PROJECTED AND PERCEIVED IMAGE OF LATVIA AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

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1. Introduction

Destination image is one of the most extensively studied topics in tourism research (Pike, 2002; 2007) mainly because destination image is considered to impact the overall success of a tourist destination (Hunt, 1975; Crompton, 1979; Chen & Kerstetter 1999). According to previous studies (Chon, 1992; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Tasci & Gartner, 2007, Chi & Qu, 2008, etc.), the perceived destination image directly influences travel-related decision-making and buying behavior, thus indicating that destinations with a positive image are likely to attract more visitors. It is therefore crucial for destination marketing organizations (DMOs) to gain a comprehensive understanding of the perceived destination image in order to develop successful marketing strategies (Goodall, 1990; Shani & Wang, 2011).

Researchers have extensively studied the factors that impact the formation of destination image (Gunn, 1972; Phelps, 1986; Gartner, 1993; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). The majority of studies have focused on assessing visitors' perceived destination image (Beerli & Martin, 2004b; Leung et al., 2011; Li & Wang, 2011; Ly, 2013; Tseng et al., 2015). Assessing solely the perceived destination image might not provide comprehensive information, thus, it is important to study the connection between the projected and the perceived destination image. The studies that have considered both of these concepts, however, are limited (Grosspietsch, 2006; Koerte et al., 2009; Andreu et al., 2000). Moreover, the destination images of less developed or developing destinations, such as Latvia, have received limited researcher attention (Sönmez & Sirakaya, 2002).

Previous studies on destination image have mostly utilized quantitative data obtained through visitor surveys. Advancements of information technology have, however, changed travellers' information search behavior, creating new forms of travel-related information sources, such as social media and travel blogs. Online information sources, particularly travel blogs, have become the principal tool for tourism information search (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Xiang et al., 2015). Due to the growing popularity of travel blogs as a travel-related information source, researchers have acknowledged that travel blogs can serve as an effective research tool for DMOs (Carson, 2008; Pan et al., 2007; Wenger, 2008; Banyai & Havitz, 2013).

Recognizing the limited number of studies that studied the destination image of least developed tourism destinations, and the limited number of studies that analyze and compared the perceived and projected images of a tourist destination, the purpose of this study is to

determine and compare the images of Latvia as a tourist destination as perceived by visitors, and as projected by the Latvian Tourism Development Agency (LTDA). The study aims to identify the most frequently used words to describe Latvia's tourism offerings in travel blogs and in the Official Latvian Tourism Portal, the positive and negative aspects of the country's image as perceived by visitors, and lastly, to evaluate the congruency between the perceived and projected image of Latvia.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Destination Image

The topic of tourism destination image has been studied extensively since 1970s (Pike, 2002; 2007). Due to the complex nature of destination image, however, this concept is interpreted differently, and a common definition has not yet been established (Gallarza et al., 2002). Two of the most frequently used definitions are those of Crompton (1979) and Kotler (1994), which state that destination image is the combination of a person's attitudes, impressions, and perceptions of a destination. Most of the researchers agree that the destination image concept represents a global impression (Gallarza et al., 2002), and "a totality of beliefs, feelings and expectations and that it is an accessible mental schema or information store" (Pearce, 2005, p.93).

Destination image is considered to be the foundation of effective destination marketing (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Several studies have found that the success of a tourist destination is largely dependent on the destination image (Hunt, 1975; Crompton, 1979; Chen & Kerstetter 1999). Numerous researchers have focused on the demand-side implications of destination image (Hunt, 1975; Goodrich, 1978; Crompton, 1979; Gartner, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Researchers have shown particular interest in how destination image influences consumer decision-making processes. Multiple studies show that a positively perceived destination image is strongly associated with the selection of that particular destination (Goodrich, 1978; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Bigne et al., 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2007). As noted by O'Leary & Deegan (2005), destination image serves as a tool for travelers to distinguish tourism destinations. Not only has destination image been found to have an impact on decision-making behavior, but also on the future, post-decision-making behavior (Alhemoud & Armstrong, 1996; Bigne et al., 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Lee, 2009). Moreover, previous studies show that the image of a destination can positively impact

satisfaction (Bigne et al., 2001; Beerli & Martin, 2004a; Chi & Qu, 2008; Lee, 2009). Based on tourism literature, it can be concluded that tourism destination image is the foundation of visitor satisfaction and potential behavior. Other researchers have found that destination image affects the supply-side/marketing-related aspects (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Chen & Kerstetter 1999).

It is suggested that destination image encompasses three interrelated components – cognitive, affective, and conative (Gartner, 1993). The cognitive component relates to the beliefs and knowledge someone has about a destination; the affective component refers to someone's feelings toward a destination; and the conative or action component refers to the behavioral intentions toward a destination (Gartner, 1993, Pike & Ryan, 2004). Researchers agree that the cognitive and the affective components are important in shaping a destination's image (Fakery & Crompton, 1991; Gartner, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999, Beerli & Martin, 2004a; San Martín & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2007), and that the affective component is subsequent to the cognitive component (Stern & Krakover, 1993; Beerli & Martin, 2004a). The majority of previous studies have focused on the cognitive component of destination image (Hunt, 1975; Goodrich, 1978; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Pike & Ryan, 2004; Grosspietsch, 2006; Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2006; Govers et al., 2007; Qu et al., 2011; Stylos & Andronikidis, 2013). Other researchers have recognized the importance of the affective component when studying destination image (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Walmsley & Young, 1998, Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). According to Tasci et al. (2007), the subjective nature of the affective component is the main reason why it has not been studied as widely as the objective component. It has, however, been found that the affective component has a significant influence on a person's evaluation and selection of a tourism destination (Yuksel & Akgul, 2007). These findings indicate that the affective component is important in conceptualizing and evaluating a destination's image, and, thus, should be used in conjunction with the cognitive component. Furthermore, the conative component has not been widely used and studied. Tasci et al. (2007), however, argue that the behavior component is significant in conceptualizing destination image, and thus the researchers developed an interactive system of image components that incorporates all three components – cognitive, affective, and conative.

The evident influence of travellers' perceptions of destination image on a destination's overall success has prompted researchers to study the factors that influence destination image formation (Gunn, 1972; Gartner, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Tasci

& Gartner, 2007, McCartney et al., 2008; Fries et al., 2008; Camprubi et al., 2013; Tseng et al., 2015).

