Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) effects on tourists' perceptions towards a destination

The case study of Colombia and dark tourism

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ABSTRACT

This study's objective is to map how the audience creates an image about a tourism destination through user-generated content. Literature has stated that UGC aids at promoting a tourism destination and generates awareness for various services or local problems (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). The present research challenges the idea that dark tourism creates a negative image for a destination. Therefore, the researcher has chosen the example of Colombia to analyze how dark tourism can change positively tourists' perceptions about a destination.

For this study, foreign traveler's reviews from TripAdvisor were analyzed in order to respond to the research question: *How does the portrayal in social media of "negative tourist assets" affect the image of countries – specifically, how does the portrayal of drug tourism in social media affects the image of Colombia among foreign tourists?* The criteria for choosing the reviews was that they had to be written by foreign tourists, due to different perspective tourists might have about the culture and current situation in Colombia.

For this study, thematic analysis was chosen as analysis method of the dataset. The main findings of this study exposed that dark tourism can have a positive impact over a tourism destination because social media and especially UGC, have a great impact on tourists' decisions when choosing a destination to travel to. In some cases, user-generated-content has become a great asset to erase the negative stigma of a country that has been known to have a high level of violence. Therefore, making tourists curious to visit the places they have seen in series such as "Narcos" and interact with locals. By studying the effect of narco-tours in Medellin, Colombia over tourists' perceptions about the country, this study shows that travelers enjoy learning about the dark part of Colombia's history. According to the results from the analysis, tourists consider that by educating themselves about what happened in the recent history of Colombia, such events can be avoided in the future. Moreover, the country is seen as prosperous and with a positive look over the future. An identified gap in the tourism industry and poorly studied is how dark tourism influences people's perceptions about the destination and if the UGC helps at changing opinions. It is important to know how dark tourism influences tourists' perceptions about a destination because, marketing and governmental bodies can use travelers' feedback to improve their tourism in the area.

KEYWORDS: *TripAdvisor reviews, dark tourism, UGC, eWOM, destination image*

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1. Introduction

The exponential growth of social media channels, such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and reviews websites in the last few years have empowered consumers in ways that have changed the marketplace. Because of the growth of social media channels, products and services' sales have experienced a shifting from physical stores to online stores (Dellarocas, 2003; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). Millions of people from around the world, users of social media channels, have started to create content themselves (Musser and O'Reilly, 2006) evaluating all kinds of products and services. This, in turned, has changed the way people access and process information. From product reviews to opinions, consumers have shaped social media networks into a powerful marketing tool. Tourism is one of the realms in which this change can be easily seen.

If before the Internet era, the most powerful and convincing incentive to visit a tourism destination was the word-of-mouth from friends and family, now recommendations one on one seem to multiply exponentially. The notion of electronic word-of-mouth changes the balance, since every user can reach a big audience, ideas that were before shared among friends in a living room can now reach every part of the world (Reza Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008; Jalilvand, Esfahani & Samiei, 2011). For tourism, WOM together with electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM) represent fundamental assets, due to their power of shaping the image of the destination in the mind of the consumer (Reza Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Sen & Lerman, 2007, Xia & Bechwati, 2008). The travel industry has also entered in the new era of online content, where tourists themselves can act as destination branding creators, more than the official sources of communication (Oliveira & Panyik, 2014).

Quoted by the company as "World's largest travel site", TripAdvisor claims it has over 760 million reviews out of which 600+ millions are unbiased travelers' reviews ("Media Center", 2019). In some cases, the evolution of online content creators on social media networks and review websites, such as TripAdvisor, have managed to change people's perspectives about a destination. Morgan, Pritchard & Piggott (2003) state that place branding is essential in developing tourism destinations. An example for the previous statement can be found in the study of Compete (2006). The previous author identified that half of the sales connected with traveling come from people who read online reviews.

Based on the studies previously mentioned, tourism branding represents an important factor when people choose a destination to visit. In the last decade, more brands and tourism agencies have strongly taken part in online conversations and monitored online reviews (Christodoulides, 2007).

Buhalis & Law (2008) stated that the development of Internet has facilitated worldwide communication between different parties involved in the tourism industry. Although, one of the most prominent benefits of the development of the Internet in the tourism industry consists in creating a significant amount of jobs, it has also developed a more demanding consumer. The same authors write that consumers nowadays are impatient and do not tolerate long periods of wait. In order to satisfy the new type of consumer and their fast-paced life, personalized and individual travel packages have been developed. Also, because of the tourist's rising curiosities, different types of tourism have now been categorized based on tourists' interests.

Mowforth & Munt (2008) states that depending on the goal of the trip, tourists choose specific destinations and activities while traveling. He makes a categorization including five types of tourism: philanthropic, adventure, dark, agricultural and heritage tourism.

Philanthropic tourism includes medical tourism, which represents traveling to destinations where there is a lack of medical personnel. Tourists travel to poor countries in the world and help the local hospitals or clinics to take care of patients. It is called medical tourism because besides the aid tourists give to the local people, they also have the possibility to travel to close areas around the main destination and learn the culture of the host country.

Another type of tourism is adventure tourism and involves traveling to destinations where physical activities are required. Some of these activities are bungee jumping, hiking and paragliding. Usually, adventure tourism is developed in remote areas in the world by tourists who seek exciting activities to do while traveling.

Disaster tourism consists of visiting the areas where disasters happened out of curiosity. The previous authors write that tourists who want to travel to disaster areas and take part in organized tours have a desire to understand, learn and help people who are or were in need.

Heritage tourism is focused on the cultural sites in the chosen tourism destination. Because culture has always been a key aspect in trips, touring the heritage sites has become an important part of trips. This addition to tourism is due to the cultural connections different buildings have with the events that happened in various destinations.

Mowforth & Munt (2008) also describe a so-called dark tourism. Dark tourism is defined as the activity of visiting places which were the center of tragic events and they still impact people's lives to this day (Tarlow, 2005). According to Philip R. Stone (2006), there are three important reasons why people wish to experience dark tourism. One of the reasons could be emotional, such as understanding different aspects of the tragedies. Another reason could be cultural; tourists have a desire to learn about major phenomena that changed the course of history. The third reason might be that not until long ago, these places were forbidden for tourists to visit and curiosity is what drives human beings. The main aspect of dark tourism involves traveling to places where tragedies happened and left a scar on the society. According to the previous author, there have been many studies focused on dark tourism, due to its considerably rise in the last years.

Multiple studies raise questions about the ethical implication of visiting such places (Ashworth & Hartmann, 2005; Sharpley & Stone, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Lennon & Foley (2000) and Seaton (2009), for example, have questioned how moral it is to visit death and war related destinations. In the studies previously mentioned, it is stated that part of dark tourism is also drug tourism. This specific part of dark tourism, which is called drug tourism, has been defined over the years from different perspectives.

For long periods of time, drug tourism has been associated with tourism of consumption. Winkelman (2005) described it as tourism that involves drug consumption and involves activities related to drugs consumption. He states that it appeals to international tourists, especially from countries, such as North America and European countries, due to drugs being illegal in their country of residence. As an example of this, in 2012, the state of Colorado legalized marijuana for adults older than 21 years. Perhaps unintendingly, this law increased tourism in the area, culminating with a full week of events in the month of April dedicated to marijuana. The week is called "World Cannabis Week" and residents as well as tourists are legally allowed to smoke marijuana. In the week dedicated to the consumption of marijuana, concerts and other tourism activities are taking place (Hoffman, 2014).

In Europe, the country with the most permissive laws regarding drugs is The Netherlands. The Netherlands is usually associated with legal testing of particular drugs. Among the most known and visited cities for such activities is Amsterdam (Hoffman, 2014). However, Uriely & Belhassen (2005) and Ryan (1993) wrote that drug tourism is also part of those activities that remain controversial among tourists' activities. The most known

geographic areas where drug-tourism thrives are Europe, North America, along with South and Central America (Hoffman, 2014). Tourists who want to take part in drug tourism are driven by the easiness and accessibility of consuming drugs, which in many countries from other continents are illegal (Valdez and Sifaneck, 1997).

However, the drug tourism taking place in South America is slightly different than the one in Europe. Even though, tourists travel to South American countries to test difference types of drug, there are also tourists interested only in learning how the drug tourism evolved. For example, in Bolivia's capital, La Paz, tourists are interested to learn about the harvesting of coca leaves from an agricultural tourism perspective. Thus, tourists do not actually travel there to consume the product deriving from the coca leaves which is processed with other substances to produce the substance called cocaine. According to Hoffman (2014), although drug consumption is illegal in Latin America as well, the cultivation and harvesting of coca leaves is being backed up by authorities, hence it allows drug trafficking activities to grow. Therefore, making Bolivia one of the most prominent countries in South America at drugs production. Resulting in tourists eager to travel to countries popular for permissive laws regarding drugs production to learn more about the process and consequences of this activity (Winkelman, 2005).

Besides tourists traveling to South America for drugs consumption, another part of drug tourism is represented by knowledge tourism. There are also activities part of drug tourism which do not consists in testing drugs. The activities consist of visiting and learning about events and people that had a great impact on a society. In this study, the discussion will not be focused on the perspective of drug consumption, but on the perspective of visiting drug-related tourism destinations and learning more about its history.

The continuous growth of drug tourism started in 2007 in Colombia, when many tour guides and travel agencies included in their travel packages the so-called narco-tours (Naef, 2018). According to the previous author, the popularity of these narco-tours has grown significantly with the release of Netflix's TV series "Narcos". However, Netflix was not among the first ones to produce "narconovelas" (Cano, 2015). This relatively new genre, which focuses on drug kingpins from Latin America and target drug trafficking-related activities has gathered global viewers (Cabañas, 2012). For example, the soap opera "*Sin Senos No Hay Paraiso*" was produced in Bogotá, Colombia in 2008 and focused on the life of the drug

kingpins' escorts. Official numbers showed that it reached "884,000 adults, ages between 18-49 in August 2008" (Cabañas, 2012, p. 83).

The majority of these series are based on real-life situations, although at the beginning of episodes it is specified that some events are a work of fiction. After the launch of "Narcos", newspapers have written about the fact that certain tour guides give more popularity to the tours because some of them are organized by former assassins of Pablo Escobar. An example of one narco-tour itinerary consists of visiting the former house of Pablo Escobar, "Monaco" building and former prison "La Catedral". Narco-tours represent an action as a response to the impact of "narconovelas" (Cano, 2015) on tourists, such as "Narcos" from Netflix. The Colombian journalist Jorge Caraballo Cordovez (Radio Ambulante, 2018), declared that his attention was caught by one tour in particular, which was endorsed by Pablo Escobar's top hitman, John Jairo Velasquez Vasquez who confessed of murdering 300 people. Through the advertising done by John Jairo Velasquez to that tour in particular, the number of tourists rose in Colombia, who reviewed their experience on the narco-tour's TripAdvisor page and presumably led to even a higher number in tourists. Because of the high media coverage and worldwide response people had regarding to the story depicted in "Narcos", online communities and discussions have started online. Also, social networks have played a key role in the popularity of Colombia and narco-heritage.

The rapidity with which the information spreads online through user-generated-content (UGC) is helping change the image of tourism destinations. Sharpley & Stone (2009) believed that there are still unanswered questions by the literature regarding tourists' motives to travel to dark places. Therefore, the goal of this study is to shed light over what people think about drug tourism in Colombia after taking part in a dark tourism activity, such as narco-tours. Although, dark tourism and more so, drug tourism represents a negative badge over a country, there are also positive aspects which will be discussed further in the research.

Colombia is attractive to international tourists for its natural abundance in copper, gold, gas, petroleum and more (Hudson, 2010), but it remains a country mostly known for the impact and stories involving drug dealers, such as Pablo Escobar (Naef, 2018). Even though, the government of Colombia has been trying to reform the country's image, the days of violence still haunt Colombians. However, citizens of Colombia are trying on their end to

change the image of Colombia through interacting with foreign tourists during narco-tours and sharing their stories.

In the case of Colombia, police and government officials are opposed to capitalize on the image and memory of Pablo Escobar, due to the negative image brought to the country (Giraldo et al., 2014; Van Broek, 2018; Naef, 2018). The same authors mention that besides the illegality of drug consumption, this activity also brings out difficult issues such as crimes made because of cocaine production, corruption and wars between paramilitary and guerrilla groups resulting in innocent casualties.

The absence of this part of history in public educational organizations such as museums and schools, is being told by private parties like travel agencies through private tours. The researcher believes that this study represents a good starting point to observe how dark tourism influences tourists' perceptions about a tourism destination.

1.1 Scientific relevance

Previous studies on dark tourism and influence of electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM), constitute the base of this research. An identified gap in the tourism industry and poorly studied is how dark tourism influences people's perceptions about tourism destinations and if the UGC content helps at changing opinions. It is important to know how dark tourism influences traveler's perceptions about a destination because marketing and governmental bodies can improve the image of the destination affected by dark tourism. As Lennon and Foley (2010) stated in their study, by visiting destinations where tragedies occurred it encourages educational and memorial purposes. Therefore, aids at creating awareness.

Even though, the concept of dark tourism is considered to be a negative and heavy topic among tourists, it can also bring benefits to the destination. Kang, Scott, Lee and Ballantyne (2012) discussed in their study that dark tourism can also have a positive impact over a country, such as creating awareness over the problem and learning more about a culture. Nowadays, with the help of social media, spreading the word and creating awareness about a problem through electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM) can arrive in minutes to every part of the world.

