ISCTE Business School
Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

THE INFLUENCE OF SOFIA'S DESTINATION IMAGE ON SATISFACTION, INTENTION TO RECOMMEND, AND POST-VISIT INTENTIONS TOWARDS BULGARIAN PRODUCTS: DOES UNIQUE IMAGE MATTER?

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Abstract

This thesis is studying the destination image of an emerging tourist destination – Sofia, Bulgaria. The city's number of foreign tourists has increased with 18 per cent in 2017. As destination image has been proven to be an important factor influencing significantly both pre-visit and post-visit intentions, the city is in pressing need to create a strong image in tourists' minds.

Based on previous literature, a conceptual model investigating the relationships between the different components of destination image, tourism satisfaction, intention to recommend, and post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products was proposed and tested. Destination image was studied with three components – cognitive, affective, and unique. The latter has been often overlooked in previous studies and there is not much clarity about its conceptualization and measurement. This study provides more information about the concept but it also proposes a new method of measuring it through text-mining of user-generated blog posts.

A questionnaire was distributed to 314 foreign visitors of Sofia. The data analysis methods included descriptive statistics, principal component analysis, and multiple linear regressions. The results reveal that the unique image has a significant influence on all constructs, however, it is the affective which has the strongest impact. Moreover, the traditional affective image has the strongest influence on overall image and tourism satisfaction, which in turns has the strongest impact on traditional word-of-mouth. Cognitive image has influence on all constructs except on electronic word-of-mouth. Finally, post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products are influenced by all variables, with the exception of tourism satisfaction.

Keywords: destination image, unique image, Sofia, post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products

JEL classification: M390, Z310

Resumo

Esta tese tem como objetivo estudar a imagem de um destino turístico emergente - Sofia, Bulgária. Dado que o número de turistas estrangeiros na cidade aumentou 18% em 2017 e sendo a imagem de um destino considerada um fator importante na influência das intenções de pré-visita e pós-visita, Sofia necessita de criar uma imagem forte na mente dos turistas.

Um modelo conceptual, que investiga as relações entre as diferentes componentes da imagem, a satisfação do turista, a intenção de recomendar e as intenções pós-visita face aos produtos búlgaros, foi proposto e testado. A imagem do destino foi estudada com três componentes - cognitiva, afetiva e única. Esta última tem sido muitas vezes ignorada na literatura e não há muita clareza sobre a sua conceptualização e medição. Este tese fornece mais informações sobre este construto, mas também propõe um método para a sua medição através da extração de textos de *posts* gerados por utilizadores de *blogs*.

Aplicou-se um questionário a 314 turistas de Sofia. Os métodos de análise centraram-se em análises de componentes principais e regressões lineares múltiplas. Os resultados revelam que a imagem única influencia todos os construtos, no entanto, é a afetiva que tem o impacto mais forte. Além disso, a imagem afetiva tradicional tem a maior influência na imagem geral e na satisfação, o que, por sua vez, tem o impacto mais forte na *WOM*. A imagem cognitiva influencia todos os construtos, exceto *eWOM*. Finalmente, as intenções pós-visita aos produtos búlgaros são influenciadas por todas as variáveis, com exceção da satisfação.

Palavras-chave: imagem de um destino, imagem única, Sofia, intenções pós-visita face aos produtos búlgaros

JEL: M390, Z310

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List of Abbreviations

CDI – Cognitive Destination Image

UDI – Unique Destination Image

ADI – Affective Destination Image

COI – Country-of-origin Image

TDI – Tourism Destination Image

DI – Destination Image

WOM – Word-of-mouth

eWOM – Electronic Word-of-mouth

UGC – User-generated content

TS – Tourism Satisfaction

BG – Bulgaria

PCA – Principal Component Analysis

MLR – Multiple Linear Regression

1. Introduction

1.1. Relevance of the topic

Paris, London, New York – what these three cities have in common? Apart from being three of the most visited tourist destinations in the world, they easily provoke image associations about their main attributes and the atmosphere which individuals should expect to experience there. Potential tourists can easily imagine the tall buildings and the hectic atmosphere on Times Square, or the romantic mood on the Eiffel Tower, even if they have never actually visited these places. Having such strong image associations in potential travellers' mind makes these three destinations some of the most attractive places to visit and they are a part of every traveller's bucket list. This showcases the importance of a tourist destination to build a strong image and, based on its characteristics, branding and marketing strategies in order to attract and retain more visitors.

People's lifestyles have changed drastically over the past few decades, mainly because of the increased disposable incomes, the globalization, and the never-ending technological advancement. One of the results of these factors was the growth of the tourism and travel sector. The latter is one of the largest and fastest growing industries which registered a global economic contribution of over 7.6 trillion USD in 2016 (Statista, 2016). As the travel and tourism sector is constantly expanding, it is also becoming a bigger and more important part of the national GDP of many countries around the world. This makes it an increasingly integral part of the economy. As a result, many tourism organizations and institutions around the world have started to implement and invest in marketing and branding strategies in order to differentiate their destination offerings, position themselves in tourists' minds, and attract more visitors.

Destinations, just like products, are competing against each other as consumers often choose their next holiday vacation between places with similar attributes, such as climate, sports conditions, safety, etc. (Qu *et al*., 2011; Chiadmi *et al*., 2017). There are a number of factors which influence the final destination choice, but as the literature review will prove later in this master thesis, destination image is one of the most significant decision-making factors as it helps to differentiate a place in consumers' minds (Marchiori & Onder, 2017). Previous research has also proved that destination image is related to tourism satisfaction and post-visit

intentions to revisit or/and recommend, which makes it a great tool to predict tourist behaviour and create meaningful and tailored offerings.

The destinations which normally get attention in academic research are mostly places where over-tourism is already happening and marketing strategies are already put in practice. There are also a number of other destinations which are emerging as new frontiers of tourism and are yet to be developed as tourism products. Sofia, Bulgaria, is one of these cities where the number of foreign visitors is constantly growing, but a defined vision and strategy for tourism have not yet been implemented. Moreover, the city was ranked by Mastercard's Global Destinaton Cities Index study (2017) as the third fastest growing European destination city in terms of international overnight visitors from 2009 to 2016.These statistics only prove that now is the best time for tourism institutions in Sofia to set up a better structure for tourism. The capital of Bulgaria has seen an unprecedented number of tourists over the last years but it has not yet been able to successfully create an identity or market strategy to position itself as a unique tourist destination in the global and increasingly competitive market. This master thesis will be focused on studying destination image in the context of Sofia.

The following thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter I serves as an introduction of the topic, purpose of the study, and research questions. Chapter II gives a walk-through of previous research on several topics related to destination image, including conceptualization, formation process, relationship with tourism satisfaction, intention to recommend, and post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products. Moreover, it gives some insight about the previous studies related to the tourism situation in Bulgaria and Sofia. Chapter III gives a summary of the conceptual model derived from the literature review. Chapter IV explains the methodology which was undertaken in order to conduct the study. Results and main findings are presented in Chapter V. Last but not least, Chapter VI is based on the conclusions and discussion of the main results, and Chapter VII discusses the limitations of the study and suggests ideas for further research.

1.2. Research problem and main objectives

A growing number of studies about the destination image of different countries, cities, and places, as well as in different tourism contexts have been published over the last years. However, it has been noted, that the tourism situation in Sofia, Bulgaria, has not been the subject

of a lot of previous research, and there is none when it comes to destination image. Therefore, the purpose of this master thesis is to assess Sofia's destination image from the perspective of international tourists.

Moreover, in the literature, destination image is normally studied as a multi-dimensional construct of at least two components – cognitive and affective. Previous research often overlooked a third important component – the unique destination image. The latter has been proven to have an even stronger influence on forming the overall image of a destination than the affective one (e.g. Qu *et al.*, 2011) and is important for the differentiation of the destination. There is only a small number of studies which examine the perceptions of the unique features of a destination, and even less which study how to measure them. One of the objectives of this thesis is to study the concept of unique image and propose a method for its measurement.

Drawing on the aforementioned points and previous research, the main research question can be summarized as: **What is the influence of Sofia's destination image on tourism satisfaction, intention to recommend, and post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products? Does unique image matter?**

The main contributions of this thesis can be summarized as it follows:

- Examine the affective, cognitive, unique, and overall destination images of Sofia as a tourism destination;
- Develop the literature of the unique destination image by studying the perceptions of unique features of Sofia and proposing a method to extract measures based on text mining of user-generated content;
- Study the post-visit intentions of foreign visitors towards Bulgarian products;
- Propose a conceptual model and analyse the relationships between (1) the different components of destination image on tourism satisfaction; (2) the different components of destination image on intention to recommend; (3) tourism satisfaction on intention to recommend; (4) the different components of destination image on post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products; (5) tourism satisfaction on post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products; and (6) intention to recommend on post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Destination Image

2.1.1. Destination Image – Definitions

Brand image has been extensively studied in the marketing literature and is perceived as one of the most important components of brand equity as it transmits the worth of the brand to the customers (Malik *et al*., 2012). According to the definition of Kotler (2001:273), an image is "the set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person holds regarding an object". Moreover, in his brand equity model, Aaker (1991) gives five arguments about the ways brand image contributes to creating value: it differentiates the product and its positioning; it provides reasons to buy; it helps the consumer process; it tends to develop positive customer affection towards the brand, and it serves as a base for brand extensions.

The aforementioned concept of an image has been applied and studied in the context of tourism since the 1970s (Stepchenkova & Shichkova, 2017). The research pioneers were Gunn (1972), whose study was based on the destination image formation process, and Hunt (1975), who proposed a way to measure destination image. Since then, it has been studied extensively and, as mentioned in De Nisco *et al.* (2015), the most popular topics in destination image research include: the conceptualization and measurement of destination image (e.g. Echtner & Ritchie, 1991,1993; Hunt, 1975; Gartner, 1986; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999), how destination image is affecting tourists' behaviour and destination choice (e.g. Pearce, 1982; Hosany *et al.*, 2007; Tasci & Gartner, 2007), destination image formation process (e.g. Gunn, 1972; Gartner, 1986; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Kim & Chen, 2016), and destination image management policies (e.g. Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). Still, a lot more has been written on the concept of country of origin image, whereas in the literature about destination image there are still some areas which need further investigation and clarification.

Even though it is a well-researched topic in the field of tourism marketing, scholars still have not reached a general agreement about the definition of destination image and its components, as this term has been used and defined differently in a number of contexts and disciplines (Echtner & Richie, 1991; Gallarza *et al.*, 2002; Tasci *et al.*, 2007). A substantial number of destination image studies have been conducted and different researchers have proposed various definitions for the same construct. Destination image has been widely defined as impressions

or perceptions of a place. Furthermore, Hunt (1975) proposed that image is a perception held by potential tourists about a specific destination, whereas Um and Crompton (1990) described it as a holistic construct. It is also often referred to as the mental picture which an individual has of a certain place (Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Kotler *et al.*, 1993). *Table 1* presents a summary of some of the definitions of destination image which were encountered in the academic literature.

Tasci *et al.* (2007) conducted an extensive review of the extant literature with the aim to propose a clarified definition of destination image which could be used by researchers. They proposed that destination image is "an interactive system of thoughts, opinions, feelings, visualizations, and intentions towards a destination" (Tasci *et al.*, 2007:200), therefore stressing on the complex nature of image and its cognitive, affective, and conative components. This is also the definition, which was accepted as the most complete and accurate for this master thesis.

Table 1 Definitions of Destination Image in Tourism Literature

Author/s	Definition
Crompton (1979:18)	"the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination."
Embacher & Buttle, (1989:3)	"Image is comprised of the ideas or conceptions held individually or collectively of the destination under investigation. Image may comprise both cognitive and evaluative components."
Echtner & Ritchie, (1991:40)	"The perceptions of individual destination attributes and the holistic impressions made by the destination. (…) consists of functional characteristics, concerning the more tangible aspects of the destination, and psychological characteristics, concerning the more intangible aspects."
Gartner, (1994, as cited in Kahle & Kim, 2006:120)	"Destination images are developed by three hierarchically interrelated components: cognitive, affective, and conative."
Parenteau (1995, as cited in Kahle & Kim, 2006:120)	"Is a favourable or unfavourable prejudice that the audience and distributors have of the product or destination"
Milman & Pizam, (1995:21)	"a sum total of the images of the individual elements or attributes that make up the tourism experience."
MacKay and Fesenmaier, (1997:538)	"a composite of various products (attractions) and attributes woven into a total impression"

Walmsley & Young, (1998:65)	"A common structure or schema of evaluations that can be used to differentiate between tourism destinations."
Tapachi & Waryszak, (2000:37)	"perceptions or impressions of a destination held by tourists with respect to the expected benefits of a destination"
Leisen, (2001:49)	"The mental construct developed by the consumer on the basis of a few selected impressions among the flood of total impressions. "
Sonmez & Sirakaya, (2002:185)	"a mental conception held in common by members of a group and symbolic of a basic attitude and orientation"
Ahmed *et al.*, *(*2006:59)	"defined as what tourist think or perceive about a state as a destination, its tourism resources, its tourist services, the hospitality of its host, its social and cultural norms, and its rules and regulations which influence their consumer behaviour"
Tasci et al., (2007:200)	"Destination image is an interactive system of thoughts, opinions, feelings, visualizations, and intentions towards a destination."
Alcañiz *et al.*, (2009:16)	"It consists of all that the destination evokes in the individual; any idea, belief, feeling, or attitude that tourists associate with a place"

As tourism is an intangible service, its products cannot be experienced by consumers prior to purchase. This makes image a particularly important variable for the success of a destination as a tourism product. The destination image is important to be investigated as it has been found to have an impact on destination choice, satisfaction, and post-purchase intentions (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Ramseook-Munhurrun *et al.*, 2015). The image which a tourist has before visiting a place is considered one of the key factors in tourists' decision-making process (Chiadmi *et al*., 2017). Furthermore, destinations which have stronger positive images are more likely to attract tourists, as well as to be revisited by them in the future (Kim & Lee, 2015).

2.1.2. Conceptualization and Components of Destination Image

Research about the conceptualization of destination image emerged in the early 1970s with the studies of Hunt (1971) and Gunn (1972). Even though a number of studies have been conducted afterwards, the construct of destination image is still a topic which researchers have not reached a consensus about (Gallarza et al., 2002; Tasci *et al.*, 2007). This is due to the complex, subjective, and multidimensional nature of destination image, and the fact that image is a

multidisciplinary concept applied to a number of fields, including tourism, marketing, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and etc. (Gallarza *et al.*, 2002).

Different scholars proposed a number of conceptual frameworks over the past decades. Generally, researchers agree that the image of a destination can be studied as an overall (global) impression (Gallarza *et al.*, 2002). Though, there is not so much agreement when it comes to the components involved in this global impression. Several authors claim that image has only cognitive components (Crompton, 1979; Chen & Phou, 2013). Another stream in the literature looks at image as a multidimensional construct of both cognitive and affective components (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Baloglu et al., 2014). Additionally, Gartner (1994) proposes that destination image consists of three hierarchically-related components: cognitive, affective, and conative. Echtner and Ritchie (1991) propose a slightly different framework based on three axes: attributive/holistic; functional/psychological; and common/unique components of image. This part of the literature review aims to explain in-depth the conceptual frameworks and components, which have been identified in the scholar research so far, in order to create a conceptual model which will be used to measure the destination image of Sofia.

2.1.2.1. Cognitive and affective components of destination image

The majority of the scholars conceptualized destination image as a multidimensional construct of at least two components: cognitive and affective (e.g. Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Hosany *et al*., 2007; Baloglu, *et al*., 2014; Lopes, 2011). The cognitive component is subject to the beliefs and knowledge which one holds about the attributes of a certain place. According to Tasci *et al.* (2007:199), cognition is "a mental response, interpreting, evaluating, and making division about stimuli in the environment". When it comes to image, cognitive evaluation is based on factual knowledge, personal beliefs, meanings, and memories. On the other hand, the affective component is subject to the emotions and feelings, which a person holds towards a particular place (Baloglu *et al*., 2014), and it can be either favourable, unfavourable, or neutral (Arslanova *et al*., 2017). Affect is expressed with positive or negative feelings with varying intensity. On one end of the extreme are emotions, such as love and anger, followed by feelings such as satisfaction and frustrations, and moods like boredom and relaxation. At the bottom of the extreme are evaluations such as liking and disliking (Peter & Olson, 1999, as cited in Tasci *et al.*, 2007).

In the literature, there are a number of studies examining the differences between the cognitive and the affective image components. According to Kim *et al.* (2009), the affective component is more volatile than the cognitive one as it is based on emotional situations. The authors also found out that cognitive image tends to last longer as it is subject to previously-formed knowledge. Moreover, some researchers (e.g. Baloglu, 1999; Baloglu *et al.*, 2014) found out that the influence of these components tends to differ between visitors and non-visitors. The authors suggest that the cognitive evaluation of an image is a more dominant factor among non-visitors, and the affective one becomes stronger once a tourist visits the place.

Moreover, the literature also suggests that the cognitive and the affective images together form the overall image of a destination (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Lopes, 2011; Baloglu *et al.*, 2014, Stylos *et al*., 2016). Previous research has proven the positive correlation between cognitive and affective images and overall image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). This overall image helps the tourist to narrow down his/her vacation options, and eventually makes a decision (Matos *et al.*, 2015).

According to Del Bosque & Martin (2008), most of the previous destination image studies concentrated on measuring only one of these dimensions – the cognitive or the affective, with a strong predominance of the cognitive (Chiadmi *et al*., 2017; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). The main reason for this is the fact that cognitive image is comparatively easier to observe and measure (Chen & Phou, 2013). There is a fewer number of studies which measure both of the components, therefore for this master thesis, destination image will be studied as a construct of both its cognitive and affective components. The following hypothesis can be suggested based on this literature review:

H1: Cognitive image will positively affect the visitor's overall image of a destination.
H2: Affective image will positively affect the visitor's overall image of a destination.

2.1.2.2. Conative component of destination image

In addition to the cognitive and affective components of destination image, there are some authors who included a third component in their conceptual models – a conative (behavioural) one (e.g. Gartner, 1994; Dann, 1996; Pike & Ryan, 2004; Tapachai & Waryszak, 2000; Tasci

et al., 2007; Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Stylos *et al.,* 2016; Basaran, 2016). While the cognitive evaluations are expressed by what a consumer knows about a destination, the affective by how he/she feels about it, the conative component is intentional and can be explained by how he/she will act upon this information (Tasci *et al.,* 2007). In previous studies, the conative component has been widely examined by the consumer's intention to choose a place for a holiday destination, as well as by his/her intention to revisit and recommend it after visitation (Bigné *et al.,* 2001; Gartner, 1994; Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Tasci *et al.,* 2007; Agapito *et al.,* 2013). In this sense, it has been often considered as analogous to actual behavioural intention (e.g. Gartner, 1994; Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Pike & Ryan, 2004; Qu *et al.,* 2011), and in some studies it has been disregarded completely (e.g. Del Bosque & Martín, 2008; Baloglu *et al.,* 2014).

In terms of the interrelationship between the three components, researchers have reached different conclusions. Gartner (1994), for instance, was the first to propose that the three components form a hierarchical causal relationship model with cognitive preceding the affective, and the affective preceding the conative. In opposition, there have been other scholars, who suggested that conation can be directly influenced by both the cognitive and the affective components (e.g. Bagozzi, 1992; Agapito *et al.*, 2013; Basaran, 2016). Furthermore, according to some authors, the combination of these three components forms the overall image (e.g. Beerli & Martín, 2004; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Agapito *et al.*, 2013; Stylos *et al.*, 2016). In contrast, Baloglu *et al.* (2014) suggested that it is actually the overall image, formed by the cognitive and the affective components that may lead to the formation of a conative image, which on its side will influence tourists' future behavioural intentions.