2.2. Destination Image Formation

Understanding the factors that influence destination image formation is important, particularly for destination marketing organizations (DMOs), in order to make more effective marketing decisions (Goodall, 1990; Shani & Wang, 2011). Based on previous studies, Tasci et al. (2007) have conceptualized destination image formation as "a construction of a mental representation of a destination on the basis of information cues delivered by the image formation agents and selected by a person" (p. 414). Destination image can be formed in various ways. Several researchers (Crompton, 1979; Gartner, 1993; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Walmsley & Young, 1998; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Chen & Kerstetter, 1999) found that the perceived destination image is shaped through personal experience. Destination image formation can also be solely formed through various information sources (Gunn, 1972; Bojanic, 1991, Gartner, 1993). Information sources are also referred to as image formation agents (Gartner, 1993), and as stimulus factors (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Accroding to Alhemoud & Armstrong (1996), destination image can also be formed without having exposure to any kind of commercial information sources.

Gunn (1972) argued that the formation of destination image perceptions depends on the type of information sources a person is exposed to – organic or induced. The organic image is formed through noncommercial, unbiased information sources such as mass media, friends and family, and books. The induced image, on the contrary, is formed though the external information sources that are controlled by destination marketers (Gunn, 1972; Gartner, 1993). Later, based on Gunn's (1972) classification, Gartner, (1993) established a typology consisting of eight image formation agents that range from induced to organic - overt induced I, overt induced II, covert induced I, covert induced II, autonomous, unsolicited organic, solicited organic and organic image. According to Gartner (1993) and MacKay & Fesenmaier (2000), each formation agent has a distinctive impact on shaping a destination's image, and therefore, to ensure successful marketing efforts, various formation agents should be combined to maximize the effect.

Phelps (1986) categorized destination image as primary and secondary image. The secondary image refers to the perceived image of a destination before the actual visit to the destination, and it is formed through the induced and organic information sources, while the primary image refers to the image that is shaped by visiting a destination. According to previous studies (Phelps, 1986; Beerli & Martin, 2004), the destination image that has been

formed through past experiences is typically more representative, multifaceted, and different than that formed through secondary sources. Nevertheless, secondary information sources help travelers form the initial destination image, thus minimizing the uncertainty and risk associated with travel decision-making, and it serves as justification for travel-related decisions (Mansfeld, 1992). Moreover, a person's perceived image of a destination is not static. The perceived image might change over time or based on the visitation experience (Chon, 1992; Gallarza et al., 2002; Li & Vogelsong, 2006). For example, the destination image might change during the actual visit, post the visit or at a repeat visit.

Based on the model of Stern & Krakover (1993), the perceived image of a destination is formed through information sources (primary and secondary), and personal factors. Personal factors are the internal determinants such as socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, social class, education level, etc.), and psychological factors (motivations, personality, cultural values, etc.). Numerous researchers have studied the influence of social factors on destination image formation. The majority of studies revealed that the social characteristics have a significant impact on the image formation (Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999, Hui & Wan, 2003; Beerli & Martin, 2004a; 2004b). Academic literature demonstrates that the perceived image of a destination is influenced by a person's familiarity with the destination, the number of times a person visited the destination, the amount of time a person stayed at the destination, and the interaction with the destination (Phelps, 1986; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Beerli & Martin, 2004). Although the influence of psychological factors on destination image formation has not been studied as extensively, the existing studies show that psychological factors are integral in image formation (Gartner, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004a; San Martín & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2007). Grounded on previous studies, Tasci & Gartner (2007) classified the sources of destination image formation agents in three categories: (1) supply-side or destination (2) independent or autonomous, and (3) demand-side or image receivers.

According to Költringer & Dickinger (2015), if a destination's projected image is congruent with the image projected by other sources, the destination's image is stronger. As various types of factors influence destination image formation differently, the perceived and projected images are not always congruent (Andreu et al., 2000; Grosspietsch, 2006; Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Költringer & Dickinger, 2015). Moreover, advancements in information technology (IT) have changed travelers' information search behavior (Kim et al., 2013; Xiang et al., 2015). It is, therefore, important to understand how people search for travel

related information, in order to gain a better understanding of what shapes perceptions of destination image.

2.3. Tourist Information Search Behavior

Information search has been defined as "the motivated activation of knowledge stored in memory or acquisition of information from the environment" (Engel et al., 1995). Travellers undertake travel-related information search in order to reduce the uncertainty and risk, as well as to increase their satisfaction and quality of a trip (Fodness & Murray, 1999; Money & Crotts, 2003). Tourist information search behavior affects the decision-making processes, thus it is essential to understand the information search process and strategies of travellers in order to develop successful destination marketing communication strategies and to provide better quality services (Srinivasan, 1990; Gursoy & McCleary, 2004; Gursoy, 2011). The significance of comprehending tourist information search behavior is continuously increasing due to the variety of services and the rapidly proliferating competition in the hospitality and tourism industry (Fodness & Murray, 1999; Gursoy, 2011).

There are numerous factors that can influence a traveller's choice of information sources utilized to make travel decisions. Based on previous studies, three distinct approaches of information search behavior can be identified (Srinivasan, 1990) – psychological/motivational, cost/benefit or economics approach, and process approach. The psychological/motivational approach relates to the individual characteristics of the traveller. Many researchers argue that also socio-demographic characteristics (occupation, level of education, age, nationality, etc.) of the traveller impact information search behavior (Fodness & Murray, 1999; Chen & Gursoy, 2000; Money & Crotts, 2003; Bieger & Laesser, 2004; Luo et al., 2005; Ramkissoon & Nunkoo, 2008). The second perspective of the psychological/motivational approach addresses the trip-specific differences. Researchers state that the travel-specific attributes, such as the length of stay at the destination, travel party characteristics, and previous trip experiences, all influence tourist information search behavior (Schul & Crompton, 1983; Fodness & Murray, 1999; Bieger & Laesser, 2004; Gursoy & McCleary, 2004). They also agree that the travel-specific factors can explain search behavior more accurately than the socio-demographic factors that have a trivial influence. The second approach – economics approach – addresses the cost/benefit perspective of information search behavior. The cost of information search relates to the financial cost, the time spent searching for information, and to the effort required for gathering the necessary information (Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998). According to Gursoy &

McCleary (2004), if the cost of information search increases, the level of information search activity is expected to decrease. The third approach addresses the process of information search. Several researchers argue that the information processing consists of several stages - information acquisition, procession, purchase, and consumption stage (Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998; Correia, 2002).