Although, multiple studies have researched destination image formation of dark tourism places (such as, Foley and Lennon, 1996; Lennon and Foley, 2000; Tarlow, 2005;

Sharpley and Stone, 2009; Bowman and Pezzullo, 2009), the image of a destination portrayed on social media through UGC influencing tourists' perception is rarely studied in academic literature. This research also focuses on the differences in opinions between what travelers expect to find while visiting dark places and how their actual experience was.

Moreover, there are various studies about tourism in Colombia and the influence of online reviews (UGC) regarding travel decisions, along with research touching on the subject of what type of people are interested in the drug trafficking subject presented on TV (Cano, 2015; Naef, 2018; Fletcher, 2011; Brida & Monterubbianesi, 2010). Over the years, image destination formation studies such as, Pike (2002), Tasci et al (2007) and Zhang et al (2015) have focused mostly on the general overview of the topic. Further studies about image destination photography and tourism destination portrayal through photos have also been tackled by researchers (Camprubi et al., 2008).

However, there are not enough academic studies (Zhang, Zhao & Xu, 2015; Hochmeister, Gretzel, & Werthner, 2013) focusing only on how online opinion leaders, such as tourists writing reviews on TripAdvisor might influence negatively or positively the portrayal of a country known for drug tourism in various societies around the world. By exploring and analyzing user-generated-content, the researcher aims to add knowledge to existing literature about the effects of UGC on social media over a country's image creation. As well as the effects of dark tourism over the image of a tourism destination.

1.2 Social relevance

This research is socially relevant as it contributes to the society by exploring how social media can change ideas and beliefs about a culture. It consists of analyzing how UGC can change people's perspective about tourist destinations. Also, the goals of the guided tours, such as narco-tours, go beyond visiting and taking a photo of the heritage. It encourages the creation of a strong governmental and financial support system to help the affected people resist against power abuse (Pezzullo, 2007).

Effects on people's behavior through traditional media, such as newspapers and TV have been studied previously by Bieger and Laesser (2004), Palma & Rochat (2000), Xiang, Woeber and Fesenmaier (2008) and others in order to understand the consequences of tourists' travel decisions after booking a trip based on what they have seen in the previously

mentioned media outlets. However, due to the rise of social media, studies by Brida and Monterubbianesi (2010) and Schroeder & Pennington-Gray (2014), have been conducted in order to analyze how are tourists creating an image of a destination through user-generated content. As well as, research studying people's trust in online reviews of strangers regarding travel destinations (Yoo, Gretzel and Fesenmaier, 2009; Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides, 2012).

Some destinations around the world which are famous for tragic events are receiving tourists due to that dark part of history which is believed to have a negative impact over the image of a destination. However, Kang, Scott, Lee and Ballantyne (2012) have discussed in their study about how dark tourism can bring positive outcomes benefiting the country which might be known for its dark history. By creating awareness over the problem and learning more about a culture, the image of the destination can be changed from a dark tourism destination to a changed and positive society which is capable to overcome its tragic past. Due to travelers' experiences and opinions shared through eWOM on reviews websites, such as TripAdvisor, the image of a destination can change from negative to positive.

1.3 Research Question

This study's objective is to map how tourists create an image about a destination through user-generated content, such as travelers' reviews on TripAdvisor. Therefore, the research question for this descriptive Masters' Thesis is: *How does the portrayal in social media of "negative tourist assets" affects the image of countries – specifically, how does the portrayal of drug tourism in social media affects the image of Colombia among foreign tourists?*

The research question will study tourists' opinions about the country and society. By interacting with locals and visiting important landmarks, tourists get a different perspective in comparison with the news arriving in their home countries, as well as a better understanding of the situation through listening to local's stories. This study aims to help at understanding how citizens from foreign countries traveling to Medellin, Colombia describe their experience after taking part in narco-tours through user-generated-content (UGC) via electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM) on TripAdvisor.

It will also give insights into how tourists think and perceive Colombia and Medellin not only by visiting places known for being narco-heritage sites during a narco-tour, but also

through interacting with locals and listening to their personal stories. The interaction with locals provides a deeper understanding of the history and situation. Thus, resulting in a strengthened eWOM supported by the real life experiences of people. This research will include an exploration of how TripAdvisor reviews describe Colombia and especially Medellin, along with how is the drug tourism portrayed, including tourists' experiences described by them in online reviews on TripAdvisor about narco-tours.

2. Theoretical framework

Theoretical framework will focus on defining the main concepts which stand behind the research for this master's thesis. The first subtitle of the theoretical framework chapter is aiming at providing theoretical background of how creating the image of a destination has started. Then, dark tourism and various aspects of it will be explained. Next, the third subtitle aims at clarifying how social media acts as a source of information for tourists. Finally, the fourth subtitle focuses on explaining how tourists act as opinion leaders through user-generated content (UGC) on TripAdvisor reviews.

2.1 Creating the image of a destination

The image of a destination could be described as the perception people have about a certain place before and after visiting it (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). The image of a destination is the sum of opinions and assumptions people have created in their minds about what a destination could look like from stories they heard or saw online (Jenkins, 1999; Kaikkonen, 2016). Usually, when people decide to travel to a destination is because of the images and assumptions they have about that place (Alvarez and Campo, 2011; Beerli and Martin. 2004).

Urry (1990) researched tourists' behavior before the Internet became the number one place to search for travel recommendations. In his study, he discussed how tourists want to experience genuine travel and cultural experiences. People's expectations have been shaped by tourism boards, word-of-mouth (WOM) from friends and family, travel agencies and mass media through marketing images. However, Larsen & Urry (2011) reminded that Berger (1972) stated that these expectations might change due to contemporary trends and historical events. For example, the photos showed online of the on-going war outcome in countries in the Middle East, have made people wary of visiting these countries due to the violent images tourists might have about the countries in this region.

In his study, Gunn (1972) examined how people react to promotional and advertised content around tourism. His research identified two types of images for destinations: the "natural feel image", formed without any forced advertising, and the image created in people's minds through marketing and advertising materials. He discovered that even though marketers use different strategies to promote a destination, people trusted more the content which appeared to have a more natural feel, thus leading to more sales.

The study of Gunn (1972) grouped the stages of destination image formation into four phases. First phase is the dream phase, which is before the trip, and at this time prospective tourists have a certain image about a destination based on WOM and advertising.

The second phase is choosing the itinerary for the trip. The image of the destination changes once the tourists research more about the place; the image of the destination is clearer, and expectations are known. In the third phase, perceptions about the destination are formed by experiencing the trip itself. The expectations are either met and fulfilled or the experience is disappointing, and the destination does not live up to the forecasted views. The fourth phase is the period after the trip has ended. This is where strong points of view regarding the image of the destination are formed based on previous experiences. These opinions will positively or negatively influence future trips to the destination.

Due to not being a physical object to purchase, the image creation is key for destinations to attract more tourists (Pike, 2009). In order to create the image about a destination, travelers must be exposed to content, such as images or videos about the place (Gartner, 1994).

Online content creators are currently some of the most important actors in shaping ideas about destinations. Because of and depending on their high following and their high influence over the audience, certain content creators are being paid to review or test certain products or services and share opinions about it. By paying for content, some brands require to see it before it goes live in order to approve it, so it can be in line with the brand's values and image (Woods, 2017). Thus, the content becomes part of a controlled and specifically targeted audience marketing material. However, when tourists search for unbiased tourism-related opinions they usually go to reviews platforms (Pan et al., 2007). Tourists can share their opinions about destinations without being subject to becoming marketing material. The previous author acknowledges that users can share their opinions and experiences freely by giving their feedback after visiting the places. This serves as unbiased travel information, which helps people form an image about a destination and make plans for their trip (Frias et al., 2008).

2.2. TripAdvisor

Researchers have been conducting studies about why people want to search online for other people's opinions. Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006) found that among the most important reasons for people to read other's opinions were interactivity and the rapidity with which they can find information. The effects of online interactivity were studied by Thorson and Rodgers (2006) and discovered that due to interactivity, people are convinced more easily about a certain brand.

Services, destinations or products reviews are a key part in the storytelling of travel adventures (Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2008). Hence, sharing travel experiences is a very important part in creating an image for travel destinations as well (Edson Escalas, 2004). Due to how easily people can share their opinions with millions of other people, one story can have favorable or unfavorable effects on the image of a destination (Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Lee and Tussyadiah, 2011, p. 173). Therefore, tourism brands are strongly monitoring the opinions and experiences shared online about their travel services or products (Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica and O'Leary, 2006).

Even though Chung & Buhalis (2008) stated that TripAdvisor might not be the most trustworthy place to find qualitative information, other researchers such as Leung, Law, van Hoof & Buhalis, (2013) consider that because of the high number of monthly visits, TripAdvisor is actually a trustworthy platform. Because of the trust it inspires to people, the reviews platform has seen a steady growth since its foundation to the present day (O'Connor, 2008). In his research, he states that the reviews written on TripAdvisor are coming from regular people, single tourists or traveling together with their family who are sharing their experiences after staying at a hotel, eating at a restaurant or taking part in a narco-tour.

Lee, Law & Murphy (2011) study researched what makes a trustworthy review on TripAdvisor. The conclusion was that tourists' reviews who travel frequently and to diverse tourism destinations and who also post frequently are the most reliable and trustworthy reviews. Exploring the effects of TripAdvisor reviews will give a deeper insight about the power of opinion leaders over travel destinations' image creation.

2.3. Tourists as opinion leaders

The previous research studying the influence of media on people's perceptions dating back to the late of the last century. Delwiche (2005) acknowledged that Cohen (1963), was the first researcher who affirmed that media can influence people's ideas about significant problems in the society. However, communication analysts declined Cohen's statement and declared that mass media texts' influence over people's opinions were restricted (Lowery and DeFleur, 1995).

McCombs and Shaw (1972) took Cohen's study and further studied it by asking voters in Chapel Hill to find serious problems regarding the Presidential election in 1968. The two researchers compared the outcome to news in the same time period. They identified solid evidence that voters thought of the same problems as news when reporting about the Presidential election. Therefore, McCombs and Shaw were the first scientists to establish media effects on people's opinions. Even though, there are researchers arguing about what types of methodology and descriptions are better to study the issue, all of their studies agree on the allegation that media influences people's ideas and perceptions. After researching other papers on the subject, Dearing and Rogers (1996) concluded that even though the media does influence people's opinions, there are other factors involved in regards with the issues that this situation brings. For example, opinions leaders can influence people's opinions significantly.

Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), Rogers and Shoemaker (1971) and Atkin (1972) describe opinion leaders as people who take part in offline conversations and look for discussion topics in mass media to either write or talk about them based on their interests. The difference between these periods is related to how people were perceiving the studies and discussion topics in mass media.

In recent years, Valente & Pumpuang (2006, p. 881) defined opinion leaders as "people who influence the opinions, attitudes, beliefs, motivations, and behaviors of others". Carroll & McCombs (2003) stated that the influence of early social media on people's opinions is strongly related to individual experiences. Regular people saw the opportunities the Internet was bringing as well and started writing online themselves. The previous authors observe that some people might have thought that within mass media there was a lack of important topics involving their society, therefore personal blogs were formed.

Herring et al. (2005) described bloggers as intermediaries between classic journalists and website readers. Ho and Dempsey (2010), Chung and Darke (2006) and Ramaswamy (2008) identified some of the reasons people might have to start writing about newsworthy topics. Firstly, there is their desire to be a part of a specific group and to develop online relationships. Secondly, every person wants to feel unique and there are some brands with which they identify themselves deeply, therefore they want to share their opinions about them. Thirdly, curiosity, entertaining or controversial personalities, like Pablo Escobar in Colombia, constitute a topic of interests for tourists from foreign countries.

Nowadays, the content distributed and shared by tourists is mostly created by other users through user-generated content. One of the most prominent examples of sharing opinions and describing experiences through user-generated content are blogs. Even though, in the beginning people who wrote on blogs were called amateur journalists (Herring et al., 2005), in time their status changed to content creators. These are the types of people who become important personalities by creating large communities online (Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005). Hence, they have the power to influence reader's opinions. Even though before the Internet, opinion leaders were taking the information from mass media, filtered it and then shared it via word-of-mouth with their friends and families (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), nowadays they share mostly personal experiences (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014).

By explaining why blogs and influent online opinion leaders are relevant to this topic, the reader can understand how tourists sharing their opinions and experiences via reviews websites are creating online communities among users of the platform. Therefore, resulting in influencing their decisions. The last authors mention that by reading people's real experiences and opinions, tourists are able to identify and create an image about a destination.

Although, the most known channel of sharing opinions and ideas are blogs, in the last decade microblogs made their appearance. Microblogs represent a subdivision of blogs and they allow users write brief messages, share photos or videos online with their audience in just minutes on their personal social media profile, meaning they are a lot smaller than the normal blog posts (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). The most famous microblogging platform is Twitter (Nations, 2018) where users interact with each other by updating their status within a character limit.

According to Nations (2018), Tumblr, Instagram and Facebook represent microblogging platforms due to the short descriptions or status updates the users create. The same author notes that some of the benefits of microblogs are reduced time to write and share ideas, is straightforward and the updates can be viewed instantly worldwide. Also, it is a more informal way of sharing information and because smartphones and internet connection are easily accessible, readers can see news from around the world quicker.

