Behind the scenes of mediatised tourism

The case of Rotterdam's sightseeing lists

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ABSTRACT

This research used a qualitative method to gather data about the selection process of sites for sightseeing lists of Rotterdam. Eleven experts, in the person of authors of sightseeing lists of different types (guidebooks, city maps, touring programmes, blogs, and artistic collections) were interviewed about their experiences of authoring a sightseeing list of Rotterdam. More especially, how they selected sites for their sightseeing lists and choose to illustrate these lists. Major findings include evidence of the influence of mediatisation processes on the selection of sites for sightseeing lists. Mediatisation processes influenced the creating and the display of visuals in sightseeing lists for particular purposes. Moreover, there is evidence of the influence of mediatisation processes on the characteristics of visuals such as recognisability of the selected sites. The illustration of these sites need to be of high-quality and selected with care; evidence of a controlled balance in the selection of touristic icons and hidden gems with on the one end, icons aimed at seducing potential readers and on the other hand hidden local gems aiming at playing the surprise element. However, the influence of mediatisation processes on the selection of sites for sightseeing lists is limited as it appears, that a great majority of criteria weighting in for the selection of sites are not related to mediatisation processes. Criteria such as the ability to provide additional value such as being informative, differentiating the list, being able to experience, or tell a story influence the selection of a site. Another criteria which weights in the selection of a site is the gut feeling of the authors of the sightseeing lists, the belief that their appreciation for a site will transfer to their readers and that they will thereby be able to share their love for the site. This research opens a path for further research in the form of comparative research, mixed methods research or a focus on tourism practices in relation to social imagery platform Instagram.

KEYWORDS: Mediatisation, sightseeing list, visuals, selection, Rotterdam.

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1. Introduction

In an interview, renowned architect and former filmmaker Rem Koolhaas declared that we are experiencing a return to a visual culture (Crimson, Gadanho, Lootsma & van Toorn, 2001). Many aspects of our contemporary lives are appreciated, or even executed, merely for their visual value. More than ever before, we are producing and consuming visual products constantly. We design objects that have great visual and photographic value because these will get good media coverage. These visually enjoyable objects have also seen over the years an increased appreciation by private audiences. While aesthetic appreciation is a phenomenon that has existed since the beginning of times, the focus on the visual value is a quite recent phenomenon. In fact, we are now subjected to a media logic that permeates most of our actions, mediatises how we experience life.

This willingness of visually documenting life coincides with the technological advances and the affordability of technologies such as personal cameras and smartphones, but also widespread Internet broadband available to a growing number of people. More specifically, these technologies allowed on the one hand a great number of users to watch media content anywhere and at anytime, and on the other hand, they allow users to take pictures and share them on social media. The advent of such technologies has considerably changed 'the ways in which individuals visually capture and consume their travel experiences' (Lester & Scarles, 2016, p. 261), think for example of the role of a postcard. Images can now be made and sent instantly to hundreds of others. These self-made images are considered user-generated content, content that is created and made available publicly online 'outside of professional routines and practices' (OECD, 2007, p.4). According to Rocamora (2016), an increasing importance is given to the visual and photographic potential of our surroundings. This coincides with the emergence of academic researches based on mediatisation theory, media logic has penetrated institutions of the society that were considered independent, such as tourism while at the same time, tourism activities are increasingly integrated into the media in all its forms. To echo Couldry's (2013, p.35) definition of media 'encompassing not just the traditional media (television, radio, press, film) but all the other media platforms, mobile or fixed, through which content of any sort- both institutionally and individually produced is now accessible or transmissible'. Lester & Scarles (2016, 256) claim that media and processes of mediatisation have changed the way that we 'engage with, experience and exist in a media infused society'. It is therefore important to understand how society and culture are impacted by media.

As Lester & Scarles (2016) notice, 'the notion of tourism as an institution and its mediating power is not a new concept'. However, our relation to mediated experiences has grown over the last few years, impacting the way culture and society is impacted by the media. Indeed, media consumers have become media tourists. Reijders (2011) emphasizes the notion of 'being there' as a tourist. When there are countless possibilities to 'visit' from a screen, the value of physically being there and making one's own pictures increases. Reijnders (2011) emphasizes the willingness of media consumers to become media tourists. In other words, to be eager to come visit places that they have seen in the media. This echoes Mansson's (2011) study of tourism convergence, where she explains that places seen in famous movies, such as the Rosslyn chapel from Dan Brown's Da Vinci Code have seen a boom in their touristic activities.

Mediatisation theory has been studied as applied to various fields such as fashion (Rocamora, 2016), sports (Birkner & Nölleke, 2015), public health (Briggs, 2011), consumption (Jansson, 2002), diplomacy (Pamment, 2014), politics (Kepplinger, 2002; Strömbäck, 2008), and tourism (Jansson, 2002), among others. Almost all aspects of modern life could be studied under this framework. However, there is little research dedicated to the study of tourism and its artefacts (such as sightseeing lists). Magasic (2016) offers a developed analysis of how touristic practices are impacted by social media with his study on social media pilgrimage and the selfie-gaze. Magasic's selfies-gaze (2016) is inspired by Urry's tourist gaze (1992), a concept stating that tourists in general see what they expect to see during their visits, they discover new places through their expectations of the local population, touristic attractions, etc. In other words, tourists encounter new cultures through 'learned ways of seeing' (Urry, 1992, p.177). Magasic (2016) takes the notion of the tourist gaze a step further and adapts it to modern times. The selfies-gaze (Magasic, 2016) extends or activates the tourist gaze through the use of modern technologies such as social media, which focus on visual culture and connectivity. Magasic (2016) further introduces the notion of social media pilgrimage, which consists in the tendency modern tourists have to re-enact sightseeing lists by taking pictures of themselves, selfies, in front of touristic sites. Modern technology has allowed tourists to take touristic souvenirs such as post cards to a personal level. Technology has afforded the luxury of immortalizing the fact that someone has been to a specific place.

However, tourism is still an underdeveloped branch of mediatisation. According to Lester & Scarles (2016), tourism and the media have received limited

academic attention. Especially studies about non-visually oriented media artifacts have been neglected, leaving studies of visually oriented media artifacts such as films in the spotlight in tourism studies (Lester & Scarles, 2016). Due to the recent advances of technology, a lot has changed in tourism practices. There are countless reasons to believe that it is a field that will continue to change as technology advances follow their course. With such a gap in the research while tourism and visual reality is present in daily life, this thesis would like to address the effects that mediatisation has on the creation process of sightseeing list, more specifically, the process of selection of tourist icons. The interest is to unveil how media logic – thus mediatisation – influences the tailoring process of must-see lists and the selection of tourist icons of the city, impacting with this the experience that the visitors will have on it. The research question for this thesis is stated as follows: How have mediatisation processes influenced the selection of touristic icons for sightseeing lists in the case of Rotterdam?

This research come to answer a series of questions and verify a series of assumptions that can not be achieved within the current gap in the theory of mediatisation of tourism, more especially for less visual media types. How are touristic icons made? What does it take for a site to be called a touristic icon? Why are the various sightseeing lists of Rotterdam are so similar in their choice of sites? Why has Rotterdam being such a touristic success in the last few years? What is the role of the media in touristic success? Does the photogenic aspect influences touristic success? Tourism is a field that has considerably changed in the last decades, on the one hand due to the commoditisation of travel. Travel has been affordable and seen as a commodity by an increasing number of people during the last decades. On the other hand, changes in new media technologies and the impact of these on tourism has been great. Media is an increasingly integrated part of our lives, it is therefore interesting to study how that affects tourism, more especially tourism artefacts.

Sightseeing lists offer an interesting perspective as a typical touristic media artefact. They allow the study of 'how people interact with the natural, material and virtual worlds' all at the same time, and more interestingly, the intersection of these worlds in mediating experiences (Lester & Scarles, 2016, p.261). The sightseeing lists for this study encompass a broad range of types, from the typical guidebook to the Instagram accounts, thus social media, dedicated to the recommendation of sites. This broad range allow the study of mediating technologies in relation to the interplay of media avant-garde and cultural traditionalism, as suggested by Lester & Scarles' (2016).

Rotterdam was selected as a case study for the particular position of the city as a centre of culture, tourism and icons. Due to its peculiar history, Rotterdam has gained over recent years a particular status as an urban space with prominent cultural and touristic icons after going through a complete reconstruction in the aftermath of World War II when the city was almost completely destroyed. Indeed, on May 14th 1940, the major part of the city of Rotterdam was destroyed by a bombardment from German air forces (Maandag, 2002). Very few buildings were left standing, forcing the city into a state of emptiness and a total loss of cultural identity. After this sombre period, the city experienced a rebirth. Because of its lack of cultural identity, Rotterdam was named by many song artists such as Paul de Nooy, a 'stad zonder hart', a city without soul (Heiblom, 2015). There was an urgency to give shelter to the people of Rotterdam; building practically but not beautifully, using cheap materials and blend designs. According to Crimson et al. (2001), the city started the rebuilding of the old workers neighbourhood in the 1970s. This practical reconstruction turned the city in a plain boring city of ugly architecture (Crimson et al., 2001). It was not until the mid-1990s that architects and urban planners started to see the unprecedented possibilities for recreation of the lost cultural identity. They also saw the need to bring the city back to life with interesting architecture and urban planning. The time had finally come to build beautifully or architecturally interesting buildings. From this moment on, architects and urban planners started to see what the city had to offer by its freedom from historical deadweight: a city that was 'free to reinvent itself' and so became a 'laboratory for urban planning and architecture' (Crimson et al, 2001, p.27), where its absence of history became a culture. This is the time where architects let their creativity run free and the first rebirth touristic icons emerged, such as The Cubic houses from Piet Blom, De Rotterdam and Kunsthal from Rem Koolhaas, and the famous Erasmus Bridge from Ben van Berkel (Rotterdam Tourist Info, n.d.). All of these are unique buildings, which have created great touristic attraction value (Rotterdam Tourist Info, n.d.). Rotterdam's cultural development had thus a late (re)start, leading to great touristic rivalries with the capital, Amsterdam. However, rewards came in soon. In October 2015, Rotterdam was ranked 5th in the top 10 cities in the world by the travel guide Lonely Planet (Janse, 2015), confirming its status of maturity as a cultural city and touristic destination. During the last five years, Rotterdam was able to develop a great touristic image for itself, relying on the constant addition of strong touristic icons. For example, the Rotterdam Central Station renovation works were completed in 2014 (Rotterdam Centraal, n.d.), a few months before the new covered market; Markthal was opened (Markthal, n.d.). Rotterdam is a city filled with eccentric and remarkable

architectural buildings such as the flashy yellow Luchtsingel opened in 2015. Rotterdam is also a place where more ancient cultural institutions have been given a fresh start such as the Van Nelle Fabriek which received the title of UNESCO World Heritage site in 2010 (Van Nelle Fabriek, n.d.), the Timmerhuis which combines old and new and hosts the museum of Rotterdam, or the Groot Handelsgebouw which displayed with pride a momentary staircase going to the top of the building for the 75th celebration of the city's renewal in 2016 (Redactie, 2016).

