

Impacts of Mass Tourism and Communication on the Image of a Destination: The Case of Barcelona

Bachelor Thesis for Obtaining the Degree

Bachelor of Business Administration in

Tourism and Hospitality Management

Submitted to Dr. Bozana Zekan

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Vienna, 31 May 2018

Affidavit

I hereby affirm that this Bachelor's Thesis represents my own written work and that I have used no sources and aids other than those indicated. All passages quoted from publications or paraphrased from these sources are properly cited and attributed.

The thesis was not submitted in the same or in a substantially similar version, not even partially, to another examination board and was not published elsewhere.

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Abstract

Destination image plays an essential role in the tourism industry. Not only can it help destination marketing organizations (DMOs) to attract tourists, but it can also be helpful to tourists in making their holiday destination choice. This thesis not only explains the main aspects of destination image, but also assesses the interrelationship between destination image, mass tourism, and communication, especially in the city of Barcelona. Mass tourism and communication are both crucial topics that can influence the image of a destination. Mass tourism affects many places throughout Europe and can harm the image of a destination drastically. Furthermore, with the rise of technology and the development of various communication channels, positive news, as well as negative, can be shared rapidly, and can therefore influence a destination's image. The aim of this thesis was to find out how mass tourism and communication impact the image of Barcelona and how recent incidents changed people's perception of the city. Moreover, the purpose was to identify why Barcelona is one of the most popular cities in Europe.

Results of this study revealed how mass tourism and communication changed the way tourists see the city as a holiday destination. 77.1% of the respondents of the survey are impacted in the way they think about the city by the effects of mass tourism. Moreover, recent news released on several communication channels influenced the perception of Barcelona of 41% of participants. Almost half of the respondents of the survey have a rather negative or very negative image of the city. The answers to open-ended questions revealed that the main reasons to visit Barcelona are its weather, the architecture, the offer of sights, as well as the city's culinary.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

“Tourism is one of the most important sectors of the international economy” (Ferreira, Rial, & Varela, 2009, p.492). According to Echtner and Ritchie (1991), the rapid growth of the industry has led to numerous obstacles and difficulties in the marketing of a destination. Since the tourism product is intangible and cannot be tried before purchase, tourism marketers often try to analyze and improve a destination’s image, as it is one of the main influencing factors of consumer behavior. The large number of accessible holiday destinations often makes it difficult for consumers to choose the right one for their vacation. Especially in the decision-making process of tourists, the image of a destination plays a significant role concerning their travel motivation (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991).

Destination image has repeatedly been subject of research in the past. However, this thesis will mainly look into the topics of mass tourism and communication and their impact on the image of a destination, as these are very current topics. In the eyes of the researcher, the two mentioned subjects have not received much attention in the literature.

1.2 Aim and Research Questions

As destination image is a vital factor in the marketing process of a destination and is of great importance to tourism marketers and destination marketing organizations (DMOs), it is a crucial topic to be researched. The main aim of the thesis is to look into the topics of destination image, mass tourism and communication and the interrelationship between these factors. Furthermore, another principal aim of the thesis is to cover the topic of tourism in Barcelona. Due to the personal interest of the researcher, this city was chosen as study area. The researcher aims to find out why the city gained such high popularity throughout the last years and if recent incidents in the city have changed people’s opinions about it.

Literature has mostly mentioned the fact that Barcelona is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Europe regarding the number of visitors (ECM Benchmarking

Report, 2017). However, the reasons why Barcelona is visited by such a large volume of tourists have hardly been covered by literature. Therefore, the aim is to discover tourists' motivation of visiting Barcelona as it may help tourism marketers to cope with high numbers of tourists in the future.

Mass tourism is an important topic to address nowadays as the rising number of tourists in specific areas can have severe environmental and social impacts on a destination and its residents (Cócola-Gant, 2015). The high volume of tourists can therefore also hurt the image of the destination.

Furthermore, the topic of communication is of importance due to its massive power nowadays. Several forms of communication in marketing can impact the way people perceive a destination and influence their decision-making, in both positive and negative ways. With the rise of the Internet and online communication channels, communication especially changed destination marketing.

Further research should be done in the fields of mass tourism and communication and its impacts on building a destination's image as it might help DMOs in the marketing process of a destination. The final outcome of this thesis can especially be valuable to Barcelona's DMO, in order to shape its' image and to work on a sustainable future plan of this popular city.

This thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

- Why is Barcelona such a favorable destination among tourists?
- How do mass tourism and communication impact the image of a destination?
- Did recent incidents change the way people perceive Barcelona?

1.3 Outline of the Thesis

The thesis will be outlined as follows:

- Chapter 1: The first chapter of the thesis will include an introduction to the topic as well as the research questions.

- Chapter 2: This chapter will be divided into three parts. First, the topic of destination image will be covered, part two will include the topic of mass tourism, and the last part will talk about communication.
- Chapter 3: The third chapter will cover the background information about tourism in the study area of Barcelona, Spain.
- Chapter 4: This chapter will include the research design of the primary research as well as the development and process of data collection.
- Chapter 5: The fifth chapter will talk about the findings of the study.
- Chapter 6: The last chapter of the thesis will conclude the previously discussed chapters and will talk about whether mass tourism and communication have an impact on the image of Barcelona. Moreover, it includes limitations to this study and recommendations for future research.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Destination Image

The competition between holiday destinations is growing due to a rise in leisure time, the increasing number of accessible destinations, and higher incomes of consumers (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). According to Echtner and Ritchie (1991), tourists are confronted with a more extensive choice of destinations, and this, therefore, can pose a challenge for tourism marketers concerning the assurance of competitive advantage in the international market.

Hunt (1975, as cited in Beerli & Martín, 2004) was one of the first researchers who realized the relation between a destination's image and its tourism success in terms of visitor numbers. A destination with a positive image has a higher chance to be visited by tourists, whereas as a negative association with a destination can lead to a different choice of destination (Woodside & Lysonski, 1989). It can be said that the image of a destination is of great importance to its marketers who want to attract visitors as it affects consumer behavior of tourists and influences their decision-making process (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Not only is the image able to impact the choice before visiting a destination, but it can also affect the evaluation of the experience and therefore the intention of re-visitation in the future (Chen & Tsai, 2007).

2.1.1 Definition

Throughout the last decades, numerous researchers emphasized the importance of the image of a destination. Although the term destination image has been used repeatedly in literature, no universal definition can be found. According to Lawson and Baud-Bovy (1977, as cited in Ferreira, 2011, p.871), destination image is a term for all "objective knowledge, prejudices, imagination and emotional thoughts of an individual or group about a particular location". Assael (1984, as cited in Baloglu & McCleary, 1999, p.871) defined it as "a total perception of a product that is formed by processing information from various sources over time". Echtner and Ritchie (1991) have mentioned several other definitions by researchers such as the most common by Crompton (1979): "the sum of all beliefs, ideas and impressions that

people associate with a destination” (p.7). Hunt (1975, as cited in Echtner & Ritchie, 1991, p.7) defined it as the “perception held by potential visitors about an area”. According to Gartner (1989, as cited in Echtner & Ritchie, 1991, p.7), destination image equals “a complex combination of various products and associated attributes”.

According to San Martín and Rodríguez (2008), the image people have about a destination is mainly subjective because it depends on how they perceive it, relying on word-of-mouth communication. However, destination image is not only about how tourists see the destination, but also about the holistic impression made by the destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991).

According to Echtner and Ritchie (1991), destination image is a construct of functional characteristics referring to measurable elements of a destination such as price, as well as psychological characteristics, relating to the aspects that are intangible such as the atmosphere at a destination. As Jenkins (1999) points out, from a psychological view image is often referred to a visual representation, whereas in marketing, the term concerns attributes and the relation to consumer behavior.

2.1.2 Image Components

2.1.2.1 Cognitive versus Affective Image

Diverse researchers such as Lawson and Baud-Bovy (1977, as cited in Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006) have suggested that two main components form destination image: the cognitive and the affective. The cognitive dimension, or also called perceptual dimension, refers to the importance of attributes of the destination, such as sights and attractions (Ferreira, 2011) and the general knowledge of tourists about a destination’s characteristics (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Stabler (1995, as cited in Ferreira, 2011) suggested that attractions persuade people to visit the destination. As Gartner (1994) states, tourism products are intangible and the image of a destination often relies on perceptions tourists have about it.

On the other hand, the affective aspect concerns emotions that are provoked by a destination, or the attachment to the destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999).

According to Gartner (1994), the affective component plays a role in the selection process of a destination as it concerns the motives a tourist has for visitation. It can be said that both the affective and the cognitive dimension have a significant impact on the total image of a destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999).

2.1.2.2 Organic versus Induced Image

A large number of researchers have studied the formation of a destination's image. According to Gunn (1988, as cited in Pike, 2008), an image is formed on two dimensions: the organic, and the induced. The organic image concerns knowledge about the destination gathered from various sources such as books, school lessons, magazines as well as word-of-mouth stories of friends and relatives who have already visited the place (Gunn, 1997). According to Gunn (1997), the induced image of a destination includes the influence of promotional literature, such as travel brochures, folders, and advertisements. Moreover, Jenkins (1999) stated that the actual experience at the destination results in the modified induced image.

Figure 1 comprehensively illustrates the process of image formation suggested by Gunn's stage theory. In the first and second stage, information from secondary sources is covered, whereas, in the last stages, the personal experience plays a crucial role in the formation of the image (as cited in Jenkins, 1999).

According to Gunn (1972, as cited in Jenkins, 1999), potential visitors, non-visitors, and visitors who have returned to the destination will have different images. Gunn (1972), as well as Gartner (1989), supported the idea that an actual visit shapes the existing image more realistically (as cited in Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

Chon (1992, as cited in Jenkins, 1999) emphasized the relation between the image, the expectation and the personal experience during actual visitation. The results of the studies have shown that a positive image before traveling and a positive experience at the place make tourists evaluate the destination positively, whereas a negative evaluation can be the result of a positive image before visitation and a negative experience at the destination (Chon, 1992, as cited in Jenkins, 1999).

