

# **THE JOURNEY TO DESTINATION ‘THE NETHERLANDS’**

A Study on the changing Representation of the Netherlands

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Master’s Thesis

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<b>Abstract</b> <p>The purpose of this study was to research and get a better understanding about the choices behind the representation of a destination on a tourism website by a destination marketing organisation (DMO). The study wants to get more insights on the motivations behind the created image of a destination when looking at the fields of tourism, marketing and intercultural communication. The research questions are: 'What motives do the national Dutch Destination Management Organisation have for the representation of the Netherlands on their new website?' and 'How has the representation of the Netherlands changed from the old to the new website of the national Dutch Destination Management Organisation?'. The research consists of two types of qualitative research: semi-structured interviews and an analyses of the old and new version of the DMO's tourism website. The interviews have been analysed by using the method of thematic qualitative analysis and the analysis of the websites by using the method of semiotics and a model of visual rhetorical interpretation. The translation of the brand, the ideal target group and strategies to portray the Netherlands are all in development to create their ideal representation of the Netherlands. The brand also describes the country as: open, inclusive and innovative. The switch from both websites shows there is a big change in the content, especially the visual content. The changes that have been made, together with the reasons and motives that have been given by the participants, show that the image of Holland has changed or is changing to a diverse, contemporary and less cliché new Netherlands.</p>	
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This master's thesis analysed the representation of the Netherlands on the website Holland.com. This website is the national tourism website of the Netherlands and the product of the organisation NBTC Holland Marketing, who are responsible for attracting visitors to the Netherlands for tourism purposes and business meetings. The organisation launched a new version of their website in 2019, and is still working on changing and adding new content and design features. The look and context of the website have changed and with this the way the Netherlands is represented and branded by the organisation has also changed. In this study the image of the country that has been portrayed on the old and the new version of the tourism website was researched.

The purpose of this research was to get a better understanding of the reasons, motivations and actions that are chosen to create a certain image of a destination and how this is represented. This topic is related to the fields of tourism and travel, intercultural communication and online marketing. This thesis was founded because of interest, information, experience and research in all three of those fields. Because of the change from the old to the new website the image of the country has changed and it is important for the three fields to look further into the motivations, background and choices related to this for future research on the representation of a destination. Also this thesis might be interesting for possible future choices and motivations of organisations that could influence a visitor's image of a destination.

It is a valuable study to get more insights on the overall topic and to contribute to research in the fields of tourism, intercultural communication and marketing. For the tourism field this thesis can be useful for destination management organisations to get a different view on the representation and image that they portray of a destination. Also it gives more insights into the motivations for a destination marketing organisation for showing the image that they want to portray and gives more information about the trends, research and current events in the field of tourism. The information and results of this research can also give more insight for tourism on the creation of country images when the content is shown to (potential) visitors. The study is also relevant for the field of intercultural communication as it tells more about the motivations, choices and background behind the communication and interactions with visitors from all over the world. Also it gives more insight and knowledge on the topic of nation branding, which has been discussed and researched in the field. Other topics relating to nation branding like

representation of a country, stereotypes and target groups can give more insights for research and knowledge in the field. The marketing field could also have an interest in this study as it discusses topics like branding, target groups, motivations and strategies, which could be useful for research, businesses and organisations in the marketing field.

In this study the image that an organisation, like NBTC Holland Marketing, creates on their website and what the underlying reasons and motives are behind this representation were looked at. In this way the questions give a better understanding of the motivations for the choices of the destination management organisation and how this is shown to the (potential) visitor. The following research questions were researched:

RQ 1: What motives do the national Dutch Destination Management Organisation have for the representation of the Netherlands on their new website?

RQ2: How has the representation of the Netherlands changed from the old to the new website of the national Dutch Destination Management Organisation?

In this thesis the first thing that was looked at is literature that tells more about the topics of tourism, marketing and nation branding. The information gives more insight into the research of the two questions on a broader and more detailed level and also shows why it is important to research these topics in the fields of marketing, tourism and intercultural communication. The research questions were answered by doing two different kinds of qualitative research: interviews and an analysis of the old and new website Holland.com. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. For the interviews, the method of thematic qualitative analysis was used to analyse and find the themes that stood out from the data. For the analysis of the website both textual and visual content were analysed on both versions of the website and on five different webpages. For the second part of the research the methods of semiotics and visual rhetorical interpretation were used. The findings of the study will be discussed and reviewed in combination with the literature and finally there will be a conclusion for the research.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review, I first discuss the literature about the industry of travel and tourism. The destination management organisation and especially different types of consumers in the travel and tourism industry are mentioned in the research along with their motivations. Next the paragraph about branding and marketing in the industry, which discusses the differences between marketing and branding on it's own and the specialization of branding and marketing a nation. The image of a country is also addressed in the literature review. This section talks about the image a (potential) tourist or visitor has and the image that a DMO wants to create. It also discusses topics like stereotyping and othering. The last topic in the literature review is about the trends in the industry of travel and tourism. There is a focus on current topics relating to sustainability and technology, that are discussed in various literature. I finish the literature review with a summary of all the insights from the studies.

### 2.1 The Industry of Travel and Tourism

The market of tourism and travel is considered one of the biggest industries or economic sectors in the world (Middleton, Fyall, Morgan & Ranchhod, 2009; Sharpley, 2006, pp. 18-24). According to a report from the World Tourism Organisation (2018) there were 1,323 million international tourist arrivals in 2017. Sharpley (2006, pp. 37-43) said the industry of travel and tourism can be explained as the following:

*“All the individuals, businesses and organisations that, collectively, provide the products, services and, hence, overall experiences that tourists ‘consume’ or enjoy - it facilitates people’s participation in tourism.” (Sharpley, 2006, pp. 38)*

In this paragraph we will first look at the consumers that participate in tourism. In the travel and tourism market the consumers are visitors and tourists. There is a difference between the visitor and the tourist (Middleton et al., 2009). Visitors are all travellers who are included in the term tourism, and tourists are visitors that stay overnight at a destination (Middleton et al., 2009). There are also different classifications for tourists (Kotler, Bowen, Makens and Baloglu, 2017), which are used by tourism organisations and companies: (1) organised mass tourism (package tours/organised vacation). (2) individual mass tourism. (3) explorers, who



make their own decisions on what to do. (4) drifters, who are most of the time younger people that stay at youth hostels with friends or go camping. (5) visiting friends or relatives (VFR) (6) business travellers (7) pleasure travel, which is a very big classification. (8) bleisure, which stands for business and pleasure travellers (8) educational and religious travel (9) pass-through tourists, who are tourists that stay at one place overnight or just to rest. Along with these categories there are also some other characteristics mentioned that can be applied to tourists. For example, if the target group is an independent or a group traveller, a short- or long-haul tourist and first time or repeat visitor. What kind of visitor an organisation prefers to attract depends on the wishes and motivations of the organisation.

Why do people travel? The previous paragraph already discussed different types of travellers, but there are also motivations as to why people travel or choose a particular type of travel. Franklin (2003, pp. 21-37) mentioned that Thomas Cook, the founder of modern tourism, said that tourism is not seen as something for only pleasure, but also as something more serious. According to him it was a part of becoming a modern person. Salazar and Graburn (2014) state the view that the desire for difference, escape or exotic is seen as an exciting experience for the potential tourist. Franklin (2003) mentioned this could be quite a simple way to see it. As the world and the sector of travel and tourism are constantly changing, our motivations that make us want to travel are also changing, for example due to globalisation and technology. However, the motivation to travel for authenticity is something to keep looking at. Different factors have to do with this (Sharpley, 2006, pp. 31-36), like the social and cultural environment, escape from stress or for religious or spiritual reasons. Eight different motivations for travelling are pointed out in the book by Kotler et al. (2017) and show how many different motivations a traveller can have to visit a destination. The motivations mentioned are: (1) Prestige has always been connected to travelling, even though it is only in the mind. (2) To escape from everyday life (which is sometimes even literally mentioned in adverts). (3) Sexual opportunity as some people travel to meet attractive people. While this may be considered as a positive motivation, it can also include negative aspects, for example prostitution. (4) Travel is also seen as educational and broadening. (5) Social interaction can be a reason for people to travel to meet and interact with other people. (6) Family bonding is a motivation for some people, family reunions for example. (7) Relaxation (8) Self-discovery to 'find oneself'.

Apart from the tourists and visitors there are also a lot of other actors in the travel and tourism industry. Sharpley (2006, pp. 37-43) described that there are seven sectors in the travel and tourism market: principals (e.g. accommodation/hospitality providers), intermediaries (e.g.

travel agencies), private sector support, public sector support, sectoral organisations, tourism organisations and destination organisations. The sector of destination organisations includes National Tourist Boards (Sharpley, 2006, pp. 215-226) or a broader used term: Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs). This thesis focussed on the NTO/DMO of the Netherlands: NBTC Holland Marketing. The organisation NBTC Holland Marketing does the branding and marketing for the Netherlands as the brand 'Holland'. For this thesis NBTC Holland Marketing has been referred to as a DMO since it is a more frequently used term for this organisation. The DMO of the Netherlands focuses mainly on inbound tourism of the Netherlands. Inbound tourism means foreign visitors go outside their country of residence to travel to another country, in this case the Netherlands, for tourism purposes (Middleton et al., 2009). In the concept of inbound tourism there are two other concepts: outbound tourism and domestic tourism (Middleton et al., 2009). Outbound tourism is when people travel outside their own country of residence to visit other countries for tourism purposes and domestic travel is when people travel inside the country of residence.

## **2.2 Branding and Marketing in Travel and Tourism**

There is a difference between the terms branding, marketing and management, but all used in the travel and tourism industry and also mixed together sometimes. Promoting destinations has been going on for a long time (Anholt, 2010). However, it took a little bit longer before the concept of a brand was applied. According to the article of Anholt (2010) it is not uncommon, because of globalization, that locations compete to promote destinations. First, the term brand will be explained from a marketing perspective, which is according to Armstrong, Kotler and Opresnik (2016, pp. 237):

*“A name, term, sign, symbol, or design or a combination of these that identifies the products or services of one seller or group of sellers and differentiates them from those of competitors” (Armstrong, Kotler, & Opresnik, 2016, pp. 237).*

The definition looks at a brand from a broad perspective, however a country as a brand is a bit different as it is not really something that is sold or a typical product. Since the definition has not really included nation as a brand in the tourism marketing field it is also important to include the definition of 'nation branding'. Nation branding made it possible for countries to

make their image more visible to the rest of the world in this time of globalization (Nas, 2017). Franklin (2003, pp. 21-37) discussed that tourism is still an important factor for the nation state. He mentions that for example tourism is still a major source of income for nations and is still used as a part of their international policy and international relations.

A destination is a more complicated product in the marketing world as it offers a lot of different products (Kotler et al., 2017), for example accommodations, flights, attractions, entertainment etc. Valaskivi (2016, pp. 1) explains nation branding in the following definition.

*“In other words, nation branding is a matter of countries trying to manufacture and project the right kind of image with the right kind of appeal while retaining the idea of being unique and authentic” (Valaskivi, 2016, pp. 1).*

The quote shows that the idea of uniqueness and authenticity is important for the image of a country. This was also mentioned in the previous definition of branding, where they talked about how the brand wants to differentiate. This explanation and the previous quote give an idea of what branding and nation branding are. However, both are not completely applicable to this thesis. As with nation branding it is not only about looking at the uniqueness or authenticity of a place. For example, Avraham’s study (2018) looked at a Dutch commercial, where the organisation emphasised that English is a language most Dutch people can speak in the Netherlands. Even though it can be seen as a factor that differentiates a visit to the country from other countries, it can also be something that gives a visitor a more comfortable or relatable feeling. The definition that Valaskivi (2016, pp. 1). and Armstrong, Kotler and Opresnik (2016, pp. 237) have in common is that because of the uniqueness, brands want to differ from other brands. The slogan of the brand is also an important part, as it can already give an idea of the image (Kotler et al., 2017).

For the organisation there are also other factors that can contribute to the branding of a nation. Skinner (2018) talks about how user-generated content, or tourist generated content (TGC) as referred to in the article, also contributes to the co-production of a place’s image on the internet and social media. User-generated content will be discussed in chapter 2.4. The tourist or visitor itself is in this way also a part of the creation of the nation brand. Also the residents are a part of the process, as they are kind of the representatives of a place. This is according to Skinner (2018), why user-generated content is preferably used instead of tourist

generated content. The article from Pamment and Cassinger (2018) explains how the resident is an important factor of nation branding, where it focuses on the Swedish Number campaign, where the potential visitor or tourist can call the Swedish phone number and is randomly connected to an individual living in Sweden.

Place and destination branding are also mentioned as forms of branding a location, however as nation branding focusses on the country it differentiates itself from other terms as it is more attached to economic and political goals of the country (Nas, 2017). Skinner (2018) defines the different terms associated with place branding. Place identity, image and brand are all different things. In short the place identity is what a place is, the place image is how a person perceives a place and the place brand is unlike other products, because it is not owned or manageable. Place branding is where a positive identity of a place is created and presented to certain audiences. Then there is also place brand identity and place brand image, that look more at the marketing side of the previously mentioned terms.

For the term of marketing I used the definition from Armstrong, Kotler and Opresnik (2016, pp. 32)

*“Marketing is engaging customers and managing profitable customer relationships”* (Armstrong, Kotler, & Opresnik, 2016, pp. 32).

When looking at the definition from a current inbound tourism perspective, the customers could be seen as first time and repeat visitors / tourists. Uysal, Harrill and Woo (2011) mention that sometimes places have the desire to become popular, which can be achieved by marketing. However, the definition from Armstrong et al. (2016, pp. 32) can also include keeping a good relationship with visitors and tourists (and also potential tourists). In marketing a destination, it is important to understand the customer, and in the case of the tourism and travel industry their motivations (Sharpley, 2006, pp. 83-90). Like discussed in the first chapter about the industry of travel and tourism there are many characteristics organisations can categorise their target group in. Sharpley (2006, pp. 83-90) mentioned that they can look at demographic factors, psychographic factors and product benefits as a few examples. It is important to know the identity of the target group and to know what they want (Kotler et al., 2017). Characteristics like, durations of stay, motivations for travel, purchasing behaviour and events and attractions of interest should be taken into account. Events and attractions are two strategies for destinations to attract certain target groups (Kotler et al. 2017). Attractions can be natural or

manufactured and natural attractions are most of the time valued by destinations and are protected. However, for long term success manufactured attractions are needed to satisfy the desire for travel, since some natural popular attractions are having an increased number of visitors (Kotler et al., 2017). Events, for example cultural events, sport events, food events and political events, drag more tourists to the country, the Eurovision Song Contest for example.

### **2.3 The Image of a Country**

Imagining the country or destination is a frequently studied concept in travel and tourism. Images are important for marketeers as they want to sell peoples' travel fantasies or dreams (Salazar & Graburn, 2014). Imaginaries are powerful as they can be personal, but it can also be an image that is shared by more people across the globe. According to Salazar (2012) with a lot of activities, like reading a book, watching a movie, playing games, imagining things is something we do and also when traveling or planning a holiday people have an image of the 'other' place they are going to visit or the 'other' people they are going to meet. The images that are created can come from a lot of different sources/channels, like movies, books, art, post cards, video games, photographs, blogs, websites, guidebooks, brochures etc. In many cases these can portray for example stereotypical images or romantic images. An example of a cliché that can still be empowered is when a historic event or romantic image of a place is used as an attraction or site for tourists (Salazar, 2012). The article of Salazar (2012) gives an example of a trip to the Maasai that is presented as a 'exotic journey to the past'. The tourism industry looks at the imaginaries of tourists and in this way makes the tourists experience them in real life. However also interesting is the 'cosmopolitan logic' that he mentioned. In this case the tourism worker tries to distance him- or herself more from the locals and make himself more like the foreign tourist. However, according to Salazar (2012) tourists would still like to see some local expertise and the tourism worker would not completely differentiate from the locals. This example could be seen as a form of othering. According to Kotler et al. (2017) it is important to show tourists the 'real' experience of the destination otherwise there is the risk of losing tourists or getting bad reviews for example.

In the study of Cherifi, Smith, Maitland and Stevenson (2018) the results showed different themes that came up from the research on imagined experiences of a destination. The themes that came up were: visual imagined experience, olfactory imagined experiences (e.g.

smells of the environment), gustatory imagined experiences (e.g. taste of food), tactile imagined experiences (feeling the weather), imagined sounds experiences, imagined feelings, imagined physical behaviour, imagined perceived social identity (e.g. language barrier) and imagined thinking at the destination. These different themes show that outside the visual imagination of the place, there are also lots of other factors that can contribute to a person's image of a place, for example smell, taste and sound. The article (Cherifi, Smith, Maitland & Stevenson, 2018) also states that because of this marketing strategies could look further than the visual side of imaginaries.

Salazar (2012) explained that it is difficult for destination marketers to control the created image of a destination. Since these images are a collective image, circulating around, a lot of time based on myths or history and a part of a person's imagination. However, I think it is possible to show people the other side of a picture by concentrating on something else. In this way the stereotype might be less associated with the image of a country. Avraham (2018) looked at different strategies that National Tourism Organisations used for using and fighting stereotypes. The National Tourism Organisations applied different categories of strategies to combat stereotypes: source, message, and audience strategies. These show the different ways these organisations present their messages. A case of message strategy is for example, expanding the image beyond stereotypes. In the article of Avraham (2018) a video commercial of NBTC Holland Marketing was analysed, where they used the strategy of the use of language, as they emphasized that most people in Holland speak English, which can be seen by the target group as positive. The other example is that in the beginning of the commercial stereotypes are presented, but after this the commercial showed what other things the Netherlands has to offer besides the stereotypes. Another research that discussed the representation of the Netherlands is by Van Gorp and Béneker (2007), where they talked about intentional and unintentional images of the Netherlands. They mentioned stereotypes are used on the website of the National Tourism Organisation to create an image for the target group. According to the article the image is as the following: clogs, windmills, tulips, women in traditional clothing and cheese. Some of the other examples the article listed of how the country is portrayed are flat, green, lots of water and some windmills. The article also mentions the image of old Dutch cities or 'old Holland'. Besides the images, the choice for Holland instead of the Netherlands is also discussed. According to the article this is because 'Holland' is more familiar abroad and the presented images are mostly of Holland. Also, the article talked about that the 'region' Holland is seen as a more popular and interesting destination for tourists, other regions are not that

interesting to visitors. Anholt (2010) also mentioned this in his article and that since Holland is more well-known it is accepted as a name for the Netherlands.

Van Gorp and Béneker (2007) stated how there is nothing 'really' Dutch to represent the country, for example tulips are originally from Turkey and windmills and cheese can be found in other parts of the world. A lot of countries have similarities or adapted something from a different destination. However, even though it might not be originally from a destination it can still become an important factor or attribute of the location. For example tulips might be not originally from the Netherlands, but flowers are a very important factor/industry for the country. However, according to Van Gorp and Béneker (2007) the country finds more use in images that show othering. For example, by presenting the flatness of the country or the nostalgic image.

Dervin (2012) presented the idea that in the field researchers and teachers should not try to erase the stereotypes but make people aware of them. According to him stereotypes cannot be erased, but for research it would be interesting to see how they are used. Also othering cannot be undone according to Dervin (2012). I think Dervin's (2012) view is interesting as in my research I looked at the more objective picture and included the possible reasons and motives for why stereotypes are used. In this way I would like to keep the term 'representation' broader. Stereotypes are not something that can easily be removed from the world, since like I said before it is most of the time a big collective image and something that is in someone's imagination. This makes it very difficult to remove or change the person's image of a country in their mind.

In the article of Kerrigan, Shivanandan and Hede (2012) it is mentioned that in the promotion of places in international campaigns the representation can give an illusion of the reality, when marketers keep their ideas on the nation and culture. Also, the article mentioned that in the case of the researched campaign of India, othering is seen as a way of interesting the tourist. However, in the beginning tourism was not about the other or different, but more about the feeling of the familiar and belonging (Franklin, 2004). Qu, Kim and Im (2011) said that destinations all offer stunning views, great accommodations and friendly locals, that is why it is important for a destination to be unique. The authors stated that with a strong and unique brand it is easier to attract new and repeat visitors to the country. In the report of NBTC Holland Marketing (2019) they also presented the strengths of the country: the country has a lot and different things to offer for tourism and business related visits, everything is geographically

close to each other, there is a big variation of local identities, Dutch people are open-minded and the 'New Dutch', which stands for a strong offering of creativity, innovation and design. For example being a small country and everything being such a short distance away could be an example of how the Netherlands differentiates itself from other countries. However along with marketeers in the tourism field, tourists also have an influence on the image of a destination and also on the representation of the country (Hunter, 2016), which will be further discussed in paragraph 2.4.2.

