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**Promoting Norway in social media in China:**

Visit Norway's co-created storytelling on Sina Weibo

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## **Foreword**

Many complicated feelings arise while I am sitting here writing these words. Many unexpected things happened throughout this long research journey. Many people have provided me with priceless help during the writing of my thesis.

I would first like to express my deep and sincere gratitude to Bente Heimtun, my amazing supervisor. I gratefully acknowledge her professional instructions, encouragement, patience and her invaluable feedback during this entire writing journey. Her inspiration and guidance saved me when I felt like I was lost. She also helped me to contact people who work in Visit Norway in order for me to get more information that I needed. Thank you, Bente.

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## **Abstract**

Social media has changed how tourists obtain information about destinations. Utilizing social media provides both opportunities and challenges for the promotion of destinations. In this Master's thesis, I explored how the Norwegian national destination management organisation (DMO), Visit Norway, promoted Norway as a tourist destination on one of the most popular Chinese social media platforms, Sina Weibo. The focus of my study was on examining storylines and narratives posted by Visit Norway from 2018-2020 and on how Sina Weibo's users responded to Visit Norway through comments and likes. My qualitative study was inspired by constructivism. Netnography and thematic analysis were employed as the research methodology of the study and the method of data analysis for examining the narratives of Visit Norway and users on Sina Weibo. Theoretically, this study drew on a conceptual framework consisting of four sociological concepts: storytelling, mobilities, performances and performativities. Through thematic analysis, I identified five themes: celebrity endorsement, impact of films and television series, “*Mei*” of Norway (“*mei*” is “美” in Chinese, which means beauty), “*Xiang*” about Norway (“*xiang*” is “想” in Chinese, which means expectation/willingness) and longing for “*lixiangguo*” (“*lixiangguo*” is “理想国” in Chinese, which means utopia/wonderland). This study demonstrates that stories based on these five themes attract the most attention from users and gain the most responses from Sina Weibo users. The study provides Visit Norway with a better understanding of the growing Chinese tourist market and give better insights into which types of stories capture social media users' attention.

*Keywords:* social media, DMOs, storytelling, Chinese social media user.

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## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

Social media has become an ever more important information source for tourists to obtain information (McCartney & Pao Cheng Pek, 2018) and it has also become an important marketing tool for DMOs (Wu, Clark, Kang, & Fine, 2016). Nowadays, DMOs have to include social media into their marketing strategies for their promotion of destinations (Lund, Scott, & Scarles, 2018; Uşaklı, Koç, & Sönmez, 2017). Based on the fact that mainstream western social media like Facebook and Twitter are banned in China, in order to reach Chinese tourists via social media, it is necessary for international DMOs to utilise Chinese social media platforms. In China, Sina Weibo is one of the most popular social media sites and has become the preferred microblogging site for DMOs to market their destinations to Chinese tourists (Yang & Wang, 2015). This study will shed light on Visit Norway's promotion on Sina Weibo.

### **1.1 Background and choice of topic**

In the past decade, social media has been increasingly recognised as an important tool and an important space for doing research in the field of tourism (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). In tourism studies, research has emphasised the important role of social media on tourists' information seeking and decision-making and on the marketing strategy development of tourism suppliers (Hoffman & Novak, 2012; Tham, Mair, & Croy, 2020; Wu et al., 2016; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Yang & Wang, 2015).

There were three reasons why I was interested in studying destination promotion of DMOs and social media in a Chinese context. First, few current studies have focused on the destination promotion of overseas DMOs in a Chinese social media context. Instead, many studies have already focused on the destination promotion of DMOs in a western social media context. Uşaklı et al. (2017) selected four social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube) to investigate European DMOs' usage of social media for destination promotion. Lee, Hong, Chung and Back (2021) examined how DMOs through their online narratives included customers' engagement via Facebook. A challenging problem that arises is that relevant research has been mainly conducted in the context of a western setting, with posts in English language, and predominantly studied via western social media platforms. Nevertheless, compared to other western social media sites, there is still a dearth of studies of international DMOs' use of Chinese social media. Therefore, in order to understand international DMOs'



destination promotion in social media within a Chinese context, it is crucial to conduct the study via Chinese social media and examine posts in a Chinese context.

Second, in 2018, China has taken over Japan to become the largest Asian market in Norway's inbound tourism (Xie & Tveterås, 2020). There were over 29,000 overnight guests from China in 2019 and even though influenced by the COVID-19, there were still over 20,000 overnight guests from China in 2020 (Statistiknett Reiseliv, n.d.). However, compared to German, Sweden, Denmark, and the USA, the Chinese market still has potential for growth. However, there is a deficiency of studies regarding Norway as a tourist destination in a Chinese context. It is necessary for the Norwegian tourism industry to learn about this emerging market and prepare for the arrival of future Chinese tourists. This study can benefit the local tourism industry in Norway by providing a better understanding of the Chinese market.

Third, as a Chinese tourism enthusiast, many years ago I fell in love with Norway's stunning and magical Northern Lights and the undisturbed environment. This was the one reason I choose to come to UiT\_The Arctic University of Norway to start my graduate studies. Moreover, being a social media user for more than eight years, I have followed Visit Norway in social media even before I came to Norway and I still do. Before I was just a potential tourist interested in Norway, after I started my Master's program in Norway, I started to think differently about the content of narratives of Visit Norway in social media. I started to ponder why some posts had more users comments and likes than other posts and why Visit Norway posted a particular topic on a particular day? I also started to think about the reason behind all of these posts. My personal experience and my study background thus triggered me to think about how the beauty of Norway could become known to more tourists via social media.

Given its popularity, Sina Weibo was chosen as the social media platform for me to discover the destination promotion of Visit Norway via social media in China. In the next chapter, I will introduce more about the popular social media platform, Sina Weibo.

## **1.2 Research question**

My main research question for this study was: *How does Visit Norway use storytelling to promote Norway as a tourist destination on the Chinese social media platform, Sina Weibo?*

There are six research sub-questions that inform the main questions:

1. *How can the use of the four technologies of power make the co-created stories more effective?*
2. *How does the use of celebrities work in the co-creation of stories?*
3. *How does the content about movies or TV series impact the co-creation of stories?*
4. *How does Visit Norway utilise Chinese people's affection for the aesthetics work in co-creating of stories?*
5. *How do tourists' expectations influence the co-creation of stories?*
6. *How do tourists' longing for utopia inspired Visit Norway in co-creating stories?*

### **1.3 Structure of this thesis**

Chapter 2 presents Sina Weibo, which is the social media platform that was chosen for my study. This basic introduction of Sina Weibo facilitates readers understand of this Chinese social media platform. I also introduce Visit Norway and the Sina Weibo account for Visit Norway.

Chapter 3 starts by reviewing previous studies related to the topic of my study. This chapter consists of relevant definitions and theories that assisted me in discussing the results of my study.

Chapter 4 presents the discussion of the conceptual framework that I applied in this study. The framework is based on four sociological concepts that are labelled the four technologies of power. So, in this chapter, I first discuss what technology of power is, then I outline the conceptual framework of this study representatively by these four sociological concepts.

Chapter 5 begins with the discussion of the research philosophy used in this study, then I explain my research design for data collecting and analysing the data. I also discuss my role as a researcher reflexively. To conclude this chapter, I discuss the ethical issues that could have been confronted in this study.

Chapter 6 presents the findings and discussion of the study. The chapter is organised systematically by themes that came out of the thematic data analysis. Under each theme, I firstly

present the main results of the analysis and then I discuss and analyse the findings based on the conceptual framework presented in chapter 3.

In the last chapter, I summarise and conclude the study as well as make suggestions for Visit Norway's future promotional campaigns on Sina Weibo or other similar social media platforms. Some limitations are presented at the end of this chapter.

## **Chapter 2 Sina Weibo and @visitnorway**

In this chapter, I first introduce the present situation of Chinese social media. Secondly, I present Sina Weibo, which is the social media platform that I chose for doing my research. I introduce the popularity of Sina Weibo in China and the features and functions of this microblogging site. Thirdly, I introduce Visit Norway and how their promotion activities work in China based on my interview with the representative of Visit Norway's office in China. Finally, I introduce the Sina Weibo account for Visit Norway and present the profile page of Visit Norway in detail.

### **2.1 China's social media**

The number of netizens in mainland China was up to 989 million at the end of December 2020 (CNNIC, 2021). The internet indisputably represents a huge potential marketing opportunity space in China for the tourism industry (Zhang, Gui, Wu, Morrison, & Li, 2016). In recent years, social media has become a global phenomenon (Lund et al., 2018). Chinese social media nowadays stand for a significant share among global internet media (Jiang & Fu, 2018). Accordingly, in 2020, there were over 931 million social media users in China (We are social China, 2021). In comparison to other countries, which are dominated by brands like Facebook, Twitter, etc. In China, the most popular social media brands are homegrown networks (We Aare social China, 2021), for example WeChat, Renren, Douyin, and so on. Sina Weibo, the platform used in this study, is the second most used social media platform by Chinese users (We Aare social China, 2021).

### **2.2 Sina Weibo**

As mentioned in last chapter, in mainland China, western social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube are banned. Therefore, there are many local social media sites that have come up and captured the interest of Chinese Internet users. Sina Weibo is one of the most popular social media platforms and the biggest microblogging website (Bao, Shen, Huang, & Cheng, 2013). As the Chinese equivalent of Twitter (Yang & Wang, 2015), Sina Weibo has over 465 million monthly active users as at the first quarter of 2019 (Sina technology, 2019). The rate of usage of Sina Weibo among Chinese internet users accounted for 40.4% at the end of June 2020 (CNNIC, 2020).

Sina Weibo shares some similar features to other microblogging sites. On Sina Weibo, there is a word limitation rule that users can only post within 140 characters. On Sina Weibo, users can share their opinion, personal stories, and leave their comments and likes/dislikes to other users' posts on the platform. In addition to text, Sina Weibo also facilitates the sharing of pictures, videos and articles attached to posts. Users can follow other users and they can communicate with each other via the platform. Users are also allowed to repost other users' posts and attach their personal comments on such posts. Sina Weibo also enables users to post more frequently and without time and space limitations. Nowadays, the popularity of Sina Weibo has attracted the attention of many domestic and international DMOs. These have opened their official Sina Weibo accounts to connect with Chinese tourists.

### **2.3 Visit Norway and @visitnorway on Sina Weibo**

Norway is presented as a tourist destination through Visit Norway under the management of Innovation Norway (Visit Norway Innsikt, n.d.). The main tasks for Visit Norway are to contribute to innovation, development and branding of Norwegian tourism. Visit Norway is a global organisation with offices in several countries, one of which is in China. In this introduction, I focus on how Visit Norway works with social media in China. This work is aligned with the overall strategy of Visit Norway, which I do not go into here. Instead, I present some information based on an interview that I had with a representative of Visit Norway's office in China.

According to the interview, Sina Weibo is the main social media platform for Visit Norway to promote Norway in China. On Sina Weibo, Visit Norway posts content to introduce Norway's tourist attractions (both cultural and natural), lifestyle, latest news, practical information and some niche attractions. Compared to other platforms on Sina Weibo, Visit Norway puts more attention into interacting with users. The huge number of followers on Sina Weibo also provides different types of customer groups. Therefore, the content of posts on Sina Weibo are wider than other platforms.

Visit Norway's office in China follows the strategy of the head office in Norway with regard to destination promotion. At the same time, Visit Norway's office in China also adjusts some instructions to fit the Chinese market. For example, on Chinese traditional holidays, Visit Norway posts relevant content about the holidays or traditions that can be related to Norway.

Keeping up with current trends in China and posting up to date content is also one of the local strategies use by Visit Norway’s office in China.

On Sina Weibo, Visit Norway commits to provide an open platform, whereby users can speak freely and take an active part in sharing their stories. One of the strategies that Visit Norway uses to encourage users to share their stories is through organising online activities and gift giveaways for participants. Meanwhile, making sure of the quality of the content of Visit Norway’s posts is also important. It is vital for Visit Norway to keep the content interesting and attractive to appeal to audiences.

Visit Norway joined Sina Weibo in 2018 and posted the first weibo on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2018 (see Figure 1). Visit Norway has over 140 thousand followers (updated on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2021). The profile picture of Visit Norway’s Sina Weibo account (see Figure 2) is a picture with words on it. It has red background and two lines of words. The first line is “NORWAY”. The second line is “EMPOWERED BY NATURE”. The background picture of Visit Norway’s profile page is wintertime fjord view, and the cover picture of Visit Norway’s profile page is a man who is skiing. It is obvious that Visit Norway stresses the importance of nature’s resources of Norway and the nature of Norway plays a significant role in attracting tourists and representing Norway to Chinese tourists.