Due to the fact that the majority of the scholars have investigated the conative destination image as the actual behavioural intention, this master thesis will do the same. As the study will take place during and at the end the tourists' actual visit to Sofia, the conative image will be measured by their intention to recommend and spread positive word-of-mouth to friends and family, as well as in online platforms.

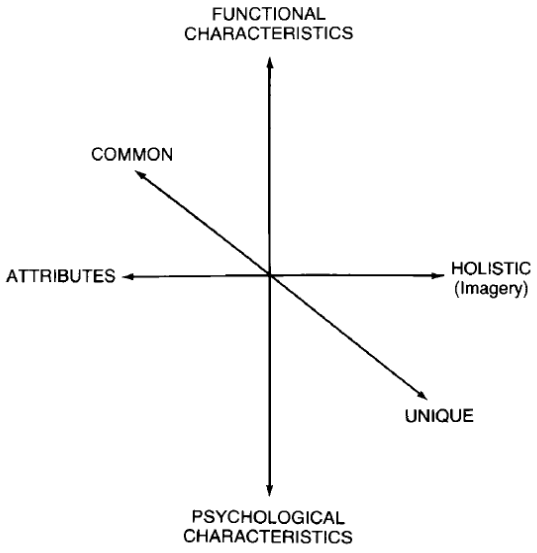
2.1.2.3. Three-dimensional model

Echtner & Ritchie (1993) proposed a slightly different approach for the conceptualization of destination image. The authors designed a three-dimensional framework (Figure 1), used not only for explaining, but also measuring destination image. The framework is based on three

continuums which destination image should be measured by: attribute/holistic, functional/psychological, and common/unique. The first axis is the attribute/holistic one. In it, the authors suggest that the destination image consists of the tourist's cognitive and affective impressions about individual attributes (such as climate, accommodation, etc.), as well as his/her holistic (or overall) impressions of the place.

The authors further propose that these components are formed by functional and psychological characteristics, which form the second axis of the model. Functional are those traits, which are tangible and observable (e.g. sceneries, attractions, etc.). Psychological are based on more abstract and intangible ones (e.g. hospitality and atmosphere) (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). This approach has been well-accepted by researchers, and modified versions of it have been used in papers trying to measure the destination image of a number of destinations in different contexts.

Figure 1 Echtner & Ritchie's framework of destination image



The last continuum which Echtner & Ritchie propose in their model (1991) is the common-unique one. Here the authors suggest that the destination image can also have common characteristics, as well as unique ones. In other words, on one extreme of the continuum, the destination image can consist of the perceptions about a group of both functional and psychological characteristics, which are typical for all destinations, and which are part of the images of all places. For example, prices, transportation infrastructure, accommodation, safety, hospitality, etc. But on the other extreme of the continuum, destination image also has unique features (functional characteristics) and/or special auras (psychological characteristics)

(Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). An example of the latter can be the Vatican, which is a destination with both unique features and unique aura.

2.1.2.4. Unique destination image

Contrary to the cognitive and the affective components, the unique image is not that broadly studied in the destination image literature. An example of a study which included unique image is the one by Qu *et al.* (2011) who created a conceptual model of overall destination image composed of cognitive, affective, and unique images. The authors found out that the unique attributes of a destination are critical to forming the overall image in consumers' minds, and that they are actually more important than the affective component. Therefore, a strong unique image is more likely to lead to a more favorable overall image of a destination.

As uniqueness is not universal and the unique features of one destination are completely different from all the others, it is impossible to create a scale which will work for all destinations. Most of the research which somehow studied the unique image included some type of text analysis. For instance, Echtner & Ritchie (1993) propose to ask respondents open-ended questions about which tourist attractions they found distinctive and unique to the destination. This approach was applied by Santana & Gosling (2017) who studied the unique image of Ilhéus, Brazil, by asking open-ended questions to tourism academicians and professionals. Furthermore, Qu *et al.* (2011) did an analysis of promotional brochures. In this thesis, the unique features of the city of Sofia will be measured by open-ended questions, as well as by identifying a list of unique features from a text. The latter will be derived from user-generated blog posts giving information about the travellers' experience in Sofia. The following hypothesis is proposed based on the literature review:

H3: Perceptions of unique features of a destination will positively affect the visitor's overall image of a destination.

In conclusion, for the purpose of this master thesis, the destination image of Sofia will be measured by its cognitive, affective, unique, and overall images. The conative image will be measured by the behavioural intention to recommend the city offline and online.

2.1.3. Destination Image Formation Process

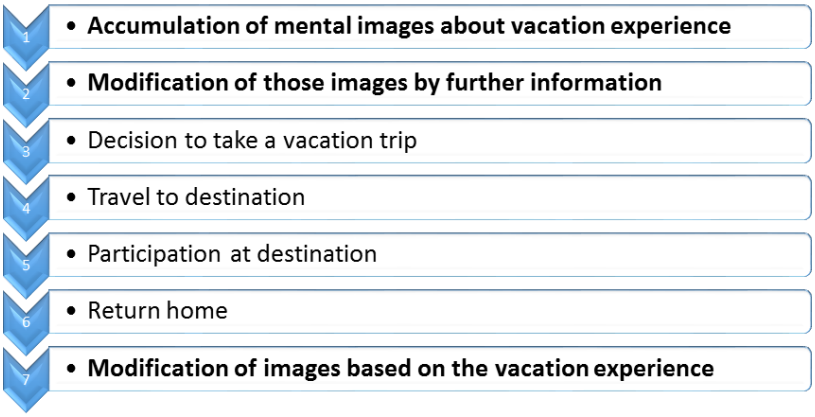
In order to get a better understanding of how to use destination image as a competitive advantage in tourism, it is important to explore how it is actually formed in consumers' minds. The process of destination image formation has been defined in the literature as "a construct of a mental representation of a destination on the basis of information cues delivered by the image formation agents" (Alhemoud & Armstrong, 1996; Gartner, 1994; Gunn, 1972; Bai & Lee, 2015; as cited in Tasci & Gartner, 2007:414). Moreover, Gartner (1994:197) described the image formation process as "a continuum of separate agents that act independently or in some combination to form destination image unique to the individual", therefore highlighting the fact that the image of a destination tends to form differently between different people due to the fact that they are exposed to various information sources or a set of them. Finally, Kim & Chen (2016:155) defined destination image processes as "continuous mental progressions in which diverse sources of information converge", stressing on the continuity of the destination image formation as it tends to alter when new and different information arise.

There have been a number of researchers who have created frameworks for the destination image formation process (e.g. Gunn, 1972; Phelps, 1986; Gartner, 1994; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Kim & Chen, 2016). The pioneer was Gunn (1972), who proposed that there are two levels of image formation based on the different information sources: organic and induced. According to the author, organic images are formed as a result of exposure to non-commercial and unbiased sources of information in the natural course of life, such as actual visitation of the place, news, and word-of-mouth. The induced image, on the other hand, is formed from the marketing and advertising activities of the tourism industry. Gunn (1972) further argued that once the destination has been visited, the image of it changes to a modified-induced, which results from the actual experience. The latter is also considered more realistic and complex (De Nisco *et al.*, 2015). Gunn (1988) further proposed a seven-phase model (Figure 2) of the image formation process. He identified that image formation happens in phase 1 (organic image), phase 2 (induced image based on secondary information), and phase 7 (modified-induced image based on actual experience).

Gunn's research was further elaborated by Gartner (1994), who, in addition to the organic and induced image formation agents, also added the autonomous ones, which include news articles,

educational materials, movies, and popular culture. Autonomous sources are considered particularly influential as they can reach mass audiences and are able to transmit knowledge about the destination. Most of the studies about the impact of autonomous destination image agents are focused on the negative impact of news reporting on political tensions, riots, terrorism, natural cataclysms, etc. (Bai & Lee, 2015).

Figure 2 Gunn's Image Formation Model. Source: Gunn (1988)

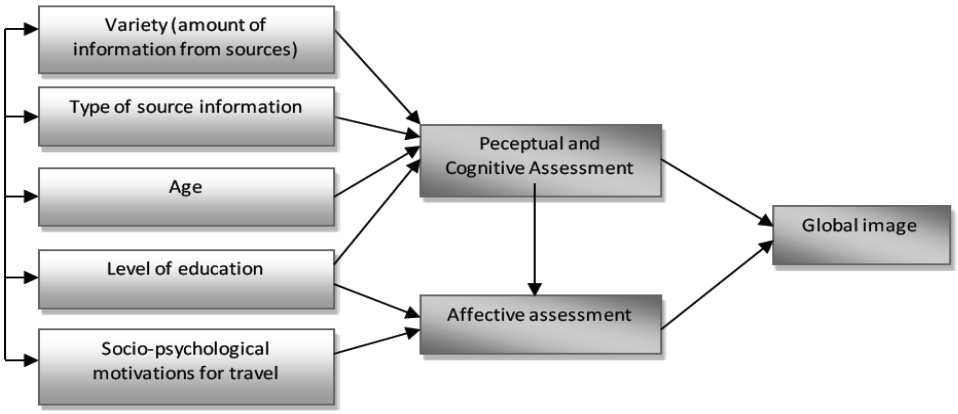


Gartner (1994) further proposed a detailed typology of eight image formation agents based on their credibility, influence, and the level of control by the destination and suppliers: (1) overt induced I (traditional forms of advertising); (2) overt induced II (tour operators, wholesalers, destination area promoters, etc.); (3) covert induced I (using a recognizable spokesperson); (4) covert induced II (sponsored sources of information, such as articles, reports, or stories by travel writers); (5) autonomous (unbiased sources of information, such as news and popular culture); (6) unsolicited organic (word-of-mouth when information is not requested); (7) solicited organic (word-of-mouth when information is requested); and (8) organic (based on previous travel experience in the destination). According to the author (1994), the agents, which do not have a commercial interest in the destination are considered more credible (Gartner, 1994).

Baloglu & McCleary (1999) conceptualized that there are two main forces, which influence the destination image formation: stimulus and personal factors. According to the authors (1999), stimulus factors are those, which come from external sources or previous experience, whereas personal factors are the socio-demographic (age, education, marital status, etc.) and psychological (values, motivations, and personality) characteristics of an individual. Moreover, they tested a path model (*Figure 3*) explaining how destination image is formed when there hasn't been an actual visitation of the destination by the tourists. Their findings showed that variety of information sources, type of information, age, and education influence the

perceptions of destination (the cognitive evaluation). These perceptions, together with tourists' socio-psychological motivations, form feelings towards destinations (the affective evaluation). Moreover, the study also showed that different types of information sources have a different effect on the cognitive evaluations. For instance, word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and relatives were the source which ranked as the most important. This was also confirmed by Jalilvand (2017) who investigated the influence of word-of-mouth and mass media on destination image. The findings of her study showed that, even though both are positively influential, word-of-mouth is more significant.

Figure 3 PATH model of the determinants of the destination image
Source: (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999)



When it comes to more recent destination image formation models, Kim & Chen (2016) conducted a study based on the concept of 'schema', which is "a set of accumulated knowledge that forms tourism destination images" (Kim & Chen, 2016:157). The authors conceptualized two schema-related models, which showcase the image formation process before, during, and after the visitation of the destination. In their model of before-the-trip destination image process, they distinguished five Prime Tourist Destination Schemas (PTDS) which helps to form the destination image: place, mega-event, crisis, self, and emotional. In brief, place schemas are the common impressions of a destination, such as physical and human characteristics like natural environment, climate, social environment, architecture, history, etc. Mega-events are major and short-term events, such as the Olympic Games, World Cup, world fairs, etc. Crisis schemas are based on unfortunate events (e.g. terrorist attacks, natural cataclysms, political uncertainty, etc.), which took place in this particular destination, and which might affect negatively its destination image. An example of this is Turkey, where tourism has been suffering over the past few years due to the increased amount of news reporting about terrorist attacks, violence, and political riots. According to Sonmez (1998),

terrorism can easily vilify the image a destination as unsafe. Self-schemas are based on the self-concept of individuals. They can be collective (based on one's belonging to a social group) or individual (based on the characteristics which differentiate the individual from the others). The emotional schemas are linked with all of the above and evoke emotional experiences. All of these schemas contribute to one's collective memory, and after a schema-driven process, they create associations and stereotypes in consumers' minds (Kim & Chen, 2016).

Furthermore, it is important to note that most of the mentioned models were created before the era of Web 2.0, which made it possible for previously passive Internet consumers to now be active and generate content, write reviews, communicate, and engage online. With the globalization and technological advancement, an increasing number of tourists are using online platforms to share and search for information prior to making a decision about their trips. This has led to the emergence of the so-called electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which is defined as "all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers" (Goldsmith *et al.*, 2008:461). In terms of tourism, websites like TripAdvisor, FourSquare, Zomato, Yelp, etc. offer a platform where tourists can have an easy access to other's opinions and reviews of hotels, restaurants, and tourist attractions, as well as they can share their recommendations or complaints. Moreover, potential tourists are exposed to a lot of information about destinations on social media networks (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.), whether it is through images, multimedia, or text, making it an influential source for the formation of the image of a particular destination.

Over the last few years, there have been a number of researchers, who explored the impact of web platforms on the destination image formation process. For example, Riera *et al.* (2015) tested a variety of websites with both suppliers- and user-generated content (UGC). The results of their findings showed that search engines and sources that feature UGC are considered particularly important information sources. Their findings further showed that UGC is highly valued by tourists who publish travel reviews themselves. Furthermore, UGC is considered to be a more reliable source of information than content published by tourism or marketing officials (Munar, 2011). Another stream of the literature is focused on the negative impact of eWOM on destination image due to the fact that negative content spreads fast and can be particularly damaging for the reputation of the destination (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Chen *et al.*, 2016).

Finally, there have been a number of researchers who studied the image modifications as a result of an actual destination experience, compared to the pre-visit expectations of tourists (Pearce, 1982; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Kim & Chen, 2015; De Nisco *et al.,* 2015). An example of such a study was done by Pearce (1982), who found that tourists changed some of their image perceptions after visiting the destination. Moreover, several authors suggest that the image formed as a result of actual visitation is more complex due to the fact that it goes beyond stereotyping and brings a more realistic comprehension of the destination (De Nisco *et al.*, 2015).

2.2. Tourism Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction has been widely studied in both marketing and tourism research. It is generally considered a post-purchase construct based on the extent to which a customer liked or disliked a service or product after experiencing it (Sukiman *et al.,* 2016), and the extent to which the product or service met the customer's expectations about it (Oliver, 1980). Previous literature suggests that customer satisfaction is one of the essential pillars of marketing as it influences customer loyalty, which in due course contributes to improving the financial performance of the company or the service provider (Dmitrovíc *et al.*, 2009). In terms of tourism, satisfaction is an important factor which has a significant influence on the competitive success of a destination as previous research has proven that it affects destination choice, revisit intentions, and intention to recommend (Aliman *et al.*, 2016).

Even though customer satisfaction has received a lot of attention from scholars in the past decades, there are still some major debates regarding its conceptualization, definitions, and measurements. A number of models, theories, and paradigms have been proposed and used, including the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Paradigm (Oliver, 1980), Norm Theory, Perceived Performance-Only (Cronin & Taylor, 1992), Equity (Oliver & Swan, 1989), etc. The following chapter aims to give an overview of the most relevant academic research to date and to clarify some of the issues around the construct of tourist satisfaction. Moreover, it goes further to explore the relationship of tourism satisfaction with destination image, which will help the researchers to draw hypothesis and create the conceptual model which will be tested in this thesis.

2.2.1. Understanding Satisfaction

In order to examine the construct of satisfaction, it is important to see how it has been defined in the literature and what are the main approaches and theories applied. A review of the past research reveals that scholars have not reached a universal agreement about the definition of the concept. There is generally a debate whether satisfaction is an outcome (e.g. Churchill & Surprenant, 1982; Silva & Alwi, 2008) or a process (e.g. Pizam & Ellis, 1999). Moreover, another question regarding the definition of satisfaction is whether it is a cognitive judgment (e.g. Chadee & Mattsson, 1996), an affective state (e.g. Westbrook, 1980), or a combination of both (e.g. Oliver, 1993; Del Bosque & Martín, 2008; Martínez Caro & Martínez García, 2007; Bigné *et al.*, 2005; Chen & Phou, 2013). *Table 2* showcases some of the definitions which were encountered in the customer and tourism satisfaction literature:

Table 2 Definitions of consumer satisfaction

Author/s	Definition
Howard & Sheth (1969:145)	"the buyers' cognitive state of being adequately or inadequately rewarded for the sacrifices he has undergone"
Oliver (1981:27)	"Evaluation of the surprise inherent in a product acquisition and/or consumption experience. In essence, the summary psychological state resulting from the emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectations is couples with the consumer's prior feelings about the consumption experience"
MacKay and Crompton (1990:48)	"psychological outcome which emerges from experiencing the service"
Westbrook & Oliver (1991:84)	"A post choice evaluative judgment concerning a specific purchase selection".
Halstead *et al.* (1994:122)	"a transaction-specific affective response resulting from the customer's comparison of product performance to some pre purchase standard"
Oliver (1997:13)	"a judgment that a product, or service feature, or the product or service itself, provides a pleasurable level of consumption–related fulfilment, including levels of under or over fulfilment"
Chen & Tsai (2007:1116)	"the extent of overall pleasure or contentment felt by the visitor, resulting from the ability of the trip experience to fulfil the visitor's desire, expectations and needs in relation to the trip"
Del Bosque & Martin (2008:553)	"an individual's cognitive-affective state derived from a tourism experience"
Chen & Phou (2013: 271)	"tourists' emotional reaction to the extent to which a specific destination is able to meet their travel needs and expectations"

Aliman *et al.* (2016: 174)	"the extent of the tourist's fulfilment pleasure which occurred from the trip experience about a product or service feature that fulfils the tourist's desire, expectations and wants in association with the trip."

Generally, it can be said that the customer satisfaction research can be divided into two schools of thought: cognitive and affective (Agyeiwaah *et al.*, 2016). Traditionally, satisfaction was studied as a cognitive process of comparing the customer's previous expectations with his/her perceived experience with a product or service. This approach adopts the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Paradigm (EDP), which was developed by Oliver (1980), and which has become the most widely applied method of consumer satisfaction evaluation. In this model, Oliver (1980:418-419) suggests that "consumers are posited to form pre-consumption expectancies, observe product (attribute) performance, compare performance with expectations, form disconfirmation perceptions, combine these perceptions with expectation levels, and form satisfaction judgments". In the aforementioned process, the level of satisfaction is a result of the comparison between the expectations that a customer had prior to consumption/purchase and the perceived performance afterwards. Generally, there are three possible outcomes: confirmation occurs when the perceived performance met expectations; positive disconfirmation occurs when the performance was superior in comparison with the customer's initial expectations; and negative disconfirmation is a result of the performance being inferior to the customer's expectations.

The Expectancy-Disconfirmation Paradigm, even though widely used and accepted, received some criticism. The latter is mostly based on the fact that it assumes that consumers' expectations are constant when they can be modified not only after the experience but also before it (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000). For instance, potential tourists might be exposed to information about a destination via social media posts and reviews, word-of-mouth, news, advertising, or other promotional methods prior to their trip, which can have an influence on their expectations about it. Several authors (e.g. Pizam *et al.*, 1978; Huang, 2010; Taplin, 2012) have used an alternative method called the Performance-only model, which is based on the theory that satisfaction is a result solely of the actual quality of performance or experience. Moreover, Taplin (2012) further elaborated this theory by adding an element of relative importance, which is basically the importance which an individual ascribes to a destination attribute related to his/her overall evaluation of all attributes. This is an interesting approach to measure satisfaction as it can help tourism providers to develop better offers as different

destination attributes might be of different importance to the various market segments. For instance, the experience at the accommodation might be more important for middle age tourists in comparison with backpackers who may put a higher importance on nature and outdoors activities.