Rotterdam counts many prominent cultural elements that have elevated themselves to the status of touristic icons of the city, which tourists from all over the world come to see and photograph. This raises the following questions: Is Rotterdam's touristic success linked to the city's countless photographic opportunities? Does the amount of photogenic icons of the city displayed in sightseeing lists influences tourists' travel planning? And if that is the case, is this selection of photogenic icons a conscious choice of the authors of sightseeing lists, or a result of mediatisation processes, or both? As Cohen & Cohen (2012, p. 2191) affirm, city icons are 'markers of continuity in a fluctuating world, as symbolic distinctiveness under conditions of cultural globalisation and homogenisation and as icons of personal or cultural identity'. Rotterdam counts a lot of icons, which grants it a very strong and distinctive identity. This cultural identity is often branded and sold as a product through sightseeing lists which promise to tell which buildings you need to see, which places you need to go in order to have really seen the city.

According to Mansson (2011), there is a lack of research in the area of consumer consumption changes and its impact on tourism. On the other hand, Lester & Scarles (2016) suggest studying mediated tourism from the perspective of tourism industry workers. This study aims at bringing a new academic perspective and to help broaden the field of mediatised tourism studies. This research will bring interesting insights into the effects of media and mediatisation on tourism practices. Possible outcomes of this study could include revisiting touristic marketing strategies. Moreover, the outcomes of this study could influence the content of touristic guides and the process of selection of touristic icons for sightseeing lists.

Data for this research was gathered through 11 qualitative interviews with experts, namely authors of sightseeing lists in order to study the influence of mediatisation in the selection process of touristic icons of Rotterdam for the making of sightseeing lists.

This research follows the structure of an academic article. First, the theoretical framework reviews previous studies on the matter as well as theory relevant to the research question. The theoretical framework is aimed at guiding the research from a theoretical point of view and defining concepts used in the research question or relevant to this research in general. Concepts defined in this research include: the mediatisation of travel, social media, user-generated content, word-of-mouth, opinion leaders, sightseeing lists, pseudo-events, and touristic icons. These concepts are defined for clarification purposes as the definition of certain concepts may vary from one author to the other, it is important to define what is understood of them in this specific research. Then, the methodology provides a detailed and accurate description of the method followed for this research. It provides justifications and explanations for methodological choices for all steps of the methods of this research. The method section describes: the choice of method, choices regarding the sampling, the operationalization, proceedings of the interviews, choices of transcription, processes related to the coding, such as description of the coding tree and an evaluation of the aptness of the coding instrument. Moreover, it discusses ethical issues and issues of validity, reliability, and generalizability. Then, the analysis and results chapter discusses and analyses results as grouped into themes of the coding scheme: the reasons for making a sightseeing list, the sources of information, the reasons for selecting visuals, and the reasons for selecting sites. The results are illustrated by paraphrased claims or direct quotes from the interviewees. Some conclusions are already drawn for each theme. And finally, the conclusion chapter contains overarching conclusions answering the research question. It also includes limitations of the research and suggestions to take this research further. In addition to these chapters, appendices provide a list of references used in this research. Appendix A provides the interview guide, appendix B provides an overview of the interviewees, appendix C provides the coding tree as a result of the coding analysis on Atlas.ti, appendix D provides an exemplar or the informed consent from that was presented to the interviewees, and finally, appendix E provides an overview of the sightseeing lists used in this research.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews previous literature on the topic of mediatisation of tourism and related concepts such as mediatisation of tourism, social media, user-generated content, word-of-mouth, opinion leaders, sightseeing lists, pseudo-events, and touristic icons. The aims of this chapter include giving theoretical guidance to this research as well as offering clarification on what is understood by the above-mentioned concepts in this specific research and giving an overview of the definitions other researchers gave to these concepts.

2.2. Mediatisation of tourism

Media has long been acknowledged as an important part of tourism. By tempting, informing or helping tourists via diverse media forms, tourist agencies, publication of tourist guides, broadcasts of travel experiences. As media came to occupy an even more important part of our everyday life, media also got a major role in tourism (Mansson, 2011). With her study on the influence of entertaining forms of media on tourism, Mansson (2011) suggests that more importance should be given to the analysis of interrelationships between media and tourism consumption but also to tourists' participation in these processes. With the advent of affordable technology, user-generated content, content reflecting a certain amount of creative effort that is created outside of professional routines and practices, that are made publicly available over the Internet (OECD, 2006, p.4), developed as a common practice in contemporary society. As a result, user-generated content has an impact on tourism practices. This suggests that tourism-related content such as review websites, travel blogs and picture sharing platforms such as Instagram should be taken seriously in the study of tourism.

Furthermore, user-generated content encourages the creativity of the individual. Waterton (2015) declares that tourists use photography to capture memories and a frame of reference but also give thereby meaning to the sites pictured. In other words, the act of taking a picture of a site results in a meaning making process impacting both the photographer and the site. Technologies have enabled visitors to become active producers of content instead of passive viewers (Waterton, 2015). Although it may be too simplistic to think of tourists as passive before the advent of technologies, it is useful to consider in what ways the possibilities have been widened for modern day tourists. Contrasting with the argument that technology encourages creativity, we notice a well-established 'circle

of representation' of touristic sites and a search for reproducing and imitating existing images. This can be regarded as the prominence of touristic icons in tourism. There is now increasing importance given to having one's own portrait taken next to the cultural icons of a city in order to post this image on social media, which Magasic (2016) defines as social media pilgrimage. This leads to the creation and publication of a series of similar pictures. Furthermore, the touristic gaze, the extent to which tourists tend to see what they expect to see during their visits 'becomes intertwined with the general consumption of media images as tourists consume mediated images of places' (Mansson, 2010, p.169) (Urry, 1992) (Magasic, 2016). Places and cultural icons, when captured as pictures became commodities of tourism. This is expressed in Magasic's (2016) selfie-gaze, a concept integrating the use of modern technologies used as visual and connectivity tools to Urry's (1992) notion of the tourist gaze.

Tourism has been quick to adopt the modern technologies such as the Internet. Touristic information is widely available online, from touristic advertising, online booking to online guidebooks. In contrast, there is an emerging trend to using physical travel guides for their decorative values as souvenirs rather than for their informative values. This mediatisation of the tourist experience triggers the thick mantle of images and representations (Cohen & Cohen, 2012). As a result, the touristic experience is strongly associated with social media. For some, the goal of the touristic experience is to have one's selfies taken in front of a touristic icon in order to share one's experience online and thus 'participate in the meaning of tourist sites' (Magasic, 2016, p. 175). Social media thus allow users to 'create and disseminate their own interpretations of the tourist experience' (Magasic, 2016, p.176).

In addition to that, Mansson (2011) claims that intertextuality has permeated our society. Intertextuality can be defined as the reference to one media product within a different media product (Mansson, 2011), thus how various media products refer to one another. Our media products are now cross-referencing and reflecting various interrelationships, thus displaying convergence of the media. Mansson (2001, p.1635) calls *mediatised tourism*, the convergence process of a 'more profound perspective than that of tourism viewed through the lens of a single media product and understood as a niche activity'. Cohen & Cohen (2012, p.2194) suggest that 'mediatised tourism [i.e. images of places in the media] will not replace physical traveling but will on the contrary trigger an interest in first-hand experiences.' This suggests that the increased mediatisation of tourism will intensify the emphasis on

touristic icons and the importance to physically travel to touristic icons and to take a picture of it. In other words, the availability of pictures of touristic icons on the Internet triggers the need to make one's own picture of the icons. But mediatisation of tourism isn't a new phenomenon.

Indeed, tourism has always been mediated; tourism has always used the media to display its activities (Magasic, 2016). In the recent years, however, media logic has become more pervasive and inherent to previously independent institutions such as tourism while on the other hand, tourism activities are increasingly integrated into the media, echoing Hjarvard's (2008) definition of mediatisation. Mediatisation entails that our contemporary society is increasingly being permeated with media logic. Hjarvard (2008, p.105) who has dedicated various studies to the field of mediatisation defines it as the process whereby 'contemporary society is being permeated by the media to an extent' that former independent spheres of society 'may no longer be conceived of as being separate from cultural and other social institutions'. This echoes Lundby's (2014) description of mediatisation as a process that is taking place within two stages. First, it implies the impact of the media upon a sphere of society typically separated from the media (Lundby, 2014). Second, it is admitted that the effects of mediatisation 'work in a complex manner over a considerable period of time' (Lundby, 2014, p. 703).

Strömbäck (2008), who analysed mediatisation in relation to the political sphere, declares that mediatisation is a process, which can be described in stages. In his analysis, he explains a continuum of four stages where the media logic becomes more prevailing than political logic, to a final moment when institutions 'not only adapt to the media logic and the predominant news values, but also internalize these and […] allow the media logic and the standards of newsworthiness to become a built-in part of the governing processes' (Strömbäck, 2008, pp. 239-240).

Indeed, media and communications now bear broader consequences for the contemporary society (Couldry & Hepp, 2013). According to Magasic (2016, p. 174), the media and more specifically social media have impacted tremendously 'previous conceptions of the travel experience'. For example, what Magasic (2016) calls social media tourism express the inseparability with which social media has come to be perceived in tourism, as a support and extension of the traditional process of tourism. This confirms Rocamora's (2016) affirmation that society cannot be though out as an entity separated from the media sphere, the society and the media form a whole. Indeed, mediatisation is related to the fact that our contemporary society, including

tourism, is saturated with media. And social media constitute an increasingly important part of the media.

The contemporary society is thus 'to an increasing degree submitted to, or becomes dependent on the media and their logic' (Hjarvard, 2009, p.160). Our contemporary society is permeated with media through its building blocks institutions, such as politics, culture, religion, law, sports, health, and others (Hjarvard, 2008). It is therefore useless to try study central functioning aspect of these institutions without considering the media (Waisbord, 2013). In other words, media is now to be considered as an integrated part of these spheres of society. Deacon & Stanyer (2014) affirm that due to its growing importance, mediatisation placed the media at the centre of various spheres, such as the cultural, political and social spheres. According to them, mediatisation posits the media as agents of change and holders of power – rather than particular individuals or social groups. Mediatisation refers thus to media's transformative power (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014). On the other hand, Deacon & Stanyer (2014), advise not to overlook non-media factors such as national and intergovernmental communication policy in the processes of mediatisation.

2.2.1. Social media and user-generated content

It is however useful to provide an academic definition of social media. As mentioned earlier, social media and social networking sites have increased in popularity over the last few years. The recent technological advances have made technology both relevant and affordable for a greater number of people. As a result, an ever-growing number of people own technological devices such as smartphones, tablets and personal computers. Moreover, the costs of broadband and mobile Internet greatly decreased over the years, allowing a greater number of people to go online and share their stories. These advances in technologies also supported the development of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and many more. These platforms are called social networking sites (SNS) (Enli & Moe, 2013). Kaplan & Haenlein (2010, p. 61) give a broader definition of social media as 'a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content'.