Based on Engel's et al. (1995) definition, information search can be internal or external. Internal information search implies using personal experiences, and knowledge gained through past and continuous search to make travel decisions (Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998; Fodness & Murray, 1999; Chen & Gursoy, 2000; Money & Crotts, 2003; Gursoy & McCleary, 2004). People traveling to formerly visited destinations, for example, may base their travel decisions solely on the internal search (Snepenger & Snepenger, 1993). If, however, internal search does not provide sufficient or up-to-date information to make a travel-related decision, it is expected that the traveller will use external information sources (Beatty & Smith, 1987; Gursoy & McCleary, 2004). External search can take place through diverse channels, which Money & Crotts, (2003, pp. 193), grounded on previous studies, have classified in four categories: "(1) personal (e.g., word-of-mouth advice from friends and relatives), (2) marketer-dominated (e.g., advertisements in print and electronic media), (3) neutral (e.g., third-party sources such as travel agents and travel guides), and (4) experiential sources - direct contacts with retailer." Another external source that is widely being studied in relation to tourist information search behavior is the Internet (Money & Crotts, 2003; Jang, 2005, Ho et al., 2012).

Traditionally, the sources of tourist information search included offline information sources such as travel books and magazines, newspapers, TV and radio, travel agents, etc. (Ho & Liu, 2005; Chung & Koo, 2015). The rapid advancements of information technology, however, have created an online information source – the Internet – that has become one of the most common sources for travel-related information search (Jang, 2005; Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006; Buhalis & Law, 2008; Ho et al., 2012). From the marketers' perspective, the Internet offers exclusive customization possibilities and means of providing extensive information about the destination (Law et al, 2004; Chung & Koo, 2015). Nonetheless, a challenge marketers face is the high level of information saturation (Xiang et al., 2015). Therefore, marketers need to find ways of distinguishing their offerings from the competitors. An increasing number of tourists are utilizing the Internet and various online resources to search for travel-related information due to several advantages that these online information sources provide. These include global accessibility, low cost, high interactivity, and ease of

product comparison (Wang et al., 2002; Law et al., 2004). Some shortcomings of the online information sources that have previously been cited include information overload (Frias et al., 2008), lack of trust and reliability, and lack of customization (Gretzel, 2011). Numerous website design improvements as well as more stringent security measures have assisted in overcoming these issues (Gretzel, 2011). Some researchers have argued that the Internet will replace some of the offline information sources, such as travel agencies (Buhalis, 1998). More recent studies, however, show that although the Internet serves as the dominant source of information for tourists, it will not substitute the traditional offline information sources, such as magazines, referrals, radio, TV (Ho et al., 2012; Xiang et al., 2015), and travel agencies (Frias et al., 2007).

Tourists representing various generations have adapted the Internet as the primary tool for tourism information search; however, the use of the Internet to search for necessary information varies depending on the generation (Xiang et al., 2015). Some segments, particularly the millennial generation, admit the importance of social media in tourism information search (Bizirgianni & Dionysopoulou, 2013; Kim et al., 2013; Xiang et al., 2015). Social media refers to Internet-based applications that encompass user-generated content - sharing information, thoughts, experiences, ideas, etc., and facilitate search for services and interactions with other users (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Chung & Koo, 2015; Luo & Zhong; 2015).

2.4. Travel Blogs and eWOM

Due to the intangible nature of tourism services word-of-mouth has a great impact on travellers' decision-making process (Shanka et al., 2002; Bei et al., 2004; Pan et al., 2007). Traditionally, word-of-mouth was the process of informal information exchange between acquaintances but now travellers can exchange information with strangers globally (Pan et al., 2007). The advancement of Internet applications, such as blogs, have had a major impact on the hospitality and tourism industry as they serve as a platform for electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Pühringer & Taylor, 2008; Litvin et al., 2008). Some argue that online blogs are a more credible source of information than the more traditional forms of media (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Johnson & Kaye, 2004; Mack et al., 2008).

Travel blogs are a relatively new type of social media that are gaining popularity as information sources and marketing channels for travellers (Pan et al., 2007; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Travel blogs can be considered as online travel journals or diaries that encompass personal travel stories and reviews on various tourist destinations (Wang, 2012). As noted by

Gretzel et al., (2007), the exploration of diverse travel blogs is a common online activity. Travel blogs are regarded as unbiased, independent sources of information (Litvin et al, 2008; Banyai & Havitz, 2013). According to Bickart & Schindler (2001), travel blogs are a more preferred source of tourist information than marketer or media-generated information sources for various reasons. Blogs provide personal travel stories that are infrequently shared in the traditional information sources. The personal travel experiences shared on travel blogs help tourists gain a better understanding of what can be expected at a particular destination. Moreover, bloggers are considered to have more ability to affect the readers by providing educational and entertaining information about a destination. According to Hennig-Thurau & Walsh (2003), blogs can help make better choices and reduce decision-making time.

Several researchers have studied travel blogs in relation with destination image formation (Wenger, 2008; Koerte et al., 2009; Li & Wang, 2011; Son, 2011; Wang, 2012; Prats & Marin, 2012; Tse & Zhang, 2013). For example, through blog analysis Wang (2012) found that a blog reader's perceived image of a destination is influenced by affective images (experiencing appeal, generating empathy, etc.), cognitive image (providing guides), and interpersonal interactions. Considering the growing popularity of travel blogs as an influential source of travel planning and decision-making, they are considered as a major research tool for DMOs (Carson, 2008; Pan et al., 2007; Pühringer & Taylor, 2008; Akehurst, 2009; Wenger, 2008; Banyai & Havitz, 2013). Travel blogs serve as a cost-efficient source for DMOs to assess visitor experiences at particular destinations (Pan et al, 2007; Banyai & Glover, 2011). Although the majority of researchers agree that travel blogs are an effective tool for assessing traveller attitudes, travel blog analysis entails some limitations. For example, Wenger (2008) and Choi et al. (2007) noted that bloggers' viewpoints might not be entirely representative of the destination visitor population.

2.5. Latvia as a Tourist Destination

Latvia is one of the three Baltic States situated in North-East Europe; it boarders with Lithuania, Estonia, Russia, and Belarus. Since Latvia entered the European Union in 2004, the country's tourism sector has been continuously growing. The Latvian Tourism Development Agency (LTDA) is in charge of the tourism policy implementation and tourism promotion. The national tourism strategy primarily focuses on cultural and natural tourism. The country also attracts tourists who travel for medical, recreational, and business purposes. The national tourism industry is benefiting from cross-boarder partnerships and EU tourism development policies (Euromonitor International, 2014). For example, in 2014, Riga - the

capital city of Latvia, was titled European Capital of Culture. This title helped the country raise awareness as a tourist destination and to attract more tourists (Riga 2014, 2014).