## **2.4 Trends in Travel and Tourism**

In the market of tourism and travel there are constantly new developments and trends happening. For example, niches are developing and growing, like space tourism, hiking, pilgrimages, genealogical tourism and medical tourism (Kotler et al., 2017). There are also bigger developments and trends happening. In this chapter two trends will be discussed that have been mentioned in research and reports.

### **2.4.1 Sustainability**

Ecotourism is one of the fastest growing niche markets in travel (Kotler et al., 2017). Kotler et al. (2017) discussed that carbon-neutral vacations are going to increase due to global warming. Also, the protection of natural attractions is a positive factor, for example the protection and preservation of UNESCO sites. Sharpley (2006, pp. 120-126) mentioned the protection of heritage is one of the positive things tourism brings. There are also negative effects on the environment that are caused due to tourism (Sharpley, 2006, pp. 120-126; Lew, 2018): reduction of natural resources, physical damage (for example on heritage), impacts on wildlife and pollution (for example the climate change impact of the effect of airplanes and cruise ships). Lew (2018) also mentioned 'overtourism'. From the 1960s the fast growth of international mass tourism started (Sharpley, 2006, pp. 13-17) and today this is still an important and current topic discussed in the field. For example the DMO of the Netherlands mentioned in their report Perspective Destination Netherlands 2030 (NBTC, 2019) that because of the expected growth in incoming tourists, the organisation might be facing a problem: An overload of tourists, that can have an impact on the liveability, especially in popular places and



cities. This is a reason why wanting more visitors to your destination is not always a good thing. In the report (NBTC, 2019) they described that the goal is to attract different visitors to different places at different moments, with the condition that there are enjoyable touristic facilities and services provided at the location. This strategy is interesting, as it possibly gives more information about the motives and reasons on the organisation's choices on what to market. Besides this strategy the organisation also mentioned they want to attract more 'quality tourists' and discourage the visit of tourists who cause nuisances. The organisation described quality tourists as 'visitors who will contribute to the Netherlands as a future-proof destination'.

Tourism has different impacts on our world. These can be economical, social, cultural or environmental (Kotler et al., 2017). Nowadays many travel destinations want to manage this by making sure the impacts and changes are minimal, creating economic possibilities for the local community and maintaining the destination, for example by putting a limit on the capacity of an attraction or location. What is interesting is that both the tourists and the locals are important in this matter. An economic impact could be taxes and a social/cultural impact could be when the local community is not agreeing with the way tourism is taking place in their community. Sharpley (2006, pp.135-138) addressed the ways of protecting a place and finding a balance between the needs of all stakeholders: the tourists, the location, the locals and other stakeholders. There are three different ways of managing this (Sharpley, 2006, pp. 135-138): 'influencing visitors' behaviour, redistributing demand and rationing demand.' In the report of NBTC Holland Marketing (NBTC, 2019) they mentioned four points that tourism could contribute to: strengthening the Dutch identity and pride, increasing the liveability, realising sustainability goals, and creating employment opportunities. These points also take into account the different stakeholders.

#### **2.4.2 Technology, The Internet and Social Media**

An important trend to mention is the developments in technology (Bowen & Whalen, 2017), like social media and with this the growth of accessibility to data for the tourism and travel sector. In the field of technology a lot has changed in the area of hospitality, for example where staff in hotels have been replaced by robots. Advertising and promoting have been questioned and there is a need for new marketing strategies for destinations (Kotler et al., 2017). New media, like social networks and websites are becoming more important. An example of how internet and social media have changed the tourism field is the sharing

economy, as mentioned by Bowen and Whalen (2017), where companies like, Uber and Airbnb, have made it possible for people to ‘share’ their car or house. Hand-held devices, like mobile phones and tablets, have become more popular and are growing fast (Wei, 2013). Wei (2013) talks about how mobile phones are taking over mass communication. The article also refers to the network society and how these connect people with each other no matter where they are. In this way different individuals can be connected and produce information and other content.

Huang, Goo, Nam and Yoo (2017) used the term Smart Tourism Technologies (STTs) in their article. STT includes all kinds of online applications and information sources related to tourism, like websites and social media. Also, websites of destinations or agencies, blogs, reviews and social networks belong to STT. These technologies also influence the decisions a traveller or visitor makes, for example a review of a hotel can be important in the decision making of the traveller’s accommodation. Primary products, like accommodation and flight tickets, secondary products have also become an important product to buy online. For example, museum tickets or restaurant reservations. DMOs, like NBTC, also have websites and social media. The promotional content on the websites of National Tourism Organisations can be presented visually and textually. For example, the research of Wu (2018) looked at the linguistic aspect of the National Tourism Organisations’ websites. According to the article, aspects of the visual side have been frequently studied, but the textual side also plays an important part in the promotion of destinations. Wu’s research (2018) states that destinations with different cultural contexts have differences in the way they brand and market themselves in textual content, for example a city’s image. For this research, I looked at both the visual and textual context for my research, as both are just as important for the representation of a country.

Social media is becoming more important for the branding of a product, as consumers’ stories, experiences and opinions are shared and in this way they co-create the brand (Lund, Cohen, & Scarles, 2018). On social media for example tourists show and share their experience before, during and after a trip (Kotler et al., 2017). Lund, Cohen and Scarles (2018) stated that if a tourist finds negative images or experiences about a destination they are more unlikely to choose this destination. Because of social media consumers now have a growing power when compared to the marketing managers. Traditional marketing has been less important and instead of looking for people to consume products, marketers are looking for people to produce. The internet has made it is easier and on a larger scale than what was once possible for organisations and companies to share tourists’ feedback and reviews (Middleton et al., 2009). Influencers are a trend at the moment, that is also used by DMOs. An influencer can use

social media to share sponsored content from brands with people (Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). The number of followers, the personality of the influencer and type of content shown are all influencing the trust a millennial has in an influencer. According Chatzigeorgiou (2017) everybody can become an influencer if they build an audience.

User-generated content (UGC) has become important, as people share content and collaborate with other people to create content. This can be anything like, reviews, photographs, information. According to Kim and Fesenmaier (2017) most people concentrate on the use of social media for travel planning or why travellers create content. During the pre-trip stage it is not only planning, but also dreaming and creating desires for a future destination on social media. Social media can have an influence on tourists' views and images on places, activities and people. It can also influence the tourism experience during whole trip. According to the article emotion and evaluation have to do with sharing the experience on social media. Also sharing post-trip experience gives a more positive evaluation. According to Hunter (2016) the experience of the consumer can have an influence on the representation of a country. In the research of Mak (2017) this is described as the concept of tourist generated content. Mak (2017) mentioned that National Tourism Organisations sometimes use photos from tourists, the website of the Tourism Authority of Thailand is given as an example. I would say this term is nowadays better known as the general term: user-generated content.

User-generated also gives a better insight into the opinions of visitors (Bowen & Whalen, 2017). Also, these opinions are important in the marketing field, as nowadays not only marketers, market organisations, products, destinations or companies, but also the tourists and visitors share brands, information, ideas and experiences. This means that not only the marketers in the tourism field, but also the tourists have an influence on the image of a destination (Hunter, 2016). According to Maria Munar (2011) Image and awareness of a destination are influenced by user-generated content, or Tourist Created Content (TCC) as she names. An example of a popular website that uses user-generated content is for example TripAdvisor, but also social media channels like Facebook and Twitter. I believe also Instagram has become an important channel for user-generated content nowadays. The article of Maria Munar (2011) was from 2011 and does not include the latest trends on user-generated content. However, it gave a good view of how brand and image are related, but are at the same time two different terms. They come together in the way that the brand depends on the image that people have of a destination. DMOs do not have the control over this image, but they can for example create brand awareness and image formation.

Storytelling is an important part of content sharing (Lund, Cohen, & Scarles, 2018). Stories have always been important for people and storytelling is used a lot in social media. Collaborative storytelling is very important and for DMOs it is important to be active in interacting with the users. Also visitors and tourists can communicate with each other in online communities (Middleton et al., 2009) In online communities, people with a special interest in something, like an activity or product, interact with each other via forums, chat rooms etc. These online communities are not only present in the field of tourism, but also for example in lifestyle, art, health and entertainment. Social media, like Facebook or Twitter, also connect people together, but here people have a more personal page with followers/friends. On Facebook it is also possible to create product/organisation pages instead of a personal page, which the DMO of the Netherlands has for example. It is also possible to create a group page, which could be for example for a specific online community, for example people who love the Netherlands.

## **2.5 Summary**

Tourism and travel is one of the biggest industries or economic sectors in the world (Middleton, Fyall, Morgan & Ranchhod, 2009; Sharpley, 2006, pp. 19-24). In this industry the consumers are visitors and tourists (Middleton et al., 2009), who have different wants and needs when we talk about the kind of travel or tourism they desire. Also, travellers have different reasons to travel to and visit destinations. There are different sectors in the industry (Sharpley, 2006, pp. 37-43) and for this thesis I looked at destination organisations and in particular the Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) of the Netherlands: NBTC Holland Marketing.

Branding, marketing and management are all terms that are used in the travel and tourism industry and they are sometimes mixed together. Nation branding is something that is being discussed in various literature. In destination marketing it is important to understand the characteristics and motivations of the traveller or visitor (Sharpley, 2006, pp. 83-90; Kotler et al. 2017)

The image of a country that a tourist or visitor has or a DMO wants to create was a very important topic for this thesis. It can also lead to stereotypes or othering. While it is also

difficult to control this created image of a destination (Salazar, 2012), I believe it is possible to make them look beyond this created image and in that way change their view of a destination. Since destination marketers can influence the image people have on a destination. (Hunter, 2016).

It is important to know about the trends that are happening in the travel and tourism industry. The trend of sustainability has been discussed a lot in literature and then we talk about for example global warming (Kotler et al., 2017), protection of heritage (Sharpley, 2006, pp. 120-126) and overtourism (Lew, 2018). Especially the last one is something that can also be found in the strategies of NBTC Holland Marketing. (NBTC, 2019). Both the literature and the organisation say it is important that the stakeholders work together (Kotler et al., 2017; Sharpley, 2006, pp.135-138; NBTC, 2019). Along with the trend of sustainability technology, the internet and social media are also a trend that is important to discuss. A lot of examples are mentioned that influence the tourism and travel industry. For instance: the increase of the use of robots in the sector of hospitality (Bowen & Whalen, 2017), different ways of information search on travel and tourism (Huang, Goo, Nam, & Yoo, 2017) or the ways visitors and tourists give feedback and reviews (Middleton et al., 2009).

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

In the methodology section the aim and research questions of this study will first be discussed. In the second section, the organisation will be talked about more in detail. Next the data of the interviews and the website pages will be presented and in the methods I will talk about the different methods that have been used to analyse the datasets. Lastly the ethics of this research will be discussed.

#### **3.1 Aim and Research Questions**

My aim for the research was to get a better understanding of the reasons and motives behind content and the design of a DMO's website. This research can also be very interesting from the perspective on the field of intercultural communication, in how a destination is represented by a DMO and what the reasons behind these choices are. From an intercultural communication perspective the questions looked at how does the organisation present or communicate the Netherlands to its audience and how the country is represented on their website.

In the case of this research I looked at the destination of the Netherlands. The image of a country is something that people create, like mentioned in the literature review. Holland NBTC Marketing wants to create, like other DMOs, the image of their country according to their motives and reasons and to show it in the way they want. The image of a country could evolve from a collective view, myths or history or stereotypical views, but it is possible to make the, possible, visitor or tourist look beyond this image of the destination. The organisation has changed their website according to their new strategy and for this research I looked at the motives and reasons that they have for presenting the Netherlands on the new website. I also researched how the country is represented on the new website and how this representation has changed from the old to the new website. In this way the representation of the country and the possible image that is created for the potential visitor or tourist were analysed. The fields of travel and tourism, intercultural communication and marketing can gain more insights from this research as it looks at topics that are of interest to all of them. The travel and tourism field can benefit from the results of the research as it gives more insight about the decisions of a DMO behind the image, content and design of the organisation's website and also relates to

topics like target groups, trends and motivations in the travel and tourism industry. On top of that NBTC Holland Marketing specifically, but also other DMOs, can get more knowledge and ideas of the different points that are discussed and the results from the research. More insights about nation branding, stereotyping and target groups are beneficial for the future research in the field of intercultural communication. For the field of branding and marketing, the trends relating to the organisation could offer more insight, new perspectives and ideas for future research for organisations and businesses.

The Netherlands was chosen as the destination for the research, as it is the country of residence for the researcher. I was in this way more familiar with certain locations in the country and information about the Netherlands. I also did my internship at the researched destination management organisation, NBTC Holland Marketing, during this time more knowledge and experience about the organisation and the field of tourism were gained. Also, already during the internship the thesis plan was discussed with different employees. During the internship the launch of the new website was discussed and prepared for. The choice to focus on the change also came during this time, as it would show how the image of the Netherlands changed on this new version compared to the old version. NBTC Holland Marketing was not involved in the planning of this thesis or the formulation of the research problem or questions. However, also written in the consent forms that were signed (See appendix 2), was that participants of the interviews had the right to read the finalized thesis before it is published.

The choice for semi-structured interviews was made as this type of research can go more in depth and give a good view on the motivations of the employees for changing the website. Furthermore, it looks at the opinions and thoughts they had on certain topics and decisions that were made. The analysis of the website is more focussed on the viewpoint of the researcher. It observes the visual and textual content to see what the changes are from both websites. The research focused on five webpages: Homepage, Destinations, Discover Holland, Holland Stories and Holland Information. These five webpages were chosen, since they showed in the navigation bar of the old website and in this way are easy to visit for an online visitor. The limited time for this study made it not possible to research more pages of the website and that is why these five pages were chosen. It also gives a perspective on how an online visitor would see the website and what content the organisations shows to an online visitor. Together both researches give a different perspective for the representation of the Netherlands on the website and give more insights on the choices that were made by the organisation. The choices that

were made for this research give more insight to the research questions that were made for this study from the literature review, which are the following:

RQ 1: What motives do the national Dutch Destination Management Organisation have for the representation of the Netherlands on their new website?

RQ2: How has the representation of the Netherlands changed from the old to the new website of the national Dutch Destination Management Organisation?

The first question looks at the motives of the employees of NBTC Holland Marketing for the way they choose to represent the Netherlands on their new website. This research question was created from the literature review, where it became clear that the motivations of the organisation have a major influence on how the country is represented. These motivations can have an influence on factors like the brand, target group, focus on uniqueness or similarity, trends, attractions, events and locations that are shown. These topics were all discussed in the literature review and show that the organisation has a certain influence on all of them. It is important to see in what way the organisation finds these topics important and what the motivations behind the choices they make are to create a certain image of the Netherlands.

The second question looks more at the website itself and the content that is shown on both versions of the website. The previous motivation for RQ1 mentioned the different topics from the literature review that the organisation has an influence on. RQ2 was also created while keeping most of these topics in mind, but looking more at the tangible factors, for example, target group, different possible strategies (e.g. uniqueness, focus on stereotypes, etc.) and types of activities, events and locations that are portrayed. In RQ1 we focus on the motivations behind the image that the organisations wants to create and with RQ2 we also look at what image of the country the organisation has changed and created for their online visitors.

The questions were answered by doing two types of research: semi-structure interviews with employees of NBTC Holland Marketing, who work or are connected with the changes to the website of Holland.com. The data was analysed by doing a thematic qualitative analysis. The other part of the research is a content analysis of the old and new website of NBTC Holland Marketing. The data from these analysis were looked at with semiotics and visual rhetorical interpretation.



The findings of the research can contribute to other research that looks at the representation of a destination and other topics. For example in marketing and stereotyping the image of a destination or strategies to create a better situation for all partners involved in the tourism field that DMOs focus on. On top of this, the research gave insights and recommendations to the organisation NBTC Holland Marketing for their future plans for the website Holland.com

### **3.2 Case Organisation**

NBTC Holland Marketing is the destination management organisation of the Netherlands (NBTC, n.d.a). The organisation works for and with different stakeholders, such as companies from the tourism industry, regional and local destination management organisations, provinces and ministries, and they also work with different sectors for positioning, development and marketing of the country. Together they create initiatives to attract visitors for vacations and business meetings in the Netherlands. NBTC is an independent organisation which works together with the Raad van Toezicht [English translation: Supervisory Board]. The organisation also gets subsidies from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy (Rijksoverheid, n.d.). Around 70 professionals are a part of the NBTC team in the head office in the Netherlands as well as in foreign locations (NBTC, n.d.a). The organisation involves public and private partners and on top of that the organisation receives government funding. In 2017 the Netherlands had 18 million incoming visitors (NBTC, 2019) and according to the organisation this may become 29 million or more in 2030. The ten countries with the most incoming visitors are Germany, Great Britain, Belgium, United States, France, Italy, Spain, China, Switzerland and Ireland.

The organisation has different visions and strategies (NBTC, n.d.i). The website mentions that they want to portray the country as a liveable, popular and valuable destination for visitors, companies and residents (NBTC, n.d.a). In the report Perspective 2030 Destination Netherlands 2030, (NBTC, 2019) they talk about the HollandCity-strategy, which puts the focus on spreading the growing number of visitors by time and space. The strategy is about making visitors aware of all the different cities and regions that can be visited in a small period of time, because of the short distances between locations (NBTC, n.d.b). The organisation tries

to attract international visitors to the more unknown places in the Netherlands instead of following the well-known locations like Amsterdam.

A tool they are working with, which is also visible for the visitors of the webpage, is the different storylines that connect places and sights based on a theme or interest. The storylines are Hansa Towns, Land of Water, Royal Holland, Liberation Route, Flowers, The Golden Age, Castles and Country Houses, Dutch Food and Cuisine, Vincent Van Gogh and Mondrian and De Stijl (NBTC, n.d.e). Also events and theme years have an impact on the HollandCity strategy. For example, in 2015 it was the year of Van Gogh and in 2019 Rembrandt and the Golden Age (NBTC, n.d.h). In 2021 the theme year will be Ode to the Dutch Landscape, which not only looks at the beauty of the Dutch landscape, but also pays attention to sustainability. On the website they also talk about branding the Netherlands (NBTC, n.d.g). According to the organisation the three core values that make the country unique are: open, inclusive and inventive. Also, there are the Netherlands Passions: Water (landscape), Flowers, Coast, Dutch Masters / Art, Traditional Holland / Heritage, New Dutch / Creative sector, and Biking. It has been announced that a new brand name will be used, that instead of 'Holland' the organisation will be switching to 'The Netherlands' (NBTC, n.d.d). NBTC Holland Marketing is currently looking at how they can apply this in their strategy, but the new webpages already show that there is a change in the branding of the organisation.

On the website of NBTC Holland Marketing (NBTC, n.d.f) they portray the different target groups that they focus on. This can be a target group as in a specific country (NBTC, n.d.c.), but they also show different personas. The personas are different kinds of fictional people, who have been created by a market research company to focus on a more specific kind of person. These are shown in a segmentation model and are focused on the neighboring countries/regions, which are Germany (Nordrhein-Westfalen and Niedersachsen) and Belgium (Flanders). Here I would like to put some descriptions and characteristics of the different target groups. A very detailed description of can be found on the website of NBTC Holland Marketing. On this webpage (NBTC, n.d.f) there are documents with slides, which look like mood boards and give a detailed and big description of every persona. The following descriptions are written and interpreted from the information that can be found in those slides.

- *Michael*: Described also as the achiever. Top 5 countries of origin are Spain, France, Italy, UK and the USA. Average age is 39. A visit to the Netherlands looks like: A weekend trip to the Golden Tulip in Amsterdam with friends by airplane. Some activities of interest are for example: visiting dance events, visit bars/cafes and active/sport activities.

- *Mary*: Described also as the traditional. Top 5 countries of origin are Netherlands, Denmark, Italy, Sweden and France. Average age is 54. A visit to the Netherlands looks like: A week trip to a bungalow in the Veluwe with husband and dog by car. Some activities of interest are for example: cycling, seeing the highlights, experiencing culture.
- *Paul*: Described also as the upper-class. Top 5 countries of origin are France, Belgium, Germany, Italy and the UK. Average age is 49. A visit to the Netherlands looks like: A weekend trip (2 nights) in a good known hotel in the centre of Amsterdam with his wife, son and daughter by airplane. Some activities of interest are for example: shopping, eating out, sailing, visiting museums or classical concerts
- *Nora*: Described also as the post-modern. Top 5 countries of origin are Spain, Italy, Denmark, UK and Sweden. Average age is 43. A visit to the Netherlands looks like: A week (4 nights) to a B&B in Amsterdam with three very good friends by train. Some activities of interest are for example: experiencing/doing like the local, visiting museums, shopping, also visiting a different place than Amsterdam.
- *Peter*: Described also as the mainstream. Top 5 countries of origin are USA, Sweden, The Netherlands, UK, Belgium. Average age is 41. A visit to the Netherlands looks like: A long weekend (3 days/nights) in a holiday home in Duinrell with the wife and kids by car. Some activities of interest are for example: Visiting the nearby beach and sights/attractions, spending time at the holiday park and spending time with the family.