A revolutionary part of social media platforms consists in the ease of use with which they allow users to create and distribute content, called user-generated content (UGC). User-generated content is content that is created 'outside of professional routines and practices' and shared online (OECD, 2007, p.4). A report from the OECD (2007) identifies various motivations, called drivers, for users to

participate in the creation of UGC: technological drivers, which consist in the previously mentioned technological advances; economic drivers that consist in the growing number of media platforms hosting UGC; legal drivers, which consist in the flexibility of licenses allowing users to create content; and social drivers, which consist in the social, non-monetary capital earned from UGC. This social capital is a reflection of the adaptation to the media logic. The social capital earned from the creation and online diffusion of UGC results in micro-celebrity (Magasic, 2016). For example, when a person posts a blog article or pictures of his/her last travel online, he/she instantly can measure the popularity of the content in likes, views and comments. This activity thus results in ego boosting for the author of the content. It is however good to keep in mind that most social media users are not active creator of content but rather 'lurkers', preferring to watch content posted by others rather than being active producers of content (Van Dijck, 2009).

In relation to this research, it is interesting to see to how social media platforms and user-generated content have integrated tourism practices and more specifically, the making of sightseeing lists.

2.2.2. Word-of-mouth and opinion leaders

Social media and more generally, the digitalization of media have impacted tourism practices, that includes the way we travel, the way we prepare to travel, the process through which we choose a destination and gather information about this destination. A notion that took a new turn is the notion of word-of-mouth (WOM). The notion of word-of-mouth has always been important in practices such as marketing and tourism (Confente, 2015). The WOM traditionally consists in the transmission of critical reviews and opinions in 'an oral, person-to-person communication between a communicator and a receiver whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, product, or service' (Arndt, 1967, p.292). Because recommendations from friends and family are perceived as more trustworthy than any form of advertising or marketing of business initiated form (Confente, 2015), the word-of-mouth recommendation is therefore perceived as a very reliable source of information.

However, due to the digitalization and prominence of the Internet as an intermediary of communication, the WOM expanded to an online notion where the network is considerably expanded (Mansson, 2011). According to Kang & Schuett (2013, p 93), the advent of Internet-based social media technologies has enabled travellers to quickly and conveniently share their travel experiences. The WOM is still 'a factor of influence on tourists travel decisions but [it] can now spread instantly and

globally to friends and far beyond one's own network by social media posts' (Mansson 2011, p. 1639). Although few writers have a wide media spread, it is still a great change compared to the oral WOM. The number of people reached is still considerably higher. Moreover, user-generated content is able to transmit content by appealing to one's memories and dreams, giving a more personal touch (Mansson, 2011). This personal touch in turns makes the user-generated content seem like a more objective and reliable information source in travel planning (Mansson, 2011). There are incentives for the users to participate in creating digitized WOM. According to Kang & Schuett (2013), users share WOM on social media based on social influence theory, thus for three reasons: identification, internalization, and compliance.

Consequently, social media platforms are recognized by tourism organisation marketers as platforms where travellers share experiences and look for independent, objective WOM in the planning of their travels (Kang & Schuett, 2013). Some users have more influence, more viewers, and more followers than others. These users are called opinion leaders, or social media influencers, 'a new type of independent third party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media' (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011, p. 90). These social media influencers have thus persuasive power, which means that their recommendations are often followed. Thus, their recommendations are not only seen by a lot of people, they are also trusted for their personal touch. However, the sponsoring of some of these influencers has led to criticism. Indeed, it is hard to know when an influencer has been paid to recommend a site and when it is his own opinion.

Both traditional and digital word-of-mouth are relevant to this research. For the purpose of this research, it is interesting to see how authors of sightseeing lists go about these in the practice.

2.2.3. Sightseeing lists as pseudo-events
A sightseeing list is a collection of recommendations of places to see in a pre-defined area. A sightseeing list consists in the pre-defined list of must-sees, namely touristic icons of a city. The sightseeing list holds the promise of giving the true travelling experience by listing items such as buildings, museums, bars etc. that must be visited in order to have experienced the city. The touristic goal consists therefore in enacting this list in a personal way. Thus, taking of pictures or selfies in front of the touristic icons listed by the sightseeing list (Magasic, 2016) and then posting these

pictures online, transforms the touristic adventure into a pilgrimage of social media tourism (Magasic, 2016). The idea that is enforced for the tourists is that their own enacted list (experienced and later shared in Social Media) is better than the sightseeing list by itself.

These sightseeing lists consist in fact in pseudo-events as defined by Boorstin (1972), events that media make happen as opposed to events that occur from the flow of life. The sightseeing lists are fabricated by their authors who define which places qualify as must-see and which do not (Boorstin, 1972). The authors decide which are the items of the city that give a *real experience* of the city. These sightseeing lists are thus planted for the purpose of attracting visitors who will in turn give media coverage (Boorstin, 1972). Thus by the very act of listing certain touristic icons in a sightseeing list, the author of the list promote these places to the status of touristic icons.

In addition to that, sightseeing lists provide expectations about tourism in the city of choice. The readers of the list expect the city to match the description given by the author, or they expect the city to look like the pictures shared by the author of the list. The readers thus set a specific tourist gaze (Urry, 1992) that include expectations from the content of sightseeing lists, often idealizing the touristic experience. For example, the pictures from the sightseeing lists could mislead the reader about the weather conditions or the natural beauty of the destination that change constantly. A remarkable fact about sightseeing lists is that, although coming from different sources, they tend to recommend the same sites. As a matter of fact, sightseeing lists often recommend a limited number of sites, they thus focus on the 'must-sees', the most remarkable sites of the city, the so-called touristic icons.

For this research, it is interesting to see to what extent the authors of sightseeing lists are aware of the above mentioned theories, such as the tourist gaze, the creation of pseudo events in the making of a sightseeing list and how they react towards this awareness.

2.2.4. Touristic icons

Touristic icons are sites that have established touristic prestige. Touristic icons often constitute the touristic business cards of a city. Touristic icons are strongly related to the idea of mediatisation as both concepts share common grounds in the importance of the visual culture (van Eeden, 2010). Allen, Gupta & Monnier (2008) conclude in their study about cultural symbols' influence on taste that the human brain is very fast in making associations. By seeing elements bearing representative value of a

product, the human brain is able to associate these very quickly and make connections. This suggests that in tourism, touristic icons of the cities are directly associated to the 'brand' of the city because of their representative nature. 'Human value priorities and cultural symbols influence taste evaluation and attitude toward products' (Allen, Gupta & Monnier, 2008, p.302).

Consequently, tourists come to value these icons more than other cultural elements in the city. These touristic icons constitute the must-sees of the city, implying that if a tourist visits Rotterdam and leaves without having seen one of the *must-sees*, his touristic goals have not been fulfilled and he must therefore come back. For example, the Erasmus Bridge is often used on touristic flyers for its representative image of Rotterdam; the bridge bears a strong association with the city. However, we should be careful not to generalize tourists, as they might have different interests and look for different things while visiting a city.

During the last few years, pictures resulting of travels have been massively displayed online. For example, Instagram has been hosting an increasing number of accounts dedicated to travel. Some of these accounts are held by tourists, some by proud inhabitants of a city, and some by a city promotion institution. When touristic icons gather attention on social media, they contribute socially and culturally to the identity of Rotterdam. Lizardo (2016, p. 200) defines these touristic icons as 'motivated mappings between external form and cognitive meaning, used for both the private evocation of and the public externalization of those meanings'. The importance of culture comes from the touristic icons' affordability to structure or constitute our mental experience (Lizardo, 2016). Touristic icons are thus used to trigger the act of meaning making from individuals. On the other hand, touristic icons are not free from meaning. Touristic icons carry with them forms of mental experience (Lizardo, 2016). Tarlow (2001) considers the *economy of icons* and declares that it becomes successful in the capitalist economy; one has to transform commodities into icons. Because tourists come to see the icons they've seen on flyers, the role of tourism is not to sell enjoyable holidays but to emphasize the meaningful experience (Tarlow, 2001). In this research, touristic icons are defined as elements of architecture, buildings, statues, bars, etc. which over the years, came to bear a significant iconic representation of the city of Rotterdam. The term icon is used rather than symbol as it expresses a strong meaning of representativeness.

For this research, it is necessary to understand how icons of Rotterdam are being made, how these impact the selection of sites in sightseeing lists and how the selection of sites in sightseeing lists influence the icons.

2.4. Conclusion

Mediatisation of tourism is a field that is still largely under studied. When there is evidence that the society as a whole is evolving towards the mediatisation of various spheres, it seems logical to apply the study of mediatisation to the sphere of tourism. Furthermore, there is evidence of an intertwined relation between tourism and media. As a result, technical advancements in media technologies have in turn impacted tourism, for example giving a new turn to the word-of-mouth. There is therefore evidence of a change of tourism practices in the last few years but the bigger picture still needs to be understood. It is also suggested to dedicate more research to less visual medium, i.e. films and focus on more literary forms. This theoretical framework aims at reviewing previous literature and defining the meaning of the concepts related to the research question understood in this research. This framework gives the necessary theoretical background to understand the concepts relevant to this research. It also provides definitions to measure and recognize the concepts at hand. And finally, this framework allows the making of assumptions based of theory that will be verified after the analysis of the results.

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the methodological guidelines of this research from the choice of method to the measure of validity and reliability. In addition to that, this chapter contains the justifications for all the methodological choices made in this research, some of which supported by academic sources. The method section describes: the choice of method, choices regarding the sampling, the operationalization, proceedings of the interviews, choices of transcription, processes related to the coding, such as description of the coding tree and an evaluation of the aptness of the coding instrument. Moreover, it discusses ethical issues and issues of validity, reliability and generalizability.

3.2. Choice of method: qualitative method & qualitative interview

This research used a qualitative method in order to hear directly from the source (the authors of sightseeing lists) and learn how they proceeded to the making of their lists, more especially, to the selection of touristic sites. According to Hammersley & Atkinson (1995, p. 106), 'the aim will often be to target the people who have the knowledge desired and who may be willing to divulge it'. Qualitative method is the appropriate method for collecting in-depth data from experts. In addition to that, qualitative methods are best suited for providing descriptive answers and answering questions about experience, perception and processes (Lindlof, 2011). In fact, qualitative interviews allow probing on the answers of the interviewees, thus extracting data from them without being leading in the questions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to proceed to the interviews in a casual atmosphere that put the respondents at ease.

A total of 11 one-on-one expert qualitative interviews were pursued, allowing the collection of in-depth data while enjoying great flexibility in the data collection (Lindlof, 2011). The data obtained consists in the detailed explanations and legitimization of choices of sites of the city of Rotterdam for sightseeing lists through the eyes of the authors of these lists, the interviewees. This study took place in Rotterdam between March and June 2017.

3.3. Sampling: the units of analysis

The units of analysis of this study, the people interviewed to gather the data in order to answer the research question (Brynman, 2012) were chosen because of their quality as experts. Littig & Pöchhacker (2014, p. 1088) describe the expert interview as 'a semi-standardized interview with a person ascribed the status of expert'.

According to Littig & Pöchhacker (2014, p. 1089), what defines the status of experts on a topic is the 'specific knowledge […] acquired in the course of their (professional) activities.' Experts dispose of specific professional knowledge in their field of expertise, knowledge of organizational routines and procedures in their field of expertise and finally, there are able to draw interpretations on their field of expertise Littig & Pöchhacker (2014). This knowledge and practice allow them to speak on behalf and be considered as a representative of their field of expertise Littig & Pöchhacker (2014). Littig & Pöchhacker (2014) describe three types of expert interview: exploratory expert interviews, systematizing expert interviews, and theory-generating expert interviews. This study concerns the latter, the theory-generating expert interviews. This specific type of expert interviews is aimed at recollecting knowledge through the expert's professional activities to discover what field specific practices shape the expert's professional activities (Littig & Pöchhacker, 2014). In the case of this study, the practices that shape the expert's professional activities are researched through taking the interviewer through the whole process of the authoring of a specific sightseeing list of Rotterdam.