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Data Collection

This study aims to look at destination image of Latvia from two perspectives – the projected image by the country (Latvian Tourism Development Agency (LTDA)); and the perceived image by the international visitors. LTDA is a government institution that is supervised by the Ministry of Economics. The Agency is responsible for the implementation of the country's tourism development policy and promotional activities within Latvia and abroad (Latvian Tourism Development Agency, n.d.). First of all, text data from the Official Latvian Tourism Portal - http://www.latvia.travel/en - were collected, saved as one Word document and analyzed by word frequency analysis. Secondly, text data were collected from various travel blogs and analyzed by word frequency analysis and content analysis. These travel blogs were extracted from two popular travel blog websites – www.travelpod.com and www.travelblog.org that both are among the Top10 most popular travel related blog websites (as identified with Google's PageRank system on August 20, 2015). Particularly these two websites were chosen because they share common characteristics, such as chronological ordering of blog entries; opportunity to search for blog entries relating to a specific country, region, city; possibility to access and read the blog posts without registering; option to post videos and photos.

Explicitly the travel blog entries relating to Latvia were identified and arranged in a reverse-chronological order to identify the latest blog posts. As the aim of the study is to gain a current understanding of the perceived image of Latvia, only the blogs posted from January 2014 to September 2015 were downloaded, saved in another Word document and evaluated. A total of 221 blogs were downloaded. 19 of these blogs did not contain relevant information to a trip to Latvia or did not contain textual data, and 26 of these blogs were not written in English but in another language, thus they were eliminated. Therefore, the total number of blogs analyzed in this study is 176.

3.2. Data Analysis

The text data collected from the Official Latvian Tourism Portal and the travel blogs was analyzed using the NVivo10 software. The NVivo software permits analyzing qualitative data and identifying the most frequently used words in a text. First of all, the textual data was

cleaned. The words that do not carry a specific meaning (e.g. "the", "as", "it" "where") were removed. The plural nouns were transformed into singular (e.g. "cathedrals" to "cathedral", and the words that in combination carry one specific meaning were unified into one-word format (e.g. "old town" to "oldtown", "art nouveau" to "artnouveau"). Also, words that do not carry any specific meaning and are widely used in travel-specific literature were eliminated (e.g. "room", "dinner", "time"). After cleaning the textual data in both data files, the NVivo10 software was applied to each document separately to identify the 100 most frequently mentioned keywords in travel blogs and in the Official Latvian Tourism Portal.

Having identified the most frequently cited words, based on their characteristics they were categorized into ten dimensions– destinations, attractions & entertainment, nature & environment, infrastructure & transportation, accommodation, culture & history, activities, cuisine, tourism, and descriptors. Although the most frequently used words provide an insight into visitors' experience in the country, they do not offer sufficient understanding of the positive and negative aspects of their travel experience. Therefore, content analysis was applied to the travel blogs. Content analysis is used to interpret qualitative data in order to identify common themes and patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The most frequently used words in the travel blogs were then coded based on the positive or negative nature of the sentences that they appeared in. Lastly, the congruency between the perceived and the projected images of Latvia was evaluated by comparing the destination image attributes and the positive and negative aspects of the identified attributes in the travel blogs.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Frequency Analysis

The one hundred most frequently mentioned words were identified and displayed in a descending order for each of the two data files. The nouns were then grouped into the following dimensions or categories - destinations, attractions & entertainment, nature & environment, infrastructure & transportation, accommodation, culture & history, activities, cuisine, and tourism. Table 1 displays the dimensions and frequencies of words mentioned in the Official Latvian Tourism Portal representing the projected image. Table 2 displays the dimensions and frequencies of words cited in the travel blogs, thus representing the perceived image.

Table 1 – Most frequently used words in the Official Latvian Tourism Portal

Dimension	Keyword	FRQ	FRQ %	Dimension	Keyword	FRQ	FRQ %
Destinations 14,0%	Riga	345	0,060	Infrastructure & Transportation 10,9%	Street	103	0,018
	Kurzeme	60	0,010		Port	34	0,006
	Latgale	51	0,009		Bicycle	30	0,005
	Liepaja	50	0,009	Attractions Entertainment 24,4%	City	177	0,031
	Jurmala	45	0,008		Castle	146	0,025
	Sigulda	41	0,007		Church	112	0,019
	Vidzeme	41	0,007		Town	107	0,019
	Gauja	39	0,007		Centre	100	0,017
	Valmiera	38	0,007		Festival	99	0,017
	Ventspils	36	0,006		Museum	98	0,017
	Rezekne	34	0,006		Beach	58	0,010
	Cesis	31	0,005		Manor	52	0,009
Culture& History 15,7%	Latvian	204	0,035		Palace	51	0,009
	Building	116	0,020		Event	50	0,009
	Art	77	0,013		Village	46	0,008
	History	67	0,012		Exhibition	45	0,008
	Music	67	0,012		Opera	41	0,007
	Architecture	55	0,010		Theatre	40	0,007
	People	51	0,009		Monument	40	0,007
	ArtNouveau	47	0,008		NatureReserve	40	0,007
	Tradition	47	0,008		Market	37	0,006
	War	39	0,007		OldTown	37	0,006
	Culture	38	0,007		Concert	34	0,006
	Children	35	0,006	Nature & Environment 10,9%	Nature	116	0,020
	Celebration	31	0,005		Lake	103	0,018
	Style	31	0,005		Park	80	0,014
Activities 2,7%	Activity	45	0,008		River	80	0,014
	Recreation	39	0,007		Water	67	0,012
	Walking	39	0,007		Sea	66	0,011
	Fishing	32	0,006		Forest	51	0,009
Cuisine 2,8%	NationalCuisine	77	0,013		Trail	42	0,007
	Restaurant	52	0,009		Territory	39	0,007
	Beer	31	0,005		Region	38	0,007
Tourism 2,0%	Visitor	78	0,014		Hill	33	0,006
	Holiday	39	0,007		Seaside	30	0,005
Accommodation 0,8%	Hotel	44	0,008				

"Riga" is the most frequently used word in the Official Latvian Tourism Portal website. Riga, the capital city of Latvia, seems to have received the most attention from the LTDA highlighting many attractions that can be found within the city. The second mostly used word is "Latvian", which represents the Latvian people and culture. "City" is the third most frequently used word. Most of the tourist attractions can be found within cities, thus the LTDA is aiming to attract visitors not only to the capital city but also to nearby cities. Other frequently cited cities include – Liepaja, Jurmala, Sigulda, Valmiera, Rezekne, Ventspils and

Cesis, which are all represented by the "Destinations" dimension. Three regions of Latvia have also been widely cited in the website – Kurzeme, Latgale, Vidzeme.

