cafés exceeded the ones associated with nature with 108 words. The median was although three food-related keywords per blog entry, which equals the keywords related to nature per entry. Even though the amount of keywords about food was greater than the one associated with nature, the median percentage of words in each blog entry got a value of 0,61%, which is slightly lower than the median of nature keywords. A factor, which explains this relation, is that a few blogs were very detailed in their descriptions of their Gothenburg food experiences, while 14 didn't mention any words associated with food at all. In comparison to this, we found out that five of the blogs didn't include any keywords referring to the city & nature experience. Taking all this into account, we argue that the nature concept is portrayed slightly stronger than the food concept in Gothenburg, even though the words written about it aren't as many as the food experiences. We argue in favor of this since the amount of bloggers that had not written anything about the city & nature combination are five compared to the 14 that had not written about food out of these 40 blogs. The nature keywords had also a smaller spread, from 0 - 21, while the food keyword had a spread from 0 - 34.

The reason why the median was chosen instead of the mean in all the calculations above was because there was a large spread between the collected data. The median value was therefore chosen, above mean value, to give the most reliable calculations. We conclude that the median percentage of keywords per entry is a more true measure than just counting the amount of words. This is concluded since a tourist who looks for information online is not very likely to find the exact same blogs that we found and in these topics there are a large variety of how many words that were written.

When looking at the general expressions regarding city & nature, there were 24 expressions in total, 21 were positive and thereby reflected the combination of city & nature and three contradicted this identity. An example of a negative expression is "*Lacks natural feel*" which

clearly shows the contradiction. The expressions were mixed, where some related more to the category of green areas, like “*A beautiful tree lined path that would probably look gorgeous in the fall*”. Some were more connected to water, for example “*Offers miles of coastline dotted with thousands of islands*”, while some could be placed in both categories, like “*Hike up wild hills for spectacular sea-view*”. There were in total nine positive general expressions related to food compared to the positive nature related expressions that were 21, which is more than double. Out of the five blogs that did not mention any nature keywords at all there were three of these that mentioned general expressions. Out of these three blogs, one mentioned a negative general expression, which brings us to the conclusion that three of the blog did not at all portray the combination of city & nature. In the 14 blog entries that did not mention any food-related keywords, there were no mentioned general expressions referring to any food experience either.

To summarize, we believe the identity of city & nature is portrayed slightly more than the food image based on these four factors:

- Fewer bloggers who did not mention any nature keywords.
- The spread between how many nature keywords were written in each blog entry was smaller.
- More positive city & nature-related general expressions were identified.
- Slightly higher median percentage of nature keywords per entry.

#### **4.5 Water versus green areas**

According to the theory of identity and image as communication between the company and the consumer, the analysis of keywords related to nature written by bloggers who have visited the city center showed if and how the bloggers had unwrapped the desired identity into a matching image. The analysis shows that when the identity of Gothenburg as a combination of city & nature is unwrapped by the bloggers into an image, it consists of two different areas. These two areas were made into two categories: *Water* and *Green areas*. Out of the total frequency of 146 nature keywords, 113 of the words were water-related and 33 words were related to green areas. There were 17 different kinds of keywords that were water-related, and 16 different keywords in the category of green areas. This means that even though the water-words were more than three times as many as the green area-words, the two categories had almost the same variety. 12 blog

entries did not mention any water-related keywords compared to 18 blog entries that didn't write about any green area keywords at all. This amount of water keywords could have been explained in the same way as the food-related keywords, that a few bloggers had written a lot and very detailed about water-related keywords. This appears not to be the case when looking at the median percent of the keywords per total words in an entry in the two categories. The water-related words have a median percentage of 0,39% while green area-related words have a median of 0,05% keywords per entry. The median is used for the same reasons mentioned in the previous section.