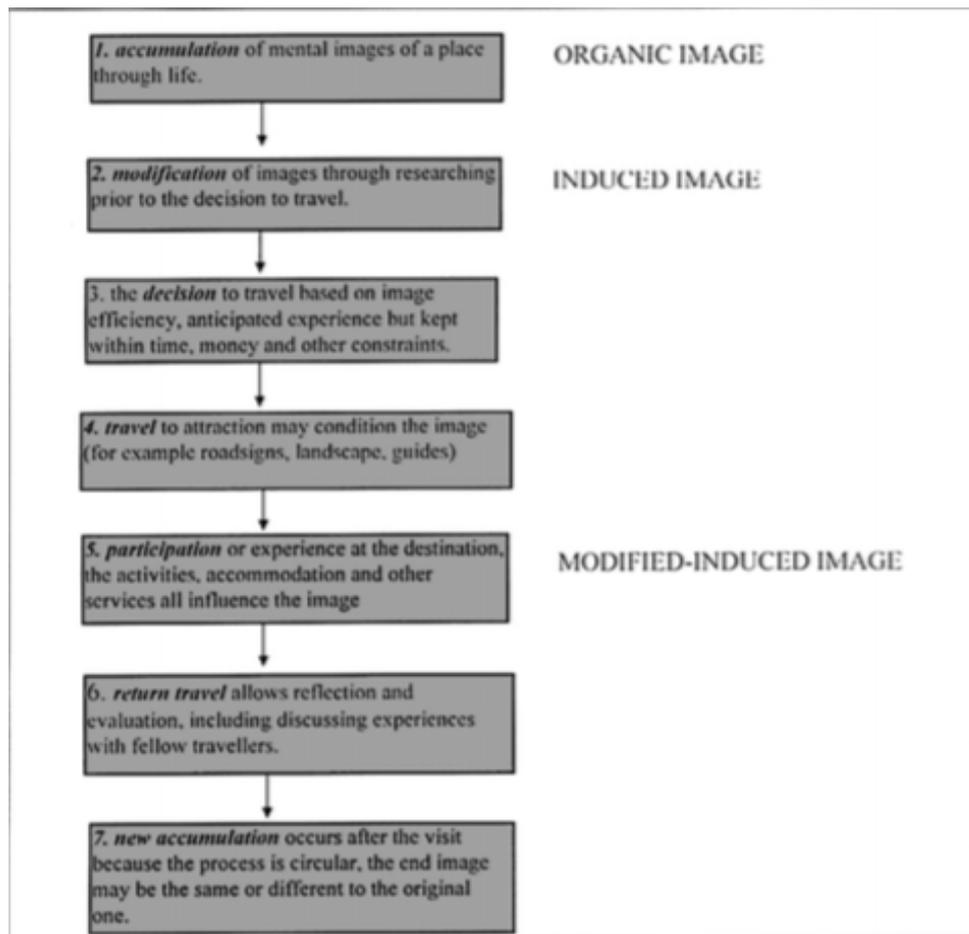


Figure 1. Stage theory of destination image (source: Jenkins, 1999, p.4)

2.1.3 Image Formation

The image of a destination is constructed of several factors. However, the two main forces are stimulus factors and personal factors (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Stimulus factors refer to information gathered from several sources as well as the personal experience, whereas personal factors refer to the characteristics of an individual (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). The main framework of the image formation process by several factors is shown in Figure 2.

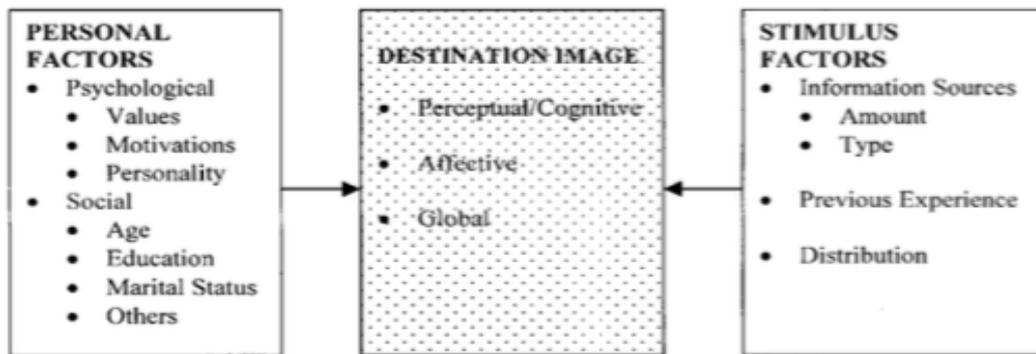


Figure 2. Framework of the image formation process (Source: Baloglu & McCleary, 1999, p. 870)

According to Gartner (1994), these influencing forces are called image formation agents. He established a framework with the following eight factors:

- Overt Induced I
- Overt Induced II
- Covert Induced I
- Covert Induced II
- Autonomous
- Unsolicited Organic
- Solicited Organic
- Organic.

(Gartner, 1994)

Overt Induced I refers to influencing factors such as advertising in the form of television, brochures, magazines, billboards, and radio. Overt Induced II agents are concerned with information received from several tourism intermediary companies such as tour operators and travel agencies that are responsible for making the destination attractive for tourists. Covert Induced I are agents using celebrities to endorse advertising the product. Covert Induced II refers to agents, which advertise through unbiased reports and articles. The fifth component of the image formation process is the autonomous image formation agents that comprise documentaries, movies, and news articles. The unsolicited organic image formation involves unrequested information of friends who have been at the destination, whereas the solicited organic refers to information received through word-of-mouth by friends

and relatives. The last component of the image formation process is the organic image formation agent that involves the personal experience through the actual visitation of the destination (Gartner, 1994).

2.1.4 Importance of Destination Image in Tourism

Destination image plays a key role in tourism, especially in the marketing of a destination. Destination marketing is concerned with creating awareness and therefore increasing the visitor numbers of a destination (Palmer & Bejou, 1995). For a destination, it is not only important to attract visitors, but also to make tourists revisit the place in order to be successful in the tourism destination development process (Chen & Tsai, 2007). To be able to do so, it is of great importance to impact the consumer's decision-making process that is often influenced by the image of a destination.

According to Palmer and Bejou (1995), not only the tangible attributes of a destination such as hotels and attractions but also intangible assets such as the destination image form the total product of a tourism destination. According to Pike (2008), tourism marketers are aware of the fact that what people perceive is real as most tourism products are intangible and destinations' images are very important attributes to be compared. In today's competitive marketplace, the goal of destination marketers is to establish and maintain a positive image in order to attract tourists (Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

In order to build a positive image in the minds of potential tourists, it is important for destination promoters to comprehend how the destination image is formed in order to respond to tourists' needs appropriately (Gartner, 1994).

2.2 Mass Tourism

In general, the term mass often refers to "a large number of people or objects crowded together" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018). According to Ghimire (2001), mass tourism helps to explain the magnitude of tourism at a destination. Burkart and Medlik (1974, as cited in Bramwell, 2004, pp. 7-8) argue that mass tourism "is essentially a quantitative notion, based on the proportion of the population participating in tourism or on the volume of tourist activity". It is often concerned

with large volumes of tourists at a destination, “the remarkable growth in tourist numbers, democratization of tourism, standardization of products and societal transformations” (Vainikka, 2015, p. VII).

Mass tourists often only stay at the destination a short amount of time, they do not prepare themselves intellectually for their visit, and they are noisy compared to individual tourists. Individual tourists, however, prepare themselves for their visit, they know foreign languages, and are not noisy (Červinka, Švajdová, & Tyvka, 2014).

Certain countries, especially in the southern part of Europe, attract millions of visitors every year. Some destinations on the Mediterranean coast are confronted with tourists focusing on particular areas, which, therefore, leads to mass tourism. Moreover, specific regions are forced to cope with seasonality as tourists prefer specific times of the year for their visit due to several reasons such as school holidays (Ghimire, 2001). Especially in the summer months, many destinations are confronted with masses of tourists searching for the so-called sun and sea product (Bramwell, 2004).

Mass tourism or tourism in general, can bring a number of positive impacts to visitors and locals of a destination. However, through lack of management, tourism can create adverse impacts on the environment, economy, safety, and social values of the local community of a destination (Bosselman, Peterson & McCarthy, 1999).

2.2.1 History and Development

After the industrialization of a majority of countries, traveling became a lot easier for many people (Akis, 2011). With the increase of disposable income and leisure time as well as the rapid development of transportation means, vacation journeys had been made possible for a vast amount of people (Akis, 2011). Baum (1995, as cited in Vanhove, 1997, p.58) suggested that other reasons for the increase in tourism are the “lifestyle and work-related changes”, “changes in the demographic structure of the most affluent societies, especially improved health among the retired”, and “a growing interest in other cultures and ways of living”. According to Bosselman, Peterson, and McCarthy (1999), technological changes and therefore improvements in communication, as well as the further development of tourism

service delivery, are more reasons for the exploding growth of the number of tourists. Especially after the 1950s, tourism became a major aspect of the economy (Akis, 2011). According to González Tirados (2011), the number of international travelers reached 278.1 million by the 1980s, whereas in the year 2000 the number of tourists worldwide increased to 687.8 million. Moreover, in the turn of the millennium, when further development made an increase in low-cost airlines possible, mass tourism further expanded (Hrala, 2001, as cited in Červinka, Švajdová, and Tyvka, 2014). In the year 2017, the total number of tourist arrivals accounted for 1,322 million and is expected to reach an even higher number in 2018 (World Tourism Organization UNWTO, 2018). Traveling has become even easier with the development of online booking systems and travel services (Vainikka, 2015). Mass tourism has provoked a number of positive and negative changes that also include environmental pollution and sociocultural impacts on locals (Akis, 2011).

2.2.2 Positive Effects of Tourism

2.2.2.1 Economic Benefits

Next to several benefits for tourists, one can also identify numerous positive impacts of tourism on a destination's economy. One of the most important benefits is the profit made by the many tourist amenities. Governments put emphasis on the employment opportunities that tourism brings with it, an increase in the tax revenues, as well as an improvement in the living standards (Bosselman, Peterson & McCarthy, 1999).

According to Vanhove (1997), the most important terms regarding benefits of tourism are expenditure, investment, income, and employment. It all starts with the investment in a tourism facility such as a hotel, a resort or a holiday village. It can be said that an investment enhances expenditure of tourists. The expenditure in a hotel, for example, provokes economic benefits, as it is direct income to the region. Local suppliers benefit from it and more jobs are created. Other parts of the expenditure are used for the payment of taxes or of further goods and services. Buying groceries at the supermarket can enhance similar economic activity as it produces indirect income. As disposal income increases, it enhances a change in consumer behavior as people provide a higher amount of money to spend. As

workers spend their income in the area, tax revenues rise which then have a positive impact on the improvement of local infrastructure and services provided to tourists (Vanhove, 1997).