Apart from the "Descriptor" dimension that encompasses the majority of most frequently used words (see Table 3), the "Attractions & Entertainment" category has received the widest coverage on the website. The most mentioned words in this dimension include "castle", "church", "town", "centre", "festival", "museum", and "beach". Although the website is promoting many tourist attractions within the cities, such as churches, museums, opera, theatre, the Agency has made effort to familiarize visitors with attractions and entertainment opportunities outside the major cities. Information can be found about smaller towns that attempt to draw visitors' attention to such attractions as castles, palaces, manors, nature reserves, and festivals.

Attributes within the "Culture & History" dimension have also been widely mentioned. The website familiarizes people with the local architecture, buildings, art, and music. To help better understand the culture and behavior of locals, information is also provided on the country's history, traditions, and people.

Equal attention by the LTDA has been devoted to the "Infrastructure & Transportation" and "Nature & Environment" categories. Throughout many sections of the website, the nature of Latvia has been highlighted and emphasized. There are many lakes, rivers and the Baltic Sea, thus many opportunities to do water sports and relax close to the water. Latvia is portrayed as a green destination with many possibilities to spend holidays close to the nature.

Regarding the infrastructure and transportation, the most frequently used words were "street", "port", and "bicycle". Due to Latvia's geographic location and the wide coastline, the country operates numerous ports from several cities and towns. The existence of ports is not only beneficial for visitor transportation but also for trade. Thus, the LTDA is also projecting Latvia as country with potential business development opportunities. Cycling seems to be the suggested form for traveling within the city. During the last year, many cycling routes have been created, thus the government encourages a more eco-friendly means of transportation.

Based on the "Activities" dimension, it can be observed that Latvia is portrayed as a destination where to enjoy somewhat relaxing activities, such as, "recreation", "walking", and "fishing". These activities project an image of Latvia that might seem appealing to older generations, but less attractive to younger people.

The LTDA has undertaken effort to introduce visitors not only with the local traditions but also with the national cuisine. The website emphasizes many restaurants where to have a typical meal. Restaurants, however, might not be affordable for all the visitors. Similarly, in the "Accommodation" dimension among the most frequently mentioned words the only lodging suggested is a hotel, which might not attract the budget travelers.

In short, it can be concluded that Latvia is projected as (i) a green destination, (ii) a culture-wealthy destination, (iii) destination suitable for relaxation and recreation.

Table 2 – Most frequently used words in travel blogs

Dimension	Keyword	FRQ	FRQ %	Dimension	Keyword	FRQ	FRQ %
Destinations 6,5%	Riga	446	0,061	Culture & History 12,3%	Latvian	199	0,027
	Sigulda	36	0,005		Building	187	0,025
Attractions & Entertainment 15,7%	City	211	0,029		People	167	0,023
	OldTown	176	0,024		Euro	72	0,010
	Town	172	0,023		Music	53	0,007
	Castle	109	0,015		Latvians	44	0,006
	Church	101	0,014		Style	41	0,006
	Market	76	0,010		ArtNouveau	39	0,005
	Museum	76	0,010		Choir	39	0,005
	Beach	72	0,010		History	34	0,005
	Bridge	45	0,006		WoodenBuilding	32	0,004
	Tower	43	0,006	Activities 9,4%	Walking	241	0,033
	Garden	38	0,005		Biking	109	0,015
	Centre	37	0,005		Tour	105	0,014
Nature & Environment 5,6%	River	102	0,014		Playing	73	0,010
	Park	101	0,014		Dancing	69	0,009
	Water	43	0,006		Singing	62	0,008
	Snow	39	0,005		Shopping	36	0,005
	Flowers	33	0,004	Cuisine 6,3%	Restaurant	101	0,014
	Rain	33	0,004		Bar	70	0,009
	Countryside	30	0,004		Food	62	0,008
	Weather	30	0,004		Beer	60	0,008
Infrastructure & Transportation 7,6%	Bus	187	0,025		Mushroom	46	0,006
	Street	115	0,016		Drink	33	0,004
	Road	100	0,014		Cheese	31	0,004
	Train	57	0,008		Coffee	31	0,004
	Car	52	0,007		Meal	31	0,004
	Station	47	0,006	Tourism 1,9%	Tourist	50	0,007
Accommodation 3,6%	Hostel	101	0,014		Trip	47	0,006
	Hotel	93	0,013		Guide	41	0,006
	Camp	41	0,006				
	Apartment	33	0,004				

As in the Official Latvian Tourism Portal website, "Riga" is also the most frequently mentioned word in travel blogs. Riga and its attractions were mentioned in the majority of blogs. This can be explained by the presence of the international airport and the international

coach station within the city. Most tourists that come to Latvia first arrive in Riga, visit the city and then further explore the country.

"Walking" is the second most frequently cited word in travel blogs. Cities in Latvia are rather small, thus it is possible to go almost everywhere on foot. Many bloggers admitted that walking is the best way to explore the city.

The third mostly used word is "city". Most tourists who visited Latvia stayed in Riga and only explored the city. This can be explained by the short nature of the trips to Latvia as mentioned in some blog posts. Riga was the most frequently discussed city, as mentioned above, followed by Sigulda – a city nearby Riga that offers many tourist attractions and outdoor activities. Within the "Attractions & Entertainment" dimension, other frequently used words include "old town" and "town" signalling that travellers enjoy staying in more populated and active parts of the country, rather than exploring the countryside. Visitors have expressed their interest in visiting and observing castles, churches, markets, and museums. Several bloggers admitted that many museums are very informative and of high standard. During their journey many visitors have also been interested in visiting the beach.

As many tourists choose to stay within the city, the attributes related to the natural environment of Latvia have not been as widely cited. The most frequently used keywords in this category are "river" and "park", which can be found within Latvia's major cities.

Keywords related to the "Culture & History" have been frequently used to describe travel experience. Travellers have shown an in-depth interest in and attention to architecture – buildings, art nouveau, and wooden architecture. Several bloggers have emphasized the friendliness and kindness of locals. Fewer have not had such a positive experience. Some of the visitors have shown interest in Latvian folk music and choir music.

