# North Korea as a Tourism Destination:

# An Image Analysis

## What do tourist's post-visit images show?

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE TOURISM THESIS

**Name**: Joëlle de Raaff
**Student registration number**: 960215-677-070
**Supervisor**: Rami Isaac
**Date**: 27-05-2018
**Course code**: GEO 80818

WAGENINGEN
UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences

## BSc Tourism author statement

**Full thesis title:** North Korea as a Tourism Destination: An Image Analysis
**Author's name:** Joëlle de Raaff
**Bachelor degree programme:** BSc Tourism
**Educational Institutes:** NHTV Breda University of Applied Science and Wageningen University, NL

### Authorship statement

I hereby declare that this thesis is wholly the work of Joëlle de Raaff. Any other contributors have either been referenced in the prescribed manner or are listed in the acknowledgements together with the nature and the scope of their contribution.

Where I have consulted the published work of others this is always clearly attributed. Where I have quoted from the work of others the source is always given. A list of the references used, is included. An appropriate referencing style is used throughout. With the exception of such quotations this thesis is entirely my own work. I have read and understand the penalties associated with plagiarism as stated in the Student Charter.

### Declaration of Partial Copyright

I hereby grant to NHTV Breda University of Applied Science ("NHTV") and Wageningen University ("WU") the non-exclusive, royalty-free right to include a digital copy of my thesis and associated supplemental files ("Work") in the Library Catalogue at NHTV. NHTV and WU may use, reproduce, display, convert, sublicense and distribute the Work for purposes of a scholarly or research nature, in any format and any medium, without prior permission or charge, provided that the Work is not altered in any way and is properly acknowledged, including citing the author, title and full bibliographic details. (Note: this corresponds to the Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives, or CC BY-NC-ND Creative Commons license)

I further agree that NHTV and WU may keep more than one copy of the Work for purposes of back-up and security; and that NHTV and WU may, without changing the content, translate, if technically possible, the Work to any medium or format for the purpose of preserving the Work and facilitating the exercise of NHTV and WU's rights under this license. I understand that work deposited in the NHTV Library Catalogue will be accessible to a wide variety of people and institutions - including automated agents - via the World Wide Web. Copying, publication, or public performance of the Work for commercial purposes shall not be allowed without my written permission.

While granting the above uses to NHTV and WU, I retain copyright ownership and moral rights in the Work, and may deal with the copyright in the Work in any way consistent with the terms of this license, including the right to change the Work for subsequent purposes, including editing and publishing the Work in whole or in part, and licensing the content to other parties as I may desire.

I represent and warrant that I have the right to grant the rights contained in this license and that the Work does not, to the best of my knowledge, infringe upon anyone's copyright. I have obtained written copyright permission, where required, for the use of any third-party copyrighted material contained in the Work. I represent and warrant that the Work is my original work and that I have not previously assigned or relinquished the rights conferred in this license.

**Date: 28-06-2018**
**Signature:**

**Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to examine the tourist's post-visit image of North Korea. North Korea is one of the poorest countries in the world (French, 2014) and its tourism industry is relatively small with about 100.000 visitors each year (Beauchamp, 2017). Tourism brings more income to a destination (Zaei & Zaei, 2013), which is why improving North Korea's destination marketing could be of great interest for the destination. A key way to strengthen the marketing is by understanding tourists' destination images (Buhalis, 2000). There is often too little focus on learning from post-visit images (Çakmak & Isaac, 2012) and since nothing is known about post-visit images of North Korea, this is the subject of investigation in this thesis. It is a netnography study which includes a word frequency analysis, semantic network analysis and critical content analysis are performed on 96 travel blogs about North Korea. The results show that tourists mainly travel to the destination for its unusual sides. Certain aspects are unique to North Korea, such as its controlling of citizens and tourists, big focus on the leaders and strong presence of propaganda. Tourists dislike some aspects of their tours in the country, such as constantly being followed by guides. At the same time, they see less enjoyable experiences as part of the strange, unique experience and none of the tourists regret traveling to North Korea. This knowledge on the post-visit images of tourists could be useful for destination marketers. To the best knowledge of the author, this is the first study conducted on the post-visit images tourists have of North Korea.

KEY WORDS: North Korea, destination image, image analysis, controversial destinations

**Acknowledgement**

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Dr Rami Isaac, from the NHTV University of Applied Sciences. He made certain from the start that I was on the right track with this thesis and supplied me with many titles of relevant research papers that helped me forward. Whenever I had any questions, I could always visit or email him and receive replies back very quickly. Furthermore, I would like to thank Paulina Schmitz and Yulia Kisora, from Wageningen University & Research, for holding helpful thesis meetings and providing me with useful answers to my questions.

Thank you for all your help.

Joëlle de Raaff

**Table of Content**

**Chapter 1. Introduction**

Since the 1960s the tourism sector has known a massive growth and continues growing today (Mason, 2012). More and more tourism destinations arise and to keep attracting tourists, destinations need to work harder on having competitive advantages (Srivastava, Fahey & Christensen, 2001). A key way to do this is by understanding tourists' destination images and using this knowledge for marketing purposes (Buhalis, 2000).

Both marketing and tourism related fields have been studying destination images of tourists for decades now (Çakmak & Isaac, 2012). The image a tourist has of a destination affects their decision-making (Pike, 2002; Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). It is important for destinations to understand how tourists form pre-visit and post-visit images as no matter how they were formed and how truthful they are, they have a significant impact on destination choices of old and new tourists (Barich & Kotler, 1991). Destinations can use image knowledge to practice stronger marketing strategies and consequently strengthen the tourism industry. Understanding image formation processes is a key part of image knowledge and being able to apply these better strategies (Çakmak & Isaac, 2012). What a tourist knows about a destination, what motivates them to travel and which destination they actually choose are three phases in which the tourist forms this image (Gartner, 1994).

While image-related studies have been performed on most countries in the world, one country stays behind while it could actually use the income from a better marketed tourism industry (Kim, Timothy & Han, 2007). This country is North Korea. North Korea is known as the most isolated country in the world (Delisle, 2017), and stands out in more ways than just this. Its political, economic, sociological, technological and moral circumstances are different from most countries and therefore can cause quite some controversy.

North Korea is a country that has been through a big variety of developments in the past and present and the country is seen as controversial by most other countries. Examples of controversial events include North Korea's stance on the Korean War in the 1950s, a great famine in the 1990s and current suppression of freedom of North Korean citizens and heavy labour camp punishments when critical opinions are outed. It could be logical for one to think that foreigners want to stay far away from the country, however, still 100.000 tourists visit North Korea each year (Beauchamp, 2017). Their pre-visit idea is to see with their own eyes what the situation in North Korea is like and to find out how this is different from or similar to their expectations (Connell, 2017). Of the tourists' post-visit image of North Korea nothing is known. Whether the tourists like what they discover or not and whether it fits their expectations or not has not yet been researched.

The country has known great poverty for decades, as especially became clear during millions dying caused by hunger in the 1990s (Haggard & Noland, 2016; Goodkind, 2015). Since then, North korea has barely grown economically and is still one of the poorest countries in the world (French, 2014). Living circumstances of North Koreans are often poor and there is a lack of accessible proper health care (Bahk, Ezzati & Khang, 2018). Because of these facts, the country hopes to improve its economic situation (French, 2014). Improving their tourism industry could offer an effective way for North Korea to gain more income and therefore to decrease its poverty (Kim, Timothy & Han, 2007). Tourism has been proven to offer positive social and economic consequences, namely, among other consequences, increasing a destination's income and improving the health care in that destination (Zaei & Zaei, 2013).

A key way for destinations to improve their tourism industry is by learning from the pre-visit and post-visit destination images tourists have. This knowledge is important when marketers want to apply effective marketing techniques (Echter & Ritchie, 1991; Çakmak & Isaac, 2012). Since North Korea currently knows much poverty and has a relatively small tourism industry with 100.000 visitors per

year (Beauchamp, 2017), applying stronger marketing strategies to improve the tourism sector could be an effective way to boost North Korea's economy.

As stated earlier, having knowledge on destination images and how they are formed is important for destination marketing purposes. While pre-visit images are researched often, learning from post-visit images should be taken more seriously by destination marketers (Çakmak & Isaac, 2012). Knowledge on the post-visit image of tourists is of great importance, as marketers can learn from these experiences and this gained information can be used to improve the destination experience and image (Çakmak & Isaac, 2012).

In this thesis, the post-visit destination images tourists have of North Korea will by analysed, as there is no scientific literature on this topic yet and the outcomes could offer useful insights for marketers of the destination.

*1.1 Overall aim*

With its poor economic and welfare circumstances and the lack of knowledge on its tourists' post-visit destination images, North Korea will be the research subject of this thesis. This means the following research question will be attempted to answer in this paper:

"*What is the tourist's post-visit image of North Korea*?"

Therefore, the focus of this study is on travellers' post-visit regarding their evaluation of North Korea. Specifically it examines the image of North Korea through employing qualitative methods to analyse the image of North Korea's tourists' online publishing on their blogs.

*1.2 Structure of thesis*

In chapter 1, the introduction, the research topic and its relevance were introduced. The literature review of chapter 2 will give broader information on destination images and travel blogs. In the next chapter, more background information on North Korea is given. Chapter 4 describes the used methodologies, findings and discusses these findings by comparing them to other research papers. The limitations of the research are discussed in this chapter as well. Then, chapter 5 points out the key findings, managerial and academic recommendations. A reference list is shown in chapter 6, followed by chapter 7, the appendix, as a separate document.

**Chapter 2. Literature Review**

*2.1 Introduction*

To gain a deeper understanding of image analyses, background information is needed on this concept and its use in academic research. This knowledge is needed to understand what should be researched in relation to North Korea's destination images, to be able to interpret the results well and to connect them to already existing literature. First, destination image, its importance, formation factors and influences will be explained in more detail. This offers a better insight in how to interpret, analyse and discuss the results in chapter 4, Methodology & Findings. As the subject of the analysis is travel blogs, these and their importance will be defined as well, to explain why analysing them gives a proper understanding of tourists' post-visit destination images.
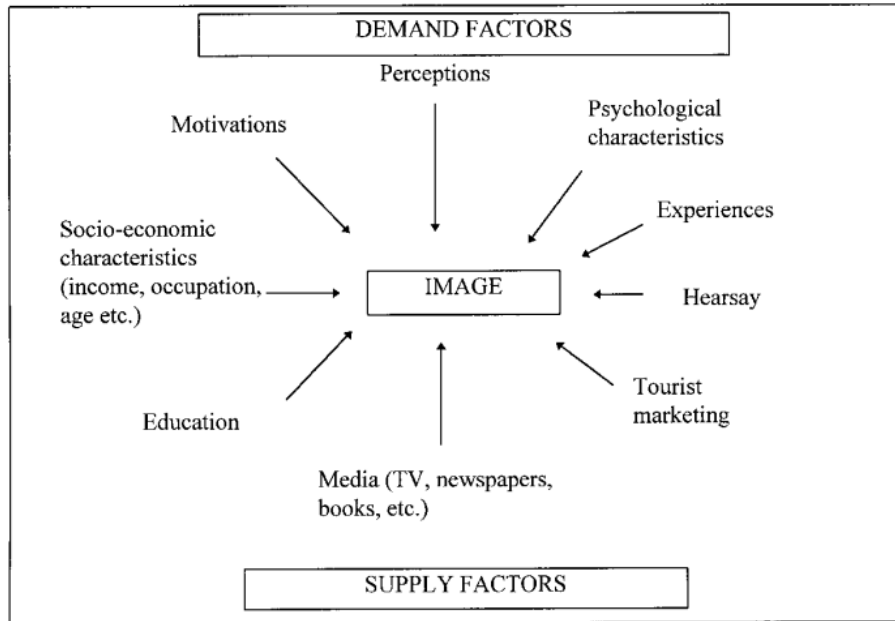
*2.2 Destination image*

Tourists have certain images before visiting a destination and after visiting a destination. These images tourists form are called destination images. "*Destination image*" is a concept that is not often defined in academic literature, as researchers tend to see it as a vague or incomplete concept (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Tasci, Gartner & Tamer Cavusgil, 2007). One short and concrete definition is given by McClinchey (1999): "*the perceptions or impressions a person has of a place*" (p. 9). A broader definition of the concept was thought of by Alcaniz, Alcaniz, Garcia & Blas (2009), who describe a destination image as something that "*consists of all that the destination evokes in the individual; any idea, belief, feeling or attitude that tourists associate with the place*" (p. 716). The destination images of tourists can be shaped in many different ways and could therefore be partly or fully correct or false. No matter what the image is and how it was formed, it will always affect a tourist's decision-making (Barich & Kotler, 1991; Jenkins, 1999).