However, from a business perspective, comments and reviews made on important websites like TripAdvisor represent important branding tools (Amaral, Tiago & Tiago, 2014). When it comes to the decisions that travelers make regarding their next trip, image destination plays an important role (Tse & Zhang, 2013). Litvin et al. (2008) states that if a traveler gets valued by his online community as reliable and knowledgeable, his or her reviews have a likely higher chance of influencing other tourist's perceptions on the image of a destination. These types of online entries classify as electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Filieri, Alguezaui & McLeay, 2015).

2.4. User-generated content (UGC)

Blackshaw and Nazzaro (2006, p. 4) state that UGC "is a mixture of fact and opinion, impression and sentiment, founded and unfounded tidbits". Due to the authenticity and intimate feel it inspires to the reader, UGC might be considered more powerful than traditional media. By sharing their opinions and experiences, it helps other tourists discover if they would like to travel to that place or not.

Nowadays, according to Amaral, Tiago & Tiago (2014) the communication is not just the message sent to the receiver, it also includes the interaction between people, computer and messages shared about travel related activities and products. Because people are reading reviews every day, rather than searching for information through traditional media and travel agencies, it is no surprise that in 2018, TripAdvisor was a market leader when it came to people's travel decisions ("Influences on Diner Decision-Making | TripAdvisor For Restaurants", 2018). Therefore, TripAdvisor is an important factor when deciding for a travel destination, thus having a direct connection with how a destination is portrayed through people's reviews.

With the apparition of the Internet, online reviews, as well as other actions of people taken online, are part of what is called user-generated content (UGC). User-generated content (UGC) acts as an online behavior, where people are looking for information online and write about it based on their interests (Daugherty, Eastin & Bright, 2010).

Travelers use social media sites to search for information in three different stages of their trip (Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica and O'Leary, 2006). First stage is before the trip, when people search online for reviews about possible places to travel to. It is believed to be the "dreamy" period, where people gather information from tourists' opinions about the place, airplane tickets and hotel prices. Second stage is during the trip when tourists use UGC again to find reviews regarding qualitative restaurants and interesting places to visit. Finally, according to the previous authors, third stage is after the trip is over, when they return home and share their expected and real travel experiences.

A key aspect in shaping tourists' opinions is storytelling. Bernard Robin (2006) defines storytelling as the combination between the ability of telling stories along with photos or videos. He classifies advices and recommendations as information stories which provide the user a deeper understanding of the situation as well as convince him better. In the first phase before the trip, which is when people seek information, travelers' stories and experiences can inspire dreams in the readers' thoughts (Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Lee and Tussyadiah, 2011). The previous authors also state that, UGC is an important aspect of traveling, because when people decide to go on a trip, different aspects have to be taken into consideration.

As electronic-word-of-mouth weigh heavily in the eyes of prospective tourists, Jansen et al., 2009) defines it as the process of sharing information from peer to peer. Word-of-mouth coming from friends and family has been a decisive factor for people before making purchasing decisions (Richins & Root-Shaffer, 1988). With the apparition of the Internet, tourists can read through unbiased reviews from other travelers, as well as engage in eWOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Despite the fact that people tend to believe more what friends and family recommend, in the last years, strangers sharing their experiences and opinions through online reviews have gained more power over known acquaintances (Duan, Gu & Whinston, 2008). Jansen et al. (2009, p. 2), states that although, eWOM might "be less personal", in the sense that it is not communication face-to-face, it is more effective. eWOM travels fast and can reach millions of people within minutes. Therefore, social media networks and opinion leaders play

an important role in defining the image of a tourist destination. Tourism boards and travel agents have admitted the importance of taking into consideration users reviews as feedback to improve their services and use them as tools for marketing purposes (Litvin et al., 2008; Schmallegger and Carson, 2008).

2.5. (Social) Media as source of information for tourists

When tourists choose a destination for traveling, they usually have various sources of information: friends, family (WOM), literature, travel brochures and mass media such as, newspaper and TV (Richins & Root-Shaffer, 1988). As previously stated, Jansen et al. (2009) describes word-of-mouth as the process of sharing information from peer to peer.

On the Internet, WOM is not only between people that know each other, but with people worldwide. Interactivity represents a key aspect of the Internet which adds value to the news (Pavlik, 1996; Ha and James, 1998).

In Jenkins, Ito & Boyd (2016, p. 6) study, involved actors are described as "participatory culture which embraces the values of diversity". The "participatory culture" is also defined as a mass of people able to form their own opinions and can share them via a wide range of channels and methods. According to Kenney, Gorelik and Mwangi (2000) people are looking more for information and the feature of being able to add information is making the line between contributors and professional journalists blurry.

Since social media has grown to be much more influent than mass media, the rapidity with which messages are being sent to the receiver is mostly because of the wireless smartphones (Amaral, Tiago & Tiago, 2014). The previous authors also mention that another factor which allowed social media to grow as much as it did, is the freedom of sharing any type of information with worldwide readers in a few minutes. As a consequence of the growth of technology along with information shared online by people worldwide, tourism recommendations are searched for everyday by millions of people. Thus, every user has the chance to share their own views about a destination, adding to its image.

Nowadays, as a result of what the previous authors stated regarding technology and online interaction, tourism recommendations are not coming mainly from tourism agencies anymore, but also from tourists sharing their experiences online.

The most prominent website where tourists are searching for travel information is the travel reviews platform TripAdvisor (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). Although, researchers Chung & Buhalis (2008) acknowledged the fact that TripAdvisor reviews are not the most trustworthy, the platform remains one of the most important websites for travel information. TripAdvisor, along with social media has also played an important role in developing the tourism industry and adding information to it. Therefore, the travel industry relies heavily on online searches and eWOM (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

Anderson (2008) describes eWOM as being more trusted by the consumers than the traditional information sources. He indicates that this is due to the trust it inspires to people, rather than making the audience feel like they are being targeted with tailor-made advertising and special discounts for travel packages.

In a study from 2008, it was discovered that 82% of US tourists read blogs and reviews websites before traveling or engage in any travel-related actions (eMarketer, 2008). Nowadays, the reviews website TripAdvisor might be the leader within the travel review websites niche (Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides, 2012).

2.6 Dark Tourism

Dark tourism was defined in academic literature by John Lennon & Malcom Foley (1996) as visiting tombs of famous individuals, cemeteries, sites where tragedies happened, war fields, along with houses that belonged to influent people. They coined the term dark tourism as a result of the growing interest of tourists in death and war-related destinations. Their research into the phenomenon, started as a reaction to people visiting Nazi's concentration camps, such as Auschwitz or trips to former prisons (Strange and Kempa 2003), for example Alcatraz in the U.S.A. Some of the first itineraries related to dark related tourism included guided tours inside morgues during the Victorian age (Stone, 2006). Although, at that time only the high-class society was allowed to take part in these guided morgue tours, over the years middle-class people were allowed to visit the morgues as well. By allowing middle class people to take part in these tours, news about dark tourism started to spread.

Although the term has been coined by Lennon & Foley, previous studies before them (Rojeck, 1993; Vellas and Becherel, 1995) have already tried to understand this phenomenon.

Rojeck (1993) describes the activity of visiting dark places as an attractive itinerary that tourists enjoy taking part in.

In his study, Dann (1998) spotted five motives of people visiting this kind of places: overcoming paranormal fears, searching for something unique, memories, crimes celebration, and death intensity feelings. The same author stated that these motives are very broad and might be more related with the destinations itself, rather than people's individual desires. In his research he explains that these places have become famous due to the tragedies and curious tourists that want to learn more about the history of that destination and what exactly happened.

Later, Lennon & Foley (2000, p 11) stated that dark tourism fascination is mostly a "product of post-modernity". By post-modernity, the authors refer to the rapidity with which news travel in the Internet era and how the messages can be infinitely shared online, due to people's interest in dark travel destinations. They state that tourists' curiosity regarding those places, is connected to the contrast between the past and present history evolution. The previous authors mentioned that other people's motives could be related with the uncertain line between different messages the site is transmitting, for example, the way the cultural aspect is being sold to tourists through marketing materials. Based on the reasons people might have to visit places where tragedies happened, private tourism agencies have transformed them into tourist destinations (Sharpley & Stone, 2009).

Stone (2006) categorizes further various types of dark tourism according to their purposes. For example, dark exhibitions focus on dark tourism products displayed for educational purposes. For instance, the "Catacombe dei Cappucini" in Palermo, Italy where mummified corpses were displayed on the walls. Another type of dark tourism consists of visiting graves of famous people. The previous author also mentions that cemeteries have become one of the most bought itineraries in a travel package. In his study he states that trips to resting places have gained popularity due to electronic-word-of-mouth and guided tours.

Keeping in mind the dark tourism description, which researchers consider is visiting graves of famous people, war sites and places where mass murders happened, researchers acknowledged that part of the dark tourism is also, drug tourism (Winkelman, 2005).

Some of the most famous places for drug tourism are in Latin America and Colombia is one of the top destinations (Wood, 2017). deRios (1994) describes drug tourism as tourists travelling to certain parts of the world to taste the plants considered sacred by indigenous

people. Psarogianni (2017) talks in her study of spiritual healing rituals taking place in different countries in South America and involve sacred hallucinogenic plants used by indigenous people. These plants are considered sacred by shamans and believe they can help people re-discover and self-transform themselves into their best and positive self. The previous author also states that the plants have captivated non-locals' interest, especially westerners who want to escape their daily routines. However, the same author mentions that because of the properties these hallucinogenic plants have, some foreign tourists are looking for drug-related experiences rather than spiritual healing. Therefore, starting drug tourism for consumption. The same author mentioned that this activity attracts mostly tourists from foreign societies to countries in Latin America looking for substances, which in most of their home countries are illegal.

Nevertheless, drug tourism does not only mean testing hallucinogenic plants, but also visiting places related to drug trafficking activities. Patrick Naef (2018) talks about another side of drug tourism and that is *narco-heritage sight-seeing.* Narco-heritage is defined by the previous author as: "objects, sites, and practices embodying and representing the illegal production, as well as consumption, of narcotics." (Naef. 2018, p. 486). However, the previous author notes the fact that narco-heritage is not specific to Colombia. Because of the activities and rise of Pablo Escobar in Medellin between 1980-1990, most tourists remember or hear about Colombia because of the famous drug dealer influence and work on the worldwide drug trafficking process.

According to the same author, narco-heritage embodies not only "museums or conservation institutes" (Naef, 2018, p.2), but every aspect of narco-tourism that is present in people's memories. Even though, the police and government officials in Colombia are opposed to capitalize the image and memory of Pablo Escobar, tourism offices and agents are having financial profits from it (Giraldo et al., 2014; Van Broek, 2018; Naef, 2018).

Also, not only tourism offices and agents are making a profit off of it, but also movie studios. The popular series "Narcos", portrays the life of the well-known drug lord, Pablo Escobar, creating a myth around it and making Colombia, especially Medellin, famous around the world. Thus, making drug tourism in Colombia more popular and driving foreign tourists to the country willing to learn more about the tragic events. Naef (2018) describes that many people from other countries, such as the U.S.A., U.K., The Netherlands, France, Spain and

more have heard about Medellin due to the online series "Narcos". Nevertheless, the same author mentions that in Medellin, citizens do not want to be associated with such a figure.

Nonetheless, narco-tourism has become an important part of the tourism in Colombia, bringing more people every year to visit the country. Although, the government of Colombia does not explicitly say they disapprove of dark tourism, through the slogan "The only risk is wanting to stay" from their marketing campaign destined to promote the riches of Colombia, the government is trying to distance the country from dark tourism stigma. At the same time, the slogan acknowledges that violence is still present in Colombia, however, the Colombian government is focusing on the development brought to the society and safety of visiting the country (Fletcher, 2011). Lakoff (2004) admits that the more the government is trying to move forward from their dark past and not talk about it, the more attention it gets from foreign tourists.

Since the Colombian government does not want to be associated with violent history related to drugs, this missing part of their past in history books and classes is being told by TV series, such as "Narcos" (Cabañas, 2012). Other parties interested and involved in tourism tell the history via various channels such as movies or street paintings. Naef (2018, p.2) mentions that private third parties, like travel agencies, have created "Pablo tours or narco-tours" and this activity is among the most famous and bought travel package in Medellin.

He describes in-depth the narco-heritage sites and "Touring the Pablo Escobar legacy" (Naef, 2018, p. 490) in Medellin through narco-tours. The tours are coordinated by either private travel agencies or independent individuals taking tourists to places where Pablo Escobar lived or where tragedies because of his orders happened. However, the previous author mentions that Colombian people and officials believe that by allowing narco-tours to exist, a negative stigma falls over their nation.

The cultural representation of Pablo Escobar in movies and TV series, has had a great impact on the Colombian society, as well as for the tourism jobs it provides. According to the previous author, if it was not for the people telling the stories behind the ruins, the sites associated with the tragic events that happened would be just deserted buildings.