For this study, the experts are representative of the writing process of sightseeing lists of Rotterdam and therefore, the selection of sites for sightseeing lists of Rotterdam. Their quality as experts can be described as their knowledge and experience of authoring or co-authoring a sightseeing list, listing must-sees of the city of Rotterdam. Through their experience of having authored such a list, they are able to speak of their professional practices but also to give a broader insight of the field they work in. These experts have specific knowledge on which they were interviewed, namely, why they selected certain sites rather than others, the rationale for these choices, and how they informed these choices. An overview of the interviewees is available in appendix B.

The selection of the experts, authors of sightseeing lists was proceeded through the sampling of sightseeing lists. This research thus proceeded to a purposive sampling. Sightseeing lists grouping the must-sees of the city of Rotterdam were selected. From these sightseeing lists, the (co-)authors of eleven of these lists were interviewed. The sightseeing lists came from various supports such as travel guides, city maps, art products, touring programmes, travel blogs, Instagram accounts, etc. As a result, the sampled lists consist in a broad variety of sightseeing lists of touristic icons of Rotterdam, some more focused on text, and some more focused on a gathering of pictures or drawings.

The sampling of the sightseeing list was done following a time criteria. All lists included were published between 2014 and the first semester of 2017. During this period, Rotterdam has become an especially attractive city for these kinds of lists: it was included in the lists of top 10 must-see places of the year by the Rough Guide (8th out of 10) and the New York Times (10th out of 52) (Rotterdam partners, n.d.). Followed in 2015 by its nomination as European city of the year by the London Academy of Urbanism (Bas, 2015). And its ranking 5th out of 10 top cities of the world attributed by the travel guide Lonely Planet in 2016 (Bas, 2015). In addition to that, 2014 is also the year of the opening of the Markthal and the renewed Central station, which is why lists that did not mention a publication date were included if they mentioned either the Markthal or the Central Station. This time criteria ensured that the sightseeing lists were published recently, covering a short period of time, meaning that the city of Rotterdam was relatively unchanged during this period. In other words, the touristic icons present in the city were relatively similar at the time of authoring of each list. An overview of the sightseeing lists is available in appendix E.

In addition to the above mentioned sampling method, respondents were asked if they knew other possible interviewees, leading to snowball sampling after verifying the validity of sightseeing list they authored regarding to my research. An overview of the respondents is available in appendix B.

As a general remark, it is striking to see a proliferation of sightseeing lists of Rotterdam. More specifically, it is striking to see that a vast majority of these lists have been published after 2014. It is frequent for an author to have authored more than one sightseeing list. The authors of sightseeing lists have often authored sightseeing lists for different place or authored several sightseeing lists of Rotterdam. On the other hand, it has been quite challenging to get answers from authors of sightseeing lists and even more challenging to get them to agree to an interview between the months of March and April.

3.4. Operationalization into variables

A semi-structured interview guide guided this research in order to lever data to analyse and provide answers to the research question (see interview guide in Appendix E). In other words, the interview guide helped transform the research question into observable data. The topics are related to the selection process of touristic icons of the city of Rotterdam for the making of sightseeing lists such as the idea, the documentation, the selection, the visuals, the edition and looking back. Thus topics such as *the idea* operationalized the concepts of word-of-mouth and

social media influencer as well as user-generated content. Then, topics such as the *documentation phase* operationalize the concepts of pseudo-events and mediatisation. The topics of selection of icons, the visuals, editing, social media and looking back will operationalize various concepts from the theoretical framework. The interview guide provided a general structure for the interview while allowing for a lot of flexibility in the questions. This flexibility in the questions helped to adapt the questions for the various interviewees explaining their various experiences and processes in the selection of touristic sites. Moreover, the flexibility helped to adapt to the flow of the conversation so that the interview could be pursued in a casual way.

3.5. The interviews

Contact was established with the interviewees via an e-mail in which the researcher introduced herself, the purpose of her research, and its relevance. It was insisted that their participation in the research was on a voluntary basis, that it was not remunerated and that their contribution was very valuable because of their knowledge. A date and location for the interview was planned together with the interviewees willing to participate to the study.

The interview took place in the language of predilection of the interviewee (English or Dutch). The audio recording function of the application Evernote was used on a mobile phone to record the interview. This recording method presents the advantages of being discrete and of low disturbance to the interviewees. In addition to that, it provides good quality of the recording even when the interview took place in noisy surroundings. And finally, it stores the recording directly in the cloud and provides easy access to the file when proceeding to the transcription. Measures of prevention were applied such as taking the mobile charger to the interviews and turning the device on place mode before the beginning of the interview.

Either a hard copy or screenshots of the sightseeing list authored by the interviewee were brought to the interview. This support helped refresh the interviewee by looking to the sightseeing list again or having a visual support to answer specific questions. In addition to that, a printed copy of the interview guide (see the interview guide in Appendix E) was used for taking additional notes. As it was learned from previous experience that note taking is distracting for the interviewee, only the necessary notes were taken during the interview, notes of minor importance were added after the interview was finished. Taking notes directly on the interview guide allowed the researcher to have all of her field notes in one place as

well as sorting the notes directly by topics. Furthermore, the first section of the interview guide is dedicated to personal information of the interviewee to be filled in by the researcher, such as their name, the name of the list they authored, if the informed consent form has been signed, and the date of the interview.

When the interview came to an end, the recording device was stopped. The researched thanked the interviewee for their contribution and paid extra attention in case the interviewee would share valuable information related to the research while the recording was stopped. It has been learned from experience that interviewees tend to share valuable information after the recording is ended. It was also asked if the interviewees had any questions or comments on the interview or on the research in general.

3.6. Transcription

Each interview was transcribed directly after it had taken place, resulting in the transformation of audio records of the interviews into text documents. The direct transcription helped to have a fresh memory during the transcription of possible unclear fragments. The researcher herself proceeded to transcribe the recording. This helped her keep a fresh memory on the transcripts, the pre-existence of context and having lead the interview helped transcribing fragments that might have been unclear for an external person. In the case of fragments that could not be deciphered, the transcription was marked 'unclear fragment' and indicated the time stamp of when the transcription recovers.

The interviews were transcribed in verbatim, in other words, a transcription of each word said by the interviewee (Lindlof, 2011), this provided cues such as hesitations, pauses and silences. Irrelevant passages, for example, when the interviewee had to take an urgent phone call were marked by a break in the recording indicating 'irrelevant fragment' followed by the time stamp of when the record starts again. In the case of interviews in Dutch, the transcription of the interview was proceeded in Dutch but the quotes were translated into English when inserted in the result chapter.

3.7. Coding

A thematic analysis was based on the interview transcripts (Boeije, 2010). The codes were data-driven, thus based on the data (Lindlof, 2011) as not to exclude interesting information that was not part of the theoretical framework. The coding of the transcripts has been executed by the researcher. Each interview transcript was separately uploaded in a project in the Atlas.ti software. First, the researcher read the

transcripts attentively in order to be aware of all the available data. In this sense, the transcription of the interviews by the researcher already served as first readings of the data and the familiarizing with the data. Then, the transcripts were read again in a systematic search for initial codes, marking codes identifying interesting features of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The initial codes were identified at the 'latent or interpretative level', thus concerned with the broader meaning and underlying assumption under the lines (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.84). Some segments were coded with various codes when they happened to refer to several relevant features of the data. Then, the initial codes were looked at again in order to insure the consistency of the coding, i.e., the researcher used the same name of each code referring to the same feature of the data. Resulting from this, a total of 391 quotations were marked with 46 different codes. A few of the codes are in vivo codes, codes that were mentioned by the interviewees (Lindlof, 2011), such as 'storyteller' and 'eye catcher' used to describe qualities of the sites during the selection. Then, the researcher looked to regroup the codes into themes, resulting into four themes. The codes were grouped into themes in accordance to which stage of the process of the making of sightseeing lists they belong to. For example, the theme referring to where the authors looked for information on new sites were regrouped under the theme 'sources of information'. Finally, the themes were reviewed to make sure that they were able to contain the entire dataset as well as working with the coded segments (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A coding tree illustrating the final themes and corresponding codes is available in Appendix C.

The final coding scheme counts 4 themes: reasons for making a sightseeing list, reasons for selecting visuals, reasons for selecting sites, and sources of information. The final themes contain codes representing the justifications of the interviewees for their choices in the corresponding themes. The theme 'sources of information' contains codes, which describe the various sources that the interviewees use in the process of authoring a sightseeing list. For example, the code 'network' refers to the preference of interviewees to rely on sources whom they know such as family and friends or official sources such as press relations. This expresses the interviewee's attitude towards review sites. The theme 'reasons for making a sightseeing list' refers to the reasons why the interviewees write sightseeing lists. The codes of this theme also stand for the objectives the interviewees aim to reach by authoring a sightseeing list. For example, interviewees emphasized the desire the share an 'experience' with the reader of the sightseeing list. The theme 'reasons for selecting sites' lists the criteria, which according to the interviewees weight in the decision to select a specific site for the sightseeing list. 'Additional value' is a code

that has a lot of weight in the theme 'reasons for selecting sites'; this code expresses various elements that can give a site extra value and therefore advantage it in the process of the selection of site for a sightseeing list. And finally, the theme 'reasons for selecting visuals' contains codes related to the choice of visuals to illustrate the sightseeing lists. For example, the code 'eye-catcher' refers to the quality of the visuals to catch the tourist's attention and therefore bring the sightseeing lists forward.

Although the coding was done data-driven, these categories relate very closely to the theoretical framework, which is logical since the interview guide was build drawing on the theoretical framework. These themes contain codes representing the justifications of the respondents for their choices in the corresponding themes. This explains why the theme reasons for selecting sites counts more code members than all other themes.

A codebook ensured that it was clear what was understood by each code. This helped making the right choice of code when there was a hesitation in the marking of a quotation. A few memos were made during the coding process, these concerned possible grouping of codes into themes and were later applied during the grouping of the codes under themes. The codebook for this research has proved to be apt to code the eleven transcripts of the interviews. It has contributed to the appropriate coding of quotations and identifies interesting themes that could be classified into themes.

3.8. Ethical issues
In order to ensure the respect of ethical issues in the research, the anonymity of the respondents was preserved by using their initials in the parts of my study that are made public. In addition to that, the interviewees were asked to fill in and sign two copies of the disclosure form (see in Appendix B). One of the copies was for them to keep while the other was for the researcher to keep as a proof of the interviewee's permission to record the interview.

3.9. Validity, reliability and generalizability
Qualitative research is concerned with the validity of the research (Brynman, 2012), the concern is that the study studies what it intends to study. This concern was addressed by building a valid interview guide that guided the interviews. This interview guide is based on the research question but also informed by the theoretical framework. This research is deductive; the interview guide is based on theory and verifies expectations with empirical data (Lindlof, 2011).