As customer satisfaction literature evolved, more and more scholars started to investigate customer satisfaction not only with the aforementioned cognitive approach, but also from a more affective perspective (Del Bosque & Martín, 2008; Oliver, 1993; Martínez Caro & Martínez García, 2007; Chen & Phou, 2013). Scholars started to include different emotional variables into the conceptualization of satisfaction, particularly in the service and tourism research, due to the fact that these industries have an experimental nature and the feelings of the consumers are a big part of their experience (Bigné *et al.*, 2005; Martinez Caro & Martinez). One of these scholars was Oliver (1993) who added to his cognitive paradigm an affective component, which suggests that satisfaction is also influenced by negative and positive emotions. According to this affective approach, satisfaction is defined as the consumer's fulfilment response – whether or not the product/service was able to provide the desired level of pleasure (Oliver, 1993). The latter, together with arousal, form the two dimensions of emotions (Bigné *et al.*, 2005), where arousal is the extent to which a person feels activated or stimulated (Russel & Pratt, 1980) and pleasure is the degree to which a person feels good, joyful, or happy (Bigné *et al.*, 2005).

In recent years, the approach which has been mostly adopted is a combination of both – the cognitive-affective model – which suggests that satisfaction is influenced by both the cognitive judgments of the consumers, as well as their emotional response from the experience (e.g. Oliver, 1993; Bigné *et al.*, 2005; Martínez Caro & Martínez García, 2007; Del Bosque & Martín, 2008; Chen & Phou, 2013). In this view, the mental processes of assessing the experience are done by the cognitive system, whereas emotions are related to the consumer's feelings towards the service (Del Bosque & Martín, 2008).

Before moving forward, the researchers would like to look at two alternative theories which also received acceptance in the literature. The first one is the Equity theory, which was applied in the context of customer satisfaction by Oliver and Swan (1989). It is based on the statement that a customer's rewards in an exchange should be proportional to his investments, such as time, costs, or efforts, and value received (Oliver & Swan, 1989). Furthermore, the second one

is the normative theory, which suggests that there is a "norm" set as a reference point against which the level of satisfaction is measured upon (Armario, 2008). In the case of tourism, the norm is usually represented by past travel experiences or other alternatives, to which the tourist is comparing his current experience with a destination or service (Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

Another important point to mention when clarifying the definition of customer satisfaction is that there is a difference between attribute-specific and overall satisfaction (Bigné *et al.*, 2002). Attribute-specific satisfaction is based on the evaluation of each of the attributes of the product/service separately. Overall satisfaction, on the other hand, is a broader concept, which includes not only the sum of the satisfaction levels of each of the attributes but also a more holistic evaluation of the experience (Fornell, 1992). Overall satisfaction is based on the experience as a whole (Spreng *et al.,* 1996), therefore, it also includes the consumer's emotions which might not be directly influenced by the tourism product.

2.2.2. Relationship between destination image and tourism satisfaction

Tourism satisfaction is one of the variables which has been extensively studied in the literature in relation to destination image. The positive relationship between the two constructs is well established in past studies (e. g. Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Aliman *et al.*, 2016; Tsai, 2015, etc.).

One stream in previous research is dedicated to examining the role of the predetermined destination image in the formation of expectations prior to the trip, which, as explained in the chapter above, are later on used to evaluate satisfaction by comparing them with the actual experience. According to Chen & Phou (2013), tourists depend on their previous knowledge about a destination in order to be able to evaluate whether it will be able to satisfy their needs. Several studies proved that image is used as an expectation-setter (Del Bosque *et al.*, 2006), and that the more positive the predetermined image of a destination, the higher the tourist expectations about it (Del Bosque & Martín, 2008). Furthermore, Chen & Tsai (2007) suggest that a positive destination image increases the likelihood that the traveller will make a positive evaluation of the actual experience, therefore he or she will be satisfied with it. According to Gartner & Tasci (2007), if the experience at the destination lives up to the pre-trip expectations of the tourist, he or she will experience satisfaction.

Another stream is dedicated to proving the positive influence of destination image on tourist satisfaction (e.g. Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Cheng *et al.*, 2016, Ramseook-Munhurrun *et al.*, 2016; Chi & Qu, 2008; Loureiro & Gonzalez, 2008; Aliman *et al.*, 2016). A study performed by Bigné *et al.* (2001) reports that destination image directly influences perceived quality and satisfaction. Similarly, Ramseook-Munhurrun *et al.* (2015) showed that destination image is a direct determinant of satisfaction, and Aliman *et al.* (2016) proved that the higher the destination image which tourists hold, the higher the satisfaction levels. The study of Cheng *et al.* (2016) further proved that both the cognitive and the affective components of destination image influence satisfaction. Moreover, destination image directly influences attribute-based satisfaction, and destination image and attribute satisfaction are both direct antecedents of overall satisfaction (Chi & Qu, 2008).

Having the aforementioned research in mind, the following hypotheses are suggested:

H4: Cognitive destination image and tourist satisfaction are positively related.
H5: Affective destination image and tourist satisfaction are positively related.
H6: Unique destination image and tourist satisfaction are positively related.

2.3. Post-Trip Behavioural Intentions

There are several variables which are usually used to measure post-trip behavioural intentions in the tourism literature but the most common ones are intention to return and willingness to recommend (Chi, 2012; Moore & Taplin, 2015). According to Alcañiz *et al.* (2009), tourists usually want to discover new places and cultures even when they are highly satisfied with the previous trip to a destination. This was further supported by Ekinci & Hosany (2006) and Kozak & Rimmington (2000), who suggest that intention to return is not important for tourism destinations due to the fact that tourists seek variety. Therefore, in this master thesis, one of the variables which will be used to measure behavioural intentions is the tourists' intention to recommend the destination after the visit. The intention to recommend will be further divided into traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). This part of the thesis aims to look at previous literature about the concept of WOM, the differences between traditional WOM and eWOM, the motivation to disseminate them, and the relationship between destination image, tourism satisfaction, and intention to recommend.

2.3.1. Word-of-Mouth (WOM)

When it comes to the definition of word-of-mouth communications (WOM), there has been an evolution over the years. When marketing research about the topic started in the 1960s, the definition was limited to "an oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator, whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, product, or service" (Arndt, 1967, as cited in Confente, 2014:614), stressing on the fact that communication had to either face-to-face or over the phone. Later on, the definition was transformed to include all types of informal interpersonal communication directed at consumers about "the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services or their sellers" (Westbrook, 1987:261). In more recent research, the definition includes not only communications from people that the consumers know, but also sources from online platforms and other influencers which are not related to the brand or the sellers. In addition, there are three possible valences of WOM: positive, neutral, and negative. Positive WOM involves "pleasant, vivid, or novel experiences, recommendation to others, and even conspicuous display", whereas negative includes "product denigration, relating unpleasant experiences, rumor, and private complaint" (Anderson, 1998:6).

Intention to recommend has been studied extensively in the marketing and tourism literature. Confente (2014) did a critical review of 46 WOM studies conducted between 1987 and 2013. She found out is that the majority of the studies on the concept (30 from the 46 articles) were based on empirical research. Some of the topics of these articles were based on the influence of WOM on travel decisions (e.g. Murphy *et al.*, 2007; Leach *et al.*, 2008), online WOM and the features of online reviews (e.g. Stringam & Gerdes, 2010; Racherla *et al.*, 2013; Park & Allen, 2013), the eWOM influence on travel decisions (e.g. Patterson, 2007), and the motivations of consumers to search for WOM (e.g. Kim *et al.*, 2011).

As it was already mentioned earlier in this thesis, word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and family are one of the most important destination image formation agents (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) and they have a bigger impact on destination image than mass media communication (Jalilvand, 2017). Moreover, recommendations coming from satisfied customers are a very effective way to attract new ones without further costs and can contribute to the overall positive reputation of a company or a destination (Fornell, 1992). In tourism, a

research done by Philips *et al.* (2013) further demonstrates that positive WOM does not only contribute to creating a positive image of a destination, but it also increases the awareness about it among potential tourists who are not familiar with it. In the same logic, negative WOM can have the opposite effect, as consumers who are dissatisfied with a tourism experience can spread unflattering information about their experience (Goldsmith *et al.,* 2008).

Additionally, WOM is one of the most important sources when consumers are considering to buy a product or service with some risk involved as they find recommendations from friends and family to be more trustworthy (Qu *et al.,* 2011). Moreover, this type of information can help them to reduce perceived risk and to formulate a better decision in order to avoid regretful purchases (Bristor, 1990). This is particularly true in the context of tourism, as it is an industry based on services and experiences which are both difficult to evaluate prior to consumption (Zeithaml *et al.,* 1996).

As word-of-mouth is such an important source of information, it is curious to see what the research so far suggests about the motivations of consumers to share it. One of the studies which is often being referenced is the one by Dichter (1996) who proposes that there are four different categories of motivations for WOM communication. The first category is product-involvement, which refers to a situation when the consumer has strong feelings or attachment towards a product/service and feels the need to talk about it. The second motivation is self-involvement, which indicates that the consumer can be motivated by the desire to get recognition from others by using the product/service as a mean to accomplish this. The third motivation is the other-involvement, which occurs when the consumers want to help others by sharing their experience. The fourth and last motivation outlined by Dichter (1996) is message-involvement, which occurs when consumers share unique and attractive advertisement or marketing messages. Another study by Sundram *et al.* (1998) suggests that the motivation of consumers to engage in positive WOM is altruism, self-enhancement, and seeking opinions, whereas altruism, vengeance, and reduction of anger, anxiety, and sadness can result in negative WOM.

2.3.2. Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

Technology has advanced over the past few decades and it has changed drastically the way people live, purchase, communicate, travel, learn, and etc. Human beings are not only exposed to a constant and unlimited amount of information, but they can also share and create user-

generated content (UGC). As mentioned earlier, the latter was made possible because of the Web 2.0, which allowed users to interact and collaborate with each other, share opinions, experiences, and be an active part of the information flow online, in contrast to the first generation of Web 1.0 websites where people were limited to being passive observers of content. The emergence of social media networks, blogs, websites, recommendation sites, and virtual communities made it possible for people to share and read each others' opinions about different products, services, and experiences, which led to the emergence of the concept of eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth).

The aforementioned is also valid for the tourism industry, where websites, such as TripAdvisor, Zomato, and FourSquare offer a platform for consumers to share their experiences and perceptions about destinations, hotels, restaurants, tours, etc. Positive reviews online work as free advertising for destinations and tourism providers, however negative comments online can have the opposite effect and damage the image and reputation of the company/destination (Chen & Law, 2016). One of the main challenges for companies and tourism destinations today is that they often do not have any control over what is being written online. As negative eWOM can have a very damaging effect on the destination/tourism provider, it is important for management to implement a strategy in order to avoid it or react to it appropriately.

In academic research, eWOM is a relatively new area, which has been gaining popularity over the last decade. Chen & Law (2016) conducted a literature review of 43 eWOM studies in hospitality and tourism management from 2008-2014. Their findings showed that research was generally related to three topics: the nature and characteristics of eWOM, antecedents of eWOM, and its impact.

A big part of the publications related to the nature and characteristics of eWOM is dedicated to the way it differs from the traditional WOM. Tham *et al.* (2013), for instance, outlined five distinctive dimensions: (1) source-receiver relationships; (2) channel variety and presentation of contents; (3) opportunities for information solicitation; (4) message retention capabilities; and (5) motivations for disclosing information. First, in conventional WOM sources usually know each other, and consumers can have a judgment of their expertise and ability to provide information, whereas in electronic WOM the receiver often does not know who the source is and what is his/her purpose for sharing the information. Secondly, traditional WOM can be

done face-to-face or over the phone, whereas in eWOM the connection is mediated through technology, and there is a bigger variety of platforms. The third difference is that of information solicitation. In WOM, the information is solicited from familiar sources for a specific purpose and is perceived as more credible than unsolicited information, because people normally tend to ask information from sources who they perceive to have some extent of expertise on the subject (Gartner, 1993). The fourth distinctive dimension is message retention capabilities. Traditional WOM depends on the ability of the receiver to recall the information, whereas online reviews and comments are stored for much longer and can be accessed at any time. Finally, the fifth dimension, which Tham *et al.* (2013) outlined, is the motivation of the message creators. In the case of traditional WOM is it to provide assistance in making informed travel choice, while the motivation factors to disseminate eWOM include helping others and socializing in a virtual community. From these differences, it can be concluded that WOM has more credibility than eWOM, although the latter has greater exposure and accessibility. In this way, online platforms have more potential to enhance the visibility of the destination.

Another point mentioned in the literature is dedicated to the power of negative eWOM, which is proven to be stronger than that of the positive eWOM (Chen & Law, 2016). According to Sparks & Browning (2010), negative reviews and comments often use descriptive language that results in higher message retention by readers Additionally, freedom of speech in the form of negative comments can be misused to satisfy personal needs (Chen & Law, 2016) in a way that it can impact negatively the image of a destination or a company.

Furthermore, researchers examine the antecedents of eWOM and the factors which influence people to disseminate information online. These antecedents include the profile of eWOM creators, product/service attributes, and the motivations to use eWOM (Chen & Law, 2016). Jalilvand *et al.* (2012) proved that socio-demographic characteristics have a significant impact on eWOM usage. Moreover, Rong *et al.* (2012) supported that by proving that age, education level, income level, level of travel experience, and certain travel motivations are all differentiating factors. Their findings revealed that younger travelers search for information and share their travel experiences online. People with higher education and income are more likely to browse travel websites and share their travel experiences online. Moreover, women tend to spend more time browsing travel websites and are more willing to share their experience online than men. When it comes to the motivation to participate in eWOM dissemination, Bronner & De Hoog (2011) outlined eight general categories: (1) personal, (2) social benefits, (3) social

concerns, (4) functional, (5) quality assurance, (6) economic incentives, (7) entertainment, and (8) helping the company.

The last stream in the eWOM literature studies the impact of eWOM. Jalilvand *et al.* (2013), for instance, found that eWOM positively affects the attitude and travel intention of travellers towards a destination. Mauri & Minazzi (2013) propose that eWOM is correlated with the service expectations which customers form and their purchase intentions. Furthermore, previous research indicates that tourists look for reviews not only during the pre-purchase phase of the trip, but also during their actual stay (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012). In the same logic, Hudson & Thal (2013) presented an updated model of the consumer decision journey based on four stages: consider, evaluate, buy, and enjoy, advocate, and bond. The authors suggest that, in the world today, social media plays a significant role in the evaluation and advocate stages.

2.3.3. Relationship between Destination Image, Tourism Satisfaction, and Intention to Recommend

The literature suggests that both destination image and satisfaction are important antecedents of intention to recommend (Bigné et al., 2002; De Nisco *et al.,* 2015). Intention to recommend is one of the most important behavioural outcomes triggered by destination image (e.g. Baloglu *et al.* 2014; Bigné *et al.,* 2001; Qu *et al.,* 2011; Chen & Tsai, 2007). A study done by Baloglu *et al.* (2014) proved that cognitive, affective, and overall destination images are all predictors of intention to recommend for first-time visitors, whereas repeat visitors do not rely on cognitive destination image while recommending it.

Tourism literature has also demonstrated that tourists with higher levels of satisfaction are more willing to spread positive WOM (e.g. Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Chi & Qu, 2008). This was also shown in the study of Philips *et al.* (2013), which indicates that both attribute-based and overall satisfaction are predictors of positive WOM. Moreover, Ozturk & Gogtas (2016) researched how the satisfaction of cruise visitors with a destination can influence their intention to recommend it to people in their social and professional network. Their study proved that satisfaction with a destination has a positive influence on the word-of-mouth recommendations intentions of the tourists.

There is also a number of studies which examine the relationship between all three variables in conceptual models. Chen & Tsai (2007), for instance, proved that destination image and satisfaction are both direct antecedents of post-visit intentions, such as intention to recommend. Chen & Phou (2013) further suggest that destination image has a positive effect on destination satisfaction, which in turn, directly and indirectly, influences intention to recommend. Moreover, Bigné *et al.* (2001) empirically proved that destination image is a direct antecedent of willingness to recommend the destination, as well as that satisfaction determines the intention to recommend. Cheng *et al.* (2016) found that there is a direct influence of affective image and satisfaction on loyalty. The findings of the authors showed no direct impact of cognitive image on tourist loyalty, though it has an indirect influence through affective image and satisfaction.

Based on the aforementioned summary of previous literature about the relationship between the different components of destination image, tourism satisfaction, and intention to recommend, the following hypothesis are proposed:

H7: Cognitive destination image and intention to recommend are positively related.
H8: Affective destination image and intention to recommend are positively related.
H9: Unique destination image and intention to recommend are positively related.
H10: Tourism satisfaction and intention to recommend are positively related.

2.4. Post-visit intentions towards products made in the sojourn country

Whether it is eating pizza in Rome, staying in a robot hotel in Tokyo, or strolling through local stands selling cork goods in Lisbon, coming into contact with the local products is an essential part of the travelling experience to a foreign destination. Previous research has shown that when travelling to a foreign country, individuals tend to increase the information search for local products (Hallberg, 2005). As one of the objectives of this thesis is to study the post-visit intentions of foreign tourists towards Bulgarian products, this part of the literature review will give an overview of the previous research on this topic.

In general, there are two major concepts which have been studied in regard to intention to buy products: country-of-origin image (COI) and tourism destination image (TDI) (e.g. Lee & Lockshin, 2012, Papadopoulos & Heslop, 1986; Hallberg, 2005; Elliot *et al.*, 2011, etc.). Even though they have emerged as separate constructs, both are focused on studying how the image

of a specific country/destination could impact the consumers' intention to buy and/or recommend the local products (Lee & Lockshin, 2012). Another variable which was also studied in fewer of the studies is the influence of tourism satisfaction on intention towards products made in the country of travel (e.g. De Nisco *et al.,* 2015).

In terms of country-of-origin image, previous studies have demonstrated that customers tend to have a more favourable opinion about products made in countries with positive images (Chattalas *et al.,* 2008, as cited in Lee & Lockshin, 2012). An interesting observation was made in a study by Bilkey & Nes (1982) who found that the image of the country alone is an influential factor for consumers to evaluate the quality of products which they have never tried or purchased before. In tourism, one of the first studies was done by Papadopoulos & Heslop (1986). They studied how the opinion of Canadians about another country's products varies between those who have visited the country and those who have not. The authors found a significant difference in the opinions of the two groups, proving that visiting a destination changes how the local products are perceived. This was further confirmed by Hallberg (2005) who found that travel experiences can cause changes in the travellers' intentions towards products associated with the visited country.

Both the COI and TDI literature studied the influence of the cognitive and affective components on the tourists' evaluation of the local products (e.g. Laroche *et al.,* 2005; Elliot *et al.,* 2011; De Nisco *et al.,* 2015). Most of the results showed that, even though the cognitive component has an effect on the visitors' the evaluation of the local products, it is the affective one which drives the behavioural intentions (Elliot *et al.,* 2011). There is only one study (De Nisco *et al.,* 2015) which didn't support the influence of affective country image on the post-visit intentions towards local products. Furthermore, no previous research studying the influence of unique image on attitude towards local products was found.

In TDI literature, post-visit intentions are mostly measured by the intention to return to and/or the intention to recommend the visited destination. De Nisco *et al.*'s study (2015) is one of the few ones which added another variable: intention to buy and recommend products made in the sojourn country. Their research studied the influence of both tourism satisfaction and tourism destination image on the post-visit consumption intentions of foreign visitors towards Italian products. Results showed that the destination image is positively connected to the post-visit

intentions to buy and recommend local products. Moreover, satisfaction was proven to have a significant role in the intentions towards the visited country's products. The study further showed that satisfied tourists are more likely to increase consumption of Italian products once they're back to their home country and recommend them to family and friends (De Nisco *et al.,* 2015).