Direct impacts of tourism refer to sales, jobs, tax revenues as well as income levels mentioned above. Indirect effects of tourism are changes in prices, changes in quality and quantity of goods and services, and changes in property taxes. Furthermore, tourism can have induced effects such as on household spending. The mentioned impacts sum up to the total economic impact of tourism (Stynes, 1997).

2.2.3 Negative Impacts of Tourism

2.2.3.1 Tourism Gentrification

According to Cocola-Gant (2015), “gentrification is usually defined as a process in which middle class residents move into working class areas, resulting in the displacement and exclusion of communities” (p.2). In the case of mass tourism, however, the moving of residents provoked by tourists is called “tourism gentrification” (Cocola-Gant, 2015). Cocola-Gant (2015) defines it as “a process of socio-spatial change in which neighborhoods are transformed according to the needs of affluent consumers, residents and visitors alike” (p.4).

As many rental apartments are being transformed into accommodation facilities for visitors, tourism gentrification often leads to residential displacement and to threats that impact the everyday life of locals. As gentrification further establishes and rent prices increase, locals, especially those with a lower income, are not able to afford to live at their residence and feel the pressure to move to cheaper areas (Cocola-Gant, 2015).

One of the reasons why housing prices rise is the issue of peer-to-peer platforms offering accommodation for tourists, such as the popular website Airbnb. The increasing demand for tourist lodging facilities has led residents to rent out their homes to tourists. A rising number of tourists prefer to book private housing on platforms like Airbnb since the prices are often considerably lower than a stay at a hotel. Furthermore, it is easier for Airbnb to expand for example in a city center than for hotels (Gutiérrez, García-Palomares, Romanillos, & Salas-Olmedo, 2017).

Moreover, difficulties to afford living costs can also be associated with the loss of services in the area of residence. Cocola-Gant (2015) calls this “lack of consumption facilities” which is provoked by commercial gentrification (p. 10). Stores that have been visited by locals are replaced by facilities, which attract people with a higher income (Cocola-Gant, 2015).

Furthermore, the privatization of public amenities due to the need of space for facilities like restaurants and cafés, impact the lives of residents in a drastic manner. This issue mainly affects locals who make use of public meeting points such as elderly people and young adults (Cocola-Gant, 2015).

2.2.3.2 Environmental Impacts

Mass tourism is often considered to bring drawbacks such as impacts in the form of environmental issues. By the construction of hundreds of hotels and resorts and other tourism facilities, as well as by deforestation to make space for construction, natural resources are often being deteriorated. Moreover, not only the construction of tourism amenities, but also the building of infrastructure, including the construction of roads, can put harm to the environment (Bosselman, Peterson & McCarthy, 1999). Bosselman, Peterson, and McCarthy (1999) also mentioned pollution in terms of discolored beaches in consequence of the large amount of waste, as well as from traffic.

Furthermore, many destinations have to cope with water pollution or even water shortages. Stonich (1998, as cited in Gabarda-Mallorquí, Garcia, & Ribas, 2017) pointed out that not only hotels, but also their facilities that seem interesting for tourists, such as golf courses, hotel gardens, lakes, ponds, and swimming pools consume an enormous amount of water.

Moreover, tourist destinations are not only affected by water pollution but can also be impacted by air pollution. Especially cities visited by masses of tourists are affected by increased amounts of traffic (Akis, 2011).

2.2.3.3 Negative Economic Impact

Tourism is often said to bring numerous economic benefits, as it creates jobs and positively affects the destination. However, critically examining the tourism

industry, mass tourism, in particular, has also brought several economic disadvantages. Many destinations have to deal with seasonal fluctuations and therefore changes in demand. According to Bramwell (2004), the tourism industry is therefore often concerned with having issues with seasonal unemployment as well as long working hours. Moreover, much of the employment generated is often seasonal, unskilled and low-paid (Vaughan & Long, 1982, Allcock, 1986, as cited in Ratz, 2002).

2.2.3.4 Sociocultural Impacts

Mass tourism or tourism in general, can bring both positive, as well as negative sociocultural impacts with it. Tourism gentrification and its' displacement of locals previously mentioned is one of the drawbacks that one can encounter. Furthermore, changes in value systems, traditional lifestyles, individual behavior, community structure, and family relationships can be impacts of tourism on the host community (Ratz, 2002). The changes can vary in significance as the cultural and economic difference between tourists and the local community is not always the same (Mathieson & Wall, 1982, as cited in Ratz, 2002). According to Ratz (2002), the relationship between tourists and locals and the development of the tourism industry are the two main factors that influence the quality of the community's life. The tourist-host relationship refers to tourists receiving goods and services from locals, being at the same place at the same time, and sharing information (de Kadt, 1979, as cited in Ratz, 2002).

2.3 Communication

As competition between destinations is increasing, destination marketers try their best to deliver the right message to potential consumers to raise awareness of their product, which is the destination (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2002). It is therefore important to know which message content, as well as through which channel the message is sent. In marketing, there are three different levels on how to approach the consumer: rational, emotional and moral. The rational appeal refers to the self-interest of the audience. Furthermore, the emotional approach tries to provoke feelings that result in buying the product. In case of destination marketing, this refers to the actual visit of the destination. Last, but not least, the moral appeal involves the moral sense of the consumer (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2002).

2.3.1 Communication Process

The primary purpose of communication is transmitting information from the sender to the receiver by using certain communication means (Wiktor, 2001, as cited in Dębski, 2013). In marketing, communication often refers to promotion communicated to potential customers. It involves a message sender who can be an entrepreneur or organization, and a receiver who is the potential customer. In the marketing of a product it is not only essential to develop the product, but also to effectively communicate the message to the end consumer.

The process of sending a message refers to encoding (Hudson, 2008). The message is sent via a particular communication medium, such as via an advertisement on television, and should persuade the consumer to purchase the product or in the case of destination marketing, it should evoke the wish to visit the destination (Dębski, 2013). Although the ultimate goal of marketing communication is to persuade people to buy the product, it is first important to arouse attention, then engage the interest of the receiver, induce the wish to purchase the product, and ultimately to convince the consumer to buy the product. This model is called AIDA, and the letters refer to attention, interest, desire, and action (Hudson, 2008).

The act of decoding refers to the process of filtering the received message. Although especially tourism marketers try to deliver the right message, it is not always easy to achieve the correct perception in the minds of consumers. Several disruptions, such as negative headlines in the newspaper or on television, might affect the intended message to be internalized in a different manner (Hudson, 2008).

2.3.2 Communication Tools

There are several forms of communication tools used in the marketing of a destination, of which some are personal, and others are non-personal (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2002). The following types are of importance to marketers:

- Advertising: television, newspapers, magazines, billboards, Internet, brochures, guidebooks.

- Sales promotion: short-term incentives to induce purchase, aimed at salespeople, distributors such as travel agents and consumers.
- Public relations: all non-paid media exposure appearing as editorial coverage, includes sponsorship of events and causes.
- Personal selling: Meetings and workshops for intermediaries; telephone contact and travel agents for consumers.
- Word-of-mouth: Promotion by previous consumers to their social and professional contacts. Often perceived by consumers to be the most credible form of promotion.
- Direct marketing: Direct mail, telemarketing and travel exhibitions.
- Internet marketing: Direct email marketing, Internet advertising, customer service, and selling and market research.

(Hudson, 2008, p.255)

2.3.2.1 Advertising

Advertising in the form of media is one of the non-personal communication tools used to deliver messages to consumers in the marketing process. According to Kotler, Bowen, and Makens (2002), it is “any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or services by an identified sponsor” (p.583). There are numerous types of media: print media, such as the press, magazines and posters, broadcast media including television, out of home media like billboards, ambient media, and the Internet, which has a global impact (Hudson, 2008).

Some important media types such as newspapers provide poor reproduction quality; however, the advantages of this type of media include timeliness, flexibility and high believability (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2002).

2.3.2.2 Sales Promotion

According to Fill (2009), sales promotion includes plenty of different marketing techniques and is a non-personal communication tool in marketing. Fill (2009) states: “the aim is to accelerate sales and gather marketing information” (p.21). Tourism organizations often use sales promotion to enhance the process to attract

customers for the first time. Sales promotion is a useful tool to target specific market segments (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007).

According to Kotler, Bowen & Makens (2002), sales promotion includes cents-off deals, coupons, and other offers. These are meant to raise awareness of the product, attract a high number of consumers and to increase sales (Kotler, Bowen and Makens, 2002).

2.3.2.3 Public Relations

Kotler and Armstrong (2004, as cited in Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007, p. 171) define this type of communication as “Non-personal stimulation of demand for a product, service or business unit by planting commercially significant news about it in a published medium or obtaining favourable presentation of it on radio, television, or stage, that is not paid by the sponsor”. According to Hudson (2008), public relations are an essential type of communication used in the tourism and hospitality industry to keep up or improve relations with other organizations or individuals. It is important to have good relationships with publics to maintain a positive image. According to Kotler and Keller (2006), a public can be explained as any group or individual that is interested or can influence the achievement of the company’s goals. Publics can be external, such as customers and the news media, or internal, such as shareholders (Hudson, 2008). The roles of public relations communication include establishing a corporate identity to maintain government relations, as well as customer relations, to manage crises, to communicate internally, and to market publicity (Hudson, 2008).

According to Kotler, Bowen, and Makens (2002), the advantages of public relations include high believability. People are more likely to believe information concerning events or news stories (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2002).

2.3.2.4 Personal Selling

One of the most effective communication tools in tourism marketing is personal selling. It refers to interactive communication between a seller and the buyer with the purpose of a purchase. “Many different messages can be delivered by a single salesperson” (Fill, 2009). This type of communication, however, can come at a high

cost. Therefore marketers often choose other channels such as mass media to raise awareness for their product (Hudson, 2008).

The roles of personal selling in the tourism and hospitality include being aware of trends and gathering information about competitors, maintaining customers through customer relationship management and generating sales at the point of purchase (Hudson, 2008).

2.3.2.5 Word-of-Mouth Communication

One of the informal types of communication with the most power is word-of-mouth communication (WOM). Word-of-mouth communication refers to “communication undertaken voluntarily between people, concerning the quality or characteristics of products, services and organizations” (Fill, 2009, p. 935). Arndt (1967, as cited in Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012, p. 202) defines WOM as “oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, product or service”. According to Silverman (2001, as cited in Hudson, 2008, p.320), “word of mouth is communication about products and services between people who are perceived to have no vested interest in promoting them”.