Figure 1 @visitnorway’s post on 2 January 2018, Sina Weibo

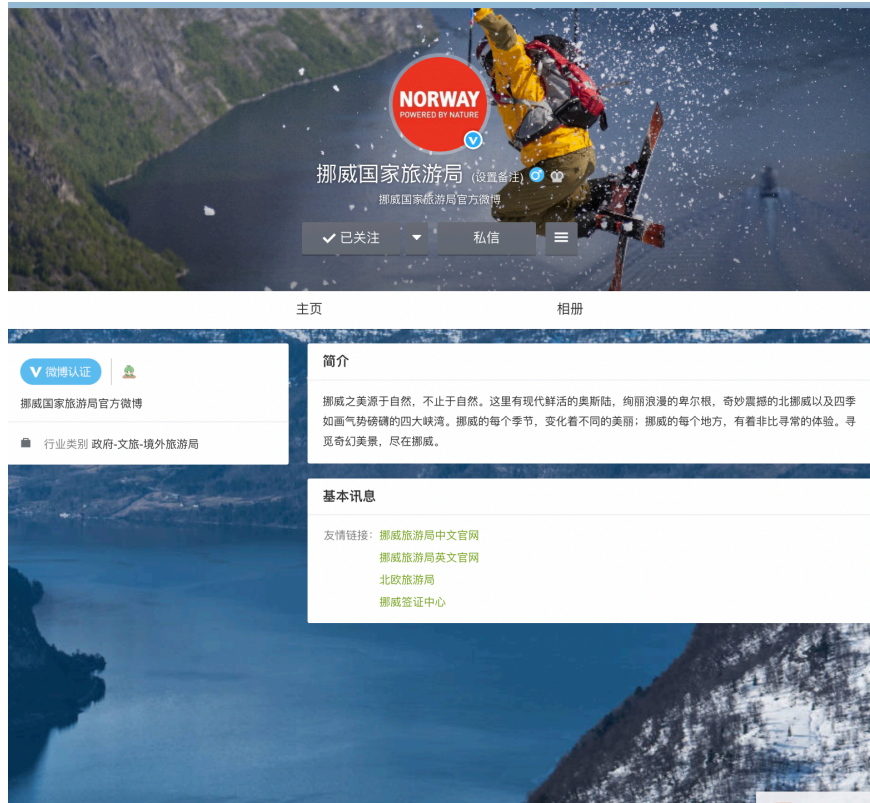


Figure 2 Profile page of @visitnorway

## **Chapter 3 Literature review**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to provide a review of the most relevant findings of previous studies which corresponded with my research question. That research question was: “*How does Visit Norway use storytelling to promote Norway as a tourist destination on the Chinese social media platform, Sina Weibo?*”. In order to answer that question, the role and application of social media for tourism and DMOs’ usage of social media is firstly discussed. Literature regarding user generated content and eWOM is then subsequently considered. Next, relevant studies of destination image, branding and tourist expectations are chronologically presented. Storytelling is systematically discussed in the next chapter, which focusses on my theoretical framework. By reading the posts of Visit Norway on Sina Weibo, it was obvious to see there was plenty of popular content related to celebrities, film and TV work. Thus, these relevant literatures are also discussed. The background of this study is based on a social media platform wherein the users are mainly Chinese people. So, Chinese cultural background also plays a crucial role in this study. Therefore, this chapter also discusses literature relating to how Chinese culture influences Chinese tourists’ perceptions of destinations. These influences include for example, their aesthetic judgement, their expectation for destination and their keenness for a utopian destination.

### **3.2 DMOs’ use of social media**

Social media refers to web-based applications, which enable individuals or groups to produce, distribute and exchange content, ideas, and information to other individuals or groups present on a network (Kakirala & Singh, 2020). Social media has brought pervasive changes in online communication. Compared with traditional media, social media provide platforms for users to create and transmit content (Safko, 2012) instead of just the producers distributing information. In the social media era, the Internet has become a platform where users are allowed to participate in collaborating and sharing of information (Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013).

In tourism and hospitality research, there have been emerging studies focused on examining the role and usage of social media in influencing tourists’ decision-making and in impacting tourism management and operations (Leung et al., 2013). Previous studies have highlighted



that the use of social media was vitally changing tourists' ways of searching, finding, trusting, creating and sharing information about tourism destinations (Christou, 2012; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Simultaneously, the role and application of social media on operations and management of tourism companies have attracted attention of researchers, who acknowledge the importance of social media (Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007; Sanliöz, Hanim, & Kozak, 2015). Studies have highlighted that the increased popularity of social media has motivated organisations considering social media as a reachable, powerful, effective and low-priced tool for marketing (Hoffman & Novak, 2012; Uşaklı et al., 2017).

DMOs are crucial organisations, which play an important role as strategic leaders in managing destinations with regard to tourism (Molinillo, Liébana-Cabanillas, Anaya-Sánchez, & Buhalis, 2018). The main responsibility of DMOs is to help destinations with organising, planning and developing relevant matters with local communities as well as different organisations and institutions (Beritelli, Buffa, & Martini, 2015). Researchers have placed considerable value on the social media area for DMOs promoting a destination campaign. The study of Hays, Page and Buhalis (2013), which focused on the DMOs of ten of the most visited countries by tourists from all around the world proved the growing influence of social media on determining DMOs' marketing strategies. Kladou and Mavragani (2015) have highlighted the importance for DMOs in exploiting data on social media to collect and interpret tourists' positive or negative images for further marketing. More recently, Lund, Cohen and Scarles (2018) analysed VisitDenmark's usage of social media to demonstrate the power of storytelling of DMOs on social media in destination branding. Although scholars' have put attention on DMOs usage of social media, there is still a dearth of study regarding how DMOs perform and organise activities in social media (Lee, Hong, Chung, & Back, 2020), let alone for international DMOs' performance on social media platforms of target markets (different countries).

### **3.3 User generated content (UGC) and Electronical word of mouth (EWOM)**

As previously mentioned, social media provide platforms for users to create and transmit content (Safko, 2012). Social media enable plenty of fruitful and authentic information to be shared about tourist experiences (Pan et al., 2007). The content that is made by social media users is called user generated content. User generated content (UGC) stands for media content that is created by the public rather than professionals who get paid (Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright, 2008). Further, UGC is primarily issued via Web 2.0 technologies (Daugherty et al., 2008), for

example via social media. The UGC is individually or collaboratively created through social media, which allow users to communicate with each other without limitation of time and space. Tourists can create and spread the content they made on the internet, whereby they can document their travel activities and emotions or their attitudes about a particular destination (Li & Wang, 2011). Nowadays, social media content plays an indispensable role in influencing destination attractiveness (Shu & Scott, 2014). For consumers (including tourists), UGC has become an important information source for purchase decision-making (Yan, Wu, Wang, Wu, Chen, & Wei, 2016).

Accordingly, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is a special form of user generated content (Teso, Olmedilla, Martínez-Torres, & Toral, 2018), which enables customers' statements about a product to be available to numerous people throughout the internet (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh., & Gremler, 2004). Social media users share their opinions about their experiences or the quality of products they have purchased via social media platforms (Yan et al., 2016). Their opinion, which is regarded as eWOM can impact on other users' thoughts. On Sina Weibo, comments or posts are the approaches being adopted by users to present their opinions. Users via writing comments and posts distribute their opinions and these comments and posts are eWOM that can impact on other users.

Many studies have already emphasised the crucial role of UGC and eWOM on influencing tourists' perception of destinations, shopping behaviours and their tourism satisfaction (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016; Gerdt, Wagner, & Schewe, 2019; Reyes-Menendez, Correia, Matos., & Adap, 2020). Yet, there is still a paucity of research regarding how DMOs utilise eWOM and UGC on target market's social media platforms for destination promotion. In this study, Visit Norway posted attractive content or organised activities to encourage users to co-create content that related to the storyline of Visit Norway's post. Accordingly, these comments and posts created by users were UGC or eWOM, which can influence other users to some extent. My study sought to fill the research gap by analysing such content made by users in order to examine their cooperative role in promoting Norway.

### **3.4 Destination image**

Studies about destination image date back to the 1970s, and since then numerous researchers have contributed to the study of this topic. Early researchers emphasised the relationship

between tourist travel preferences and destination images (Goodrich, 1978; Hunt, 1975). Then, researchers focused on analysing the relationship between tourists' temporal and geographical impact with tourists' destination image formation (Crompton, 1979; Gartner, 1986; Gartner & Hunt, 1987). Later researchers started to study the measurement of destination image (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Driscoll, Lawson & Niven, 1994) as well as the difference between tourists' images of destinations and what was actually presented at destinations (Stabler, 1990).

Since social media has become an increasingly widespread tool for tourism suppliers, studies have focused on estimating destination image via social media platforms (Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini, & Manzari, 2012). Previous studies have emphasised the important role of users' social media engagement and the influence of eWOM on destination image and attitudes of tourists towards destinations (Jalilvand et al., 2012; Song, Park, & Park, 2020). Furthermore, researchers also have noted the role of information quality on social media in regard to the formation of tourists' destination images (Kim, Lee, Shin, & Yang, 2017). Additionally, researchers have already highlighted that social media can encourage DMOs' building and promotion of destination images (Molinillo et al., 2018).

However, there are various gaps between the DMOs' projected image and users' perceived image (Sun, Tang, & Liu, 2021). Accordingly, understanding how the image is perceived by tourists is a competitive advantage for tourist destinations (Narangajavana, Callarisa Fiol, Moliner Tena, Rodríguez Artola, & Sánchez García, 2017). Therefore, for DMOs, understanding a destination's image that is held by tourists can assist a promotion campaign to go well. Nonetheless, compared to literature on utilising UGC or eWOM in destination image studies, there is still a paucity of studies regarding the investigation of the role of DMOs' generated content in destination image studies (Sun et al., 2021).

### **3.5 Branding**

According to Kotler and Gertner (2004), a destination's brand is the totality of beliefs and impressions people have regarding its places. Likewise, Baker (2007) suggested that a destination's brand is the sum of perceptions, thoughts and feelings that customers hold about a destination. Researchers have highlighted the vital role of branding in marketing due to

branding possessing long term competitive advantages and destination awareness generation in the global market (Baker & Cameron, 2008).

An emotionless approach to destination image is not enough to satisfy present-day customers who are eager to have emotional experiences in the destination and not just to go sightseeing. Further, destinations have to provide more than good service, interesting events and convenient infrastructure (Lund, 2018). They also have to offer the opportunity for people to find inspirational experiences (Lund, 2018). Branding is concerned with the development of a distinctive personality or image for service, product or company (Baker & Cameron, 2008). This can provide a promise of unique unforgettable experiences for tourists (Richie & Richie, 1998). When a brand is created with a more distinctive emotional attraction than other destinations, it will then attract more potential tourists.

Brands can help differentiate one product from other products. According to Lund (2018), there are five key attributes of brand: unique selling proposition, holding a promise, possessing a distinct personality, evoking emotions and building emotional connection and creating value. A unique selling proposition is the single factor that distinguishes any service, product or company from any other service, product and company (Miletsky & Smith, 2009). In this study, in order to make the attractions of Norway stand out from other destinations, it is important to find out the unique attractions that Norway possesses. For example, the well-known fjords, Northern Lights, Viking culture, Sami culture, and so on. These unique selling propositions differentiate Norway from other places. Brands also have the quality of holding a promise that the brand motivates a belief in people (Kotler & Gertner, 2004; Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009). A resilient brand can build positive reputation that can boost customers' expectations (Morgan et al, 2011). Therefore, a brand needs to keep fulfilling its promise to avoid customers turning to other brands to satisfy themselves (Miletsky & Smith, 2009). Besides this, brands need to have a special personality. In this study, the personality of the brand of Visit Norway, on one hand, depends on Visit Norway itself. On the other hand, it depends on users' co-creation of narratives, thereby users' individual personality is added to the brand of Visit Norway. In order to induce customers to repeatedly return to productions, it is necessary for a brand to evoke emotions and build an emotional connection with customers (Baker & Cameron, 2008; Kotler & Gertner, 2004). Therefore, in this study, it is important for Visit Norway to produce content that has inspirational narratives and emotional resonance. The last factor of brand is that a brand needs to build tangible value for customers (Spillecke & Perrey, 2013). In this study, Visit Norway

presents the value of the appealing attractions of Norway. Moreover, by encouraging users to share their travel experiences, Visit Norway also provides them with status identity as a former tourist who has already visited these astonishing places.