Destination images exist in two different categories: the pre-visit image and the post-visit image. The pre-visit image is influenced by a variety of factors on both the demand and supply side of tourism. These factors are socio-economic characteristics, motivations, perceptions, psuchological characteristics, experiences, hearsay, tourist marketing media and education, as shown in Figure 1.

*Figure 1. Demand and supply factors influencing the destination image (Stabler, 1988)*



Since Figure 1 dates back to 1988, certain additions need to be made. Currently, important factors that also influence destination images are newer forms of media such as information that can be found on the internet. (Frías, Rodríguez & Castañeda, 2008).

Post-visit images are formed when the destination is left and the tourist has experienced its reality, which they can then compare to their pre-visit image. Positive post-visit images can cause good (electronic) mouth to mouth stories about a destination, which in turn can create other tourists to have a more positive pre-visit image of the destination. Furthermore, the post-visit image of tourists depends on the match of their experience and previously gathered information of the destination (Beerli & Martin, 2004).

Different information sources will affect the pre-visit image, which will on its turn affect the post-visit image (Beerli & Martin, 2004). Psychological aspects play an important role in how tourists perceive a destination to be. The two most important factors that influence the psychological influences on images are "*the individual's motivations and cultural values*" (San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008, p.274). These motivations and values differ due to the different backgrounds of people from different nationalities (San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008). Another factor influencing the image of tourists is whether they are repeat visitors or not. If tourists have previously experienced the destination, it affects their new post-visit image as well (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). A broad range of factors influencing image formation was given by Beerli & Martin (2004), who researched the exact effect of the following factors: "*secondary and primary information sources, motivations, experience of leisure travel, and sociodemographic characteristics related to gender, age, level of education, social class, and country of origin*" (p. 676).

Destination image literature contains a variety of academic papers that show the stages tourists go through that affect their image formation. Gartner (1994) outlines three stages, namely the cognitive, affective and conative stages. Cognitive components describe what the tourist knows about the destination and how they believe the facts to be (Scott, 1965). San Martín and Del Bosque (2008) added that the cognitive exists of two parts: functional and psychological parts. The first describes actual tangible surroundings such as the landscape or historical buildings. The latter defines more abstract aspects such as the hospitality of locals. The affective component of the three stages tells what a tourist's motives are for visiting and what they want to obtain from the destination (Boulding,

1956). This stage is more about the emotions that tourists feel about a destination, such as feeling excited about it (San Martín and Del Bosque (2008). These two stages result in the conative stage, which is the stage in which the action of deciding the destination takes place after taking image and motives into account (Gartner, 1994).

Stages that include factors affecting post-visit image formation are defined by Gunn (1988). This list is summarized by Echter & Ritchie (1991) as following:

"*1. Accumulation of mental images about vacation experiences*
*2. Modification of those images by further information*
*3. Decision to take a vacation trip*
*4. Travel to the destination*
*5. Participation at the destination*
*6. Return home*
*7. Modification of images based on the vacation experience*" (p. 38).

Stages 1 and 2 influence the pre-visit images of tourists, while stage 7 purely influences the post-visit images (Echter & Ritchie, 1991). During each of these stages, different aspects influence the destination image formation. Across literature a big variety of these aspects have been identified. Isaac & Çakmak (2012) summarize these aspects as relating to "*built environment; scenery (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003); culture (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999); modernity (Tapachi & Waryszak, 2000); and friendliness of people (Nadeau, Heslop, O'Reilly, & Luk, 2008*)" (p.125). They also describe the factors that affect the image formation of tourists after visitation as: "*arousal and excitement (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999); quality of service (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003), satisfaction (Chon, 1990)*" (p.125). In chapter 4, Methodology & Findings, these factors are included in the analyses and the ways in which tourists experience each factor are discussed.

Understanding how destination images are formed is important for destination marketers, as it causes them to be able to apply market segmentation and practice stronger marketing strategies (Çakmak & Isaac, 2012). Especially since the pre-visit destination image a tourist has plays a key role in  the decision-making of a destination, it is important to comprehend the tourists' destination image formation (Jenkins, 1999; Pike, 2002; Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). Though there has already been much research on destination images as a part of marketing, there still are many destinations that could benefit from destination image research. Pre-visit images are usually seen as an important part of marketing-related research, while more attention should be paid to learning from post-visit images by destination marketers (Çakmak & Isaac, 2012). One key way to gain an understanding of tourists' post-visit images is by analysing travel blogs.


*2.3 Travel blogs*

Sellers want to influence the pre-visit image of tourists and these tourists tend to want to share their post-visit image. People desiring to buy a product in general, like a computer or indeed a holiday, can be easily influenced by word-of-mouth stories of other consumers of that same product. Since the marketers of the products are able to manipulate the image of a product, consumers tend to believe other consumers more quickly (Crotts, 1999; Schmalleger & Carson, 2008). This also applies to tourists, who nowadays inform themselves of tourism products by getting information from other consumers. The main way in which the image of tourists can be influenced is by travel blogs (Zhang & Mao, 2012). 'Blog' is a shorter word for 'web log' (Chow, 2005).

Since the growth of information technology, people have been able to get increasingly more information from these travel blogs on destinations before visiting it and thus are influencing their

own pre-visit image. Travel blogs are a form of e-WOM, which stands for electronic word-of-mouth. These blogs tend to cause intentions to visit a destination faster than official informative websites do, as they feel more interpersonal. Novelty, understandability and interest are the main factors of travel blogs that create certain travel intentions in tourists. Each of these factors improves the enjoyment of the reader and can increase their willingness to travel to a certain location (Chen, Shang & Li, 2014).

Travel blogs do more than just influencing the image of future tourists. Importantly, they also show the post-visit image of the bloggers. Travellers share their opinions on their blogs and talk however they prefer about their experiences in a destination (Pan, Maclaurin & Crotts, 2007). Bloggers write about their experiences for different intrinsic reasons, namely "*to document one's life; as a commentary; as catharsis and outlet for their feelings; and as a thinking tool*" (Nardi, Schiano et al, 2004, p. 8). Schmalleger & Carson (2008) add to this that travel bloggers like keeping an online diary, enjoy updating their loved ones digitally on their adventures and wish to spread information about their experiences with other travellers.

More and more travel blogs are being put on the internet every day and this increasingly enables researchers to perform qualitative research on them to learn more about destination images. Consequently, methods that grow in use are frequency analyses, semantic network analyses (Jenkins, 1999; Pearce, 1992) and content analyses (Chon, 1990; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). These three analyses are the most commonly used in destination image research papers, as scholars find them to be effective effective methods. Pan, MacLaurin & Crotts (2007) performed multiple analyses on travel blogs and discussed the effectiveness of these analyses. First of all, they state that semantic network analyses are useful when travel blogs are to be investigated. This adds to different literature on this method, stating that semantic network analyses are highly useful when content containing varying forms of communications has to be researched (Doerfel & Barnett, 1999; Banyai & Glover, 2012). Frequency analyses also are found effective by researchers analysing travel blogs. The outcomes clearly state what tourists mention mostly and are important to perform before performing proper semantic network analyses (Pan, MacLaurin & Crotts, 2007). Furthermore, content analyses help with gaining insights in bloggers' images. Performing these analyses on travel blogs is very effective for tourism and marketing research (Pan, MacLaurin & Crotts 2007). Pan, MacLaurin & Crotts (2007) encouraged future destination image researchers to use these three methods to analyse travel blogs.

Based on this encouragement and on the frequent use of these methods in similar research papers (Choi, Lehto & Morrison, 2007; Pan et al., 2007; Jani & Yeong-Hwang, 2011; Çakmak & Isaac, 2012; Yafang & Zhia, 2013; Shen, Song, Li & Jiang, 2015; Sun, Zhang & Ryan, 2015; Isaac & Çakmak, 2016), these analysis methods will be applied in this thesis.


*2.4 Conclusion*

Destination images are important to understand in tourism-related and marketing-related fields of study. Although pre-visit images are taken very seriously, post-visit images deserve more understanding as well, as they can help destination marketers to learn about what tourists liked and disliked. If a better understanding of the post-image of a destination is desired, a good way to gain insight in this is by analysing post-visit travel blogs (Law & Cheung, 2010). The proper methods for this, as described by many scholars, are frequency analyses, semantic network analyses and content analyses.

Clearly, destination images are important to understand for destinations and destination marketers, if they wish to improve their tourism industry. As outlined in the introduction, a destination that could economically benefit from developing itself better as a tourism destination is North Korea. Nothing is yet known about the post-visit images tourists have of this country, which is why this thesis attempts

to fill this scientific gap. To be able to understand the results of the travel blogs analyses in chapter 4 well, more information on North Korea is needed. This will give a better insight in how to interpret the images of tourists in relation to what is already known about the country. Hence, chapter 3 describes more about the background of North Korea.

**Chapter 3. North Korea**

*3.1 Introduction*

Since many countries mostly see North Korea as a controversial country and it is known that tourists visit the country to see whether their image, likely a controversial image, fits reality (Connell, 2017), the concept "*controversial destinations*" is defined in this chapter. Pre-visit images of tourists are likely to be partially about the controversies of the country and the results will show whether these controversies are also part of the post-visit images. To be able to interpret these results properly, it is important to have knowledge on controversial destinations, why tourists visit them and what is different about their experiences there.

Furthermore, this chapter describes the past and current situation of North Korea regarding political, social, and economic circumstances. Understanding this is important to make sense of the results and to be able to interpret them well. Also, the results can then be compared and related to already existing literature about North Korea.

*3.2 Controversial destinations*

The word "*controversial*" can be defined as "*giving rise or likely to give rise to controversy or public disagreement*" (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.). Tourists traveling to destinations for controversy reasons may do this for different reasons. They can act as activists, for which they can be highly criticized by the national media. Activism can exist in the form of volunteering, observing or protesting (Shields, 2003). Different political opinions due to varying cultural backgrounds can cause risky circumstances for tourists (Shields, 2003). However, tourists might not just travel to a destination to actively involve themselves in the national, regional or local controversies and politics. They can be intrigued by the controversial way media have described the destination and therefore could want to travel there to see whether that image is correct. They want to experience the reality and discover what is false or true of the image they had formed beforehand (Connell, 2017).

Going to a destination for controversy oriented reasons allows the tourist to enter a zone that is usually politically and morally divided (McDowell, 2008). Different opinions and ideas exist about national politics, power-structures, morals and more, but not everyone is free to express these. Usually in controversial areas, certain people or groups are excluded or suppressed. Being able to travel to these destinations as an outsider of the situation allows one to hear the variety in local points of view. The experience the tourist gains from being in this situation allows them to judge the destination and its inhabitants differently, caused by their locally gained insights (McDowell, 2008).

North Korea's political situation is unique within the world and knows much controversy. Tourists travel to this country to see the reality of their expectations. The results will show what tourists think of the destination after visiting and possibly these will show controversial aspects. Therefore, since this country has a controversial image, using it as a case study will hopefully provide clear outcomes that can be used well in a practical sense for North Korea and perhaps for other controversial destinations. As explained previously, knowledge on the post-visit images of tourists is a key way for marketers to learn about what tourists thought of their experiences (Echter & Ritchie, 1991; Çakmak & Isaac, 2012). Having this knowledge and applying it well by using stronger marketing techniques, like marketing segmentation, is one of the key ways to improve the tourism industry in a destination (Echter & Ritchie, 1991). Currently, North Korea's tourism industry is relatively small with 100.000 visitors each year (Beauchamp, 2017), and since the country is very poor and is not developing well

economically (French, 2014), the income from a stronger tourism industry could be helpful. More about North Korea's background will be described in the following section.

*3.3 Background of North Korea*

As stated earlier, North Korea will be researched because of the gap in literature about the post-visit image of tourists and because of its exceptional political and controversial state. Opinions about the way the country functions differ greatly, which is why a factual background description will be given first.

North Korea lies between the countries China and South-Korea and between the Japanese Sea and the Yellow Sea. The country has 25,37 million inhabitants (World Bank, 2018). About 100.000 tourists visit North Korea each year, of which 90% is Chinese and the other 10% come from varying western countries (Beauchamp, 2017).

The country presently practices and historically has practiced activities that have significantly influenced the image of the country that foreigners have. First of all, from 1950 to 1953, the Korean War took place, in which South Koreans, helped by the United Nations, fought against the North Koreans, who sided with communist countries as China and the Soviet-Union. It ended with a truce, but from 1953 until now there has been no peace treaty between the two countries, which means there theoretically still is an ongoing conflict (Lowe, 2014; Macdonald, 2018).

After the Cold War, North Korea industrially developed itself further and while the welfare of the country seemed to improve, a great famine in the 1990s proved the opposite. The horrible famine meant the loss of many North Korean lives, of which estimates differ from a million (Haggard & Noland, 2016) up to three million (Goodkind, 2015). The powerful leaders of the country could not prevent the huge amount of people starving to death.