Two of the water-related words, *island(s)* and *boat(s)*, were by far the most mentioned keywords with a frequency of 26 respectively 25 mentions each compared to the word *ferry*, which was mentioned 10 times and thereby the third most mentioned keyword. Together *island(s)* and *boat(s)* stand for approximately one third (51/146) of the total frequency of words. The frequency of water keywords stands for 77% (113 / 146) out of all of the words. This is interesting when looking at which areas the bloggers have written that they visited. Only 28% had written that they had visited the city center and also a water area like the archipelago. Since some of the water words could be experienced from the central parts of the city without the need to visit one of the water areas, a division was made where some words were removed. This division better represents which of the bloggers that wrote about water actually visited a water area that was not a part of the city center. The water related words that could be experienced from the central part of the city was removed, such as *canal* and *waterfront area*. After this removal, 82 water-related keywords remained. As mentioned earlier, there are a total of 146 keywords, which means that the water related words that could be experienced outside the central part of the city equals 56% (82 / 146) of the total keywords. This is still more than the 28% who actually wrote about having visited one of the water areas outside Gothenburg. Comparing this to the bloggers who has written green area keywords and also visited a green area where there is a match and 22% has visited a green area and 23% (33 / 146) of the keywords are related to green areas.

There is a possibility that a few bloggers could have written a large amount of the water keywords that can only be experienced from outside the city center and therefore the assumption above may not be entirely correct. Although, when looking at the bloggers who only visited the city center (and possibly a green area), there are six of these blogs that have mentioned water related words that can only be experienced outside of the city center. The fact the most of the bloggers visited Gothenburg for a weekend is also a factor, which can affect this theory. A weekend is quite a short time to visit a city, which can explain why just 28% have visited the city center plus a water area outside the city. This means that the weekend visits are something which should at first sight favor the green area keywords since they are more involved in the central part of the city, and therefore easier to spot. The fact that this is not the case, and water related words are more common, is in favor of the argument that water is being portrayed to a greater extent than green areas. We interpret and explain this phenomenon as a part of the transformation theory mentioned in chapter two. According to the theory of transformation, if water experiences are used in marketing activities and it is common to display water and Gothenburg in the same context, it creates expectations and predictions about water being a significant part of the city. This could explain why many bloggers mention water related words that could only be experienced outside the central part without ever visiting these outer parts, such as the archipelago and/or the islands.

A reason why the green area words, as a part of the Gothenburg brand as a combination of city & nature, is not written about to the same extent as the water related words might be because green areas, such as parks, are not an area of differentiation for Gothenburg. As Morgan, Pritchard and Pride (2005) say, it is important for destinations nowadays to differentiate to be able to face the competition and branding is the main tool for this. Looking at other big cities around the world, especially in the United Kingdom and Germany, many of them have famous green areas such as Hyde Park in London and the Olympiapark in Munich. If green areas are seen as an area of parity and something to be taken slightly for granted when visiting similar cities in Europe, this might explain why these types of words are not mentioned. In other words is there no reason to state the obvious.



To summarize this section, we consider the water part of Gothenburg's identity of city & nature to be better portrayed by bloggers than the green area part of the identity based on these arguments:

- The frequency of water keywords is 77% (113 / 146) out of all of the words.
- More of the bloggers did not mention any green area words at all.
- The water-related words have a median percentage of 0,39% while green area-related words have a median of 0,05% keywords per entry.
- 56% of the keywords are water-related words that can only be experienced outside the city center and only 28% of the bloggers write about visiting a water area outside the city center.

#### **4.6 Summary**

From the blogs that have been studied, we found the results and analysis representable for Gothenburg due to the saturation we experienced when searching for blogs that had written about Gothenburg. As a result, this analysis shows that the identity of the DMO of Gothenburg as a combination of city & nature is not being contradicted in the German and British blogosphere. There is no clear incongruence between the identity and image of Gothenburg as a combination of city & nature and we argue in favor of this since there were very few opponents and contradictions to this combination. The identity is somewhat portrayed in the blogs but when looking at the food keywords, which are not an expressed area of differentiation, there are almost the same median percentage of these words. Since city & nature is a part of the desired identity expressed by the DMO, we argue that these words should be mentioned more than the food keywords in order for it to stand out as a strong and differentiated portrait in the blogosphere and to fully support the identity.