DMOs have acknowledged the important role of social media on destination branding (Hipperson, 2010; Lim, Chung, & Weaver, 2012). Social media enable users to share the content they make, thereby these user generated contents can have the ability to influence users' brand perceptions of destinations (Lim et al., 2012). Marketers have recognised the advantage of UGC in developing a branding strategy (Hays et al., 2013; Lim et al., 2012; Lund et al, 2019). However, different from DMOs' narratives, the UGC can be positive or negative towards the destination (Hipperson, 2010). There is a dearth of studies regarding branding strategies used in social media by international DMOs in the Chinese market. In this study, both Visit Norway's and the users' narratives on Sina Weibo were taken into consideration with regard to influencing the brand of Norway as a tourist destination.

### **3.6 Tourist expectation**

Olson and Dover (1976, 1979) suggest that consumers' expectations of a product refer to consumers' pretrial beliefs about the product. Accordingly, expectation can determine consumers' performance perceptions of the product and service (Gnoth, 1997). In the last section, I discussed studies about destination image. Destination image is regarded as the source of tourists' expectations (de Lima, Mainardes, & Rodrigues, 2020). Within a tourism context, experience expectations of tourists are described as a specific event or situation that tourists believe that they can have at a destination (Maghrifani, Li, & Liu, 2019).

Tourists' expectations have been valued by numerous researchers because they play a crucial role for tourism suppliers and researchers in understanding tourists' behaviour and decision-making (Morgan & Pritchard, 2004; Skinner & Theodossopoulos, 2011; Chang & Wang, 2019). A study by Maghrifani, Li and Liu (2019) demonstrated that expectations can influence tourists' visiting intentions and their willingness to travel. Larsen (2007) also argued that tourists' expectations impact tourists' experiences and their choice of destination. Holding high expectations for tourists can assist a destination to stand out from other competitors (Morgan & Pritchard, 2004). This is because tourists' expectations influence tourists' satisfaction with a

destination (Chang & Wang, 2019). For tourism institutions, factors related to experience expectation can assist them in having more control over tourists' satisfaction levels (Maghrifani et al., 2019).

The popularity of social media provides new opportunities for showing, examining and utilising tourist expectations for both tourists and tourism suppliers. Social media have become an important information source for tourists (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Studies have indicated that positive social media content can positively impact tourist expectation (de Lima et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2017; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). At the same time, social media also provide platforms for tourists to share their expectations. Therefore, social media also enable tourism institutions such as DMOs to have a good grasp of tourists' expectations. Nevertheless, there is a dearth of research regarding examining how DMOs utilise tourists' expectations via social media. In my study, I address this gap by taking the expectations of the users into account, and, discuss the impact of their expectations on the co-creation of stories for promoting Norway via Sina Weibo.

### **3.7 Celebrity endorsement**

Celebrity endorsement has gained importance in promoting destinations (Roy, Dryl, & de Araujo Gil, 2021). Destination marketers have realised the crucial role of celebrity endorsement on spreading WOM about destinations to more audiences (Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993). One study demonstrated that celebrity endorsement can be a desirable tool for marketing (Gamson, 2015). It can also impact the process of destination selection (Glover, 2009). Celebrities, who have great market appeal for consumers (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1995) as well as content about celebrities can easily capture users' attention (Misra & Beatty, 1990).

Many destination markets have employed celebrities, who come from the target markets, to attract tourists from that target market (Roy et al., 2021). For example, Switzerland Tourism utilised Indian actor Ranveer Singh to promote Switzerland to Indian tourists (Bapna, 2017). Proper utilisation of celebrities can successfully promote products and attract positive responses from customers (Park & Yim, 2020). With the help of the popularity of celebrities, DMOs can easily raise the awareness of people about their destinations (Shen, Li, Lyu & Chang, 2015) and encourage tourists to come.

Previous researchers have already thoroughly discussed celebrity endorsement in a marketing context, especially how celebrity endorsement works for advertising a product (Misra & Beatty, 1990). Whereas there is still a paucity of studies regarding DMOs utilising celebrity endorsement via social media to promote their destinations. In my study, I discuss how Visit Norway utilised celebrity endorsement to create narratives about Norway to attract users' attention and also encouraged users to co-create narratives in order to promote the destinations.

### **3.8 Film-induced tourism**

Film-induced tourism refers to visiting a place or attraction because it has been portrayed in television, film, or video (Wen, Josiam, Spears, & Yang, 2018). The development of new media and growing exposure of audiences to various online resources accelerated rapid growth of film-induced tourism since the early 2000s (Zhang & Ryan, 2018). Nowadays, film-induced tourism is a worldwide growing phenomenon (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006).

Movies or TV series are non-sales forms of interaction that enable audiences to discover filmed sites as opposed to commercially produced advertisements (Riley & Van Doren, 1992). Motivated by the movies or TV series, tourists want to experience the lifestyles illustrated in the movies or TV series (Wen et al., 2018). They also want to re-enact the scenes from the clips they had seen previously in such movies or TV series (Kim, 2010). Through the storylines of movies or TV series, audiences can have vicarious involvement with the filmed settings (Riley & Van Doren, 1992), which can accelerate the bonding between audiences with the locations in movies or TV series and thereby raise their awareness of the locations (Riley & Van Doren, 1992).

There are already plenty of researchers, who have studied the impact of films (movies and TV series) on international tourism (Josiam et al., 2020; Kim & Wang, 2012). There is also comprehensive research on the effect of films on Chinese tourists' perception of international tourist destinations (Wen et al., 2018). But for Chinese tourists, both movies and TV series about Norway and attractions of Norway are niche products. To date, no study of Chinese tourists has been conducted to discuss film-induced tourism related to a movie or TV series, which has been filmed in Norway. There is a huge research gap of film-induced tourism, which relates to Norway in the Chinese market, especially for Chinese social media users. Since Chinese tourists are highly engaged with movies and TV series (Wen et al., 2018), it is crucial

for DMOs to pay attention to film- or television-induced tourism with respect to Chinese tourists when promoting destinations. Compared to movies, the longer screening period of a TV series enables audiences to have more exposure while watching (O'Connor et al., 2009). Audiences regard TV series as extensions of their daily life, which drives them to seek out where the TV series were filmed (O'Connor et al., 2009). With the help of the globalisation of media, TV series filmed in one country can be aired in other countries (Su, Huang, Brodowsky, & Kim, 2011) and social media enable TV series like *Skam* can be popular either nationally or internationally (Duggan, 2020), so as in China.

Many films or TV series have unintentionally, yet profoundly influenced people's travel preferences (Wen et al., 2018). DMOs in different countries have already utilised movies or TV series to promote destinations (Wen et al., 2018). Visit Norway is no exception. In later chapters, I discuss how movies or TV series impact Chinese tourists' narratives on Sina Weibo and how Visit Norway utilised film and television works to promote Norway on Sina Weibo.

### **3.9 Chinese culture and aesthetics**

Aesthetic experiences are a crucial element for tourism (Hosany & Witham, 2009) and is one of the main pursuits for tourists (Barretto, 2013). Tourism aesthetics stimulate tourists to judge a destination as ugly or pretty (Kirillova & Lehto, 2015). Many researchers have already focused on the problem of how aesthetics influence tourist satisfaction (Alegre & Garau, 2010; Hosany & Witham, 2009; Knudsen, Metro-Roland., & Rickly, 2015; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Lee, Jeon, & Kim, 2011). Furthermore, tourists' cultural background plays an indispensable role in the whole process (Zhang & Xu, 2020). Wang, Xia and Chen (2008) suggest that individuals' aesthetic values on the same landscape can be different based on the individuals' own value system.

With thousands of years of inheritance and development, China has created splendid cultures and developed different schools of thought. Among these schools of thoughts, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism are the three most acknowledged schools. These three schools of thought have shaped Chinese people's traditions and values. Although these three schools of thought have conflicts with each other, integration still occupies the mainstream of Chinese cultural values development (Guang, 2013). “*Mei*” (“美” in Chinese) is the word being used for Chinese people to describe the aesthetic quality. When something, someone or somewhere is pretty,



people say it is “*mei*”. Taoism believes that acquiring the most of “*mei*” is the ultimate purpose of travelling for Chinese people (Jiang, Scott, Tao & Ding, 2019). Another study found that aesthetic qualities of destinations play an integral role in impacting Chinese tourists’ experiences and satisfaction (Lee et al., 2011). Additionally, the importance of utilising beautiful environments to address the desire of Chinese tourists (Jiang et al., 2019) also has been emphasised. But there is still a research gap of how aesthetics influence DMOs promotion on social media and how social media users’ aesthetic perceptions of a destination influence the promotion process of DMOs via social media platforms. In my study, I address this gap by discussing perceptions and influences of Sina Weibo users’ aesthetic judgements of Norway and how Visit Norway utilises Chinese people’s affection for aesthetics in co-creating stories about Norway as a tourist destination.

### **3.10 Chinese tourists’ longing for an escape to Utopia**

The word “utopia” was first brought up by Sir Thomas More in 1516. Utopia is regarded as an escapist unreal world (Podoshen, Venkatesh, & Jin, 2014). In the modern world, utopia has become more action oriented, which means that utopian visions are based upon the belief that they can be attained (Macbeth, 2000). According to the utopian ideal of Macbeth (2000), people are looking forward to something that is more and better in their lives and something which can enrich and enliven themselves. Utopia, now, can be used to describe a promise of a brighter future (Christou & Farmaki, 2019), where people want to escape to and find better life.

In recent years, China saw high economic growth and increasing standards of living, simultaneously people’s lives were getting occupied, and the environment was getting crowded, which pushed to people want to escape. For Chinese tourists, the sense of escape is inseparably connected with the social and cultural environment of contemporary Chinese society. Studies have shown that escapism is one of the most crucial motivational factors for Chinese outbound tourists (Kau & Lim, 2005; Skivalou & Filippidi, 2017).

Nowadays, Chinese people utilise utopia to describe a place where the environment is beautiful, and people can have a happy and carefree life. Previous studies have realised Chinese tourists’ enthusiasm for escaping from the surroundings of daily life (Kau & Lim, 2005; Skivalou & Filippidi, 2017). But there is still a scarcity of research that examines how DMOs utilise tourists’ desire for escapism to promote destinations via social media. Moreover, Macbeth’s (2000)

study has shown that examining tourists' pursuit of utopia enables researchers or tourism suppliers to understand tourists' satisfaction with their travel experiences (Macbeth, 2000). My study discusses how tourists' longing for utopia inspired Visit Norway to co-create stories about Norway as a tourist destination.

### **3.11 Summary**

Various relevant literatures have been reviewed in this chapter regarding DMOs' usage of social media in destination promotion, destination image formation and destination branding. The reviewed literature denoted that there are both advantages and challenges for DMOs utilising social media to promote their destinations. Sociological and cultural contexts also impact the action of both tourists and tourism suppliers. Although previous studies have realised culture can influence tourists in different ways, there is a scarcity of studies that examine how the culture of a target market influences DMOs' destination promotion via social media platforms. This chapter also provided a review of literature regarding celebrity endorsement and film-induced tourism that have been mentioned many times by Visit Norway in their posts and by users in their comments. This previous literature discussed how DMOs utilise users' co-creation of narratives to promote destinations via social media. This provided the background theory for my study. Subsequently, in the following chapter, I present the conceptual framework for this research.

## **Chapter 4 Conceptual framework**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I discuss the conceptual framework that I used in this study in order to analyse how Visit Norway uses storytelling to promote Norway on Sina Weibo. The conceptual framework of my study is based on the theory of Lund (2018), which depends on four sociological concepts that are also regarded by Lund (2018) as four technologies of power. The four key sociological concepts are storytelling, mobilities, performances and performativities. I elaborate on these four technologies of power and their role in the conceptual framework in the following sections. It is crucial to clarify what a technology of power is before elaborating on the conceptual framework of this study.

### **4.2 Technologies of power**

In social media, power, as an essential and common human concern (Schwartz et al., 2012), shapes consumers' online activities and controls their access of information/knowledge (Labrecque, von dem Esche, Mathwick, Novak, & Hofacker, 2013). Simultaneously, social media users are empowered by social media with the opportunity to construct power (Lund et al., 2018). Accordingly, the construction and circulation of knowledge and meaning is the production of power (Foucault, 1977, as cited in Lund et al., 2018), and knowledge and power directly imply one another (Foucault, 1977, as cited in Lund, 2018). For social media users, they can produce, exercise and be controlled by power. In the era of Web 2.0, social media provide opportunities for each user to generate power (Lund et al., 2018).

According to Lund, Scott and Scarles (2018), the technologies of power refer to techniques that are used to practice power. By applying technologies of power, both individuals and groups can engage in social practices and exert influence on other individuals or groups in social media (Lund et al., 2018). There are four technologies of power that can be used by individuals or groups to gain more influence in social media: storytelling, mobilities, performances and performativities (Lund et al., 2018). On Sina Weibo, both Visit Norway and its audiences (Sina Weibo users) can post their opinions, stories, knowledges via the platform, thereby both of them can practise power via Sina Weibo.