Reliability is less concerning in a qualitative study. However, the same interview guide was used for all the interviewees, so that each of them was asked about the same topics. In addition to that, the interviews were all recorded and transcribed in verbatim to ensure the consistency of the research.

And finally, the generalizability of a study is often limited to quantitative studies (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) as most qualitative studies aim at providing a detailed analysis of particular (group of) cases in context rather than to generalize the findings to a population. However, it is possible to generalise the findings of qualitative studies when 'cultural consistency' of social practices is achieved and observed (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p.273). Indeed, analytical generalization entails that the findings of one study can be generalized to a study applying the same theoretical and physical context (time, place, people, etc). Analytical generalization can therefore be applied to this study. Although there was proceeded to a limited number of eleven interviews, limiting the ability to understand the diversity of the topic at hand, i.e. the effect of mediatisation processes on the selection of icons for sightseeing lists, the quality of the interviewees as experts combined to the theory of the phenomenon at hand allow a broader applicability of the findings of this research than this particular case (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). It is therefore possible to claim that the findings of this study also apply to situations presenting theoretical and contextual conditions similar to the ones of this study. For example, the findings of this particular study regarding the effect of mediatisation processes on the selection of icons for sightseeing lists of Rotterdam may also apply to the selection of icons of sightseeing lists of Amsterdam or sightseeing lists of a different city. However, further research is needed in order to confirm the absolute generalizability of the findings of this research to different cases. In addition to that, it is suggested to take the public of the sightseeing lists in consideration as well as the cultural difference between in the context as these factors might influence the generalizability of the findings of this study.

3.10. Conclusion

By giving a detailed and accurate description of the methodical choices and challenges encounters, this research is given the necessary transparence to reach academic standards and any avoid conflict of interest.

4. Analysis and Results

4.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the four themes that resulted from the coding process: reasons for making a sightseeing list, sources of information, reasons for selecting visuals, reasons for selecting sites. This chapter compares for each theme the assumptions made by the theory and the actual data after analysis. This chapter enjoys a number of inserted quotes from the interviewees that support the claims. Some conclusions are already drawn upon the summarisation of the categories of results.

4.1. Reasons for making a sightseeing list

The case of Rotterdam is very interesting because all of the interviewees were living in Rotterdam at the time of the interview; they shared a passion for the city. They were informed about everything going on in the city, of which they have seen the development over the years. As a consequence, they have a desire to communicate their knowledge and passion for the city, to 'share the love', in the words of interviewee 7. The past of Rotterdam as an empty and boring city is a dead weight for the city's image, which the authors of sightseeing lists want to get rid of by showing the treasures of the city and celebrating the entrepreneur city, get the conversation started about the city of Rotterdam. On the other hand, interviewees notice that an important part of tourists coming to Rotterdam are people who have heard quite recently of the city and are not always aware of the historical background that made the city what it is today, i.e. the bombardment of May 1940. Authors of sightseeing lists therefore find it of their duty to tell the background story of Rotterdam as in their opinion, it is difficult to understand the city within hearing about its history. In other words, one of the goal they would like to achieve through their sightseeing lists is to infuse historical background of the city to their reader or at least raise their interest in the city's historical background and want to learn more, so that they are able to grasp the current state of the city. This is often accomplished by selecting specific sites that allow for historical background. For example, interview 9 explains that they use a book during their tour so that they can stop at sightseeing sites and show the actual building of interest in comparison with a picture of the site after the bombardment.

In addition to that, there is great care put into the giving of an experience to the tourist, echoing Cohen & Cohen's (2012, p. p.2194) claim that 'mediatised tourism will not replace physical traveling but will on the contrary trigger an interest in first-hand experiences'. Indeed, authors of sightseeing list declare willing to inform

their readers through their sightseeing lists but also creating an experience for the tourists. There is therefore great care taken in the selection of site to recommend sites (and activities on site) with special experiences. For example, interviewees 6 and 9 claim recommending using the water taxi as a mean of transportation because of the particular feel of the city it can give to tourists. It this constitutes an experience specific to Rotterdam. Namely, the water taxi offers a view of the city that is not comparable with the underground or the bus. Furthermore, water taxi is very specific to Rotterdam as not many European cities dispose of these means of transportation. The sharing of an experience also goes through the celebrating of the entrepreneurial spirit of the city.

Authors of sightseeing lists are proud of the city development and through their sightseeing lists, they hope to communicate that Rotterdam is an interesting city, a city where there are a lot of nice things to see and to do. This means that they are very proud of the status of Rotterdam as an entrepreneur city, which they therefore try to let see into their sightseeing lists. On the one hand, the sites selected for their entrepreneurial qualities give the tourists a feel of the spirit of the city. On the other hand, by selecting a small business in their list, authors of sightseeing list contribute to the economy of the entrepreneur's businesses.

Most importantly, authors of sightseeing lists have a great relation with the city of Rotterdam; they have an incommensurable love for the city and its beautiful sites. This is why they wish to share this love for the city, recommend places where they enjoy going so that other people can have as much pleasure as they have in their city. On a different level than simple city promotion, they like to spread the word that Rotterdam is a city worth visiting. It is however useful to mention that the authoring of sightseeing lists of Rotterdam does constitute at least a share of the interviewees' income, there is thus always a financial advantage to publishing sightseeing lists attractive to tourists. However, the perspective of financial gain does not drive the selection of sites in sightseeing lists. It is rather goals such as: adding historical background, sharing an experience, spreading the love for the city that drive the making of sightseeing lists.

4.2. Sources of information

As mentioned before, authors of sightseeing lists are active city dwellers, they are lovers of their city and know a lot on the history of the city as well as what is happening in the city. They are also often actively involved in the city's activities or at least frequent visitors of cultural activities in the city. Because of their frequent cultural involvement, authors of sightseeing lists are often aware of recently opened

sites. They even often hear of their sites even before their opening or construction, the can thus gather all the information about a site and are able to tell the whole story of a site from its beginning. They thus have a great personal knowledge of the city and the interesting sites and activities that it offers.

Besides their personal knowledge as city dwellers, the authors of sightseeing lists get informed through their network of families and friends but also through press relations. The traditional version of the word-of-mouth such as described by Arndt (1967, p.292), 'an oral, person-to-person communication between a communicator and a receiver whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, product, or service' is still very much present in collecting of information for the making of sightseeing lists. Interviewees claim that the traditional word-of-mouth from family and friends is still the most trusted source of information for them. They justify it by the non-commercial nature of the recommendation but also because they can evaluate the recommendation by knowing the person who recommended it. For example, interviewee 2 declared that she asked her aunt for recommendations because she wanted to include sites that were enjoyables for older women in her sightseeing list.

In addition to that, there is an emerging trend of using user-generated content as a source of information, in other words, digital word-of-mouth. A few interviewees declare using digital word-of-mouth to check the reviews of a place. However, contradicting Mansson (2011) claim that the personal touch of a user-generated review grants a more objective and reliable aspect to the information, interviewees are consider most online review to be non-trustworthy. They claim that the online review game is rigged because people tend to praise their own causes or make use of sponsoring practices. In contrast to Kang & Schuett's (2013) claim that social media platforms are platforms that are recognized and relied on and look for for their independent and objective word-of-mouth based on experiences of users, authors of sightseeing lists mostly distrust these platforms. As a result, they only look at review of sites for informative purposes and always in combination with a self-verification.

As a matter of fact, most authors of sightseeing lists also have a blog or own a social media platform that they consider as their blog and on which they share their either personal content or publish in relation to their sightseeing lists activities. Interviewees who use a blog or Instagram in their sightseeing list activities, can definitely be considered opinion leader or social media influencers according to Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg's (2011, p. 90) definition of the term 'a new type of independent third party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media'. Because of their position as such,

they are aware of sponsoring practices and other misleading recommendations in the industry. Namely, interviewee 2, 3, 6, and 10 expressed their criticism towards the Rotterdam based food critic website for their sponsoring practices.

And finally, there is an emerging trend of applications and blogs used as replacement or in combination with guidebooks etc. For example, interviewee 11 is the author of a sightseeing list that works based on an application. This corresponds to a trend of striving to be more digital and interactive. Authors of sightseeing lists also claim to listen reader's feedback and when possible, to integrate it in the new editions of their sightseeing lists.

This theme contradicts the assumptions made from the theoretical framework that authors of sightseeing lists would embrace and rely on digital word-of-mouth as a source of information for their sightseeing list. Analysis of the data proves that they generally distrust or at least handle with care information from digital word-of-mouth and prefer to rely on their personal knowledge or traditional word-of-mouth.

4.3. Reasons for selecting visuals

The theme 'reasons for selecting visuals' expresses the most clearly the influence of mediatisation processes on the selection of sites for sightseeing lists in the case of Rotterdam. To begin with, all 11 interviewees used visuals to illustrate their selection of sites. In addition to that, most interviewees declared that the visuals are of major importance in their sightseeing lists. Interviewee 3 associated visuals with the first impression the readers of her blog and Instagram page get of a site, she declared:

'I think the visuals is, it's like the first impression, if the visual is bad, you make a bad impression. (…) we post the pictures on our Instagram and our Facebook and we link in our bio to the website. But I think if the picture is ugly or not interesting or bad, it would not invite me to click on the link or to read the whole article. (…) and it would definitely not invite me to go there for myself, so I think visuals are very important'.

In other words, the visuals, usually pictures, illustrating the site bear a function of bait. They must give a good impression of the illustrated site that must catch the readers' attention for them to want to read the article or even go visit the site by themselves. As interviewee 3 explains, the readers of blogs and followers of Instagram accounts scroll very quickly through the daily content. Articles and pictures can pass very quickly before the reader's eyes. In fact, she claims that each posts gets less than few seconds of the reader's attention. It is during these few seconds that the readers decide if an article is worth reading or a picture worth a like. This practice implies that the published content must be catchy enough to convince the

reader in less than a few seconds. This results in posts displaying catchy headlines, but most importantly, in the intensive use of aesthetically pleasing visuals. Interviewee 6 confirms the previous quote and declares that visuals are very important to seduce the readers of his guidebook into visiting the sites recommended in his guidebook. This proves that the presence of aesthetically pleasing visuals of the sites does not merely apply to online content but also to physical guidebooks. Interviewee 6 adds that he himself would not go to a site if it did not look good on picture. This is justified by our society's attraction to aesthetically pleasant or at least curious elements. In addition to that, there is a certain influence of the social media pilgrimage theory; authors of sightseeing lists are aware of the tourists' desire to take pictures of beautiful or extravagant places. Tourists enjoy taking nice souvenir pictures home. In addition to that, there is also a trend to displaying the pictures taken on social media resulting in a display of the places visited by the tourist or pilgrimage.

Furthermore, interviewee 9 declares that the visuals on her touring company's website are used to show potential clients what sites they would encounter during each of the various tours offered. She adds that it is very important to illustrate the tours because the clients like to visualize what they are going to see during the tour:

'*Because we put it on the website people think oh that's interesting we go there, we go there, we see a lot of the city, we understand the city*'.