In conclusion, according to De Nisco *et al. (*2015), there is still a lack of studies aiming to clarify how the image of a destination could influence the intention of foreign visitors to buy and recommend the products made there. This master thesis aims to further develop this topic by testing the following hypotheses:

H11: Cognitive destination image has a positive influence on post-visit intentions toward Bulgarian products.
H12: Affective destination image has a positive influence on post-visit intentions toward Bulgarian products.
H13: Unique destination image has a positive influence on post-visit intentions toward Bulgarian products.
H14: Tourism satisfaction has a positive influence on post-visit intentions toward Bulgarian products.
H15: Intention to recommend a tourism destination has a positive influence on post-visit intention towards Bulgarian products.

2.5. Contextual framework

Even though the concept of destination image is a well-studied topic in the tourism marketing, there is still a lack of research about Bulgaria's and Sofia's destination images. In general, after reviewing the available published articles about the tourism industry in Bulgaria, it can be concluded that there is a very limited research about the image of the country. The following sub-chapters aim to provide some insight and information about the tourism situation in Bulgaria and Sofia.

2.5.1. Destination Bulgaria

Bulgaria is a country located in the southeast part of the Balkan Peninsula and is the 14th largest country in Europe. The population of the country in 2018 is 7,027,689 (World Population Review, 2018). In terms of tourism, attractions in Bulgaria can be classified into five categories: seaside resorts, winter sports resorts, spa resorts, historical sites, and other (adventure tourism, wine tourism, rural tourism, ecotourism).

One stream of the tourism literature about Bulgaria analyses the tourism situation of the country after the fall of the communist regime. According to Bachvarov (1997), for instance, Bulgaria emerged on the international tourism market in the 1960s and positioned itself as a typical sun, sea and sand destination, particularly attractive for its Black Sea coast. From the 1960s until late 1980s the country was the most prominent foreign tourism receiving country in the COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance), which comprised of the Soviet Union, the Eastern Bloc, and most of the communist states around the world. After the fall of the Berlin wall, the country went through a severe economic and political crisis, which led to the decrease in international tourists for some years. Nevertheless, since 1999, Bulgaria's tourism has been registering a steady growth (Banabakova, 2007), especially in the past few years.

According to the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism (2018), the total number of international tourists that came to Bulgaria in 2017 was 8.8 million, which is a 7.6% increase compared to 2016. The results from January 2018 indicate that 437 000 foreign tourists visited the country, which an impressive increase of 19% in comparison with January 2017. More recent statistics, published in an official statement from the Ministry of Tourism (September, 2018), states that 5.2 million foreign tourists visited the country in the first seven months of 2018, which is an increase of 7% compared to the first six months of 2017. The revenue from tourism from the first six months of 2018 was 1.3 billion leva (~$771 million), which is a 10% increase in comparison with the same timeframe in the last year. In terms of the purpose of visit, during the period January-July 2017 most tourists visited the destination with holiday and recreation purpose (62.9%), followed by trips with business and professional purpose (17.28%); followed by other (12.44%) and visiting as guests (7.33%).

Furthermore, according to the European Travel Commission's Travel and Trends Report (2017), Bulgaria is the sixth fastest-growing tourist destination in Europe with a growth of over

17% regarding international arrivals. The data used for the report was based on the second quarter of 2017. The top ten countries of origin of Bulgaria's international visitors for the period January – July 2017 included: Greece, Romania, Germany, Russia, Turkey, Macedonia, Serbia, Poland, the United Kingdom and Ukraine (Ministry of Tourism, 2017). Bulgaria was a particularly popular destination among German tourists with arrivals growth of more than 35% (European Travel Commission, 2017). Another country of origin of international tourists which increased over the last year is China. Nearly 19 thousand Chinese tourists visited Bulgaria for the period January – August 2017, which indicates a growth of 50% in comparison with the same period in 2016 (Sofia News Agency, 2017).

According to the European Travel Commission (2017), the growth of international visitors is partly because of the fact that the country is perceived as a more affordable alternative for winter breaks, as it offers several destinations with ski and snowboarding facilities, including the capital Sofia. Tourists from Germany, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom seem to have changed the traditional winter destinations (e.g. Austria or Switzerland) for more affordable ones, such as Bulgaria (European Travel Commission, 2017). Moreover, the country is widely visited for its Black Sea coast.

Banabakova (2007) studied the development and the problems of the tourism industry in Bulgaria. The author states that, even though the tourism is one of the most developing branches of the economy, it still faces some major issues, especially when it comes to its weak marketing and advertising national efforts. In terms of marketing and advertising, Bulgaria lacks a united and developed concept of the country as a whole-year tourist destination. There is also a misunderstanding about the actual logo of the country (Banabakova, 2007). *Figure 4* presents two of the logos that are being used: the first one symbolizing a rose (indicating that Bulgaria produces over 75% of the rose oil in the world); and the second one symbolizes the sea, sand, mountain, and a rose, which positions the country in a very mass manner, instead of using its unique features (apart from the rose).

Banabakova (2007) outlined the following major issues in the development of the Bulgarian tourism: the mono-structural development of the branch; the concentration of tourism in the sea resorts; insufficient marketing and advertising activities; insufficient quality of services and lack of qualified staff; poor conditions of the infrastructure; limited use of the internet; mainly offering of mass tourism product; and the inefficient role of the branch associations. As the

article was published in 2007, some of these conditions such as the limited use of internet and the infrastructure have already improved. An argument for the latter is the opening of several international highways in the country and the extension of the metro lines in the capital Sofia in the last five years. Moreover, Bulgaria is considered to have one of the fastest internet connections in Europe in 2018.

In terms of marketing efforts, in December 2017 the Ministry of Tourism launched the "You can't help falling in love with her at first sight" campaign. The latter was created for the launch of The Presidency of the Council of the European Union to which a Bulgaria was a host for the first part of 2018. This has also resulted in a lot of attention from international media and European institutions.

Figure 4 Brand Logos of Bulgaria. Source: Visit Sofia

Moreover, research done by Dimitrov *et al.* (2017), studied the destination image of Bulgaria among foreign tourists. Their findings showed that the most appealing attributes were the cultural ones, namely the architectural and historical artefacts, archaeological sites, carnivals and festivals, religion and religious sites, and authentic cuisine. The second best-scored attribute was hospitality. The attribute which was ranked the lowest was infrastructure, which included social, utilities, communications, and transportation.

Additionally, a research which was done by the Bulgarian Ministry of Economy and Energy in 2012 examined what are the appropriate symbols and visual elements for the tourism brand Bulgaria, based on the opinion of 200 Bulgarian and 400 foreign tourists from ten markets (the United Kingdom, Germany, Greece, Ukraine, Russia, Serbia, Romania, Turkey, Sweden, and the Czech Republic) who visited the country in the period 2009-2010 (as explained in Stankova & Vasenka, 2015). Their studies found that Bulgarian tourist associate the country's image with rose (91%), sea (90%), mineral springs (83%), mountains (82%), and churches and monasteries

(81%). The foreign tourist, on the other hand, associate with sea and beaches (42%), sun (39%), rituals and crafts (39%), folklore (36%) and wine (29%).

Bulgaria's tourism is currently underdeveloped as it is mainly offering the mainstream beach resorts and winter sports tourism, despite the country's assets, such as mineral springs, natural scenery, and archaeological sites (Stankova & Vasenska, 2015). More efforts should be concentrated on the development of the cultural, spa, balneological, congress, and ecotourism in the country (Banabakova, 2007).

2.5.2. Destination Sofia

As there is almost no research about the city in the context of destination image, and tourism in general, this part of the literature review will be based on statistical reports and credible news sources. It will be used to create an idea of what is currently being said about the city, and what is the tourism situation.

Sofia is the capital of Bulgaria and its largest city and is located in the western part of the country. As of 2015, the city has an estimated population of 1,260,120 people (World Population Review, 2017). It is the main administrative, industrial and transportation centre of the country. Moreover, it is one of the oldest cities in the world, and as such, it has a rich cultural heritage with 1400 cultural monuments. It also has a rich cultural life with numerous film, music, and art festivals being hosted there every year.

Furthermore, Sofia is surrounded by three mountains – Vitosha to the south, Lyulin to the west, and the Balkan Range to the north, therefore the city offers natural attractions and hiking opportunities. Vitosha Natural Park offers opportunities for paragliding, skiing, snowboarding, ice and rock climbing, alpinism, and other extreme sports. Apart from this, many marathons and sports events were hosted in the past years which has led to the title European Capital of Sport 2018 (Figure 5). In 2015, the Sofia municipality invested 5.5 million BGN (approximately 2.75 million EUR) in sports infrastructure (Sofia Tourism Administration, 2015). Therefore, it is obvious that the government has taken actions into building the image of the city as a sports destination. In 2016, funds were also invested in improving parks and green spaces, including the Sofia Zoo, in cultural heritage exhibitions, cultural events, and in the modernization of the public transport (Sofia Tourism Administration, 2016).

International tourism in Sofia has significantly increased over the last years. As mentioned in the introduction, the Bulgarian capital was ranked as the third European city, which registered the highest growth in terms of international tourists for the period 2009-2016. The city was visited by 1.19 million tourists in 2016, which is a growth of 18% in comparison with the previous year (Mastercard, 2017). According to the Bulgarian financial media Capital (2016), one of the major reasons for this is the fact that the low-cost airline RyanAir started operating with 21 flights from Sofia in September 2016. Moreover, there is an increased competition for cheap flights with the Hungarian airline WizzAir, which accordingly increased its low-cost flights, which now include destinations, such as Dubai and Tel Aviv (Capital, 2016).

Figure 5 Logo of Sofia as the European Capital of Sport 2018 Source: Sofia2018.bg

In the same article, it is mentioned that most of the tourists spend a weekend in the city. One of the main advantages of the city, which the interviewed tourists listed, is the good balance between price and quality of food, accommodation, and nightlife (Capital, 2016). The author of the article further acknowledges that, currently, the city attracts tourists because of its "exotic unfamiliarity" and that it is important to work on creating a destination brand and identity. According to the Sofia municipality, the aim is to position Sofia as a "modern European city focused on cultural tourism" (Capital, 2016).

One of the few academic studies done about the city is the one of Marinov *et al.* (2015). The authors interviewed 173 accommodation establishments and 35 travel agencies in order to make a "diagnostic" of the current tourism situation in the city. The interviewees indicated that there is a gap between the potential which the city has and the actual status of its tourism offerings, particularly for ski tourism, green tourism, heritage tourism, and wellness tourism. Figure 6 shows the results of their study, in particular, the gaps between the potential and the current stage of the tourism products. The study also identified which are the areas where tourism businesses think financial resources should be allocated to. The results from the interviews

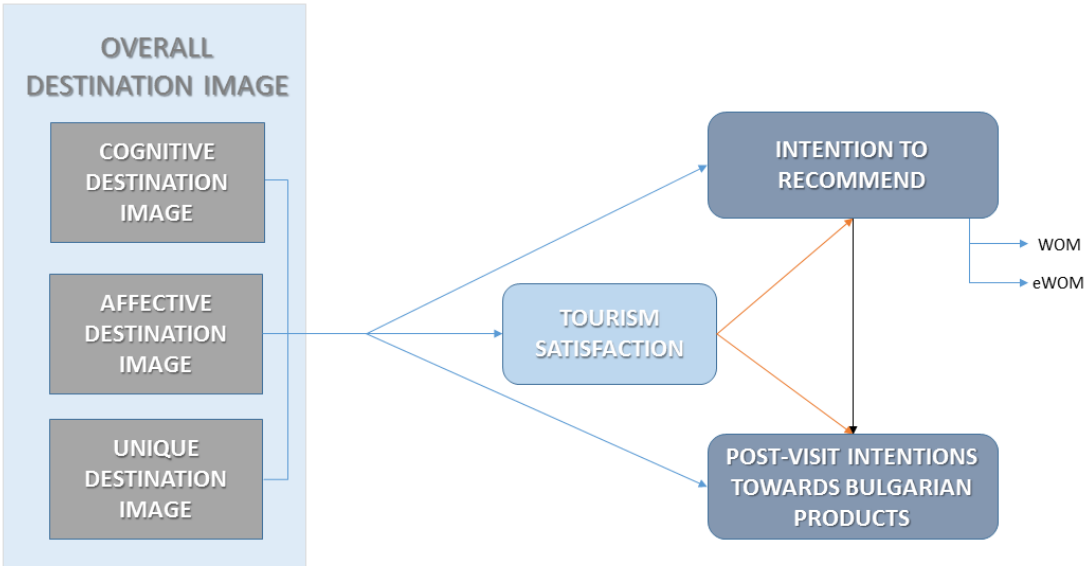
show that restoration of heritage sites, information boards and signposting, construction of spa facilities are the top three areas which need further investment and improvement.

Figure 6 Gaps between the development potential of Sofia and the current state of tourism. Source: Marinov et al. (2015)

3. Conceptual Model

After conducting the literature review, the following conceptual model *(Figure 7)* was created. A total of 15 hypotheses were proposed and will be tested. A summary of the hypotheses and the a model of each one of the proposed relationships can be seen in the Annex 1.

Figure 7 Conceptual model



4. Methodology

For the purpose of completing the objectives of this thesis, a suitable methodology had to be defined. This chapter aims to explain in more details both the data collection and data analysis approaches taken by the researchers as part of this study. The data was collected in two parts. Firstly, a qualitative text analysis of online blog posts was performed in order to determine the measures of the construct of unique image. The content was analysed with the help of the NVivo 12 software. The second part of the methodology was the quantitative analysis, which included the questionnaire design, distribution and collection of answers, and data analysis with the help of the IBM SPSS software.

4.1. Part I: Qualitative Text Analysis

The first part of the research process was to identify and create a list of the unique features of Sofia, which were later used to measure the perception of the unique image in the questionnaire. In order to identify the items, a text mining analysis of user-generated content was performed. Text mining is 'a computer-assisted technique that is equipped with the capability to extract information and trends from large amounts of textual data, giving an overview of the main issues discussed' (Aureli, 2017:4). Text mining has found wide application in a number of fields, including academic and industry research, social media and web analysis, business intelligence, etc. (Talib *et al.*, 2016). The process of text mining offers different techniques and tools to extract information from a text, including summarization, classification, clustering, natural language processing, etc. The latter could be used for opinion mining, feature extraction, sentiment, predictive, and trend analysis (Talib *et al.*, 2016). There is a variety of software which was used in previous research, including ATLAS.ti. NVivo, Leximancer, SAS, R, etc. The software which was used for text mining in this thesis is the NVivo 12.

NVivo is a computer-assisted qualitative analysis software (CAQDAS) developed by QSR International. It has been used in a number of disciplines and studies, including in tourism and marketing. Examples of the type of data which can be analysed in NVivo include interviews, open-ended questionnaire answers, articles, social media posts, online content, etc. It could help researchers to "manage and organize data and facilitates the analysis of data, identification of themes, gleaning insight, and developing conclusions" (Sotiriadou *et al.*, 2014:220). In this

case, the type of data which is going to be analysed is user-generated content in the form of blog posts. The techniques used include text summarization and classification.

The final data set included a total of 72 blog posts published between 2015-2018. All of the posts were extracted from individual blogs written by foreign visitors in English, and the total number of words accounted for 86,395. The type of blogs was about travelling, and the selected posts included guides, tips, and advice about what to do while visiting the city. Moreover, they were based on the personal opinion and experience of the bloggers, who own the websites. After the data was collected, it was coded in an Excel spreadsheet. Additionally, it was corrected for spelling mistakes by running a spell check and the names of tourist attractions were checked to make sure that they were written in the same manner. After the data was treated, it was imported in NVivo 12 software for further analysis.

The first step after importing the data in NVivo was to code the text into different nodes. Coding is an essential part of the qualitative analysis as it helps the researcher gather all of the quotes and references about a particular concept into a separate folder for further exploration. This separate folder is called a node and it serves as a sort of a container for different themes and concepts. The process of coding into nodes helps to identify patterns and generate ideas in the research materials (Wong, 2008). This can be done both automatically and manually. For the purpose of this thesis, coding was done manually as the concept under analysis was to identify unique features. Some studies (e.g. Sotiriadou *et al.*, 2014) have brought it up that the manual data analysis could be subjective, but also more engaging for the researchers.

Each of the 72 blog posts was analysed separately. Common codes were grouped into 10 different nodes, featuring both cognitive and affective features which were considered as unique by the blog writers. The first node **Attractions** was composed by 8 sub-nodes, including *Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, Statue of Saint Sofia, Vitosha Mountain, Ivan Vazov National Theatre, Square of Tolerance, Vitosha Bouleavard, Slaveykov Square open book market, and National Palace of Culture*. The second node was composed of **Adjectives** used to describe the city and included: *The cheapest capital in Europe, Underrated tourism destination, City of Contrasts, Multicultural city, Charming and Quirky city, and One of the oldest capitals in Europe.* The third node was called **Communist History and Heritage** and was composed of one sub-node: *Soviet Architecture and Buildings* (referring to quotes about the construction of blocks as well as the brutalist architecture). The fourth node was named **Delicious and**

distinctive traditional cuisine, which also served as a code itself. An additional sub-node was added: *Vegan and vegetarian-friendly destination* as a substantial number of the blog posts mentioned vegetarian and vegan food. The remaining five nodes were separate and were named as the following: **Street art, Squat shops, Availability of hot mineral water, Great Wi-Fi connectivity,** and **Sofia nightlife.** The aforementioned 24 codes were later used to measure the perception of the unique features of Sofia in the questionnaire. All of the nodes and sub-nodes can be seen in *Table 3*Table 3.

Table 3 A summary of the nodes extracted from NVivo 12

Nodes
Attractions
Alexander Nevsky Cathedral
Ivan Vazov National Theatre
National Palace of Culture
Slaveykov Square open book market
Square of Tolerance
Statue of Sofia
Vitosha Boulevard
Vitosha Mountain
Availability of hot mineral water
Selection of Free Walking Tours
Communist History and Heritage
Soviet Architecture and Buildings
Delicious and distinctive traditional cuisine
Vegetarian and vegan-friendly destination
Great Wi-Fi connectivity
Adjectives
Multicultural city
One of the oldest capitals in Europe
Quirky and charming
City of contrasts
The cheapest capital in Europe
Underrated tourism destination
Sofia nightlife
Squat shops
Street art

4.2. Part II: Quantitative Analysis

4.2.1. Sample

To test the proposed model, it was necessary to conduct a survey on a sample of international tourists. The data collection took place over the course of four weeks in the months March and April of 2018. The questionnaire was administered both face-to-face and online. Face-to-face was done predominantly by asking foreign visitors to fill it on paper or on a tablet in the departure zones of Sofia Airport before leaving the city. Additionally, a smaller number of questionnaires were distributed at the Visit Sofia's tourism office and other institutions, such as museums, galleries, hostels, etc. The questionnaire was also distributed online by contacting people who left social media reviews about the city's attractions during the period of the study. The websites used include Facebook, TripAdvisor, Twitter, and Instagram.

For the purpose of this thesis, a quota sampling method was applied. This method is used when there is no sampling frame available. As official data about the characterization of the tourists in Sofia was not found, unofficial data about the country of origin and age from tourist centers was used instead. In order to avoid bias and diversify the data, the interviewer aimed to collect data on different dates with different flight destinations, as well as on various places in Sofia. At the end of the survey, a total of 314 respondents from 55 countries constitute the sample.

4.2.2. Questionnaire

The questionnaire itself included 18 questions which were organized in the following sections: (1) decision-making factors (Q1); (2) destination image (Q2 – Q6); (3) tourism satisfaction (Q7); (4) intention to recommend (Q8); (5) post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products (Q9); (5) socio-demographics of respondents (Q10 – Q15); and (6) characterization of the trip (Q16 – Q18). The last part of the questionnaire asked respondents to answer questions about their age, country of origin, income, education, marital status, and gender, as well as about some details about their trip, such as companion, length of stay, and purpose of visit. It was quite long and on average took around 15-20 minutes to collect an answer. The full version is available in the *Annex 4*: Questionnaire.