On social media platforms like Sina Weibo, the influence of the account decides the embeddedness of the platform and persuasiveness of the content generated by the account (Labrecque et al., 2013). The embeddedness and persuasiveness determine whether the content is successful or not. Studies have indicated that the use of the four technologies of power determines the influence of the content (Lund, 2018; Lund et al., 2018). Therefore, in this study, the conceptual framework draws on the four sociological concepts that are conceptualised as the four technologies of power that Lund (2018) used when examining social media promotion used by VisitDenmark. These four technologies of power when combined together to make stories by Visit Norway or stories by users can serve to reach more users. In the next sections, I outline these four technologies of power respectively.

### **4.3 Storytelling**

Storytelling has been an important part of human society for thousands of years. In recent years, the attendance of the experience economy, the development of technologies and tourists' changing desires have accelerated the demand for stories in the tourism industry (Bryon, 2012). According to Simmons (2007), a story is a reimagined experience described with abundant detail and feeling to ignite the imaginations of story listeners to virtually experience the story as real. After thousands of years of development, the function of storying in our society has never stopped working. Nowadays, social media provide users with a platform and the chance to apply not only text, but also images and videos to share their stories with other users.

Within the four technologies of power, storytelling plays a primary role (Lund, 2018). Tourists through storytelling share their stories with other users on social media. This provides novel ways for tourists to be involved in destination promotion. Digital storytelling is the new, contemporary version of ancient storytelling (Malita & Martin, 2009). Hull and Nelson (2009) propose that the presence of digital storytelling is a novel form of self-presentation via multimedia. Through sharing stories via social media platforms, users or organisations like Visit Norway, and other users who view the content can share their feedback, and interaction is built.

Since stories can differentiate destinations and transform destinations into attractive places (Lund et al., 2018), it is necessary for DMOs to attach importance to utilising stories in destination promotion. Social media provide both opportunities and challenges for DMOs with

regard to producing stories for destination promotion. On one hand, the low cost, the convenience of online action and diverse forms of narratives (text, pictures, videos) encourage the storytelling of DMOs. On the other hand, different to before, social media enable users to become cocreators of storytelling. Every user has their power to influence the storytelling via a social media platform. For social media users who are both audiences and actors of narratives of DMOs, they get involved in the storytelling process and become active in producing the whole story. Social media users cocreate their experiences with other stakeholders and their own characters and values are infused into a destination's identity (Lund, 2018). As Miles (2010) stated, creative tourists now are not only passively consuming a destination that they visit but they also play an active role regarding who gets involved in the place and in making their experience about the place. Hence, for DMOs, it is crucial to involve and instruct social media users in the production of stories for promoting the destination. Storytelling via social media as a new technology of power can be used by DMOs to promote destinations (Lund, 2018).

#### **4.4 Mobilities**

Although storytelling is the primary technology of power (Lund, 2018), mobilities are also indispensable technology of power (Lund et al., 2018). Mobilities also play an essential role in modern and postmodern life (Cresswell, 2011). According to Sheller and Urry (2006), physical or virtual movement can be regarded as a source of status and power. The popularity of social media assist users to physically and virtually move. Social media users who come from all around the world are connected together via the internet and interact with each other without time and space limitations.

Social media provide a novel network of virtually moving stories. In the study by Lund (2018), it was suggested that in social media, influential stories imply that these stories are well mobilised via the platform, which also means the stories are empowered with more power. However, on social media platforms, not all stories have the same influence as some stories can reach more users, but some cannot (Lund et al., 2018). The influence of the story creator, the size of the social networks of the story creator, the quality and attractiveness of the story, and the use of promotional tools all can impact the mobilities of stories. Meanwhile, the more popular (have many likes/comments) the story is, the more power the story possesses, thereby the story can be mobilised to more users, and vice versa.

According to Lund's (2018) study, mobilities as a technology of power for my study involves a combination of corporeal mobilities, communicative mobilities and virtual mobilities. These three kinds of mobilities facilitate the production and reach of stories in social media (Lund, 2018). Another study shows that users' corporeal mobilities can help their stories win more admiration from other users and attract more users' attention to their stories (Gössling & Stavrinidi, 2015). Communicative mobilities enable social media users to make conversation, share stories, and share experiences with others (Lund, 2018). The virtual mobility of users enables their stories to reach other users via a virtual platform. Whereas it is important to be aware that not all stories have the same opportunities to be accessed (Lund, 2018), some stories are privileged and can be noticed by many people, while other stories are subjugated and ignored (Lund et al., 2018). Mobilities as a technology of power play a crucial role in affecting how many users can be reached, which decides the competency of storytelling.

As I mentioned before, influence plays an important role for users in social media. Therefore, it is crucial for marketers to leverage the influence of their stories. Influence in social media is embodied as the ability of reach ability of an account or the post. In my study, in order to enhance the influence of Visit Norway's storytelling, it is fundamental for Visit Norway to construct its reach on Sina Weibo by utilizing mobilities as one of the technologies of power. Whereby producing attractive and memorable stories are necessary for the development of influence of the stories made by Visit Norway. For users who shared their personal stories, using their mobilities power is also important, by which they can attract more attention from other users.

#### **4.5 Performances and performativities**

Performance and performativity are the last two interconnected technologies of power which play an important role in producing more personalised and relevant stories (Lund, 2018) in social media. According to MacCannell (1976), destinations can be seen as a front stage for tourists can fulfil their expectations by the offers staged by the destination. In the Web 2.0 era, social media provide a new form of front stage for DMOs to show their destinations to tourists. In this era, DMOs are enabled to put on performances via employing stories and images to present destinations to tourists. Based on Lund's (2018) study, DMOs utilise performances as a technology of power when they deliver storytelling performances in the shape of storytelling

about the destinations. Thereby, DMOs are utilising performances as a technology of power in destination promotion.

Tourists are co-actors who perform according to the scripts offered by tourism marketers (Lund, 2018). For tourists, they can participate in the performance without time and space limitations. They are not only performed at a destination; social media provide them the opportunity to perform online. In the era of social media, people prefer to show themselves rather than tell others who they are (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). Subsequently, social media users prefer to tell their stories and share their experience using social media or by posting pictures to make desired impressions on their audiences. In this study, the comments left by users to the posts by Visit Norway are tourists engaging in the performance of Visit Norway on Sina Weibo. Through storytelling, users get involved in the destination promotion process of Visit Norway, whereby users utilise storytelling performances as a technology of power to co-construct narratives of the destination with Visit Norway.

As the last technology of power for this study, performativities are also indispensable and powerful. Compared to performances, performativities focus more on “doing things”, for instance, on constructing new and novel things instead of just reflecting an existing social structure (Cohen & Cohen, 2012). Further, performativities are concerned with constructing spaces, meanings, realities, social structures, and discourses to establish identities (Lund et al., 2018). Performativities are created via the reconceptualising of relationships between individual agency and social structures (Nash, 2000). Accordingly, performativities are known as reiteration of norms, which have assumed status via the repetition of the norms (Nash, 2000). Performativities can control, subjugate and shape social media users and relate to the construction of spaces, realities and meaning (Lund, 2018).

In a tourism context, performativity plays a vital role in affecting discourses and narratives of a destination (Lund et al., 2018) for both tourism suppliers and tourists. Since performativity can shape social communications, discourses and opinions in social networks (Lund, 2018), it is vital for DMOs to know how performativities works, how to utilise performativities and how to encourage tourists to utilise performativities. Tourists’ use of performativity enable users to co-construct narratives of DMOs via their performance of storytelling (Lund, 2018). Utilisation of performativities enables DMOs to influence their audiences’ performances in social media and attract storytelling performances from audiences that can reconstruct the DMOs’ narratives.

#### **4.6 The role of the conceptual framework**

According to Lund (2018), the conceptual framework provides a tool for studying the mediated experiences of storytelling on social media platforms. The conceptual framework provides a standard for examining the quality of stories and offer tools for DMOs and social media users to regulate their narrative on social media platforms, thereby developing destination promotion.

For DMOs, in order to strengthen the narratives of a destination, it is crucial for DMOs to utilise both their technologies of power and their audiences' technologies of power. In order to develop powerful narratives of a destination, it is essential for DMOs to produce powerful storytelling to attract audiences to co-construct the narratives of the destination. For users who are also audiences of DMOs' narratives, utilising the four technologies of power to create storytelling empowers users to win attentions from other users, thereby raising their status and earning reputation from other users. Simultaneously, tourists' powerful narratives can determine or reinforce the narratives of DMOs with the help of social media.

#### **4.7 Summary**

In this chapter, I have introduced and reviewed the conceptual framework used in my research. The conceptual framework of this study was inspired by Lund (2018). The framework depends on four sociological concepts that are also known as four technologies of power.

The discussion above has shown that the conceptual framework illustrates the important role of the four technologies of power in spreading stories upon social media platforms. For DMOs, the four technologies of power enable them to participate into social media and communicate with their users through their storytelling performance. The conceptual framework can provide the opportunity for DMOs to apply technologies of power to construct the image of destinations and to utilise users' narratives to co-construct the brand of destinations. A conceptual framework plays a crucial role for DMOs to understand how to promote their destination. It can also help DMOs understand more clearly the politics and social mechanisms imbuing social media. For social media users, the ability of them to utilise the four technologies of power can decide how they produce content and influence brand narratives on social media platform (Lund,



2018). In my study, through analysing the narratives made by Visit Norway and Sina Weibo users regarding to the four technologies of power to examine how Norway get promoted.

## **Chapter 5 Research Methodology**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I outline the approach that I chose for my research in terms of research philosophy, research design as well as the ethical issues that I confronted with during the study. I discuss why I choose to join with constructivists and what influenced my decision. I also explore my role as a reflexive researcher. The netnography approach that I applied in this study is overviewed as well as how I used the approach to conduct my research.

### **5.2 Research philosophy**

Research philosophy is about how a researcher observes the world and perceives knowledge (Lund, 2018). As the basic set of beliefs of researchers, paradigms are the foundation belief systems which consist of ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For researchers, there are three major paradigms from which to choose: positivism, constructivism and critical theory. In order to decide which paradigm best fits a research project, three fundamental questions need to be framed around an ontological question, an epistemological question and a methodological question. The answers to these three questions determine the researchers' position with regard to which research approach best fits the research questions. In the following sections, I discuss why I chose the constructivist paradigm.

#### **5.2.1 Ontology**

Ontological questions ask about what the nature of reality is (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For a positivist, there is a 'Real World' out there, which is independent of individuals (Moses & Knutsen, 2012). They believe that for every research phenomenon there exists a single objective reality (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988) and such reality is objective and value-free. Compared to positivists, both constructivists and critical theorists criticise positivists because the latter ignore the complexity of our social world and the individual's role in understanding the world. Ontologically, critical theorists believe that the understanding of reality is opinionated as they are formed by ideological factors which means they are historically progressed (Caton, 2014) and not a natural object just existing out there.

For constructivists, instead of a realist ontology and objectivist notion of truth, they endorse a relativist ontology. A relativist ontology declares that there are numerous socially constructed realities, which are unrestrained by nature or causal laws (Morgan, Ateljevic, & Pritchard, 2007). Ontological relativists estimate that different people can possess different realities (Khine, 2008). Constructivists insist that what we are observing is determined by a complex mixture of social and contextual effects (Moses & Knutsen, 2012). In other words, reality exists in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, which are socially and experientially based (Lincoln & Guba, 1998). In my study, the account of Visit Norway on Sina Weibo and Sina Weibo users can be seen as individuals who are shaped by social and contextual effects. Further, the narratives they created were dependent on their own experience and values. There is no single reality that exists independent of all these individuals and of the people who read all the Visit Norway contents. Therefore, the ontological view of this study was relativist.

### **5.2.2 Epistemology**

Epistemological questions ask about the relationship between the knower and knowable (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and how researchers approach the production of knowledge. The basic question of epistemology is “what is knowledge” (Moses & Knutsen, 2012). For a positivist, researchers can objectively observe and measure facts out there and the researchers are separated from the object being researched. The researchers through observation and direct experience gain knowledge (Moses & Knutsen, 2012). Critical theorists share a similar belief to constructivists in that researchers and their values are unavoidably intertwined with the known that they are researching (Caton, 2014). Further, constructivists acknowledge that researchers can look at the same thing but perceive that thing differently (Moses & Knutsen, 2012).