Even though Colombia seems most famous for drug tourism, it is not a distinct feature of the country. Some of the western European countries also talk about illegal substances, however information about this topic can be found in public institutions, for example the "Hash Marihuana and Hemp Museums in Amsterdam and Barcelona". What makes narco-

heritage interesting in Colombia is the lack of drugs history in "public institutions" and how a man's influence and power reached within the highest levels in the Colombian government. However, the same author provides a possible explanation for the lack of this part of the history. If Colombian officials would agree to showcase the history of narco-trafficking, it would also reveal the "corruption, paramilitary, guerilla warfare and state crimes" (Naef, 2018, p.3).

Nevertheless, the previous author mentions that tourism agencies saw the potential of making a profit, from telling the tragic events to curious foreign tourists, as well as raising awareness over what happened. Thus, because of the rapidity with which information is shared online, people from all over the world, and especially from countries with different cultures than the Latin American country, travel to Colombia to visit the birthplace of Pablo Escobar. Therefore, contributing to narco-tours, even though authorities do not encourage this kind of tourism.

As previously stated in the introduction chapter, dark tourism can also contribute positively to a country's image formation. By raising ethical questions and showcasing the positive outcome from the tragedies that occurred, dark tourism can bring positive benefits to the society. An example of positive impact of dark tourism is the case of Jeju April 3rd in South Korea. Jeju April 3rd is a park which wants to remember the actions taken by the islanders on April 3rd, 1948 against the Korean Government during the tragic period before the Korean War (1950-1953). In that period, it culminated with "over 30,000 victims either dead or missing". Hence, the site is a symbol of the political fight South Korea went through after "the War in the Pacific in 1945" (Kang, Scott, Lee and Ballantyne, 2012, p.258). The topic was forbidden to be discussed for more than fifty years because of the country's laws. However, in 1998 due to a change in governance, the situation has changed on the island and it was registered as "World Peace Island" in 2005. Ever since then, the officials want to create an image of peace. The case of Jeju April 3rd represents a part of dark tourism which is seen as positive, since it shows the rebirth of the island. Here, dark tourism is also seen as educational and sensitive experience while tourists have the possibility to learn about the history of the country (Henderson, 2000; Lennon & Foley, 2000).

Although, Colombia is known for dark tourism, specifically drug tourism and many people believe it represents a negative aspect of the country, there are also positive aspects which will be discussed further in the research.

3. Methodology

3.1 Choice of method

The research method used for this study to analyze the dataset was qualitative content analysis. Qualitative research allows the examination of the data set by classifying the text into codes "and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Sandelowski (2004) states that the goal of qualitative research is to observe the way people perceive, sense, portray and interpret the world around them. Therefore, this technique helps comprehend the deeper meaning of the text which will be analyzed. According to Kassarjian (1977), patterns and themes can be better found through content analysis because concerns, principles, opinions, and point of views are frequently debated this way.

In order to analyze how dark tourism influences the image of a destination, this study will focus on user-generated content (UGC), specifically electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM). To do this, the data set of this study had as primary objective discovering opinions about narco-tours in Medellin based on TripAdvisor reviews. The reviews website TripAdvisor was chosen based on the official statement, which can be found on their website, claiming to be the most accessed website regarding tourism information ("Majority of Global Online Travel Buyers Visit TripAdvisor before Booking a Hotel or Flight, According to New Study | TripAdvisor", 2018). Because of how trusted it is by tourists, TripAdvisor has seen a steady growth since its foundation until today (O'Connor, 2008).

By collecting tourists' reviews based on their narco-tours experiences from TripAdvisor, the researcher aims to find out how the audience shapes the image of a destination through user-generated content. The proposed research question for this study is: *How does the portrayal of drug tourism in social media affects the image of Colombia among foreign tourists?*

It aims to reveal tourist's opinions and thoughts about the overall situation within the country after taking part in a narco-tour. Also, by interacting with locals and visiting important landmarks, tourists get a different perspective from the news arriving in their home countries. Along with a better understanding of the situation by listening to locals' stories.

3.2 Operationalization

Based on the explanation of the chosen research method for this study, further rationale for the research question is as follows. Based on the proposed research question, one of the goals is to help understand how people from other countries traveling to Medellin, Colombia describe their experience after taking part in narco-tours through electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM) on TripAdvisor. It also aims to not only give insights into how tourists think and perceive Colombia and Medellin by visiting places known for being narco-heritage sites during a narco-tour, but also after interacting with locals and listening to their personal stories. The interaction with locals provides a deeper understanding of the history and situation. Therefore, resulting in a strengthened eWOM supported by people's real experiences.

After explaining what is expected the research question to answer, rationalization for data collection is explained as follows. The collected data resulted in 600 TripAdvisor reviews from tourists who took part in narco-tours provided by three different tour agencies: "Medellin City Service", "Tour Pablo Escobar by Paisa Road" and "Real City Tours The Walking Tours". All the tours took place in Medellin, Colombia. The demographics chosen for this research were foreign tourists from countries such as the U.S.A. or European countries.

Next, sampling, method of analysis, reliability, validity and limitations will be explained.

3.3 Sampling Method

For this study, the dataset selected was based on TripAdvisor reviews. The relevant TripAdvisor reviews were chosen based on one criteria: most representative narco-heritage landmarks seen online or in TV series/movies by travelers.

Because the aim of this research is to see how Colombia is portrayed in countries with a different political and societal situation, the reviews were limited to tourists from countries like the U.S.A. and European countries who wrote reviews about their experience. The rationale behind this is to ensure a comprehensive look into how people who only heard about Colombia from movies and TV series based on drugs history, form opinions about Colombia after visiting it. Therefore, purposive sampling was chosen as the sampling method.

Matthews and Ross (2010, p. 154) defined purposive sampling as "a sample of selected cases that will best enable the researcher to explore the research questions in depth". In the

study of Neuman (2014, p. 273), purposive sampling was defined as "a non-random sample in which the researcher uses a wide range of methods to locate all possible cases of a highly specific and difficult-to-reach population". Based on the definitions of purposive sampling presented above, the sampling selection relies on the judgement of the researcher. This allows to discover which topics are more important than others (Babbie, 2014). In order to analyze the data, thematic analysis was used.

3.4 Thematic Analysis

Braun & Clarke (2006) defined thematic analysis as a form of recognizing, studying and describing themes inside a data set. The researchers highlight thematic analysis as a rationalist method, while keeping in mind the authenticity of reporting the significance, experiences and opinions of the respondents. The previous researchers note that thematic analysis is a wise choice when the research is based on analyzing large quantities of documents or user generated content.

Darlington and Scott (2002, p. 154) state that thematic analysis is "an integral part of the analysis, involving sifting through the data, making sense of it and categorizing it in various ways". The key aspect of thematic analysis is coding. For this research, an inductive approach was used in order to develop codes and categories, due to not having a pre-existing coding tree (Thomas, 2003). The researcher of this study aims to "systematically describe the meaning" of the coded data in regards with the proposed research question (Schreier, 2013, p. 3).

In the transcribing and studying phase of the data set, the researcher found the preliminary codes by "breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing" the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2007, p. 61). In order to discover the codes, the researcher identified them by color-coding them manually on the transcripts in Microsoft Word. The most important criteria when selecting codes was based on their significance for the research. After the preliminary codes, the researcher examined and organized them into broader themes which suggested their ability to respond to the research question (Flick, 2002). In order to respond to the research question, the researcher made sure the themes found were in accordance with and supported by the key theoretical concepts discussed in the chapter of theoretical framework. Meaning that, for almost every key concept discussed

in the theoretical framework chapter, a theme related to it was found. However, two of the themes that resulted from the analysis, "Opinions about the tour guides" and "Historical information", were not supported by theoretical background in the theoretical framework chapter. Nevertheless, in order to provide a detailed and pertinent answer to the research question, the researcher considers these topics important as they provide a complete view over the image creation of a destination.

From the preliminary codes, the resulted coding scheme contained a large number of codes (Boeije, 2010). The preliminary codes were transported and organized into an Excel sheet. By organizing them this way, it allowed the researcher to avoid parts of the reviews which did not need coding and concentrate on finding the key codes important to the research. Hence, it is aligned with the previous author's theory stating that open coding is essential in order to group the data sets based on the exact needs of the research.

After the open coding process, the next essential step in the study was to identify axial codes. From the identification of axial codes, the main themes emerged and by selective coding, the researcher identified the overarching themes and sub-themes which helped provide answers to the research question (Carson et al., 2001). Furthermore, every theme was briefly described in the coding scheme in order to facilitate the description of the findings (see Table 1).

Table 1

The themes and codes which resulted from the analysis of the dataset

Themes	Code	Description	Example
(Social) Media as Source of Information	Movies/Online series	Movies or online series acted as base to learn about the drug dealing industry.	"Well, part of our decision to visit Colombia was that husband and I just finished binge watching Narcos, I know "how cliche" you'd think but it's a great interesting real story. (…)" (Review 85).

(Social) Media as Source of Information	Social Media influence	Social media had a key role in tourists' desire to visit Colombia.	"(…) I'd seen lot of reviews and vlogs about the tour, but I didn't expect it to be so engaging, informative, respectful, and even entertaining (…)" (Review 268).
Opinions about the tour guides	Positive	Travelers considered that the tour guides did a good job presenting the situation.	"(…) His capability as teacher made the tour funny and interesting, happy and sad, gray and colorful, all of that at the same time! He captivated us as much that I thought the tour took just one hour (…)" (Review 266).
	Disappointment	Tour guides did not meet travelers' expectations for the experience.	"(…) Our tour guide, Nicholas, was not able to answer any questions asked about more detail into Escobar's life. (…)" (Review 20).
	Evaluation of the tour guides	Tourists shared their opinions about the tour guides behavior.	" (…) I couldn't really enjoy it because our guide (Paola) had a really weird and annoying manner of speaking. She kept making faces while telling us the story and was being overly sarcastic. It was quite unpleasant to watch her speak. (…)" (Review 25).
	Pablo Escobar effects on the tour guides	The tour guides lived at the same time as Pablo Escobar, hence, they decided to share personal experiences from that time.	" (…) It is really interesting to hear from the locals about life at that time as it is a topic that many paisas (Medellin locals) do not wish to talk about. (…)" (Review 592).

Narco-tours	Skepticism	Travelers were skeptical to visit the places related to Pablo Escobar due to various reasons.	"I had read previous reviews so I was a little sceptical about this tour. (…)" (Review 32).
	Morality	Tourists were concerned about how ethical it is to visit the sites associated with Pablo Escobar.	"Narco tours are a bit controversial in Medellin as Escobar is seen as a mass murdering psychopath who dragged Colombias name through the mud by a large part of the population. This tour however does nothing to glorify the man and is presented in a balanced and ethical fashion." (Review 439).
	Reviewer's perception about narco-heritage	Personal opinions about the places they visited, which were buildings owned and operated by the drug cartel.	"(…) Medellin's most significant "history" is not in centuries past, but a "story" that is still unfolding today. Medelln's art is not hidden in museums but on display for everyone to see as beautiful graffiti on the city walls and Botero (Medellin native) statues in public squares. Medellin's most impressive monuments are not historical buildings or ruins, but places that are heavy with tragic stories and symbols of hope.(…)" (Review 230).
	Emotions	During visits to sites associated with narco-heritage, people had experienced different emotions related to the places.	"(…) Visiting another country isn't just about the sites, monuments, and buildings.. It's about the people. It's about the culture. It's about the stories that bind a people to their city and country. (…)" (Review 256).

Narco-tours	Educational importance	Tourists believed narco-tours were educative.	"I am so glad I took this tour. It not only was interesting to see the former drug cartel related places in Medellin.(…) It added a lot to my understanding of this country and the people." (Review 71).
Society Changes	Positive changes of Medellin and Colombia	Travelers acknowledged that there are beneficial changes across the country and the city.	"(…) But we also appreciated the fact that it was not all about Escobar - you also go to Comuna 13 with it's amazing graffitis, you learn about the new Medellin, the positive changes all around the city etc. (…)" (Review 411).
	Representation of renowned areas of Medellin	Different places within the city have changed throughout the years.	"I had a really nice time going around comuna 13, using the metrocable, going through tranvia ayacucho, and gaining knowledge just talking and asking Johan about Medellin. (…)" (Review 432).
	Safety	Before traveling to Colombia, tourists raised questions about how safe it is to visit the country.	"The sites we hit were all on my list of places I wanted to see and learn more about It felt like an in depth tour; and I felt very safe. There is a lot to see in Medellin but it's not necessarily safe to wander around on your own so I appreciated that this your was 4 hours and felt like a great activity to dedicate your day to. (…)" (Review 243).

Historical information	Search Bloc	The police task force was founded to capture Pablo Escobar.	"The tour was amazing with ex cop Carlos. He had amazing true stories about what went on during the Escobar era and what it was like to be a police officer and on the hunt for him. Carlos was a part of the Search Bloc and answered all questions he could and if he didn't know the answer he wouldn't make up a lie. (…)." (Review 431).

Lastly, the themes which resulted from the analysis were translated into understandable text in order to respond to the research question and were based on the theoretical background presented in the theoretical framework.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

In order to ensure validity for this research, care was taken to guarantee the structure of the research design, so the results of the analysis provide valuable insights for the main research question (Leung, 2015). To limit personal bias from influencing the results of the analysis, the researcher conducted the study following a rigorous system in the form of table to create a structured data corpus to analyze. Also, previous to collecting the data, the researcher studied intensively the chosen topic to research in order to be up to date to any new developments regarding image destination formation.