In this case, the visuals are used to illustrate the possible tours that a person can book through the company. This is accomplished by selecting visuals for each tour that illustrate places where the tour guide will take the bookers of the tour. For this reason, the visuals have to justify why a specific tour is interesting and worth being booked. The visuals have to convince that the sites where the guide will take them to are worth seeing and are intriguing enough to deserve an explanation from the guide. Further a visual such as a map of the tour can give indication such as the walking distance that the tour requires. On the other hand, specific sites are chosen for sightseeing lists and illustrated by visuals because of their great media exposure. Authors of sightseeing lists expect their readers to have seen certain images of the city they are preparing to travel to. These images are highly mediatised pictures of sites of a city known as the touristic icons of the city.

Therefore, the sites chosen to illustrate the lists are selected for their aesthetic qualities but also because they are recognisable and visually identifiable as specific sites of Rotterdam by the readers. The recognisability of sites of Rotterdam is accounted for by their broad exposure in the media. In other words, the exposure

of certain sites in the media creates a certain image of the city in the minds of tourist who in turn are able to recognize these sites as being specific to the city of Rotterdam but also expect to encounter these sites during their visit. The authors of sightseeing lists are expected to include at least a few of the highly mediated sites to fulfil the expectations of their readers.

Another important function of the visuals is to attract the reader's attention and seduce the reader into reading the list and visit the sites mentioned. According to interviewees 1, 4 and 8, iconic sites such as the Markthal, the Erasmus Bridge and Central Station are *eye catchers* (in vivo code suggested by interviewee 8) as they capture the attention of the readers, seduce them into booking a tour, buying a guide or increases media attention for the blog. Interviewee 3 explains:

'*They are very popular. If we look at our most liked pictures, (…) it's the Erasmus bridge, the Markthal, the Central Station, maybe just a picture of the Witte de With straat because I think everybody knows it. Everybody says oh it's a great picture (…) and I know where it is because sometimes we post (…) photos of a small coffee place that nobody knows but if you know something, and you feel some sort of connection (…) That's why we post them, because they're really successful'.*

In other words, the role of these iconic places is very important in order to catch the tourists' attention and get them interested into buying a product. The use of visuals of iconic places often already indicates to the tourist which city the list is about. This is comparable to the use of pictures of the Eiffel tower on sightseeing lists of the French capital, Paris. For example, a sightseeing list of Paris that would fail to mention the Eiffel tower would not fulfil the tourists' expectations of a sightseeing list of Paris and lead them to question the reliability of the list (will this list really tell me what are the most important or nicest sites to visit?). However, once they've bought the product, authors of sightseeing lists want to let their readers see lesser-known sites of the city. As a result, eye catchers are used to attract the tourists' attention with visuals they associate and expect to see for commercial reasons while sightseeing lists' authors are mostly interested in introducing the tourists' to sites and information that they do not know about the city. Moreover, authors of artistic sightseeing lists declare that they best sold pieces represent the so-called icons because the buyer can identify with these sites. Indeed, interviewee 4 and 11 declare that there is a kind of emotional attachment to the eye-catchers from the people who know the city, mostly inhabitants of Rotterdam.

On the other hand, the choice of visuals to illustrate sightseeing lists is often an editorial decision, thus relayed to a higher authority than the author himself. This demonstrates that people involved in the making of sightseeing lists are very aware

of the importance of visuals and take the illustration of their list very seriously. Additionally, most interviewees declared that the pictures selected to illustrate their lists were taken by either a photographer, a professional camera, or a mobile phone with high camera resolution. The characteristics that sightseeing lists' authors look for in a picture varies among them. Overall, they look for clear weather, good light, colours, and as mentioned earlier that the place is recognisable.

Because of the importance granted to visuals in sightseeing lists, the social imagery platform Instagram is a social media platform that is increasing in popularity among the interviewees in order to promote their activities.

This theme therefore proves that the sightseeing list industry has fully acknowledged the importance of visuals. The fact that sightseeing lists all contain pictures is striking as well as the fact that the choice of the visuals is considered of high responsibility. Touristic icons, called eye-catchers, have a pre-defined function, they must be at least partly selected as to prove the reliability of the list thus answering to what Urry (1992) calls the tourist gaze, to seduce the reader into reader the list, buying the list and visiting the sites mentioned in the list. But more interestingly, authors of sightseeing lists are aware of Magasic's (2016) social media pilgrimage, their desire to reproduce pictures of aesthetically pleasant sites.

4.4. Reasons for selecting the sites

This theme regroups code members that express the characteristics, which sightseeing lists' authors look for when selecting sites. When asked about the reasons for selecting specific sites rather than others, interviewees expressed a few qualities of sites they take into account in their selection. These are explained in the paragraphs underneath.

First of all, all interviewees declare aiming at giving a form of additional value to their readers. This additional value takes different shapes. For interviewees 1, 9, 10 and 11, it consists in adding necessary historical background. As a result, they make sure to select sites that tell the historical development of the city. Some sites are therefore chosen for their informative value. Furthermore, for authors of sightseeing lists in the form of maps, sites are also selected for their quality as orientation landmark. Therefore, the iconic status of a site and the fact that it is recognisable makes it easy for tourists to find their way. Additional value is also expressed in the ability to difference oneself. For example, interviewee 1 expresses how important it is for his business to approach his selected sites differently than competitors; interviewee 7 and 8 add that it is important for their business to be able to offer exclusivity for the sites they select. For interviewee 7 it consists in selecting

sites that no one else has selected, while interviewee 8 aims at offering an experience that is exclusive of her touring business for the sites she selects. Furthermore, being able to put bundles and arrangements together is considered additional value for touring companies. In addition to that, most interviewees agree that the best sites are the sites that the tourists can experience for themselves. For example, a site that hosts a restaurant or a museum is considered additional value because of the possibility to look at it both from the outside and the inside as well as to experience it.

Another important criteria that increase the chances of a site to be selected is its quality of storytelling. This translates into the ability of the site to tell a story about city development or the inhabitants of the city, thus to some extent to add historical or human dimension, such as the business owner. According to sightseeing lists' authors, this story gives them an angle to write the small description accompanying the sites, or to tell during the tour. According to interviewee 2:

'What we also like is if it has a nice story behind. That's actually a really important criterion if I think about it because (…) we write the text and it's quite small per address but we really like it if there's a nice story behind it or if you can tell something about the architect or about the building that not a lot of people know. That's actually really important for the selection'.

As a consequence, the authors are much more inclined to select sites with storytelling qualities. As a matter of fact, Rotterdam has a great history of entrepreneurship and *gewoon doen* (just do it) spirit. The entrepreneurial success story is a story that is greatly valued by the authors of sightseeing lists, not only for its narrative quality but also for the opportunity to give support to these great entrepreneurial projects by mentioning them in their lists. As a result, they would tend to select a business if they believe in it. As explained by interviewee 3:

'I associate the hotspot with the person and it just makes it so much more fun. (…) You have the 'gun facteur', that you really (…) think well she deserves it so well! I'm just going to go back or I'm just going to put an extra picture in the article or I'm just going to name her again. And (…), it really adds, it's value, both for us and definitely for, for the restaurant or the owner itself'.

Another element which sightseeing authors look for in the selection process is the possibility to surprise the reader with the feeling of having discovered a hidden gem. This is often displayed by holding a tension between elements of the lists, combining iconic and less iconic sites, older and newer sites. In addition to that, there is great importance accorded to giving a local feeling to the readers of the list. In other words, the tourists must not feel as tourists anymore but they must feel like

inhabitants of the city. Interviewee 9 explains that this desire of feeling like a local while travelling might have a lot to do with the changes in travel habits:

'I think back in the days people (…) didn't travel as much as they did now, it wasn't so easy to travel as it is now, you had to book a lot through travel agencies (…) so most of the time when you booked something you went there only once and you just went to see all the highlights and all the popular things and the famous things. For instance, (…) people just maybe went to New York only once, now they go four five times in their lifetime and they the feel like their more part of the local culture than they are tourists so I think the same counts for every of their guides. So the want to create that feeling for every destination, yes.'

Authors of sightseeing lists also make sure to include sites that represent something typical of the city either to make a statement about the spirit of the city, for example, interviewee 5 who makes illustrations of the city declares:

'There is no crane in reality but it was more because of the thought of Rotterdam. Here it's always under construction (…) I don't think you can bike in Rotterdam without seeing a crane'.

For him, integrating a visual of a crane was a way to illustrate how dynamic Rotterdam is and how much the city is currently developing. Rotterdam is a city where there are so many possibilities; it is still a relatively young city as it has been merely reconstructed after the bombardment in 1940. In contrast with Amsterdam where few square feet are left to be constructed, and new buildings have to match the existing old style of the buildings; Rotterdam is a city of spaces and infinite architectural possibilities.

Or in the case of interviewee 2, integrating a site of an editorial requirement to do so. In other cases, editors also ask the authors to include a few sites but the selection mostly consist in a series of free choices form the authors.

Some criteria's for selection apply to specific types of sightseeing lists. For example, a selection criterion that is typical to touring businesses and guidebooks including walking tours is the concentration of icons. The proximity of sites is very important to these types of lists, as mentions interviewee 2:

'*Well you don't send people like half an hour out of Rotterdam just for one building. So it's nice if there is also like a café there or a restaurant or a nice shop*'. In other words, distance between the selected sites is a criterion that has to be taken into account in the making of sightseeing lists for tours. For example, sites that are located in areas with few other sites are less likely to be selected because they imply that tourists have to spend a lot of time and energy to get to the site and back being offered few possibilities on the way.

This criterion also applies to the makers of maps because of the fixed format of their list. On the other hand, authors of artistic sightseeing lists affirm being bound to choose sites that fit the artistic qualities of their design. They would for example not choose a site that is aesthetically unpleasant using their artistic technique. In other words, the criteria of selection of sites depends a lot on the type of sightseeing list on which it is going to be published. Furthermore, the purpose of the list is also important, for example some lists are event-related (i.e. festival) and are bound in time or target a specific public.

And finally, most authors of sightseeing lists admit that a big part of the selection is related to a gut feeling. They like the place and they assume that their readers will also enjoy it. As interviewee 9 explains, she wants to share the love of the places she likes to go to and pass it on to her readers.

This theme lists qualities of sites which authors of sightseeing list take into account when selecting sites. It is striking to see that few of these criteria have any relation with the mediatisation of tourism.

4.5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the process of authoring sightseeing lists of Rotterdam, selecting sites for sightseeing lists as well as illustrating of these lists is a complex process that brings insights into current tourism practices and brings into perspective the real extent of the effect of mediatisation on tourism practices.

The importance of visuals in sightseeing lists is well established and acknowledged by the authors of sightseeing lists. For example, the visuals used to illustrate the lists are often taken by professional photographers or devices with high resolution. In addition to that, the choice of the visual is in some case made by the editor of the list, proving that it is a matter that is taken very seriously.

A parallel can be made between the visual display of highly mediated, very recognizable touristic sites called either touristic icons or eye-catchers that tourists already associate with the image of Rotterdam and their expectations of the sites they want to visit in Rotterdam. For the non-tourists readers of the lists, the use of recognizable visuals of sites of Rotterdam plays into their sentimentality and their attachment to the city. By showing the readers of the lists what they want and expect to see of Rotterdam, the authors of the list ensure that the reader of the list will more likely buy the proposed product. This coincides with the fact that authors of sightseeing lists are often asks by their editors to incorporate sites that are representative and, or typical of the city (i.e. the harbour, the water taxi, the Erasmus

bridge). As a result, sightseeing lists often counts an important number of sites or visuals of touristic icons of the city.