Different opinions exist on the power-system in North Korea. Most people believe it to be a military dictatorship. Others believe the Kim family, with currently Kim Jong-Un as the leader, rules over all power organs, including the military, the state, the Party, the parliament and more (Frank, 2012). Frank (2012) has analysed the different interpretations and states that North Korea is not led by a military dictatorship but by an "*extreme case of a state-socialist autocracy*" (p. 125). Most citizens have grown up to strongly believe in the ideology the state pushes onto them during their entire life and therefore the obedience of North Koreans can be seen as following an ideology after a life of indoctrination instead of simply being oppressed (Frank, 2012).

Still, North Korea is known by most people for suppressing the voices of its citizens. Expressing unwanted political opinions can cause a citizen to receive a prison sentence and courts are known to falsely accuse people of crimes. These are just two examples that show how the North Korean government practices a dictatorial power and how citizens could never make their critical opinions heard without facing punishments for them and possibly even their family (Smith, 2015). Prison does not simply mean being locked up in a cell, but can mean prison camp, in which the accused people perform heavy labour under bad circumstances (Lankov, 2014). In 2003, an estimated 150.000 North Koreans were in prison (Walmsley, 2003).

North Korea is often described as the most isolated country in the world. Freedom of the people is highly restricted in more ways than the risk of voicing one's critical opinion. Another way in which innocent citizens are being denied freedom is by the inaccessibility of the internet to the public (Delisle, 2017). Influences from 'the West' are seen as wrong and even the most accessible phenomena in the West like rock music are forbidden in North Korea (MacDonald, 2018).

Furthermore, the borders of country are guarded and free travel of foreigners into the country and of citizens out of the country is forbidden (Buda, 2015).

Related to the limited access of foreigners, North Korea has established sanctions on trade with certain countries, which makes it harder for the country to develop itself. The rich North Koreans with political power are able to live their normal lives without being affected by these sanctions, but the poorer people are left behind. They are forced to find their own way to survive (Lee, 2018).

The fact that the life circumstances of ordinary citizens are of no interest to the North Korean government shows in medical information. Data from 2008 shows how the average life expectancy of a North Korean person between 1 and 55 years old is ten years shorter than the life expectancy of a South Korean person. This big difference has multiple causes, including the less accessible health care in North Korea (Bahk, Ezzati & Khang, 2018). Other striking data showing the country's poverty comes from Yoon (2003), who shows that, in 2003, North Korea placed between the 150th and 160th spot on the worldwide list of Gross National Income per capita. Since then, the country has barely grown economically (French, 2014).

Hunger and low income are still relevant issues in the country. A consequence of this is that on the one hand income from the tourism sector is wanted as the country deals with serious poverty (French, 2014), while on the other hand the government does not want citizens to get in contact with foreign cultures (Kim, Timothy & Han, 2007). Consequentially, certain groups who are seen as a bigger threat than others are denied access more quickly. These groups mainly contain Americans, journalists and South Koreans (BBC News, 2003; Kim, Timothy & Han, 2007). Moreover, strong etiquettes must be followed in order to keep your own fate and the fate of your guide safe (Lonely Planet, n.d.). Tourists must indeed always be with their guide and contact with locals is basically prohibited. An interesting addition is that outbound tourist numbers are very low, as only high ranking officials from the communist party are allowed to leave the country (Kim, Timothy & Han, 2007).

A final important point that must be mentioned is that North Korea has made known to the world that it possesses nuclear weapons. These weapons are extremely destructive and every country rightfully does want to risk anything that would make the North Korean government use these nuclear weapons (Lankov, 2014).

Clearly, North Korea has a controversial past and present, which is mostly not seen in a positive light by other especially Western countries. Still, tourists are attracted to the country, namely 100.000 tourists each year (Beauchamp, 2017). This is caused by an interest in the moral and political side of the country and the hope of tourists to experience how the country truly functions in reality, compared to their pre-visit image caused by media and other information sources (Connell, 2017).


*3.4 Conclusion*

To conclude, North Korea is a country with a tumultuous past and present that is seen by most other countries as controversial. Nothing has yet been academically researched about the post-visit destination images of tourists that visit North Korea. Learning about these images fills a gap in academic literature about North Korean post-visit destination images, which might also be relevant for controversial destinations in general. Furthermore, knowledge on post-visit destination images could be used for stronger marketing strategies and possibly boost the tourism industry and thus the economy of North Korea.

In the following chapter, the methodologies that are used to find out more about these post-visit images are described and the results are shown and discussed.

**Chapter 4. Methodology & Findings**

*4.1 Introduction*

This chapter describes the methodologies that help gaining an insight in post-visit destination images of North Korea. How the travel blogs data is collected through netnography is outlined and a description of the bloggers and blogs is given. Then, the data is analysed by using three methods: word frequency, semantic network analysis and critical content analysis. These methods are based on methodologies used in similar research papers (Choi, Lehto & Morrison, 2007; Pan et al., 2007; Jani & Yeong-Hwang, 2011; Çakmak & Isaac, 2012; Yafang & Zhia, 2013; Shen, Song, Li & Jiang, 2015; Sun, Zhang & Ryan, 2015; Isaac & Çakmak, 2016). They qualitatively researched images of particular destinations, which is what will be done in this paper as well. Finally, the results will be compared to similar methods research papers and also, the results will be discussed and related to already existing literature on the topic. These steps give an understanding of post-visit images of North Korea and how these results are different or similar to outcomes of other research papers.

*4.2 Data collection*

Netnography as a method was developed when it became clear that the internet was becoming increasingly important as a source for research. A recent definition of netnography is given by Bowler (2010): "*ethnography over the internet – a method specifically designed to study cultures and communities online*" (p. 1270).

In this thesis, netnography means the picking of travel blogs about North Korea. Firstly, a look was taken at the most visited travel blog websites, of which only two blogs websites, www.travelblog.org and www.travelerspoint.com contained blogs about North Korea. On the first website 44 blogs were found and on the second website another 2 were found. Secondly, 50 other blogs were added by searching the term "*North Korea travel blog*" in Google, adding up to a total of 96 blogs.

*4.3 Data analysis*

Afterwards, a content analysis is applied by using multiple methods: word frequency, semantic network analysis and critical content analysis. Content analysis has shown to be a practical tool to apply on travel blogs in a big number of previous researches (Banyai & Glover, 2012). Analysing word frequency is performed by using the computer software tool NVivo 12 and applying it to the content of all the blogs. Words of these texts are sorted on frequency and analysed for their meanings. Afterwards, the semantic network analysis visualizes frequently used words and clusters them. These clusters help with visualizing the words, the frequency of mentioned words and how they relate to other words (Batagelj & Mrvar, 1998; Doerfel & Barnett, 1999).

Finally, the critical content analysis contains of coding the blog texts and identifying themes. The themes show in more general categories what tourists describe mostly about the destination. This gives a clear overview, with each theme containing specific words or phrases that belong to that theme. An example is how "*surprised*" and "*anxious*" belong to the theme "*emotions*". To identify these themes, factors that form destination images that were mentioned in the literature review (built environment, scenery, culture, modernity, friendliness of people, arousal and excitement, quality of service and satisfaction) were searched for but the author also was open to identifying any new themes and themes that appear to be specifically relevant or striking in the case of North Korea.

Based on previously named similar research papers (Choi, Lehto & Morrison, 2007; Pan et al., 2007; Jani & Yeong-Hwang, 2011; Çakmak & Isaac, 2012; Yafang & Zhia, 2013; Shen, Song, Li & Jiang, 2015; Sun, Zhang & Ryan, 2015; Isaac & Çakmak, 2016) similar steps in the methods were undertaken to make the analysis more appropriate. One step of this was to remove words like "*I*", "*she*" "*is*" from the analyses, as they help constructing sentences but have no interpretable content. Furthermore, the option "*with stemmed words*" was chosen in NVivo 12, which means that similar words were grouped together instead of separating words like "*tour*", "*touring*" and "*toured*".

*4.4 Findings*

*4.4.1 Blogger's profile*

Of the 96 bloggers 67 were male, 23 were female. These numbers include two blogs that were written by couples, meaning that in total the gender of 8 bloggers were kept private. Only four bloggers shared their age, which was three times 26 and once 23. Looking at the photos that bloggers post of themselves, however, it shows that most bloggers are likely to be between the ages of 20 and 30 years old. Only a handful appear to be over the age of 40. Regarding nationality, the following information was found: 6 bloggers are from the USA, 5 are from the UK, 3 from China, 3 from Dubai, 3 from Denmark and a single traveller from each South Africa, Ireland, Australia, Finland, The Netherlands, Malaysia and Singapore. The remaining 76 bloggers did not share their nationality.

*4.4.2 Blogs' characteristics*

On average, the blogs were about 2008 words long. The oldest blog dates back to June 22nd, 2004, while the most recent blog is from May 6th, 2018. The average amount of photos used in the blogs was 16,22, with the lowest amount being 0 and the highest amount being 150. All analysed blogs were written in English.

*4.4.3 Word frequency*

In NVivo 12 the option "Word frequency" was run, which resulted in a table ranking the most frequently used words to the least frequently used words. The top 50 of this list is shown in Table 1.

*Table 1. Word frequency of North Korea travel blogs*

| Place | Word | Count | Weighted Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | north | 2194 | 2,11 |
| 2 | Korea' | 1662 | 1,60 |
| 3 | Korean | 1352 | 1,30 |
| 4 | Pyongyang | 939 | 0,90 |
| 5 | one | 809 | 0,78 |
| 6 | country | 644 | 0,62 |
| 7 | tours | 636 | 0,61 |
| 8 | peoples | 629 | 0,60 |
| 9 | liking | 528 | 0,51 |
| 10 | Kims | 521 | 0,50 |
| 11 | visits | 488 | 0,47 |
| 12 | guiding | 486 | 0,47 |
| 13 | hotel | 467 | 0,45 |
| 14 | time | 446 | 0,43 |

| 15 | seeing | 429 | 0,41 |
|----|--------|-----|------|
| 16 | Il | 388 | 0,37 |
| 17 | south | 377 | 0,36 |
| 18 | days | 376 | 0,36 |
| 19 | looks | 373 | 0,36 |
| 20 | even | 341 | 0,33 |
| 21 | travels | 338 | 0,32 |
| 22 | locals | 318 | 0,31 |
| 23 | place | 311 | 0,30 |
| 24 | trips | 309 | 0,30 |
| 25 | leader | 297 | 0,29 |
| 26 | world | 295 | 0,28 |
| 27 | group | 293 | 0,28 |
| 28 | DPRK | 281 | 0,27 |
| 29 | way | 281 | 0,27 |
| 30 | photos | 277 | 0,27 |
| 31 | two | 268 | 0,26 |
| 32 | things | 266 | 0,26 |
| 33 | city | 260 | 0,25 |
| 34 | war' | 258 | 0,25 |
| 35 | tourists | 257 | 0,25 |
| 36 | buildings | 244 | 0,23 |
| 37 | rooms | 239 | 0,23 |
| 38 | sung | 232 | 0,22 |
| 39 | side | 228 | 0,22 |
| 40 | trains | 225 | 0,22 |
| 41 | pictures | 216 | 0,21 |
| 42 | DMZ | 209 | 0,20 |
| 43 | really | 209 | 0,20 |
| 44 | Jong | 205 | 0,20 |
| 45 | seemed | 204 | 0,20 |
| 46 | bus | 203 | 0,19 |
| 47 | nation | 201 | 0,19 |
| 48 | museum | 199 | 0,19 |
| 49 | military | 195 | 0,19 |
| 50 | walking | 195 | 0,19 |

North, Korea, Korean and Pyongyang were the most frequently mentioned words, showing how the tourists focus on describing their destination with Pyongyang as the main attraction and simultaneously the starting point of most tours. "*Country*" ranks 6th, showing that the bloggers focus on the destination as a country and it being different from other countries. "*DPRK*", the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, ranks 28th. This is the name the country prefers for itself, but the relatively low ranking shows that bloggers mostly see the country as North Korea. "*World*" is used to either state that the country is the most isolated country within the entire world, or to compare North Korea's practices to other countries in the world. An example of this is the comparison of low electricity use compared to the rest of the world. Furthermore, "*nation*" on spot 47 relates to this. North Korea gets described as a nation or stated to be incomparable with other nations. More frequently, "*national*" is used to describe specific national practices that are quite unique within the world, such as a blogger describing the national mentality:  "*…national mentality — called the Juche Idea—is one which embraces national isolation, rejecting any interest in foreigners at all.*" Also, nationalism and nationalist ideas are frequently mentioned, as shown by this statement from a blog: "*Most of the karaoke songs were full of nationalist propaganda, with a video of Kim himself running at the back.*"

"*One*" on spot 5 is often used for sentence construction, but also to emphasize exceptionalities in North Korea, like in "*one of the few places in the country to get enough electricity*". Another way in which unique experiences are emphasized is by the use of the word "*really*". Especially unique characteristics of experiences in North Korea are strengthened by this word, such as in the phrases "*It really is the most fascinating place in the world to visit*" and "*This trip to North Korea is really an eye-opener for me.*"

The high ranks of "*tours*" and "*guiding*" show how one cannot visit North Korea freely, as tourists can only visit the country by joining a guided tour. "*Group*" also relates to these guided group tours. "*Peoples*" and "*locals*" received the 8th and 22nd place. Bloggers write differently about them. They mostly write about not being able to freely talk to locals, as this quote shows: "*Interaction with locals […] is limited if not non existing*". They state it is not illegal but hardly possible due to having full schedules, constantly being guided and language differences. "*Yes, in other countries you get far more interaction with the locals but at least this was something*", writes one blogger. However, some bloggers also write about finding contact with locals way easier than expected. One blogger, for example, writes: "*We were allowed to visit a couple of bars and a bowling alley where also plenty of locals were hanging out. This was pretty fun as you could almost freely get into any conversation with anybody you want. I did not really expect this, as the DPRK is extremely protective when it comes to foreign influences*". Overall, most bloggers state contact with locals is limited, while a few describe how they had quite a lot of positive contact with them.