On top of these target groups the website also shows a model that is more focused on international visitors. The two segments, the achievers and the creatives, are made into the two following target groups.

- The Independent Explorer (Creatives) is looking for unique experiences and experiencing local culture.
- The Quality Seeker (Achievers) looks for high quality, service and a more luxurious holiday.

The target groups that are created in personas are something that is common for the marketing field. Normally companies create these to get a better understanding of the brand or product, which in this case is the country the Netherlands. Also, since this is a ‘product’ that could be interesting and accessible for everyone, it means that the target groups also need to include everyone. When looking at the different personas and their characteristics I thought it was very detailed, descriptive and almost too much. This in the sense that it is so narrow, but

applicable to a group, that it is almost creating a stereotypical image of a certain visitor. Also, since people differ in their motives, reasons, interests, lifestyle and also vacation style from time to time, it almost seems difficult to apply these personas to a big group. However, it is a good tool in the sense that it can show what kind of person the organisation wants to focus on and what kind of content to create. In this way the personas could be useful to narrow the focus down and also brings attention to the content and persona that the organisation wants to focus on.

### **3.3 Data**

The research was done with qualitative analysis and divided in two parts: an analysis of semi-structured interviews with employees of NBTC Holland Marketing and an analysis of the old and new website on the textual and visual content of Holland.com. The results of both analyses are discussed in the findings and discussion chapters of this thesis.

#### **3.3.1 Interview Data**

For answering the first research question I interviewed 5 participants, who are all employees of NBTC and all worked on the website or work together with the website department. There is also a difference in the level of involvement on the website per participant. For example one of the interviewees' main task is working with the social media channels. However this person is also working together with the website, and because of this the answers are still a good contribution to the research. During my internship at NBTC Holland Marketing in 2019 the thesis was already discussed with different employees and in a later stage plans and arrangements were made for the interviews. All participants signed a consent form to agree with the terms of the interview and recording. The interviewees were aware that the name of the organisation was going to be revealed, as it is difficult to anonymise as there is only one organisation like this in the Netherlands. They were also aware that, because of the difficulty of anonymization, there is a possibility that they could be recognized by colleagues.

The interviews were semi-structured and were held face-to-face at the head office of NBTC Holland Marketing in the Hague, The Netherlands. One interview was cancelled on the

interview day and was held on a different day by phone call. Interviews were around 20-50 minutes and held in English. All of them were recorded and transcribed afterwards. The participants agreed that the thesis will be shown to the organisation before it will be published online.

The interviews were held in English, but all the participants speak Dutch as their first language. However, the preference was to do these interviews in English for multiple reasons. All participants have good English skills and can express themselves in this language. The thesis was written in English, which means that otherwise the interviews would have to be translated. Now the interviewer and interviewee were both speaking in not their first language and they could express themselves by choosing their own words instead of the interviewer translating them. Also, for time management this seemed to be a good solution, as the interviews did not have to be translated, which saved a lot of time.

For the interviews' interview questions have been made that focused on different topics that have been drawn from the information from the literature review and information about the organisation. Topics that are being discussed are: the brand Holland, image of the country, stereotypes, target groups, motives, uniqueness, passions and storylines, HollandCity strategy, trends (e.g. sustainability, social media, user-generated content) and interaction with the possible tourist or visitor. The research questions can be seen in appendix 1. During the interviews the same interview questions have been asked to all the participants, except for the social media questions, which were asked to a person who focuses on the social media of the organisation. However, extra questions were asked if this was valuable for the research.

### **3.3.2 Website Pages Data**

For this part of the research I will analyse the old and new website of Holland.com. The new website was published on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2019. The analysis was done by researching the following pages: Homepage, Destinations, Discover Holland, Holland Stories and Holland Information. I took screenshots in pdf- and jpg-files of both the old and the new website. The screenshots of the old websites were taken on the 25<sup>th</sup> of July 2019 (See image 1) and the screenshots of the new website on 27<sup>th</sup> of December 2019 (See image 2). For the analysis of the website I will be looking at the visual (photos, videos, maps etc.) and textual content (titles and descriptions) on five main pages of the website.

The webpages can be seen in the images 1 and 2. The typical page of the old website was filled with a lot of different content and articles. Titles and descriptions were added when necessary. The pages use mostly the colours, white, black and orange, but orange was more present on the old website than on the new website. Images were used for the background, but also with article titles and descriptions. On the old website videos were not as present as on the new website. On the new website the homepage shows a video as the banner of the page. On the new website the layout of the page is ordered in a different way, that sections are more sorted together. Titles and descriptions are added to most sections to offer information to the online visitor. Colours that are used are mostly white, gray and black with accents of orange. The background is white and images are no longer used to fill up the whole background. Images are used with article titles and descriptions, but also user-generated content (CrowdRiff collages) is used to show images of the Netherlands. The images were also used on the old website, but on the new website you can see this more frequently. The languages that are available are Dutch, English, French, Italian, Spanish, German and Japanese.

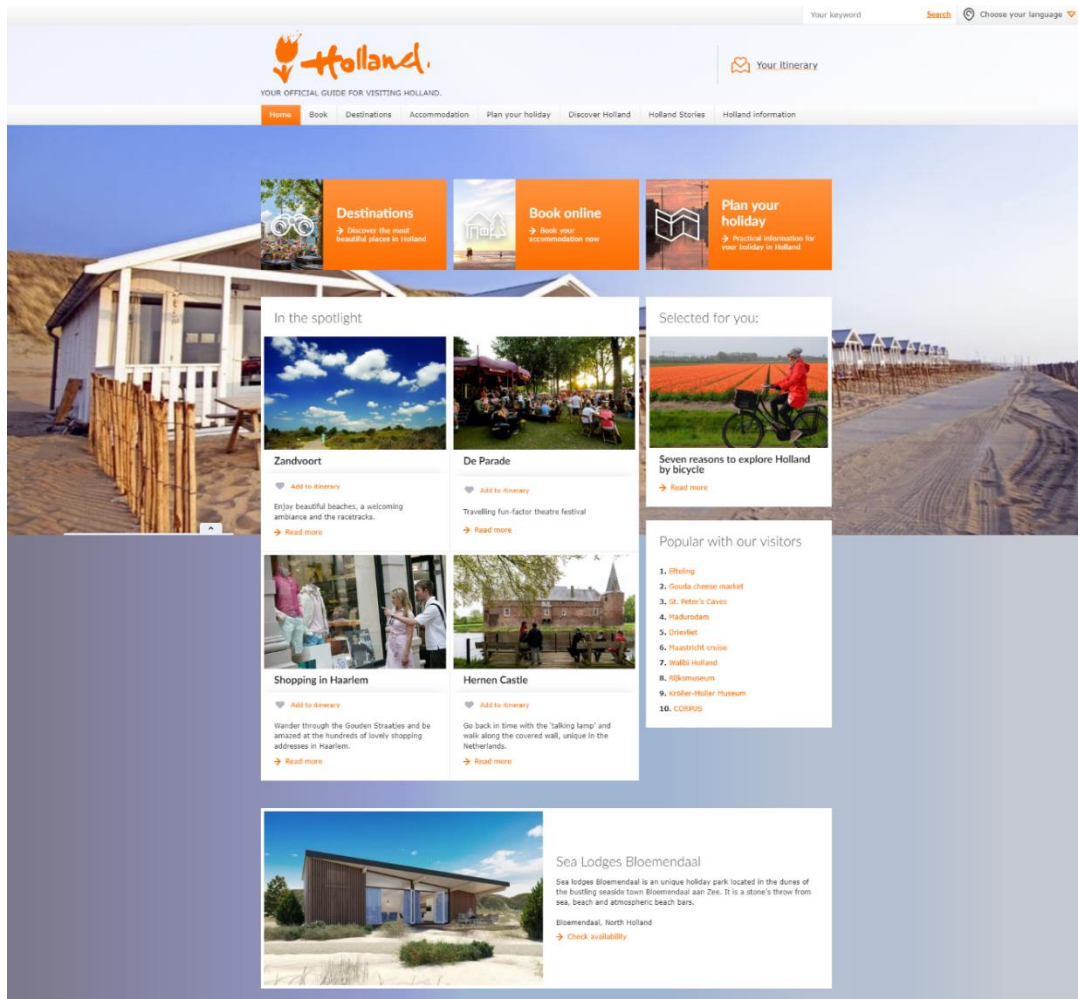


Image 1: A part of the screenshot that was used to analyse the Homepage of the old website of Holland.com on the 25th of July 2019.

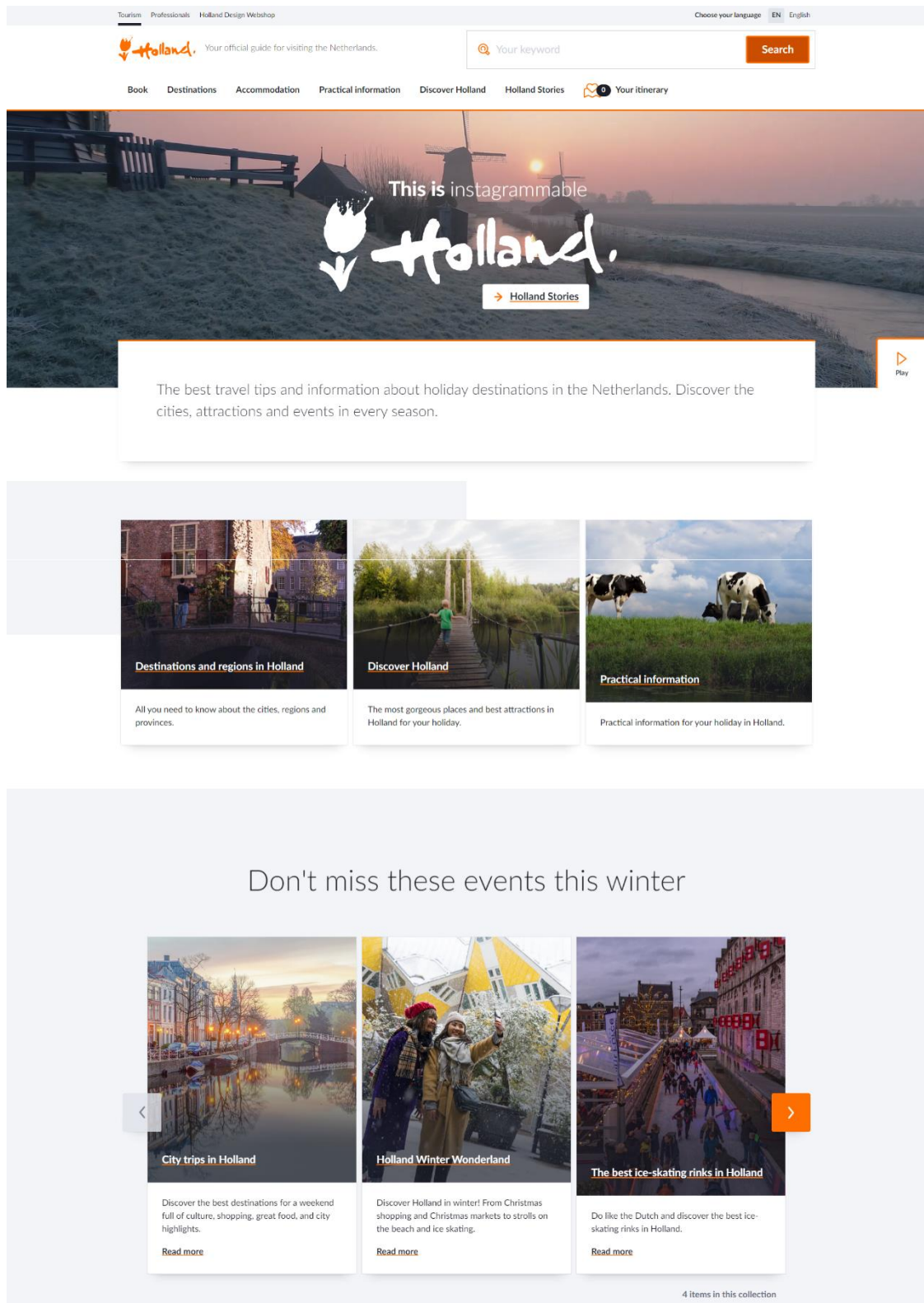


Image 2: A part of the screenshot that was used to analyse the Homepage of the new website of Holland.com on the 27th of December 2019.

## **3.4 Methods**

In this paragraph the methods that were used for the datasets of the interviews and the old and new website are discussed. For the interviews a thematic qualitative analysis was used as a method and for the website analysis semiotics and visual rhetorical interpretation was used to analyse the data.

### **3.4.1 Thematic Qualitative Analysis**

The interviews of this research were held to give a better understanding of the experts' views and opinions, in this case employees from NBTC Holland Marketing, who are working or connected to the organisation's website. With this type of research, I wanted to answer my first research question and find out what the motives are for the National Dutch DMO to present the Netherlands on their new website in the way they do.

The thematic qualitative analysis was used to analyze my interviews. The method goes through the data and themes and topics emerged, that give more meaning to the whole data set. Positive features of using a thematic analysis are that it is flexible and useful. The method is about looking through textual data and finding and creating themes that gives a better view on and structure to my research results (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Ignatow and Mihalcea, 2017; King and Brooks, 2018). The analysis does not have a strict guideline on how to apply it. For my analysis, I used the six steps from the step-by-step guide of Braun and Clarke (2006).

Step 1 was getting familiar with the data. This process started when I did my interviews. Since I did my internship at the organisation, I was familiar with some of the topics and I talked before with people of the organisation. I transcribed my interview recordings and, in this way, familiarized myself with the data. The template with the interview questions can be viewed in chapter 9.1

Step 2 was about generating initial codes. For this process, it was important to start making groups of categories to give to parts of the interviews. I did this by color-coding and numbering the interview parts and later name each color. This resulted in 22 different categories, that can be seen in table 1.



Number of interview part	Categories
1	Introduction
2	Brand Holland characteristics
3	Clichés/Stereotypes about the country
4	Brand Holland acts/activities/features
5	The feel/vibe of Holland instead of static business style
6	Writing style
7	The new Netherlands instead of Traditional
8a	Old design VS New Design
8b	Visual Content
9	New target group
10	Old target group
11	Uniqueness of Holland
12	Time consuming/ Work in progress
13	Short distances
14	Similar less crowded/known places
15	Local culture/people
16	Relationship with the visitor/tourist
17	Sustainability
18	Well known/ popular places
19	Other trends
20	Commercial
21	Off the beaten track

Table 1: Results of the first process of coding the interview transcripts.

Step 3 was searching for themes. During this process, I looked at the previous coded categories and checked to see if there were categories that related to each other, which could be grouped in an overlapping theme. From here, I created the potential main-themes, sub-themes and other themes that might be used in my research. I also created a mind map, which gave a good overview on these themes. This mind map was still quite big and messy.

Step 4 was reviewing the themes. In this step I reviewed the data to see if the themes fit the data and vice versa. Once the chosen themes were put into a theme mind map (See figure 1). As well as checking if the data fits the themes it was also important to check any other data that was not categorized in the themes but might still be interesting. After this step there was a clearer idea of what themes are going to be used for the study.

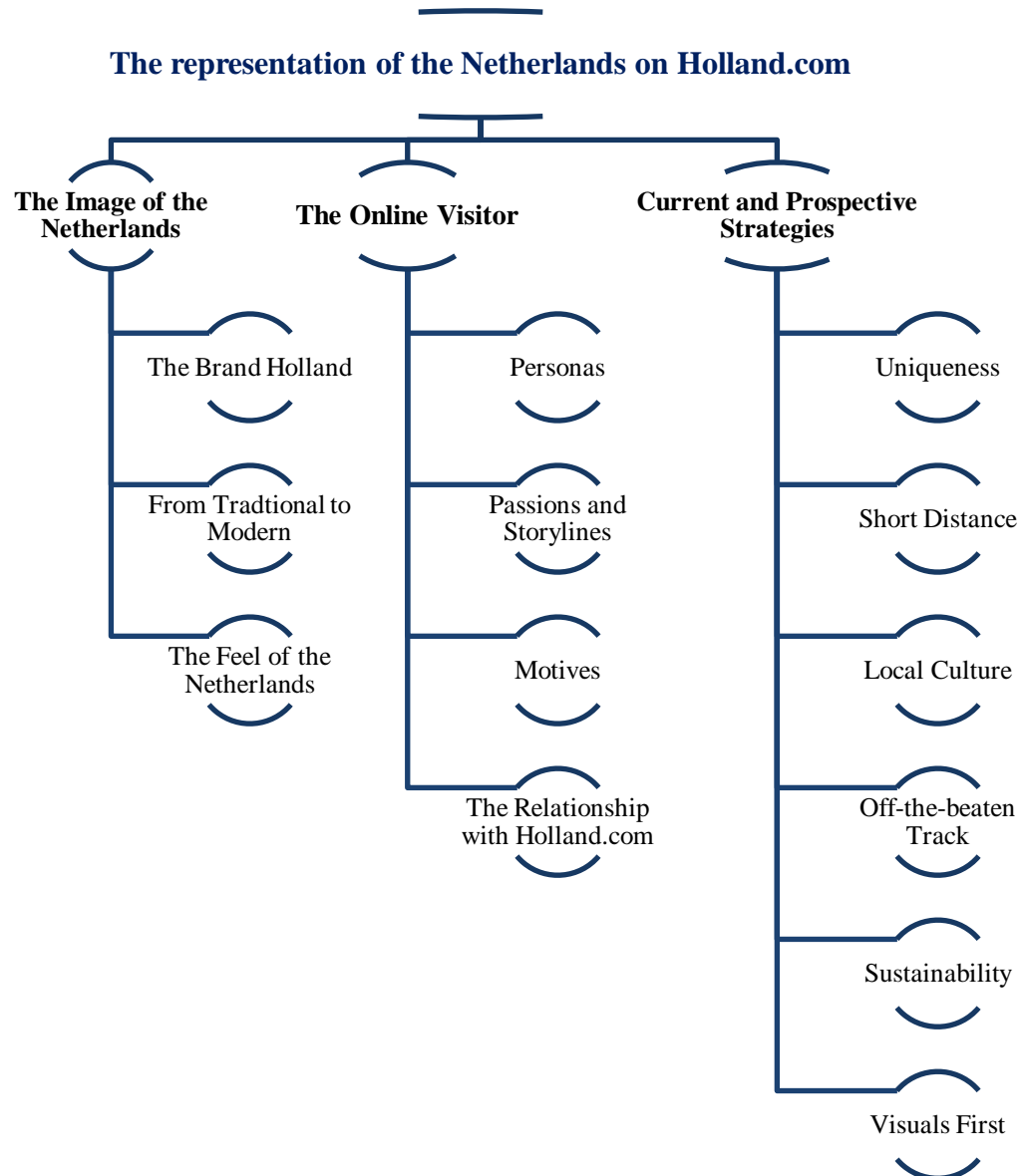


Figure 1: Mind map used during thematic qualitative analysis showing themes made of the interview data.

Step 5 was defining and naming themes. During this part of the process, it was important to define the themes in a way that that can clearly describe what they are about. In addition, it was important to give them names I wanted to use in my research.

Step 6 was producing the report. The last step was about doing the final analysis and writing down the data and argumentations for my themes.

This type of analysis was according to King and Brooks (2018), besides the field of psychology, where Braun and Clarke (2006) paper is focused on, is also a method that is used in other fields, for example organisational research. Also, Ignatow and Mihalcea (2017)

confirmed that it is used widely in the social sciences. The advantages of the method are for example that it can be used for many different things and that it can create themes in the data that are fitting to the research question. King and Brooks (2018) mentioned that these 6 steps are not strict guidelines, but steps that a researcher can adjust and apply to their own research. By following this method, I wanted to find themes that fit my research questions and get a better insight and understanding about the organisations view on the representation of the Netherlands on Holland.com.