Another important part to consider when conducting a qualitative research is reliability. Reliability ensures that findings are reliable and future research can be reproduced using the same methodology (Silverman, 2016). In comparison with quantitative research, total foolproof reliability cannot be achieved in qualitative research due to the subjective nature of it. However, in order to ensure transparency of the data, the researcher provided comprehensive information of the data set, data collection, sampling, analysis and research design in the Methodology chapter. Further proof of reliability was submitted with this research and included all the 600 TripAdvisor reviews.

4. Results and Discussion

According to the research question, *How does the portrayal in social media of "negative tourist assets" affects the image of Countries – specifically, how does the portrayal of drug tourism in social media affects the image of Colombia among foreign tourists?*, this research aims to examine how user-generated content defines the destination image of a country known for dark tourism.

The previous objective was the basis for the themes found in the data set which are: (social) media as source of information, opinions about the tour guides, narco-tours, society changes and historical information. The data set consisting of TripAdvisor reviews was analyzed using thematic analysis, which included open and axial coding. Furthermore, the axial codes were categorized into themes and sub-themes, which form this chapter. The themes are aligned with the main points of discussion and research question of this study. These themes will be explained by presenting significant patterns identified in the data analysis supported by relevant quotes from reviews so as the findings to be easily understood.

4.1. (Social) Media as Source of Information

This first theme examined how (social) media influenced and acted as a source of information for tourist's travel decisions to travel to Colombia. This section focuses on explaining and showcasing the main influences from (social) media which motivated the tourists to travel to the destination and visit landmarks part of dark tourism. Through analysis and coding, two important patterns were identified within the data set. The patterns were coded as: movies/online series and social media influence. Although, one could take these two codes independent from one another, they are both part of the media landscape therefore, they are connected.

4.1.1. Movies/Online series

As mentioned in the theoretical framework chapter, Anderson (2008) mentioned that among the most important factors regarding information findings are social media networks along with mass media. Before the easily accessed information on the Internet and the launch of social media networks to the public, information about tourism destinations was made through word-of-mouth among people who knew each other (Jansen et al., 2009). Nowadays,

online communities created by users share information among them thus, spreading information through eWOM.

Although movies and TV shows or online series are not something new, based on the high number of reviews that mentioned the previous information channels, they still act as one of the main sources of influence when it comes to travel decisions. Due to the way Hollywood productions are showing various aspects from a society, it highly influences the image people are creating about a destination. The analysis highlights the influence movies, series and online discussions have over people. One of the most recurrent subjects among the motives which convinced people to travel to Colombia was the original series of Netflix called "Narcos". According to the official description, the show portrays "The true story of Colombia's infamously violent and powerful drug cartels fuels this gritty gangster drama series." ("Narcos | Netflix Official Site", 2019).

Most of the TripAdvisor reviews which were analyzed stated that what made travelers curious about Colombia were the images seen and the information heard in the famous online series "Narcos" from Netflix:

"What I knew about Medellin was just Escobar, and what I knew about Escobar was based on Narcos and other films" (Review 53).

"Well, part of our decision to visit Colombia was that husband and I just finished binge watching Narcos" (Review 85).

"The Pablo Tour was an incredible experience, especially seeing the places shown in movies/TV in person" (Review 450).

"Our previous understanding of this period had come mainly from the Netflix show Narcos."(Review 472).

Because of the global coverage the show "Narcos" had, people became more interested in Pablo Escobar and the dark period in Colombia's history, which was between 1980 and 1990. The high interest in drug traffickers' history can be measured in the thousands of reviews on TripAdvisor, left for tour agencies running narco-tours. The series "Narcos"

portraying the life of Pablo Escobar and Colombia's drugs history had a very high influence over people's travel decisions regarding Colombia: "After binging on Narcos last year, we knew the Pablo Escobar tour was a must during our visit to Medellin" (Review 538).

However, although people were fascinated with the story of Pablo Escobar and the drugs industry developed in Medellin, the narco-tours presented by local tour guides, who lived in that period, told another side of the story. Tourists learned from the tour guides that many of the details showed in the "Narcos" series were not true and that Hollywood romanticized the story and main character, Pablo Escobar. Some of the reviews supporting the previous statement wrote: "How disappointing to hear that many things in Netflix's Narcos series were untrue." (Review 5), "Narcos (the series) is not correct!!" (Review 19), "She was able to debunk many of the "myths" currently being shown on "Narcos." (Review 45).

The tourists appreciated the tour guides sharing the real story and debunking the distorted reality told in the popular series: "As watchers of the Narcos series, we went to all the key areas we wanted to see from the show. (…) He was able to tell us the truth from the fiction." (Review 539), "I had some knowledge of Escobar from watching documentaries and the Netflix show Narcos. Julio added in more facts and details. He was able to have a great discussion with me about what it was like then versus now" (Review 545), "Although generally a fascinating experience, the tour was particularly interesting to a Narcos fan such as myself as it cleared up several myths perpetuated by the show" (Review 546).

After the experience, tourists wrote in their reviews about the narco-tours and their understanding of Colombians and appreciation for the tour because it showed the real history: "From the Narcos series I had inaccurate knowledge about Pablo and other narcotics. Because of this tour, now I know that many things were not true in the Narcos series. And I understand why people in Columbia do not want to talk about Escobar." (Review 6). Even though, these reviews illustrate the experience tourists had during narco-tours and the information learned, there were also other aspects regarding narco-tours which made prospect tourists skeptical.

4.1.2. Social Media influence

As previously stated by Amaral, Tiago & Tiago (2014), nowadays social media represents an influent factor regarding travel decisions. Due to the photos and information shared online by tourists that had traveled to a certain destination, people who are looking for their next travel destination take into consideration their experiences and advices. Especially tourists wanting to travel to destinations with a dark history that created the image of dark tourism destinations. The next reviews show the thoughts of prospect tourists when reading about narco-tours in Medellin, Colombia:

> "I was a little bit torn whether to do the Pablo Escobar trip as we had read that a lot of local people want to try to forget about this period." (Review 430).

> "Firstly, before writing this review I had researched the 2 different Escobar tours in Medellin and their reviews too" (Review 78).

> "I had read previous reviews so I was a little sceptical about this tour. However for people who want to learn about the real impact Escobar had on Colombians this is an excellent investment of your time and money." (Review 32).

Due to the local people desire to forget this sad and bloody part of the past, many tourists felt "a bit torn" to travel to Colombia. For many years, Colombians have been associated with drug dealers and their international image was of a country of violence. Hence, this had contributed to the development of dark tourism in the area. Some tourists have stated that tour guides explained why locals want to forget about this past: "Like Paula said, this part of Colombia's history is very recent and the scars of the people are still very much open" (Review 103). Because it represents the recent history of Colombia, people that went through it still live to this day and it is painful to be remembered of such tragedy.

However, with this information spreading on social media, people are getting more curious about Colombia's history. By traveling to Colombia and participating in a narco-tour after reading the reviews, their perception of Colombia changed: "Reading all the reviews I was a bit skeptical, however after going on the tour I can say that the reviews do not do it justice." (Review 276), "I knew going into the tour that it was going to be good. I'd seen lot of

reviews and vlogs about the tour but I didn't expect it to be so engaging, informative, respectful, and even entertaining" (Review 268). The previous reviews are relevant because they highlight the discrepancy between tourist's real-life experiences and how Colombian society is represented online or in movies.

Therefore, as previously mentioned in the theoretical framework, dark tourism can become positive and serves as a good way of learning about the history of a destination (Kang, Scott, Lee and Ballantyne, 2012). Also, an important part of the narco-tours worth mentioning is that the tours telling the story of Colombia are locals who went through the dangerous period. Tour guides can influence positively or negatively the experience tourists have during the tours.

4.2. Opinions about the tour guides

If the previous results explained how (social) media influences people's traveling decisions, next we will develop how tourists perceived the destination after interacting with the tour guides. Tour guides act as ambassadors of the country and are also in charge for the destination image formation through services provided and interaction with tourists (Ap & Wong, 2001).

This section aims to summarize the most important aspects from the reviews about traveler's experience with the tour guides leading narco-tours. The key themes are: positive, evaluation of guides, disappointment and Pablo Escobar effects on the guides.

4.2.1. Positive

For two out of the three tour agencies, the reviews on TripAdvisor about the tour guides were mostly positive. For "Real City Tours the Walking Tour", tourists' reviews showed that their tour guides have an open mind perspective when discussing about the difficult subject of Pablo Escobar and their history. Besides the good knowledge of their history, tourists said that "Hernan is a well informed guide and frankly tells the whole story of region with aspects of geographical, political, social etc. details." (Review 325). Further, reviews also mentioned the open mind of "Real City Tours the Walking Tour's" tour guides such as: "The guide Julio was such an open minded and funny person!" (Review 398).

Another characteristic of the tour guides which tourists appreciated was the care taken by the guides to remember their names in a short period of time. The same tour agency had the majority of the reviews mentioning this characteristic.

> "Juan took special care to learn our names, identify our backgrounds and to portray a balanced look at his city." (Review 129).

> "He impressed many of us by memorizing all of our names and where we were from!" (Review 131).

> "He engaged with each of us during the tour and remembered all of our names" (Review 273).

> "We had a tour through the centre of Medellin with a local guide called Monsa She was awesome (she learned all our names very quickly!), she always tried to present the reality - the good and the bad - so we could take our own conclusions. At the same time she was really passionate and the whole experience was a lot of fun" (Review 393).

Based on the reviews, tourists were impressed by how fast the tour guides memorized their names and involved them as much as possible in the tour to make it more personalized. This finding correlates with Buhalis and Law (2008) study which discuss personalized travel packages based on tourist's lifestyle and making them feel part of the culture. Tourists that visited Colombia are history enthusiasts wishing to learn more about the country and Medellin. Another characteristic of the tour guides which tourists enjoyed was the tour guide openness of sharing personal stories.

Due to the fact that most of the tour guides are locals and the history is quite recent, they survived through that dark period. Tourists were pleased to hear their personal stories which otherwise they would not find anywhere else: "I loved his analogies and personal stories throughout the tour!" (Review 131), "Our tour guide, Juan, mixed compelling historical stories with personal stories, insights, tidbits from his own life as a Colombian who's lived in the United States before" (Review 256), "He was honest about politics and sentiments in the

region and shared some personal stories as well as the real history" (Review 267), "He also added some fascinating personal stories and analogies along the way" (Review 287), "He tells honest and personal stories to let you understand more about Colombia and its history and transformation" (Review 289).

Although, tour guides incorporated personal stories and points of view into the tour discussions, tourists believed that the guides told the truth. People appreciated the honesty of the tour guides, even though the history is dark, very sensitive and subjects like corruption of the government surfaced.

> "The guides for this trip are enthusiastic and passionate about their city. They give a very thorough and honest history of the region, and can give lots of tips about where to go and what to do during your trip" (Review 290).

> "Juan was a wonderful guide - his account of Medellin history, its transformation and the present was really honest and personal" (Review 295).

> "He was honest and humbling, and he gives you insights about the real life, the real facts about Medellin and Colombia. Especially his honest and reflected thoughts about the "Colombian way of happiness" are touching and eye opening" (Review 301).

> "Our guide was very passionate about telling the truth, didn't sugar coat anything which was refreshing. I think Columbia is a gorgeous country and hope in time that healing might start but have the impression it is still too soon for that for most people. And the corruption still continues today." (Review 74).

In addition to the enthusiasm and passion of the tour guides of telling stories and presenting the history, tourists also noticed the love of the guides for their city. For example, Hernan from Real City Tours the Walking Tours, "Hernan clearly cares about his city and his country and makes tourists feel very welcome." (Review 156). Or Manuel from Medellin City Services "he was an excellent tour guide, polite, courteous with great English and it is clear

that he adores his city so this is way more than just a job to him." (Review 597). Tour guides made the tourists feel welcomed and people left with a good feeling about their guides.

4.2.2. Disappointment

Out of the three tour agencies analyzed on TripAdvisor, "Tour Pablo Escobar by PaisaRoad" had the most negative reviews regarding their tour guide. Most of the tourists expressed their discontent with how negative the guide Paula from PaisaRoad was towards Colombia and their future:

> "Like many other reviewers have mentioned, the guide Paula is extremely negative about Colombia and provides a very depressing view of the country and the way it is today. I understand being negative about the 80's and 90's but her sarcastic, very incorrect criticisms of the way that Colombia is today were unneeded. She went on rants about how it's impossible to trust police because they're all corrupt, how women have no rights, how Colombians are dark, disturbed people, and how manufacturing has ruined the country etc.
> She even went as far as complaining about how women in Colombia only got the right to vote in 1954!!! Not only was she negative, she cursed way more than is necessary to get a point across." (Review 66).

People who took part in the narco-tour organized by PaisaRoad, also wrote that they felt as if the tour guide was blaming them for the drugs industry growth in Colombia, "I know Columbia has its problems but tourist are not to blame as a whole" (Review 62) and "We would reccommend people do this tour if you want a less westernised view on colombia. regarding Paula, she is a passionate and enthusiastic young Colombian who is proud of her country and wants the rest oc the world to start remembering it for its beauty rather than its dark and violent past which is completely understandable (especially considering how ignorant some tourists are), however towards the end there was a small part where I felt as if I was being blamed for the Spanish invasion and for contributing to the worldwide cocaine demand." (Review 108) or "However you have to sit through 3.5hrs of reasons why 'you people' (ie us fee paying tourists keeping the sarcastic and bitter Paula in a job) are to blame

for increasing the demand of cocaine worldwide, oh and for the Spanish invasion 500 years ago" (Review 113).