Although the blogs describe quite positive experiences, the frequent use of the word "*liking*" partly derives from comparisons using the word "*like*" or from describing what something looked *like*. Interestingly but not surprisingly, the leaders of North Korea are mentioned a lot. "*Kims*", "*Il*", "*leader*", "*Sung*" and "*Jong*" received the 10th, 16th, 25th 38th and 45th spot, showing the presence of the leaders of North Korea in the images of the bloggers. Many sites, attractions and other aspects in the country are about the Kims or are named after members of the Kim family, such as the Kim Il Song Square, statues of the Kims, photos of the Kims in hotel rooms and locals wearing pins with Kim Il-Sung's face. The Kim family is simply very present and tourists are forced to be actively involved with them by for example having to lay flowers at or bow for two well-known statues of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jung-Il. One tourist writes about these statues: "*pretty cool, but you have to bow to the statues to show respect*".

"*South*" is almost solely used to describe the background of the friction between South and North Korea. "*Two*" relates to this too, as bloggers tend to write about the two Koreas. "*Two*" was also used to describe the two latest Kim leaders. Another connected term is "*war*", on the 41st spot. Almost all mentions of this word are about the Korean War and otherwise about the Korean War Museum, in which North Korea's victory is shown, ignoring the fact that the war ended in a truce.

"*Visits*", "*hotel*", "*place*", "*trips*" "*city*", "*seeing*" and "*walking*" is what the tours mainly consisted of, according to the bloggers. "*Way*" is connected to all these terms as bloggers describe which ways their trip took and in what ways their experiences took place. Related to each of these words is the observations of "*buildings*" by tourists, that are mainly either seen as communist buildings or as buildings that show the national power of the leaders. "*Room*" relates to the rooms in hotels and other accessible buildings and these rooms are characterized in a variety ways. Recurring themes in these descriptions are the fact that rooms look old-fashioned and that the rooms contain nationalistic aspects, like photographs of the leaders. Another part of the tours that ranks lower but is still part of table 1 is "*museums*". The "*Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum*" is named most frequently of all museums, as all tours include this museum and bloggers find it interesting to describe what they experience there and, according to the bloggers, what nationalistic lies they are being fed. Furthermore, they visit the DMZ, which stands for demilitarized zone. The DMZ is an area between the Koreas where the military is allowed to guard their own country but use of war weapons is

prohibited (Sarantakes, 2017). This and the presence of military in many other areas of the country explain the frequent use of the word "*military*", reserving the 50th spot.

"*Photos*" was frequently used by bloggers to talk about the photos they showed in their blogs, but also to describe the strong rules around photography in North Korea. Most who mention the photography topic, state how guides permitted or forbade them to take certain photos. One blogger describes how a professional photographer would film and photograph the whole trip so tourists did not have to do this themselves. This blogger adds that he still did it, but by following the guide's remarks: "*He also explained that I must only take 'nice' photos and nothing that could show the DPRK in a bad light. He said all the pictures would be checked at the border. I assured him I only ever take nice photos…!*" However, there are also a few bloggers who say that photography rules were not that strict at all. One of them writes the following: "*You can basically take photographs/video of anything you want. There were a couple of places, such as the mausoleum of the late Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-Il, where you are not allowed to bring your camera, but there are certain places in every country where that's the case.*" Connected to these restrictions is the word "*tourists*". It not only describes how bloggers saw other tourists, but mainly the way in which the country handles its tourists. This handling of tourists entails the way tourists are constantly guided, how their items and behaviour are checked, the way tourists can or cannot interact with locals and how tourists cannot freely go anywhere and often have very busy schedules to follow. Bloggers describe how these ways of being dealt with made them feel restricted and limited in their actions.

"*Side*" was used in multiple ways. Physical sides were mentioned, like which sides of streets were interesting, but also the many sides of North Korea were described. These sides include the different sides of the Korean War, different political sides, human sides, visible sides of the country and sides that the country prefers to keep hidden. "*Seemed*" was also used by bloggers to describe the differences between what North Korea wanted to show compared to what the bloggers felt like they were actually seeing. For example, this blogger describes what he thought he was actually seeing of a guide talking about North Korea: "*she seemed embarrassed at times about the obvious lies and the state of her country as a whole.*"

"*Trains*" and "*bus*", on the 40th and 47th spot, are the main ways of transport. Most tours travel to North Korea via Beijing and in Beijing either a plane or a train has to be taken. Traveling through the country itself happens by both trains and buses.

*4.4.4 Semantic network analysis*

A semantic network analysis is done by using VUE 3.3.0. This programme allows one to make clear cluster diagrams. The word frequency analysis outcomes are used to visualize the frequency and the connections between words and phrases. Four clusters have been created, as shown in Figure 2. The bigger the clusters and connected nodes are, the more frequently they were mentioned by the bloggers. The central nodes represent the central themes to which frequently mentioned words are connected. These themes are "*experiences*", "*tours*", "*politics*" and "*emotions and feelings*", all showing the tourist's destination image. These four themes were thought of as the outcomes of the frequency analysis showed clear themes. A part of the most frequently mentioned words clearly only showed the experiences of tourists, hence the central concept "*experiences*". Other frequently mentioned words purely described how tourists experienced their tours, which is why cluster b has "*tours*" in the centre. Furthermore, over ten words that were mentioned often were clearly related to the political situation of North Korea. Hence, cluster c shows concepts related to "*politics*". Finally, tourists write about what they actually feel as well. High ranking words that had not yet been connected to cluster a, b and c, clearly connect to emotions and feelings of tourists. This is why cluster d has frequently mentioned words connected to the theme "*emotions and feelings*".

*Figure 2. Semantic network clusters*
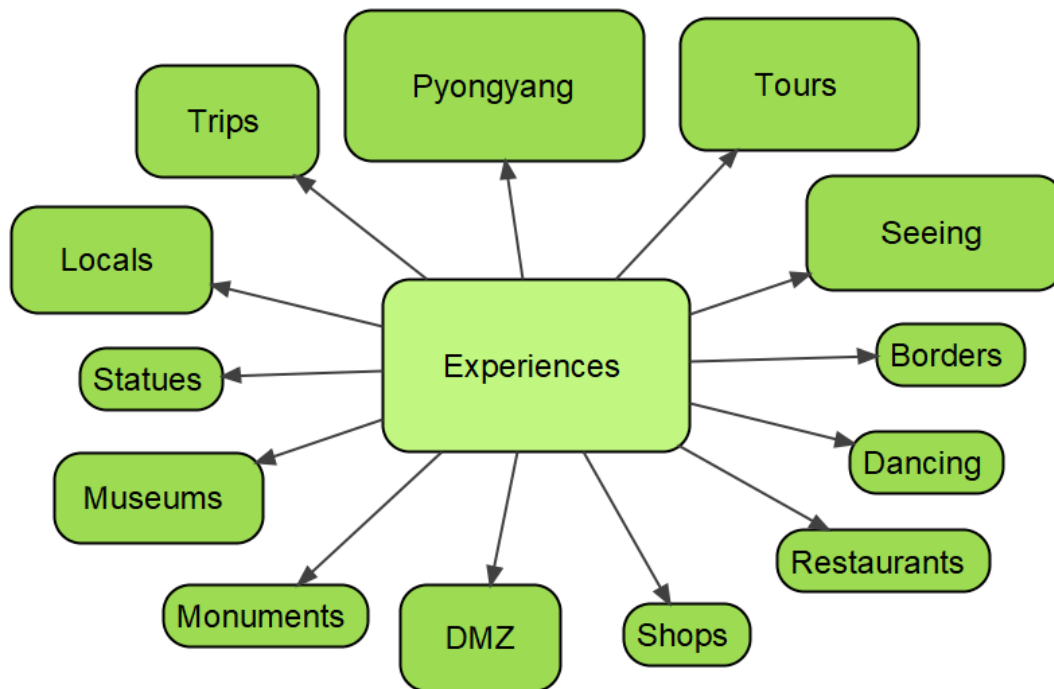


*(a)*

Cluster *a* shows how especially Pyongyang was the main experience of the bloggers' tours and trips, followed by visiting the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) and having experiences with local North Koreans. Pyongyang is indeed the main attraction for tourists and where they stay the largest time of their trips. Most of the attractions in cluster *a* are located in Pyongyang as well, namely the biggest part of all tours, trips, statues, museums, monuments, shops, restaurants and dancing. Dancing, according to the bloggers, mostly happens in parks in Pyongyang. Only the borders of the country and the DMZ are outside of the capital city.
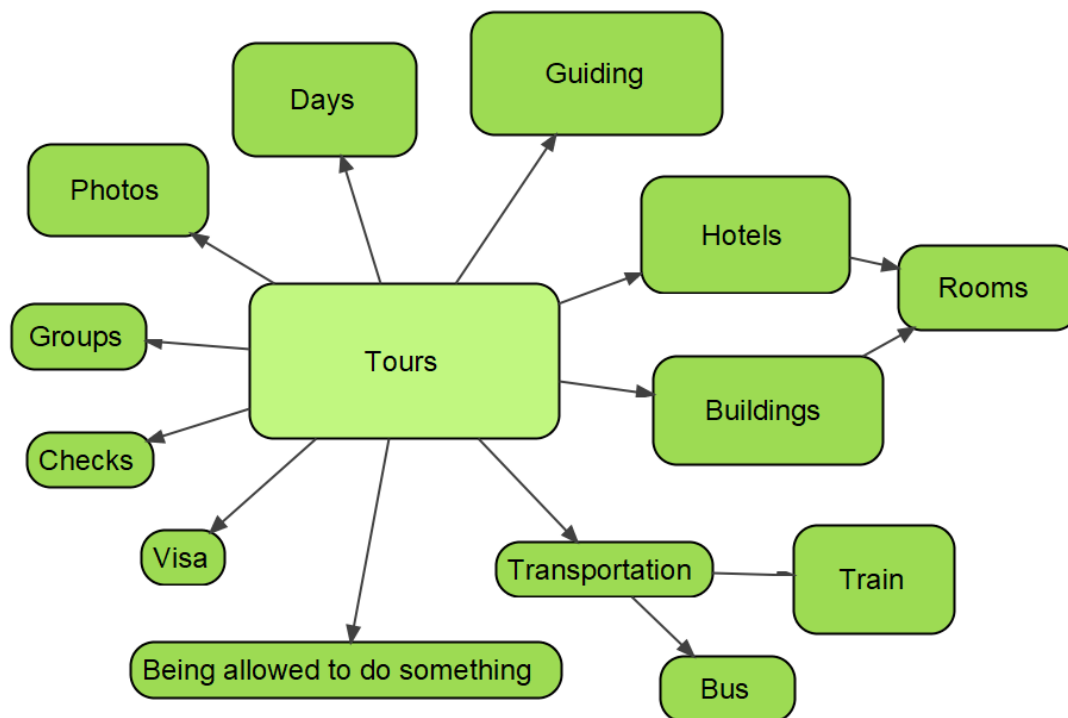
*(b)*

Cluster *b* shows the importance of the actual tours in the bloggers images and how especially certain aspects are mentioned a lot in relation to this. First of all, guiding is the most frequently mentioned word in relation to the tours. Bloggers mostly think positively of their guides, but dislike the constant guiding. One blogger describes being constantly guided as following: "*It's very restricted and you almost feel as though you live on the tour bus as you can't wander around freely – you have two guides who chaperone you every step of the way*." Besides not being able to travel through North Korea without a guide, it is also not possible to travel without a group. This explains "*groups*" being named frequently in relation to tours.

After guiding, bloggers mostly describe their hotels and other buildings in North Korea. These are mostly described as communistic style buildings or buildings that honour the present and past leaders. Rooms in hotels and other buildings are frequently characterized as being dated and old-fashioned.