A pre-test was performed on a small sample of 58 prior to collecting the final sample. The internal consistency analysis of each construct, more specifically the Cronbach's alpha, was

examined in order to see how closely related the items are as a group. Alpha increases as the correlations among items increase, therefore it is known as a measure of the internal consistency of instrument reliability. The reliability scores of Cronbach's alpha for each construct were between 0.808 and 0.934 and were considered as good and excellent reliability, respectively (*Table* 4).

Table 4 Results of Cronbach's alpha of internal consistency of pre-test

Construct	Cronbach's alpha
Post-visit intentions towards towards Bulgarian products	0.861
Intention to Recommend	0.876
Tourism Satisfaction	0.926
Affective Image	0.934
Cognitive Image	0.929
Unique Features	0.885
Decision-making factors	0.808

4.2.3. Measures of the model constructs

Adapted scales from previous studies were used to create measures for each one of the model constructs. They were selected on the basis of the specific characteristics of the destination. According to Beerli & Martín (2004), there is a lack of a universal and reliable scale when it comes to measuring destination image. What can be concluded from the literature review, is that most of the research about the concept measured it either with a multi-attribute approach or with non-structural techniques, with the first option being predominant (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). The multi-attribute approach measures image through a list of attributes assessed by a Likert scale (Bigné *et al.*, 2001). Beerli & Martin (2004) further created a list of all of the attributes used in existing scales, and classified them in nine dimensions: natural resources, general infrastructure, tourist infrastructure, tourist leisure and recreation, culture, history and art, political and economic factors, natural environment, social environment, and atmosphere of the place. This was the selected method to measure cognitive, affective, and unique images in this thesis.

The unique image was measured by two questions. The first one was an open-ended question adopted from Echtner & Ritchie (1993). Respondents were asked to list the first three

features/associations which come to their mind when they think of Sofia as a tourism destination. The second question to measure unique destination image was based on the multi-attribute approach, where the 24 features obtained from the qualitative text analysis of the blog posts were used. The aforementioned features included both cognitive and affective variables which were considered unique by the blog posts writers. Tourists were asked to rate the extent to which they agree that the features are unique for Sofia on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The measure for the cognitive image was developed by selecting 29 items from previous studies (e.g. Stylos *et al.,* 2016; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Qu et al., 2011; Basaran, 2016; Ramseook-Munhurrun *et al.,* 2015). One more additional item "Availability of organized sightseeing tours" was added by the researchers. Foreign visitors were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Similarly, the affective image was measured by using 14 variables. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Finally, the overall image was measured with a single question, which was adopted from Bigné *et al.* (2000). Respondents were asked to rate their perception of overall image of Sofia on a 5-point scale of favourability, where 1 was very unfavourable and 5 highly favourable. A full list of the variables used for the measurement of the cognitive and affective constructs, as well as their sources, are presented in Table 5Table 5Table 5.

Table 5 Sources of measures of Cognitive and Affective Destination Image

Construct variables and items	**Article**
Cognitive Destination Image	
Sofia offers interesting places of historical and cultural interest; Good nightlife; Sofia has a good name and reputation; A good quality of life;	Beerli & Martin (2004)
Beautiful surrounding natural environment; Distinctive characteristics of architecture and buildings; Unique folklore and unusual customs;	Basaran (2016)

Variety of products that promote local culture; Pleasant weather; Various shopping facilities; Good variety of restaurants and cuisines; Good quality of restaurants; Good quality of accommodations; Good variety of accommodations; Good opportunities for sports and outdoor activities; Ease of access to places of interested; Good value for money; Good public transport network; Appealing local food cuisine;	
A lot of open green place; Attractions for children; Availability of tourism information;	Qu *et al.* (2011)
Clean and unpolluted environment; Friendly and helpful local residents; No language barrier; Signs and indicators are properly displayed and easy to understand;	Ramseook-Munhurrun & Naidoo (2015)
Ease of access from country of residence;	Stylos (2016)
Availability of sightseeing tours	Own source
Affective Destination Image	
Pleasant; Exciting; Relaxing; Arousing;	Baloglu & McCleary, 1999
Interesting; Cosy; Safe; Friendly;	Own source

Modern;
Preserved;
Trendy;
Dynamic;
Exotic;
Creative;

Tourism satisfaction was measured by five items based on a 7-point Likert scale. Two items ("My visit to Sofia is worth my time and effort" and "In comparison with other similar places I've visited before, Sofia is a better destination for tourism") were taken from Yoon & Uysal (2005); one ("Overall, I am satisfied with my travel experience to Sofia") from Bigné *et al*. (2001); and another ("My travel experience to Sofia exceeded my expectations") from De Nisco *et al.* (2015). A fifth item "My visit to Sofia was a wonderful surprise" also added by the researchers.

Intention to recommend was measured by six items on a 7-point Likert scale, which were further divided into two groups – intention to recommend face-to-face and intention to recommend online. The five measures for the post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products were adapted from De Nisco *et al.* (2015).

4.2.4. Statistical analysis

The collected data was mainly analysed with the help of the IBM SPSS 24 software. The quantitative techniques used include descriptive statistics, principal component analyses, and testing multiple linear regression models. For the analysis of the open-ended question of perceptions of unique image, a word frequency query was performed using NVivo 12. The explanation of the statistical analyses developed are presented in more detail in this subchapter.

4.2.4.1. Descriptive Statistics

The first step was to obtain descriptive statistics about the respondents' demographics in order to get acquainted with the data and get an insight into who the surveyed tourists are. Furthermore, descriptive statistics were used to characterize the trip in terms of length, companion, purpose of visit, as well as to determine the most important decision-making factors to make a trip to Sofia. The tools used include frequency tables and descriptive measures.

4.2.4.2. Perceptions of Unique Image

After completion of the data collection, all responses given in the open-ended question about unique features were downloaded and moved into a separate text file in Microsoft Word, where it was corrected from spelling mistakes by running a spell check; it was made clear that names of tourist attractions and specific terms were written in the same manner (e.g. Nevski as Nevsky, etc.); and all punctuation, plurals, and capitalization were removed. After the data was treated, it was saved as a .txt file and was imported in NVivo 12 for further analysis.

Another tool which NVivo provides is the Word Frequency Query, which identifies the most frequently mentioned words in the text (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). According to Bazeley & Jackson (2013), this tool could be used for text-mining queries as part of a text analysis. The aim of running the Word Frequency Query was to find the top 50 words used to describe the city Sofia in the questionnaire responses. Prior to running it, the following settings were selected: (i) limit the number of the words displayed to 100; (ii) exclude small words by selecting to include only words with four letter or more; (iii) adjust the grouping slider to group stemmed words in order to avoid duplication. The results are presented in three ways: a frequency table, word cloud, and tree map. In the following chapter, the results will be presented by the first two.

4.2.4.3. Principal Component Analysis (PCA)

The next step was to conduct principal component analyses (PCA) in order to reduce the data and identify the underlying dimensions of cognitive, affective, and unique images, tourism satisfaction, intention to recommend, and post-visit intentions towards buying Bulgarian products. The components were then labeled according to the items in each one.

One of the requirements to perform PCA is that the initial variables are correlated. There are some measures which have to be assessed prior to performing PCA in order to see if the sample under analysis is suitable: (1) Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy value higher than 0.6; (2) the significance of Bartlett's test of sphericity lower than 0.05, indicating that there are pairs of variables which are significantly correlated.

Several criteria were used in order to make a decision about the number of PCs to extract, namely: (1) eigenvalues higher than 1.0; (2) percentage of variance explained at least 60% of

the total variance; (3) and the scree plot. Items with low factor loadings (<0.5), high cross-loadings (>0.4), and low communalities (<0.4) were excluded from the analysis (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, the reliability coefficient of Cronbach was analysed to determine the consistency of each dimension (Cronbach's alpha coefficient should be greater than 0.6).

4.2.4.4. Multiple Linear Regression Models (MLR)

Multiple linear regression (MLR) is used to explain the relationship between one dependent variable and two or more independent variables. This is also the methodology which was applied in this thesis in order to test the relationships between the constructs in the conceptual model.

There are several assumptions that have to be met in order to perform MLR. They are as it follows: 1) linearity of the relationship between each X and Y; 2) the mean of the residual component of the model is zero; 3) the independent variables are not correlated with the residual terms; 4) there is no correlation between the residual terms; 5) the variance of the random term is constant; 6) the normality of the residuals; 7) there is no correlation among the explanatory variables.

In order to test the conceptual model and hypotheses, five models were estimated, one for each dependent variable, as described by the model equations presented in Table 6. The aforementioned assumptions were checked and verified for all estimated models. It is important to mention that the Stepwise method was applied to all models in order to avoid high correlations between the independent variables. Stepwise eliminates the variables which are correlated beforehand, therefore the multicollinearity assumption was met.

Table 6 Model equations for each dependent variable

Model 1 - Overall Image model	**Overall Image = β_o + β1 * cognitive image + β2 * affective image + β3 * unique image + ε**
Model 2 - Tourism Satisfaction model	Tourism Satisfaction = β_o + β1 * cognitive image + β2 * affective image + β3 * unique image + ε

Model 3 - eWOM model	eWOM = β_o + β1 * cognitive image + β2 * affective image + β3 * unique image + β4 * tourism satisfaction + ε
Model 4 – WOM model	WOM = β_o + β1 * cognitive image + β2 * affective image + β3 * unique image + β4 * tourism satisfaction + ε
Model 5 – Post-visit intentions towards BG products model	Post-visit intentions towards BG products = β_o + β1 * cognitive image + β2 * affective image + β3 * unique image + β4 * tourism satisfaction + β3 * intention to recommend + ε

5. Results

5.1. Quantitative results

5.1.1. Sample Characterization

The sample is composed of 314 respondents, from which 50.6% are male and 49.4% female. The age of the respondents was distributed mostly between 18 years old and 45 years old, with a higher concentration in the "25-34" range (34.7%), "18-24" (19.7%) and "35-44" (19.1%) of the total sample. In terms of education, the majority of the respondents have Bachelor (35.7%) or Master Degree (33.4%). Furthermore, the majority of respondents have an average (41.7%) or above average (36.0%) income; 25% come from Southern Europe whereas about 20% come from Western Europe. In terms of separate countries, the most tourists came from the United Kingdom (N=37; 11.2%), Italy (N=32; 10.2%), United States of America (N=21; 6.7%), Spain (N=20; 6.3%), Germany (N=18; 5.7%), and France (N=18; 5.7%). The distribution of the foreign visitors' socio-demographic characteristics is presented in Table 7Table 7.

Table 7 Distribution of socio-demographic characteristics

Sample Characteristic	N	%
Gender		
Male	159	50.6%
Female	155	49.4%
Age		
18-24	62	19.7%
25-34	109	34.7%
35-44	60	19.1%
45-54	42	13.4%
55-64	37	11.8%
65 or older	4	1.3%
Level of Education		
Primary	2	0.6%
High School	41	13.1%
Bachelor Degree	112	35.7%
Postgraduate Degree	37	11.8%
Master Degree	105	33.4%
PhD	17	5.4%
Annual Personal Income		
Below average	49	15.6%
Average	131	41.7%
Above average	113	36.0%
High	21	6.7%

Country of residence		
Northern Europe	54	17.2%
Eastern Europe	49	15.6%
Southern Europe	79	25.2%
Western Europe	65	20.7%
North and Central America	29	9.2%
Africa	3	1.0%
Oceania	3	1.0%
South America	6	1.9%
Asia	26	8.3%

5.1.2. Characterization of the trip to Sofia

The purpose of visit to Sofia was mostly Holiday/leisure (50%), followed by Business (18.5%), and visiting family and friends (17.5%). The duration of the stay in Sofia was mostly more than three days (29.9%), three nights (25.8%), or one week (22%). Furthermore, one-night trips were scarcely represented (4.1%). In terms of travel companion, most of the respondents stated they travelled with their friends (28%), solo (26.4%), or as a couple (23.2%). The distribution of trip characteristics to Sofia is presented in *Table 8*.

Table 8 Distribution of trip characteristics to Sofia

Purpose of Visit	**N**	**%**
Holiday/Leisure	157	50.0%
Visiting friends/family	55	17.5%
Business	58	18.5%
Education	27	8.6%
Transfer to another destination	10	3.2%
Volunteering	5	1.6%
Other	2	0.6%
Companion		
Solo	83	26.4%
With friend/s	88	28.0%
With family	45	14.3%
As a couple	73	23.2%
Business	24	7.6%
Other	1	0.3%
Length of stay		
One night	13	4.1%
Two nights	36	11.5%
Three nights	81	25.8%
A weekend	21	6.7%

More than three nights, less than a week	94	29.9%
One week	69	22.0%

5.1.3. Decision-making factors

The first question of the survey aimed to identify the factors which influenced the tourists to choose Sofia as a tourism destination. Respondents were asked to rank from 1 to 5 (1-not important/5-very important) their level of importance given to each factor. According to the results, the most important decision-making factors are "price/cost of trip" (mean=3.93; sd=1.19), followed by "by chance, got an opportunity to" (mean=3.81; sd=1.26), and friends and family advice (mean=3.11; sd=1.45). The least important sources were "travel agency advice" (mean=1.78; sd=1.04) and "advertising in the media" (mean=2.08; sd=1.10). The descriptives of decision-making factors are presented in Table 9.

Table 9 Descriptives of Decision- making Factors

Decision-making variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
I have always wanted to visit Sofia	2.82	1.258
Family/friends advice	3.11	1.451
Social Media	2.56	1.261
Price/cost of trip	3.93	1.186
Travel websites	2.69	1.282
Travel agency advice	1.78	1.041
Online advertising	2.23	1.178
Advertising in the media	2.08	1.102
Press/TV Articles	2. 19	1.133
By chance, got an opportunity to	3.81	1.260
Previous visit	2.48	1.536

5.1.4. Destination Image Components

In terms of cognitive image, the items which respondents agreed with the most are: Sofia offers intersting places of historical and cultural interest (mean=4.44; sd=0.752); Good value for money (mean=4.43; sd=0.752); and Beautiful surrounding natural environment (mean=4.25; sd=0.905). The one which has the lowest level of agreement is Clean and unpolluted environment (mean=2.74; sd=1.184). The items which influence the most affective image include: Interesting (mean=6.04; sd=1159); Pleasant (mean=5.82; sd=1.250); and Friendly (mean=5.38; sd=1.439). The one with the lowest scoring is Exotic (mean=4.29; sd=1.576). For

unique image, the features which were rated as most important include: Alexander Nevsky Cathedral (mean=4.61, sd=0.675); Vitosha Mountain (mean=4.36; sd=0.857); and Underrated tourism destination (mean=4.10; sd=0.989). The least important is squat shops (mean=3.12; sd=0.999). The full descriptive statistics of the cognitive, affective, unique destination images, tourism satisfaction, intention to recommend, post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products are presented in Annex 2. Finally, the overall image of Sofia was rated with a mean of 4.04 out of 5 (sd=0.747) as shown in Table 10.

Table 10 Descriptives of Overall Destination Image

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Overall destination image of Sofia	4.04	0.747

5.2. Unique Image: Results from the open-ended question

As mentioned in the methodology, the construct of the unique image was measured by two questions. The first question was open-ended and asked the respondents to list the first three associations which come to their mind when they think of Sofia as a tourism destination. This subchapter will explain the results obtained from the text analysis with Nvivo 12.

After running the Word Frequency Query, a frequency table was obtained. The latter consists of five columns, including information about the most frequently used words such as: the word itself, length of the word, the number of times it appeared in the selected text, weighted percentage (the frequency of the word relative to the total words counted), and the group of similar words which were counted together. The top ten most mentioned words by the respondents are the following: cheap (66 mentions); food (60 mentions); mountain (56 mentions); history (53 mentions); cathedral (41 mentions); Vitosha (41 mentions), culture (40 mentions), city (36 mentions), Alexander Nevsky (34 mentions), people (29 mentions). More detailed information about the 20 most frequently mentioned words in the text can be seen in Table 11.

Table 11 The 20 most frequently mentioned words from the open-ended question

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)	Similar Words
cheap	5	66	3.75	Cheap
Food	4	60	3.41	Food
mountain	8	56	3.18	Mountain
history	7	53	3.01	History
cathedral	9	41	2.33	Cathedral
vitosha	7	41	2.33	Vitosha
culture	7	40	2.27	cultural, culture
City	4	36	2.04	City
Alexander Nevsky	15	34	1.93	Alexander Nevsky
people	6	29	1.65	People
beautiful	9	28	1.59	beautiful, beauty
good	4	28	1.59	Good
architecture	12	27	1.53	architectural, architecture
church	6	26	1.48	Church
price	5	24	1.36	Price
communism	9	17	0.96	Communism
interesting	11	17	0.96	interest, interested, interesting, interests
friendly	8	16	0.91	friendly, friends
great	5	15	0.85	Great
Nice	4	15	0.85	Nice

The results from Table 11 are also presented in a more visual and interactive way in the form of a word cloud. Word clouds (also known as tag clouds) are widely used to visualize and summarize information from a text by depicting the words which occur most frequently in it. The main concept behind word clouds is that the font size of the depicted words are positively correlated with the number of times it appeared in the text (Heimerl et al., 2014), so the bigger the size of the word, the more times it was mentioned. Additionally, the location of a word in a word cloud is also indicative and the predominant ones are positioned in the centre (Hai-Jew, 2017). The word cloud which was created in NVivo in order to visualize the results of the open-ended question can be seen in Figure 8. It consists of the 50 most frequent words in the text and has a circular layout, meaning that the most occurring words are positioned in the centre (Lohmann *et al.*, 2009).

The next stage was to run a Text Search Query which is an automated coding and shows all of the references and mentions of a word or phrase in choice. The results from the Text Search Query can be visualized in a word tree, which helps researchers to discover the recurring themes and phrases that surround a word of interest and give a context to it. This was done for the first ten most mentioned words in order to understand with what other words were they mentioned in the responses.

Figure 8 Word Cloud with the 50 most mentioned words of unique image

The word cheap was mostly used to describe other words, such as destination, food, beer, nightlife, and price. The second most mentioned word was food and it was often predetermined by adjectives, such as good, great, tasty, cheap, delicious, and traditional. The text search query results showed that mountain was widely mentioned as Vitosha Mountain, highlighting the uniqueness of this feature for the city. Moreover, mountain was also used together with other words, such as beautiful, snow, and scenery. History was often described as interesting, ancient, and Balkan. Cathedral was mostly used with Alexander Nevsky, which is also one of the most mentioned words, demonstrating that this is one of the top emblematic and unique attractions in the city. The city was described as old, nice, and cheap. The locals were described as friendly, nice, and lovely people. The adjective beautiful was mentioned a lot of times in different context, with the most mentioning of women, followed by scenery and monument. The

architecture was often described as brutalist, communist, diverse. The word Vitosha was used predominantly for the mountain, but also it was associated with the boulevard. Finally, good was used mostly with food, followed by value, vibe, weather, and wine.

5.3. Principal Components

In order to be able to test the conceptual model and hypotheses, a set of linear regression models should be estimated. Previously, it was necessary to reduce the number of variables per construct by several principal component analyses (PCA). In this sense, a principal component analysis was performed to all of the constructs in the model: cognitive image, affective image, unique image, tourism satisfaction, intention to recommend, and post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products. The descriptive statistics of all construct measures factors are presented in Annex 2.