### **3.4.2 Semiotics and Visual Rhetorical Interpretation**

For my research of the old and new webpage of Holland.com I utilized the approach of semiotics. Semiotics is the study of analysing meaning-making in for example, texts or images (Gibson & Brown, 2009). Gibson and Brown (2009) mentioned that Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Peirce are the dominant theorists in semiotics. Gibson and Brown (2009) mentioned two concepts of Saussurian semiotics: Denotive and connotive meaning (or denotations and connotations). A denotive meaning is a sign that is obvious and direct, while a connotive meaning of a sign is based on implications and cultural meanings. For my research I used both types of meaning making. Connotations can lead to a more subjective view on some categories, since the researcher is the only person looking at these meanings. However for some categories it is impossible to give a totally objective meaning or look at the denotive meaning (for example get the answer from what can be seen in an image), but for this research I gave my own views and thoughts on the visual or textual content. In some cases the meaning cannot be exactly drawn from what is seen in the visual or textual content. However, it is good to mention that both types of meaning making were used in my research. Criticism to semiotics that is mentioned by Gibson and Brown (2009) is that the meanings that are constructed in research are individual and not everyone finds the same interpretation or meaning with a message. However, parts of the analysis are subjective since they are analysed from my own point of view and reflections on the topic. Gibson and Brown (2009) also mentioned there are some other related concepts to the two concepts of denotive and connotive that have to do with the relationship between the features. Echtner (1999) mentioned the relation in Peirce's semiotic triangle between interpretant, sign and designatum. Every point interacts with the two other points, the relationship of two points should be analysed to get to know the system of signification. I believe in tourism marketing these three points could be: potential tourists, tourism advertisements and destinations. Also, Echtner (1999) named some examples, like that

a sign can be as symbol like the Eiffel Tower in a tourist brochure. I think that maybe in these modern times, advertisements can be also seen as the webpages or social media posts of these DMOs. Desai (2002) discussed that in semiotics the method looks more at cultural aspects instead of only looking at the consumer. According to him the study can help achieve a better understanding of the meaning behind shown images and texts.

In the research of Michelson and Valencia (2016) they used the model of multimodal social semiotics (MSS) by Kress where they look at four components in the process: rhetor (in this thesis this could be the people behind the website of Holland.com) , design, ground and interpreter (the visitor of the website). Afterwards they did a microanalysis on language, image and layout. While analysing images they looked at the categories: actors, locations (grouped in smaller categories related to ‘learning’ and ‘tourism and recreation’) and activities. These are also categories that are interesting for my research. Locations and activities will be discussed in the denotive section. Actors are also an important factor that influences the targeted audience of a message, I discuss this in a separate category called ‘Target Group’.

My analysis of the websites’ data looks within the approach of semiotics and for a more specific analytic tool I looked at the framework used by Kedra and Sommier (2018). The research of Kedra and Sommier (2018) used the model for visual rhetorical interpretation of journalistic photographs, which also includes some aspects that are relevant for this research. The interpretation of photographs is something I also applied when researching the visual content and when analysing the textual parts. The model contains six different points that are being analysed. For my research I looked for both textual and visual content at basic denotation, analysis of photographic techniques and atmosphere and visual rhetorical figures. These categories came back in my research and were added or slightly changed. I also added the category target group to my research as this is an important factor. The categories were also different in the research for both the textual and the visual content, since both were analysed differently.

To give a good overview of the categories that I researched I present both strategies in models. The categories on the textual parts on the webpage can be seen in table 2.

<b>Categories of the textual parts on the webpage</b>	
<b>Basic Denotation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keyword(s) (nouns)</li> <li>• Topic(s) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Theme(s)</li> <li>- Passion(s)</li> <li>- Storyline(s)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Location(s)</li> <li>• Use of the Netherlands</li> <li>• Activity/Activities (verbs)</li> </ul>
<b>Visual Rhetorical Strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the text communicate with its audience? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Informal/Formal voice</li> <li>- Adjectives</li> <li>- Imperatives</li> <li>- Strategies that are used to make the description enticing.</li> <li>- The use of metaphors and similes</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Target Group</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who is the text targeted at?</li> </ul>

Table 2: Categories of the textual parts on the webpage.

The first category is basic denotation, which is based on the category from Kedra and Sommier (2018). The category stands for what we can read or understand in/from the text, as denotation means literal meaning. For this category I looked at four different points. First keywords that described the text and next the topics related to the text which are labelled in the passions and storylines that NBTC uses themselves. I also added a topic not mentioned in the passions and storylines if I found it to be relevant. The last three points are the locations, use of the Netherlands (words describing the Netherlands: The Netherlands, Holland and Dutch) and activities that are presented in the pictures. The second category was also based on the category Visual Rhetorical Strategies from Kedra and Sommier (2018). This tells how the text wants to communicate with the audience. This was researched by looking at different aspects: informal/formal voice, adjectives, imperatives, strategies that are used to make the description enticing and the use of metaphors and similes. The last category for the text is the Target Group, which was considered by identifying the implied target group for the text.

Next to the text I analysed visual content. The categories that are related to this part of the research can be seen in table 3. Like the textual content, basic denotation was also included for the visuals. However, I added type of content, since this was also an interesting feature to

take into account for the research. The next category was the analysis of photographic techniques and atmosphere. For this I looked at the colour (warm/cold) of the picture and the emotion of the picture (happy, serious, playful, cosy etc.). The next category was visual rhetorical strategies, where I looked at how the image communicates with the audience, for example how is the image recognizable for the (possible) visitor/tourist. The last category was the target group, so who is the image targeted at? For example what kind of people do we see in the image?

<b>Categories of the images and videos on the webpage</b>	
<b>Basic denotation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Type(s) of Content (For example user-generated content, video, header, social media etc.)</li> <li>• Keywords</li> <li>• Topic(s):               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Theme(s)</li> <li>- Passion(s)</li> <li>- Storyline(s)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Location(s)</li> <li>• Activities</li> </ul>
<b>Analysis of photographic techniques and atmosphere</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colour: Warm/Cold</li> <li>• Emotion</li> </ul>
<b>Visual Rhetorical Strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the image communicate with its audience?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- E.g. Is it a recognizable image?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Target Group</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who is the picture targeted at?</li> </ul>

Table 3: Categories of the images and videos on the webpage.

The analysis was done in Excel sheets to keep an organised and clear view of the data. Also, I wanted to add that during the text analysis part of the website I noticed that most of the text on the five researched pages, except for the homepage did not change. This is something I took into consideration during the research. All categories mentioned above in the textual and visual part will be researched in the analysis and put in the Excel sheets. Image 3 is a screenshot of a part of one of the sheets for visual content of the Discover Holland page, where the categories were used. This is of the first visual content of the Discover Holland page. Gray blocks mean the category was not presented in the content and was not analysed.

K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U
Basic denotation					Analysis of photographic techniques and Colour: Warm/Cold		Emotion	Visual Rhetorical Strategies	People in the picture	Target Group
Keywords	Topic(s)	Location(s)			Activities			How does the image communicate with the audience? Is it		
Theme		Passion(s)	Storyline(s)							
bridge, nature, water, green	Nature		Flevoland		Walking	Warm		In combination with the text I think the picture gives the audience a feeling of exploring/discovering, maybe even a idea of looking for an adventure	A child	Targeted at everyone (picture focuses more at families)

Image 3: Screenshot of the categories and a part of the data in an excel sheet that is used to research the visual content on the Discover Holland page.

After coding the data from the spreadsheets the findings have been analysed in a more detailed way. The data has been looked at per theme or topic that was in the spreadsheets, for example ‘location(s)’ as can be seen in image 3. After analysing the data from a more detailed level and categorizing and analysing these answers the main categories and findings were found for the findings’ chapter, which were: the change from the older to more modern content, the traditional Netherlands, balance in topics, the attention for locations outside of the region of Holland and strategies that were used by the organisation. These themes emerged by looking closely at the data and comparing the aspects of the text and visual with each other and looking at noticeable differences or similarities in this content. During the research it showed that both denotative and connotative meaning making were used to analyse the data, however this depended also on the kind of topic and content that was analysed.

### 3.5 Ethics

In this paragraph I discuss the ethical part of my research and I look at the situations, standards and issues that I came across or considered during the research. For my thesis I did two different types of research. First, I will discuss the interviews and the secondly the analysis of the website.

The first ethical point that should be mentioned is my earlier internship at the organisation. The knowledge and previous experience have been of significance for this study, but also may have influenced the framing of the study.

For the interviews it was important to first discuss the ideas and circumstances with my internship supervisor from the organisation, who was my main contact during the thesis process.

Later the other participants were contacted about the details and circumstances of the interview. All participants are employees of NBTC Holland Marketing and working with or collaborating with the website of Holland.com. They have all been sent a consent form, that can be viewed in chapter 9.2, with all the details and conditions of the interview. These consent forms were all signed by the participants. Participants also agreed with this to get more information, to interrupt their participation or to cancel their consent if they want at any time during the study.

In the consent form was mentioned that the interview recordings will be destroyed after the master's thesis has been published and the recordings were not shared with anyone. During the thesis process they have been stored on a password secured laptop and an external drive. Four interviews were recorded face-to-face at the head office of NBTC Holland Marketing in The Hague, The Netherlands and one interview was recorded by phone call. The last recording was of lesser quality because of this and made some parts difficult to understand, however it did not have a large effect on the final data that was used for the analysis.

In the master's thesis the names of the participants were anonymized to make sure the interviewees cannot be identified. However, their functions were mentioned together with the name of the organisation, which makes total anonymisation impossible. The reasons for this are; 1. NBTC Holland Marketing is a one of a kind organisation in the Netherlands, which means it would be recognizable in this research, even if it is anonymized, 2. Since the website pages were also analysed, the results of this research can be found in relation to NBTC Holland Marketing's website. The participants were aware that they could be identified, by for example their colleagues, and were speaking on behalf of the organisation and not as private individuals. The participants also have the opportunity to read and comment on this thesis before it is published online. The willingness of the organisation and the participants to participate in this study is very much appreciated.

Another important point is that all interviewees had, along with the interviewer, Dutch as their first language. However they all have English as their second language and the participants also use this in their working life. Since English is also used in this thesis as the main language it seemed like a suitable option for the interviews. Also, as discussed earlier, it was more practical for transcribing, time management and the participants could express themselves in their own (English) words. Sometimes Dutch words were used, but these have been translated in the transcriptions and analysis.



For the analysis of the website it is good to mention that the website is a public website that can be viewed by anyone on the internet. The analysis was done on five different pages on both the old and new website: Homepage, Destinations, Discover Holland, Holland Stories, Holland Information. Screenshots were taken of both versions of the website to analyse this. It would have been better if both of the websites could have been analysed for the same period/season, because of similarity in content relating to the time period and this could have been an interesting part to analyse. However, this was unfortunately not possible within the time frame of the thesis and the screenshots were taken on the 25<sup>th</sup> of July 2019 of the old website and on 27<sup>th</sup> of December 2019 of the new website.

The owners of visual content have been credited if the credits were visible on the webpage. For the textual content this was not necessary as there are no credits or authors written with the articles published on the webpages that were analysed. However, the organisation is seen as the author and is credited with authorship on the textual content of the articles.

During the analysis there were some scrolling banners, that can be seen at the bottom of image 2 and later on in image 7, which have not all had screenshots taken from the old website, which made it impossible to research those images in the time after the old website was taken down. This has been taken into consideration when researching the images on the old and new website.

In section 3.4.2. about the Semiotics and Visual Rhetorical Interpretation it was already mentioned that the research results have a subjective character. It was impossible to analyse all categories by noting down what is literally in a picture or text and that is why for some categories my own views and interpretations of the data were used to analyse the data. However, I believe my views and interpretations are relevant for this research, because of my experience in intercultural communication and the travel industry and the knowledge I gained from the literature about the different topics and methods in this thesis. The subjective part of the analysis is, because of this, also relevant for the research on the representation of a destination for the fields of intercultural communication, tourism and travel and marketing.

## **4 DUTCH DMO PROFESSIONALS' VIEWS ON THE REPRESENTATION OF THE NETHERLANDS ON HOLLAND.COM**

In this chapter the findings of the interviews with employees of NBTC Holland Marketing are discussed. The first research question of this research: 'What motives do the national Dutch Destination Management Organisation have for the representation of the Netherlands on their new website?' was the key question for the interviews, and the findings focus on answering this question. The interview data was analysed with a thematic qualitative analysis, where the following three main themes were identified: The Image of the Netherlands, The Online Visitor and Current and Prospective Strategies.

### **4.1 The Image of the Netherlands**

In this section I discuss the image of the Netherlands and how this has changed from the old to the new website. First, I look at the brand Holland, then the change from a traditional to a modern image and then how the new website shows that the feel of the Netherlands is important.

#### **4.1.1 The Brand Holland**

The website Holland.com looks at the brand Holland from the consumer/leisure side point of view. According to one of the participants the logo lets potential visitors and tourists know that Holland.com is the source when they would like to obtain either information about the Netherlands or find inspiration for their next journey. In time the brand will also switch from Holland to the Netherlands, but during the time of this research Holland is still used as the official brand name.

Open, inclusive and inventive are the three words that are used on the organisation's website (NBTC, n.d.g) and also were mentioned by most of the participants to describe the brand Holland. These descriptive words, or characteristics, were believed to describe the brand,

but also more active or graspable descriptions related to the country were mentioned. However, these still seem to fit quite well with some of the three main keywords used by the organisation.

Some characteristics like open, direct, open-minded, down-to-earth can be linked to the category open. Also, some topics or laws relating to the country were mentioned, such as the freedom of speech, which could also belong to the category of open. Alongside this is also articles on the website were referred to, for example about topics like gay tourism in the Netherlands or an explanation about drug policies, that according to the participants show the open-minded and transparent character of the country.

The country's high standard of living, the safety, freedom to be yourself, acceptance of homosexuality and for example the possibility to walk freely hand in hand without being bothered were mentioned examples that could fit more to the inclusive character. The different cultures and backgrounds in the Netherlands were stated by one participant and could also be a part of inclusive. However, the participant who referred to this example was talking more about the open character.

Then the innovative character is showed in in the interview when the 'Land of Water' storyline is mentioned as something that describes Holland. One of the participants also talks about the dynamic cities that had to innovate a lot during the past. According to her these cities were along with the countryside the things that make Holland.

These three characteristics are interesting, as they almost show the country as a person. The participants describe the country by connecting its acts, laws, characteristics of people, culture etc. From an intercultural perspective this is fascinating, especially how characteristics of people or a culture would be applied to a country and how these characteristics are generalized. These characteristics could also lead to stereotypes, as they could give potential visitors or tourists an idea of how a Dutch person is or what to expect, but when visiting the county this could be contradicted depending on their experiences. However, from my perspective these characteristics were used to give the brand a more personal touch. The characteristics are more tangible and possibly even more engaging then just putting suggestions on what to do or see in a brand description. These are also characteristics that would appeal to most people as they are quite positive and show the positive sides of the country. It showed what the organisation probably wants to focus on in their new brand strategy. It addressed the themes that are more about what Holland is according to them or what they want to show. The

brand is still in development and these descriptions also show the first steps that are being taken to go from the more traditional and cliché to a more modern and personal image of the brand.

#### **4.1.2 From Traditional to Modern**

In the interviews the participants mentioned that the Netherlands stands for a little bit more than the contemporary, like clichés such as tulips, windmills, wooden shoes, and cheese. It was clear from the interviews statements was that on the old website these icons were visible, which gave a very traditional and typical image.

The new brand description also does not fit with the image of clichés according to the participants. However, it was mentioned that these clichés are still a big source of attraction, and even though they still want to show more than just clichés on Holland.com, tourist/visitors will still come to the Netherlands to see these popular sights, products or attractions. A new strategy was applied to use these clichés in a modern, contemporary or innovative way, while still keeping the traditional aspect, which is discussed more in detail in paragraph 4.3.4. In the literature review it was already discussed that stereotypes are not easy to erase and by taking advantage of them and turning them into something more modern, it could work in their favor.

One participant describes the way that the content is being presented in a metaphor, where the country is compared to a shop with a lot of windows.

*“What you lay out is not necessary the clichés, but the stuff you think is really cool. The clichés are still there, but they are more in the back of the shop. You need it to attract visitors, but once they come to our website, we want to show them that there is just plenty more to see and do.”*

In the interviews it shows that the traditional side of Holland is not put on display, but the focus is more on attracting and showing this new type of Netherlands. For example, when presenting agriculture, they are not only showcasing flowers and tulips, but also presenting the new green.

#### **4.1.3 The Feel of the Netherlands**

One change that was mentioned more often in the interviews was how showing the feel of Holland has become more significant instead of focussing on the number of visitors

or the conversion, for example the amount of hotel bookings on the website. On the old website the brand was not really translated for the online visitor, but more commercially driven. One of participants mentioned the following:

*“Your website is really like your business card, it is your portfolio, it is the thing that people see first about you and it really has to show what the organisation is all about. So, in line with that they really gave us the assignment to make Holland.com more like a flagship store. And a flagship store can for instance show the product that they are most proud of or the inventions that you want to showcase, really the things the brand stands for. So in line with that, they want Holland.com to reflect more what we as an organisation are about instead of all the collected campaign materials and other things.”*

This quote showed that according to the respondent the organisation wants to change the way they translate the brand for the website. Also, the reference to a flagship store showed that they really want to make the website a place for potential visitors and showcase what the organisation wants to show. It also illustrated the importance of why this change needs to happen and what the brand needs to represent.

The feel of the old website was, according to some of the participants, more about how amazing or beautiful it was. The old website was more business-like. One of the participants even mentioned it felt like a Wikipedia webpage, for example because articles were more focused on history. Now the website is more focused on showing the feel and the vibe of the Netherlands to the visitor. It is more personal, tongue-in-cheek, more friendly and less business-like. One of the participants compared it almost to writing a travel blog. The importance of storytelling is mentioned a few times. It is also important to mention that the website is going to step away from a lot of commercial activity. According to the participants this will also have a big influence on the content, since then the team is now not influenced as much by partners in what to create.

The use of new content was said in several interviews to be a good example of how the brand image is reflected on the new website. The first view as a visitor on Holland.com, is a video with changing slogan words: *‘This is... instagramable, adventurous, historic, friendly, memorable, amazing, surprising, relaxing, refreshing’*. The *‘This is’* refers to the video content, which are videos of locations and activities in Holland in a specific season. The descriptive words could be seen as characteristics that represent the Netherlands. The words are, like the

three characteristic words that explain the brand Holland, descriptive words, that are mainly positive and descriptions that could attract more online visitors. Some are broader than others. For example instagramable could probably be more focussed on a younger and more social media interested target group, while amazing is something that could apply to many different things. Even though these characteristics might not seem applicable to a specific thing or are quite broad this can also be positive. The online visitor can apply them to their own view. For example, 'amazing' or 'relaxing' can have a different meaning for different visitors, when thinking about a visit to the Netherlands.

One of the participants mentioned that the video banner tries to capture 'the cultural things'. The participant points here at people, atmosphere and nature aspects in the video. In this case maybe 'cultural things' can refer more to aspects of the country, the flat landscape for example. The participant stated that this is the only thing on the website where the culture of Holland can be really seen. According to the participant the summer video was more Dutch than the current winter video, which is being analysed in this research. The participant here could be referring to culture to mean the feel of the Netherlands. For example, what landscapes are shown, what people are in the video, how do they look, if they are happy or curious, what type of activities are done etc.

Another example that was talked about of how the brand was more translated to the new website is the use of colour. In different interviews it was said how the orange colour was too much on the old website and how online visitors gave feedback on the website that this looked a little bit old. A participant mentions the colour is very iconic and typical. Orange is associated with the Netherlands as it is the colour of the royal family, and as such a part of the Dutch history. Nowadays it can also be seen as a symbol for the Netherlands, for example orange is used as the colour for many professional sports clothing, like football, and is also a typical colour to wear on King's Day, a Dutch holiday to celebrate the king's birthday. On the new website it is now only used in small texts and buttons, which is more targeted at a younger audience. This also showed how there has been more focus on the feeling of the Netherlands as the use of the colour was described as typical and old, but now it is according to the participants used in a more modern, younger and structured way.

The participants confirmed that a lot of things are still in development or need to be evolved on the website to get to the final product. One of the participants mentioned that there are around 1500 articles and more than 300 pages in eight languages on the website, which

takes a lot of time to change. The redesign and new touch to the articles are the first steps. At the moment of the interviews the website was still in a transitional phase, where they are looking at and deciding what old and new content fits within the brand, the strategies and contributes to this feel of the Netherlands. In the interviews it is made clear that the process takes a long time, but with the steps that have already been taken it seems the website of Holland.com looks already like it is showing an image that fits more to the modern ideas of the organisation.