Modes of transport are mainly the train and the bus. Cars are barely mentioned and when they are it is because tourists describe the lack thereof. While cars are one of the most common forms of transport in most countries, most North Koreans are not allowed to own a private car and this shows on the roads of the country. This travel blog quote shows what a tourist thought about this: "*The highway was 6 lanes wide, and yet the road was almost completely devoid of cars for the entire 3 hour drive*."

Furthermore, "days" describes the amount of days people joined tours to North Korea. Most tours last between 3 to 10 days. To be able to join a tour, foreigners need to apply for a visa. Two bloggers state that only Malaysians and Singaporeans do not need visas. When entering the country and during the trips bloggers describe experiencing multiple checks. Some state that their visas and moreover all items in their bags were thoroughly checked when entering the country. A few other bloggers mention how their cameras were checked during their trips by guards.
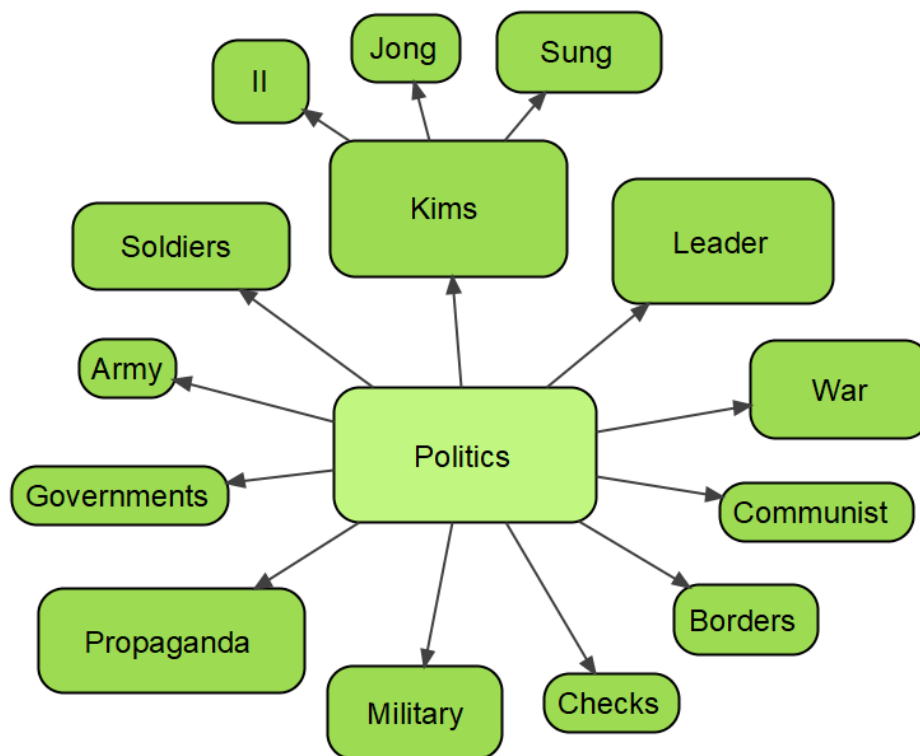
*(c)*

Cluster *c* shows a strong presence of the Kim family and the importance of past and present leaders of North Korea in the images of the bloggers. As mentioned in the frequency analysis, many sites and attractions are about the Kim family or honour them. Visual presence of the leaders can be found anywhere in the form of posters, pin badges, statues and more. This relates to the next biggest node in this cluster, namely "*propaganda*". Propaganda exists in many form. Bloggers describe propaganda music, propaganda vans, propaganda museums, propaganda stories by guides and more.

Next, "*military*" and "*soldiers*" were mentioned frequently. "*Army*" relates to these two concepts as well. First of all, the tour guides come from the military. Also, soldiers are present in many areas of North Korea and it is forbidden to take pictures of soldiers or military buildings. One blogger states about walking in Pyongyang: "*Even though not allowed, now and then some military just happened to "sneak" into a picture… They are everywhere!*" Soldiers are also present at the borders of North Korea. Especially at the DMZ, the area between North and South Korea, many soldiers guard the border. An example of how bloggers describe this is the following quote: "*It is marked by barbed wire and guard posts, and is desolate. It is the most heavily militarized border in the world.*" Related to this is the word "*checks*". This was also mentioned in cluster *b* as checks happen during tours, but the reason they happen is because of the strict political situation in North Korea. Tours are created and approved by the government and tourists get checked before entering the country and during their trip. These previously explained checks happen as a consequence of the controlling government, thus the word "*checks*" was added in cluster *c* as well.

Another quite frequently mentioned term is "*war*", which is often used by bloggers to talk about the history of the country. Mainly, the Korean War is mentioned and how North Korea claims to have won this war, while officially the war ended in a truce. Furthermore, there are many statues, memorials and parts of museums that remember the Korea War, such as the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum.

Finally, the government and the communist political system were mentioned frequently by bloggers as well. "*Government*" is mostly mentioned by bloggers who describe its power and the way it controls its citizens. "*Communist*" both described the communist government of North Korea and the communist style buildings throughout the country.
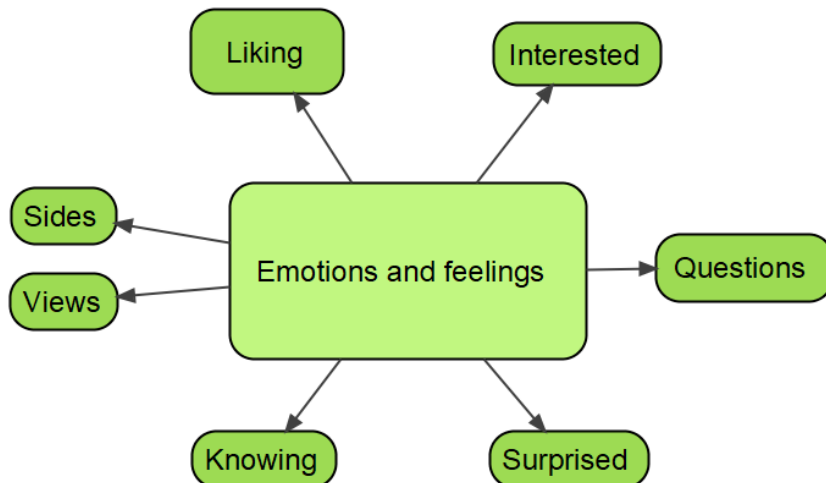


*(d)*

Finally, cluster *d* shows the emotions and feelings tourists had during their tours in North Korea. The nodes in this cluster were mentioned less frequently than the nodes in clusters *a*, *b* and *c*. The biggest node contains the word "*liking*", but this word was used by bloggers for multiple purposes. As explained in the word frequency analysis, the word is used to compare characteristics North Korea to other destinations or to describe what certain sites, buildings or experiences were *like*. However, it was also frequently used by bloggers to point out what they liked during their trip. For example, one blogger purely enjoys writing positively about their destination visits and called their blog about North Korea "*88 REASONS WHY I LIKED THE DPRK*".

Having "*questions*" is another feeling tourists start, undergo and leave their tours with. Old questions get answered and new questions arise. "*…the country gave me more questions than answers*", states one blogger. But, the bloggers are not the only ones with questions. They write about locals asking them questions often. When they get in contact with locals, they seem to be very curious about the background and home countries of tourists and ask many questions about it. Another frequent feeling tourists experience is feeling surprised. This surprise is caused by a big variety of experiences, such as being surprised by the country being more free than expected, locals being friendlier than expected and attractions being more beautiful than expected such as Buddhist temples. An example travel blog quote shows the surprise of a blogger: "*I turned on the television and if my eyes did not deceive me, it was CNN! After seeing the BBC in the Yanggakdo Hotel, I thought that nothing more would surprise me - but unexpected surprises seem to know no end in North Korea.*"

"*Interested*" is another often repeated feeling. Tourists find many aspects of North Korea interesting, whether they like or dislike them. Even the control of the government over the tourists themselves is found to be interesting. A clear example is the following quote: "*It was interesting to see the amount of CCTV cameras on both sides monitoring every inch of the space.*"

Finally, "*sides*" and "*views*" refer to the many point of views there are regarding North Korea. The world thinks differently of many aspects related to North Korea than the country itself, such as who won the Korean War, technological developments, morality of controlling citizens, inhibiting Western

influences and more. Bloggers mention the sides they knew before traveling to North Korea and the new sides they got to learn about while being there.

*4.4.5 Critical content analysis*

Finally, a critical content analysis is performed, as it helps with understanding and interpreting the descriptions and images of the bloggers (Isaac & Çakmak, 2016). This qualitative method is applied by coding the content by closely reading it. In this thesis, the coding was done by the author, who read the entire content thoroughly before starting the coding. This was done to correct grammar and spelling mistakes. By using systematic sampling, every third blog is coded, adding up to a total of 32 coded blogs. Afterwards, a key part of this analysis is to find themes in the coded words (Neuendorf & Kumar, 2006). The document with the 32 coded blogs and the 64 other blogs can be found in the Appendix.

The identified themes are described as "*trees*". Each tree with its nodes, namely the coded words and phrases, are clarified in Figure 3.

**Figure 3. Destination image coding**

| Tree 1. Motivations of tourists |
| --- |
| - Unusual destination<br>- Mysterious country<br>- Curiosity, explore unknown<br>- Specific interest in isolation of the country<br>- Wanting first-hand experience with secretive culture<br>- Did not want media to dictate opinion on North Korea |
| **Tree 2. Tourist activities**<br>- Pyongyang<br>- War Museum<br>- DMZ (Demilitarized Zone)<br>- Numerous museums<br>- Many monuments and war memorials<br>- Sites shown that government wants tourists to see<br>- Monuments about war, war victory or the leader(s)<br>- Kaesong |
| **Tree 3. Political aspects of North Korea**<br>- Leaders / Kims<br>- Propaganda<br>- Soldiers / military<br>- Presence visuals honouring Kim-family and the leader<br>- War and war victory<br>- Communism<br>- As tourist: don't mention political criticism |
| **Tree 4. Emotions and feelings of tourists**<br>- Interested<br>- Surprised<br>- One of the greatest experiences ever had<br>- Stepping back in time half a century |

- Questions before, during and after tour
- Feel like being watched all the time
- Anxious, not knowing what will happen next
- Uncomfortable
- Feeling sorry for guides and locals
- Uncertain about authenticity
- Fear
- Impressed

**Tree 5. Impressions of locals**
- Friendly
- Shy
- Ignore tourists
- Hospitable
- Limited interaction with locals outside of tourism industry
- Feeling bad for locals' living circumstances

**Tree 6. Impressions of North Korea**
- Strictly controlled by government
- Strange
- Eye-opening to see freedom restrictions
- Nice/good
- Interesting
- Safe for travellers

**Tree 7. Impressions of tours**
- Sites shown that government wants tourists to see
- Tightly controlled
- Guides follow everywhere
- Busy trip
- Parts felt staged/scripted

**Tree 8. North Koreas controlling aspects**
- Checks
- Photography restrictions
- Tours tightly controlled
- Guides follow everywhere
- Sites shown that government wants tourists to see

**Tree 9. Facts or myths**
- Birth story Kim Jong-Il
- Library with 30 million books
- Korean War information
- "show streets" that show good living circumstances
- Information outside borders approved by regime
- Scripted trips
- Technology ready to take on the world

Motivations of tourists to travel to North Korea were mostly named as curiosity for a country that they have heard much about, but still is so isolated and mysterious. People desire to have their own experiences there, to discover what is really going on there instead of just following the media's descriptions. These quotes show examples of these motivations:

> "*I traveled to North Korea to see, first-hand, what life was like inside the Hermit Kingdom.*"

> "*The truth behind my choice to go to North Korea is because I didn't want the media to dictate what I thought about this country.*"

The activities of tourists are similar to those mentioned in the semantic network analysis, however two interesting additions can be seen here. Firstly, bloggers mention often that all the sites they see are sites that North Korea wants them to see. The country prefers showing a certain image and if tourists want to see a site that would put a negative light on North Korea, it will not be allowed. Secondly, all monuments have nationalistic aspects in the sense that they represent how the country fought bravely in the Korean War, how they had multiple war victories and how respected and important their leaders are. These are examples of tourists writing about their activities:

> "*We also went to numerous museums, including a Smithsonian like set of museums at 3 revolutions place (the 3 revolutions are ideological, cultural, and technological.)*"

> "*…A third was monuments to the Kim Family, a third "Look at our children/farms/factories we are a successful country!,""*

Important additions of the third tree about politics, in comparison with the semantic analysis of politics, are that some bloggers write about a strong political hierarchy in North Korea and that travellers should not openly criticize the political system of the country to guides or other local people. The quote below is a clear example of this.