Not only in tourism and the hospitality industry, but also in other industries it is of great importance, especially to marketers. One reason why WOM is particularly powerful in the tourism industry is that its’ products and services usually are intangible and therefore cannot be tested beforehand (Shoemaker, Lewis & Yesawich, 2007). Word-of-mouth communication can be held in form of a conversation between one or more people. It can be a conversation in person, via e-mail, by telephone and other types of communication. It is said to be nine times as effective as advertising in influencing the perception people have about a product or service (Buttle, 1998). According to Silverman (2001, as cited in Hudson, 2008, pp.321-322), there are ten main reasons why WOM has so much power:

- It has independent credibility.
- It delivers experience.
- It is more relevant and complete.
- It is the most honest medium.

- It is customer-driven.
- It feeds on itself.
- It has expert power.
- Influencers like to influence.
- It is money and time-saving.
- It is an illusory force.

With the development of the Internet and especially social media, marketing communication has changed over time. According to Wang, Yu, and Wei (2012), social media communication has an impact on the consumer buyer behavior in two ways: it has a direct impact by conformity with peers online and an indirect effect by reinforcing product involvement (Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012). Word-of-mouth via the Internet is called eWOM. It distinguishes itself from traditional word-of-mouth by reaching a larger amount of people all over the world. According to Bronner and de Hoog (2011, as cited in Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012), eWOM might be more powerful in terms of a range of influence than traditional word-of-mouth due to its' reach, ease of use, speed, and anonymity.

For DMOs, social media is a very useful tool as they can streamline information and keep potential customers up-to-date and add value to their customers. Moreover, it brings benefits for consumers as they can easily access information about destinations based on the experience of other customers. Another growing trend in the field of eWOM is using travel blogs to help make up an image of the destination or to receive authentic information helpful for the decision-making process (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012).

2.3.2.6 Direct Marketing

Direct marketing can be realized by direct mail, telemarketing or travel exhibitions. It is an important tool for communicating with consumers. This type of communication is especially important for hotel chains as it allows them to talk directly to their corporate clients (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007). According to Swarbrooke and Horner (2007), direct mail is used by organizations to communicate with consumers. Especially tourism organizations make use of this

type of communication in order to develop customized promotional offers (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007).

As Kotler, Bowen, and Makens (2002) state, the advantages of direct mail lie in audience selectivity, flexibility, and personalization. Furthermore, there is no ad competition within the same medium. However, direct mail has relatively high costs and could bring a junk mail image (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2002).

2.3.2.7 Internet Marketing

Internet marketing refers to direct email marketing, Internet advertising, as well as customer service. Direct email marketing is a form of communication in marketing, which involves messages sent via the Internet. This type of non-personal communication is often chosen by the consumer in order to receive information about offers or promotions. The advantages of direct marketing include a high response rate, as well as low costs. However, consumers often receive a high amount of unwanted messages via email, which then refers to “spam” (Hudson, 2008).

3 Study Area: Barcelona

3.1 General Information

The area chosen for the study is the Spanish city Barcelona. The city has a population of 1.608.746 inhabitants and a total area of 101,3 km² (Turisme de Barcelona, 2016). The numbers show that Barcelona has a high population density with almost 16.000 inhabitants per square kilometer. According to Cocola-Gant (2015), Barcelona is Spain's most visited city. Barcelona Tourism Statistics Report 2016 states that Barcelona ranked number one in Spain in terms of total bednights followed by Madrid, Alicante, Malaga, and Girona (Turisme de Barcelona, 2016).

The historic city in Catalonia even became one of the most popular touristic cities in Europe in terms of tourists. In the year 1990, the total number of bednights amounted 3.7 million (Turisme de Barcelona, 2016). With a number of 19.1 million of total bednights in the year 2016, it ranked number five of the top cities in Europe behind London, Paris, Berlin, and Rome (ECM Benchmarking Report, 2017). Concerning international bednights, it ranked number four with a number of 16.2 million following London, Paris, and Rome (Turisme de Barcelona, 2016). Moreover, compared to other European cities, Barcelona achieved the highest growth rate of 8,5% in terms of total bednights in the year 2016 (ECM Benchmarking Report, 2017).

Tourism represents a very important industry in the city of Barcelona with more than 140.000 employees working in the tourism sector (Turisme de Barcelona, 2016). Furthermore, in the year 2016 more than 9000 tourism companies existed in the city of Barcelona (Turisme de Barcelona, 2016). The tourism sector made up 14% of Barcelona's GNP (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2015).

Moreover, cruise tourists make up a great number of the total amount of tourists in Barcelona. In the year of 2016, 2.7 million cruise travelers boarded, disembarked or made a transit at the port of the city. The number of cruise ships arriving at the port of Barcelona added up to more than 700 in 2016 (Turisme de Barcelona, 2016).

Although Barcelona had hosted various major events like the Eucharistic Congress in 1952 or the World Cup in 1982, its tourism success started in the year 1992 when the city hosted the Olympic games. The event stimulated tourism growth in the city and brought a new image to this destination (Heeley, 2011). Compared to the year 1990 with 3.8 million bednights, it achieved a number of 7.8 million bednights in the year 2002 (Gutiérrez et al., 2017). In the year 2010, this number increased to more than 14 million (Turisme de Barcelona, 2016).

In 1993, Barcelona's DMO Turisme de Barcelona, a public-private consortium, was established which further promoted the city (Serra, Font & Ivanova, 2017). Prior to and during the time of the event of the Olympic games in the years 1989 to 1993, the city started planning to become a tourist center by analyzing its' current situation. Turisme de Barcelona started targeting tourists by establishing the Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan (Duran, 2005). The development of the plan included defining actions, creating a portfolio of products, as well as managing planning and control systems (Duran, 2005). Later on, the city tried to include target groups such as meetings, culture, shopping, cruises, sport, gastronomy, gay as well as health. Several sports, cultural and events, as well as business conventions have helped the destination to further increase its' visitor numbers. Moreover, the city expanded in terms of hotel bed capacity from the year 1990 to 2006 by 182% which made it possible to host even more tourists. Other benefits of the Olympic games in 1992 include the construction of infrastructure and therefore the possibility to host exhibitions and congresses in the future (Heeley, 2011).

3.2 Impacts of Tourism on the City

Although Barcelona succeeded in attracting large volumes of tourists, the masses of visitors brought numerous drawbacks to residents of the tourist destination. As mentioned in the literature review of this thesis, mass tourism can have several impacts on the community of a destination. Especially in Barcelona, tourism is concentrated in specific districts and tourism supply and demand is unequally dispersed throughout the city (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017). According to Còcola-Gant (2015), tourist gentrification especially took place in specific districts of Barcelona that are highly frequented by tourists such as Gòtic, parts of Raval and Born. A large number of Barcelona's residents have the feeling of displacement,

and some have even expressed their dissatisfaction with their community association (Cócola-Gant, 2015).

Newspaper headlines like “Why Barcelona locals really hate tourists” appear more frequently these days (López-Díaz, 2017). According to López-Díaz (2017), graffiti like “Tourist you are a terrorist”, “All tourists are bastards”, and “Tourists go home” cover the walls and pedestrian crossings of Barcelona. It can be said that local residents of Barcelona react to massive crowds of tourists in a negative way. Locals feel pressured as prices rise and fear the loss of life quality (López-Díaz, 2017). According to López-Díaz (2017), the results of a recent study by the government have shown that locals see tourism as a major issue. The results of an opinion survey among residents of Barcelona have shown that 64% of the population thinks that prices are rising in the city due to tourism (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017). According to the Ajuntament de Barcelona (2015), reasons for a reduction in the quality of life of locals include noise pollution and the requirement of cleaning and maintenance of public spaces. The Rambla, as well as the iconic Sagrada Família, are some of the most visited places in Barcelona (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017).

Furthermore, due to the increase in demand for tourist accommodation facilities, housing prices are rising and this often leads to the problem that locals are not able to afford their rent anymore (Cócola-Gant, 2015). A large number of housing blocks are being transformed into hotels and housing units are often being converted into tourist accommodations or also called tourist-use housing (HUTs) (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017).

The indirect effects of mass tourism, as well as the economic crisis, have especially impacted Barcelona’s district Ciutat Vella which has a very high population density. This district of the city has lost 11% of its residents within 8 years. Another example is the district Barri Gòtic, which has lost 45% of its population within less than 10 years (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017).

3.3 Barcelona’s Tourism Model

According to Valls Giménez, Banchini, Falcón Martínez and Valls Tuñón (2013), Barcelona’s original tourism model was one of the reasons the city became popular

in the past years. However, it needs repositioning in order to keep up its' competitive advantage compared to other European cities (Valls Giménez et al., 2013).

The primary goal of Barcelona's tourism model in the last years was to attract tourists, which worked well. However, the goal nowadays is to attract "better clients for the city rather than just more of the same" in order to keep up growth and to increase sustainability (Valls Giménez et al., 2013, p.98). According to Valls Giménez et al. (2013), not only international tourists but also local residents of Barcelona should be seen as clients as they make up a major part of the development of the city. Furthermore, visitors who stay in the city for a short amount of time for the reasons of sports, health, and business should be considered in the development of the tourism model. Moreover, tourists who spend a long time in Barcelona and who make use of a lot of facilities should be part of establishing a vital brand image of the city. In addition, a specific tax for tourists should be introduced to be able to finance the resources needed in order to become a sustainable city (Valls Giménez et al., 2013).

Barcelona's new strategic tourism plan for 2020 includes the values sustainability, responsibility, and improvement of the lives of local residents. Data was collected and the current tourism situation was analyzed in order to design a strategic plan. The strategic tourism plan will include the following work areas: governance, tourist management, territorial strategy, work and business, as well as promotion and marketing (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017).

The Ajuntament de Barcelona (2017) mentions a very important quote of the suggested tourism plan: "What is good for citizens is good for tourism. Places that are good for living in are good for visiting. Efforts will focus on improving the quality of life of citizens, managing friction between residents and visitors and promoting dialogue and interaction between visitors and residents" (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017, pp.14-15)

It can be said that the focus of the plan lies in establishing a better environment for both residents and tourists. One of the most essential parts of the strategic plan is

to improve Barcelona's tourism governance by introducing specific regulations and policies.