From an intercultural point of view, it seemed that a lot of stereotypical or cliché ideas on how to present the country have been replaced by more tangible and personal perspectives. It is no longer about this is what we offer, this is the expectation or the well-known image is not the first priority to show. Instead it is more about diversity in content and the characteristics that are mentioned might give a more personal touch to the visitor's experience. The characteristics try to give a more positive image to the country, since it is about tourism and marketing it is important for the organisation to showcase the qualities that they think should be shown to international visitors. However the new brand can also create some other stereotyping when we look at the country. For example the characters open, inclusive and innovative can give the visitor ideas or a perception of an image of the country or the people of the country. When visiting the Netherlands after having this image would that give them high expectations of what they will see or experience. Nevertheless, when looking back at the answers given in the interviews the participants gave the idea that these characteristics are a more overlapping theme or characteristic that includes a lot of different subjects relating to the country, the people, attractions and activities in the country, which means they can be seen quite broad and detailed. Also the view on the online visitor has changed a lot, which is discussed in the next paragraph.

## **4.2 The Online Visitor**

The content on the website of Holland.com is focussed on their online visitors. Different aspects came up in the interviews that help to focus on this and also show how the focus on a target group has evolved in the process. First, I will discuss the personas, passions and storylines and motives and how these are believed to help create better content that is more focussed on a specific target group. After that I will also talk about the relationship the

organisation has with their online visitors and how this contributes to creating the image of the Netherlands according to the participants.

#### **4.2.1 Personas**

The target groups have developed a lot compared to the old website, according to the participants. In the interviews it was clear that the three personas Paul, Nora and Mary were mainly used on the old website. Paul being the upper-class persona, Nora the post-modern persona and Mary the traditional persona. However, it was mentioned that these personas were not really taken into account when writing an article. The diverse information and content on the website attracted all sorts of people, but on the new website they wanted to focus more on a specific target group, when writing new articles.

The participants explain the new focus is on the personas Nora, the Independent Explorer and/or the Repeat Visitor. The repeat visitor is someone who visits the Netherlands more than once. The independent explorer has the interests to visit places that are more off-the-beaten track and wants local experiences, which is why this target group also fits in the strategies that are mentioned in the next paragraph (4.3). New content and old content that is being adapted are going to focus on these three target groups.

The idea of focussing on more specific and narrow target groups is something that, when thinking of the marketing field and wanting to create the best product for the audience, seems like it gives a more focused view. However, personas can also lead to stereotypes of an audience, which also one of the participants noted. In tourism there are a lot of different people with different motives, interest and wants, who will visit the Netherlands with these desires in mind. That is why these personas could also lead to a overly narrow categorization. It is also important to keep in mind that personas are temporary. A person does not always have the same motives to travel and sometimes wants to have a different type of vacation, which will also be talked about later in this paragraph (See chapter 4.2.3 about motives).



#### 4.2.2 Passions and Storylines

Along with the focus on personas there is also a focus on visitors from a specific country, since content can be more interesting for visitors of a specific country compared to visitors of another country. For example the coast was mentioned to be more relevant for German and Belgium visitors, than for Italian or Spanish visitors, because according to the participants those visitors already have a beautiful coastline at home. Cycling was also believed to be a topic that is especially interesting for the German and Belgium visitor. Cycling and Coast both are categories of the passions. The passions are new and in 2020 they should become clearer on the website, by for example getting their own landing page. Passions are related to specific seasons, for example cycling is not as popular in winter as it would be in summer, and that is why it is sometimes shown less on certain webpages.

After the passions there are the storylines. The storylines were, as they are during the time of the interviews, according to one of the participants more collections of articles that they want to make into real stories. One of the participants mentions that the goal is to make it more of an interactive storytelling experience. The participants tell that some storylines will be discontinued, but will stay on the website and will not be updated anymore. These are Mondriaan and De Stijl, Van Gogh and Flowers. The reason for this is that there will be no partners connected to these storylines anymore, which means the website is free to showcase these storylines in the way they want. For the other stories they do still have partners. Because of this change the participants say that there is a bit more flexible, however it is important for the stories with a partner that they are equally shown. The idea of creating a more in dept and personal story could also contribute to the image of the Netherlands on the website. As when people visit these pages they are interested in a certain topic, for example Castles and Country Houses. According to a participant that when the visitor then gets a more interactive story with a more personal feeling they would get more intrigued and interested, instead of getting a story about history or static text.

One of the participants mentioned that storylines and passions can also be seen as motives, in the sense that they are focused on one theme. A few times is mentioned that the storylines help people with a specific interest to visit the Netherlands and discover other locations outside of the popular ones.

*“The message we communicate to our target audiences is that you can see Van Gogh in the Van Gogh museum in Amsterdam, but did you know that you can also learn about his childhood and history as a painter in other places in the Netherlands, which are now primarily situated in the southern part of the Netherlands, Brabant.”*

The passions are more like motives when compared to the storylines, according to one of the participants. Cycling, the Coast and Traditional Netherlands / Heritage, could all be reasons why people are interested to visit the Netherlands. The idea of looking at what people want and focussing on that, with keeping the idea in mind of the strategies that the organisation has (See chapter 4.3), is possibly something that could really give a representative and truthful image of the Netherlands, that would work for all involved partners. Motives are discussed further in the next section.

### **4.2.3 Motives**

Apart from the personas and passions and storylines the motives are a topic that have not been really present or focused on yet in the strategies of the organisation. However, it was a topic that was mentioned several times in the interviews and something they were working on. Some participants said this is a strategy that they want to focus more on.

After the interview I received an e-mail from one of the participants with the exact travel motives for the Netherlands, that the organisation is focussing on for 2020, since the participant was not sure about the exact names during the interview. The motives are: Relaxation, Getting Away, Experience culture (this also includes for instance off-the-beaten track and live like a local), Reconnecting, Personal Interests and Business. These motives possibly show that they want to get further away from the classifications of the more stereotypical personas. The following quote talks about this in relation to the content on their social media.

*“Unique and authentic, that are two keywords that I’m really focussing on. This is also something people do not expect from our channels. Coming back to my previous comment that we will not be posting anymore about Zaanse Schans and Kinderdijk, but that our channel is really out there to showcase other windmills in this case. So unique experiences.”*

Another participant talked about how this motivation is applied to their strategy and shown on the website.

*“Of course there are people coming to Amsterdam, because they really want to see Amsterdam. They are welcome, but that’s not our strategy so everything we are doing is trying to focus on these off-the-beaten track, lesser known, Nora kind of activities, like cycling and things that are maybe not commercially interesting, but strategically important.”*

Both of these quotes show how the motivations of travellers are taken into consideration, but also applied on the website in a way that they can also meet the vision and strategy of the organisation. Kotler et al. (2017) gives the motivations of a traveller to visit a destination in the literature review. Some of these mentioned motives connect to the motives that the organisation came up with, like relaxation and escape from everyday life. However, the ‘Experience culture’ which includes the ‘off-the-beaten track’ and ‘live like a local’ motives is not mentioned directly by Kotler et al. (2017) as one of the motives for travel and could be a new or evolving motive.

These categories also put people less in stereotypical boxes as they are broader and more flexible when focussing on a visitor or tourist, than when looking at personas or countries. One of the participants also confirmed this by saying that the personas could sometimes be seen as stereotypes. They give the team of Holland.com and the organisation in general a good guideline of who to create content for and present it in the way they want.

When looking at these three sections that were discussed in the interviews, it showed that the motives, passions and storylines are starting to get more into the picture of the organisation than the personas. The findings showed that the motives, passions and storylines are in line with their views and strategy, while the personas are still narrowed to one specific kind of target person and their interests, characteristics and motives. It could lead to a more stereotypical image of what the favoured target group looks like. However, the motives showed for example that they can be applied to a broad audience and are more flexible. The next chapter will look at the interaction with the online visitor and how according the participants the organisation tries to learn more about their motives, needs and wants.

#### **4.2.4 Interaction with the Online Visitor**

For a better understanding of the online visitor it is also good to look at their needs and wants. The participants tell in the interviews that the relationship with the target group is important for Holland.com. Most of the online visitors are organic visitors, who find

the website through a search engine, and that is why thinking about the questions they have is important according to one of the participants. One of the participants explains that a function on the website called my itinerary, where people can add a destination and create their own plan for when visiting Holland, gives more insights on the customer's journey and is useful for the people working on the website as well as for social media. Social media and the website are working together in a way that social media uses the user data of the website for their channels. An example would be what kinds of articles people want to read, so the organisation can take that information with them for content planning on social media. The interaction with the visitor or the tourist on social media and the website seemed to be mainly focussed on getting to know what their motives, needs and wants are, so that the team knows what kind of content is appealing for them or peaks their interest.

Social media is the main channel for direct interaction between NBTC and the visitor, as one of the participants mentioned. Some of the participants state that social media can show what the country is like, gives a personal touch to the brand, feels more personal and there is more interaction than on the website. One of the participants said that the interaction on social media is in a way different, since the online visitor cannot comment on articles or interact with the people from the website. Also, the potential of letting citizens and international visitors engage with each other on a social media post is mentioned. It makes both parties interact with each other, which could also contribute to the strategy of the local (More about this in section 4.3.). The interaction, active and passive, is mentioned as being important to get to know what the online visitor wants to see or read.

The interaction seems to be an important part for the participants, and looking at the findings it seems to be a passive way of interaction. Tracking visitor behaviour, could be used to enhance the evolution of the motives that have been created to really focus on what people want to see and read. It is said, that for the more direct interaction it seems useful to have this personal touch to the organisation. This is happening on social media, but not on the website, according to some of the participants. Social media seems to be a more capable and suitable platform, for where most of the direct interaction takes place. However, the website is according to the participants, still the most visited platform, but just less engaging to the online visitor than social media. One of the participants described that on the website there is no opportunity for the visitor to comment on a webpage, while on social media it is possible to leave a comment on a post. It was stated by some of the participants that the use of mobile

phones and tablets for viewing has become more popular, like also mentioned by Wei (2013) in the literature review, and the new website was also designed to work well on these devices.

### **4.3 Current and Prospective Strategies**

During the interviews different kinds of strategies were mentioned by the interviewees and these were constructed in six different strategies in this paragraph. The strategies are *constructing uniqueness*, *experiencing local culture*, *focussing on the off-the-beaten track*, *addressing short distances*, *putting visuals first* and *looking at sustainability*. All of them are already being applied in the content on the webpage, as the participants mentioned in the interviews, except for the last one. This is more of a niche topic at the moment but might become bigger in the future, according to some of the participants.

#### **4.3.1 Constructing Uniqueness**

Together with the characteristics that were mentioned in section 4.1.1. about the brand, also unique was mentioned. In section 4.2.1. it was also mentioned there is a focus on the personas Nora and the Independent Explorer, who both want to see unique places. According to one of the participants on social media there is also the focus of introducing potential visitors to new places. One of the previous quotes (paragraph 4.2.3) said there is a focus on the two keywords unique and authentic, which is according to one of the participants not something that people would expect from their social media channel. They would expect to see images of popular places/icons like Zaanse Schans or Kinderdijk. A tool to show this uniqueness that is used for both the website and social media is user-generated images. According to one of the participants these show a feeling of authenticity. Interesting is to see how the focus is on these types of places that are somehow there to present the contrast of popular places and icons.

Also, the question to what is unique is something that seemed difficult to answer. Participants came up with different explanations of what is unique to the Netherlands as a country. Locations, accommodations, topics from the passions and storylines, other topics, but also even the clichés, like clogs, cheese and windmills, were mentioned as something that

makes the country unique. However, the clichés and icons are said to be something to be left in the background, but they are still mentioned as unique factors of the country. One participant mentioned that even a generally loved topic, like food, could be unique for the country.

**Interviewer:** *“Are you focussing more on the uniqueness or the similarity of the Netherlands, as a country for a tourist/visitor, compared to his/her country of residence?”*

**Participant:** *“I guess it’s more the unique things and if we are talking about similarities than it might be for instance that all people love food. You know that love goes through the stomach. But still then you try to explain why the Dutch kitchen is unique.”*

To find the uniqueness of the country they also look at how other similar DMOs promote their uniqueness to see how the Netherlands can position themselves in a more unique way.

It seemed the question of what is unique in the Netherlands is something that could be answered broadly. It was as if the label of uniqueness could be applied to almost anything. However, the main focus on this strategy and the definition of this type of uniqueness is more on places and locations that are less known and are likely rare to find anywhere else in the world. As an example, I would think the storyline ‘Land of Water’ would fit this picture. There are some sights related to this storyline, that have their own history, image, look, and feel that would be difficult to find somewhere else, for example the Delta Works.

### **4.3.2 Experiencing Local Culture**

In chapter 4.2.4 it was already mentioned that in the interaction with the online visitor the feeling of local culture and getting the local experience is something that is presented to online visitors. One of the participants said that this is also a trend, where people would prefer to have an authentic and true experience. The participant talks about how this can be seen in the rise of platforms who are offering experiences, like cooking or staying in a local accommodation rather than in a fancy hotel. This was mentioned in the literature review with Airbnb.

From an intercultural perspective this can be seen as the visitor wanting to experience the local culture, with this meaning accommodation, people, food, day-to-day life, cities, values etc. Local culture, like uniqueness and culture on its own is a word that can be applied to a lot of different kind of categories or topics. The meaning of what is unique or what is culture is

not quite clear. It seems from the results that it can be applied to many different situations. It can be used to give this feeling of authenticity, the feeling of a location being special or even the feeling of keeping it a more mysterious/unknown world to the visitor, that could attract them into wanting to know more or visiting the country. There does not seem to be a clear or overall definition of culture, local culture and uniqueness. However, these words are also used in the strategy of the organisation and it is important to have a clear definition of them. For the local experience for example the visitors might have a deeper value than only 'experiencing the culture'. When a visitor gets in contact with a Dutch person or stays at a Dutch person's place it is more about the experience of that person sharing ideas, thoughts and tips with the visitor. Staying at a 'local persons accommodation' could also be for other reasons like type of accommodation, price, facilities, location etc. outside of experiencing a citizen's home. The importance of social media made these two changing ways of experiencing the local easier and more attractive for the visitor, because social media is for sharing one's own experiences with others.

On Holland.com cities that are less known will be highlighted instead of the more popular places, like Amsterdam or Rotterdam. One of the participants mentioned it is important that those lesser known cities keep the local feeling or the feeling of authenticity.

*"Less tourist shops, less souvenirs, less crowds. I think those type of cities. So those mid-range cities, where you can experience local culture, are the places people should really see. And keeping that in mind I think we really make sure they keep their local feel. For instance, I live in Gouda, which is a tourist city, but also still has really authentic feels. There are tourist shops, but they are not the main focus. Also, there are still independent stores. It is still a liveable city and I think that is very important. But I think those types of cities that really have that local feel are really worth visiting and are also the cities we are highlighting next year on Holland.com.*

They also try to include local people in their new content by asking them how they think Holland.com should show their place or location to the online visitors. The image of the Netherlands expand from the most popular cities to also lesser known places and in this way it gives a more representative picture of the country. Asking residents about the locations that they would like to show or see on the website would give a better view of what there is to see and do in a place.

### 4.3.3 Focussing on the Off-the-beaten Track

One of the strategies that was mentioned frequently is showing the unknown, off-the-beaten track and unique places. The strategy is to move people from the crowded, popular and well-known places to locations with a similar look or feel, but that less know about, that are less crowded, with a more local feel and that are off-the-beaten track. One of the reasons for this is that the less known and less crowded places could use more promotion than the popular and well-known places. However, sometimes this is difficult to define according to one of the participants, as when can someone determine if there is enough tourism or not. For cities instead of showcasing the more popular cities, like for example Amsterdam or Rotterdam, more less known cities, like Zwolle, with a more local feel, less tourism and less crowds are going to be highlighted to the online visitor. According to one of the participants the popular icons should still be used, but in a slick and low approaching way, where similar locations can be highlighted, as one of the participants stated. Amsterdam could be the driving force to familiarize people with similar looking cities, like Leiden or Delft. The participant also mentions another example of another popular Dutch location.

*“We say the Keukenhof doesn’t need promotion from us. However, we can still use the Keukenhof to get people acquainted with other places where they can find tulips. Because it is also our corporate strategy, that we are using the known to introduce the new. And that is one of the reasons why we still need those places, because people would always like to refer to something. And it goes without saying that we need to catch people on social media within a second and I think we can do it better when we use those icons instead of letting people get acquainted with things they have never heard of.”*

It is not the case that instead of the popular sites specific places or locations are highlighted, but they focus more on cities outside of the Randstad, the megalopolis in the west of the Netherlands, which include the bigger cities like Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague. However, some participants also say some cities that are in the more known west side of the Netherlands but are less known and less crowded are shown more often. Locations outside of that area, like cities such as Groningen, Zwolle, Deventer or Nijmegen or provinces like Brabant, Zeeland and Limburg, will have more of a focus. For the provinces like Zeeland and Limburg, a participant states that these areas could really benefit from the advantages that tourism brings. Some participants added that this is an important factor, that they want to help boost a location that could use promotion. On the new website they want to make these kinds of locations more visible by showing the more well-known cities less and these alternatives



more. The storylines are used to get people from the more popular places related to a theme to the more off-the-beaten track.

#### **4.3.4 Addressing Short Distances**

Another strategy that came up in the interviews was showing the short distances between locations in the country. One of the participants said that showcasing that everything is nearby and connects to each other, as in it can be visited easily, is the most important part of the HollandCity strategy. This also contributes to the previous strategy (4.3.3. Focussing on the off-the-beaten track) in my opinion when people know travel distances are short, they might be more willing to travel to places off-the-beaten track. The short distances between places and the Netherlands being a small country is something that could actually be seen as a unique characteristic. Visitors are able to visit different and more places in a shorter period of time. The idea of making this very visible could definitely have a positive effect on the visitor's customer journey and also on their motive to travel to the Netherlands.

Some of the participants explained that to show that places are connected and/or have a short distance they use for example a listicle where several places that are close by are mentioned. Also the new my itinerary function, that was mentioned before, is going to contribute to showing the short distances. It already does this by showing on an interactive map where the locations are situated. However, this option is still in development according to one participant, but there will also be an option available later where travel times will be shown or after choosing a destination or location related things in the area will pop up. On all the destination pages, like Amsterdam, there is a map on the side of the page that shows three reference locations. For instance, for the Amsterdam page it shows that Groningen is 147 kilometres away and Den Bosch 80 kilometres. They want to change the kilometres to a different and more clear measurement, like travel time.

#### **4.3.5 Putting Visuals First**

During the interviews it was also made clear that the new website's major change has been the visual part. The images are especially important. Images are now put in first place, according to a participant, since they now have the room to communicate what they want and

the quality is also much better. The participant also mentions that when the old visuals are compared to the new visuals it is clear that there has been improvement in those areas. Pictures of a higher quality and that are less old fashioned will also have a different effect on the visitors view of the Netherlands.

Some of the participants also mentioned user-generated content and especially CrowdRiff collages, as one of the main visual tools that is used. These collages show different user-generated images of a specific location/topic/activity.

*“I always love user-generated images and Instagram images, because they have a feel of authenticity that we don’t get when we have stock images for instance. Or images from our local partners. It really adds a new dimension of authenticity to a webpage if you use CrowdRiff.”*

*“I think also because UGC allows us to really have a strategy by saying by people for people. That whenever they engage with our content that they know that these pictures could have been made by themselves instead of a fancy photographer, who is having an assignment carried with him or her. In that fashion UGC is something, I can also say, that is playing a pivotal role in the Holland.com strategy, because I always say that we are selling visuals. As in we are selling stories that are being told by visuals and that is also something that people tend to look at first when they navigate on a website or engage with a social media post. The image says it all.”*

One of the participants also mentioned that user-generated content causes people to stay on the webpage longer. The organisation would like to focus more on the content of residents, since this is also more approachable. International visitors and citizens can connect more with each other by pictures on one of the social media channels. This also contributes again to the local experience of the visitor.

#### **4.3.6 Looking at Sustainability**

The last strategy that I wanted to mention is sustainability, which is not a current strategy and was mentioned as more of a trend in the interview. Since it was a topic that came back a few times while writing the literature review, this trend has been addressed in the interviews specifically when asking about trends in general. Probably it would not been mentioned that often if it was not addressed in the question as it was clear that at the moment of the interviews this topic is not visible on the website. However, it will become more important in future, according to some participants. This is the reason why this topic is included in the strategies.

The trend of sustainability in tourism includes examples like climate change, mass tourism and the protection of heritage. According to one of the participants the theme is something that online visitors expect from a brand, and as an organisation it is a topic to do something with. In the literature review it was clear that the topic of sustainability is important and needs to be addressed. Potential customers of a brand expect that a brand thinks about these kinds of issues and for the field of tourism it is an important topic.