> "*The only way you are likely to put yourself in any danger is by criticising the North Korean leaders or government.*"

Regarding the emotions and feelings of tourists during their trip, a big variety in descriptions were given that were mostly not extremely positive. Clear positive feelings are "*interested*", "*one of the greatest experiences ever had*" and "*impressed*". Besides these, tourists state the feeling of having many questions, stepping back in time, feeling watched constantly, feeling anxious, fearful and uncomfortable about the situation they are in and about the uncertainty of what might happen next and, feeling sorry for the poor and strict circumstances in which locals have to live and the strict rules under which guides have to function and, finally, feeling uncertain about the authenticity of experiences. The two following quotes show examples of feeling sorry and anxious during the bloggers trips.

> "*Finally the guides, they were nice enough and I felt sorry for our guide in particular, though I am sure she must belong to the upper class to be allowed this job. But she seemed embarrassed at times about the obvious lies and the state of her country as a whole.*"

> "*It first hit me that I was going to North Korea when I was checking in for the flight at the airport. My palms were sweating and I felt very anxious. I had no idea what was about to happen over the next 3 days of my life.*"

Bloggers mostly agree that contact with locals not working in the tourism industry is nearly impossible, some stating because it is impossible due to their purposely full schedules and others

stating it is because of the shyness of locals or the fact that they ignore them. Those who did get in contact with local North Koreans describe them as hospitable and friendly. As mentioned in tree 4, bloggers tend to feel bad about the ways in which locals have to live their lives. Two examples of thoughts on locals are:

> "*Interaction with locals other than colleagues and staffs working in shops and restaurants is limited if not none existing by principle but smiles or friendly waving do happen somehow more often.*"

> "*…and almost everyone I met on the streets was more than friendly even after learning where I was from.*"

Then there are the impressions bloggers had of North Korea as a country. Six points were mentioned quite frequently, of which half is positive and the other half not as much. On the one hand, tourists described the country as a nice and good country that has interesting sites for tourists to see. They see it as a safe country for travellers. On the other hand, bloggers quite often described the country as being strange and seeing many signs of the strict control the government practices over its citizens. Seeing this control and other ways in which North Koreans locals lack certain freedoms was found eye-opening by the bloggers. These two quotes exemplify these impressions:

> "*North Korea is wonderfully interesting.*"

> "*Visiting North Korea is a way to experience that same fascination again that you had with everything the first time you traveled. And I think it's eye-opening to see what happens when people are stripped of freedom, both politically and economically.*"

Besides impressions of the locals and of the country, bloggers also frequently described certain aspects of the tours they joined. These descriptions clarify the control the North Korean government seems to have of the tour structures. The bloggers felt that the tours were strongly controlled by only showing North Korean sides that the government wants foreigners to see and by the constant following of the tour guides. Furthermore, quite frequently tourists describe the feeling of parts of the tour feeling scripted and inauthentic. The tours are mostly described as busy tours with a full planning, which some bloggers explain as a method to keep them from contacting local North Koreans. Examples of impressions of the tours are:

> "*It is very true that you only see what the governments wants you to but that doesn't mean that everything you see is totally fake.*"

> "*Our guides were with us the entire trip. They made sure we never left their sight.*"

The eighth tree describes the theme of controlling aspects of the country. Some of the nodes in this tree have been mentioned before, namely the tours being tightly controlled, guides constantly following everywhere and only being able to see sites that the government wants tourists to see. Another node in this cluster shows bloggers mentioning the checks performed by the government. Some bloggers write about a check at the airport, of which one blogger describes the taking away of a tourist's book that mocked Kim Jong-Un. Other checks happen by constantly checking the behaviour and whereabouts of the tourists and by checking what kind of photos they take. A few bloggers mention being forced to remove certain photos that show North Korea in a negative light, such as showing the poor living circumstances of locals. Guides, guards and other soldiers would check their cameras and make certain that unwanted or illegal photos would be deleted. One blogger describes how a soldier reacted to being photographed: "*I looked at the picture as if I were seeing the soldier for the first time. 'You must delete this picture!' 'Okay', I said coolly, taking the camera from*

*him, and as I deleted it, realizing it wasn't a picture at all, but the last frame of a video. He double checked it wasn't there anymore, gave me the camera back, nodded and waved me to go...*" This relates to the other addition in this tree, namely the photography restrictions. Some bloggers describe needing the permission of guides to take photos. Many bloggers state it was completely forbidden in certain places and some bloggers describe their cameras being checked when leaving the country. A few bloggers state that the photography restrictions are not as bad as they expected and that a tourist can basically take photos of most places. These blogger quotes show some controlling aspects of North Korea:

> "*My first real DPRK experience was border control – an official guard of the DPRK army came and checked our visas, there were also a few spot checks of some cameras and laptops.*"

> "*Some of these pictures are a bit blurry, because you're not allowed to take pictures inside any of the country's stores. So, I had to get creative with my photography.*"

> "*Photography restrictions have also sharply decreased in the last few years – the only thing we were not allowed to capture on camera during our visit last year were military targets and a burning building we accidentally encountered in central Pyongyang.*"

Finally, tree 9 shows the reoccurring theme of "*myths or facts*". Tourists name multiple experiences and stories of which they doubt the authenticity. First, there is the birth story of Kim Jon-Il, about which one blogger critically writes: "*he was born on a sacred Korean mountain top (he was actually born in the Soviet Union) and that his birth caused winter to change to spring (it stayed winter).*" Another story is that Pyongyang has a library containing 30 million books, discussing all kinds of subjects. The few bloggers that mention this library do not believe anything of this story. As named previously, North Korea claims to have won the Korean War and tourists who experience this side in museums or elsewhere know this to be untrue. What they also know to be untrue is the living circumstances of local North Koreans. One bloggers talks about "*show streets*", in which tourists get to see nice living circumstances that citizens live in. The bloggers do realize that the government prevents them from seeing the actual poverty that many locals live in. This is just one example of the tours that tourists believe are scripted. Another part of North Korea's narrative that tourists do not believe is the fact that they claim that their technology is so well developed, it could compete easily with the rest of the world. In reality, bloggers experience North Korea as technologically lacking behind. The first quote below show the surprise of a traveller reading a North Korean newspaper and second quote shows a blogger describing the secretive sides of the country.

> "*The inside, however, had a few interesting bits – it was enlightening to know of the technological advancements the country had made and how they were ready to take on the world, namely America, Japan and South Korea. I could contain myself no longer. I hissed into my neighbour's ear. 'What the hell is all that? How ridiculous.'*"

> "*The information we get outside its borders is either regime-approved content or the analysis/speculation of several intelligence agencies that is leaked to the press.*"

*4.5 Discussion*

In this section, the results will be discussed and compared with other research papers. This gives a clearer insight in whether the post-visit images of North Korea are similar to other destinations or have unique characteristics. A look back will be taken at the literature review to see how the results support, contradict or add to it already existing literature on the topic.

*4.5.1 Comparison with similar method research papers*

In this section, the results of the analyses of this paper will be compared to similar research papers on other destinations. However, North Korea is a unique country and there is no research paper on a similar destination. Comparing the results of this thesis with similar research papers on other destinations show clear differences in the outcomes. Firstly, Isaac & Çakmak (2016) performed similar methods on Tuol Sleng, a Genocide Prison Museum in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. A resemblance between the two destinations is that they both offer war-related experiences, however, for North Korea this is only a part of what they offer. The word frequency shows completely different outcomes. Bloggers who write about Tuol Sleng use emotionally heavy words way more often, such as "*horror*", "*sad*", "*shocking*", "*emotional*" and "*disturbing*". These are all part of the top 10 highest ranking words, while the only emotion in the top 10 of North Korea is "*liking*".

The fact that emotions describing North Korea are not as extreme suggests that the country does not have very negative or shocking sides. However, the literature review has shown multiple negative sides and disastrous periods in the country, including millions dying of hunger only twenty years ago, war victims, serious freedom restrictions and heavy punishments for a lawbreaker and possibly their entire family. An explanation for the lack of bloggers having strong emotional reactions to their experiences in North Korea is that the country attempts to only show its good sides to tourists, hiding whatever could show the country in a bad light. However, tourists do not blindly believe that what they see represents the country well. Tourists write about noticing the strict rules, having no time or permission to talk to locals and to wander around without a guide. The anxiousness and uncomfortable feelings relate to this strict control that does not make it possible for tourists to explore the negative sides of the country.

Other research papers with word frequency methods include image analyses on Macau, China (Choi, Lehto & Morrison, 2007), South Island, New Zealand (Sun, Zhang & Ryan, 2015), Singapore (Shen, Song, Li & Jiang, 2015) and Hangzhou City, China (Mali, Yafang & Zhia, 2013). Word frequency analyses of these four papers mostly mention typical desired aspects of tourism destinations, including beautiful nature, buildings, shopping, food, transport modes, historical sites and nice people. These destinations are indeed very different from North Korea and so are the post-visit images of the bloggers, as word frequency analyses show. The first word in table 1 that compares to the outcomes of the other research papers is "*peoples*" on spot 8, followed by "*hotels*" in the 13th place. Most words in the table are completely unique to the bloggers images of North Korea, showing the unique characteristics of the destination.  Almost all words in table 1 cannot be found in word frequency tables in the other mentioned research papers. Only a few words like "*peoples*", "*hotel*", "*liking*",  "*photos*", "*locals*" and "*museums*" are not unique to North Korea.

Unique characteristics of the destination appear to be related to the central concepts in the clusters of Figure 2, namely "*experiences*", "*tours*", "*politics*" and "*emotions and feelings*". Nodes of these clusters mostly contain specific destination concepts that show the unique characteristics of North Korea. For example, North Korea offers experiences unique to that country, such as almost solely offering experiences in Pyongyang, letting tourists visit the guarded DMZ, countless buildings, monuments, museums and statues honouring the leaders and attractions that offer controversial views on the country's past and present. These views show themselves in the "*politics*" cluster as well. This cluster shows the endless adoration of the leaders, endless presence of propaganda, presence of the military, controlling of citizens and tourists, impressions of the communistic government and North Korea's view on the Korean War. The "*tours*" cluster shows more similarities with other papers, namely that tourists describe their hotels, length of stay, photos they have taken, buildings they have seen during the tours and the modes of transport. Nodes different from the other research papers describe the obligated group tours and the constant guiding. Also, the strict checks of

visa, belongings, photography and behaviour are not mentioned in the other papers. Furthermore, bloggers frequently describe going somewhere or seeing something during their tours as *actions they were allowed to perform*. North Korea has secretive sides and strict rules for tourists, which means that tourists frequently need permission from guides to perform a certain activity. Again, this does not recur in the other research papers. The "*emotions and feelings*" cluster contains nodes that have already been discussed in the word frequency analysis, but there are some additional comments to be made that show the differences between what tourists feel in North Korea compared to other destinations. While Tuol Sleng's research results contains heavy emotional words as "*shocking*" and "*heartbreaking*", the other four papers contain strong positive emotions. The analyses on Macau did not result in specifically named emotions, but showed outcomes of tourists naming their undertaken activities such as "*historic buildings and heritage*", "*cultural events and facilities*", "parks and gardens", "*shopping*", "*tourism facilities and infrastructure*", "*entertainment and gaming*" and "*bird's eye or scenic views*". These are activities that can be expected from a generally positively experienced tourism destination. The word frequency analysis of South Beach shows strong positive results, including "*beautiful landscape and scenery*", "*good environment*", "*clean*" and "*comfortable*". Next, Singapore's word frequency analysis also shows highly positive outcomes. "*Enjoyment*" and "*excellent*" show these positive images. Finally, Hangzhou was judged positively in general. The exact emotions were not named, as they were generalized in the paper to "*positive comments*". All these results differ greatly from feelings tourists experienced in North Korea. First of all, no strong positive or emotional feelings were mentioned frequently. "Liking" was named mostly, which also refers to comparisons and descriptions of what experiences were *like*. Tourists were mostly interested in whatever they experienced, whether they enjoyed or did not enjoy it. Having old and new questions, knowing about various political, economical and social issues in North Korea and learning about different views to look at the country are feelings tourists describe, which are feelings that are not as intensely positive or emotional as in the other similar research papers. Also, the feelings are unique to the destination image of North Korea, since the other papers contain no similar or stronger versions of these emotions.