However, even if this guide was perceived negatively by the tourists because of the anger towards tourists, it did not influence people's perception about Colombia. With reference to the previous statement, tourists said that "(…)I didn't pay good money to sit in a van and be force fed a political agenda in a beautiful country. Viva la Colombia." (Review 61) and "It's pretty darn impressive. I have found Colombia to be a vibrate country working towards a new future." (Review 72) or "(…) But don't let it stop you from visiting as there is so much more to Columbia to see and it's a beautiful place!" (Review 74).

Tourists still believed Colombia is a beautiful country that deserves to be visited. In order to have a pleasant experience, tourists also give advice to future travelers to avoid this company if they would like to take part in a narco-tours "our guide wanted to know the price of cocaine in our countries and when advised by the group she stated Colombia does not see enough of the money, although she had spent the previous time moaning constantly about everything cocaine related. (Now she wanted more money for it?) she was hypocritical which overall made this a pretty poor tour, worth avoiding!" (Review 94). Together with the positive and disappointment themes discovered in the reviews, there was also a pattern which showed that tourists evaluated the tour guides.

4.2.3. Evaluation of the tour guides

Tour guides are the most representative part of the tourism industry for the destination chosen by tourists. Their actions play a key role in customer's satisfaction and brand image, along with the destination image formation (Bowie & Chang, 2005; Zhang & Chow, 2004). An inadequate tour guide can damage tourists' experience (Lopez, 1980) and affect negatively the image of the destination (Ap & Wong, 2001).

Relating to the theory, tourist's satisfaction who took part in a narco-tour in Medellin is strongly related with the tour guide. As previously stated in the "Disappointment" section, tourists were unhappy with one of the tour guides from Tour Pablo Escobar by PaisaRoad. Besides their disappointment, they evaluated their guide as follows:

"I couldn't really enjoy it because our guide (Paola) had a really weird and annoying manner of speaking. She kept making faces while telling us the story and was being overly sarcastic. It was quite unpleasant to watch her speak." (Review 25)

"The guides attitude was disappointing. They say they give you the good and the bad but her personal issues clearly came through in her commentary. I think she may have been doing it for too long." (Review 35).

Although, for some tourists the guide Paola was considered rude or negative, other tourists saw her in a different way and even gave some possible explanations for her behavior: "Coming from the north of ireland and growing up in the troubles i could relate to a lot of what Paula said. and even though people say in the reviews that its intense/depressing yes some of it is because that is the history of medellin. and that is the life and surroundings that shaped Paula and i found this to be hugely intriguing and interesting and made me warm to her a lot." (Review 42). Therefore, based on tourists' previous experiences, they could empathize with the guide and understand her behavior.

Nevertheless, there were also a couple of tour guides at the same tour agency which some tourists enjoyed listening to, such as "Daniel, who spoke very good English" and "I recieved great personalized service for this tour! Thanks Daniel!!!" (Review 448). Travelers also evaluated positively the second tour guide: "Nico was a great tour guide, He was very informational and personable" (Review 4). Another tourist said that "our guide Nicolas knew a lot and was confident in his delivery as well as his management of the group and he took time to answer individual questions" (Review 12). According to the tourists who took part in the narco-tour organized by PaisaRoad agency, the last tour guides made their narco-tour experience better and helped them understand the history of Colombia: "Really informative learning about Escobar and the way in which he shaped Columbia's history." (Review 44). Due to the fact that all the tour guides lived through the period of Pablo Escobar and most the stories and history revolves around him; it was inevitable to avoid the effects of Pablo Escobar over tour guides.

4.2.4. Pablo Escobar effects on the guides

Many of the tour guides that provided tourists with information about Pablo Escobar and the drugs war during narco-tours, were also survivors of that period. Although, the reviews were written by customers and not tour guides, tourists shared insights from what the tour guides told them while visiting the most important drugs war landmarks in Medellin. As Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Lee and Tussyadiah (2011) mention, sharing past experiences is a key element in tourism sales. However, according to traveler's reviews, for some tour guides it was difficult to share the stories: "Secondly, and it was obvious by her emotional state that she was affected by the troubles." (Review 70), nevertheless their emotional state did not stop them from telling the stories. The main reason for this is that Colombians believe that by sharing events which affected their past, will help avoid the same mistakes in the future. For example, as one reviewer explained: "These are lessons we all must learn; hiding from your past is no way to build upon your future" (Review 599).

Also, tourists enjoyed learning and having conversations about the repercussions of Pablo Escobar over the country and its people, as one tourist said, "It came with an ongoing interesting conversation on the morality behind Pablo and the lasting impact his legacy has left on Medellin and Colombia as a whole." (Review 2). Another key aspect which tourists appreciated was that although, the tour guides were affected by Pablo Escobar actions, most of them were still unbiased when telling the story.

> "One of the best walking tours I've been on, our guide, maribelle was fantastic - great English, great passion, funny, unbiased information and a citizen born and raised in Medellin giving a first hand account of the amazing transformation of the city." (Review 240).

> "Does not glorify Escobar and tries to provide a balanced view of this turbulent time in Medellin." (Review 11).

> "His reflections on the past and current politics were very informative and unbiased." (Review 218).

These reviews re-assure future tourists, that Colombia and Medellin are trying to change for the better, "although the history of Pablo Escobar is too fresh for the people of Medellin, I would suggest this tour. It's part of the city's history." (Review 591).

4.3. Narco-tours

This section will explore one of the center themes of this study, which is narco-tours. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, due to this part of the history missing from history lessons in schools or public institutions, other media outlets such as movie studios and online forums have started to present it to the world. First, media outlets such as movie studios and online forums have started to discuss it, after that private tour agencies started selling narco-tours focusing on Pablo Escobar (Naef, 2018). The same author mentions that this publicization of narco-tourism has brought millions of tourists to Colombia and especially Medellin. The sub-themes of the overarching theme "Narco-tours" were identified as follows: skepticism, morality, reviewers' perception about narco-heritage, emotions and educational importance.

4.3.1. Skepticism

In the chapter of (Social) Media as Source of Information, skepticism towards narco-tours was briefly tackled. Therefore, in this sub-section skepticism will be further detailed. According to a high number of tourists, when they first read reviews about narco-tours, they were skeptical about visiting Columbia to learn more about Pablo Escobar and take part in a narco-tour. The reason behind people's skepticism about narco-tours is also based on one reviewer who was part of a narco-tour, "(…) We were dubious about doing a tour as we didn't want to do anything that glorified Senor Escobar. (…)" (Review 458).

For the majority of the reviews which mentioned skepticism, the main reason of it was based on the readings people have done online regarding Pablo Escobar and the tragedies that the drug industry has left behind in Colombia. Also, tourists were very careful not to offend the locals by remembering those times or the name of the drug lord.

> "(…) I was a little bit torn whether to do the Pablo Escobar trip as we had read
> that a lot of local people want to try to forget about this period. (…) The tour

was very interesting and in no way glorified Escobar or his deeds. (...)" (Review 430).

Although, the history is fairly recent and people are still sensitive to talk about it, tourists acknowledged that tour guides enjoy answering people curiosities about that time. The reason for this is to create awareness in order to avoid similar events in the future as "these are lessons we all must learn; hiding from your past is no way to build upon your future" (Review 599).

4.3.2. Morality

Based on the reviews, when people think about taking part in a narco-tour it also raises questions about morality. Theoretical framework stated that narco-tours are part of what is known as dark tourism. Dark tourism means visiting heritage or places which were part of tragic events in the past. Studies by Ashworth & Hartmann (2005), Sharpley & Stone (2009), and Lennon & Foley (2000) have discussed the morality and ethical significance of visiting places associated with death and genocides. The majority of places associated with genocide in Medellin are public institutions, such as the Palace of Justice or "La Catedral", the former prison of Pablo Escobar. Although, these places are associated with genocides caused by the drug cartels, more representative death sites are cemeteries and resting places, for example the grave of Pablo Escobar which is visited by millions of tourists every year.

Despite the fact that tourists have become interested in Colombia's history because of the movies produced at Hollywood, they still took the matter of morality online before visiting the places shown in movies or photos online. Tourists have stated in the reviews online, that during narco-tours, they have addressed how ethical it is to visit these places: "Narco tours are a bit controversial in Medellin as Escobar is seen as a mass murdering psychopath who dragged Colombias name through the mud by a large part of the population. This tour however does nothing to glorify the man and is presented in a balanced and ethical fashion." (Review 439).

Hollywood movies and online discussions have only increased tourists' desire to visit Colombia, especially places associated with Pablo Escobar in Medellin (Naef, 2018).

In addition to the ethical discussion regarding visiting these dark places, tourists also brought briefly into attention the morality behind Pablo Escobar actions.

> "It came with an ongoing interesting conversation on the morality behind Pablo and the lasting impact his legacy has left on Medellin and Colombia as a whole." (Review 2).

Before the tour starts, tour guides walk through the main rules when visiting these places and how to behave when people from the tour communicate with locals. Guides warn tourists to behave respectfully and to avoid asking questions about Pablo Escobar or ask locals if they have seen TV series such as "Narcos", as these are considered offenses to their society. These facts are backed up by tourists' reviews on TripAdvisor such as: "(…) (by the way don't ask them have they watched it as it's a very offensive thing to say)" (Review 78) or "The guide Julio really made the streets and squares come alive with history. So that you actually understood not just what you saw, but the whole situation in Medellin and Colombia today and why he didn't want to mention the name of Pablo Escobar out in the streets." (Review 162).

Therefore, the sub-theme "Morality", which emerged from the analysis of TripAdvisor reviews highlighted the fact that before traveling to destinations associated with death and genocide, people consider the moral and ethical aspect of touring them. Hence, the results agree with what the studies of Ashworth & Hartmann (2005), Sharpley & Stone (2009), and Lennon & Foley (2000) researched and that is about the ethical significance of taking part in dark tourism and visiting sites such as the grave of Pablo Escobar. Out of respect for the people who survived the tragic events caused by the drug cartels 'war, tourists consider the morality of visiting dark places. This is because travelers' visits and discussions is a reminder of the drugs' war for the people of Colombia.

4.3.3. Reviewers' perception about narco-heritage

This sub-theme will show the results from the analysis regarding tourists' opinions about places associated with the dark history of Colombia. The analysis will discuss about how physical narco-heritage is included in the developing tourism industry in Colombia and how tour guides are trying to change the image of Colombia through narco-tours. Naef (2018)

states that heritage is not restricted to what is defined as historical buildings by institutions such as UNESCO, but also aspects that include the cultural identity of a society. However, the present sub-theme will focus on physical narco-heritage and identified tourists' reasons to visit the sites as an important part of the narco-tours to understand the culture of Colombia better.

As previously mentioned, tourists who decided to visit Medellin, were intrigued by the representation of Pablo Escobar and neighborhoods in media, such as movies and online series, but also books written about the subject. Most of the well-known narco-heritage sites were owned by Pablo Escobar. Some of the most prominent places shown in Hollywood movies were Pablo Escobar's main houses and places related to his drug activities. Therefore, people became interested in seeing and visiting these places themselves in real life.

"We had a brilliant explore of La Catedral, going for the views alone would have been enough but Wilson took us to every corner. For any Narcos fan it's brilliant to see but this isn't a tour to celebrate the show." (Review 402).

"Sites he took us included.
- where Pablo was killed
- the building where Pablo was attacked after his son's communion
- Pablo's burial site
- Pablo's prison mansion (La Catedral) and here we learned the stories of how we escaped" (Review 405).

"(…) We were taken around several of the buildings that he and his henchmen/family occupied around Bogota and were told what happened there. It was hard to believe that such terrible things had happened just where we were standing all those years ago. (…)" (Review 75).

"We visited the barrio escobar, el cathedral (don't look original anymore), the escobar museum, the cemetary, the comuna13 and the building „Monaco" (we were the last tour to see this building, it was demolished today)." (Review 408).

By visiting these places in real life, tourists got a sense of the magnitude of the tragedies, as well as understanding the locals and their suffering better, as one of the reviewers said: "It added a lot to my understanding of this country and the people." (Review 71). Hence, the analysis of the data set is in accordance with the study of Ashworth (2012), which talks about the importance of heritage to a tourism destination. Although, narco-tours are based on a character such as Pablo Escobar and the tragic events that occurred between 1980 and 1990, physical narco-heritage is considered part of the recent history which impacts the current generation. This relatively new type of tourism is embraced by Colombians due to the jobs it creates.

4.3.4. Emotions

As per Dann (1998) theory, tourists have various reasons to travel to different destinations in order to take part in dark tourism. Because of the tragedies occurred in Medellin, Colombia, tourists expressed different emotional states while visiting the narco-heritage in Medellin. As a result of the tour guides' explanations while touring the sites, travelers felt the story "powerful".

The different emotions people had while visiting the dark sites, allowed them to understand the history better.

> "The tour was awesome, unhurried, and every question was answered. I now have mixed feelings about Escobar. He was a bad guy, we all know that. As a matter of fact,our guide Carlos may have easily fell victim to his killings...but this guy was also loved by those who had nothing but the shirts on their backs. What a great tour…" (Review 77).