5.3.1. PCA of Cognitive Destination Image

The results from the PCA from the 30 items of cognitive destination image yielded a seven-dimension solution, which explains 70.5% of the total variance. The selected solution was assessed by Promax rotation. The principal components were named as the following: "local food and gastronomy" (five items), "tourism information" (three items), "historical and cultural attractions" (three items), "natural environment" (two items), "opportunities for activities outside of the city" (two items), "cleanliness" (two items), and "accommodation" (two items). More detailed results can be seen in *Table 12*.

Eleven variables, "Beautiful surrounding natural environment", "Friendly and helpful local residents", "Ease of access from country of residence", "Ease of access to places of interest", "Sofia has a good name and reputation", "A good quality of life", "Various shopping facilities", "Good nightlife", "Good public transport network", "Availability of organized sightseeing tours", did not meet the criteria and were removed from further analyses because of cross-loadings, or one-item component.

Table 12 Main variables of each PC of Cognitive Destination Image

Principal Component	Variables	Loadings	Variance %	Cronbach's alpha
Local food and gastronomy	Appealing local food and cuisine	0.897	30.7%	0.829

	Good quality of restaurants	0.830		
	Good variety of restaurants and cuisines	0.772		
	Good value for money	0.700		
	Variety of products that promote local culture	0.597		
Tourism Information	Signs and indicators are properly displayed and easy to understand	0.862	10.8%	0.742
	No language barrier	0.848		
	Availability of tourism information	0.693		
Historical and Cultural Attractions	Distinctive characteristics of architecture and buildings	0.949	7.0%	0.685
	Sofia offers interesting places of historical and cultural interest	0.641		
	Unique folklore and unusual customs	0.585		
Accommodation	Good quality of accommodation	0.834	6.7%	0.841
	Good variety of accommodation	0.833		
Cleanliness	Clean and unpolluted environment	0.924	5.8%	0.797
	Cleanliness of streets and buildings	0.797		
Opportunities for activities outside of the city	Good opportunities for sport and outdoor activities (hiking, skiing, adventure sports, picnics, camping, etc.)	0.880	4.8%	0.529
	Opportunities to do daytrips outside of the city	0.715		
Natural environment	Pleasant weather	0.861	4.7%	0.534
	A lot of open green spaces	0.672		

(KMO=0.826; Bartlett's test significance=0.000)

Cronbach's alpha is low in the items referring to Opportunities for activities outside of the city (0.529) and Natural Environment (0.534). However, these two PC were considered in further analyses because of the fact that their loadings are higher than 0.5.

5.3.2. PCA of Affective Destination Image

Initially, affective image was accessed by 14 variables. Several PCA were performed in order to find the best solution. One variable, "Preserved" was removed from the PCA because it had the lowest number of significant correlations with the other variables. As a result, two dimensions were identified that explain 61% of the total variance. The selected solution was accessed by Promax rotation. The principal components were named as the following: "traditional affective image" and "modern affective image". Detailed results are presented in *Table 13*.

Table 13 Main variables of each PC of Affective Destination Image

Principal Component	Variables	Loadings	Variance %	Cronbach's alpha
PC1: Traditional Affective Image	Pleasant	0.931	51.9%	0.889
	Relaxing	0.867		
	Interesting	0.812		
	Safe	0.725		
	Cosy	0.708		
	Friendly	0.608		
	Exciting	0.595		
PC2: Modern Affective Image	Trendy	0.914	9.1%	0.854
	Dynamic	0.896		
	Modern	0.739		
	Exotic	0.702		
	Creative	0.582		
	Arousing	0.541		

(KMO=0.918; Bartlett's test significance=0.000)

5.3.3. PCA of Unique Destination Image

The PCA allowed extracting six dimensions which explain 57.9% of the total variance. Two items, "Multicultural city" and "Sofia nightlife", were removed from the PCA because of cross-loadings. The selected solution was accessed by Promax rotation. The principal components were titled: "curiosities", "tourist attractions", "personality", "communist heritage", "most

emblematic attractions", and "sightseeing". More details about the loadings, variance percentage and reliability can be found in Table 14.

Table 14 Main variables of each PC of Unique Destination Image

Principal Component	Variables	Loadings	Variance %	Cronbach's alpha
Curiosities	Great Wi-Fi connectivity	0.769	25.5%	0.735
	Vegetarian and vegan-friendly destination	0.722		
	Availability of hot mineral water	0.677		
	Squat shops	0.622		
	Street art	0.559		
Tourist Attractions	National Palace of Cultural	0.714	8.5%	0.760
	Vitosha Boulevard	0.657		
	Square of Tolerance	0.656		
	Statue of St. Sofia	0.635		
	Ivan Vazov National Theatre	0.617		
	Slaveykov Square open book market	0.598		
Personality	Underrated tourism destination	0.701	7.3%	0.731
	One of the oldest capitals in Europe	0.682		
	The cheapest capital in Europe	0.660		
	Charming and quirky city	0.627		
	Delicious and distinctive traditional cuisine	0.563		
Communist Heritage	Soviet Architecture and Buildings	0.888	7.0%	0.759
	Communist History and Heritage	0.797		
Most Emblematic Attractions	Alexander Nevsky Cathedral	0.764	5.1%	0.420
	Vitosha Mountain	0.543		
Sightseeing	Selection of Free Walking Tours	0.728	4.5%	0.541
	City of contrasts	0.634		

(KMO=0.840; Bartlett's test significance=0.000)

Cronbach's alpha is low in the items referring to Most Emblematic Attractions (0.420) and Sightseeing (0.541), However, these two PC were considered in further analyses because of the fact that their loadings are higher than 0.5, meaning that for each PC the items have high correlations between them. Moreover, in the particular case of Most Emblematic Attractions, the researchers kept the items grouped together in a PC due to the fact that the two variables Alexander Nevsky Cathedral and Vitosha Mountain are highly correlated (they are the two most emblematic attractions in the city). As a result, this solution seemed to be the most suitable PCA.

5.3.4. PCA of Tourism Satisfaction

A set of five variables were used to measure the satisfaction of the tourists with the city of Sofia. The PCA identified one solution which explains 75.0% of the total variance. This solution is good because all variables have a communality higher than 0.4 with the lowest one being "In comparison with other similar places I've visited before, Sofia is a better destination for tourism" with a communality of 0.774. The PC was named Tourism satisfaction (*Table 15*).

Table 15 Main variables of each PC of Tourism Satisfaction

Principal Component	Variables	Loadings	Variance %	Cronbach's alpha
Tourism Satisfaction	My visit to Sofia was a wonderful surprise	0.907	75.0%	0.911
	My travel experience to Sofia exceeded my expectations	0.903		
	Overall, I am satisfied with my travel experience in Sofia	0.898		
	My visit to Sofia is worth my time and effort	0.839		
	In comparison with other similar places I've visited before, Sofia is a better destination for tourism	0.774		

(KMO=0.849; Bartlett's test significance=0.000)

5.3.5. PCA: Intention to recommend

The PCA estimated a solution with two components, which was assessed by Oblimin rotation. The two dimensions explain 85.7% of the total variance. The lowest communality is 0.725 for the variable "I will be able to give helpful information about Sofia to my friends/family/colleagues". The first component is composed of three variables which are characterized by WOM activities done online, therefore it can be grouped by the name electronic WOM. The second group is also composed of three variables and are based on face-to-face communication between close ones and acquaintances, therefore suits the characteristics of the traditional WOM (Table 16).

Table 16 Main variables of each PC of Intention to recommend

Principal Component	Variables	Loadings	Variance %	Cronbach's alpha
eWOM	I will write helpful information about Sofia online in order to help potential tourists prepare their visit	0.985	62.0%	0.939
	I will write online reviews to help people to decide to visit or to choose Sofia as a destination	0.980		
	I will write positive reviews online about Sofia	0.846		
Traditional WOM	I will speak about my good impressions of Sofia to my friends/family/colleagues	0.956	23.7%	0.884
	I will recommend Sofia to my friends/family/colleagues	0.900		
	I will be able to give helpful information about Sofia to my friends/family/colleagues	0.844		

(KMO=0.779; Bartlett's test significance=0.000)

5.3.6. PCA of Post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products

A set of five variables were used to measure post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products. The PCA estimated one component which explains 79.8% of the total variance. The selected solution was named "Post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products". The variable communality is higher than 0.4 for all variables with the lowest being 0.715 for the variable "I will recommend to my friends/family to buy Bulgarian products" (

Table 17). One item "Visiting Sofia helped me to expand my knowledge about Bulgarian products" was removed because it resulted in a single-item component.

Table 17 Main variables of each PC of Post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products

Principal Component	Variables	Loadings	Variance %	Cronbach's alpha
Post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products	Once at home, I would like to buy Bulgarian products	0.933	79.8%	0.915
	Once at home, I would be willing to search for Bulgarian products	0.901		
	Once at home, I hope to be able to find Bulgarian products in local shops	0.892		
	I will recommend to my friends/family to buy Bulgarian products	0.846		

(KMO=0.918; Bartlett's test significance=0.000)

5.4. Multiple Linear Regression Models

A total of five multiple linear regression models, as presented in *Table 6*, were tested. R2 and regression coefficients for significant independent variables are presented in *Table 18*. *Annex 3.14* presents a more detailed information about the estimated model results. It should be noted that the dimensions extracted from PCA were used for each independent construct. Consequently, all variables in the model are standardized.

5.4.1. Overall image model

In the overall image model, the independent variables which have significant statistical influence on overall image are four: **Traditional Affective Image** (B = 0.456); **Opportunities for activities outside of the city** (B = 0.189); **Historical and Cultural Attractions** (B = 0.143); and **Destination Personality** (B = 0.129). As the coefficients of all of the variables are positive, their influence on the favourability of the overall image is positive. However, the **Traditional Affective Image** have the greatest impact on the overall image.

5.4.2. Tourism Satisfaction model

In the tourism satisfaction model, the independent variables which have a significant statistical influence on tourism satisfaction are five: **Traditional Affective Image** (B=0.514); **Personality** (B=0.183); **Historical and Cultural Attractions** (B=0.172); **Natural Environment** (B=0.160); and **Local Food and Gastronomy** (-0.100). This latter variable has a negative but very weak impact on tourism satisfaction (p=0.045).

5.4.3. eWOM model

There are three independent variables which influence significantly the respondents' intention to spread positive word-of-mouth online: **Modern Affective Image** (B=0.265); **Tourist Satisfaction** (B=0.245); and **Sightseeing** (B=0.130).

5.4.4. WOM model

The total of five independent variables were found to have a significant statistical influence on intention to spread positive word-of-mouth: **Tourist Satisfaction** (B=0.485); **Traditional Affective Image** (B=0.187); **Most Emblematic Attractions** (B=0.160); **Historical and Cultural Attractions** (B=0.105); and **Local Food and Gastronomy** (B=0.100).

5.4.5. Post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products model

The results showed that the respondents' post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products were significantly affected by five variables: **Historical and Cultural Attractions** (B=0.173); **Modern Affective Image** (B=0.161); **Curiosities** (B=0.153); WOM (B=0.148); and **Communist Heritage** (B=- 0.108). The first four variables have a positive influence on the post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products, whereas the last one, Communist Heritage, impacts it in a negative way.

*Table 18. Significant coefficients for the 5 multiple linear regression models (**p<0.05; *p<0.01)*

Model	R2	Significant Independent Variables	Unstand./Stand. Coefficients
Model 1 Overall Image	0.512	1. Traditional Affective Image (ADI) 2. Opportunities for Activities outside of the city (CDI) 3. Historical and Cultural Attractions (CDI) 4. Personality (UDI)	0.456* 0.189* 0.143* 0.129**

Model 2 Tourism Satisfaction	0.580	1. Traditional Affective Image (ADI) 2. Personality (UDI) 3. Historical and Cultural Attractions (CDI) 4. Natural Environment (CDI) 5. Local Food and Gastronomy (CDI)	0.514* 0.183* 0.172* 0.160* -0.100**
Model 3 eWOM	0.244	1. Modern Affective Image (ADI) 2. Tourism Satisfaction 3. Sightseeing (UDI)	0.265* 0.245* 0.130**
Model 4 WOM	0.671	1. Tourism Satisfaction 2. Traditional Affective Image (ADI) 3. Most Emblematic Attractions (UDI) 4. Historical and Cultural Attractions (CDI) 5. Local Food and Gastronomy (CDI)	0.485* 0.187* 0.160* 0.105** 0.100**
Model 5 Post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products	0.225	1. Historical and Cultural Attractions (CDI) 2. Modern Affective Image (ADI) 3. Curiosities (UDI) 4. WOM 5. Communist Heritage (UDI)	0.173* 0.161** 0.153* 0.148** -0.108**

CDI – Cognitive Destination Image; ADI- Affective Destination Image; UDI- Unique Destination Image.

6. Discussion and conclusions

6.1.Discussion

Tourists choose their next destination between places with similar characteristics, such as climate, natural environment, spiritual sights, etc. In the broad assortment of destinations with common attributes, it is the unique features of a specific place which differentiates it and makes it stand out in consumers' minds. This makes uniqueness an integral part of the marketing efforts of tourism authorities and businesses in a particular destination. One of this thesis' main focus was to expand the knowledge and scholar studies regarding the perceptions of the unique features of a destination image. As a result, the researchers proposed a methodology for measuring and studying the latter based on text-mining of user-generated content.

To the knowledge of the researchers, this is the first study to propose and use text-mining of user-generated content as a method to extract a set of unique features of a destination. Previous research has used text analysis by asking respondents to list the top three words which they think were unique about the city (which was also done in this thesis), or analysed other travel

materials, such as brochures or images. UGC online comes in a lot of forms, such as blog posts, travel reviews, images, comments, and it provides an endless pool of information which could be collected and used to analyse various topics. The findings of this study show that extracting unique image attributes from blog posts gives more complete and detailed results as the researchers can also track the context of the mentions of specific attractions or attributes in the text. Moreover, even though the results from the open-ended questions give an idea about the unique features of the city of Sofia, they are more general and broad, whereas the ones from text-mining are more complete and detailed.

Furthermore, based on previous findings, this master thesis proposed and tested a conceptual model aiming to examine: (1) the influence of cognitive, affective, and unique components of destination image on overall image; (2) the existence of a relationship between the cognitive, affective, and unique components of destination image and tourism satisfaction; (3) the influence of the cognitive, affective, unique images, and tourism satisfaction on intention to recommend the destination online; (4) the influence of the cognitive, affective, unique images, and tourism satisfaction on intention to recommend the destination offline; (5) the influence of cognitive, affective, unique images, tourism satisfaction, electronic word-of-mouth, and traditional word-of-mouth on post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products.

Results from the questionnaire, conducted on a sample of 314 international visitors of Sofia during or at the end of their stay, provided support for almost all of the hypotheses. The first three hypotheses H1, H2, H3 were all supported. These results were consistent with previous research (e.g. Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Qu *et al.,* 2011) that all three components, namely cognitive, affective, and unique, have a significant influence on overall destination image. According to the results, the affective image has the strongest influence on overall image from all of the three components, in particular, the traditional affective image, or feelings like pleasant, relaxing, interesting, safe, cosy, friendly, and exciting. These results are consistent with the study of Baloglu & McCleary (1999) who found out that the affective image has a stronger impact on overall image than the cognitive one. The second most influential component is the cognitive one, in particular, the opportunities for activities outside of the city and the historical and cultural attractions. The unique features of the destination have the least significant impact on overall destination image. This result is on the contrary of the findings of Qu *et al.* (2011) whose study found the stronger impact of the unique features on overall

destination image than that of the affective evaluations. The difference between the results can be due to the difference between the measurements of unique destination image in the two studies. Qu *et al.* identified 15 unique items from travel literature and promotional brochures on Oklahoma, whereas in this study a more up-to-date method was introduced, namely extracting the unique features of a destination through text-mining of user-generated blog posts about the city.

Furthermore, the hypothesized relationships between cognitive, affective, and unique images with tourism satisfaction (H4, H5, and H6) were also all verified. These results are accordant to the findings of Cheng *et al.* (2016) whose study proved that both affective and cognitive components influence satisfaction. The results showed that the component with the strongest impact on tourism satisfaction is the affective one, namely the traditional affective image. The unique image also influences tourism satisfaction with the items grouped under personality (underrated, one of the oldest capitals, cheap, delicious cuisine, charming and quirky). The cognitive image has the least significant effect on tourism satisfaction from the three constructs, and it is the historical and cultural attractions and the natural environment which have a positive impact. The items under local food and gastronomy, on the other hand, impact the tourists' satisfaction negatively.

The construct of intention to recommend was further divided into two sub-constructs: electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and traditional word-of-mouth (WOM). The proposed hypotheses H7, H9, H9, and H10 were tested for both separately. In terms of eWOM, the results provided support for all hypotheses, except H7, showing that the cognitive destination image has no significant influence on the intention of tourists to recommend Sofia online. However, results showed that modern affective image has the strongest influence over intention to spread positive electronic word-of-mouth. The modern affective image includes variables such as trendy, dynamic, modern, exotic, creative, and arousing, implicating that the people who do share online are mostly interested by places and attractions with these characteristics. This also goes along with the fact that a lot of the platforms to post travel information online are used by younger generations. For instance, data from January 2018 showed that 30% of the global users of the photo-sharing platform Instagram were aged between 25 and 34 years (Statista, 2018). Additionally, research done by the travel website Expedia (The Independent, 2017) studied what triggers millennials and generation X to travel. The results showed that those aged 18-34 are influenced by how good a destination will look on their Instagram feed before booking.

Apart from the affective image, eWOM is also influenced by tourism satisfaction and unique image. The latter is represented by the component sightseeing which includes the selection of free walking tours and the contrasts of the city.

The results for traditional word-of-mouth support all hypotheses. In this case, it is tourism satisfaction which has the strongest impact on intention to spread positive word-of-mouth (also demonstrated in previous research, e.g. Bignè *et al.*, 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008, De Nisco *et al.,* 2015). In terms of the components of destination image, results show that the affective image is the one with the strongest effect with the dimension Traditional Affective Image Moreover, the Traditional Affective dimension also has an indirect influence on WOM through satisfaction as it is the aspect which influences it the most. With lower impact are also the unique image with Most Emblematic Attractions, and the cognitive with the dimensions Historical and Cultural Attractions and Local Food and Gastronomy.

The findings of post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products show support for almost all hypotheses, apart from H14. The construct of post-visit intentions toward Bulgarian products is not significantly influenced by tourism satisfaction. These results are not consistent with the findings of De Nisco *et al.* (2015) whose study found that a high level of tourism satisfaction influences significantly the willingness of tourists to recommend and buy Italian products. The rest of the hypotheses were supported, with the cognitive image being the most influential component with Historical and Cultural attractions. Following are the affective with Modern Affective image, unique with Curiousities, traditional WOM, and unique with Communist Hertage. The latter impacts the post-visit intentions towards buying and recommending products made in Bulgaria negatively. Moreover, Hypothesis 15 is only partially supported as results prove that only traditional WOM has an impact on the intentions towards Bulgarian products after the visitation of Sofia

6.2.Conclusions

One of the objectives of this thesis was to study destination image in the context of Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria. This city was chosen as it was ranked as the 3rd fastest growing in Europe in terms of overnight visitors (MasterCard, 2017), proving that it is an emerging tourism destination in need of better marketing and branding efforts. Examining what international tourists think about the image of the city after visiting it could help for getting a better

understanding of what can be improved in the marketing efforts of the local tourism institutions and businesses. After conducting an extensive literature review, the destination image was studied as a multidimensional construct composed of cognitive, affective, and unique evaluations, which form the overall image.

The data collection included distributing a self-administered survey and the final sample was composed of 314 international travellers. The results showed that the three most important decision-making factors for tourists to choose Sofia as a tourism destination are: the price/cost of the trip; by chance, got an opportunity to; and friends/family advice. The two factors with the lowest importance for the respondents are the advertising in the media and advertising online. Furthermore, in terms of the purpose of visit, around half of the respondents visited Sofia for holiday/leisure. The average duration of the trip was three nights or more but less than a week, and the majority of the tourists travelled solo or with friends/family. Almost half of the respondents came from Southern and Western Europe, and the most represented countries included the United Kingdom, Italy, and the United States of America.