One of the participants told that first the website was about attracting as many visitors as possible and to generate as much conversion as possible, but now it is more about sustainable tourism. It was also mentioned that the target group they are focusing on finds sustainability an important theme. Two participants mention how they apply the topic of sustainability to articles about restaurants. One of them explained the following choice to make an article about restaurants more sustainable.

*“I would not pick the most popular restaurant necessarily, because like an all you can eat sushi restaurant isn't very sustainable even though people would probably like to visit it. But we try to pick out the really cool sustainable ones. So for instance a place that is vegan, a place that has all organic food, stuff like that.”*

The other participant talked about how she now would more likely mention that a restaurant is biological or vegan. Other participants also mention that a topic such as cycling is not necessarily put on the website with the link to sustainability, but one of them agreed that this would be a good idea for the future. At the moment of the interviews sustainability was more a niche subject, according to one of the participants.

In the interviews was also mentioned that even though sustainability is an important topic they think it is not something that they have a high involvement or contribution to and is not a main focus in their marketing strategy. One of the participants mentioned that other players focus on this topic on a nationwide level. Nevertheless, some of the participants also stated that it is a topic that will become more important and visible in the future. A participant talked about the Floriade, which will be a big event in the upcoming years about growing green cities. This event also fits the Holland brand with characteristics like openness and innovative, according to the participant.

The topic of sustainability is definitely a big subject, but by putting a small focus on this, for instance by including it in the articles about for instance restaurants or transportation, it might be a small but informative way to contribute to this topic. Online visitors might not easily search for the topic or are looking at sustainable travel, but focussing in details such as these could give a larger contribution to sustainability, and maybe even a sustainable image to the Netherlands.

## **5 THE CHANGE FROM THE OLD TO THE NEW WEBSITE**

For the second part of the research I analysed the old and new website on visual content and textual content. The webpages Homepage, Destinations, Discover Holland, Holland Stories and Holland Information were analysed.

The textual content was analysed by looking at the basic denotation, the visual rhetorical strategies and the target group. One thing that is important to address is that the page Holland information was one of the main categories shown on the top of the old webpage. On the new page it does not show up as one of the main categories but can be found under practical information and then general information. However, the page itself is still called Holland information. This might show that this page is not as important or is not as readily showcased to the audience.

For the visual content I looked at the basic denotation, the analysis of photographic techniques and atmosphere, visual rhetorical strategies and the target group. The research looked at pictures, videos and other visual content (for example maps) on the five pages of Holland.com, similarly to how this was done for the textual content.

In this chapter I present the findings by discussing the five noticeable themes that emerged from the analysis results: On the way to Modern and Dynamic Content, The Traditional Netherlands, Balance in Content: Cities and Nature, The Netherlands beyond Holland and Strategies behind the Content.

### **5.1 On the Way to Modern and Dynamic Content**

There were not a lot of changes in the type of visual content that is shown on the new website. The main change was that photos are not really used as background images, instead there is a white background. A new feature on the website is that every webpage now has a header photo and on the homepage this is a seasonal header video. Also the way content is showcased has changed, for example in image sized and more use of CrowdRiff collages. The new way of presenting the content gives a more modern and dynamic style and also a less

messy look to the website (See image 4). This is also probably how the organisation wants the design to connect to the image that people have of the Netherlands after visiting the website.

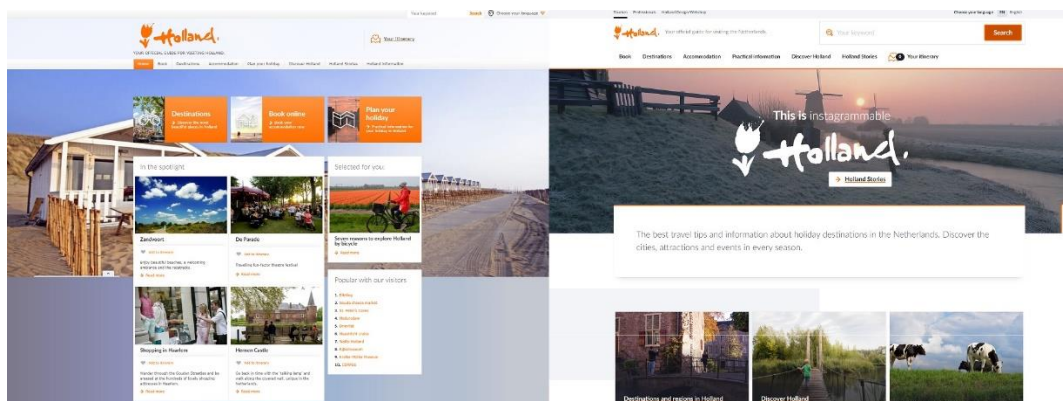


Image 4: Screenshots of the homepage of the old (left image) and the new (right image) website Holland.com.

It is important to mention that for the textual content this analysis focused on titles and descriptions and not on full article texts. During the analysis it was clear that on the new website a lot of the descriptions and titles have not been changed or have just been slightly adjusted from the old website. Most of the changes are visible in the descriptions of the homepage and that is why in the final stage of the analysis the focus was put on the results of all the pages combined (the five pages mentioned before) and also on the homepages on their own. Since the homepage has changed the most it could more easily show the changes Holland.com made from the old to the new website and what is and will be shown on the new website.

The textual content voice was the same on both versions of the website. On both of the websites the writing style was mostly informal, this is most apparent when looking at the homepages. The new design and look of the website also contributes to the informal atmosphere and this looks like it has changed more and has a bigger influence on how the online visitor perceives the webpages.

When taking a closer look at the types of words that were used in the textual content on the homepages there were some noticeable findings. Figure 2 shows the adjectives that have been used more than 3 times on both the new website as well as the old version. One interesting detail that can be seen is some adjective categories, like for example *best*, *largest* and *most* show how good or big something is. After that are the adjectives *famous* and *popular* that show something is well known. *Beautiful*, *great* and *wonderful* are more descriptive words that tell something is good or nice. *Typical* is also a descriptive word but could suggest something is

more traditional. *Dutch* shows that something is from the Netherlands or is Dutch. And *rich* is a more complicated one as it can stand for wealth, but also for having a lot of something, for example a rich history.

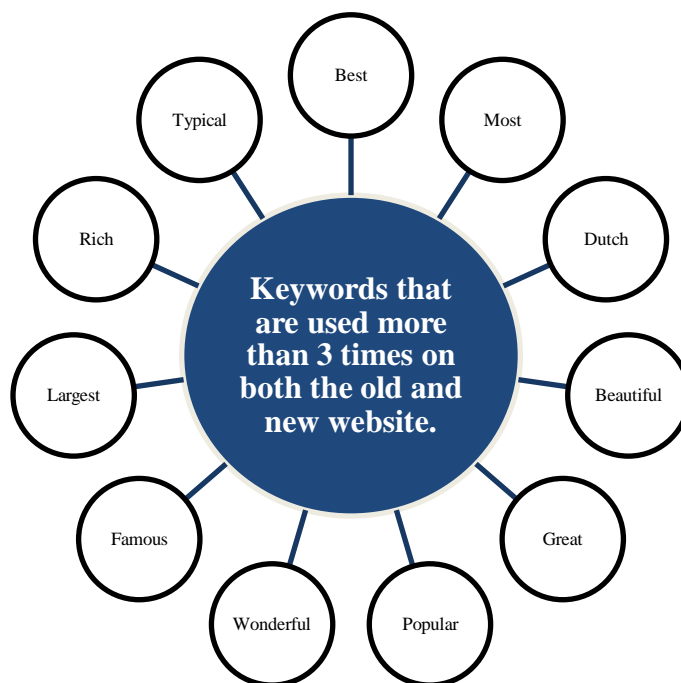


Figure 2: Keywords that are used more than 3 times on both the old and new website.

Most of these adjectives, like beautiful and largest, help to create a more positive image about a location, event, activity or topic in the Netherlands. The organisation creates a more positive image of the country to the visitor through this method. However, other adjectives that could be more descriptive could tell more to the visitor about a certain place or topic. For example instead of saying that 'Utrecht is a beautiful and great city' the description that 'Utrecht is a dynamic and traditional city' gives the online visitor a more detailed and clear idea of what the city actually looks like and even what kind of 'feel' or experience they can expect when visiting the city. However, one can see that these more descriptive adjectives are already used in the descriptions and titles, but they could contribute more to the new website and the new image of the Netherlands that the organisation wants to show. Next to the adjective mentioned in figure 2, other keywords that were used more than three times on the old website are: *Holland*, *many*, *cycling*, *special*, *ten* (or *10*) and *authentic*. For the new website other keywords that were used more than three times are: *historic*, *ultimate*, *modern*, *short* and *traditional*.

Verbs were also researched in the categories: activities and imperatives. For activities the research looks at verbs that tell about an activity or action. This section had an interesting

finding, because it was really noticeable that there was one verb used frequently on the old website, but it is used even more on the new website. The word *discover* was mentioned a lot and when later on looking at imperatives it was also clear that it is mainly used in this form. For imperatives *visit*, *read*, *enjoy* and *experience* were used the most on both versions of the websites. The use of imperative was frequent, possibly because it gives a more active voice and also motivates the online visitor to do something. It showed that they want to encourage the online visitor to do certain things. The possibly overused word *discover* is something that could be paid attention to, as the overuse of this word may come across to the online visitor as too much, for example in the article descriptions in image 5 *discover* is used in every description.

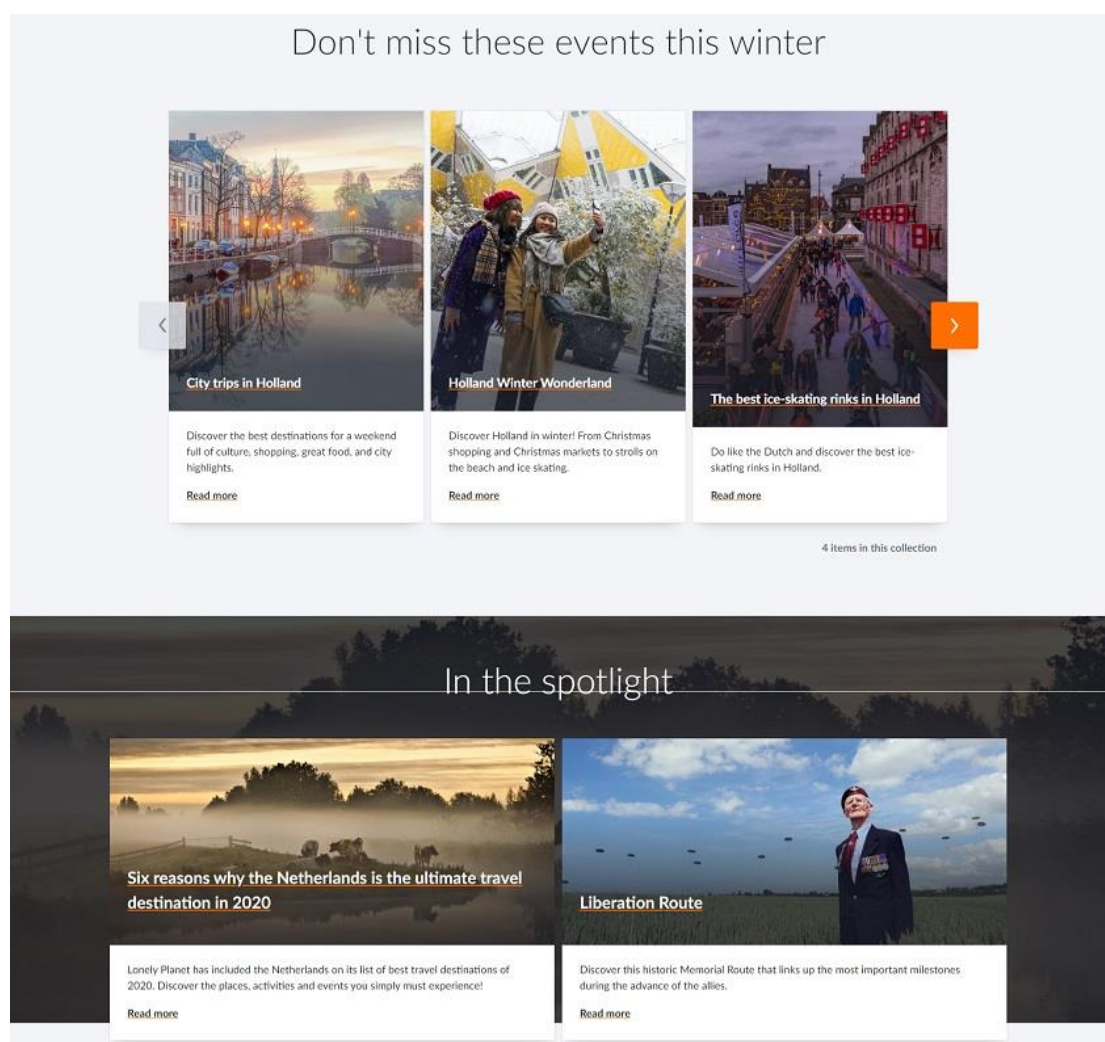


Image 5: Screenshot of a part of the homepage of Holland.com.

Other activity verbs that were used more often were *enjoy*, *experience* and *visit*. It seems that the most common activities are not a specific activity. As for the examples *discover* or *experience* are not really activities that the reader can visualize an action with. On the new



website and in particular the homepage *shopping* looked like an activity that was mentioned a few times compared to other activities. Even though *shopping* sounds like a more general topic, it can be used to display a more modern perspective, for example talking about or portraying more small, independent stores. It is however clear that the new website uses more real activities in the descriptions compared to the old website, like *sailing*, *ice skating*, *sup boarding*, *strolling on the beach*. This can be seen as positive as the descriptions are turning into more detailed and expressive descriptions, like how it is being done in the visual content. The visual content most of the time visualised an activity. It seems there is a diversity in activities present in visual content and especially specific activities, like ice-skating, cycling, taking pictures and shopping.

## 5.2 The Traditional Netherlands

Traditional Netherlands / heritage is one of the passions of the organisation and seems to still be the most noticeable in the textual content. Compared to the contrasting passion new Netherlands / creative sector. In the visual content traditional Netherlands / heritage is clearly the most accuring passion. When looking at the keywords of the visual content it can be seen that traditional icons are still shown, however no more than other topics/locations. The explanation for the presence of the traditional image could be that a lot of cities, attractions and sights in the Netherlands have a traditional look, for example houses, streets, buildings, art etc. This is the case with a lot of different locations and would be wrong to ignore, when describing the content/article. The idea of the organisation was to get away from the more traditional image. This could also mean that traditional elements are still talked about in the description or title, such as icons for example, but in the actual text there might be a reference or suggestion to a more modern topic. The possibility is that the new strategy of using traditional icons to introduce the more unknown and similar places could be used. However in this research full articles have not been analysed. An example of how a traditional and recognizable icon is used to draw people to a more modern topic can be seen in image 6, where historic figure Anne Frank is portrayed in a modern artistic way on a building and the article refers to cool neighbourhoods, which is also a new Netherlands / creative sector topic.

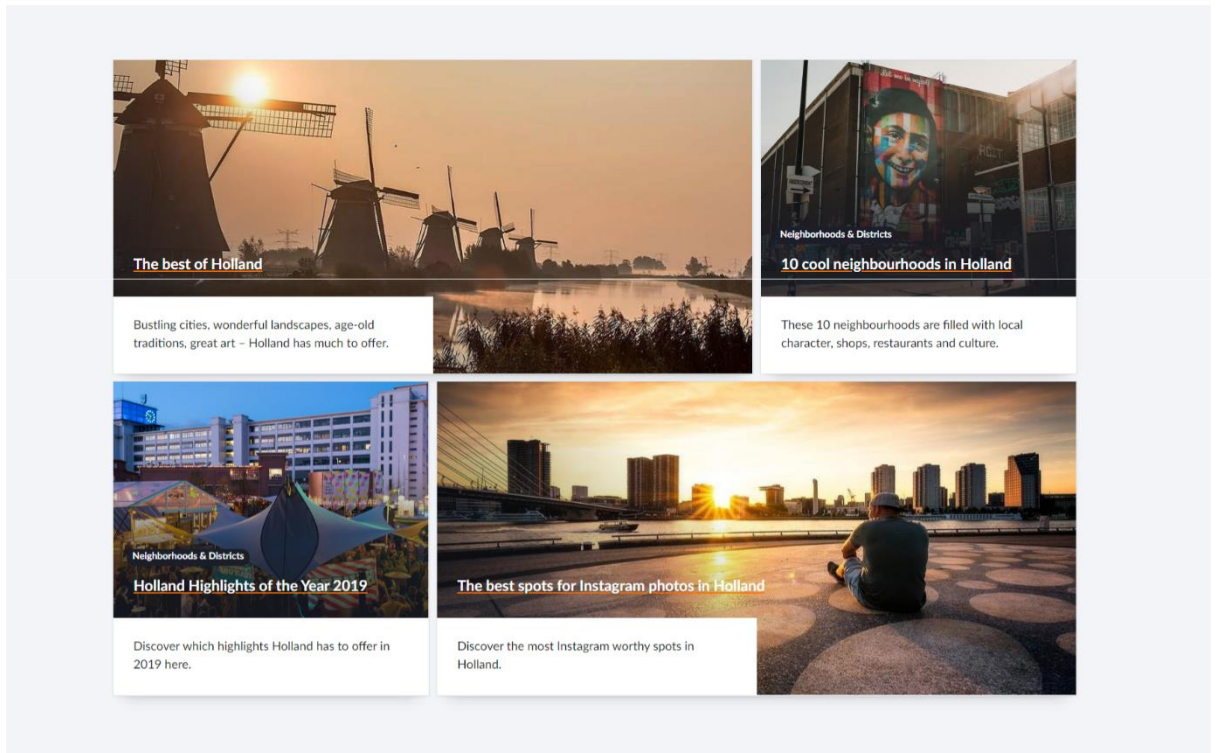


Image 6: Screenshot of a part of the 'Discover Holland' page on the new website of Holland.com.

### 5.3 Balance in Content: Cities and Nature

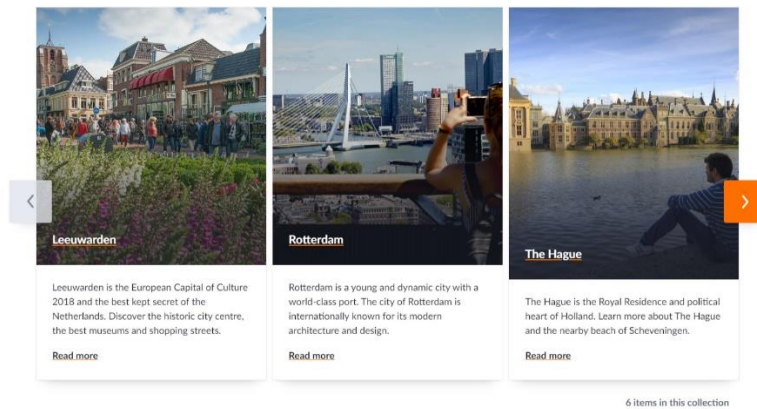
When looking at the results of the passions, storylines and other themes in textual content on the homepage it shows that they are spread. Events and cities were one of the most shown other themes on both websites. Other themes that were discussed more often than once, on one or both of the websites, were family specific activities, museums, sports, nature, shopping and textual content related to the season. Also in the visuals it showed there is variety in the topics. The theme that was most frequent is cities. A lot of visual content where a city is shown is present on the website. On the new website nature and winter themed pictures are more frequently present. Other themes in visual content on the new website were event(s), sports, art, shopping, activity/activities, landscape, museum(s), politic(s), transportation, village(s), province(s), symbol(s), the team of Holland.com and wellness. For example when looking at the more popular other topics on the new website: cities and nature. Those two contrasts were both present in the majority of the visuals with other themes and show the diversity of content.

From the findings the keywords that were given to the visual content seem to be, like the textual content, similar when looking at the changes between the old and new website. Categories of keywords that are mentioned the most are keywords relating to the topics: nature (current season, flowers), water (coast, inland water e.g. canals and rivers), type of architecture style (traditional buildings, modern), city, museum and art, landscape (flat, sunset, blue sky), activities (bicycles, ice-skating), food and icons (windmills, tulips, bicycles). All of these categories can mainly be seen in visual content on the old and new homepage, except for food (which is more visible on the old website). Also some keywords fit in more than one category. This shows the diversity of the topics and locations that they want to show, but also what kind of image they mainly want to portray. For example water related content is shown a lot in visual content on the new website, as well as city and landscape related images. There is a good balance between all of these categories as it is not that obvious that one category is shown more than the others.