Based on these differences, the underpinning of my study is a constructivist epistemology, which can be described as being transactional and subjectivist (Lincoln & Guba, 1998, 2000). Within the constructivist epistemology, the knower and knowable interact closely with each other (Lincoln & Guba, 1998) and transactions between the knower and knowable are influenced by individual and contextual surroundings (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). The epistemology of social constructionism was adopted in this study. Accordingly, social constructionism suggests that the knower and knowable co-create understandings, which also

influences interaction between the knower and informants (Lee, 2012). Whereby, Visit Norway and its users co-construct contents and interact with each other via Sina Weibo.

### **5.2.3 Methodology**

Methodological questions ask how researchers find out what they believe can be known (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The answer to methodological questions is linked to the researcher's ontological and epistemological position. The former two sections already debated my relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology which situates the paradigm of this study within the constructivist paradigm. The aim of this study was to find out how Visit Norway used storytelling to promote Norway on Sina Weibo. Erickson (2011) suggested that qualitative research enables researchers to study and to explain within narrative reporting regarding what the observed people do in their daily life and what are the meanings of those actions. In this research, the data were contents produced by Visit Norway or Sina Weibo users. These contents were storytelling and personal experience sharing which are difficult to quantify. A qualitative approach can help a researcher to comprehensively understand storytelling (Lund, 2018) as well as the interaction between people. So, applying a qualitative approach is appropriate in order to answer the question of this thesis.

As mentioned before, there are three major paradigms from which a research can choose. For a positivist, it is reliable to apply a quantitative approach to measure the realities. Different from the world of nature, our social world is more complex and changeable. Human beings as both the researched object and the researcher are complicated. Different from natural behaviour, social behaviour is embroiled in a complexity of different attitudes, value systems and beliefs (Ayikoru, 2009). Enhancing freedom of individuals and preserving social justice was not the aim of this study, so critical theory was deemed not appropriate for this study. In my study, the data for my research was generated through storytelling by Visit Norway and Sina Weibo users. These storytellings were constructed products produced by Visit Norway and social media users. Interpreting both sets of texts was a crucial part of this study. The tourism experience is subjective to an individual and something that researchers cannot access (Caru' & Cova, 2008). The researchers can only interpret the individuals' presentations of their experience (Rageh, Melewar, & Woodside, 2013). So, in this study, it was appropriate for me to choose to stand together with constructivists. The interpretation of data is addressed in more detail in research design section.

### **5.2.4 Reflexivity**

For researchers, it is crucial to have self-awareness which in other words can be known as being reflexive. Reflexivity is an outcome of personal experience and stands for the use of the self as a resource for understanding others (Galani-Moutafi, 2000). Being reflexive means researchers understand that research is an interactive process shaped by an individual's personal experience, gender, race, social class as well as other people who are included in the same setting (Ateljevic, Harris, Wilson, & Collins, 2005). According to Feighery (2006), reflexivity refers to a researchers' capacity to reflect upon their values and actions throughout research. Hertz (1996) suggested that reflexive researchers do not just report the truth of research, instead they actively construct interpretations of their experience. For qualitative researchers, it is crucial to not let reflexivity restrict a study. Albeit at the same time, researchers need to be aware of the important role of reflexivity in research processes.

According to Guillemin and Gillam (2004), reflexivity asks researchers to focus on the whole research process instead of merely focusing on knowledge production. Additionally, being reflexive means an acknowledgment of the ethical dimensions of research practice and being aware of ethical tensions (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). The ethical problems associated with this chapter are discussed at the end of this chapter. It is important to keep being reflexive during the entire research process. In this study, me, a young female Chinese, who was born and raised in China, coupled with my Chinese cultural background and my own former experiences can influence my interpretation of content of my research. Besides, in the end, it can influence the outcome of the study. Being a long-term active Chinese internet user and active user of Sina Weibo enabled me to understand internet slang and the Chinese style of online expression without any obstacles, which helped me to understand the contents more easily. But, it was also easy for me to take some cultural contents for granted and not to be so sensitive to the social value and other relevant content. I also had the experience of living in Norway instead of only having experienced Norway as a short time visitor or as a person who had never visited Norway. these personal experiences with Norway were valuable for me in understanding the cultural differences as well as enabled me to understand better the attractions that were presented by Visit Norway on Sina Weibo.

### 5.3 Netnography as research design

This thesis used netnography to study the contents of Visit Norway's Sina Weibo account as well as to analysis how Visit Norway used storytelling to promote Norway as a tourist destination on the social media platform Sina Weibo. As a dynamic set of techniques, netnography enable researchers to study the constantly evolving social media space and also to provide a local and contextualised understanding of phenomena (Kozinets, 2020a).

The use of social media data has some advantages over traditional ways of data collection. Compared with traditional ways of collecting data, using online data saves more time, costs less and provides abundant data for researchers to choose. Nevertheless, there are some shortcomings due to the context of netnography being narrowly focused on an online community (Kozinets, 2002). This serves to exclude informants who do not use the internet. Moreover, the netnography methodology focuses on a specific platform or online group, which makes the outcome of the study problematic for application to other platforms or groups (Kozinets, 2002). Nonetheless, the growing popularity of internet or social media makes up for that deficiency.

Even though the popularity of netnography is growing, compared to other mainstream qualitative methodology, netnography is still underutilised in tourism study (Kozinets, 2020a). But it does not mean netnography is unsuitable for tourism study, on the contrary, with the internet so immersed in our daily life, netnography can be applied as an efficient approach for studying tourism. Especially, during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism or e-tourism studies were inevitably utilised in response to the severe reduction in international travel. Online tourism data can provide much useful value for tourism studies.

Kozinets (2002) suggested six typical procedural stages for engaging in a netnography study: *entrée*, data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, research ethics and member checks. According to Lima, Namaci, and Fabiani (2004), for a passive or exploratory netnographic study, the first and sixth step of Kozinets (2002) are not so relevant. In my study, I did not directly participate in the community that I observed for my study. Therefore, I merely followed the four steps of netnography: data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, and research ethics for doing this study.

### 5.3.1 Data collection

Online communication can be a resource of data for analysing and understanding cultural phenomenon (Kozinets, 2010). In this study, the posts and comments on Sina Weibo were the data that were collected.

There are three data collection operations for netnographic study: investigative data operation, interactive data operation and immersive data operation (Kozinets, 2020b). Investigative operations refer to selecting and choosing from among numerous online traces that were created not for research purposes but for communications between people online (Kozinets, 2020b). Compared to the investigative operation, interactive data operations stress the importance of interference of researchers, for example online interviewing, commenting with query questions, communicating through email, and so on (Kozinets, 2020b). Immersive data operations focus more on deep data, extensively descriptive or informative data (Kozinets, 2020b). In this study, I combined investigative and immersive data operation together to collect data.

First, I utilised the investigative operation to select and choose Visit Norway's posts and comments from users. In order to accurately represent the Sina Weibo users' contents, I copied directly from Visit Norway's Sina Weibo account and did not edit for syntax or other errors. This made sure authentic interpretation of the original expression was captured. Compared to formal communication, social media interaction through platforms like Sina Weibo is more informal, contents on these platforms are commonly written in slang or colloquial style and can be easily full of typographical errors (Mkono & Tribe, 2017). Subsequently, as an active social media user, I interpreted these posts and comments reflexively. The posts and comments that I collected were in Chinese. These data needed more than just superficial explanation—they also required descriptive depiction, which requires immersive data operations to support the process. So, combining investigative and immersive data operations together was appropriate for doing this study.

There are five core operations for an investigative data collection approach: simplification, searching, scouting, selecting, and saving (Kozinets, 2020b). The first three steps mean: simplify the elements of the research question and research focus to its key elements. Develop key terms for the research and search for those keywords to find suitable data sites. Scouting all the sites being selected from the last step and narrowing down the choice. The target of this

study was Visit Norway's Sina Weibo posts and comments from users. The data site is the only one and fixed. So, there was no need to do the first three steps. In the next sections, I systemically outline the selecting and saving operations used during data collection for my study.

### **5.3.1.1 Data selecting**

The fourth step "data selecting" means limiting the size of the dataset that was being built in the last steps. This enables researchers to perform the study with a particular amount of data. Kozinets (2020b) suggests five criteria for selecting data: relevance, activity, interactivity, diversity, and richness. In this study, relevance means the data being chosen for collection had to be the posts and comments from Visit Norway's Sina Weibo account. As an active official microblog account, Visit Norway posted frequently from 2018 to 2020. The standard for the most popular posts was the number of the comments and likes of a post. The more people, who reacted to the post, the more interactivity the post had. On social media platforms, comments and likes can show the popularity of a post. There is a function of Sina Weibo that you can choose the order of the comments by "popularity". After selecting that function, all the comments of that post are ordered by the popularity of the comments. Each month, there were many posts from Visit Norway between 2018 and 2020. Within all these posts, I have chosen the post with the most comments. During the data selecting process, both Visit Norway's post and users' comments were included, which provided opinions from both the DMO and users. In order to have sufficient data, I collected one of the most popular posts and three comments from that post from each month between 2018 to 2020. In total, there were 36 posts and 108 comments.

### **5.3.1.2 Data saving**

There are four operations that can be chosen to save data in netnography: screenshot, save and print, scraping, and copy and paste (Kozinets, 2020b). "Copy and paste" refers to the method of holding and dragging with a mouse-type function that moves the text being chosen into word-processing applications. Through this operation, data can be saved in a text format with which researchers can easily work. Compared to "screenshots" and "save and print", data saved through "copy and paste" already has been refined by researchers from the start of the operation. Researchers only need to copy and paste the data they assume they need into word-processing



applications instead of having all the data unprocessed. If numerous data need to be collected, then “scraping” is the better choice for researchers. In my study, I chose “copy and paste” as the data saving operation, since my dataset was not so big. During the data collection period, I copied and pasted all the original versions of the selected posts and comments into a document in Microsoft Word for data analysis.

## **5.4 Data analysis**

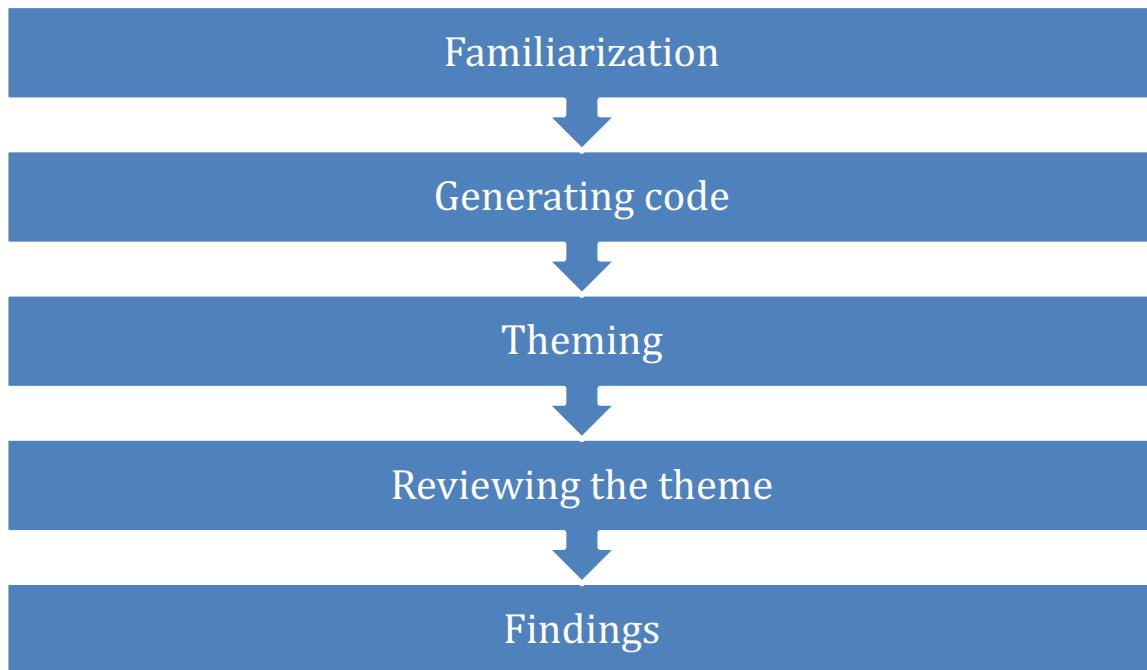
Netnography is a multimethod approach, which means a combination of various methods and techniques can be used including content analysis, historical analysis, semiotics, hermeneutics, narrative analysis, and thematic analysis (O’Reilly et al., 2007). The systematic review of Tavakoli and Wijesinghe (2019) demonstrated that for netnography’s evolution in tourism studies, thematic analysis was found to be the most applied analysis technique of all the options. A study by Whalen (2018) reported that in the field of hospitality and tourism study, 46% of studied articles applied thematic analysis among all the articles that were analysed. Because of its feature of pursuing integrating and overriding ideas to lead the discussion, thematic analysis works well for social media data interpretation (Kozinets, 2020b). When researchers are applying netnography, they perform netnography thematically, which means the meanings inherent in themes are the things we quest for and the themes can be understood as unifying ideas or certain subjects of discussion (Kozinets, 2020b). Therefore, in this study, thematic analysis was used for data analysis.