Apart from walking, biking, going on a tour, and playing have been mentioned among the most popular activities to undertake while in Latvia. Singing and dancing have also been recognized as activities that characterize Latvia. Shopping has been named among the most popular activities by some of the visitors.

The most popular forms of transportation to and within Latvia are bus, train and car. Several bloggers travelled to Latvia with a bus or by car from neighbouring countries. Between cities, train was a common method of transportation. Within the city, bus was the most frequently used transportation. The public transportation infrastructure within the cities has been noted as satisfactory. Some of the visitors have noted that the traffic is bad in the city, creating many traffic congestions.

While visiting Latvia travellers have enjoyed the local cuisine in restaurants and bars. Several visitors have become more familiar with the beer-drinking culture and mushroom-picking tradition of the locals.

Words that are descriptive in their nature were separated into another dimension and coded based on their sentiment – positive, neutral, negative (Table 3 and Table 4) to evaluate how Latvia as a tourist destination is described in the Official Latvian Tourism Portal and in travel blogs.

Table 3 – Most frequently used descriptive words in the Official Latvian Tourism Portal

Positive	Popular (65); Cultural (64); Special (55); Unique (55); Various (52); Like (41); Beautiful (39); Natural (38); Great (37); Active (35); Famous (35); Open (32); Interesting (31)
Neutral	Ancient (89); Old (66); Several (65); Small (57); Baltic (55); Local (55); Historical (51); Livonian (50); Modern (47); Traditional (45); High (44); International (42); National (41); European (33); Architectural (30); Large (30)
Negative	-

As it could be expected from a website that is intended to promote Latvia a tourist destination, there were no negative descriptors among the most frequently mentioned words on the website. Readers' attention is attracted with numerous positive descriptors, such as, "popular", "cultural", "special", and "unique". Looking at the neutral words it can be seen that the LTDA is emphasizing national/local and traditional aspects in their website.

Table 4 - Most frequently used descriptive words in the travel blogs

Positive	Like (116); Nice (115); Pretty (98); Great (87); Lovely (72); Good (70); Interesting (64); Free (55); Beautiful (53); Better (49); Warm (36); Happy (36); Best (33); Open (32); Close (30); Kind (30)
Neutral	Little (173); Old (135); Quiet (98); Soviet (87); Big (82); Russian (81); Local (76); Small (63); Different (48); Large (47); Cool (47); Huge (41); Traditional (40); New (34); Long (35); Several (33); Short (33); Medieval (32); National (30); Enough (30)
Negative	Cold (37); Far (33)

As indicated in Table 4, to express their impressions about the travel experience and tourism products/services in Latvia, bloggers used several descriptive words, for example, "little", "old", "nice", "pretty". Many of these words carry a neutral meaning, but it is important to note that a number of positive sentiments were used to express thoughts about Latvia as a tourist destination. The fact that the positive words outweigh the negative descriptors, signals that the overall impressions about Latvia as a tourist destination are positive. It is, however, important to look at the positive and negative aspects more closely, to gain a more in-depth and accurate understanding of the perceived image of Latvia.

4.2. Content Analysis

Content analysis was performed on the travel blogs to reveal if the most frequently used words have been mentioned in a positive or negative sense. The results (see Graph 1) indicate that the visitors had overall positive perceptions of all nine dimensions. However, if the attributes are looked at separately it can be identified that some specific keywords are associated with negative sentiments.

Graph 1 – Positive and Negative sentiments in each coding dimension
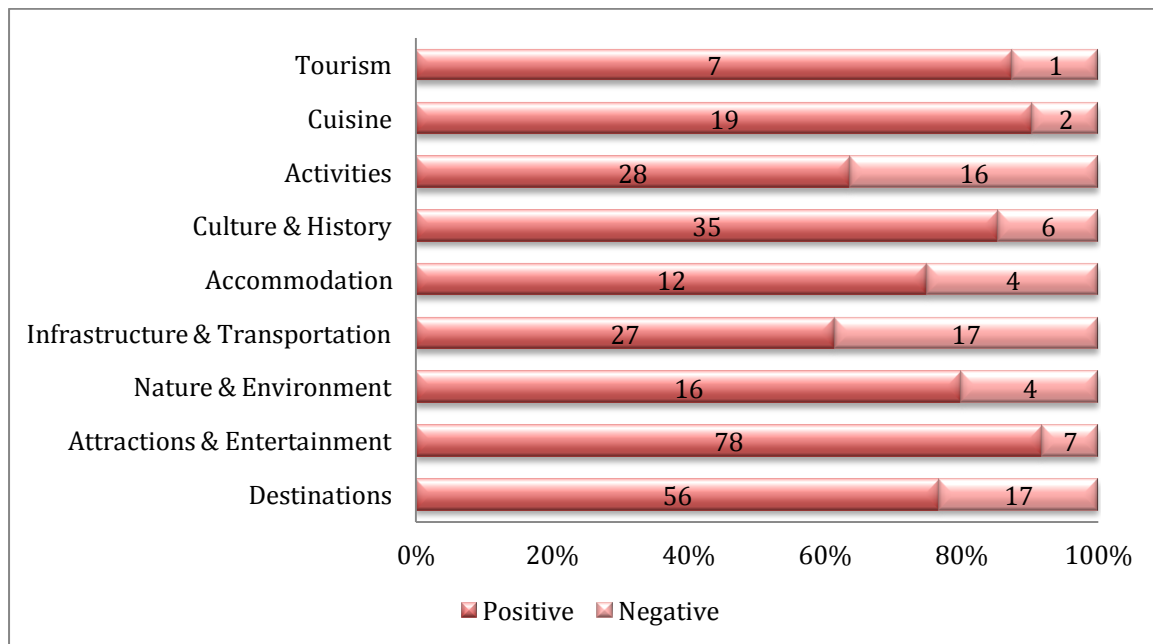
The most frequently used word "Riga" is mostly associated with positive opinions. Visitors have outlined such positive aspects as a pleasant atmosphere, many attractions, cleanliness, and a beautiful old town. One of the bloggers shared:

"The longer I stay in this city the more I like it."

On the contrary, some visitors have argued that the city is very small and there is not much to see or do. As some of the visitors commented:

"My opinion is that Riga is nice but not a city that one would want to visit more than once."

"Riga has a pleasant feel about it but certainly doesn't compare with the experiences we have enjoyed in the other locations so far."

Visitors have very positive perceptions about the attractions and entertainment possibilities in Latvia. There is a large percentage of positive comments about museums and exhibitions. Visitors have shown appreciation for the diversity and quality of the museums. One of the most visited museums is the Occupation Museum. Many bloggers have

highlighted the fact that this museum is very informative, interesting and also donation-based. Moreover, one blogger has admitted that it is the best museum he has ever visited.