#### **5.4 The Netherlands Beyond Holland**

The most mentioned place on the whole website is Amsterdam, followed by locations by or around the region of the Dutch Coast on both the old and the new website. Amsterdam still seems to be the most mentioned location, however this could also be because the article is not actually about Amsterdam, but in the description they refer to it. It can be seen that it is not taking a prominent place on the webpages, as it is for example mentioned on the destination as a last option and the visitor needs to click to see the title and description of this article. This can be seen in image 7.

## Popular cities



## Popular cities

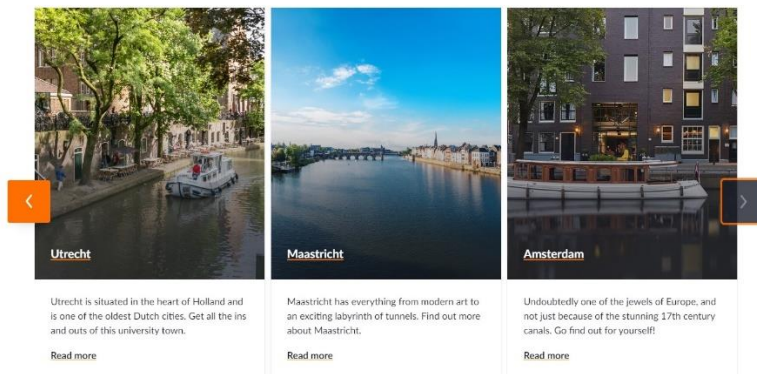


Image 7: These screenshots are taken from the 'Destinations' page. After clicking the orange arrow on the right on the top image the online visitor will see the bottom image.

Other places that are identified on the old and new website more than 3 times are Rotterdam, Maastricht, The Hague and the Veluwe. Two places that were mentioned more than 3 times on only the old website are the tulip/bulb fields and the Wadden Islands, which could have been mentioned more because of the season (summer). On the new website other places that are mentioned more than 3 times are Utrecht and Volendam. When taking in consideration that new content is still being created, the representation of locations can also still change on the website. For visual content Amsterdam seemed to be the most presented on the old website, followed by Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht.

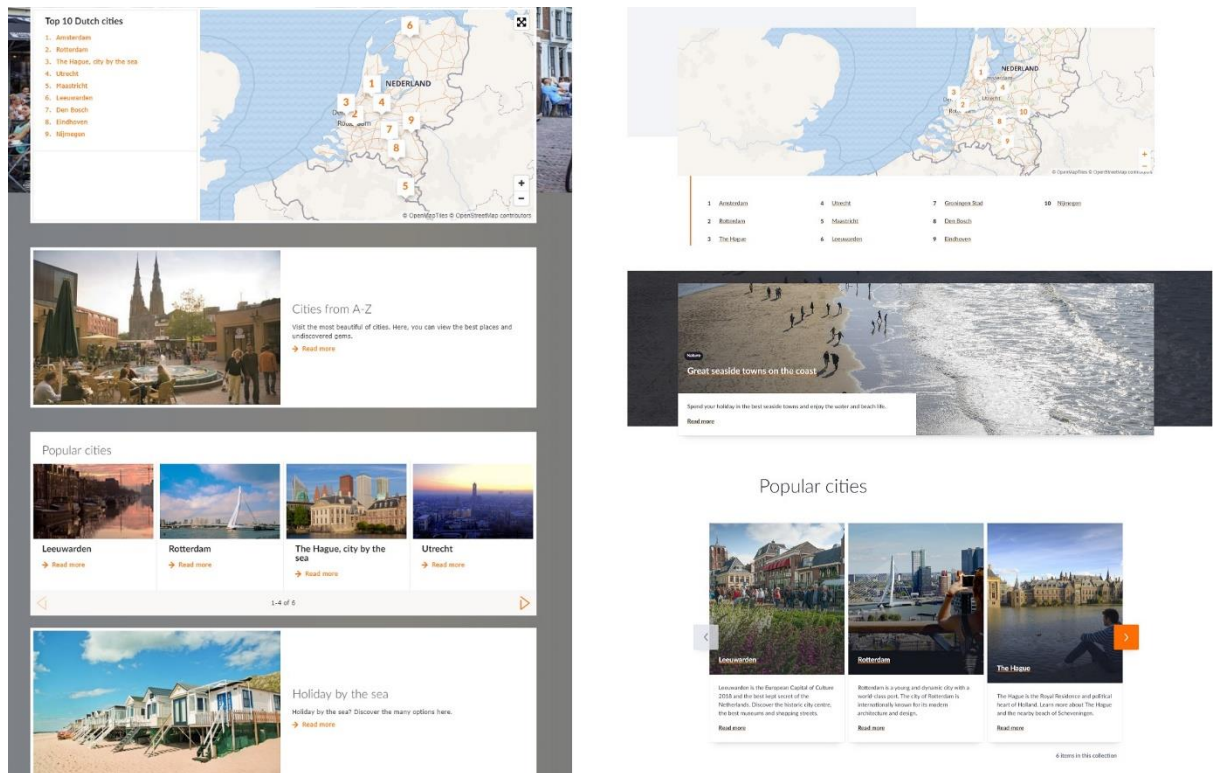


Image 8: Screenshots of the destinations page of the old (left image) and new (right image) website of Holland.com.

It is clear that the most mentioned places are in the provinces of North- and South Holland. After that the most mentioned region is the Dutch Coast. It is also noticeable that other provinces are being mentioned a little bit more, like Friesland, Groningen and Overijssel. The last one of the three was not even mentioned at all on the old website. Also interesting is that the provinces Drenthe and Zeeland are still not mentioned on any of the five pages on the old and new website. North Holland and South Holland are also mostly showcased on both websites in the visual content. However, locations in North Holland are shown way less than on the old website and there seems to be a more equal representation of the amount of times other provinces are shown. This change shows to the visitor a more representative image of the Netherlands instead of showing only the most popular provinces or just a few provinces. Now almost all provinces are shown on the new webpage. The representation of the Netherlands on the new website gives a broader picture of the regions and locations that the Netherlands has to offer. However there would still be room for improvement as the two most popular provinces are still quite noticeably leading in content than the lesser known provinces and locations. It has to be noted that not every description mentions or visual shows a specific location and it could be more about the Netherlands in general or several locations in the Netherlands.

When looking at the representation of Netherlands in the textual content it is noticeable that the most used reference to the Netherlands is still Holland. The Netherlands and Dutch are used more frequently than on the old pages, but they are still used less than Holland. This did not change that much, because the brand name is still Holland. However this will change in the future, and perhaps then the references to the country in the textual content could also change.

## 5.5 Strategies Behind the Content

A few themes mentioned in the previous paragraphs of chapter 5 already aligned with some of the visions the organisation has in their new strategy, for example showing locations outside of Holland. In the analysis of the websites some other strategies showed up and all strategies that were found, will be discussed in this paragraph.

Another theme that could be seen in the results was that the new website shows to have a less business like and formal feel. One noticeable change in this is less commercial content. Keywords related to the commercial side, like *hotel(s)* and *deal(s)*, are not used or less used on the new website. When looking at the overlapping themes in the content it seems that textual content relating to accommodations is shown less. Next to this, verbs relating to the commercial aspect of tourism, like *save (money)*, *pre-order*, *book* and *rent* are not as present on the new website anymore. When looking at the visual content on the website it is also noticeable that visual content with accommodations are shown less on the new website. These results showed that the commercial and more business feel and attitude of the website is not as present anymore.

Another aspect where one can see that the organisation wants to focus more on the new strategy is the strategies that are used to attract people to textual or visual content. Most descriptions or titles have the idea that they try to make the visitor curious of what certain places are, like cities, events etc, or what to do. The use of imperative and positive adjectives are used often in descriptions and titles, which have already been discussed before. Other ways that are used to make textual content more enticing were: asking a question, using a fact, going further than the stereotype or expected, listicles, making it personal, making it special/unknown, presenting multiple activity or destination choices, based on season or time period, showing something is well known or showing the stereotype/cliché, showing the short distance, showing that there are a lot of options to choose from, making the message simple (for example a brief

overview or all you need to know), summarizing multiple topics, summarizing positive aspects, talking about the local, talking about us (like an expert as in Dutch people), and using a different source / brand / organisation / company as a reference. Another strategy was the use of metaphors and similes, that are used to make something extra clear. For example *do like the Dutch*, *flavours of Holland* and *orange fever* are used to really show that something is from Holland or is Dutch. Other phrases like *as small as a city* and *a stone throw away* shows the short distances between locations in the country. *One of the jewels of Europe* and *undiscovered gems* give a feeling that a place is special or unique. Then *go back in time* shows to the audience that a place, attraction or location is historical or traditional looking. Metaphors and similes are not used that often and could also be seen as a part of the strategies. There are clearly many different strategies used to attract people to read a certain webpage or article, which shows diversity in the style of textual content. Especially strategies like going further than the stereotype or expected, making it special/unknown, showing the short distance and talking about the local are strategies that can contribute to the new strategy and vision on the representation of the Netherlands that NBTC Holland Marketing strives to aim for.

For the visual content the most used tool on both websites is to show a location or a place that might entice the visitor / tourist into visiting. This strategy seemed logical as the organisation wants to attract people to various places, but with this strategy it does not have to be specifically a recognizable place. After that on both websites the strategies that were used the most were showing a recognizable/famous image, symbol or icon, showing a recognizable/interesting topic for people with a special interest, for example art or sports and showing a recognizable activity or action. Something that is famous or recognizable for people still seems to be one of the key strategies to attract someone to an article or webpage. Other strategies that were used on both the old and new website were creating a positive feeling/atmosphere (for example: calm, happy, relaxed, warm, cosy etc.), giving a feeling of discovering/adventure/exploring, showing an event that might be interesting for the tourist, having bright colours in a picture, showing a picture of a serious event/happening that the visitor/tourist might want to know more about, showing a food picture that looks appetizing to a visitor/tourist, creating a feeling for the tourist of wanting to be at a place (making it more personal, for example a person sitting looking at a landscape) and showing different seasons. On the new website some new strategies were also used, such as: putting an emphasis on showing a specific season, giving a feeling of uniqueness, giving a representation of what a landscape in a part of the Netherlands looks like and informing the visitor/tourist about something. The feeling of uniqueness is interesting as it shows that it looks at the new strategy

that the organisation made. Also there were some pictures that did not have a strategy and did not seem to be well chosen for the website, for example an image of a wooden sign with words in the Dutch language on it. This is interesting as non-speakers of the Dutch language would not understand this. This example was from the old website.

For the visual content the warm/cold colour and shown emotion in a visual were also researched. Both on the old and the new websites visual content had most of the time a warm colour. Sometimes it was also difficult to see if an image went more to the cold or warm part, so these have been categorized as half warm and half cold colours. Cold coloured content was almost not used. Visual content having a warm colour might make the visitor more attracted to a destination than if it would had cold colours. For emotion most of the visuals with emotions show people with happy expressions both on the old and new website. Happy represents something like a recognizable positive experience to the potential visitor and that could also be the reason why this emotion is used frequently. Other emotions that were shown on the old and/or new website were curious, focused, friendly, interested, neutral, relaxed and serious. Much of the visual content with people in it did not show any emotion as people were often turned to the sight or photographed from the back. With the warm colour and happy expression the organisation probably wants to portray a more positive experience and view on the country, the locations, people and activities. In image 9 you can see how the picture belonging to the description and title of *Experience nature* got more warm colours and next to that there are also people in the picture who show an action and interaction that might interest or be recognizable to the online visitor.



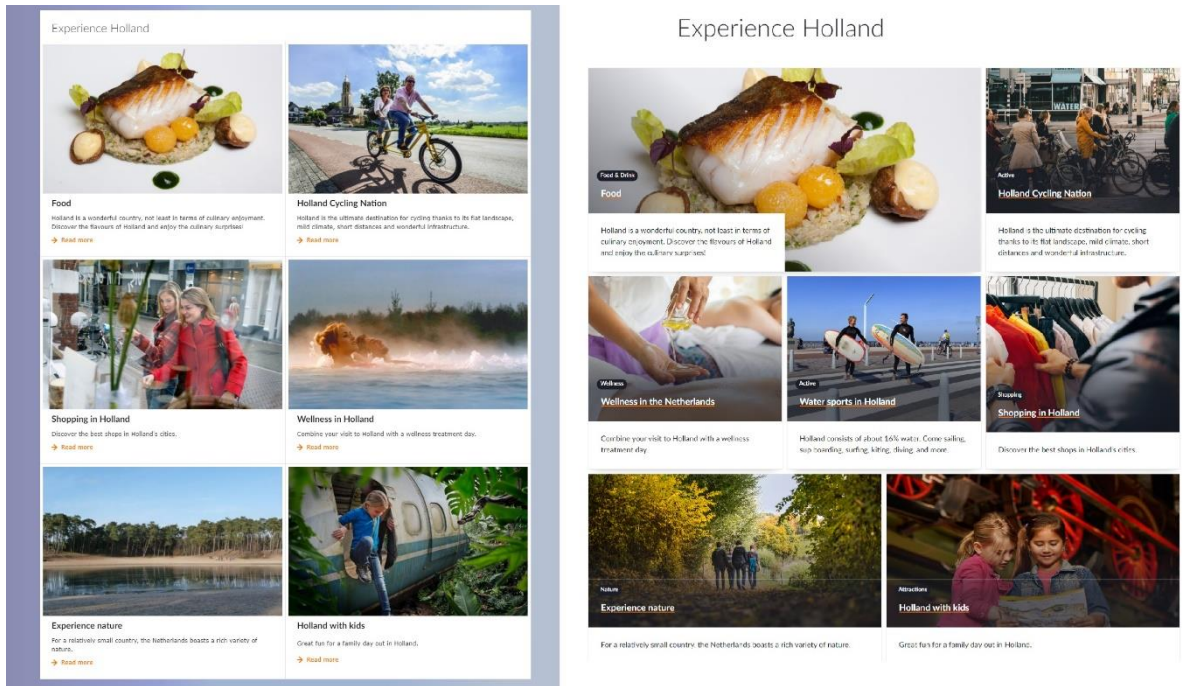


Image 9: Screenshot of the part 'Experience Holland' on the old (left image) and the new (right image) of the Discover Holland webpage on Holland.com

A part of the new strategy that the organisation is going for is to show a younger and more modern Netherlands. However, in the content it can be seen that the organisation still wants to attract everyone. When looking at people that are shown in the visual content there did not seem to be an overrepresented category group in gender, amount of people or age. This was spread out evenly, and both the old and new website appear to be equal in who they represent. However, for the age category it was noticeable that mostly young adults were represented in the content, which is also the targeted group of the organisation. When looking at both the textual and visual content most of the content is targeted at everyone. However, there were some small exceptions that some descriptions and titles were targeted at a more specific audience, though most of the time they did not exclude other groups. The target group was still kept open for everyone even if it seems more targeted at a specific group. This is to not exclude, since the website should be there for everyone who wants to find more information and inspiration about visiting the Netherlands.

In the analysis five other target group were found. These were: (1) Social media users, because of for example the use of hashtags or a discussed topic, like Instagram. (2) People who are interested in a specific type of sports, like soccer, golf, water sports or extreme sports. (3) A certain group of people/community, for example families or people who go to the Netherlands with children or the LGTBI community. (4) People who are interested in a specific

topic/event. For example people who have an interest in information about Dutch education, the Royal Family, the Dutch drug policy, Liberation Route, King's Day or the Eurovision Song Contest. (5) People visiting around a specific time period, for example wintertime or events that are being held in a specific month. These 5 other target groups show more niche or smaller topics that are more related to a specific group, community, interest or topic. These specific target audiences show that the organisation in general focuses on everyone and does not make anyone who visits the website feel left out when they want to read about certain content. However, when there is a demand for a special interest, than they try to encourage and attract the target audience more. The one specified target group that stands out is the younger audience, since this is more of the focus on the new website. The younger audience fits more readily into the new strategy and views of the organisations and that is probably why there is content that is more focussed on a younger age group.

## 6 DISCUSSION

In this study I researched the representation of the Netherlands on the website of NBTC Holland Marketing. The research is divided into two parts: 1. Interviews with employees of NBTC Holland Marketing who worked or collaborated with the website Holland.com, that were analysed with a thematic qualitative analysis. 2. An analysis of the visual and textual content on five webpages of the old and new website of Holland.com, that were analysed with the methods of semiotics and visual rhetorical interpretation.

In this chapter I will discuss my findings in relation to the research question, that I mentioned in the methodology section, together with the findings from the literature review. My research questions are:

RQ 1: What motives do the national Dutch Destination Management Organisation have for the representation of the Netherlands on their new website?

RQ2: How has the representation of the Netherlands changed from the old to the new website of the national Dutch Destination Management Organisation?

**RQ1: The motives and reasons of the national Dutch DMO to present the Netherlands on their new website in the way they do.**

The motives and reasons of a destination management organisations can be quite diverse, broad and be seen in different topics and perspectives. In the literature it is also mentioned the more intercultural perspective on the topic: The positive image of a destination that is being presented or even ‘sold’ to the visitor or tourist (Salazar & Graburn, 2014; Valaskivi, 2016, pp. 1). The image, and maybe stereotypes, a (potential) visitor or tourist have are difficult to control or change (Salazar, 2012; Avraham, 2018).

In the interviews the participants describe the brand Holland in the characteristics of open, inclusive and innovative. Looking at the examples given of topics on the website, many themes fit under these characteristics. I believe the organisation uses these to portray a more personal and positive image. Next to that the results show that the participants mention that they would like to change the image from a more traditional one to a more modern look and

feel. The traditional clichés, popular places or stereotypes are made less visible and the more modern, lesser known, off-the-beaten track destinations are displayed. In the literature review it was already discussed how focussing on something other than the stereotypes could draw people's attention to the other side of the picture or expanding the image from the stereotype to something else, since it is difficult to totally control the (potential) visitors' or tourists' created image of a destination (Salazar, 2012; Avraham, 2018). The participants of the interviews state that the stereotypes are used in ways to show the online visitor similar and unknown locations to the stereotypes or try to show the stereotypes less often. The feel of the website and the destination the Netherlands is, according to the participants, more personal, less business-like and more modern.

The interviewees mention that the path to get to this image is still a work in progress. During the interviews there were different ways mentioned to get to this image and what the reasons and motives are behind these choices are. The main reasons and motives are basically the strategies of the organisation, including a focus on a new target group. In the literature it has already been stated that there are different types of visitors and tourists, who have different wants, needs and motivations to travel (Kotler et al., 2017). And that it is important in marketing to understand these.

The organisation focusses more on: (1) Specific personas (Paul, Nora, Mary, the Independent Explorer and the Repeat Visitor). (2) Passions and Storylines (relating to visitors from a specific country). (3) Motives, which were also mentioned in the literature review. This part of the analysis was really interesting as it seemed that even though all three of these focus points are chosen to fit the desired image of the Netherlands the motives seem to have an interest. It shows and I believe that the specific personas and passions and storylines are maybe too focused on a target group and not so flexible. Motivations were also mentioned in the literature review as motivations change all the time, as well as the sector of travel and tourism, because of globalisation and technology (Franklin, 2003) and in this way they are more flexible than for example a specific target group. The motivations that the organisation looks at are: Relaxation, Getting Away, Experience culture (includes off-the-beaten track and live like a local), Reconnecting, Personal Interests and Business. These motivations seem to have connections to some of the motivations that were mentioned by Kotler et al. (2017) in the literature review. Motives seem to be a target category, which is applicable to every visitor or traveller, while personas, passions and storylines can still exclude topics or visitors from certain content, even though that is not intended.

The relationship with the online visitor seems to be very important for the organisation and to getting to know more about the motives, needs and wants of the visitor are also important. Direct interaction with the visitor online is not as present and could be a focus to develop a plan for in the future, as there are opportunities. For example like mentioned in the literature review online communities, where people with a special interests interact with each other (Middleton et al., 2009). Facebook gives the opportunity to create specific online communities, an idea that has also been mentioned during my internship. It would give the organisation an option to build an online community with multiple groups like people interested in visiting the Netherlands, frequent visitors, experts of the organisation and/or locals of the Netherlands who are willing to share experience, give information and answer questions. On the website it could also be possible to share these kinds of more personal touches, for instance experts from Holland.com giving suggestions for places to visit or locals of the Netherlands recommending their favourite locations to potential tourists. This would add to the idea of storytelling and with input from residents, tourists or visitors it could create collaborative storytelling opportunities, which also contributes to the interaction between the organisation and its audience. These two examples would also fit in the strategy of showing local culture, which is talked about more in the next paragraph.