On the other hand, authors of sightseeing lists often counterbalance this trend by selecting sites that are unknown to their readers. They try to incorporate a 'surprise element' to the list. In other words, the objective is that their readers will buy their product because of the mention of the touristic icons but that they will truly appreciate it for the mention of hidden local gems, enjoyable places where local inhabitants go. This part of the selection is appreciated by the authors of sightseeing lists because it gives them the possibility to surprise the reader and express the true value of the city. However, it has been mentioned that there is a trend to experience the city as a local. It is suggested that this trend could originate from the evolution of our travel habits.

Besides traditional sources of information (i.e. traditional word-of-mouth), there is an emerging trend for authors of sightseeing lists to discover new sites through user-generated content such as online reviews platforms, blogs and social media profiles. However, interviewees declared staying critical about these kinds of digital word-of-mouth and other types of user-generated sources.

And finally, there is evidence that a great majority of criteria for the selection of sites for sightseeing lists have nothing to do with mediatisation processes. Most respondents declare that the selection of sites for sightseeing lists is mostly a gut feeling. Moreover, the additional value of the site is having a big impact on the selection of sites. This added value can be described as informative if it adds historical background; competitive if it helps to differentiate the list from other lists; experience if it provides an interactive, teaching or food-related experience; story-telling if it adds a human dimension to the site, more especially if it can help a small business owner and boost the entrepreneurial spirit of the city. In some cases, sites are selected as a result of an editorial requirement (i.e. sponsor) but this concerns only a small portion of the selected sites.

5. Conclusion

In the introduction of this research, three sub-questions were asked: Is Rotterdam's touristic success linked to the city's countless photographic opportunities? Does the amount of photogenic icons of the city displayed in sightseeing lists influences tourists' travel planning? And if that is the case, is this selection of photogenic icons a conscious choice of the authors of sightseeing lists, a result of mediatisation processes or both? To answer the first question, this research proves that the photogenic qualities of Rotterdam have influenced its touristic success. Authors of sightseeing lists proceed to the selection of sites for their list in a way that translates the relevance of the social media pilgrimage theory (Magasic, 2016). For example, they include certain sites because they know tourist will enjoy taking a picture at these sites. Therefore, it can be said that photographic opportunities of the city influences the tourists' travel preferences to a certain extent, although other factors such as the city development and the city promotion are not to be excluded. Again, this research proves that the amount of photogenic icons of the city influences tourists' travel planning to a certain extent. The notion of social media pilgrimage is not foreign to sightseeing lists' authors who take it into account in the making of their lists. However, it cannot be measured to what extent the amount of these icons influences tourists' travel choices. On the other hand, the theoretical framework and the results of this research provide answers to the third sub-question, as authors of sightseeing lists do select touristic icons consciously and as a result of mediatisation processes. They do so because processes of mediatisation such as high media coverage and intertextuality of touristic icons (Mansson, 2011), give tourists expectations of the city that they are going to visit, what Urry (1992) calls the tourist gaze.

Authors of sightseeing lists are asked by their editor to include sites that are representative of the city, which they create the list for. In addition to that, tourists have a pre-conceived list of must-sees, their tourist gaze (Urry, 1992), which they expect to have seen and photographed before they go back home, performing what Magasic (2016) calls a social media pilgrimage. As a reaction to this phenomenon, authors of sightseeing lists include touristic icons in their lists because they are recognizable and correspond to the expectations of tourists. This represents a circle of representation of the sightseeing lists as pseudo-events (Boorstin, 1972), as a result of mediatisation processes. Indeed, the tourists expects to see touristic icons that they have seen appear in sightseeing lists, but in return, the authors of sightseeing lists are expected to select touristic icons in order to fulfil the tourists' expectations. To take this notion even further, if the tourists perform Magasic's

(2016) social media pilgrimage when visiting the sites of the sightseeing list, applying their selfie-gaze (Magasic, 2016) on the selected sites, thus taking selfies in front of the touristic icons they visit, they will recreate sightseeing lists on their social media feed, leading others to think that the sites on the pictures consist in the ultimate list of eye-catchers of the city. This circle of representation is supporting the assumption that sightseeing lists are pseudo-events (Boorstin, 1972), products of mediatisation processes. In this case, the sightseeing lists are events that are typically created, as opposed to happening in the course of things, in order to provide guidance to tourists. The sightseeing lists are created for commercial purposes, such as, the buying of the list, or the visit to the selected sites. By mentioning the icons with the aim of attracting the tourists' attention, authors of sightseeing lists contribute to the economy of icons (Tarlow, 2001). On the other hand, these touristic icons bear a sentimental value, and are therefore appreciated by inhabitants of Rotterdam who might also encounter the sightseeing list. Authors of sightseeing lists even call these touristic icons eye-catchers because they constitute the element that will motivate the reader to purchase their product, like their content or pursue their reading.

Reacting to the tourists' expectations, authors of sightseeing lists try to keep a balance between listing iconic places of the city, the ones that tourists expect and come here to see, and on the other hand, places that give a local feeling (mostly bars, restaurants etc). In other words, they present a controlled balance of eye-catchers and hidden local gems in their sightseeing lists where the hidden gems constitute the surprise element. So, if they hope to catch the tourists' attention by displaying eye-catchers, they hope that the tourists will remember their list for the hidden local gems inserted in the list.

Authors of sightseeing lists have shown that they are aware of the importance of visuals in their lists. It is clear that they believe visuals contribute positively to the interest of tourists in their sightseeing lists. Which is why the task of selecting visuals to illustrate the list is often an editorial decision. In addition to that, the visuals have to be aesthetically pleasing non-withstanding the type of visual. If the visual is a picture, it is taken by a high-resolution camera, if not by a professional photographer. The role of the visuals is clear; it must seduce tourists into buying a product or get them to visit the selected sites. Thus here again, echoing Tarlow's (2001) economy of icons by transforming commodities (i.e. touristic sites) into icons for commercial purposes.

In contrast, a lot of criteria described by the interviewees as weighting in the process of selection of sites for sightseeing lists of Rotterdam are not related to mediatisation processes. This echoes Deacon & Stanyer's (2014) warning not to

overlook non-media factors. A non-media criterion that has a lot of impact on the selection of sites is the additional value of the site. Additional value is understood as the benefit that tourists or authors of sightseeing lists get from the visit to the site. It could either offer the opportunity to inform the tourists, or to tell a story about a place or a person. As Rotterdam has a great history of entrepreneurial success stories, the possibility of helping out an entrepreneur is often valued during the selection. Additional value can also be derived from the possibility to present the list as different from competitors' lists. Additional value can also be expressed by the possibility to experience the site, for example, enjoy a learning or culinary experience in the place. This corresponds to a general trend towards a society of experience. This also confirms Cohen & Cohen's (2012, p.2194) assumption that 'mediatised tourism will not replace physical traveling but will on the contrary trigger an interest in first-hand experiences'. In other words, the increased mediatisation of touristic places increases the interest of tourists in experiencing the sites mentioned in sightseeing lists themselves but also experience these sites in a way that is not possible through simply reading a sightseeing list. There is thus an increasing trend in actively visiting a site. Moreover, the selection of a site could even result from an editorial requirement, although it is quite rare. And most importantly, most interviewees claim that the selection of sites comes mainly from their gut feeling, which is intuition and cannot be defined.

Authors of sightseeing list claim to rely on word-of-mouth as a source of information in the making of their sightseeing lists. However, although they claim being keener to look at digital word-of-mouth (Mansson, 2011) such as review platforms, blog or social media accounts to inform their selection, they stay sceptic of the reliability of these source. For example, they claim that a lot of the reviews on review platforms preach their own business or that user-generated sources are often sponsored and therefore not considered as a reliable source. As a result, they always verify the information obtained through digital word of mouth. Additionally, they claim to prefer relying on traditional word-of-mouth such as advice from family and friends which confirms Confente's (2015) claim that information obtained through family and friends, therefore, traditional word-of-mouth is considered the most trustworthy. In addition to that, a lot of them get informed through press lists and other direct sources.

Going back to the research question, how have mediatisation processes influenced the selection of touristic icons for sightseeing lists in the case of

Rotterdam, there is evidence that mediatisation processes have influenced the selection of touristic icons for sightseeing lists in the case of Rotterdam to a certain extent but the authoring of sightseeing lists is far from being a fully mediatised process. Mediatisation processes have until now influenced the creation, the use of visuals as well as the awareness in displaying visuals in sightseeing lists. Moreover, mediatisation processes have a definite influence in the recognisability, and the placement of eye catchers in their lists as to answers the tourists' expectations but also to increase the sales of products, confirming Tarlow's (2001) economy of icons stating that commodities are transformed into icons in order to be economically successful in the current capitalist economy. In addition to that, Cohen & Cohen's (2012) assumption that mediatisation of tourism would increase the popularity of the icons is confirmed. This trend of selecting touristic icons in sightseeing lists influences in turn the balance between eye-catchers and hidden local gems. Moreover, both Urry's (1992) tourist gaze and Magasic's (2016) theory of the social media pilgrimage have proven to be relevant to the case of the sightseeing lists of Rotterdam, as authors of sightseeing lists are aware and consequently select sites for their lists with knowledge of the behaviour of tourists regarding these theories, i.e., highly mediatised sites which tourist already know and expect to see appear in sightseeing lists and hope to take back home in the form of a picture. Furthermore, this research also confirms the relevance of word-of-mouth in tourism practices although there is a preference for traditional word-of-mouth from family and friends, such as claimed by Confente (2015) over digital word-of-mouth.

On the other hand, a considerable amount of criteria for selection of sites in sightseeing lists have no link to mediatisation processes. This echoes Lundby's (2014, p.703) claim that the effects of mediatisation 'work in a complex manner over a considerable period of time'. It is therefore important to not be hasting or force a determinist theoretical conclusion in favour of mediatisation processes' influence on the process of authoring a sightseeing lists. Considerable technological advances have been made over the past few years but these advances are not always directly followed by a total change in practices. These changes can take more time to be transparent in author's practices. Criteria of selection that are not related to mediatisation processes include: gut feeling, editorial requirement and additional value. The last is understood as a variety of qualities that a site can offer to tourists or the author of sightseeing lists, such as, the possibility to differentiate the author's list and business, the possibility to support an entrepreneur, the possibility to tell a story about the site, the informative value of the site, or the possibility to experience

the site. The latter confirms Cohen & Cohen's (2012) claim that the mediatisation of tourism will increased tourist's eagerness to experience a city.

This research provides a case study responding to the gap in the research of tourism as a branch of mediatisation. It also brings insights into consumer consumption changes experiences at the production level. Societal and practical implications include an academic explanation to why various sightseeing lists of Rotterdam contain a lot of similar sites in their selection. In addition to that, this research provides an insight and academic background to following researches on sightseeing lists and similar touristic products. Furthermore, this research raises awareness of authors sightseeing lists about tourism practices, media processes, and raises the authors' awareness of the pseudo-event circle generated by sightseeing lists. As a result, this research could lead to a change of tourism practices, for example, authors could decide to display visuals of eye-catchers even more strategically or this research could impact their selection criteria.