> "Seeing Escobars buildings, place of death and grave plus learning about his childhood through to his drug lord era was fascinating and imformative, as was the route the bus took" (Review 108).

> "Whether you are a fan of Narcos, familiar with the history of Pablo Escobar, or just interested in learning more about the impact of his actions within the

city - this tour is a must do in Medellin! We were picked up by Carlos, who had formerly been a cop during Pablo Escobar's time, from our apartment, and from the moment we closed the car doors he began sharing with us both the history of Pablo Escobar's life and how it intersected with his own. We were able to visit Escobar's house, prison, and cemetery, but the truly interesting information was how Escobar's actions had impacted Carlos's life. (Review 573).

"The sightseeing portion of this tour is interesting, but the story that goes with it is way more powerful" (Review 99).

However, there were also tourists who did not experience any sort of emotions at the sight of the places, as one tourist said: "The places are what they are, don't expect much special about them!" (Review 591). But, the reviewer continued explaining that what made the tour interesting was that, "the tour is much more: all places are situated around Medellin, so you get a very nice view over the city and you'll go to places that you wouldn't see as a tourist. Personally I liked the visit to El Cathedral: a 15 minute one way road up to the hills of Medellin." (Review 591).

Moreover, while visiting the sites, what tourists enjoyed even more were the stories tour guides told them in relation with the places: "We viewed all the major sites, including Pablo's grave, the Monaco building, la Manuela and climbed el peñol. (…) For instance at Pablo's grave site he shared a personal story about how his goal was to outlive Escobar, which he was able to do this year even though he was a target all throughout Escobar's rein as a cop and member of the search bloc." (Review 587).

Therefore, the results of this analysis come as reinforcement for what the theory stated in theoretical framework, that the places would only be ruins without the stories behind them. These stories are what drives people to feel different emotions regarding the buildings representing narco-heritage.

4.3.5. Educational importance

Although, the books written about Pablo Escobar and its drug empire or movies and series made about the Medellin cartel provide certain real-life details, they are still made for

commercial purposes showing distorted information. While watching or reading about the drug lords' life, people from countries such as the European countries or the U.S.A., became interested to learn more about Colombia's history, including Pablo Escobar. As described in the reviews, it does not only involve traveling to that destination and visiting the main tourism attractions to learn about a society, but also interacting with locals, their culture and food at an individual level: "Visiting another country isn't just about the sites, monuments, and buildings.. It's about the people. It's about the culture. It's about the stories that bind a people to their city and country." (Review 256).

Due to the interactivity with the locals, hearing their stories and visiting the narco-heritage sites, tourists could discuss their experience online on TripAdvisor. Tourists wrote in the reviews that the stories they heard about one of the darkest periods in Colombia's history, changed their perspective about the country. The tour also provided them with real explanations and events that helped them understand better Colombia and its people:

"It not only was interesting to see the former drug cartel related places in Medellin. (…) It added a lot to my understanding of this country and the people." (Review 71).

"It is really interesting to hear from the locals about life at that time as it is a topic that many paisas (Medellin locals) do not wish to talk about." (Review 592).

"We went on the "advanced medellin & escobar tour" which turned out to be one of the most intense and educative days of our 3months-trip. it is a private full-day tour showing the city's past and present in its many, controversial facets and it was worth every penny! here is why: Escobar tours in general: a lot of Colombians hate talking about him and don't approve of the Escobar themed tours, but I see it as an opportunity to educate tourists (instead of letting them believe everything they watch on netflix is true). So to me it's a must-do tour that will help you understand nowadays Colombia better.(…)" (Review 411).

Tourists also gave reasoning why these tours should continue to be a part of Colombia's tourism: "He was also very transparent about the dilemma the Colombian people face with this part of their history and that the local government wants to abolish these kinds of tours. I feel that would be a very bad decision. These kinds of tours aren't about glorifying the lifestyle of drug dealers, they are about telling a part of history which needs to be told." (Review 559). Due to this missing part of history from public institutions (Cabañas, 2012), private tourism institutions organize narco-tours to educate people about one of the most tragic periods in Colombia's history.

Nevertheless, besides telling the general history, tour guides also try to be unbiased when discussing about Pablo Escobar. According to tourists' reviews, tour guides told both sides of Pablo Escobar, helping them to understand locals perspective towards him: "We got to know about the history of Pablo AND also got to learn unique stories about his personality and interactions with people so we could understand why he was hated AND loved by the people!" (Review 405), "This tour however does nothing to glorify the man and is presented in a balanced and ethical fashion" (Review 439). Tour guides also explained that this activity is not to glorify him, but to make tourists understand what it was like for locals to live through that period of time: "But once Silvio arrived he quickly ensured us it wasn't a celebration of Pablos profound influence he had, but a realisation what it was like for the innocent people of Medellin" (Review 555).

By taking part in the narco-tours, tourists empathized with locals by stating things such as: "After taking this tour I have a fresh perspective and much deeper understanding of the recent history of the city and struggle some communities have undergone in order for the transformation to occur." (Review 489) and that "The tour has a very hopeful meaning for Medellin, but always remembers the bloody times and happenings in the past, that must not be forgotten." (Review 169).

4.4. Society Changes

The tragic events that happened in Colombia between 1980 and 1990 have marked the lives of Colombians and it still affects them to this day. The events did not only change the quality of their lives, but also how Colombia is seen internationally in foreign countries such as the European countries and U.S.A. This section aims to get insight into how the country

and specific areas in Medellin have changed and how tourists perceive these places nowadays.

Therefore, the key themes that were discovered and aim to add knowledge to the current theory are: positive changes of Medellin and Colombia, representation of renowned areas of Medellin and safety.

4.4.1. Positive Changes of Medellin and Colombia

According to tourists, Colombia and especially Medellin have positively changed in the last years. Although there are still issues in the Colombian society, such as drugs and consequences from government activities, tourists experience was never at risk as a result of that. Tourists who visited Medellin could not stress enough things like:

> "I can't imagine what Medellin was like in those days, but what I see now is a city that is working hard to make positive changes. I have ridden on Medellin's handicapped accessible Metro. I see bike lanes and recycle receptacles. It's pretty darn impressive. I have found Colombia to be a vibrate country working towards a new future." (Review 72).

According to tourists' reviews, the efforts of the government together with locals is what impacted positively the tourists experience. Besides the story of Pablo Escobar, which almost everyone that visited Colombia knows, tourists acknowledge that " (…) Medellin has SO much to offer to visitors beyond the legacy of a regrettably violent history. If you have the opportunity to visit Medellin, visit the public spaces, the metrocable, any parque biblioteca, the escaleras electricas and enjoy Medellin's greatest asset, the friendliest people on earth." (Review 84) and "(…) you learn about the new Medellin, the positive changes all around the city etc." (Review 411). One of the most recurrent patterns about Medellin is people's hope regarding their future:

> "Very interesting city with its unique history which Camilo was able to convey to us the resilience of the people and their commitment to look forward" (Review 157).

"Pablo did an awesome job of describing the transformation from the dark years of the drug cartels to the progressive city of today" (Review 168).

"Definitely the dark days in Medellin, and you can see how they pass those days and have now bright days!" (Review 403).

Not only because of the positive changes Medellin has gone through, but also because of the great time spent in Medellin, tourists took the liberty of giving people advices such as: "Do it if you want to emerge a more informed traveler, and truly understand the tragedy, healing and rejuvenation that is now characteristic of Medellin and its residents. It was a real emotional roller-coaster ride for everyone in my group but, made us fall in love with the city and vow to come back in a couple years." (Review 255).

As a result of the positive changes the country and the city of Medellin have gone through, tourists enjoyed their time at the destination and wish to come back. As previously discussed in the theoretical chapter, although a destination such as Colombia is known for dark tourism and tragedies, these reviews prove that it is not necessary to remain in people's memory as a dangerous or dark destination to travel to.

4.4.2. Representation of renowned areas of Medellin

Due the series "Narcos" produced by Netflix, which in its first two seasons focuses on Pablo Escobar and the drug cartel activities in Medellin, many areas across the city have become famous. Therefore, people from around the world have wanted to visit the sites seen in the series. Besides Pablo Escobar houses and properties, public spaces, such as neighborhoods, have also become famous. One of the renowned neighborhoods in Medellin is Comuna 13. Although this part of Medellin has changed greatly over the years, there are some tourists that feel as if "My only regret is that they did not warn us enough about Comuna 13 (I felt I was in a shopping mall with a very annoying touristy touch, and felt deceived by a fake success story that completely overshadows the true story of the people living in other Comunas)." (Review 194).

However, according to the majority of tourists, one the most dangerous places in Medellin known because of gang activities, it has now transformed into one of the most prosperous parts of the city. The previous statement is supported by traveler's reviews, such as:

"As an aside - I wondered if doing this AND the Communa 13 walking tour was worth it. We did both, and they were absolutely both different and worthwhile! This one was far more informative of the city's history and culture and growth and took you through the main city center. Communa 13 was more centered around the art and experience of the cable cars and escalators in uplifting a social strata of society." (Review 255).

"I had a really nice time going around comuna 13, using the metrocable, going through tranvia ayacucho, and gaining knowledge just talking and asking Johan about Medellin" (Review 432).

"Also part of the tour is Comuna 13 which is a part of Medellin plagued by violence but now is a thriving district that has recovered from it's horrid past." (Review 498).

"(…)I felt like I was at home as we walked through Comuna 13. Medellin is a beautiful city with beautiful people!!!" (Review 483).

"This was an incredible tour of two neighborhoods, Moravia and Comuna 13 used to be among the most dangerous in Medellín, maybe the world, and are now at the forefront of its transformation" (Review 534).

Another part of Comuna 13 which made tourists experience in the city even better was the street art they could find there: "Later on we also went to the comuna 13, a neighbourhood full of stunning street art!" (Review 398). One tourist pointed out that their favorite place in the city was the graffiti in Comuna 13: "My personal favourite was the Comuna 13, graffiti art. It shows a great side of the city that blew me away" (Review 497).

One of the tourists, attributed the positive changes and rejuvenation of the city to education and that "We visited Comuna 13 which is the best example that our society can improve 100% with education and art" (Review 572). This type of information, provided by tourists online, changes Colombia's international image from a dangerous country into a positive and changed society. Due to the great improvements made to this neighborhood, tourists give their acknowledgements to the governments' efforts as well: "The new found tourism (along with the metro, metrocable, escalators, govt investments, etc) are lifting this community." (Review 201).

The people who visited Comuna 13 raise awareness also of what the improvements mean for the community: "To just see the escalators is not all that sexy. But to know that many have classrooms built into them where they offer free classes in english, business, mathematics, etc is cool. The transformation that they brought has to do with tying a historically isolated and crime ridden community to the greater population of Medellin and the sense of pride it has brought to the community." (Review 202).

4.4.3. Safety

Along with the decision to visit a destination known worldwide for violence, comes also the question of safety. As previously discussed, before purchasing the trip to Colombia, tourists were skeptical about how safe it is to visit this tourism destination:

> "I heard stories of comúna 13 and was skeptical of going. But once I was there. IT WAS BEAUTIFUL. The art work, the view, the residents were humble. They may be stuck in the past, but you definitely can see before and after in front of your eyes" (Review 423).

> "WOW!! I have to admit we were somewhat skeptical about spending a few days in Medellin, but boy were we wrong." (Review 428).

However, after visiting Colombia and Medellin, tourists experienced a relatively safe destination to visit. The reviewers wrote the following statement about the safety in

Medellin: "Felt safe majority of the time for a major city." (Review 588) and "they treated us really nice and I felt always safe" (Review 541).

Travelers also wrote that even though, most places are safe to visit in the city, there are still unsafe destinations within Medellin to visit alone: "It felt like an in depth tour; and I felt very safe. There is a lot to see in Medellin but it's not necessarily safe to wander around on your own (…)" (Review 243). This is especially relevant for solo travelers who visit various destinations by themselves. In the reviews, tourists advised people who travel alone to book a tour in order to feel safe and also meet people: "(…) Take the tour if you are travelling alone, or with a group of two as not only do you feel safer but it is also a great way to meet other people." (Review 248), "(…) I would like to recommend Medellin as well for those who still think it is a unsafe place. It is such a beautiful city with new development in technology and innovation. (…)" (Review 496).

In order to understand the culture and get along with the locals, travelers also advised to "(…) please smile and say hello to the locals who are just as interested in you as you are in them." (Review 219), advising future tourists to understand that the new-found tourism in Colombia is as new for the locals as it is for them. Overall, according to the reviews these society changes impacted tourists positively and convinced them to see more of the country.

4.5. Historical information

Since the research is based on tourists' perception about Colombia after taking part in dark tourism activities, such as narco-tours, historical information is one of the most prominent themes found in the analysis. Because of the large amount of information about Colombia's history, many tourists do not know what to think about the country or they likely form the wrong idea because of Hollywood movies. The portrayal of important people in the history of Colombia, such as Pablo Escobar, is influenced by subjectivity or dramatic purposes (Naef, 2018).

This section aims to add knowledge to the present research by presenting the results of the analysis tackling the topic of historical information from the locals' perspective. Hence, the key sub theme which was discovered to add knowledge about the topic is called search bloc.