Several positive comments were also made about palaces and castles. For instance, several bloggers have recognized the beauty of Turaida Castle, which is located in Sigulda (one of the top destinations mentioned in the travel blogs):

"The castle at Turaida was the most interesting, with its garden and stories."

"This castle is beautifully located in a huge park, with interesting sculptures scattered between the trees."

Another popular attraction is the Central Market in Riga. Although many visitors have expressed positive reviews about the market, some are concerned with the safety at the market. Concern shared by one of the bloggers:

"As the only foreigner I was getting lots of stares as I walked thru looking for the hostel. It did seem like this would be a creepy neighbourhood to come back to at night when all the stalls are closed up."

Although many of the visitors did not leave the city to explore the countryside, they have positive perceptions about the nature and environment in Latvia:

"Sheila and I are both impressed with the town, the beach on the Baltic had very good sand and apparently not that cold as it is quite shallow water."

"The river was flat and calm and there was a cool breeze and the views of the old city from the water were nice, but the canal section was prettier as it passes through some of Riga's beautiful parks."

By looking at the percentages of negative associations with the most frequently used words, it can be observed that "Infrastructure & Transportation" dimension is perceived most negatively. Visitors made positive comments about the public transportation stating that the transport goes regularly, the stops are well labelled, and that it is modern. Several bloggers also commented positively on the international busses:

"The Lux Express bus was great! Plenty of room, free wi-fi, unlimited hot drinks. It's first class compared to Greyhound."

The negative comments were mainly addressed to the infrastructure, which is a serious issue for Latvia's tourism industry. Some of the people, who travelled to Latvia or in Latvia by car, stated that the road and street quality is quite low, and that it does not apply to the European standards, implying that the European funding should be used to build better highways to major cities. Some bloggers have also raised awareness to the traffic problems:

"In the city a traffic deviation with a complete stop - everywhere we tried to go the same - here a navigation system is not helpful - we saw that parts of the town was inundated by the rain and this was the cause of the traffic problem."

Not only those that travelled by some form of transportation but also pedestrians have identified problems with the infrastructure:

"Riga's major intersections have tunnels, so it can get confusing if you aren't familiar with street names."

Comments regarding the accommodation facilities were mostly positive. Bloggers appreciated staying at hostels as they are cheaper than hotels and are located in the city centre, close to the main tourist attractions. Visitors were also satisfied with the service, facilities and cleanliness of the hotels. Regarding campsites, there were some negative comments related to campsite facilities (e.g. showers, toilets), but the proximity to main cities and attractions was highlighted as a positive aspect.

Tourists enjoyed the Latvian culture and believed Latvians are very patriotic and united. As mentioned by one visitor, people are "proudly wearing national colours". Those tourists, who were in Latvia during national celebrations, have positively commented on the local traditions of dancing, singing, and playing games. Many bloggers have found Latvian people to be friendly and kind, "especially young people", as mentioned by one of the bloggers. Others have not had such a positive experience:

"People almost never smile. Don't expect them to apologize if they bump into you."

Visitors have shared several positive comments related to architecture. Many bloggers are impressed with the art nouveau buildings and the country's effort to maintain and restore the cultural heritage:

"There are tons of Artnouveau building everywhere, of them original or expertly-done restorations. Impressive!"

Wooden buildings represent another form of architecture that is widely represented all around Latvia. Although the buildings in central locations are restored and looked after, some travellers have shared their disappointment with the general conditions of many buildings:

"...I've seen countless cute wooden houses that would be lovely if only somebody would splash a bit of paint on them (in the words of my colleague's Dutch father-in-law: "Did all Latvian painters die out or ..?"). Some of them look a bit chipped, leaky and wobbly, other are plain uninhabitable, burnt down or collapsed."

"Every single building in Riga was run down and plastered with graffiti. There was no exception. This was such a sharp contrast to Estonia which seemed much wealthier."

The two most frequently cited activities in travel blogs were walking and biking. Visitors to the country positively perceive the fact they can walk to all the main tourist attractions, provided they have a map. There are many pedestrian areas, which make it safe for tourists to explore the cities on foot. Biking in the city, however, has received many negative comments. Several visitors noted that biking in the city is not safe as many cars do not respect cyclists, the biking lanes are very narrow, going through underground crossings is inconvenient as there are no ramps, so the bicycles need to be carried up and down the stairs, and there are very few bicycle parking spaces in the city. In general it is regarded as unsafe to leave a bicycle on the street because of many thieves.

Visitors have a positive perception of local shopping facilities in Latvia. They appreciated the proximity of large shopping malls, several of which are located in Riga city centre. While some were pleased with the presence of international brands and stores, others showed positive interest into some local souvenir and speciality shops:

"We walked through the nice mall and some more nice shopping areas (not intentional!) and checked out some "souveniri"s. They had the same stuff all the souvenir stores around Europe have, except they said Latvia and Riga on them."

Tourists have shared very positive reviews regarding the restaurants, value and quality of meals in Latvia. Many visitors were pleasantly surprised with how cheap the food and drinks were – *"The drinks are surprisingly cheap"*, *"Definitely the best meal I've had in Riga, and for only 16 Euros, great value for money too."* Rozengrals – a traditional medieval style Latvian restaurant - has been a popular restaurant choice among the bloggers. Dining in this restaurant has been explained as:

"Rozengrals isn't just a restaurant, it's an experience."

"This is probably the most interesting restaurant I've ever eaten in, and it certainly gets 10 out of 10 for ambience."

Regarding the "Tourism" dimension, there was only one negative commentary related to the tourism industry – *"tourism is a young industry and has to improve"*. This signals that the Latvia's tourism product and service offering needs to be extended to appeal to different travel needs of visitors. Based on the reviews posted on travel blogs it can be concluded that tourists feel welcomed by the country, there are many tourist information centres that help people plan their trips and offer valuable information. Many of the tourists have enjoyed guided walking tours and admit that they have learned a lot about the culture and history of the country from certified tour guides.

International visitors that come to Latvia have an overall positive perception of the country's image. The content analysis, however, revealed some aspects that tourists tend to have slightly negative perceptions about. These include – poor infrastructure (including cycling infrastructure), safety, and unkempt buildings. It can be concluded that Latvia is perceived by international tourists as (i) a budget-friendly destination; (ii) culture-wealthy destination; (iii) a destination that should improve its infrastructure.