Limitations to this study include a sufficient but still relatively small number of interviewees. This can be explained by the fact that this study was done during the touristic season, leading to great number of declined invitations to interviews. Suggestions for future studies would include pursuing these in the winter months such as to maximize interviewees' availability. The qualitative method use for this research proved to be the appropriate method to study experts' (i.e. the authors) experiences as it allowed to gather data of the author's own perceptions. However, this study could benefit from a mixed methods study such as a combination of the current research with a qualitative content analysis of the visuals used to illustrate the sightseeing lists of Rotterdam, or a quantitative analysis of the used visuals or selected sites. In addition to that, this research only includes the point of view of sightseeing lists authors, and therefore not including the readers of sightseeing lists. Consequently, this research only studies the selection of sightseeing lists in the opinion of one category of actors while more categories of actors are involved in the process, for example, the tourists.

This research stumbled upon a few topics that are worth to be looked further into. To cite only some of them, it would be interesting to hear about the audiences of the sightseeing lists, the tourists. In addition to that, it would be interesting to investigate further to what extent the type of support on which the sightseeing list is published influences the criteria of selection of touristic sites. As one interviewee suggested, the democratisation of travel has also a big impact in people's travel habits and therefore in how sightseeing lists adapt to this new touristic practices. In addition to that, Instagram is a social media platform that is currently having a big

impact in the tourism sphere. More specifically, it is suggested to investigate tourism practices in relation to social imagery platform Instagram, for example travel bloggers and Instagram accounts such as Rotterday and Rottergram. It is therefore suggested to start a study that is strictly focused on tourism practices and social imagery platform Instagram. And finally, Rotterdam is a city that is relatively new at tourism; studying the influence of mediatisation processes on tourism practices for other cities or countries would be interesting if not necessary to confirm a general trend.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview guide

Name:

Pseudonym:

Name of the list:

Date of the interview:

Informed consent form signed: Yes/No

I'd like you to take me through the whole process of authoring this specific sightseeing list, starting from…

1) **Idea/assignment**→ (WOM and social media influencer)(SM and UGC)

-How did you come to the idea of writing this list?

Popping up of the idea

-From whom did you get the assignment of establishing this list?

-Which guidelines did you get with the assignment? Why these guidelines?

Sightseeing lists

-Why were you asked/did you wanted to produce a sightseeing list?

-Why do you think sightseeing lists important/popular?

-What do you think about sightseeing lists/what is your opinion on sightseeing lists?

Platform

-Did you already have an idea on which support or platform you wanted to post your piece? Why this support/platform?

Audience

Is your piece designed to reach a specific audience or target group?

Why this specific audience?

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What did you put in place to reach this specific audience?

The case of Rotterdam

-Why did you choose/were assigned to author a piece about Rotterdam?

-Have you ever been to Rotterdam?

-What do you think of the city of Rotterdam? (in terms of tourism)

-Why publish a piece about Rotterdam at that specific time?

Intentions

-Did you had an idea of what you wanted to author before you started? What was that? Why this idea?

-What goal(s) did you aim to reach with the publication of this list?

-Why was that important to you?

2) **Documentation** → (pseudo-events) (mediatisation)

-How did you gather information for your sightseeing list?

Information-source

-Where did you go for information?

-Did you come to Rotterdam?

-Who/where did you asked for information?

-What kind of information did you get from which source?

Relevance of information

-What information did you think was (not) useful for your list? Why?

-Did this information change your views on what you wanted to author? How?

3) **Selection of touristic sites/elements** (pseudo-events)(touristic icons)(mediatisation)

Number

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-Did you already have in mind how many sites you wanted to select? Why this number?

-How many sites did you select in the end?

Before-hand

-Did you already have in mind which one you wanted to select before you started?

Which one were these?

Why these ones specifically?

Rationale for sites selection

-Do you remember which sites you selected?

-Which sites did you select in the end? (Look at list)

-Why did you select these specifically?

-Which sites did you consider selecting then decide to leave out? Why?

-Which sites did you not even consider? Why?

-Why were other sites not selected?

-Were some sites contested? By whom? Why?

-Do the sites you selected share common characteristics?

-On the basis of which criteria did you select the sites?

-Would you agree call the sites you selected 'touristic icons of Rotterdam'? why?

4) **Illustrating the list (visuals)** → (mediatisation)

Role of visuals

-Why did you choose to illustrate your piece of work/ work with visuals?

-Is the choice of visuals related to the choice of support/platform? How?

-What is the importance of visuals in your piece of work?

-What is the role of the visuals included (visuals for specific sites)?

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The sites illustrated

-Do you remember which sites you decided to illustrate with a visual? (Look at list)

-Which visual(s) were selected?

-For which sites were visuals selected? Why for these specifically? Why not for others?

-What are the characteristics of the visuals included?

-What is the rationale behind the number of visuals selected?/ Why did you choose this number of visuals?

Choice?

-Did you choose to illustrate your list?

- Who illustrated the list?

Origin of the visuals

-Where do these visuals come from? (photo database? Self-taken?...)

-With which device where these visuals taken or created? (mobile phone/camera)

-Did you looked for a specific representation of a site? (Specific photographic angle) why?

Subtitling or labelling

-Why did you (not) subtitle your visuals?

-Which visuals did you (not) subtitles? Why?

5) **Editing** (WOM and opinion leaders) (mediatisation)(pseudo-events)

Proofreading & gatekeeping

-Did you ask people to proofread your piece? Why did you ask for proofreading?

-Whom did you ask? Why did you ask this person?

-Who did you needed to take it through? (Gatekeepers)

-Were there modification brought to your piece? Which ones?

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- Why?

Choice of Platform

-To what extend did the platform/support on which you published your piece influenced your choices for sites?

-To what extend did the platform/support on which you published your piece influenced your choices for number of visuals and illustrated sites?

-Which choices would you have made differently if your piece were published on a different support/platform?

6) **Social media** (SM and UGC)

-What role does social media played in relation to your piece of work?

-Do you think it is important to link social media to your list? Why?

-What do social media bring to your publication? (Positive/ negative)

-Can you think of positive elements that social media brought to your piece? Which are these?

-Can you think of negative elements that social media brought to your piece? Which are these?

Feedback

-Did you ever have feedback from readers on your list?

-What do you think about the feedback you got?

-What kind of feedback was that?

-What did you do with it?

-How does feedback affect your work?

7) **Looking back (WOM and opinion leader) (mediatisation)**

Present piece of work

-What goal did you aim to reach with the publication of this list?

-Why was that important to you?

-Do you think you reached this goal? Why?

Impact on society

-How do you think that your piece affects tourism activities?

-How do you think that your piece affects the perception of Rotterdam?

-Do you consider yourself an opinion leader? Why? In what ways?

Do-over

-If you were to write this same article today, what would you do differently?

-Why?

-If you were to write this same article today,

Would you select different sites? Which ones?

Would you illustrate different sites? Choose different illustrations for the selected sites? Why?

Did you author a similar piece of work before?

What was it?

How does it relate to this piece of work?

Have you authored a similar piece of work since then?

What is it?

Why?

How does it relate to this piece of work?

How do you think you're changing tourism practices?

Do you know other authors of sightseeing lists of Rotterdam?

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Appendix B: Overview of the interviewees

	Date	Type of list	Interviewee (initials)
Interview 1	23/03/2017	Map and tours	A.H. & P.
Interview 2	27/03/2017	Guide book	S.N.
Interview 3	6/04/2017	Instagram and blog	S.W.
Interview 4	10/04/2017	Artistic collection	H.W.
Interview 5	14/04/2017	Artistic collection	M.W.
Interview 6	18/04/2017	Map	T.d.B.
Interview 7	18/04/2017	Guidebook	G.L
Interview 8	19/04/2017	App and blog	A.M.R.
Interview 9	21/04/2017	Tours	L.B.
Interview 10	21/04/2017	Guidebook	N.S.
Interview 11	1/05/2017	Artistic collection	J.H.

Appendix C: Coding tree

Central node: How have mediatisation processes influenced the selection of touristic icons for sightseeing lists in the case of Rotterdam?

Reasons for selecting visuals
- Instagram
- different approach of things
- editorial decision
- importance of visuals
- icons
  - eye catchers
- characteristics of visuals
  - recognisable
  - appealing to go

Sources of information
- other sightseeing lists
- network
  - family and friends
  - press relations
  - other
- personal knowledge
- User Generated Content
- feedback
- before it starts

Reasons for making a sightseeing list
- add historical background
- experience
  - feeling local
  - entrepreneur spirit
  - surprising discoveries
  - other
- share the love
- get the conversation started
- inform
- appealing to go

Reasons for selecting sites (additional value)
- city development
  - add historical background
- additional value
  - exclusivity
  - arrangements
  - experience
  - entrepreneur spirit
  - storyteller
  - surprising discoveries
  - inform
  - icons
    - eye catchers
    - orientation landmark
    - recognisable
  - feeling local

Reasons for selecting sites (tension)
- tension
  - event-related
  - gut feeling
  - iconic/less iconic
  - old/new
- typical
- purpose
- appealing to go
- artistic qualities
- concentration of sites
- different approach of things
- editorial requirement
- less iconic

Appendix D: Informed consent form

CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:

Charlotte Collard

Statenweg 131D 3039HL Rotterdam

charlottecollard@hotmail.fr

0631213635

DESCRIPTION

You are invited to participate in a research about the selection process of touristic icons for sightseeing lists about Rotterdam. The purpose of the study is to understand how social media impacted this process of selection.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms,

-The questions of the interview will be related to the selection process of touristic icons for sightseeing lists about Rotterdam.

-Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will use an audio recorder for the interview.

-You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. Yet, you are free to decide whether I should use your name or other identifying information [such your job position, your nationality or other information you may find indiscrete or that might identify you] or not in the study. If you prefer, I will make sure that you cannot be identified, by using a pseudonym and only mentioning your age and gender.

I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

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TIME INVOLVEMENT

Your participation in this study will take 45 to 60 minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

PAYMENTS

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact –anonymously, if you wish— Ana Uribe Sandoval, lecturer at the department of Media & Communication at Erasmus University, uribesandoval@eshcc.eur.nl

SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

Name

Signature

Date

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study

Name

Signature

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Date

(This copy of the consent form is for you to keep)

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Date

(This copy of the consent form is for you to keep)

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Appendix E: Overview of the sightseeing lists

Name of list	Type of list	Date of publication of the list
Architecture Maps Rotterdam	Map	September 2015
500 secrets of Rotterdam	Guidebook	June 2016
Rotterdam htspt	Blog and Instagram	July 2016
The Rotterdam Collection	Graphic design	2015
Icons of Rotterdam	Graphic design	After 2014
Rotterdam city Map	Map	June 2016
Discover my city Rotterdam	Guidebook + blog	May 2016
Spotted by Locals Rotterdam, spots of A.M.R.	App + blog	May 2017
Turbo Tour: The big 4 in 1 tour	Tours	After 2014
100% Rotterdam- time to momo	Guidebook + App + blog	March 2014
Images of the city	Online art gallery	January 2015