Furthermore, in order to be sustainable, one of the challenges will be a reduction of the ecological footprint of tourist activities. To improve the economic environment, it will be fundamental to develop the cooperation between private and public players. Moreover, a key aspect of the plan is to analyze the quality of jobs generated by tourism instead of looking at the quantity (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017).

Lastly, the goal of promotion and external communication of Barcelona is "to develop more comprehensive approaches, where the distinction between visitors, residents, and businesses is increasingly diffuse" (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017, p. 48). Furthermore, it will be important to reduce tourism-phobia by introducing an improved internal communication (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017).

4 Methods

4.1 Survey

There are several types of research designs that one can use in the process of primary data collection. Creswell (2014) mentions three different research designs: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. Quantitative designs are implemented in the form of experiments or surveys, whereas qualitative designs are performed in the form of case studies, ethnographies or narrative theory (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative methods focus on data collection in a standardized way to assure credible outcomes (Flick, 2011). Qualitative methods, however, use open-ended questions to avoid predetermined answers. Mixed methods are a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell, 2014). According to Flick (2011), the main focus of interest of quantitative research lies in causes, as well as in numeric data. Qualitative research focuses on a small number of cases compared to quantitative research. Moreover, qualitative research puts less emphasis on a cause, but rather concentrates on a detailed description of situations (Flick, 2011).

According to Creswell (2014), the decision on whether quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods shall be used depends on several factors, namely the research problem of the study, the personal experience of the researcher, and the audience of the report. When the researcher intends to test a theory or explanation, quantitative research is the preferred option (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research is advantageous if the researcher does not have sufficient knowledge about the variables being examined. Mixed methods are useful when the researcher wants to combine qualitative and quantitative by generalizing findings to a population, as well as to have a detailed description of the meaning of phenomena (Creswell, 2014).

As primary research for this study, the appliance of a quantitative method in the form of a survey was chosen, in order to obtain findings. "A survey design provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population" (Creswell, 2014, p.155). According to Fowler (2002), the following three uses of survey techniques are well

known: measuring public opinion for newspaper and magazine articles, evaluating political opinions, and performing market research designed to identify preferences of consumers.

Fowler (2002) outlines three major components of a survey, namely *sampling*, *question design*, and *data collection*.

1. *Sampling* is a highly important aspect of collecting data when developing a survey. It refers to choosing a part of the total population that should represent the whole population (Fowler, 2002). According to Creswell (2014), the selection of a random sample gives an equal chance of being selected to every member of the population. Furthermore, it is important that specific characteristics such as gender or age are represented in the sample of the population. This process is called stratification (Creswell, 2014).
2. *Question design*: In order to design a survey that can bring a desirable outcome, it is of importance to carefully design the questions used in the data collection. According to Fowler (2002), the design of the questions is equally important as the size of the sample, as the credibility of the outcome will depend on both. Not only the formulation of the question but also the sequence and position of a question can impact the final outcome (Flick, 2011). The purpose of asking questions is to efficiently gather information, either directly or indirectly, about the respondents' cause for a specific behavior. Furthermore, according to Flick (2011), the avoidance of multidimensional questions and double negotiations is of great importance. Moreover, questions should be designed in a way that participants understand them (Flick, 2011).
3. *Data collection*: There are various ways to collect data which include personal and telephone interviews, questionnaires sent by mail, e-mail or questionnaires published on a website (Fowler, 2002). The decision on which approach to use depends on numerous factors such as sampling, the type of population, as well as on the question content (Fowler, 2002).

Data collection through survey questionnaires has advantages, as well as disadvantages. One of the possible issues that can be encountered using survey questionnaires as primary data collection method is a low response rate as well as incompleteness of the questionnaire (Flick, 2011).

In this study, the implementation of an online survey was chosen. Advantages of sending survey questionnaires via the Internet include time-efficiency as well as low costs. Furthermore, the ease of use, as well as the lack of spatial restrictions is advantageous for the researcher. Moreover, data collection via online surveys causes fewer issues concerning the response rate in comparison to traditional surveys (Flick, 2011).

4.2 Development of the Survey

The purpose of this online survey was to answer the research questions about the impacts of mass tourism and communication on people's image of the city of Barcelona and to find out if recent incidents have changed tourists' perception of the city, as well as to identify reasons for the high popularity of this city. The questionnaire is divided into 4 parts and consists of 30 questions including open-ended and closed-ended questions.

The first part concerns the city of Barcelona and whether people have been there before as Gunn's stage theory suggests that actual visitation shapes the visitor's image (Jenkins, 1999). Furthermore, respondents were asked how long their stay was and how likely it is for them to visit Barcelona in the near future. Moreover, 8 open-ended questions were added. Respondents were asked to indicate the main reason why they would choose Barcelona as a tourist destination over any other city in Europe to answer the research question of why Barcelona is such a favorable destination.

According to Echtner and Ritchie (1993), in order to measure the holistic component of destination image the following questions should be asked and were therefore embedded into the survey:

- What images or characteristics come to mind when you think of Barcelona as a tourist destination?

- How would you describe the atmosphere or mood that you would expect to experience while visiting Barcelona?
- Please list any distinctive or unique tourist attractions that you can think of in Barcelona?

In addition, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a multiple-choice grid from strongly agree to strongly disagree with the following attributes about Barcelona: Culture, Cruise Ships, Events, Shopping, Health, Sun and Beach, in order to measure people's perception about the city. These options were chosen based on Barcelona's tourism target groups mentioned by Heeley (2011) and help to see which characteristics tourists connect Barcelona with, in order to evaluate their image of the city.

Respondents were asked to describe Barcelona with the help of 11 listed adjectives and to choose the ones that they connect with Barcelona as a tourist destination in order to measure the image tourists have about the city. The following adjectives were listed: beautiful, crowded, dirty, safe, expensive, friendly, inexpensive, historic, dangerous, empty and touristic. The researcher chose the mentioned adjectives, in order to be able to have a better understanding of people's perception of the city.

In the following two questions, participants of the survey were asked how stable they perceive Barcelona's political situation and how safe they see the city to see if recent incidents have influenced their perception. Jenkins (1999) mentioned the attributes of personal safety, as well as political stability to measure image. Lastly, the overall evaluation of Barcelona's image was asked to measure tourists' image about the city to answer the research question of whether mass tourism and communication have an impact on the image.

The second part of the questionnaire covers the topic of mass tourism. Respondents were asked to indicate the level of crowdedness they expect to experience or have already experienced in Barcelona. Furthermore, participants were asked to indicate their perceived level of cleanliness of Barcelona, as well as the noise level. Crowdedness, cleanliness, and friendliness are attributes mentioned by Jenkins (1999). As discussed in the literature review, mass tourism

can impact the noise level of the city; therefore, participants were asked about their perception of this topic. In addition, respondents were asked if any of the abovementioned factors impacted the way they think about Barcelona and an elaboration on their answer to see whether they were impacted by those factors and how they were impacted.

The third part of the survey consists of seven questions and covers the topic of communication. Participants were asked which type of media they use to consume news such as Internet, newspaper, television or other. Furthermore, participants were asked to indicate the communication tool that has the most impact on their choice of destination from the following tools mentioned by Hudson (2008): word-of-mouth, advertising, internet marketing, personal selling, direct marketing, none or other. In addition, participants were asked to indicate if they had recently heard any news of Barcelona, and if yes, what they heard. Furthermore, respondents were asked if they observed the news to be negative or positive and if recent news about Barcelona impacted the way they think of Barcelona as a tourist destination in order to be able to answer the research question about if recent incidents change the way people perceive the city. In addition, it was asked for an elaboration on the answer to the question about if the news impacted the way they think about the city.

In the last section, participants were asked for demographic information such as age, gender, nationality, as well as their level of education as these factors can influence the overall image one has of a destination. Lastly, respondents were asked for their current status of employment.

4.3 Data Collection Process

In order to reach a large number of participants, the survey was distributed via the Internet. Collection of the data was done with the aid of Google Forms, a helpful tool to create surveys. The survey was designed in English. The link to the survey was shared via Facebook, on the researcher's wall as well as in the group "MODUL University Vienna Community" addressing a wide range of age groups, nationalities and different levels of education. The link was shared on the 8th of April 2018, at 11

am. The survey was available to be answered for 14 days, until the 22nd of April 2018 at 6 pm.

Within these two weeks, a total number of 105 participants was reached. The questions asked in the survey, as well as the Facebook post of the researcher can be found in the Appendices.

5 Findings

In total, 105 survey responses were collected on Google Forms of which 58.1% were female and 41.9% were male. Looking at other demographic factors such as age, the group 19-25 years made up a significant part of respondents (55.2%), equivalent to 58 people. Unfortunately, there were no participants under the age of 18 years or over 55 years. The percentages can be seen in Figure 3.

Concerning nationality, the participants of the survey came from 36 different countries, mainly from Europe. 35.2% of respondents came from Austria. Regarding education level, 61.9% of participants have a Bachelor’s degree, 12.4 % have a Master’s degree, whereas nobody indicated to have a Ph.D. Concerning the status of employment, almost half of the respondents were students and 27.6% were employed. 3.8% of respondents were employers, and 17.1% were unemployed and currently looking for a job.

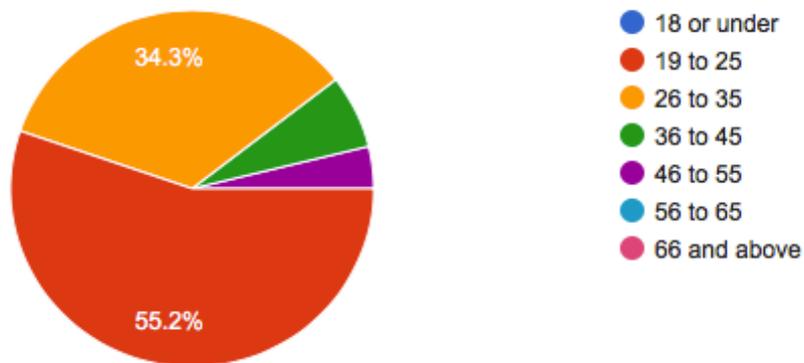


Figure 3. Age groups of participants

5.1 Part 1: Barcelona

Concerning the answers in the section about Barcelona, 81% of respondents have visited Barcelona before. 31.4% of respondents stayed less than three days in the city. The majority (54.3%) of participants spent three to seven days in the city. 8.6% of respondents stayed between 8 and 14 days in Barcelona, whereas 5.7% of the participants spent more than 14 days in the city.