In my study, posts of Visit Norway and comments of users were the data that were analysed. All these posts and comments were socially constructed. Therefore, compared to other qualitative approaches, thematic analysis can be described as a “contextualist” method. In this study, thematic analysis provided an approach to coding and theming the content collected from a social media platform that helped the analysis of data. The next section explains how thematic analysis was applied in this research.

### **5.4.1 Data analysing process**

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), there are six phases of analysis: familiarising data, generating initial codes, theming, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and

producing a report (see Figure 3). In my study, the last two stages are presented in the next chapter as the findings of this study.



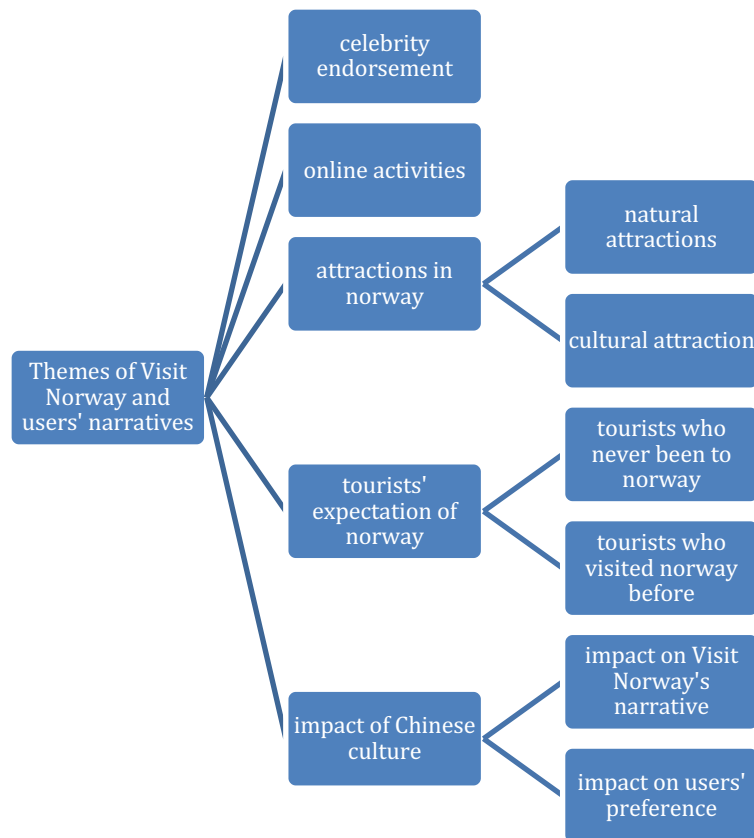
*Figure 3 Phases of thematic analysis of this study*

During the familiarisation phase, I wrote down observational notes manually in a document in the word processor application Microsoft Word. First, I read all the selected Weibo posts and comments thoroughly and iteratively. Then, I made notes that related to the research focus after and during reading the selected posts and comments. All the notes were written down chronologically, from January 2018 to December 2020. This familiarisation phase was the bedrock (Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, & Braun, 2017) for my whole thematic analysis process. Within the entire analysis process, these notes were always checked every now and then to inspire me with new thoughts. Through the observational notes, I could abstract the dataset in order to identify the data that were more relevant to my research focus.

The second phase was generating codes. According to my observational notes and following Terry et al.'s (2017) recommendations, I tagged codes with a pithy phrase or a few words that captured the meaning of a data segment for my study. Coding is the systematic and comprehensive formation of noteworthy labels attached to segments of the dataset, which have meaning related to the research questions (Terry et al., 2017). In order to answer my research questions, coding needed to focus on storytelling by Visit Norway and users. During the coding

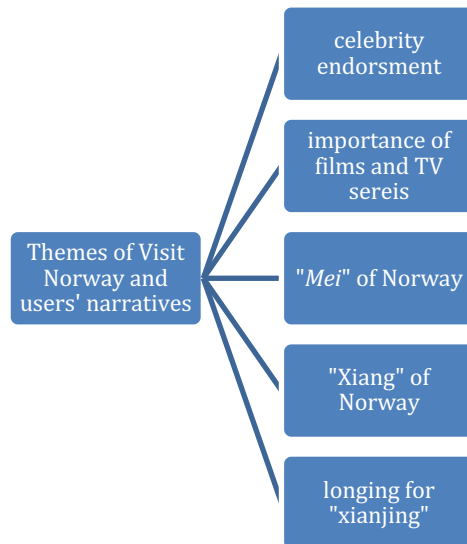
phase, I often went back and forth through the dataset to modify my coding, which avoided similar codes for the same meaning or numerous codes with many overlaps. Keeping the same code for similar meaning text is crucial during coding. I wrote down the codes of each post with comments below the notes I made from the last phase in the same document.

The third phase was constructing themes. The first two phases provided deeper understanding of the dataset. In this phase, the first version of the theme map was developed. The research questions played a crucial guiding role in determining what was relevant or not relevant with respect to the meaning of the codes. My research question for this study was “*How does Visit Norway use storytelling to promote Norway as a tourist destination on Chinese social media platform, Sina Weibo?*”. The research question and sub-questions kept the theming process coherent and relevant to the storytelling-related content. In this phase, first I wrote down all the codes from last phase in a new document in Microsoft Word. If there were the same codes with different dates, then I only kept one and deleted others. Constructing themes starts with studying codes, specifically, combining or disintegrating codes into bigger or more meaningful patterns (Terry et al., 2017). In this process, I organised an early thematic map (see Figure 4) to help me identify and understand potential themes and their relationship to each other, and to the whole dataset. There were five main themes and some sub-themes. The main themes were celebrity endorsement, online activities, attractions in Norway, tourists’ expectation of Norway, and impact of Chinese culture.



*Figure 4 An earlier thematic map*

The fourth phase was reviewing the data. In the first step, I checked whether the candidate themes captured the meaning of the dataset. In this step, these main themes needed to work well across the dataset (Terry et al., 2017). Therefore, I looked through the entire dataset again to make sure there was nothing that had been missed and that the developed themes still focused on my research questions. After reviewing themes, a finalised thematic map (see Figure 5) was developed out of the earlier map (see Figure 4). The fifth and six phases of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis were adapted and presented as "findings" in my study, which are outlined in the next chapter.



*Figure 5 A finalized thematic map*

## 5.5 Ethical issues

Internet provides researchers with more opportunities to get numerous data than they had before. Even though the internet enables us to get information we need more easily, researchers still need to be aware of the ethical issues that may be confronted during research. Keller and Lee (2013) caution that all the participants of research should be protected from having their privacy and anonymity endangered, and that cultural issues like gender, and race should be cognisant. There are some risks of endangering security when researchers collect, process, analyse data via the internet (Frankel & Siang, 1999). Therefore, it is important to be careful about ethical issues when carrying out research.

My study was conducted in line with the guidelines provided by the NESH (The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities of Norway). In my study, my data sets were public posts of Visit Norway's Sina Weibo account from 2018 to 2020. The rationale for Sina Weibo is to share your life story with other people. For users on Sina Weibo, they can choose to post their content publicly or only to their personal circle of friends. If users post their content in public that means this content is shared with everyone who has access to the internet. Therefore, "informing research participants" (NESH, 2016) did not necessarily apply to my research. With respect to concern for vulnerability, Sina Weibo has rules that restrict rules about protecting information of participants who are under 18. Hence, the participants for my study were not regarded as vulnerable. Moreover, the posts and

comments that were examined for this study did not focus on health or illness information or other private information. Additionally, the Sina Weibo users use pseudonyms, which means users are anonymous and their personal information is protected. Barrett (2016) argued that pseudonyms prevent individuals from being easily identified. In this study, the comments of users were anonymously analysed, which means their name and personal information were not documented. The data for my study were a translated version of users' narratives, which cannot be traced through any search engine, which further ensured the anonymity of users' information. For Visit Norway, as a DMO, there was no need to worry about its vulnerability.

## Chapter 6 Findings and discussion

### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I demonstrate how Visit Norway used co-created storytelling to promote Norway on Sina Weibo. I explore the findings of five themes based on an analysis of the most popular post and three of the most popular comments for that post for each month from 2018 to 2020. The discussion applies the four technologies of power that I presented in chapter 4. The discussion of each theme follows the corresponding findings. First, I explore the narratives, which contained celebrities' stories to attract users' attention and how users responded to these stories. I also investigate the users' different reactions to different posts and explored what caused the difference. Second, I display how Visit Norway used the influence of movies and TV series in their co-created storytelling. Third, I demonstrate how Visit Norway used the Chinese concept of “*mei*” (“美” in Chinese, means beautiful/ delightful/ pleasing) to build up a beautiful image of Norway as a tourism destination. Fourth, I examine the theme of “*xiang*” (“想” in Chinese, means want/wish/dream/ expectation). In this section, I explore how Visit Norway interacted with the users and thereby got to know their expectation of Norway. Finally, I will explore Visit Norway's storytelling connected to the notion of utopia in order to attract users' attention and how the users supported Visit Norway's story.

### 6.2 Celebrity endorsement

During the study period, there were three posts by Visit Norway that were collected, which used celebrities to attract users' attention. There were analysed and are now discussed regarding how Visit Norway utilised narratives derived from celebrities to promote Norway and how users reacted to the different ways of narrating about celebrities.

The first post was on 12 February 2018 (see Figure 6). In this post, Visit Norway shared stories about Wang Yuan, who is a singer in the Chinese famous band TFBOYS. He is also an actor, TV presenter and writer. Wang Yuan has 81 million followers on Sina Weibo (updated on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2021). In the post, Visit Norway wrote that “Slowing my travel in Bergen. Seventeen-year-old Wang Yuan found the light in his heart in Bergen after experiencing confusion and self-seeking. Today, we follow in the footstep of Wang Yuan to experience the most charming

harbour in Norway.” (Visit Norway, 2018a). An article was attached in the post to introduce Wang Yuan’s travel story in Bergen.



Figure 6 @visitnorway’s post on 12 February 2018, Sina Weibo

The article was about where Wang Yuan went and how he felt when he was in Bergen and showed pictures of him when he was in Bergen. In the article, Visit Norway presented Bergen as a charming harbour city in Norway. The article presented the beauty of Bryggen, the Troidhaugen Edvard Grieg Museum and the Flåm Railway were displayed with beautiful words and splendid pictures. These attractions of Bergen were presented vividly for users by following in Wang Yuan’s footsteps. Visit Norway narrated that Wang Yuan met his better self in Bergen and everyone can meet the better and real selves in Bergen too. In the article, Wang Yuan expressed his yearning for slowing down and enjoying life. Visit Norway also introduced much relevant practical travel information. For example, the addresses of the destinations where Wang Yuan visited and detailed information about the attractions.

This post received 413 comments and 1840 likes. According to my records, Visit Norway's posts of Wang Yuan’s experiences received more comments and likes from Sina Weibo users compared to other posts of Visit Norway in the same month. The other posts that did not mention Wang Yuan only had an average of 15 comments each in that month.



Down below this post, the most popular comments were all related to Wang Yuan. User 1 commented that “I want to follow in the footsteps of Wang Yuan and enjoy the beautiful view of Bergen”. User 2 commented with “I want to follow the footsteps of Wang Yuan”. User 3 wrote that “I am enthusiastic to slow travel Norway with Wang Yuan”. The amount of comments and likes of this post and these positive and popular comments indicated that Wang Yuan has great influence on Sina Weibo. Moreover, these users showed not only their support for Wang Yuan, but also their interest in destinations shown in the article where Wang Yuan had visited. Users believed that Bergen was beautiful, and they wanted to visit there as Wang Yuan did.

The second selected post was about Wang Luodan. Wang Luodan is a popular Chinese actor who starred in TV shows and movies which have received a lot of prizes. She has over 43 million followers on Sina Weibo (updated on 18 February 2021). On 30 January 2019 (see Figure 7), Visit Norway posted that Wang Luodan was nominated as the Travel Ambassador for Norwegian Fjords and sent sincere birthday wishes to her. This post received 133 comments and 374 likes. In the post, Visit Norway described Wang Luodan as an interesting, warm and adventurous person and invited users to come and explore the wintertime fjords with her. Visit Norway also depicted the snow-covered view of the wintertime fjord, which indicated a peaceful and quiet environment. Through this post, Visit Norway sought to develop a bond between users and the celebrity by expressing an invitation like “starting off with the new ambassador to explore the new route” and “get together to unlock the beauty of winter Norwegian fjords” (Visit Norway, 2019a).