4.5.1. Search Bloc

The search bloc was a police task force founded in Medellin to haunt and capture Pablo Escobar. As part of the third tourism agency was one of the tour guides which was a former police officer during Pablo Escobar era. He was also part of the search bloc and among the last surviving police officers. According to the reviews, he survived the dangerous period because "Carlos, like all cops then, was in constant danger of being killed and miraculously escaped it three times" (Review 528) and "(…) he lived in the USA for a number of years." (Review 422). Tourists' decision to take part in the narco-tour led by the former police officer was based on his three miraculous escapes and travelers recall that "(…) It was utterly fascinating to hear his stories, and he was friendly and kind, a really great guy." (Review 528). Tourists' reviews revealed that Carlos's past and experience are the reasons that convinced them to purchase the narco-tour travel package in Medellin: "Hearing it straight from the mouth of someone who was in the thick of it made it one of my best travel experiences ever." (Review 528).

People who interacted and listened to the guide Carlos wrote that the information given by him was informative and he did not glorify Pablo Escobar:

> "Having his personal takes on what happen in Medellin at that time as he was a policeman there, was incredibly informative." (Review 581).

> "(…)The highlight of this tour was Carlos. He has such a huge knowledge and he'll give you so many insights without glorifying Pablo. It gave me chills when he told all those brutal storys. (…)" (Review 408).

> "(…) Our truly amazing guide, Carlos, a former police officer, gave us a deep insight in the history of the city and of Pablo Escobars life. We were truly touched! (…)" (Review 419).

> "(…) It wasn't just a sightseeing tour of a history lesson but the personal story of Carlos, an ex cop who survived the violence (…)" (Review 424).

> "(…) To go on the tour and see the sights was one thing but to listen to the first

hand experience to and to be taken back to those times who lived and breathed the experience is something my family and I will never forget. The tour was professional, informative and I highly recommend it. (…)" (Review 429).

"(…) Carlos was a part of the Search Bloc and answered all questions he could and if he didn't know the answer he wouldn't make up a lie. (…)" (Review 431).

"(…) He doesn't glorify Escobar at all, it's more of an education." (Review 442).

As read in the reviews, people appreciated his honesty and respected him for the violence he endured. Thus, making tourists see Colombia and Medellin differently compared to how the movies and series portray the Colombian society: "The thing, though, that set this tour apart was our tour guide, Carlos. Carlos, a former policeman during the Escobar-era was able to give unparalleled insight as to what it was like to live and serve during those times. He is one of 3 policemen from his academy class of 130 that is still alive! So surreal and humbling. (…)" (Review 503) and "Comuna 13 is not something that was even on my list of things to see and definitely a highlight of my tour and trip. Carlos was exceptional, hearing his stories and his point of view was eye opening and made the trip that much better." (Review 536).

Also, tourists have made it clear this time as well that: "(…) Narco tours are a bit controversial in Medellin as Escobar is seen as a mass murdering psychopath who dragged Colombians name through the mud by a large part of the population. This tour however does nothing to glorify the man and is presented in a balanced and ethical fashion (…)" (Review 439). People like the guide Carlos are what give importance to narco-heritage, the stories and change the image of Colombia in the eyes of tourists originally from foreign countries.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine how user-generated content defines the destination image of a country known for dark tourism. In order to provide an answer to the research question, *how does the portrayal in social media of "negative tourist assets" affects the image of Countries – specifically, how does the portrayal of drug tourism in social media affects the image of Colombia among foreign tourists?*, 600 TripAdvisor reviews on narco-tours experiences in Medellin, Colombia were analyzed. The rationale behind choosing TripAdvisor reviews for this study, is that based on the theory, nowadays the website is one of the main sources of information regarding traveling.

The sampling method chosen for this study was purposive sampling and the chosen reviews targeted foreign travelers. Due to how the situation in countries like Colombia is portrayed by Hollywood movies, TV series and books, the information about these destinations, in this case Colombia, arrives distorted.

In accordance with the study of Bowman and Pezzullo (2010), by investigating and creating awareness around dark tourism destinations it creates a support system for the people affected by the tragedies, as in the example of Colombia when corruption is leading to a war between the drug cartels, government and guerrillas. This research shows how dark tourism can influence positively the image of a destination through UGC. It explores tourists' opinions about how dark tourism influences the tourism in a country and creates awareness for the tourism destinations. The study of Kang, Scott, Lee and Ballantyne (2012) focused mainly on tourists' psychological implications of visiting dark places and based on the interviews, it concluded that obligation was the most prominent reason to visit the destination. Another outcome of their study was that dark tourism can influence positively the destination.

As opposed with their study, this research investigated how electronic word of mouth (eWOM) affects tourists' perceptions towards a destination. After analyzing the results, the conclusion is that tourist's curiosity to visit Medellin rose after watching Hollywood movies and series showcasing the life of one of the most known character, Pablo Escobar. However, based on the results, after watching series like "Narcos", their next step was to read reviews of other tourists after their visit to Colombia. Due to how the events were portrayed in Hollywood representations, Medellin became known as a dark destination because of drug

activities. Although, both this research and the study of the previous authors used different methods of analysis, one of the common outcomes between the two of them is that dark tourism can influence positively the tourism in the area. Therefore, this study agrees with the study of Kang, Scott, Lee and Ballantyne (2012).

By analyzing TripAdvisor reviews, the results showed that the image of Colombia has positively changed, despite the development of drug tourism focusing on Pablo Escobar. Through electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM) people are helping future tourists understand the Colombian culture better. Although, Colombia is a country known for drug activities and violence, according to the results of the analysis, due to the positive changes brought into the community, more tourists are visiting Colombia to learn more about its troubled past.

Tourism agencies are continuously creating, adding or changing travel packages in order to give tourists a more personalized experience. The outcome from one of the most dangerous periods in Colombia's history resulted in private tourism bodies selling narco-tours in Medellin, telling the story of Pablo Escobar. Although, in various destinations around the world drug tourism is focused on drug consumption, the narco-tours in Medellin focus on educating tourists about Colombia and its drug history. The results of this analysis agree with the study of Naef (2018) that, nowadays tourist's reasons to visit destinations associated with drugs go further than drug consumption. Tourists are curious to learn about places they have seen in TV series or movies, hence drug tourism focusing on visiting places related with drug history is evolving into a flourishing business market.

It is important to mention that any feedback for a product, service or experience has an essential role in the storytelling of travel experiences (Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2008). Therefore, the narration of travel experiences is fundamental in building connections with tourism destinations (Edson Escalas, 2004). An important factor in relation with creating connections among tourists and tourism destinations are tour guides as well. Based on the results of this analysis, tourists expressed their gratitude towards tour guides because by sharing the real history and personal experience, tour guides helped tourists understand the history of Colombia. Even though tourists considered that one of the tour guides has a negative perspective over Colombia and tourists, their image about Colombia has not changed. Due to the positive changes brought to Medellin, such as neighborhoods improvements and safety in the city, tourists still considered Colombia a beautiful country worth visiting.

Based on the results, another factor that convinced people from countries such as the European countries or the U.S.A. to visit Colombia was after watching movies or series on TV or online. The portrayal of Pablo Escobar in the series "Narcos" and of various situations that occurred between 1980 and 1990 are the reasons that convinced tourists to travel to Medellin, Colombia. As previously reported in the results section, tourists came to Colombia with the desire to learn more about that time in Colombia's history, as well as visit the places they have seen in movies in real life.

Therefore, this discovery builds on the existing theory of Anderson (2008), that social and mass media have a high influence over people's travel decisions. Also, the results show the impact eWOM has among people. The analysis also discovered that people were skeptical to visit Colombia after seeing the movies and reading other people's reviews. The reason behind their skepticism was based on the fact that the events were quite recent in Colombia's history. However, by taking part in narco-tours, tourists acknowledged that this part of the history must be told in order to learn from their mistakes. People's perspective changed positively once they had the chance to interact with locals. After this experience, they shared it online in reviews, letting future tourists know that Colombia is a safe destination to travel to.

Another important aspect of the image destination formation is how safe it is to visit. Regarding the image formation of Medellin, safety played an important part in tourists' travel decisions. As a result of the law enforcement efforts to change people's perception of Medellin, tourists felt safe to walk throughout the city. Thus, creating the image of a safe destination to visit.

In addition to safety, another important aspect which people took into consideration was the morality of visiting dark places. Thus, the analysis confirmed the theory of Ashworth & Hartmann (2005), Sharpley & Stone (2009), and Lennon & Foley (2000) that people still raise questions of how moral it is to visit dark tourism sites. The conversation of morality was brought up among tourists and tour guides during the tours as well. From the reviews, people and tour guides consider the tours an educative activity. Due to this missing part of history from public institutions, tourists believe narco-tours represent a good method to learn about Colombia's history through sightseeing.

Through reviews analysis, the results showed that tourists came with respect for the locals and the tragedies they suffered. One of their interests was to learn about the historical

character of Pablo Escobar rather than offend the local people. The high number of reviews on TripAdvisor about narco-tours prove that electronic-word-of-mouth is significantly important for tourists searching for travel information. Nevertheless, the results are in accordance with Naef (2018) study which mentioned that narco-tours have become one of the most popular activities in Medellin.

Also, the results agree with the study of Miguéns, Baggio and Costa (2008), which stated that social media websites and online communication have powerful influence over tourist's travel plans. Despite the curiosity that movies about Pablo Escobar and his illegal activities during 1980 and 1990 instilled in tourists, the reviews showed that people still searched online for feedback from other tourists before booking the trip to Colombia. The recommendations in the form of eWOM, could be used by travel organizations for promotional activities. Because of the powerful influence of social media channels and forum websites, travel marketing departments must understand that word-of-mouth and especially, electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM) still has power over consumers (Anderson, 2008). Furthermore, based on the influence reviews have over tourists' travel decisions, it is advised to use personal reviews for marketing purposes.

The gap between the scientific and social knowledge is quite noticeable when it comes to the portrayal of negative tourist assets in social media and its effects over the image of a destination. While the studies of Robert Fletcher (2011) and Patrick Naef (2018) discuss the developments brought by the government to change the image of Colombia from the perspective of official institutions, the present research focuses on TripAdvisor reviews and confirms previous studies. Online opinion leaders, in this case tourists sharing their experiences on TripAdvisor, provided a detailed image of Colombia, and especially Medellin in the international context. Further, even though the government does not present this part of the history in public institutions, the rise of tourists' demand to take part on narco-tours, have led to international discussions. Therefore, the researcher believes that like in the case of Jeju April 3rd, dark tourism does not define permanently the image of a destination. Rather, it represents a benefic aspect which attracts international attention towards the issues that a society faces.

Examining the research question through analytic and interpretative perspectives, the methodology used was qualitative content analysis. The research question was analyzed and explained by means of thematic analysis. Since dark tourism portrayal is subjective, the

methodology used turned out to be suitable for the present topic that researched how is the portrayal in social media of "negative tourist assets" affecting the image of countries. Additionally, this type of research allowed an in-depth analysis of topics such as narco-tours, historical information, opinions about the tour guides, society changes and (social) media as source of information.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the broad understanding of destination image formation by showcasing how dark tourism can impact positively a tourism destination and how a sample of tourists from foreign countries portray it online through UGC. Although, a number of studies have researched the significance of destination image formation, few had researched the effect of dark tourism over tourism destinations image formation. As well as, how the image of a destination portrayed on social media through UGC influences tourists' perceptions. Moreover, this study correlates two areas of research, which are dark tourism and marketing tool (UGC).

5.1. Limitations and Future research

Due to the qualitative nature of this research, there are some limitations in the research design and theory which must be addressed. It is worth mentioning that the theory chosen by the researcher was done through independent exploration of previous studies on these topics. Hence, it might be possible that by combining other theories can lead to different results.

Next, the limitations concern the research design. Although, this research tried to portray the representation of negative tourism assets in a destination as broadly as possible, it cannot be applicable to all travel destinations. The chosen purposive sampling method is based on specific data that allows the researcher to study the research question in depth (Matthews and Ross, 2010). Therefore, this sampling method could represent a liability to the end results hence, it is only based on the researcher judgement.

Furthermore, a second limitation to this research is choosing only one tourism destination. Further studies could choose to focus on comparing two different tourism destinations with negative tourism assets, in order to prove similarities or differences among their representation online.

Although, the results of this analysis compared with the theoretical framework on the topic resulted in confirming each other, practitioners should consider further research. As this research is limited to online reviews from tourists, further studies must be done in order to understand the advantages and effects of dark tourism over destination image formation through user-generated content. More research is vital to explore traveler's experiences at dark related sites (Hannam & Knox, 2010; Sharpley and Stone, 2011).

Additionally, studies on how tourists' trust is affected by reviews would be a valuable topic to study. Even though there are studies discussing the relation between online conversations and the image formation of a destination (Zhang, Zhao & Xu, 2015; Hochmeister, Gretzel, & Werthner, 2013), there are not enough studies focusing only on online opinion leaders. Online opinion leaders, such as tourists writing reviews on TripAdvisor have the ability to negatively or positively influence the portrayal of a country. This research shows that it is important for future research to analyze the power of online opinion leaders and their influence over the image creation of a tourism destination through eWOM. Further research into user-generated content regarding image destination formation could lead to important and different discoveries regarding image destination formation.

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