Latvia has been projected as a country that offers various tourist attractions largely focusing on culture and history. The same pattern can be observed when analysing travel blogs. Visitors perceive Latvia as a culture-wealthy destination with many interesting tourist attractions. These findings indicate an overall congruency in two dimensions of the projected and perceived images of Latvia – "Attractions & Entertainment" and "Culture & History". There is also congruency within the "Accommodation" and "Cuisine" dimensions.

The major aspects that are not congruent in the perceived image and projected image are the state of maintenance of buildings in Latvia and the infrastructure. Although resources are invested into improving urban areas and restoring old, historic buildings, most of the improvement is done in central, urban areas. The travellers have noticed that buildings outside the city centre are not well maintained, are abandoned, and vandalized; this has created an incongruence of how the country is portrayed and how tourists see it.

Latvia has been projected as an easily accessible destination by land transport, sea transport and air transport. Some bloggers, however, have recognized a lack of good quality highways and roads that connect Riga with the major cities within Latvia and in the bordering countries. As many tourists arrive in Latvia by ground transportation, the government should invest into infrastructure development. Also, the tourists question the projected image of Latvia as being a cycling-friendly destination. These findings signal a small incongruence between the projected and perceived destination images.

Lastly, it seems that the LTDA projects an image that is mostly appealing to older generations. It promotes recreation, spending time close to the nature in the countryside, and relaxing activities. On the contrary, several visitors associate Latvia with a city getaway holidays, which include more dynamic activities, such as shopping, dancing, biking, and going on tours.

5. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was the determine the projected and perceived image of Latvia as a tourist destination by analysing the Official Latvian Tourism Portal operated by

the LTDA and by analyzing the content of travel blogs relating to international tourist visits to Latvia. First, the most frequently expressed words in the Official Latvian Tourism Portal website were identified to gain an understanding of how the country's image is projected. The most frequently mentioned dimensions were various tourist attractions (e.g. churches, castles, museums), culture and history, and nature (e.g. lakes, parks, rivers, sea). Secondly, the most frequently cited words in 176 travel blogs were identified. Most of the visitors visited only the capital city of Latvia – Riga during their travels. The most frequently mentioned tourist attractions were associated with culture, history and architecture (e.g. old town, churches, castles, museums). Visitors showed interest in various activities, such as walking, cycling, shopping, etc.

The most frequently used descriptive words were then identified, to gain a better understanding of how the destination is described. Latvia was projected using solely positive and neutral words that emphasize the national and traditional importance of the country and its attractions. The descriptive words used by visitors to express their travel experience in Latvia were also mostly positive or neutral, thus indicating that the overall impressions of international travellers about Latvia as tourist destination are positive. The dimensions that were associated with the most positive words were "Attractions & Entertainment", "Culture & History", "Cuisine", and "Tourism". These dimensions and particular attributes within these dimensions should be used to further promote Latvia as a tourist destination. For example, new marketing campaigns could be introduced that particularly promote the Latvian national cuisine.

The dimensions associated with the most negative words were "Transportation & Infrastructure" and "Activities". The aspects that received negative comments within the "Transportation & Infrastructure" were particularly associated with infrastructure. Visitors have drawn attention to the poor quality of highways and streets, also outlining the absence of direction signs, that would help tourists orientate in the cities. Although the country is investing into road improvements, major connections between cities are not in a good condition. There seems to be an unbalanced distribution of funds in urban and rural areas. As many visitors travel to Latvia by car, the government should consider attracting more European funds for improving and developing the ground transportation infrastructure within the country. Development of better highways could promote tourist flow to least popular regions and tourist attractions. Furthermore, to help visitors orientate and enhance travel experience, a decision should be made to introduce direction signs to the main attractions within the cities.

Visitors mentioned biking as one of the main activities in Latvia. This activity, however, has been described by many negative words. Cycling infrastructure is badly perceived by visitors. This highlights one of the incongruences between the projected and perceived destination image of Latvia as the LTDA has portrayed the country as being cyclist-friendly. The government is taking effort to improve the existing cycling lanes and to develop new ones but there is adverse publicity associated with these biking lanes. Elimination and narrowing of car lanes to create new cycling lanes has resulted in more traffic congestions and discontent drivers, thus cycling in the city is currently not the safest and most convenient activity. As the situation will improve with time, the LTDA could create safe cycling route maps for tourists who like to undertake this cycling.

Another incongruence that has been identified is related to maintenance of buildings. The city center appears to be well maintained and the LTDA is promoting architecture as one of the major cultural attraction. Visitors, however, have a different perception. Several negative comments were made about poor conditions of old buildings. Those tourists who travel outside the city center to the suburbs may develop a completely different perception of the city and country. Recently the government has started developing parks and public gardens that are located outside the city center and these improvements have received not only appreciation by tourists but also by locals. By developing the suburb areas, the country is expanding its tourism product/service offering. Thus, the government should allocate funds to develop least developed areas in major cities.

Lastly, Latvia is projected as a destination for nature-related, recreational activities. This is not entirely congruent with the image perceived by the bloggers, who prefer more dynamic activities and exploring bustling destinations. Although many visitors traveling to Latvia might represent older generations, Latvia according to the study results appears to be attractive also for younger generations. The LTDA could benefit from creating a social media campaign targeted at younger generations, promoting more active events and festivals.

This study supports the findings of Li & Wang (2011) and Költringer & Dickinger (2015) and proves that valuable information can be found by studying travel blogs, and it can help the government and destination-marketing organizations make more accurate decisions and action plans to improve tourism within a country. The LTDA could keep monitoring the travel blogs associated with visits to Latvia in the future to follow tourism trends and improve the current tourism product/service offerings.

The study was not exempt from certain limitations. Firstly, due to the complexity of data, and in order not to misinterpret the data using computerized software, the collected data

was cleaned, coded and analyzed manually solely by the author. This implies that the results rely on subjective judgment. Secondly, the study did not take into account the socio-demographic characteristics of the bloggers, as many blog posts do not contain such information. Thus, the bloggers, whose blog posts were analyzed, might not completely represent the perceptions of all visitors to Latvia. As previous studies (Chen & Gursoy, 2000; Money & Crotts, 2003; Bieger & Laesser, 2004; etc.) show that socio-demographic characteristics of travelers influence the destination image formation process, future research could focus on assessing blog posts that provide information regarding the socio-demographic characteristics of the tourists. Lastly, the study focused only on the analysis of textual data. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the perceived image, future research could combine blog text analysis with photographic and video graphic analysis.

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