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官宣！#挪威峡湾旅行大使#及飞猪明星体验官@王珞丹她分享有趣的灵魂，传递时代的温度；身兼多元身份的她，更是从未停歇对世界的探索！这个冬季，和新晋大使一起启程超级新发线，于冰雪覆盖的峡湾纵情畅游，于高山之巅感受这里的宁静与空灵，共同解锁挪威峡湾新季节之美。今天，在这个特别的日子，让我们祝福#王珞丹0130生日快乐#! 🎂🎁❤️ 收起全文 ^



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Figure 7 @visitnorway's post on 30 January 2019, Sina Weibo

Under the post, User 4 asked “Is this Bergen?”. Visit Norway replied to User 4 that “Yes, it is Norway’s charming tear—Bergen” (Visit Norway, 2019b). User 5 replied “Please talk more about the “tear” and how charming it is”. But Visit Norway did not reply to this user’s question and did not explained the “charming tear” further. This demonstrates that the narrative of the “charming tear” attracted users’ attention and it could be a catchy storyline to create an attractive story. User 6 commented that “I like Norwegian wood, Come on Dandan (Dandan is the nickname of Wang Luodan)”. In a Chinese cultural context, Norwegian wood can be a name of the book written by Haruki Murakami in 1987 or the song written by Wu Bai (a Chinese singer). The book and the song are really famous works for Chinese people. Although neither the book nor the song has anything to do with Norway or wood of Norway, many Chinese people get to know the name of Norway via these two productions. The comment of User 6 displayed support for the celebrity and things that related to Norway. However, it was not easy to tell what this user meant here about the Norwegian wood. Maybe the song, or the book or the actual wood of Norway. User 7 commented “Happy birthday. Getting a new title on the special day”. These comments of this post indicated that the storyline of Visit Norway was indeed appealing to Sina Weibo users. Responses of users to the storyline showed their interest to know more information about the destinations which were mentioned in the post by Visit

Norway. Users expressed their support for the celebrities as well, which showed the positive influence of the celebrity.

However, under posts about celebrities, there were some comments that only contained users' advocacy of the celebrities, and without any support for the destinations mentioned. For example, the post on 21 October 2019 (see Figure 8), in which Visit Norway wrote that “the popular Chinese TV show—The Protectors will be filmed in Norway” (Visit Norway, 2019c). Many popular Chinese hosts came to Norway to film this show. Visit Norway mentioned all the principal members of the show and attached pictures of those celebrities. At the end, Visit Norway posted the question: “Norway has the Northern Light, the trolls, forests and the ocean. Where will these celebrities go first?” (Visit Norway, 2019c).



Figure 8 @visitnorway's post on 21 October 2019, Sina Weibo

Within the comments, users showed their love for their idols by calling the celebrities by their names and telling them how they were looking forward to the show. Among the most popular comments, were all about one celebrity—Huang Zitao, who is a popular Chinese singer and actor and has over 60 million followers on Sina Weibo (updated on 1 April 2021). He is one of the main hosts of the show. User 8 commented that “Looking forward for Taotao's new TV show”. Taotao is the nickname of Huang Zitao. This comment received 348 likes from other users and there were many similar comments under this post mentioning the name of this celebrity. This suggested that contents about this celebrity had great influence on Sina Weibo

users. Even the comment supporting the celebrity attracted a large number of “like” from other users. In comments, users expressed their love for the celebrity and their expectation for his performance on the show, but they did not mention Norway and did not show interest in Norway’s tourist attractions that were mentioned by Visit Norway.

The main storyline of this post was that the cast of the show will come to Norway. Visit Norway did not focus on describing attractions of Norway in the post and did not post any pictures of stunning attractions of Norway. The concise narratives of a couple of attractions in Norway did not really attract users’ attention, especially as there were no related pictures attached in the post. Therefore, users’ attention was attracted by the celebrities instead of Norway’s tourist attractions.

These findings aligned with previous studies which also have demonstrated that celebrities have great market appeal (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1995) and that content about celebrities easily can capture users’ attention (Misra & Beatty, 1990). The first two selected posts were successful posts in the sense that users’ reactions advocated and reinforced the storytelling of Visit Norway. The third post did attract many users’ attention but did not win any advocacy of attractions in Norway from users. I will now discuss the three posts in more detail by using my theoretical framework of the four technologies of power (Lund, 2018) (see Chapter 4).

Visit Norway used all four technologies of power in the story about Wang Yuan’s trip to Bergen. This story displayed Wang Yuan’s past corporeal mobility. His huge number of followers on Sina Weibo implied that the account of him has indispensable virtual mobility on the platform. In the article, Visit Norway put Wang Yuan into a performance as a tourist who visited Bergen. By visiting those attractions in Bergen, Wang Yuan figured out what lifestyle he dreamed about and he gave an account of his feelings about music, life and his career. He embodied the common socially and culturally structured ideas that stressful and occupied daily life make Chinese people crave to slow down. In the story, Visit Norway performatively described Wang Yuan’s personal but publicly identified feeling of many Chinese tourists.

In the second post about Wang Luodan, Visit Norway also successfully utilised all four technologies of power. Visit Norway used the corporeal mobility of Wang Luodan and showed the pictures of her when she was in Norway and when she was visiting the fjord of Norway in winter. Visit Norway also utilised the virtual mobility of Wang Luodan. Her vast number of

followers on Sina Weibo provided many opportunities for Visit Norway to enable the story to reach more users on Sina Weibo. In the post, Visit Norway empowered Wang Luodan to put on a performance as an ambassador to attract Chinese tourists to visit Norway with her.

According to Glover (2009), a celebrity can influence potential visitors' images of a destination and this in turn can impact the selection of their future travel destinations. Users expressed their willingness of following in the footsteps of Wang Yuan, which indicated that the performativity of his story subjugated these Sina Weibo users. This is also consistent with the study of Agrawal and Kamakura (1995) that users are more likely to trust the brand endorsed by celebrities. Users who complimented the beautiful view under these two posts indicated users' positive attitudes toward Norway as a tourist destination. This is consistent with the study of Misra and Beatty's (1990) study findings that users can have more positive attitudes to a brand with the help of celebrities. Further, celebrity endorsement plays a vital role in spreading WOM about a destination to more audiences (Kotler et al., 1993).

Compared to these two posts, the story in the third post lacked attractive narratives regarding the attractions of Norway but focused more on the celebrities mentioned by Visit Norway. Therefore, users' comments consistently concentrated on the celebrities without any reactions to the attractions of Norway. The third post utilised the celebrities' corporeal mobility as these celebrities came to Norway and their virtual mobility as these celebrities have a large number of followers on Sina Weibo. Nevertheless, the storyline of the third lacked performance related to the attractions of Norway. The beauty of Norway was not shown in the narrative. Despite the number of comments and likes suggesting the popularity of the post, compared to the other two posts, the responses from users of this their post did not reinforce the narrative of Norway as a tourist destination.

To summarise, storytelling about celebrities did attract users' attention, which is supported by the study of Agrawal and Kamakura (1995), specifically that content about celebrity-endorsed promotion of destinations can assist in generating awareness among target users. The use of celebrity endorsement by Visit Norway was consistent with the trend of destination markets of utilising celebrity endorsement to attract tourists from target markets (Roy et al., 2021). Meanwhile, stories of celebrities also add their personalities to the brand of Visit Norway. Celebrities' stories enable users to emotionally bond with the destination (Baker & Cameron, 2008; Kotler & Gertner, 2002). Based on my findings, and as has previously been suggested by

Park and Yim (2020), I argue that proper utilisation of celebrities as in the first two posts can successfully promote products and attract positive responses from the customers. However, posts that lack narrative content regarding destination attractions and which only focus on celebrities can invalidly attract responses from users, which do little to promote a destination.

### **6.3 Impact of films and television series**

Movies and TV series were used as props for Visit Norway to produce narrative about Norway for destination promotion. These movies or TV series used Norway for their stories' settings. For example, the movie *Mission: Impossible—Fallout* filmed some scenes from Pulpit Rock, which is one of the most famous tourist attractions in Norway (Preikestolen365, n.d.). On 31 August 2018 (see Figure 9), Visit Norway posted that “The movie is on air now” (Visit Norway, 2018b). In the post, Visit Norway attached a video of *Mission: Impossible—Fallout*'s clip. In the clip, the view of Pulpit Rock was displayed as background to the movie. The incredible view of the Pulpit Rock was shown vividly in the clip. Visit Norway invited users to participate in an online game to win free movie ticket to *Mission: Impossible—Fallout*. The gift and the stunning video clips with the marvellous scenery view of Pulpit Rock in the movie attracted many users' attention and they were curious about the place where the shooting of the movie took place.

User 9 commented that “I just watched the *Mission: Impossible—Fallout*. In the end, Pulpit Rock suddenly came up on the screen. I went to the Pulpit Rock last year. Tom Cruise climbed the cliff and was lying on the edge of the cliff in the movie, but my legs were shaking even when I got close to the edge.”. Hereby User 9 shared her/his travel experience of visiting Pulpit Rock and endorsed that the incredible view of Pulpit Rock in the movie was real. User 9 also shared that unlike the character that Tom Cruise played in the movie, she/he was so sacred when coming close to the edge of the cliff and compared herself/himself with the character that Tom Cruise played in the movie. User 10 asked a question in the comment: “So, was the last fight scene in the *Mission: Impossible—Fallout* filmed in Norway?”. Another user replied to User 10 that “Yes, it was filmed at Pulpit Rock of Norway!”. User 10's question indicated that she/he had an interest in the filmed site in the movie and that it was not only one user who noticed the view of Pulpit Rock in the movie. Because the comment was public and all the users could read it, therefore when other users had similar questions to User 10 had, this reply stood as an answer for all of them.



Figure 9 @visitnorway's post on 31 August 2018, Sina Weibo

Another example of movies or TV series utilised by Visit Norway is the famous Norwegian TV series *Skam*. Many Chinese audiences got to know Norway through *Skam* and *Skam* spurred their interest in Norway. On 24 August 2020 (see Figure 10), which was also China's traditional Valentine's Day, Visit Norway organised an online activity that required users to repost and comment where their favourite romantic destination in Norway was and to include @ their friends to get the chance to win a gift. One of the most popular comments was from User 11, who commented that "Oslo~ Skam! The Northern Lights~ I really want to visit Norway~". This comment indicated that the Northern Lights and *Skam* were attractions for Chinese tourists. *Skam* was one of the reasons that this user wanted to visit Norway and the reason why this user chose Oslo as her/his favourite romantic destination.

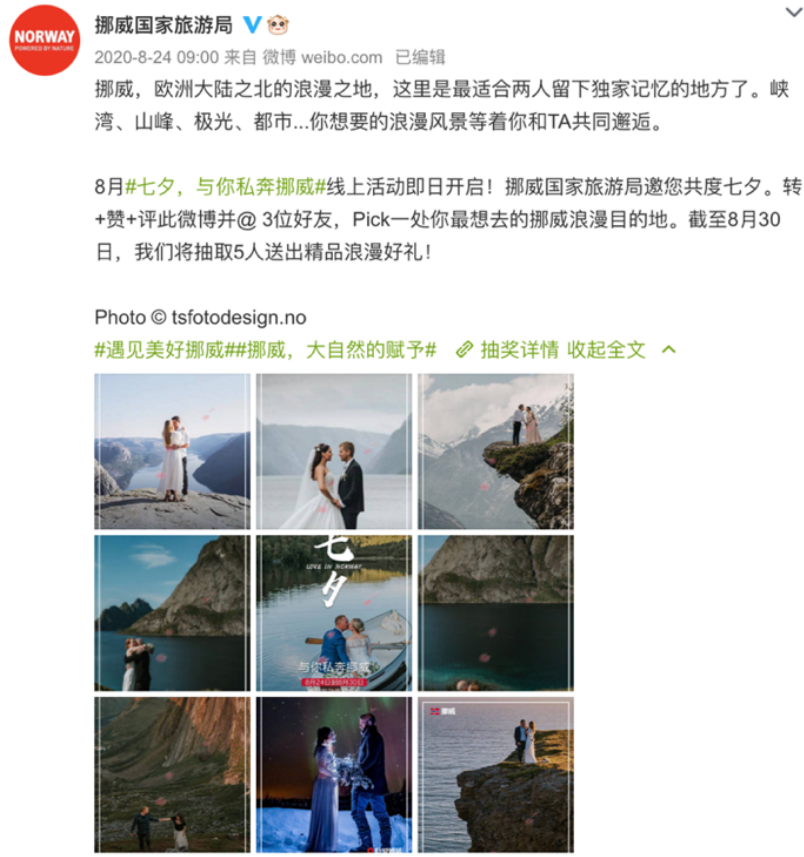


Figure 10 @visitnorway's post on 24 August 2020, Sina Weibo

Another user showed her/his love of *Skam* in the comment on a post on 11 October 2018 (see Figure 11). In order to celebrate the King and Queen of Norway's visit to China, Visit Norway offered two free plane tickets from China to Norway as a gift for Sina Weibo users. For the purpose of winning the tickets, users needed to follow @visitnorway first, then repost the post and comment with their best wishes to Norway. Under the post, User 12 commented "Please let us two fans of *Skam* to visit Oslo, please". User 12 declared that she/he and her/his friend were two fans of *Skam* and also expressed her/his strong willingness of visiting Oslo, where *Skam* was filmed.