The reason for tourists feeling so different about North Korea than about other destinations is caused by multiple unique aspects of the country. The critical content analysis of chapter 4.4.5 shows these aspects well by showing and analysing the themes that bloggers mostly write about. First of all, "*motivations*" was identified as a theme in Figure 3, but the motivations to visit North Korea compared to the other destinations differ greatly. Isaac & Çakmak's (2016) semantic network analysis shows that tourists travel to Tuol Sleng because they believe it is a must see, it is worth visiting, feel the remembrance is important and because they want to learn from the museum. Tourists travel to Macau as they are attracted to it as a consequence of their images of the activities and the authenticity of the destination (Choi, Lehto & Morrison, 2007). South Island motivates tourists to visit because of its cities and its authenticity as well (Sun, Zhang & Ryan, 2015). The main reasons for tourists to visit Singapore are its food, transportation, sightseeing, shopping, and entertainment (Shen, Song, Li & Jiang, 2015). Hangzhou is mostly attractive to tourists because of its attractions, including restaurants and museums (Mali, Yafang & Zhia, 2013). Motivations to visit North Korea are completely different from all these destinations, as tourists travel there because of its unusualness, interest in the isolation, wanting to explore the mysterious and unknown country and wanting first-hand experience with the country instead of only knowing what the media tell them. While authenticity was named twice as a motivation factor in the other researches, tourists realize that they will not experience much authenticity in North Korea. They are very well aware that they only see what the government wants to show and this, to most bloggers, is part of its mysterious charm. North Korea is seen as a unique and strange destination that has secret sides that need exploration, as far as this is possible for tourists.

Not just the motivations to visit North Korea are unique to that destination. Content of certain themes in Figure 2 have already been discussed as the outcomes were similar to the word frequency

analysis or the semantic network analyses. These themes are *"tourist activities"*, *"political aspects"*, *"emotions"*, *"impressions of North Korea"*, *"impressions of tours"* and *"North Korea's controlling aspects"*. Tree 5, *"impressions of locals"*, offers another unique aspect of North Korea. Locals being friendly and hospitable is not unique. In South Island they are described as friendly and polite and in Macau bloggers describe having friendly interactions with locals. However, locals ignoring tourists is not described in these other research papers. Neither are the limited interactions tourists can have with them and the fact that tourists feel sorry for the living circumstances of locals. These three descriptions of locals are unique to North Korea and are all most likely caused by the controlling government.

Tree 9, *"myths or facts"*, adds information on the authenticity of experiences in North Korea. Tourists describe multiple situations and stories about which they suspect them to be false. In none of the other research papers was anything mentioned about false stories. In fact, bloggers describe finding the authenticity of Macau and South Island attractive. However, many mentions of fantastic stories and inauthentic experiences were mentioned by travellers blogging about North Korea. These include the birth story of Kim Jong-Il, stories about North Korean war victories, scripted experiences and more. Bloggers clearly have much doubt about the authenticity of many experiences they had in North Korea. Known is that the country is poor, locals often live in poor circumstances and technologically speaking the country is falling far behind on the rest of the world. These are facts named in the literature review, but also mentioned by bloggers. Interestingly, however, tourists do not get to see these sides during their tours. This is why it is understandable that tourists suspect much information they receive during their trips is false and that they believe many parts of the trips are staged.

*4.5.2 Relation to different literature about North Korea*

As mentioned in the literature review, tourists travel to North Korea to find out how the country actually works and to see how that fits with their pre-visit image (Connell, 2017). The results of this paper support this statement and add to it that tourists are specifically curious to discover the reality of North Korea due to it's unusual, mysterious and isolated characteristics.

The literature review outlined the poor living circumstances of citizens in the past and present, including the great famine, war, heavy freedom restrictions and labour camp punishments. The results of this paper have barely shown mentions of these facts by the bloggers. The Korean War was mostly mentioned in relation to monuments that remember the war and museums that show the North Korean victory of the war, which is against literature stating that the war ended with a truce and there is still an ongoing conflict (Lowe, 2014; Macdonald, 2018). However, the lack of mentions of terrible events and living circumstances does not mean bloggers blindly believe the positive North Korea attempts to show. Bloggers were aware of the government hiding parts of the country. Many bloggers wrote about their awareness of darker practices in the country and their uncomfortable feelings caused by the government hiding so much and controlling tourists and locals as much as they do.

Another fact stated in the literature review is that Kim, Timothy & Han (2007) stated that tourists are generally not allowed to interact with locals. Most of the blogs contradict this information. Many bloggers explain that interaction is limited and indeed quite sometimes not allowed, but they describe it as less strict than was stated in the literature review. A few bloggers even describe feeling very free to talk to locals at most times. This might be caused by a change in the strictness of the tours or tour guides in the past decade.

"*Controversial destinations*" were described in the literature review and the post-visit images of tourists do show controversial aspects of North Korea. As the definition of "*controversial*" outlined, a destination has to give rise to public disagreement (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.). There is a disagreement on North Korea's practices between the government, locals, foreign countries and specifically foreign tourists. North Korean locals end up in prison for statin critical opinions towards the government and tourists are advised to not express any critical thought either. The government ensures its own power and its own ability to only show good sides of the country. The way it does this by applying strict rules and controlling citizens and tourists is found controversial by the bloggers. The controversy is, however, a reason for tourists to visit North Korea. If it were not for the country's isolated, freedom repressing, controlling and dictatorial-like practices, tourists would have different or perhaps no motivations to travel there. Without North Korea's controversy, big parts of tourists' current motivations would be lost, including the desire to explore the unusual, mysterious, isolated country first-hand to discover what it is actually like.

Furthermore, in the literature review, factors influencing image formation were summarized by Isaac & Çakmak (2012) as the following factors: built environment, scenery, culture, modernity, friendliness of people, arousal and excitement, quality of service and satisfaction. Built environment is described by bloggers mainly as communist style buildings or buildings, statues and monuments that honour present and past leaders. These statues and monuments are almost the only kinds of scenery that are actually named by bloggers. A few times bloggers also mentioned the nature and the skyline of Pyongyang as beautiful scenery. Regarding culture, bloggers describe propaganda, certain folk songs and certain food traditions such as eating dog as part of North Korean culture. North Korea's secretive sides and strong ideologies, such as independence and self-reliance, are seen as part of the country's culture, too. Bloggers also state that entering the culture feels like going back in time, as it feels more traditional and has barely been in touch with Western cultures. The modernity factor relates to this. Most bloggers describe Pyongyang as quite modern, or more modern than expected. Bloggers that got access to the rural areas of the country are surprised by the traditional and non-mechanical forms of agriculture. Technology overall in North Korea is poorly developed according to the images of bloggers. They describe how many buildings are not heated and how Pyongyang turns dark at night. Regarding the impressions of locals, tourists describe them as hospitable and friendly, as long as tourists were not ignored by them or limited in their interactions with them.

The final three factors were described by Isaac & Çakmak (2012) as specifically influencing the post-visit image formation. Firstly, "*arousal and excitement*" as a factor influencing the bloggers' images is present in the experiences of tourists visiting North Korea. They are interested, get surprised, explore the unknown and mysterious sides of the country, sometimes secretly perform illegal actions like taking illegal photos, get questions answered but also come up with new questions. Many bloggers describe their excitement. One blogger simply writes: "*So much mystery. So much excitement!*". Then, there is the quality of service as an influencing factor. This is not mentioned frequently by the bloggers. Overall, they seem content. North Korean hosts are found hospitable, polite and friendly. A handful of bloggers describe Koryo Air, the airlines with which they enter the country. It has the reputation of the worst airlines in the world and bloggers are indeed not content with it. One blogger describes it as an old Soviet airplane. Another blogger states that the flight was indeed awful, but the staff on board was professional. All in all, there are not many remarks about service quality and the ones that exist are quite content, except for the Koryo Air flight. Finally, satisfaction as a factor scores positively in the images of the bloggers. Not one blogger regrets their trip or states to be dissatisfied with the tour. Although the tourists find North Korea to be strange, secretive and sometimes feel uncomfortable and too controlled, they all state to be content or happy with their tours. A good example is this quote from one of the blogs: "*Visiting North Korea was an unforgettable experience and one I don't regret*."

All in all, the factors that affect image formation score quite good, some factors a bit less and some a lot better. This could explain why tourists appear to have positive destination images of North Korea. Most bloggers write positively about the destination and all are happy they made the choice to join a tour in the country.

*4.5.3 Limitations*

There are some limitations to this study. The results cannot be generalized to all tourists visiting North Korea for a couple of reasons. First of all, even though not all bloggers travelled from English-speaking countries, the content of all blogs was written in English. Blogs written in other languages were not included in this paper. Especially since 90% of all tourists is Chinese and the other 10% come from different Western countries (Beauchamp, 2017), the results can at best be generalized to the Western 10% of North Korea's tourists. Still, Western tourists do not all write blogs in English and therefore the results are hard to generalize. Another reason that is not possible is that the analyses only show results on the images of bloggers. Whether tourists who do not to blog about their experiences in North Korea have a different image is unknown. However, since each tour is controlled by the government and all tourists basically get to see and experience the same, chances are high that these images do not significantly differ. Furthermore, the content analysis is likely to be influenced by the subjectivity of the author. Since there is only one author, the coding could not be compared to and discussed with a co-author. Coding and themes were thought of as objectively as possible, but there is still a risk of the author's subjectivity affecting the results.

Another limitation of this thesis is that the research methods of this thesis are very time-consuming and therefore the sample is not large. Finding suitable blogs appeared harder than expected, as North Korea is not a popular tourism destination and not that many travellers turn their experiences and thoughts into travel blogs. Although the results show that most bloggers have quite similar images of the destination, it could be that a bigger sample would create some changes in the outcomes of the analyses. Moreover, the analyses were quite time-consuming and this forced the author to make time-related decisions, especially regarding the coding of the critical content analysis. Consequently, a third of all blogs was coded, while the coding of all 96 blogs could have given broader insights. The decision to code every third blog was made to be certain that there would be enough time left to properly analyse, interpret and discuss the results of the critical content analyses.

A final limitation is the possibility that certain errors exist in the analysed content. A digital spelling check was done and the entire text has been read slowly and concentrated by the author, but there is still a chance grammatical or spelling errors were missed in the file that contained 343 pages.

**5. Conclusions, recommendations and future research**

*5.1 Key conclusions*

The overall aim of this study was to examine the post-visit image of tourists visiting North Korea, as there was no academic literature on this topic yet. This scientific gap has been filled by analysing word frequency, performing a semantic network analysis and performing a critical content analysis.

The analyses have shown that North Korea's political aspects and controlling aspects are highly present in the images of tourists. Especially when comparing the results to similar research papers, the striking presence of these aspects of the country stand out. Tourists find the communistic political system, the country's secrecy, isolation and hidden layers interesting. Mainly present political aspects according to the bloggers' images are the admiration of the Kim family, propaganda and military presence everywhere. Although tourists do not enjoy all controlling aspects, such as constantly being followed by guides, they do see it as a part of what makes North Korea an interesting destination. The critical content analysis strengthens the conclusion that controlling aspects are strongly present. This analysis identified nine themes, namely motivations, activities, emotions, political impressions, impressions of the locals, impressions of North Korea, impressions of the tours, the controlling aspects of the country and finally myths or facts. In each of these identified themes, the controlling aspects of the government reoccur. During most activities and impressions that bloggers mention, there almost always seems to be an underlying layer of the tourists, tours and locals being controlled.

Furthermore, tourists do not use strong emotions to describe their experiences. Compared to similar research papers on different destinations, it is striking that tourists mostly use "*liking*", "*surprised*" and "*interested*" as emotions. This appears to be the case because tourists generally do not describe undergoing extremely positive experiences and the extremely negative sides of the country are attempted to be kept hidden. This is also the reason tourists arrive and leave with questions, which is not part of the images tourists have of other destinations either.

Besides parts of the country being hidden, tourists' images show that they often have doubts about the truthfulness of what is shown to them. Bloggers describe many incidents during which they suspected strong inauthenticity. Many North Korean stories, by tourists frequently perceived as myths, attempt to show North Korea in a positive light, including for example good living circumstances of locals and great technological advancements.

Images of bloggers on locals, tours and North Korea itself have in common that they all appear to be strictly controlled. This means they are strongly controlled in general and moreover, controlled in such a way that they show their positive sides to tourists. North Korean guides are controlled by the government and they in turn control the tours and tourists. Interaction with locals that do not work in the tourism industry is mainly limited, but when it happens bloggers characterize them as friendly and hospitable.

Overall, the results have clarified that tourists mostly focus on the unusual sides of the country before, during and after their stay. The secrecy and control both entertain and annoy tourists and it definitely adds to the destination's strange charm. Negative as well as positive experiences are found interesting by tourists and not one tourist regrets their decision to visit North Korea.

*5.2 Managerial recommendations*

As shown in the literature review, North Korea has known serious poverty for decades and is still not growing economically (French, 2014). Its strictly controlled tourism industry is relatively small with 100.000 visitors each year (Beauchamp, 2017). Also stated in the literature review was that income from tourism can cause a country to develop better health care and significantly improve its income and thus its economy as well (Zaei & Zaei, 2013). Moreover, known is that a key way to strengthen a country's tourism industry is by understanding tourists' images and using this for better marketing strategies (Echter & Ritchie, 1991).