Along with the target group, the motives for the way they present the Netherlands on the website Holland.com are visible in the six current and prospective strategies that were mentioned in the interviews. The six strategies are: showing uniqueness, experiencing local culture, focussing on off-the-beaten track, addressing short distances, putting visuals first and looking at sustainability.

Showing uniqueness, which means showcasing the parts, topics and sights that make the Netherlands unique as a country. Uniqueness seems to be an important aspect for branding the country. It was also mentioned in the literature review multiple times, for example in the definition of Valaskivi (2016, pp.1), where they said that a country wants to differentiate itself from other countries by being unique and authentic. Qu, Kim and Im (2011) also pointed out that all countries have similar characteristics, like beautiful views and amazing accomodations, so they need to promote what makes them unique and stand out.

Experiencing local culture, which means giving the tourist or visitor a local experience or a feeling of local culture. Like discussed in the findings the terms local culture and

uniqueness at the moment do not have a clear definition but seem to be applied to topics when it feels like it could fit. Culture and unique seem, when looking at the results, like dynamic and flexible terms that could be applied to several topics and themes and might be important to have a look at and create a clear definition or strategy on where and on what to apply to these words. Also, for the online visitor it would then really create an image of what topics such as Dutch cuisine and the urban feeling in the Netherlands are. For example if uniqueness would be described as locations and attractions in the Netherlands that are special and hardly seen anywhere else in the world, that could be a niche topic or topic of interest for visitors, and by defining that it would make it easier for them to find these locations on the website and then they could find other similar locations more easily. Then it could gather a lot of different kind of topics, locations and attractions that are defined as unique in different ways.

Focussing on the off-the-beaten track, which means showing sights, locations or attractions that are less crowded, less known and need more promotion, than the similar yet more popular, well known, crowded places. E.g. Promoting Leiden instead of Amsterdam. In my opinion it is important that the focus is on locations that could use more promotion and a boost in tourism. This would be good for spreading the amount of tourist throughout the country instead of having them visiting only the popular sights. On top of that it contributes to the representation and image of the Netherlands, since not only are larger cities like Amsterdam or Rotterdam being shown, but also the smaller, less known cities are displayed as well. When looking at this strategy from a perspective of intercultural communication, this strategy could be applied towards influencing the image of the country and look further than the stereotypes (Hunter, 2016). Also this strategy has already been demonstrated in one of the earlier promotions the Netherlands did with a video commercial to show what is beyond stereotypes (Avraham, 2018). This kind of way to present the country's stereotypes, while showing more of what the country has to offer, is a more suitable way of expanding the visitors' or tourists' view.

Addressing short distances, which means putting more emphasis on the short travel time between locations and the small size of the country. This strategy together with the previous strategy contributes to a form of sustainability that is mentioned in the literature review. Overtourism started in the 1960s and is still an ongoing topic. NBTC Holland Marketing (2019), also pointed out in their report that the expected growth of tourists might cause a problem. The strategy of focussing on off-the-beaten track and showing that short distances may help attract people to other places than the well known.

Putting visuals first, which stands for the importance of showcasing quality and approachable pictures to the online visitor. The use of user-generated content seems to be more important on the new website. In the literature review this is also discussed as being important to show visitors' views and opinions (Bowen & Whalen, 2017). Besides their views and opinions, the visitor or tourist can also share their experiences and ideas, which means that the tourist can influence the image of a destination (Hunter, 2016). This means that it would be important for DMOs to also concentrate on what other people post, besides themselves. NBTC Holland Marketing have shown that they have already been doing this by interacting with the visitors or tourists via social media or by sharing pictures on social media channels or in CrowdRiff collages. This is something that can be seen as an important strategy and development, that influences the interaction between the visitor/tourist and NBTC Holland Marketing and the image of the Netherlands.

Looking at sustainability, which means addressing the trend of sustainability in content on the website of Holland.com. There are also many trends mentioned in the literature review, for instance sustainability. Sustainability can have an economical, social, cultural or environmental impact on the country and also affect various areas of the tourism field (Kotler et al., 2017). Overtourism was already mentioned before, but it could also involve the protection of heritage, climate change and liveability for example (Sharpley, 2006, pp. 120-126; Lew, 2018) Even though the topic might not be that present on the website at the moment there is an interest in focusing more on sustainability. I believe, the topic could already contribute to the image of the website if it used in small details and suggestions in articles. This could contribute to the sustainability in tourism and also the sustainable part of the image of the Netherlands.

All these 6 strategies go together with new views on the target group and the brand image that they have in mind when thinking of Holland. All these strategies show that the organisation wants to improve the picture of the Netherlands and create an image that is more fitting to this time and age. Also, the old image of the Netherlands with more stereotypical and clichés will change, in my opinion, to a more broad and representative view of what the country has to offer.

## **RQ2: The change of the representation of the Netherlands from the old to the new website of the national Dutch DMO.**

The second research question is going to be answered by looking at the findings of the analysis of the old and new website. For the analysis I looked at the visual and textual content and used semiotics and visual rhetorical interpretation as the methods to research the content. The analysis focuses on the webpages Homepage, Destinations, Discover Holland, Holland Stories and Holland Information. From the findings five noticeable themes emerged: On the way to Modern and Dynamic Content, The Traditional Netherlands, Balance in Content: Cities and Nature, The Netherlands beyond Holland and Strategies behind the Content.

One of the most noticeable themes that stood out from the findings was that the visual content has made a change to a calmer and more modern look, which is also what the organisation wants to portray the Netherlands as to the audience and gives a more modern feeling to the website. The textual content has an informal voice on both the old and new website, but the new design and way of presenting the visual content seems to contribute a more informal feeling and style of the website. Textual content in general, descriptions and titles, has not changed much however, except for the Homepage.

Adjectives that are used the most seem to want to create a positive image of the country but could be more descriptive. This could possibly contribute to the feel of the Netherlands, that they want to show on the website. For example they could not only use the word beautiful, but more descriptive words like *modern*, *dynamic*, *innovative*, *urban*, *rural*, *peaceful* etc. that really say something about a location and could make the translation of the strategy of the organisations stronger visible for the online visitor on the website. I believe that the adjectives could really add a factor to the created image of the (potential) visitor or tourist. In the literature it was mentioned how not only the visual imagined experience, but also other experiences influence the image a person has of a destination, like imagined sounds experiences or imagined feelings (Cherifi et al., 2018).

For the analysis on verbs, activities and imperatives, one finding was really noticeable and should be pointed out. The use of the word *discover* is used frequently in the textual content and also a lot in the imperative form. *Discover* seems to be overused as just when only scrolling through the website it seems very noticeable. This word could easily be replaced by synonyms to help make the text more interesting for the online visitor. Also, some verbs that are



mentioned in the textual content are not activities that can be visualized by the reader, such as *discover* and *experience*. The results show that the content also uses more tangible activities, like ice skating and shopping, that tell more about what the tourist can do. Sometimes it is useful to use less detailed activities that way the online visitor can more readily visualise themselves discovering or experiencing the Netherlands, but with the more tangible activities the organisation might be able to focus content on topics or activities that they really want to show to the visitor. For example activities like cycling or strolling on the beach could slightly point to certain passions and storylines that might be more of a focus for the organisation, even if the description is not specifically about that topic. This, along with the adjectives, could improve the imagined experiences a (potential) tourist or visitor has of a destination (Cherifi et al., 2018).

It seems that there are a few points in the textual content that could still be developed to fit more to the strategy of the organisation, however it can be seen that the organisation already made some clear changes to get to a more modern, dynamic and young image of the Netherlands in their content, especially visual content.

Another theme is that the textual and visual content both show that the passion Traditional Netherlands / heritage is one of the most used. This could be explained as a lot of cities, attractions, sights and other locations in the Netherlands have a traditional look and would be difficult or even misleading maybe for its representation to present otherwise. However, one of the goals of the organisation was to move away more from the traditional image. Even though the traditional image is mostly used, this could also mean that they use the strategy to introduce the more unknown and similar places or reference in the article to a more modern theme. In the literature review it was mentioned that there are different ways to make the visitor or tourist look beyond the stereotypes, since it is difficult to erase them (Avraham, 2018; Dervin, 2012; Salazar, 2012). In this case it might not be only stereotypes, but more of a more-known and more presented image. However, the strategy could also be applied here in the sense that using the traditional, the new and modern could be introduced more easily.

In the findings it is also shown that there is good balance between topics. Passions, storylines and other themes seem to be all given attention on the website and there does not seem to be a theme that is really more presented than other, especially in storylines and other themes. Also it is interesting that for other themes nature and cities are both contrasts but seem to be both portrayed often in content. This shows that the balance between the contrasts in the

content and also the variety of topics that are available on Holland.com. This seems to also contribute to the idea that the website should not exclude anyone and there should be interesting topics for every kind of online visitor, but also still fit the ideas of the organisation.

The locations that are represented on the website were another theme. Amsterdam seems to be the location that is most prominent on the webpages in textual and visual content. On the new website Amsterdam is not the most visible location in the visual content. The provinces North Holland and South Holland are mostly showcased in both visual and textual content on the old website. However on the new website it seems that there is a more spread and equal representation of the different provinces and regions than on the old website. It seems that this makes the image of the Netherlands more representative, since previously the website was more focussed on the locations or parts in the provinces of North Holland and South Holland. Van Gorp and Béneker (2007) also discussed in the literature how the region of Holland was more represented on the website. However, now it also includes other locations, provinces and regions to the images and does not only present a small part of the country to the online visitor. The brand name is at the moment of this research still Holland but will in the future be changed. In textual content Holland is still mainly used, instead of the Netherlands or Dutch, to refer to the Netherlands, but when the brand name changes maybe the text will also refer more to the Netherlands. Holland was seen as a more accepted and well-known name for the Netherlands (Anholt, 2010), but maybe after this change the country's image of mostly the region of Holland will expand to the whole country.

The last theme that was discovered from the results is that the organisations uses some strategies in the way they present the content to the online visitor. First of all the website has made a big change in the sense that it does not concentrate that much on the commercial side. Before there would be a lot of content related to accommodation or bookings and now this is less relevant. The focus is now more on the experience of the visitor and presenting the Netherlands according to the organisation's strategies. There are a lot of different strategies found in the results that the organisation could possibly use for attracting visitors. It can be seen that there are also approaches used that could fit into the strategies of the organisation, like showing the short distances and talking about the local. For visual content it was interesting to see that there are multiple visuals used that have something recognizable for the online visitor. Furthermore there were some new strategies used on the new website and especially showing the feeling of uniqueness was something that stood out as it can also be seen in the strategy of the organisation. Next to these the warm colour and positive emotions that were

used in pictures show that the organisation wants to portray a positive image or experience of the Netherlands. The people that are shown in pictures are not leaning to a specific category in gender, amount of people or age, but it seems that a bigger group of the people represented are young adults. However, the target group for the visual content seems to be everyone, as there is not a focus on a specific group when looking at the webpages overall. It is shown though that in both textual and visual content there are some exceptions where the content is targeted at everyone, but more at a specific topic, community, interest, or group.

The organisation seems to focus more on the strategies that they state in Perspective Destination Netherlands 2030 (NBTC, 2019) on the new version of the website and have adapted several points to this that can be seen in the content on the website, for example target groups, strategies, what to present in visuals. However it seems that there is still room for some improvements to make the new website even more fitting to the strategy that the organisation wants to go for. When looking at the titles and descriptions that were analysed these could be made more modern and dynamic to really fit, like the visuals, the representation that the organisation wants to go for. However it can be seen that a lot of changes have already been made by the organisation and the content already is more fitting to the image of the Netherlands that they want to promote.

## **7 CONCLUSIONS**

This thesis looks at the representation of the Netherlands on the tourism website of the national Dutch Destination Management Organisation. It researches questions about the motives, reasons and changes of the how the country is represented on the new website compared to the old website. These were researched by doing interviews with employees of the organisation, who work or collaborate with the tourism website of NBTC Holland Marketing and by analysing the old and new tourism website of the organisation. The findings showed that the organisation's perspective and view on brand image, target group and strategies have changed to a more modern, personal and unique perspective. Also the textual and visual content and the website have shown to have changed in different areas, which is also related to the statements that were given by the participants. The representation has definitely changed from the organisation's perspective and it shows in both, but mostly in the visual, content on the website. However, as it has also been mentioned this is still a work in progress, which means there is still room for improvements on showing the image of the Netherlands on the website, that the organisation wants to create. From the findings this image shows to be less stereotypical, broader and more modern.

### **7.1 Limitation and Recommendations for Future Research**

The study of the representation of a destination by a destination management organisation shows that there is demand and need for this kind of research. This thesis focuses mainly on the destination the Netherlands, which was chosen because of origin of the researcher, experience from the internship at NBTC Holland Marketing and connections at the organisation of NBTC Holland Marketing. However, since this research is limited to only one country it would be interesting if other destinations were also researched in future research.

During the interviews with the participants sometimes the audio recording quality was of lower quality, because of a noisy environment or bad telephone connection. However, when the interviewee or interviewer was not able to understand something in the recording this has been written down in the transcriptions. This did not have any effects on the answers that were used for the analysis of the interviews.

Another limitation that should be taken into consideration is that during the interviews it was mentioned a few times that during the time of the interviews a lot of topics, strategies and issues for the website and organisation were still a work in progress. This means that they are still working on the representation and image of the Netherlands that is shown on Holland.com and their social media channels.

Next to that, the analysis of the webpages only focused on five pages of the website, while there are many more. The pages that were chosen were, on the old website, five pages that showed in the top main menu of the website and could, according to me, represent the website as a whole the best. However, it would have been better if more webpages were analysed for a more accurate and representative result but unfortunately this was not possible in the time scheme of the thesis. For future research that has more time to research a DMO's website it would be interesting to see a broader analysis to have an even more representative data set for the research.

Another limitation was that since the old website was not available after a certain date some of the visual content was not that well accessible anymore. A few moveable article previews were not saved in the data and had to be removed out of the research. This was taken into account during the analysis and has not caused any main issues in the analysis of the data. For future research it would be advisable to save and store all the data that is possibly going to be used.

## **7.2 Implications**

The findings of this study can contribute to the knowledge and practice on the representation of a destination on a website for destination marketing organisations. But also the motives, ideas and views that these organisations have on the representation. This also makes this thesis interesting for researchers in the field of intercultural communication as the findings of this research can contribute to future research on topics like stereotyping, target groups or representation of the country. Also for intercultural communication in practice in working life of intercultural communication relating to the tourism and marketing field the results of this study could be useful, as they give more insights about the fields and relating

topics and issues. Next to that it also discusses results that could be interesting for the fields of tourism and marketing in general.

The website starts to present an image of the Netherlands that shows how open, inclusive and innovative the country is with more than the clichés of tulips, windmills and clogs. However, the website is still in development and there are more improvements to come, according to the participants. The results show that the website wants to move away from the stereotypical images, but as mentioned a few times, also in the literature review, it is difficult to totally get away from this collective image. However, the old stereotypes and clichés are going to be shown less or replaced by the content that the organisation wants to show. However, it might be that new images, like showing Dutch openness, might create new stereotypes, as what the visitor or tourist sees on the website might not be experienced during their trip. However, findings show that the website is more open for new and various representations of the Netherlands and also contributions to this image by its online visitors or audience. The existence of stereotypes will probably always be present and is impossible to completely erase, however giving the online visitor new and broad perspectives is a start of creating a more representative image of the country.

The findings of this study provide a better understanding of the motives, views, ideas, and creation of the representation of a destination on the Dutch national DMO website. Findings show that there are different reasons and motives that lead to the image and representation of the Netherlands. The brand image, target group and strategies have been changed or made to get to the more modern view on how the country should be presented to the online visitor. Next to that it also shows how this changed in practice by analysing the website. Results show that content has an influence on how the country looks to the online visitor. However, even though all of the changes have shown a big change in the representation of the country, there is still room for improvement.

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# APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Interview Questions NBTC Holland Marketing

Thank you for participating in the interview. The interview will take around 30-45 minutes and will be held in English. The interview is about the representation of the Netherlands on the English version of the website Holland.com. The interviews will be one part of the research, the other part will be an analysis of the website. For the research I will focus on the pages: Home, Destinations, Practical information, Discover Holland and Holland Stories. During the interview, the laptop screen will give you the opportunity to give and show examples on the previous mentioned pages, but also other pages. The interview will be divided in five parts: Introduction, The Brand Holland, The Old and New Website, The New Website and Social Media.

### *Introduction*

First, I would like to ask to introduce yourself by telling your name, function and a little description of your tasks that are related to the website.

- How long have you been working for NBTC?
- What would you say is the best part/contribution of your job?

### *The Brand Holland*

- Could you explain what, according to you, the brand Holland is?
- How is this shown on the webpage of Holland.com?
- In what way do you think the image of the Netherlands has changed from the old to the new website?
- Do you use stereotypes in your content?
  - Do you try to avoid them?
  - Can you give examples of how these are (not) shown on the website?

### *The Old and New Website*

- Why did the organisation decide to change the website?
- What were your tasks/function concerning the change from the old to the new website?
- What do you think is the best improvement from the old to the new website?

### *The New Website*

- What target group are you focussing on?
  - And in what way do you show this in your content/webpage?
  - Tourists have a lot of different reasons/motives to travel to a country? What motives do you focus on?
  - Are you focussing more on the uniqueness or the similarity of the Netherlands as a country for a tourist/visitor compared to his/her country of residence?
- On the website you talk about passions and storylines.
  - Could you explain what they are?
  - How do you show these on the website?
  - Are certain passions/storylines more important than others?
- In the HollandCity strategy it is mentioned that tourists and visitors should be encouraged to visit different places in the Netherlands instead of focussing on the popular/touristic place.
  - What locations would you like to show to tourists?
  - How does this project on the website?
- How important is interaction between the traveller/tourist and NBTC?
  - How does this show online?
- The trend of sustainability is an important topic in tourism and examples like climate change, mass tourism and protection of heritage are mentioned in different articles and literature.

- How important is the topic of sustainability for the webpage of Holland.com?
- How is this presented in content?
- Are there any other trends in the tourism field that can be seen in the content of the webpage?

### *Social Media*

- In what way do social media and the website intertwine?
- In what ways do you use user-generated content?
- What kind of influence does the content published by tourists/visitors have on the representation of the Netherlands?
- In what way does the image of the Netherlands from NBTC's perspective correspond with the vision of the public?
- In what way do you think you have an influence or impact on the image of the Netherlands?

# APPENDIX 2: CONSENT FORM



UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

## CONSENT FOR MASTER THESIS RESEARCH

I have been requested to participate in an interview for the master's thesis study: The Representation of The Netherlands on the Old and New Tourism Website of the Dutch Destination Marketing Organization.

The master's thesis will be conducted in the subject of Intercultural Communication at the Department of Language and Communication Studies, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland, and it is expected to be finished in the spring of 2020. The master's thesis study will involve two different data sets: an analysis of the old and new website of NBTC Holland Marketing as well as an analysis of interviews with employees from NBTC Holland Marketing.

The interview is going to be recorded and transcribed. The recording will be destroyed once the master's thesis has been published. The recording will not be played or shared with anyone. It will be stored in a password secured laptop and an external drive. The interview will be held face to face and there will be a laptop present to allow the interviewee to interact with the website. The researcher will take notes of the interviewee's embodied actions (such as pointing to specific sections of a page). The final master's thesis will be published online.

In the master's thesis the names of the interviewees will be anonymized to ensure that specific interviewees cannot be identified from the data discussion presented in the thesis. **However, the name of NBTC Holland Marketing will be revealed in the thesis.** The reasons for this: 1. NBTC Holland Marketing is a unique organization in the Netherlands, which means it would be easily recognizable even if presented under a pseudonym, 2. The master's thesis explores the organization's publicly available webpages, which means the findings from the analysis of the pages will be traceable to NBTC Holland Marketing. **This means that the interviewees participating in the study will be identifiable as employees of NBTC Holland Marketing.**

I understand that it is voluntary to participate in the study. I have the right to get more information, interrupt my participation or cancel my consent at any time and without explanation during the study. Interruption of participation or cancellation of consent for the study have no negative consequences for me. **With my signature, I confirm my participation in the study and permit the matters mentioned above.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Sign*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Printed name*

### *Consent received*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature of the consent recipient*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Printed name*

The original signed document remains in the archive of the scientist-in-charge and a copy is given to the research subject. The consent is stored as long as the data is in a format that includes identifiers. If the material is anonymised or discarded, there is no longer need to store the consent.

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