From research point of view, this master thesis contributed to the literature of tourism marketing in at least four directions. Firstly, it is one of the few studies which studied destination image not only with its cognitive and affective components, but also added the unique one. This research not only provided further insights about the influence of unique image on overall image, intention to recommend, and post-visit intentions towards products made in the visited country, but it was also the first one to test and prove the significant influence of unique destination image on tourism satisfaction. Additionally, it also proposed and used a new updated methodology to extract unique features of destinations based on text-mining of UGC, in this case, blog posts about tourists' experience in Sofia. Text-mining of UGC proved to be an effective method, which allows studying various destinations from a distance as UGC is constantly available online. This not only makes the access to information easier but also eliminates the costs of travel when researchers are not familiar with a destination.

Secondly, it examined the cognitive, affective, unique, and overall images of Sofia as a tourism destination. It can be said that, on average, the overall destination image of Sofia was rated quite positively with a mean of 4.04 out of 5. Principal component analyses were performed to each of the components of destination image in order to find the most important dimensions. In terms of cognitive image, 7 components were extracted: local food and gastronomy, tourism

information, historical and cultural attractions, accommodation, cleanliness, opportunities for activities outside of the city, and natural environment. The results of the PCA for affective image identified two dimensions: traditional affective image (with emotional evaluations such as pleasant, relaxing, interesting, safe, cosy, friendly, and exciting) and modern affective image (with emotional evaluations such as trendy, dynamic, modern, exotic, creative, arousing). In terms of the unique destination image, the results from the text-mining methodology identified 24 unique features of Sofia. After performing PCA, two of the features were removed and the following six dimensions were proposed: curiosities, tourist attractions, destination personality, communist heritage, most emblematic attractions, and sightseeing.

According to Qu *et al.* (2011), identifying the unique elements of a destination should be the starting point of every positioning strategy as these elements are the ones which differentiate it from its competitors. As this thesis proves, in the context of Sofia, unique image has a significant influence on tourism behaviour after visitation. As Sofia is an emerging tourist destination, future marketing and branding should be focused on promoting the unique features of the city. Tourism marketers should use imagery expressing the curious and interesting characteristics of the city which makes it unique in comparison with other similar destinations. For instance, one of the influencing variables of tourism satisfaction was the unique personality of Sofia – the fact that it is underrated, cheaper, historical, quirky and charming, and offers delicious cuisine. These characteristics could be used in order to create a narrative that Sofia is an undiscovered gem in Europe, often overlooked but having a lot to offer.

The third contribution of this thesis is that it proposed and tested a conceptual model aiming to investigate the relationships between the different components of destination image, tourism satisfaction, electronic word-of-mouth, traditional word-of-mouth, and post-visit intentions towards products made in the visited country. This model added several variables to already tested frameworks, namely unique destination image and post-visit intentions towards products made in the visited country. The results verified almost all of the proposed hypotheses, except for H7 (cognitive image does not influence eWOM) and H14 (tourism satisfaction does not influence post-visit intentions towards products made in the sojourn country).

What can be concluded from the findings of the conceptual model is that the most important dimension of Sofia's overall destination image is the affective one, namely the traditional

affective image, which refers to feelings such as pleasant, exciting, cosy, safe, interesting, friendly, and relaxing. Moreover, traditional affective image is the dimension which has the strongest direct influence on satisfaction, which in turns has the strongest influence on traditional WOM. In addition to that, Traditional Affective image is also the destination image component which has the strongest direct influence on WOM. What can be concluded based on these findings is that tourism institutions and business in Sofia should pay a special attention to improving the Traditional affective image of the city as this will not only lead to an improved overall image, but also satisfaction and intentions to recommend. The way tourists feel during their stay is the most influential factor in their travel experience. The affective evaluation of a trip to a destination is hard to control as sometimes the emotional experience of a tourist could be influenced not only by the destination but also by his personal life. Nevertheless, as tourism is based on experiences, tourism of Sofia should be focused on creating offerings which are able to invoke the traditional affective evaluations in consumers, namely excitement, relaxation, pleasure, safety, coziness, and friendliness.

Moreover, the cognitive component of destination image of Sofia has an impact on almost all of the constructs, except for electronic word-of-mouth. The dimension which has the strongest influence is Historical and cultural attractions, mainly because it has the most impact on influences tourism satisfaction, overall image, traditional WOM, and post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products. In the latter, it is actually the dimension with the strongest impact.

When it comes to unique image - it matters as it influences all of the constructs, however, it has much weaker impact in comparision with the affective image. Destination personality is the most important dimension as it influences the overall image of Sofia and tourism satisfaction. As mentioned earlier in the methodology, unique image is these characteristics which differentiate a destination from all the others in people's minds, but they can be of both cognitive and affective nature. The destination personality dimension is composed of variables such as old, cheap, charming and quirky, underrated, etc., which can be considered as unique affective image, once again confirming the importance of the affective aspect.

The fourth contribution of this thesis is that it is one of the few studies which empirically tested the influence of the different components of destination image on tourists' post-visit intentions towards products made in the visited country. Previous research (e.g. De Nisco *et al.*, 2015) studied the impact of the overall destination image, but not on each of the components

separately. The findings show that all components are significantly influencing post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products, but the cognitive image has the strongest impact. Furthermore, the unique image has both a positive and negative influence on the intentions towards products after visiting the country. Positive influence is a result of the curiosities of the city, whereas the communist heritage and culture have a negative impact. This should be taken into account by tourism professionals and officials in the way they present the local products to international tourists. Products portrayed as communist can cause "ostalgia", the feeling of nostalgia for the life under communist or socialist systems, in people who lived during these regimes in certain countries in Europe, such as Germany, Russia, Slovenia, Romania, etc. But since half of the population of the sample is from Southern and Western Europe, this approach might not be very effective.

Finally, this thesis was the first study to test the relationship between the intention to spread positive WOM and eWOM with post-visit intentions to recommend and buy Bulgarian products. Results showed that only the traditional WOM has a significant effect on the intention to recommend and buy Bulgarian product once the tourists are back in their country.

7. Limitations and directions for future research

During the process of creating this master thesis, several limitations were identified. The first limitation is related to the sample of the questionnaire. It was identified that some of the age groups, namely 65 or older and 55-64, are not very well represented in the study. One of the future research suggestions would be to repeat the study but with a sample, including a more equally represented respondents from these age groups.

Another limitation was the fact that the questionnaire was created and distributed only in English. During the data collection, there were several occasions when tourists visiting Sofia could not fill out the survey due to the fact that they were unable to understand it in English. This constraint can be eliminated by translating the questionnaire into some of the most popular languages in the studied destination. The choice of which languages could be based on statistical data about the country-of-origin of the tourists who visit the destination the most (if this information is available).

Additionally, while performing principal component analyses, some variables with low Cronbach's alpha were identified, but they were still considered for further analyses. Having items with low Cronbach's alpha indicates that the correlation between them is not very strong, which can, later on, has an effect on the results.

Furthermore, as this was a study focused only on the context of the city of Sofia, the validity of the conceptual model is verified only about this destination. Future research should test the proposed conceptual model in different contexts and emerging capital cities in Europe and compare it with the findings of this study. The aforementioned limitation is also relevant for the methodology which was proposed in this thesis as a way to study unique destination image. The method of studying unique destination image by text-mining of user-generated content (whether it is blog posts, website reviews, social media posts, etc.) should be repeated and applied to other cities. For instance, studying neighbouring capital cities (such as Bucharest, Athens, Skopje, Belgrade) could give a further insight about how the capital cities in the region differ from one another and what makes each one unique.

Finally, in the near future, the researchers can make a comparative study of the perceptions of the unique image of Sofia online and offline. This study can use the data collected in this study from the extraction of the unique characteristics from blog posts (the unique image online) and the responses of the open-ended question of the questionnaire (unique image offline).

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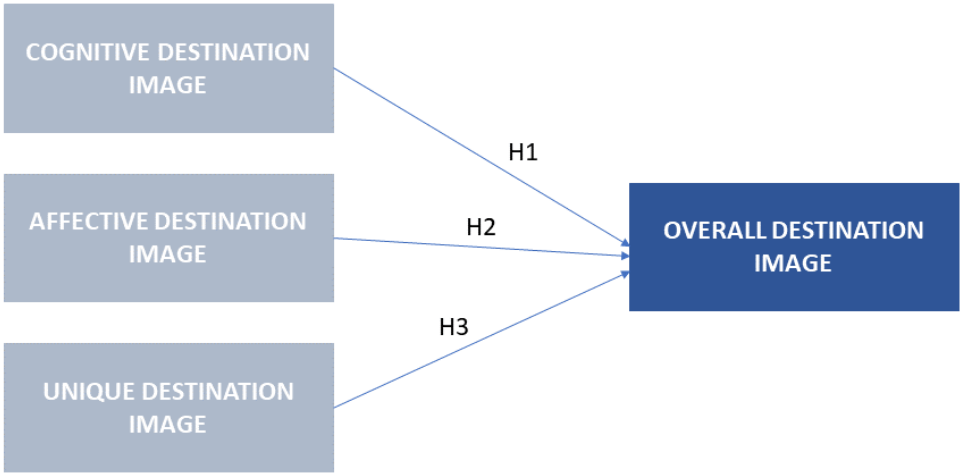
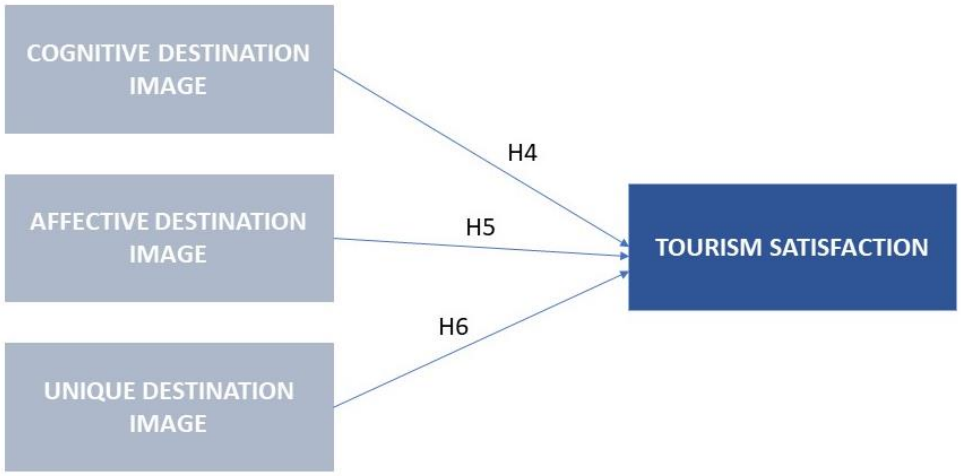
ANNEXES

Annex 1: Summary and illustrations of hypotheses of the conceptual model

H1	Cognitive image will positively affect the visitor's overall image of a destination.
H2	Affective image will positively affect the visitor's overall image of a destination.
H3	Unique image will positively affect the visitor's overall image of a destination.

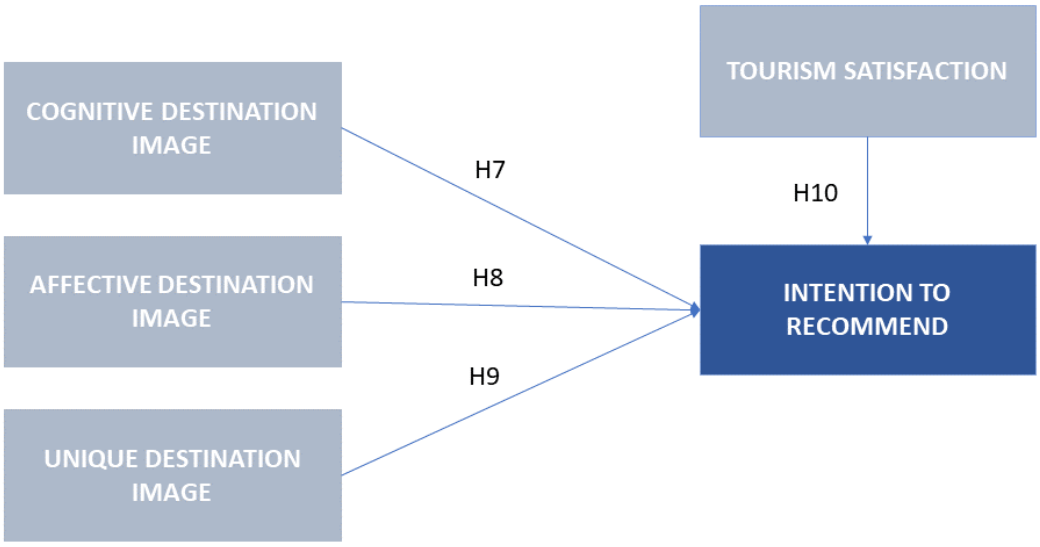


H4	Cognitive destination image and tourism satisfaction are positively related.
H5	Affective destination image and tourism satisfaction are positively related.
H6	Unique destination image and tourism satisfaction are positively related.

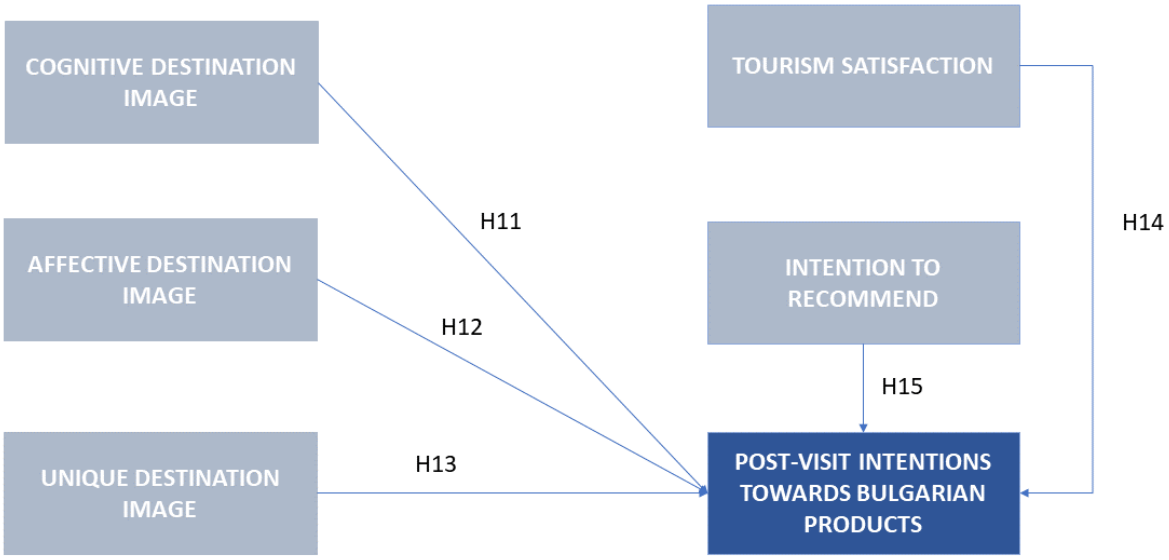


H7	Cognitive destination image and intention to recommend are positively related.
H8	Affective destination image and intention to recommend are positively related.

H9	Unique destination image and intention to recommend are positively related.
H10	Tourism satisfaction and intention to recommend are positively related.



H11	Cognitive destination image has a positive influence on post-visit intentions toward Bulgarian products.
H12	Affective destination image has a positive influence on post-visit intentions toward Bulgarian products.
H13	Unique destination image has a positive influence on post-visit intentions toward Bulgarian products.
H14	Tourism satisfaction has a positive influence on post-visit intentions toward Bulgarian products.
H15	Intention to recommend a tourism destination has a positive influence on post-visit intention towards Bulgarian products.



Annex 2: Descriptive Statistics of Unique, Cognitive, Affective Destination Image, Tourism Satisfaction, Intention to Recommend, and Post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products.

Table 19 Descriptive Statistics of Unique Destination Image

Unique Feature variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Alexander Nevsky Cathedral	4.61	0.675
Vitosha Mountain	4.36	0.857
Communist History and Heritage	3.88	1.002
Soviet Architecture and Buildings	3.93	0.926
Statue of St. Sofia	3.60	1.107
National Palace of Culture [NDK]	3.84	0.970
Ivan Vazov National Theatre	3.89	1.033
Square of Tolerance	3.53	1.012
Vitosha Boulevard	3.88	0.999
Slaveykov Square open book market	3.36	0.973
The cheapest capital in Europe	4.00	1.028
One of the oldest captals in Europe	4.04	1.044
Underrated tourism destination	4.10	0.989
Charming and quirky city	4.00	1.025
Multicultural city	3.44	1.176
City of contrasts	3.87	1.004
Selection of Free Walking Tours	3.81	1.048
Delicious and distinctive traditional cuisine	4.08	1.050
Vegetarian/vegan-friendly destination	3.14	1.145
Availability of hot mineral water	3.39	1.095
Street art	3.33	0.998

Squat shops	3.12	0.999
Sofia nightlife	3.46	1.039
Great Wi-Fi connectivity	3.46	1.114

Table 20 Descriptives of Cognitive Destination Image

Cognitive Feature variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Sofia offers intersting places of historical and cultural interest	4.44	0.752
Good opportunities for sport and outdoor activities	4.09	0.845
Distinctive characteristics of architecture and buildings	4.10	0.923
Unique folklore and unusual customs	4.10	0.870
Beautiful surrounding natural envionment	4.25	0.905
Pleasant weather	3.76	1.007
A lot of open green spaces	3.96	0.921
Friendly and helpful local residents	3.69	1.100
Ease of access from country of residence	3.85	1.065
Ease of access to places of interest	3.96	0.930
Attractions for children	3.03	0.844
Sofia has a good name and reputation	2.99	1.005
A good quality of life	3.25	0.964
Clean and unpolluted environment	2.74	1.184
Cleanliness of streets and buildings	2.81	1.180
Opportunities to do daytrips outside of the city	4.02	0.886
Various shopping facilities	3.84	0.879
Good quality of accommodations	3.78	0.887
Good variety of accommodations	3.79	0.860
Good quality of restaurants	4.17	0.836
Good variety of restaurants and cuisines	4.14	0.823
Appealing local cuisine	4.18	0.932
Variety of products that promote local culture	3.90	0.888
Good nightlife	3.73	0.887
Good value for money	4.43	0.752
Good public transport network	3.74	0.956
No language barrier	2.78	1.219
Signs and indicators are properly displayed and easy to understand	3.04	1.052
Availability of tourism informaton	3.33	0.997
Availability of organised sightseeing tours	3.81	0.910

Table 21 Descriptives of Affective Destination Image

Affective DI variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pleasant	5.82	1.250
Exciting	5.37	1.262
Arousing	4.70	1.336
Relaxing	5.19	1.368
Interesting	6.04	1.159
Cosy	5.27	1.354
Safe	5.26	1.427
Friendly	5.39	1.439
Modern	4.46	1.508
Preserved	4.91	1.461
Trendy	4.55	1.366
Dynamic	5.07	1.344
Exotic	4.29	1.576
Creative	5.25	1.322

Table 22: Descriptives of Satisfaction

Satisfaction variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
My visit to Sofia is worth my time and effort	6.13	1.216
My travel experience to Sofia exceeded my expectations	5.66	1.419
In comparison with other similar places I've visited before, Sofia is a better destination for tourism	4.56	1.610
My visit to Sofia was a wonderful surprise	5.34	1.547
Overall, I am satisfied with my travel experience in Sofia	6.09	1.234

Table 23 Descriptives of Intention to Recommend

Intention to recommend variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
I will recommend Sofia to my friends/family/colleagues	6.03	1.328
I will write positive reviews online about Sofia (including reviews about attractions, restaurants, tours, etc.)	5.26	1.763
I will speak about my good impressions of Sofia to my friends/family/colleagues	6.12	1.250

I will be able to give helpful information about Sofia to my friends/family/colleagues	6.14	1.045
I will write online reviews to help people to decide to visit Sofia or to choose Sofia as a tourism destination (including reviews about attractions, restaurants, tours, etc.)	4.88	1.796
I will write helpful information about Sofia online in order to help potential tourists prepare their visit	4.79	1.807

Table 24 Descriptives of Post-visit Intentions Towards Bulgarian Products

Attitudes towards Bulgarian products variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Visiting Sofia helped me to expand my knowledge about Bulgarian products	4.20	0.932
Once at home, I hope to be able to find Bulgarian products in local shops	3.46	1.069
Once at home, I would like to buy Bulgarian products	3.54	1.039
Once at home, I would be willing to search for Bulgarian products	3.44	1.081
I will recommend to my friends/family to buy Bulgarian products	3.79	1.020

Annex 3 – SPSS Outputs

Annex 3.1. Principal Component Analysis: Variable Cognitive Destination Image

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		,826
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2267,607
	df	171
	Sig.	,000

Total Variance Explained			
Component	Initial Eigenvalues	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings[a]

	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	5,836	30,718	30,718	5,836	30,718	30,718	4,748
2	2,058	10,832	41,550	2,058	10,832	41,550	2,699
3	1,327	6,986	48,536	1,327	6,986	48,536	3,178
4	1,264	6,655	55,191	1,264	6,655	55,191	3,099
5	1,101	5,795	60,985	1,101	5,795	60,985	2,680
6	,910	4,789	65,774	,910	4,789	65,774	2,496
7	,899	4,734	70,508	,899	4,734	70,508	2,275
8	,786	4,137	74,645				
9	,700	3,683	78,328				
10	,689	3,625	81,953				
11	,571	3,007	84,960				
12	,535	2,815	87,775				
13	,508	2,672	90,447				
14	,464	2,441	92,887				
15	,368	1,939	94,826				
16	,307	1,614	96,440				
17	,268	1,410	97,850				
18	,243	1,279	99,129				
19	,166	,871	100,000				
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.							
a. When components are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.							