Regarding the question of how likely it is that they visit the city in the near future, 39% of the respondents indicated that it is neither likely nor unlikely. 22.9% of the participants indicated that it is very likely and 13.3% said it is rather likely. Moreover, 17.1% indicated it is rather unlikely that they visit the city in the near future, whereas 7.6% said it is very unlikely. The percentages are shown in Figure 4 below.

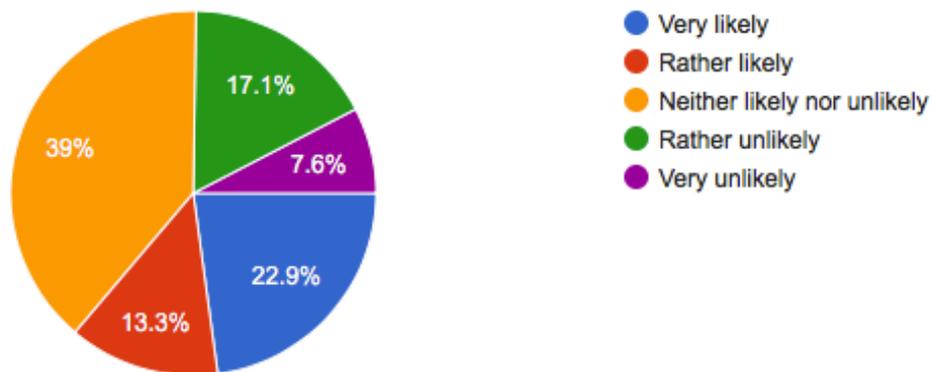


Figure 4. Intention of visitation in the near future

Concerning answers to the fourth question about the main reasons for choosing Barcelona over any other destination in Europe, the reason mentioned the most, namely 15 times, was the weather. Architecture and sights were mentioned 13 times, culinary 12 times, and people and Barcelona's international atmosphere was mentioned 11 times. Other reasons mentioned 9 times were the prices in Barcelona, as well as cheap flights. Moreover, 7 participants mentioned Barcelona's lifestyle to be a reason, and nightlife was mentioned seven times. 10 respondents indicated that they would not choose Barcelona over any other destination or that they would prefer a different city. Other reasons mentioned less often were culture, football, festivals, and events. Furthermore, 4 respondents mentioned personal reasons such as having friends or relatives who live in Barcelona. 4 participants did not indicate any specific reason.

In question five, people were asked to indicate the images that come to mind when thinking about Barcelona as a holiday destination. The results revealed that 33

participants connect Barcelona with the image of many people and crowded streets. Furthermore, 22 participants indicated that Barcelona's architecture comes to mind when one thinks about the city. Another image mentioned 21 times is the beach. Moreover, the good weather in Barcelona was mentioned 17 times. Other attributes listed less often are culture, Sagrada Familia, Gaudi, party and nightlife, and football.

When looking at the answers to question 6 concerning the atmosphere that one would expect to experience or experienced in Barcelona, a majority of participants indicated the adjective busy which was mentioned 18 times. Moreover, the adjective relaxed was mentioned 13 times and fun or amusing was mentioned 12 times. Furthermore, 11 participants described the atmosphere in Barcelona as vibrant. 10 participants described the atmosphere as energetic, active or lively; 9 respondents mentioned the word crowded in their answer. Other adjectives mentioned were annoyed, loud, open-minded, stressful, cool, positive, friendly, happy, young, cheerful, exciting, and international. 5 respondents indicated that they experienced or expect to experience an atmosphere that is not very relaxing.

Referring to the question 7, when asked to list any distinctive or unique tourist attraction, Sagrada Familia was mentioned 49 times in the open-ended answers. Moreover, the sight Park Güell was listed 37 times; Las Ramblas was mentioned 26 times. Other famous sights such as the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art, Montjuic or the Camp Nou stadium were mentioned less often.

The answers to question 8 revealed that a majority of participants agreed with the attribute sun and beach and events. 73% of respondents strongly agreed with the attribute sun and beach, whereas only 7 participants connect Barcelona with the attribute health. The comparison of percentages between the different attributes is shown in Figure 5.

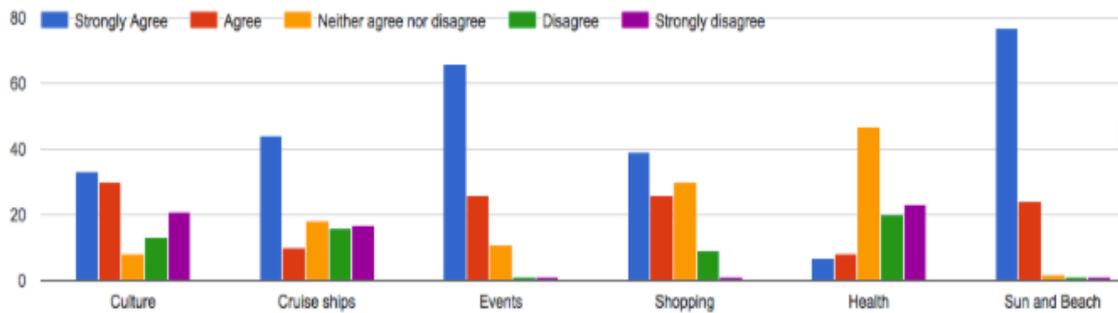


Figure 5. Level of agreement with attributes connected to Barcelona

Regarding the adjectives connected with Barcelona as a holiday destination, a majority of participants described the city as crowded (83.8%) and touristic (88.6%). Other attributes such as beautiful (55.2%) and historic (55.2%) were listed less often. This is visualized in Figure 6 below.

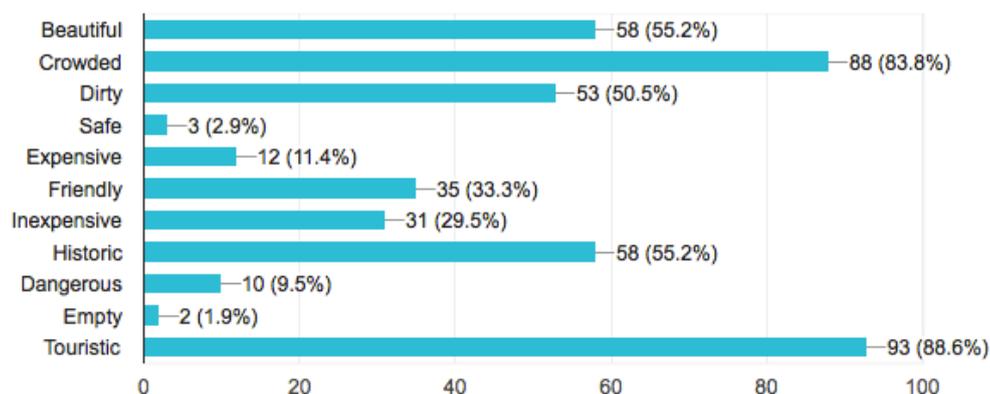


Figure 6. Description of Barcelona as a holiday destination by participants

Looking at the results of question 10, it can be summarized that almost half of the participants of the survey perceive the political situation in Barcelona as rather unstable (45.7%). 26 participants (24.8%) even indicated to find the political situation very unstable. 14.3% of the participants indicated that they have the perception that Barcelona's political situation is neither stable nor unstable. 12.4% of respondents said the political situation in Barcelona is rather stable. Only 3 respondents indicated that they perceive Barcelona's political situation as very stable.

Concerning the results of question 11 about the safety perception of Barcelona, it can be summarized that more than half of the respondents (51.5%) indicated to perceive Barcelona as very unsafe or rather unsafe. Only 3.8% of participants regarded Barcelona as a very safe city. The percentages are shown in Figure 7.

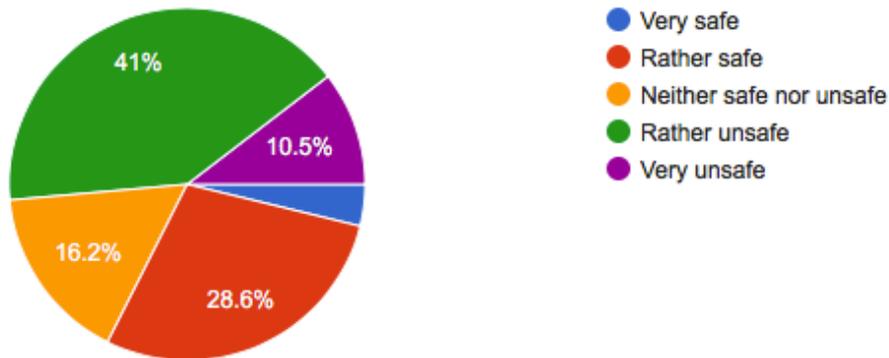


Figure 7. Perception of safety of Barcelona

Looking at the results of the final question of the Barcelona section, 20% of the participants indicated a very positive overall evaluation of the image, whereas 14.3% said to have a very negative image evaluation. The results of this question are visualized in Figure 8.

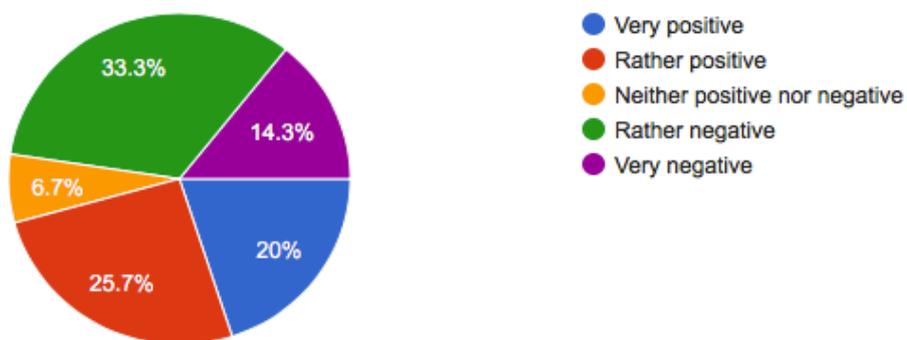


Figure 8. Overall image evaluation by respondents

5.2 Part 2: Mass Tourism

Looking at the mass tourism section, the results of the question 13 about the expected or experienced level of crowdedness in the streets of Barcelona revealed that 47.6% of participants perceived it to be rather crowded and 40% of respondents said they perceived it as very crowded. None of the participants indicated that the city is very empty or rather empty. This is shown in Figure 9 below.