With this information, a recommendation for both North Korea and its marketers can be made. If the government wants to strengthen its economy, it would be in their interest to learn from the post-visit images its tourists. Possibly, they have to make their tours less strict, for example by granting easier access to certain groups of tourists that currently are barely or not allowed to enter. This group contains mostly Americans, journalists and South Koreans (BBC News, 2003; Kim, Timothy & Han, 2007). Bloggers describe how people reacted to them traveling to North Korea and these reactions are mostly surprise and concern. Tourists still feel uncomfortable with the idea of traveling to such a strict and isolated country. Of course, the controlling aspects are rooted deeply in the North Korean political system and cannot be changed overnight. Especially since North Korea strongly attempts to show a specific image, it might be unrealistic to expect them to adapt to tourists' demands on the short term. However, a recommendation would still be for the government to lessen their strictness or at least promote the freedom tourists have during their tours. This is where the importance of destination marketers comes into play. These have the task of marketing the destination effectively. To apply better marketing techniques, the marketers need to learn from the post-visit images of tourists. Understanding these images gives the marketers a proper insight in what tourists enjoyed, disliked, found especially interesting and other important feelings tourists describe. Therefore, a recommendation for these marketers is that they should take the post-visit images of tourists visiting North Korea more seriously and use this knowledge to create more effective marketing strategies that could boost the tourism industry.

*5.3 Academic recommendations: future research*

This thesis has given insights in the post-visit images of tourists visiting North Korea. Future research could add to this gained knowledge. First of all, ideas for future research include analysing the differences of this paper's post-visit images and other academic literature on pre-visit images of tourists visiting North Korea. Analysing how similar or different these images are gives an insight in what the country offers that tourists do or do not expect. This knowledge in turn can then be used by marketers to apply stronger marketing strategies.

Furthermore, with recent developments between North Korea and other countries, new research possibilities arise as well. North Korea had an important meeting with the leader of South Korea on April 27th, 2018, during which peace was the central subject (Berlinger, Thompson & McKirdy, 2018). Another meeting happened between Kim Jong-Un and Donald Trump, the president of the United States of America, on June 12th, 2018. During this meeting Trump and Kim discussed peace, trade restrictions and nuclear weapons (Liptak, 2018). Varying opinions exist on both meetings, but certain is the fact that interesting developments are taking place in relation to the North Korean government and its relation with foreign governments. These developments could change international relations, perhaps might change policies inside the country and consequently could change tourism flows and the way tourists perceive the country. Therefore, future research could focus on analysing how tourists' images have changed after these two (and perhaps by then more) big events.

**Chapter 6. References**

Alcaniz, E. B., García, I. S., & Blas, S. S. (2009). The functional-psychological continuum in the cognitive image of a destination: A confirmatory analysis. *Tourism management*, *30*(5), 715-723.

Bahk, J., Ezzati, M., & Khang, Y. H. (2018). The life expectancy gap between North and South Korea from 1993 to 2008. *European journal of public health*.

Baloglu, S., & McCleary, K. W. (1999). A model of destination image formation. Annals of Tourism Research, 26(1), 868–897.

Banyai, M., & Glover, T. D. (2012). Evaluating research methods on travel blogs. *Journal of Travel Research*, *51*(3), 267-277.

Barich, H., & Kotler, P. (1991). A framework for marketing image management. *Sloan Management Review*, 32 940–104.

Batagelj, V., & Mrvar, A. (1998). Pajek-program for large network analysis. *Connections*, *21*(2), 47-57.

BBC News. (2003, September 17). On Holiday in North Korea. Retrieved May 28, 2018, from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3113352.stm

Beauchamp, Z. (2017). 40 maps that explain North Korea. *Vox*. Retreived from the internet on April 11, 2018, from: https://www.vox.com/world/2017/8/29/16079076/north-korea-maps

Beerli, A., & Martin, J. D. (2004). Factors influencing destination image. *Annals of tourism research*, *31*(3), 657-681.

Berlinger, J., Thompson, N., & McKirdy, E. (2018, June 05). North and South Korean leaders hold historic summit: Highlights. Retrieved June 11, 2018, from https://edition.cnn.com/asia/live-news/north-korea-south-korea-summit-intl/

Brin, E. (2006). Politically-oriented tourism in Jerusalem. *Tourist Studies*, *6*(3), 215-243.

Boulding, K. E. (1956). *The image: Knowledge in life and society* (Vol. 47). University of Michigan Press.

Bowler Jr, G. M. (2010). Netnography: A method specifically designed to study cultures and communities online. *The Qualitative Report*, *15*(5), 1270.

Buda, D. M. (2015). The death drive in tourism studies. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *50*, 39-51.

Buhalis, D. (2000). Marketing the competitive destination of the future. *Tourism management*, *21*(1), 97-116.

Çakmak, E., & Isaac, R. K. (2012). What destination marketers can learn from their visitors' blogs: An image analysis of Bethlehem, Palestine. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, *1*(1-2), 124-133.

Chen, Y. C., Shang, R. A., & Li, M. J. (2014). The effects of perceived relevance of travel blogs' content

on the behavioral intention to visit a tourist destination. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *30*, 787-799.

Choi, S., Lehto, X. Y., & Morrison, A. M. (2007). Destination image representation on the web: Content analysis of Macau travel related websites. *Tourism Management*, 28, 118–129.

Chon, K. (1990). The role of destination image in tourism: A review and discussion. *The Tourist Review, 2*, 2–9.

Chow, J. (2005). The New Frontier. National post business magazine: 40.

Connell, J. (2017). Shining light on the darkness. Placing tourists within North Korean tourism. Comment on: Desiring the dark:'A taste for the unusual'in North Korean tourism?. *Current Issues in Tourism*, *20*(4), 356-362.

Controversial | Definition of controversial in English by Oxford Dictionaries. (n.d.). Retrieved June 22, 2018, from https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/controversial

Crotts, J. (1999). Consumer decision making and prepurchase information search. *Consumer behavior in travel and tourism*, 149-168.

Delisle, G. (2017). *Pyongyang: a journey in North Korea*. Random House.

Doerfel, M. L., & Barnett, G. A. (1999). A semantic network analysis of the International Communication Association. *Human communication research*, *25*(4), 589-603.

Echtner, C. M., & Ritchie, J. B. (1991). The meaning and measurement of destination image. *Journal of tourism studies*, *2*(2), 2-12.

Echtner, C. M., & Ritchie, J. R. (2003). The meaning and measurement of destination image:[Reprint of original article published in v. 2, no. 2, 1991: 2-12.]. *Journal of tourism studies*, *14*(1), 37.

French, P. (2015). North Korea: state of paranoia. Zed Books Ltd..

Frías, D. M., Rodríguez, M. A., & Castañeda, J. A. (2008). Internet vs. travel agencies on pre-visit destination image formation: An information processing view. *Tourism management*, *29*(1), 163-179.

Gartner, W. C. (1994). Image formation process. *Journal of travel & tourism marketing*, *2*(2-3), 191-216.

Gartner, W. C., & Ruzzier, M. K. (2011). Tourism destination brand equity dimensions: Renewal versus repeat market. *Journal of Travel Research*, *50*(5), 471-481.

Goodkind, D. (2015). Discussion: On the Study of Population Structure of Democratic People's Republic of Korea. *Communications*, *22*(1), 19-21.

Gunn, C. A. (1988). *Vacationscape: Designing tourist regions*. Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Haggard, S., & Noland, M. (2009). *Famine in North Korea: markets, aid, and reform*. Columbia University Press.

Jani, D., & Yeong-Hwang, Y. (2011). User-generated destination image through weblogs: A comparison of pre- and post-visit images. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 16(3), 339–356.

Jenkins, O. H. (1999). Understanding and measuring tourist destination images. *The International Journal of Tourism Research*, *1*(1), 1.

Kim, S. S., Timothy, D. J., & Han, H. C. (2007). Tourism and political ideologies: A case of tourism in North Korea. *Tourism Management*, *28*(4), 1031-1043.

Lankov, A. (2014). *The real North Korea: life and politics in the failed Stalinist utopia*. Oxford University Press.

Law, R., & Cheung, S. (2010). The perceived destination image of Hong Kong as revealed in the travel blogs of mainland Chinese tourists. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*, *11*(4), 303-327.

Lee, Y. S. (2018). International isolation and regional inequality: Evidence from sanctions on North Korea. *Journal of Urban Economics*, *103*, 34-51.

Liptak, K. (2018, June 12). Trump's North Korean gamble ends with 'special bond' with Kim. Retrieved June 12, 2018, from https://edition.cnn.com/2018/06/11/politics/trump-kim-summit-singapore/index.html

Lonely Planet. (n.d.). North Korea. Retrieved May 28, 2018, from https://www.lonelyplanet.com/north-korea

Lowe, P. (2014). *The origins of the Korean War*. Routledge.

Macdonald, D. S. (2018). *The Koreans: Contemporary politics and society*. Routledge.

Mali, X., Yafang, B., & Zhia, S. (2013). The perceived destination image of Hangzhou city of China as received in the travel blogs of western tourists. *Journal on Innovation and Sustainability. RISUS ISSN 2179-3565*, *4*(1), 101-112.

Mason, P. (2012). Tourism impacts, planning and management. Routledge.

McClinchey, K. A. (1999). Rural images, tourism and sustainability: perceptions of rural accommodation operators and their visitors in Waterloo-Wellington region, Ontario.

McDowell, S. (2008). Selling conflict heritage through tourism in peacetime Northern Ireland: transforming conflict or exacerbating difference?. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, *14*(5), 405-421.

Nadeau, J., Heslop, L., O'Reilly, N., & Luk, P. (2008). Destination in a country image context. *Annals of Tourism Research, 35*, 84–106.

Nardi, B. A., Schiano, D. J., & Gumbrecht, M. (2004, November). Blogging as social activity, or, would you let 900 million people read your diary?. In *Proceedings of the 2004 ACM conference on Computer supported cooperative work* (pp. 222-231). ACM.

Neuendorf, K. A., & Kumar, A. (2006). Content analysis. *The International Encyclopedia of Political*

*Communication*.

Pan, B., MacLaurin, T., & Crotts, J. C. (2007). Travel blogs and the implications for destination marketing. *Journal of Travel Research*, *46*(1), 35-45.

Pearce, P. L., (1982). The social psychology of tourist behaviour. *Pergamon Press, Oxford*.

Pike, S. (2002). Destination image analysis—a review of 142 papers from 1973 to 2000. *Tourism management*, *23*(5), 541-549.

Sarantakes, N. E. (2017). The Quiet War: Combat Operations along the Korean Demilitarized Zone, 1966–1969. In *United States Military History 1865 to the Present Day* (pp. 77-95). Routledge.

Schmallegger, D., & Carson, D. (2008). Blogs in tourism: Changing approaches to information exchange. *Journal of vacation marketing*, *14*(2), 99-110.

Scott, W. A. (1965). Psychological and social correlates of international images. *International behavior: A social-psychological analysis*, 71-103.

Shen, H., Song, C., Li, M., & Jiang, Q. (2015). Shaping destination images through social networking sites: A case study of Singapore. In *Advances in Hospitality and Leisure*(pp. 89-107). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Shields, R. (2003). Political tourism: Mapping memory and the future of Québec City. *Mapping tourism*, 1-27.

Sirakaya, E., & Woodside, A. G. (2005). Building and testing theories of decision making by travellers. *Tourism management*, *26*(6), 815-832.

Smith, H. (2015). *North Korea: Markets and military rule*. Cambridge University Press.

Srivastava, R. K., Fahey, L., & Christensen, H. K. (2001). The resource-based view and marketing: The role of market-based assets in gaining competitive advantage. *Journal of management*, *27*(6), 777-802.

Stabler, M. J. (1988). The image of destination regions: theoretical and empirical aspects. *Marketing in the tourism industry*, *1*, 133-161.

Sun, M., Zhang, X., & Ryan, C. (2015). Perceiving tourist destination landscapes through Chinese eyes: The case of South Island, New Zealand. *Tourism Management*, *46*, 582-595.

Tasci, A. D., Gartner, W. C., & Tamer Cavusgil, S. (2007). Conceptualization and operationalization of destination image. *Journal of hospitality & tourism research*, *31*(2), 194-223.

Tapachai, N., & Waryszak, R. (2000). An examination of the role of beneficial image in tourist destination selection. *Journal of Travel Research, 39*, 37–44.

Walmsley, R. (2003). *World prison population list* (pp. 1-6). London: Home Office.

World Bank (2018). Population, Total. Retrieved from the internet on April 10, 2018, from: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL

Xiang, Z. & Gretzel, U. (2010). Role of social media in online travel information search. *Tourism Management, 31 (2)*, 179-188.

Zaei, M. E., & Zaei, M. E. (2013). The impacts of tourism industry on host community. *European journal of tourism hospitality and research*, *1*(2), 12-21.

Zhang, J. J., & Mao, Z. (2012). Image of all hotel scales on travel blogs: Its impact on customer loyalty. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, *21*(2), 113-131.