Annex 3.2. Cronbach's Alpha: Variable Cognitive Destination Image

a) Local food and gastronomy

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,829	,829	5

b) Tourism Information

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,742	,749	3

c) Historical and Cultural Attractions

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,685	,687	3

d) Accommodation

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,841	,842	2

e) Cleanliness

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,797	,797	2

f) Opportunities for activities outside of the city

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,529	,530	2

g) Natural Environment

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,534	,535	2

Annex 3.3. – Principal Component Analysis: Variable Affective Destination Image

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		,918
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2332,330
	df	78
	Sig.	,000

Total Variance Explained							
	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings[a]
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	6,746	51,894	51,894	6,746	51,894	51,894	6,011
2	1,178	9,059	60,953	1,178	9,059	60,953	5,614
3	,874	6,724	67,677				
4	,795	6,118	73,795				
5	,632	4,860	78,654				
6	,504	3,881	82,535				
7	,463	3,565	86,100				
8	,409	3,147	89,246				
9	,381	2,934	92,180				
10	,305	2,350	94,530				
11	,262	2,014	96,543				
12	,236	1,819	98,362				
13	,213	1,638	100,000				
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.							
a. When components are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.							

Annex 3.4 – Cronbach's Alpha: Variable Affective Destination Image

a) Modern

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,854	6

b) Traditional

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,889	7

Annex 3.5. – Principal Component Analysis: Variable Unique Destination Image

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		,840
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1890,223
	df	231
	Sig.	,000

Total Variance Explained							
	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings[a]
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	5,615	25,522	25,522	5,615	25,522	25,522	3,780
2	1,871	8,503	34,025	1,871	8,503	34,025	3,983
3	1,606	7,301	41,327	1,606	7,301	41,327	3,235
4	1,537	6,985	48,312	1,537	6,985	48,312	1,971
5	1,111	5,048	53,361	1,111	5,048	53,361	2,348
6	,991	4,502	57,863	,991	4,502	57,863	2,363
7	,910	4,138	62,001				
8	,839	3,815	65,816				
9	,821	3,734	69,550				
10	,737	3,351	72,902				
11	,712	3,238	76,140				
12	,648	2,947	79,087				
13	,589	2,677	81,764				
14	,580	2,635	84,399				
15	,560	2,545	86,944				
16	,520	2,363	89,307				

17	,481	2,188	91,495				
18	,468	2,126	93,621				
19	,405	1,842	95,463				
20	,350	1,590	97,054				
21	,339	1,543	98,596				
22	,309	1,404	100,000				
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.							
a. When components are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.							

Annex 3.6. – Cronbach's Alpha: Variable Unique Destination Image

a) Curiosities

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,735	,738	5

b) Tourist Attractions

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,760	,761	6

c) Personality

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,731	,731	5

d) Communist Heritage

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,759	,761	2

e) Most Emblematic Attractions

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,420	,429	2

f) Sightseeing

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,541	,541	2

Annex 3.7. – Principal Component Analysis: Variable Tourism Satisfaction

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		,849
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1192,757
	df	10
	Sig.	,000

Total Variance Explained						
	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3,748	74,967	74,967	3,748	74,967	74,967
2	,590	11,794	86,761			
3	,303	6,070	92,830			
4	,191	3,815	96,645			
5	,168	3,355	100,000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Annex 3.8. – Cronbach's Alpha: Variable Tourism Satisfaction

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,911	5

Annex 3.9. – Principal Component Analysis: Variable Intention to Recommend

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		,779
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1580,275
	df	15
	Sig.	,000

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings[a]
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	3,717	61,946	61,946	3,717	61,946	61,946	3,144
2	1,423	23,718	85,664	1,423	23,718	85,664	2,991
3	,398	6,628	92,292				
4	,222	3,697	95,989				
5	,157	2,617	98,606				
6	,084	1,394	100,000				

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. When components are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.

Annex 3.10. – Cronbach's Alpha: Variable Intention to Recommend

a) WOM

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,884	3

b) eWOM

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,939	3

Annex 3.11. – Principal Component Analysis: Variable Post-Visit Intentions towards Bulgarian Products

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		,840
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	913,479
	df	6
	Sig.	,000

Total Variance Explained						
	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3,192	79,801	79,801	3,192	79,801	79,801
2	,377	9,433	89,233			
3	,265	6,613	95,847			
4	,166	4,153	100,000			
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.						

Annex 3.12. – Cronbach's Alpha: Variable Post-visit Intentions to Buy Bulgarian Products

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,915	,915	4

Annex 3.14. Multiple Linear Regression Models

a) Model 1:

Coefficients[a]							
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF

1	(Constant)	-2,507E-16	,043		,000	1,000		
	Traditional Affective Image	,658	,043	,658	15,451	,000	1,000	1,000
2	(Constant)	-2,377E-16	,041		,000	1,000		
	Traditional Affective Image	,585	,043	,585	13,468	,000	,891	1,123
	Activities Outside the City	,221	,043	,221	5,089	,000	,891	1,123
3	(Constant)	-2,853E-16	,040		,000	1,000		
	Traditional Affective Image	,501	,048	,501	10,540	,000	,711	1,407
	Activities Outside of the City	,206	,043	,206	4,839	,000	,884	1,132
	Historical and Cultural Attractions	,182	,046	,182	3,935	,000	,754	1,326
4	(Constant)	-2,859E-16	,040		,000	1,000		
	Traditional Affective Image	,456	,050	,456	9,071	,000	,624	1,603
	Activities Outside the City	,189	,043	,189	4,412	,000	,861	1,161
	Historical and Cultural Attractions	,143	,048	,143	2,963	,003	,679	1,473
	Personality	,129	,051	,129	2,548	,011	,617	1,620

a. Dependent Variable: Zscore: Overall image of Sofia

b) Model 2:

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-1,032E-16	,040		,000	1,000		
	Traditional Affective Image	,713	,040	,713	17,982	,000	1,000	1,000
2	(Constant)	-1,200E-16	,038		,000	1,000		

	Traditional Affective Image	,592	,045	,592	13,023	,000	,708	1,412
	Personality	,225	,045	,225	4,940	,000	,708	1,412
3	(Constant)	-1,554E-16	,038		,000	1,000		
	Traditional Affective Image	,545	,047	,545	11,622	,000	,645	1,551
	Personality	,173	,047	,173	3,660	,000	,633	1,579
	Historical and Cultural Attractions	,153	,046	,153	3,346	,001	,680	1,471
4	(Constant)	-1,722E-16	,037		,000	1,000		
	Traditional Affective Image	,506	,048	,506	10,594	,000	,603	1,658
	Personality	,153	,047	,153	3,243	,001	,622	1,608
	Historical and Cultural Attractions	,152	,045	,152	3,369	,001	,680	1,471
	Natural Environment	,131	,041	,131	3,228	,001	,832	1,202
5	(Constant)	-1,911E-16	,037		,000	1,000		
	Traditional Affective Image	,514	,048	,514	10,780	,000	,599	1,670
	Personality	,183	,049	,183	3,723	,000	,561	1,781
	Historical and Cultural Attractions	,172	,046	,172	3,752	,000	,645	1,551
	Natural Environment	,160	,043	,160	3,731	,000	,738	1,356
	Local Food and Gastronomy	-,100	,050	-,100	-2,009	,045	,553	1,808

a. Dependent Variable: Tourist Satisfaction

c) Model 3:

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	8,768E-17	,051		,000	1,000		
	Modern Affective Image	,429	,051	,429	8,377	,000	1,000	1,000
2	(Constant)	7,648E-17	,050		,000	1,000		

	Modern Affective Image	,290	,060	,290	4,872	,000	,699	1,431
	Tourist Satisfaction	,252	,060	,252	4,222	,000	,699	1,431
3	(Constant)	6,960E-17	,049		,000	1,000		
	Modern Affective Image	,265	,060	,265	4,423	,000	,680	1,472
	Tourist Satisfaction	,245	,059	,245	4,142	,000	,697	1,434
	Sightseeing	,130	,051	,130	2,558	,011	,948	1,055
a. Dependent Variable: eWOM								

d) Model 4:

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-7,200E-17	,037		,000	1,000		
	Tourist Satisfaction	,761	,037	,761	20,739	,000	1,000	1,000
2	(Constant)	-1,074E-16	,035		,000	1,000		
	Tourist Satisfaction	,693	,037	,693	18,902	,000	,902	1,108
	Most Emblematic attractions	,219	,037	,219	5,972	,000	,902	1,108
3	(Constant)	-1,315E-16	,033		,000	1,000		
	Tourist Satisfaction	,526	,048	,526	10,911	,000	,483	2,070
	Most Emblematic attractions	,193	,036	,193	5,409	,000	,884	1,132
	Traditional Affective Image	,245	,048	,245	5,071	,000	,481	2,080
4	(Constant)	-1,675E-16	,033		,000	1,000		
	Tourist Satisfaction	,487	,049	,487	9,964	,000	,455	2,196
	Most Emblematic attractions	,172	,036	,172	4,837	,000	,858	1,166
	Traditional Affective Image	,214	,048	,214	4,422	,000	,464	2,157
	Historical and Cultural Attractions	,134	,040	,134	3,374	,001	,689	1,452
5	(Constant)	-1,517E-16	,033		,000	1,000		
	Tourist Satisfaction	,485	,048	,485	10,008	,000	,455	2,196
	Most Emblematic attractions	,160	,036	,160	4,493	,000	,842	1,188

	Traditional Affective Image	,187	,049	,187	3,810	,000	,442	2,262
	Historical and Cultural Attractions	,105	,041	,105	2,553	,011	,634	1,577
	Local Food and Gastronomy	,100	,039	,100	2,539	,012	,690	1,449
a. Dependent Variable: WOM								

e) Model 5:

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	1,456E-16	,053		,000	1,000		
	Modern Affective Image	,366	,053	,366	6,947	,000	1,000	1,000
2	(Constant)	6,066E-17	,051		,000	1,000		
	Modern Affective Image	,270	,056	,270	4,776	,000	,829	1,207
	Historical and Cultural Attractions	,233	,056	,233	4,132	,000	,829	1,207
3	(Constant)	7,124E-17	,051		,000	1,000		
	Modern Affective Image	,211	,060	,211	3,544	,000	,729	1,372
	Historical and Cultural Attractions	,202	,057	,202	3,560	,000	,798	1,252
	Curiosities	,163	,058	,163	2,830	,005	,779	1,284
4	(Constant)	9,687E-17	,050		,000	1,000		
	Modern Affective Image	,162	,063	,162	2,597	,010	,650	1,538
	Historical and Cultural Attractions	,143	,062	,143	2,304	,022	,665	1,504
	Curiosities	,155	,057	,155	2,716	,007	,776	1,288
	WOM	,153	,064	,153	2,367	,019	,612	1,633
5	(Constant)	1,040E-16	,050		,000	1,000		
	Modern Affective Image	,161	,062	,161	2,596	,010	,650	1,538
	Historical and Cultural Attractions	,173	,063	,173	2,733	,007	,630	1,588

	Curiosities	,153	,057	,153	2,686	,008	,776	1,289
	WOM	,148	,064	,148	2,305	,022	,611	1,635
	Communist Heritage	-,108	,052	-,108	-2,078	,039	,937	1,067
a. Dependent Variable: Intention to Buy Bulgarian Products								

Annex 4: Questionnaire

Destination Image of Sofia, Bulgaria

Dear Participant,

First of all, I want to let you know that I highly appreciate your valuable time invested in filling out this questionnaire.

What is the study about?

The purpose of this study is to examine the different components of the destination image of Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria, and its relationship with satisfaction and post-visit behaviour. Moreover, it aims to identify the unique features of the city and the associations about it. Your input is very valuable because, as foreign visitors of the city, you can give the best insight in order to create a better strategy for promoting Sofia as a tourist destination, as well as to understand the city's value proposition as a tourism product.

Finally, this research is being conducted as part of the methodology of a master thesis for a MSc Marketing degree at ISCTE Business School in Lisbon, Portugal.

Thank you very much for your participation!

*Please note that all information included in this survey is confidential and will only be used for the scientific purposes of this research.

* Required

Decision making factors

1. **Please indicate the level of importance which the following factors had on your decision to visit Sofia. ***

Mark only one oval per row.

	Not important at all	Not Important	Neutral	Important	Very important
I have always wanted to visit Sofia.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Family/friends advice	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Social Media	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Price/cost of trip	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Travel websites	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Travel agency advice	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Online advertising	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Advertising in the media	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Press/ TV articles	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
By chance, got the opportunity to	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Previous Visit	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Unique Features of Sofia

2. **Please list the first THREE unique features/associations that come to your mind when you think of the Sofia as a tourist destination? ***

Unique Features of Sofia

3. **Please indicate the extent to which you agree that the following features are unique/emblematic for Sofia? ***
Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Alexander Nevsky Cathedral					
Vitosha Mountain					
Communist History and Heritage					
Soviet Architecture and Buildings					
Statue of St. Sofia					
National Palace of Culture [NDK]					
Ivan Vazov National Theatre					
Square of Tolerance					
Central Market Hall [Tsentralni Hali]					
Vitosha Boulevard					
Slaveykov Square open book market					
The cheapest capital in Europe					
One of the oldest capital in Europe					
Underrated tourism destination					
Charming and quirky city					
Multicultural city					
City of contrasts					
Selection of Free Walking Tours					
Delicious and distinctive traditional cuisine					
Vegetarian/vegan-friendly destination					
Bulgarian yoghurt					
Availability of hot mineral water					
Street art					
Squat shops					
Sofia nightlife					
Great Wi-Fi connectivity					

Cognitive Destination Image

4. **Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about the destination attributes of Sofia. ***

Mark only one oval per row.

Availability of tourism information					
Availability of organised sightseeing tours					
places of historical and cultural interest					
Good opportunities for sport and outdoor activities (hiking, skiing, adventure sports, picnics, camping, etc.)					
Distinctive characteristics of architecture and buildings					
Unique folklore and unusual customs					
Beautiful surrounding natural environment					
Pleasant weather					
A lot of open green spaces					
Friendly and helpful local residents					
Ease of access from country of residence					
Ease of access to places of interest					
Attractions for children					
Sofia has a good name and reputation					
A good quality of life					
Clean and unpolluted environment					
Cleanliness of streets and buildings					
Opportunities to do daytrips outside of the city					
Various shopping facilties					
Good quality of accommodations					
Good variety of accommodations					
Good quality of restaurants					
Good variety of restaurants and cuisines					
Appealing local food cuisine					
Variety of products that promote local culture					
Good nightlife					
Good value for money					
Good public transport network					
No language barrier					
Signs and indicators are properly displayed and easy to understand					

Affective Destination Image

5. **Please indicate your level of agreement with the following feelings towards Sofia.** *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Pleasant							
Exciting							
Arousing							
Relaxing							
Interesting							
Cosy							
Safe							
Friendly							
Modern							
Preserved							
Trendy							
Dynamic							
Exotic							
Creative							

6. **How would you describe the overall image that you have of Sofia? ***

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Highly unfavourable						Highly favourable

Satisfaction

6. **Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding your satisfaction ***

Mark only one oval.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
My visit to Sofia is worth my time and effort.							
My travel experience to Sofia definitely exceeded my expectations.							
In comparison with other similar places I've visited before, Sofia is a better destination for tourism.							
My visit to Sofia was a wonderful surprise.							
Overall, I am satisfied with my travel experience in Sofia.							

Post-visit intentions

8. **Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding your post-visit intentions: ***

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I will recommend Sofia to my friends/family/colleagues							
I will write positive reviews online about Sofia							
I will speak about my good impressions of Sofia to my friends/family/colleagues							
I will be able to give helpful information about Sofia to my friends/family/colleagues							
I will write online travel reviews to help people to decide to visit Sofia or to choose Sofia as a destination.							
I will write helpful information about Sofia online in order to help potential tourists prepare their visit							

9. **Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding you're your intentions towards Bulgarian products:***
Mark only one oval.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Visiting Sofia helped me to expand my knowledge about Bulgarian products.					
Once at home, I hope to be able to find Bulgarian products in local shops.					
Once at home, I would like to buy Bulgarian products					
Once at home, I would be willing to search for Bulgarian products.					
I will recommend to my friends/family to buy Bulgarian products.					

General

10. **Gender** *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Female
- ◯ Male

11. **Age** *
Mark only one oval.

- ◯ 18-24
- ◯ 25-34
- ◯ 35-44
- ◯ 45-54
- ◯ 55-65
- ◯ 65 or older

12. **Country of origin:** *

_____

13. **Which of the following best describes your current marital status?** *
Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Married
- ◯ Widowed
- ◯ Divorced
- ◯ Single
- ◯ Single, but cohabiting with a significant other

14. **What is the highest level of education you have completed?** *
Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Primary
- ◯ High School
- ◯ Bachelor Degree
- ◯ Postgraduate Degree
- ◯ Master Degree
- ◯ PhD

15. **Annual Personal Income: Please compare to the annual average personal income in your country** *
Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Below average
- ◯ Average
- ◯ Above average
- ◯ High

16. **How are you visiting Sofia in terms of companion?** *
Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Solo
- ◯ With friend/s
- ◯ With family
- ◯ As a couple
- ◯ Business
- ◯ Other: _____

17. **Purpose of Visit** *
Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Holiday/leisure
- ◯ Visiting friends/family
- ◯ Business
- ◯ Education
- ◯ Transfer to another destination
- ◯ Other: _____

18. **Length of stay** *
Mark only one oval.

- ◯ One night
- ◯ Two nights
- ◯ Three nights
- ◯ More than three nights
- ◯ One week
- ◯ A weekend

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