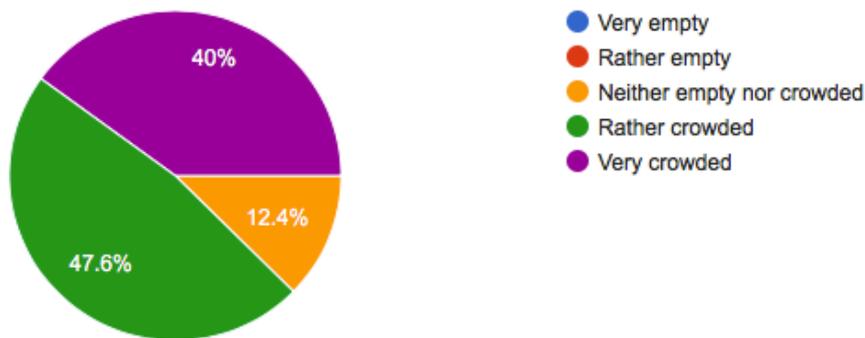


Figure 9. Level of crowdedness expected/experienced by respondents

The results of question 14 of the survey revealed that 49.5% of participants perceived Barcelona as a rather dirty city and 10.5% of respondents indicated that Barcelona is very dirty. Only 3.8% of the survey participants indicated that Barcelona is very clean. This is visualized in Figure 10.

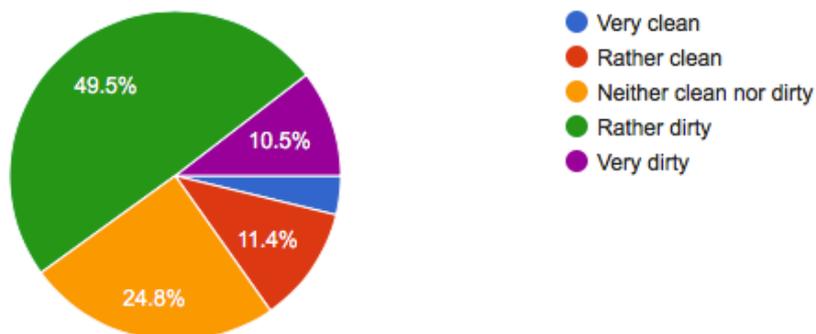


Figure 10. Perception of cleanliness of Barcelona

Looking at the results of question 15, it can be summarized that 64.8% of respondents indicated that Barcelona is rather noisy and 22.9% said it is very noisy. Only 1% of participants indicated that Barcelona is a rather quiet city. Figure 11 shows the percentages of the different answers.

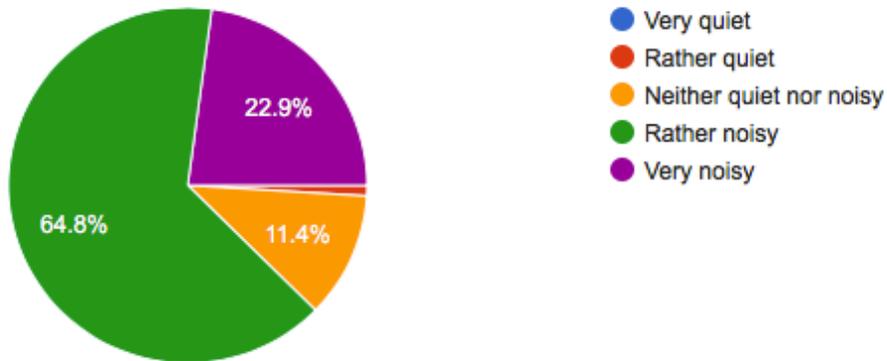


Figure 11. Perceived noise level in Barcelona

Regarding the perceptions of the friendliness of locals in Barcelona, only 7.6% said that locals were very unfriendly and 13.3% indicated that locals were very friendly. Looking at the results of this question, it can be said that the majority of tourists do not perceive Barcelona's locals to be very unfriendly or rather unfriendly. The percentages are visualized in Figure 12. Although López-Díaz (2017) pointed out that locals have issues with tourists and cover walls with messages against tourism, according to the results of the survey, the majority of tourists do not perceive locals as unfriendly.

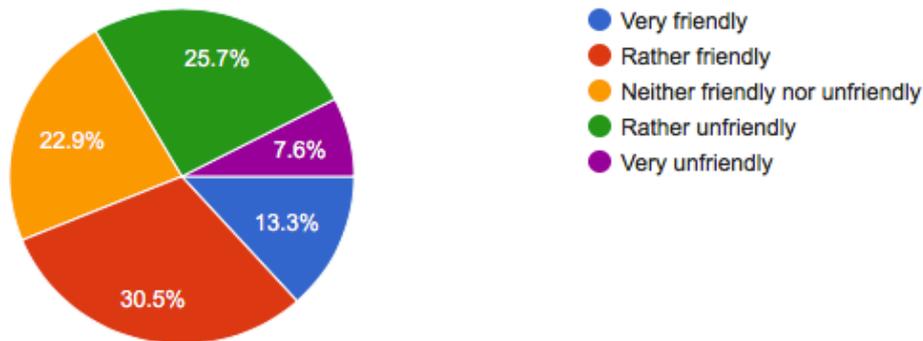


Figure 12. Perception of friendliness in Barcelona

When participants were asked if the afore mentioned factors such as level of crowdedness, noise level, and level of friendliness of locals impact the way they think about a city, 77.1% of respondents answered with yes.

Moreover, respondents were asked to elaborate on their answer to the previous question. Participants mentioned 30 times that Barcelona is not their first choice of holiday destination or that they would prefer to visit other destinations or cities which are cleaner, less crowded, more quiet, and more friendly. 13 respondents listed that locals were unfriendly in Barcelona and that they do not feel welcome at the destination. Moreover, participants mentioned 11 times that they do not plan on visiting the city soon due to its level of crowdedness, noise, cleanliness, and friendliness. Others mentioned however that they still like Barcelona or that they would still visit the city and escape crowded areas such as Sagrada Familia or Las Ramblas.

As mentioned by the Ajuntament de Barcelona (2017), noise pollution and dirty public spaces harm the quality of locals' lives. However, the results of the survey revealed that not only locals but also tourists notice these issues and that it has an impact on the way they perceive the tourist destination.

5.3 Part 3: Communication

Looking at the results of the communication section of the survey, the Internet was the most used communication tool used by respondents to consume news. It was

selected 84 times, whereas newspaper and television were selected less often. Respondents were able to choose more than one option in this question.

When asked which tool has the most impact on the choice of destination, word-of-mouth was chosen by 64.8% of the respondents. This is in line with the literature, as San Martín and Rodríguez (2008) pointed out that people rely mostly on word-of-mouth. 16.2% of respondents indicated that advertising influences their holiday destination choice the most and 5.7% indicated Internet marketing to be the most influencing communication tool. Moreover, personal selling was indicated by 5.7% of respondents, while only 1% selected direct marketing. One participant indicated that documentaries about countries influence his or her choice of holiday destination the most. Other respondents mentioned that influencers or travel accounts on Instagram have the most impact on their choice of holiday destination. One participant pointed out that he or she does his or her own research via various trustworthy sources. 2.9% of participants indicated that none of the communication tools has an impact on their choice of holiday destination.

Results of question 21 in the survey revealed that 79% of respondents have recently heard news about Barcelona. When respondents were asked which news they heard, political news was indicated 76 times by respondents. Furthermore, 13 respondents listed the terror attack in Barcelona in 2017. News mentioned less often were sports news, news about increased rents, locals' unhappiness with tourists and tourist overcrowding.

When asked if the respondents perceived the news to be negative or positive, 53.3% of participants indicated to find the news rather negative. 14.3% of respondents even said the news was very negative. 29.5% indicated the news to be neither positive nor negative and 1.9% pointed out that the news was rather positive. Only 1% of participants perceived the news to be very positive.

In question 24, respondents were asked if recent news, such as locals' attitudes towards tourists, mass tourism, terrorist attack or similar, impact the way they think about Barcelona as a tourist destination. 41% of respondents indicated that it impacts the way they think about the destination. 23.8% said they do not know if it influences their opinion about the city and 35.2% indicated that it does not affect

the way they perceive the tourist destination. The percentages are shown in Figure 13 below.

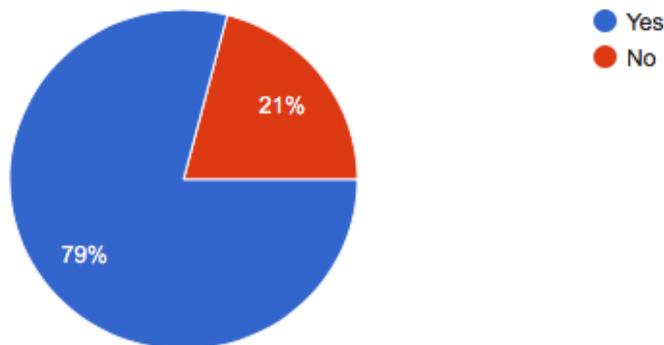


Figure 13. Impact of news on the perception of the city

When asked to elaborate on the answer to the question 24, only 52 respondents listed an explanation. 32 participants indicated that the way they think about the tourist destination was influenced negatively by recent news in media and some of them indicated that they would not like to go to Barcelona in their next holidays. Furthermore, 20 participants indicated that they try not to be influenced by news about a holiday destination and still like to visit the city.

The survey helped to answer the following three research questions:

1. Why is Barcelona such a favorable destination among tourists?
2. How do mass tourism and communication impact the image of a destination?
3. Did recent incidents change the way people perceive Barcelona?

Concerning the first research question, the answers to the survey revealed that the main reasons for visiting Barcelona are the weather in the city, its unique architecture and sights, and the culinary. Furthermore, some people mentioned that they would choose Barcelona as their holiday destination because of its people and the international atmosphere.

Regarding the second research question, it can be said that mass tourism and communication have a rather negative impact on the image of a destination. In the

case of Barcelona, 33 respondents indicated to connect Barcelona with the image of crowded streets and many people. 18 participants described the atmosphere in the city as busy. 88.6% of respondents described the city as touristic and 83.8% described it as crowded. 47.6% indicated to have a rather negative or very negative image of the city. More than half of respondents (77.1%) are impacted in the way they think of Barcelona, by the factors crowdedness, cleanliness, noise, and friendliness. This therefore also influences the image of the destination.