## 5. Conclusion

*The beginning of this chapter shows the conclusions drawn from the analysis. The conclusion is made in order to answer the research question and purpose of this thesis. The second part of this chapter involves recommendations and suggestions for further research in the area.*

A brand is the major tool to differentiate from competitors and create a unique proposal for the consumers. In our study, with support from previous research and models, we found that it is possible for bloggers to hold a powerful discussion by acting as online word of mouth carriers and to portray a destination differently than the identity of the DMO. Blogs belong to one of the three image formation factors described in Figure 2 and 3 and can thereby create incongruence between a destination's desired identity and image of the consumers. The image and identity work as communication between a company and the consumers and blog posts can be used as feedback for the company in the work of monitoring the brand image.

The purpose of this thesis was *to describe how bloggers present the image of a destination they have visited and to compare how this presentation correspond to what the DMO wish to communicate*. We have reached this purpose by answering the research questions below.

The first research question of this thesis was:

*1. How do tourists portray destinations they have visited in their blogs?*

Since our study is limited to how bloggers portray the combination of city & nature in the city of Gothenburg, the results cannot be generalized to the entire identity due to that this also includes other aspects than the ones investigated. Our results show that the identity of Gothenburg as a combination of city & nature is only being portrayed slightly stronger than the culinary view. In terms of the nature concept, water was portrayed significantly more than green areas.

The second research question of this thesis was:

*2. How does this portrait correspond to the identity of the DMO?*

We concluded that the identity is not being contradicted, but it is not being very strongly portrayed by the bloggers based on the comparison, city & nature and food, of the amount of keywords and expressions. The analysis of the keywords from the blogs shows that when the

identity of Gothenburg, as a combination of city & nature, is portrayed by bloggers it consists of two different areas; *Water* and *Green areas*. This division of the nature concept made in the blogs is not expressed by the DMO. We conclude that blogs portray Gothenburg as a city associated with its water areas rather than its green areas. Even though our results are hard to generalize, the results from the content analysis suggest that if attributes belonging to a destination's identity are not unique, it is not portrayed by bloggers to the same extent as attributes that are unique. This conclusion is suggested based on the recognition that, in the case of Gothenburg, keywords related to water were mentioned a lot more frequently than green area words. Water can therefore be seen as a more unique asset for the city of Gothenburg.

### **5.1 Implications, future research and recommendations**

We hope that this thesis can contribute to the topic of blog's influence on a destination's image and/or be used for future studies in the area. This research is limited to German and British blogs since they are prioritized markets for tourism in Gothenburg. An interesting continuation could be to investigate blogs from other countries to see how the image differs. The differences of Gothenburg's image in different countries could then be investigated and put in a cultural context where differences in Internet usage and travel expectations could be theoretical frameworks. The combination of city & nature is only one of the dimensions of Gothenburg's identity and the other dimensions could therefore also be interesting to investigate. Our findings suggest that points of parity in destinations are not being portrayed as strongly as points of differentiation. This could be investigated and developed in order to find out what differentiates a city in Northern Europe. Another interesting approach in the same area could be to study what interlinkage there is between parity versus differentiation when it comes to the unwrapping of a destination's identity.

During our research we found information on the impact bloggers have on consumers and persons looking for information, but another area that would be interesting to look further into is which impact bloggers have on other bloggers.

The findings of this thesis could be useful for DMOs, for example Göteborg & Co, who aim to market Gothenburg. The results could guide future marketing activities and suggests what need to be more strongly communicated to reach the desired image or what could be adjusted to create

consistency in the identity and image. The results also give an idea of what DMOs in Gothenburg should emphasize when co-operating with bloggers. Other similar destinations with the same characteristics that also wish to have an identity with a combination of city & nature or anything equivalent could also find this study relevant.

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# Appendix

## Table of bloggers

All accessed 4/5 - 2015

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