Although 79% of respondents have heard about news and a majority (67.6%) indicated to had observed them as rather negative or very negative, only 41% of respondents are impacted in the way they think about Barcelona. Concerning the third research question, it can be said that the impacts of mass tourism influenced tourists' perception more than news about politics and the recent terror attack.

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

The research of this thesis aimed to identify how mass tourism and communication impact the image of a destination. Furthermore, the goal was to find out if recent incidents changed the way people perceive Barcelona. The literature review of this thesis covered the topics of destination image, mass tourism, as well as communication. Moreover, a chapter about Barcelona was added to have a better insight into its' tourism and the issues the city is facing. To be able to have a better in-depth understanding of the topics mentioned, a survey was conducted.

Although numerous other researchers have dealt with the topic of destination image, the results of this research are a contribution to the existing body of knowledge. Moreover, the results of this study can be used to help DMOs to improve the image of a destination. The outcome of this study may be relevant, in particular, to destination marketers of Barcelona to work on a positive image of the city by communicating the right message.

Destination image is one of the crucial factors not only for tourists to choose their holiday destination, but also for destination marketers. As Woodside and Lysonski (1989) pointed out, a destination with a positive image has a higher chance to be visited.

After conducting primary, as well as secondary data collection, the aim of the research was accomplished. As Barcelona is one of the most popular touristic cities in Europe, the aim was also to find out what makes it so favorable. According to the results of the survey, the main reasons for visiting Barcelona are the weather, its architecture, and the unique sights of the city. However, almost half (47.6%) of the respondents indicated to have a rather negative or very negative image of the destination.

As Baloglu and McCleary (1999) stated, the formation of the image depends mainly on two factors: personal and stimulus factors. The latter can be information gathered from several sources. On the basis of primary data collection, concerning the city of Barcelona, it can be said that 79% of respondents recently heard news about the city. A majority of respondents indicated politics or the terror attack to

be the topic of the news heard and more than half of the participants (67.6%) perceived the news to be rather negative or very negative. 41% of participants were impacted by news in the way they think about Barcelona.

Furthermore, concerning impacts of mass tourism such as the level of crowdedness, cleanliness, noise level, and friendliness of locals, a majority of participants of the survey (77.1%) indicated to be impacted by the mentioned factors. The results of the survey showed that a majority of respondents connect Barcelona with the adjective crowded and dirty. It can be concluded that mass tourism negatively influences a destination's image. Although the abovementioned factors influence tourists' perceptions of the city, many tourists are not influenced in their intention to visit the destination. Moreover, although in the media locals in Barcelona are said to be unfriendly, the survey revealed that 43.8% of participants perceived locals as rather friendly or very friendly, and only 7.6% as very unfriendly.

It can be concluded that in the case of Barcelona, tourists' perception about the city is more impacted by the effects of mass tourism than by news heard about the destination such as politics or the terror attack. Although many participants indicated not to be impacted by the news about the city, a majority of participants would instead choose another holiday destination.

Throughout this study, a few limitations and shortcomings occurred that one should be aware of. Summarizing the process of secondary data collection, it can be said that there are certain limitations regarding the restricted access to existing literature such as books and journals. Looking at the primary data collection process and the results of the survey, it can be said that the total number of 105 respondents of the survey may not be a sufficient sample to generalize the outcome to the population.

Furthermore, looking at demographic factors, more than half of the respondents of the survey are between the age of 19 and 25, and this might affect the outcome of the research. Moreover, almost half of the participants indicated to be students. It can be said that more participants of other age groups, as well as employment statuses, should have been involved. Also, the majority of respondents are from European countries. 61.9% of participants indicated to have a Bachelor's degree

and 12.4% said to have a Master's degree, which means that they represent a part of the population with higher education.

Future research in this field should include tourist numbers to compare whether a negative image about a city changes the actual number of visitors at the destination. As the measurement and evaluation of destination image can be helpful to DMOs, more cities with the same issues as Barcelona should be subject of research in the future. Moreover, concerning primary data collection, a higher number of respondents should be achieved to have a larger sample of the population. This could be achieved by expanding the time frame of data collection.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to see if the perception of specific demographic groups is more affected by the factors mentioned such as mass tourism and communication. In order to test this, the responses of the data collection should be cross-analyzed in future research. Moreover, a cross-analysis of the survey would allow identifying whether people who have visited Barcelona before, would like to revisit it in the near future.

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8 Appendices

Appendix 1: Facebook post in the MODUL University Group

Facebook post with link to the survey, shared on April 8, 11.00 am:

Dear all,
Please take a few minutes to fill out this survey which is part of my Bachelor Thesis.
I would greatly appreciate it!
Thank you!

The Impact of Mass Tourism and Communication on the Image of a Destination: The Case of Barcelona

The following survey serves as a primary research and is a part of my Bachelor thesis. The purpose is to investigate if mass tourism and communication influence the way people perceive Barcelona and why this city is so popular among tourists. Filling out the survey will not take longer than 10 minut...

[DOCS.GOOGLE.COM](https://docs.google.com)

Appendix 2: Facebook post on the researcher's wall

Facebook post with the link to the survey, shared on April 8, 11.00 am:

Please support me by filling out this survey! Thank you 😊

The Impact of Mass Tourism and Communication on the Image of a Destination: The Case of Barcelona

The following survey serves as a primary research and is a part of my Bachelor thesis. The purpose is to investigate if mass tourism and communication influence the way people perceive Barcelona and why this city is so popular among tourists. Filling out the survey will not take longer than 10 minut...

[DOCS.GOOGLE.COM](https://docs.google.com)

Appendix 3: Survey

The Impact of Mass Tourism and Communication on the Image of a Destination: The Case of Barcelona

The following survey serves as a primary research and is a part of my Bachelor thesis. The purpose is to investigate if mass tourism and communication influence the way people perceive Barcelona and why this city is so popular among tourists. Filling out the survey will not take longer than 10 minutes and I would highly appreciate if you answer every question. Participation is voluntary and all data will be handled confidentially and anonymously.

In case of comments or questions, please do not hesitate to contact me:
1411522@modul.ac.at

Thank you for participating,
Paulin Heinrich

*Required

Barcelona

1. Have you visited Barcelona, Spain before? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No

2. If yes, how long was your stay? *

Mark only one oval.

- Less than 3 days
 3-7 days
 8-14 days
 more than 14 days

3. How likely is it that you will visit Barcelona in the near future? *

Mark only one oval.

- Very likely
 Rather likely
 Neither likely nor unlikely
 Rather unlikely
 Very unlikely

4. Please indicate a main reason why you would choose Barcelona as a tourist destination over any other city in Europe? *

5. What images or characteristics come to mind when you think of Barcelona as a tourist destination? *

6. How would you describe the atmosphere or mood that you would expect to experience while visiting Barcelona?

7. Please list any distinctive or unique tourist attractions that you can think of in Barcelona.

8. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: When I think of Barcelona, I think of: *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cruise ships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Shopping	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sun and Beach	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. As a holiday destination, I would describe Barcelona as (please select all that apply): *

Tick all that apply.

- Beautiful
- Crowded
- Dirty
- Safe
- Expensive
- Friendly
- Inexpensive
- Historic
- Dangerous
- Empty
- Touristic

10. Please indicate how stable you perceive the political situation in Barcelona: *

Mark only one oval.

- Very stable
- Rather stable
- Neither stable nor unstable
- Rather unstable
- Very unstable

11. Do you perceive Barcelona as a safe city? *

Mark only one oval.

- Very safe
- Rather safe
- Neither safe nor unsafe
- Rather unsafe
- Very unsafe

12. Overall, how would you evaluate the image you have of Barcelona? *

Mark only one oval.

- Very positive
- Rather positive
- Neither positive nor negative
- Rather negative
- Very negative

Mass tourism

13. How would you describe the level of crowdedness you expect to experience/have already experienced in the streets of Barcelona? *

Mark only one oval.

- Very empty
- Rather empty
- Neither empty nor crowded
- Rather crowded
- Very crowded

14. How do you perceive the cleanliness of Barcelona? *

Mark only one oval.

- Very clean
- Rather clean
- Neither clean nor dirty
- Rather dirty
- Very dirty

15. How do you perceive the noise level in Barcelona? *

Mark only one oval.

- Very quiet
- Rather quiet
- Neither quiet nor noisy
- Rather noisy
- Very noisy

16. How do you perceive the friendliness of locals in Barcelona? *

Mark only one oval.

- Very friendly
- Rather friendly
- Neither friendly nor unfriendly
- Rather unfriendly
- Very unfriendly

17. Do any of the abovementioned factors (levels of crowdedness, cleanliness, noise, friendliness) impact the way you think of Barcelona? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No

18. Please elaborate on your previous answer:

Communication

19. Please indicate the type of media you use to consume news: *

Tick all that apply.

- Internet
 Newspaper
 Television
 Other: _____

20. Which communication tool has the most impact on your choice of the holiday destination: *

Mark only one oval.

- Word-of-mouth (for example: recommendation of friends or relatives)
 Advertising (for example: newspaper, magazines, TV)
 Internet marketing (for example: direct email marketing, internet advertising)
 Personal selling (for example: travel agents)
 Direct marketing (for example: travel exhibitions)
 None
 Other: _____

21. Have you recently heard any news about Barcelona? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No

22. If yes, what did you hear? *

23. Did you observe these news to be negative or positive? *

Mark only one oval.

- Very positive
- Rather positive
- Neither positive nor negative
- Rather negative
- Very negative

24. Did recent news (e.g. locals' attitudes towards tourists, mass tourism, terrorist attack, etc.) about Barcelona impact the way you think of the city as a tourist destination? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

25. Please elaborate on your previous answer:

General Information

26. Please indicate your gender: *

Mark only one oval.

- Female
- Male

27. Please indicate your age group: *

Mark only one oval.

- 18 or under
- 19 to 25
- 26 to 35
- 36 to 45
- 46 to 55
- 56 to 65
- 66 and above

28. Please indicate your nationality

*

29. Please indicate your level of education: *

Mark only one oval.

- Secondary school
- High school
- College
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- PhD

30. Please indicate your status of employment: *

Mark only one oval.

- Student
- Hired/employed
- Employer
- Retired
- Unemployed and currently looking for a job
- Unemployed and currently not looking for a job
- Other: _____