Figure 11 @visitnorway's post on 11 October 2018, Sina Weibo

Skam was also mentioned by Visit Norway in its posts. On 25 February 2020 (see Figure 12), Visit Norway kept up with the online trend of filling up the picture of empty bottles with things that can make you happy. In their post, Visit Norway posted pictures of bottles filled up with attractions of Norway, which gave some examples of the happiness that Norway can offer to Chinese tourists. For example, the Northern Lights, fjords, forests, salmon, *Skam*, skiing, etc. Under the post, Visit Norway also left a comment for *Skam* fans. In this comment, Visit Norway produced a special *Skam* version bottle (see Figure 13) to respond to the great appeal of *Skam*'s loyal fans. Visit Norway also invited Sina Weibo users to put their favourite characters' pictures from *Skam* in the empty bottle by themselves. This comment indicated the power of *Skam* and showed that, there were many *Skam* fans following Visit Norway and they were actively interacting with Visit Norway and wanted to contribute to the storyline.



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☀️我们也许会迟到，但从来不会缺席#快乐源泉小瓶子#

提到挪威大家首先想到的是什么呢？  
一想到挪威的什么你就感到快乐呢？

极光、峡湾、森林、三文鱼、Skam、滑雪...  
挪威刷屏积极分子今天都集合了👉... 展开全文



Figure 12 @visitnorway's post on 25 February 2020, Sina Weibo

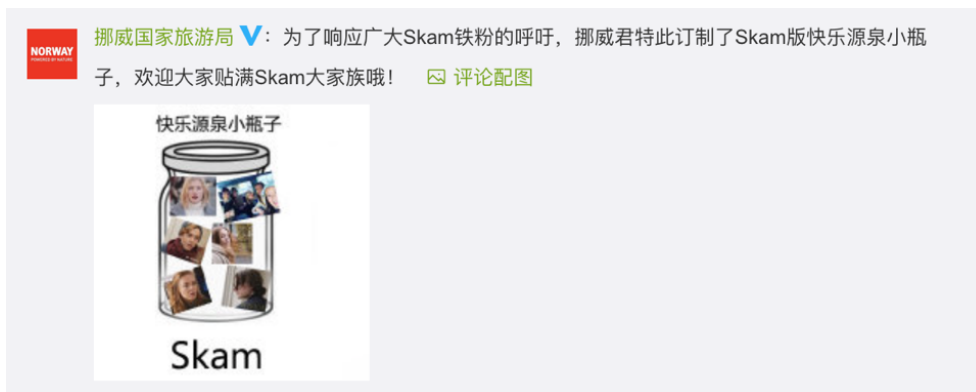


Figure 13 @visitnorway's comment of the post on 25 February 2020, Sina Weibo

The findings of this theme were consistent with the literature regarding the considerable impact of movies and TV series on tourists (Kim, 2010; Riley & Van Doren, 1992; Wen et al., 2018). Being different to commercial advertisements, movies and TV series are a non-sales form of interaction that enable audiences to discover filmed sites (Riley & Van Doren, 1992). Visit Norway used storytelling about movies or TV series in its posts to attract users' attention and to include users to co-create narratives of the destination. This approach is supported by Riley and Van Doren (1992), who commented that movies and TV series can raise audience's

awareness of the filmed sites. Users' co-creation of the storytelling about Norway advocated that the content of movies or TV series did encourage users to contribute to the storyline.

User 9 inadvertently applied all four technologies of power in their story, which enabled the story of User 9 to become the first popular comment for the post on 31 August 2018. The personal story that User 9 co-created using narratives of Pulpit Rock reflected Visit Norway's posted narrative. The story in which User 9 described the incredible landscape of Pulpit Rock corresponded with the landscape in the video that Visit Norway attached in the post. In the story, User 9 commented that she/he had already watched the movie and visited Pulpit Rock in 2017. The user's storytelling of her/his experience demonstrated the user's privileged mobility and corporeal mobility (Lund, 2018); since she/he had done something that not so many other people had done. User 9 put on a performance whereby she/he shared her/his feeling when she/he was at Pulpit Rock. User 9 also contrasted her/his personal experience and feelings with how the actor was in the movie to show how wonderful the view actually was. User 9 produced performativity in which she/he reinforced the view of Pulpit Rock in the movie and the narrative of Visit Norway's post. In the personal story of User 9, Pulpit Rock was an astonishing destination as the filmed scenes in the video showed and which were attached to Visit Norway's post. The use of the four technologies of power enabled User 9's personal story to effectively back up the narratives of Pulpit Rock in the video, which Visit Norway had posted.

The frequency of being mentioned by Visit Norway and by users showed that the power of *Skam* was more significant and the size of fans of *Skam* was greater compared to others. The popularity and the influence of *Skam* is supported by the study of O'Connor, Flanagan and Gilbert (2009). They argued that compared with movies, TV series normally have longer durations, which enable audiences to have a greater exposure period with the series and subsequently, can have a deeper impact on audiences. Users had a willingness to visit Norway because *Skam* supported the notion that TV series can influence users' travel preferences and make them want to visit locations that are shown on the screen (Wen et al., 2018).

Visit Norway utilised the virtual mobility of fans of *Skam* to reach more Sina Weibo users. In my research, the fans of *Skam* put on a performance in which they expressed their enthusiasm to visit Norway, especially Oslo, where *Skam* was filmed. As one of the crucial target groups of Visit Norway, for these *Skam* fans, Norway or Oslo were performative spaces that were created by the plots of *Skam*. Users got to know Norway and had an interest to visit Norway

because of the performative spaces produced by *Skam*. This finding is in line with the study of Wen et al. (2018), which demonstrated that movies and TV series can have unintentional but profound impacts on tourists' travel preferences.

To conclude this section on the impact of films and TV series, the results of my study suggest that Visit Norway through its utilisation of movies or TV series as themes for storytelling effectively attracted users to join in the co-creation of narratives for destination promotion. Users' active responses to the narratives about movies and TV series supported Riley and Van Doren's (1992) findings that movies and TV series can increase the bonding between users based on the filmed sites used in movies or TV series. The bond that is created through movies and TV series assist in building emotional connections (Baker & Cameron, 2008; Kotler & Gertner, 2002). Therefore, stories that relate to movies and TV series can contribute to the creation of the brand of Norway as a tourist destination.

#### **6.4 “*Mei*” of Norway**

Within the dataset the notion of “*mei*” (“*mei*” is “美” in Chinese) was used 82 times by Visit Norway and its users. In Chinese “*mei*” can be used as a noun or as an adjective. “*Mei*” can be translated as beauty/beautiful, nice, ideal, happy and other delightful things. For Chinese people, “*mei*” can be used to describe things that are attractive, beautiful or can refer to things that can pleasure people. “*Mei*” can also demonstrate the aesthetic quality of a destination. In China, Taoism believes that acquiring “*mei*” is the ultimate purpose of travelling (Jiang et al., 2019). In other words, “*mei*” plays a vital role in attracting Chinese tourist to visit a destination. For Norway, as a nature-based tourist destination, the aesthetic quality of Norway's nature is an important motivation for Chinese tourists to visit Norway.

Within the dataset, users used “*mei*” to advocate beautiful views of Norway. For example, on 15 December 2019 (see Figure 14), Visit Norway posted encouraging and romantic sentences that “Travel alone is not lonely, you can look forward to stars and moon and a romantic universe. You can walk under the stars and the moon to meet a better you. #Norway, the gift of nature# #meet nice Norway# #everyday travel news#” (Visit Norway, 2019d). There were nine fascinating pictures of Norway's beautiful scenery and all of them had a single tourist figure in the picture.



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2019-12-15 20:00 来自 微博 weibo.com

一个人的旅行并不孤单，还有星月可以寄望，还有宇宙浪漫不止，跨过星河迈过月亮，迎接更好的自己。

#挪威，大自然的赋予# #遇见美好挪威# #每日旅游新鲜事#

Foto © unis.no /Instagram



Figure 14 @visitnorway's post on 15 December 2019, Sina Weibo

Under the post, users commented with compliments about the beautiful views in the pictures. User 13 commented that “If one day I have the opportunity, I will definitely visit Norway, Norway is so “*mei*” (beautiful)”. There were many similar comments to this post, and “*mei*” was the word being used the most. Not surprisingly, the nine pictures of the back of a single tourist against the background of Norway’s marvellous landscape attracted users’ praises. At the same time, the encouraging and romantic narratives of Visit Norway was also infectious for users, whereby users noted their determination to visit Norway in the future. The most popular three comments showed that users were encouraged by the amazing pictures and text, and that they wanted to visit Norway one day. The touching narratives thus inspire users to look forward to visiting Norway.

Another example is the post on 29 May 2019 (see Figure 15). Visit Norway posted that “The nature offered in Norway has the most and the prettiest fjords in the whole world. But the “*mei*” of Norway is not only fjords. Different people have different impressions of Norway. Maybe it is the natural landscape; maybe it is a wooden church; maybe it is a gallery; maybe it is a corner,

a hotel, a delicacy, a concert, or Norwegian people. What is your personal recommendation of Norway?" (Visit Norway, 2019e). Instead of directly ask for a compliment about Norway's beauty from users, this post invited users to share "mei" images of Norway from their own perspectives. This question encouraged users to tell their personal perception about the attraction of Norway. Visit Norway provided ten limited-edition umbrellas or tote bags with a fjord pattern as gifts. In order to win the prize, users were asked to repost this post and @ three friends to share their answer with other users. At the end of the post, Visit Norway also highlighted that "Comments with pictures can increase the chance for users to win a gift" (Visit Norway, 2019e).



Figure 15 @visitnorway's post on 29 May 2019, Sina Weibo

Under the post, users shared the attractive things they thought represented the “*mei*” of Norway. What users shared were not famous tourist attractions on tourist brochures or other commercial resources. These personal sharing were about places, things or persons they felt were the most attractive thing in Norway. Many users shared the pictures they took when they were in Norway or pictures of things/people they liked in Norway. For example, User 14 shared a picture of Norwegian actor Henrik Holm. User 14 wrote that “Snow. Norway’s snow attracted me, and the snow-covered mountains presented how amazing nature can be and Henrik is my favorite Norwegian. My personal recommendation of Norway is snow and Henrik”. For User 14, the “*mei*” of Norway was snow and Henrik Holm. Henrik Holm is a Norwegian actor who also acted in *Skam* (see Chapter 6 section 3). User 15 shared a picture taken on the road, there were mountains, water, bridges and a couple of houses in the picture. The user commented that “The best way to experience Norway is a self-driving tour”. This user spoke highly of a road trip in Norway. On 18 July 2018 (see Figure 16), Visit Norway also recommended a road trip in Norway for tourists in the post. Further details regarding this are discussed in the next section. Here, User 16 told the story about their 13 days road trip in Norway with 7 friends. User 16 said that “Compared to the fantastic culture heritage, Norway’s fjord nature views are more attractive. Compared to the amazing nature landscape, the company between each other made us feel more warm-hearted. Therefore, a road trip is my personal recommendation”. User 16 thus expressed her/his admiration of Norway’s nature views and the heart-warming memory of a road trip with friends.

These findings are supported by the idea of Barretto (2013) that beauty is a touristic pursuit, and aesthetics matter. Norway as a mainly nature-based tourism destination, natural aesthetic experiences play a vital role in determining tourists’ perceptions of Norway. Therefore, for Visit Norway paying attention to narrating the aesthetics of Norway was consistent with previous studies that stressed the important roles of aesthetic for tourist destinations (Alegre & Garau, 2010; Lee, Jeon, & Kim, 2011).

In the first example, Visit Norway’s narrative was about encouraging users to not be afraid of travelling solo. In particular, Visit Norway attached nine pictures of solo travellers standing in the astonishing natural landscapes of Norway. Those solo travellers’ past corporeal mobilities were utilised by Visit Norway to present beautiful views of Norway’s nature. Users’ responses to these pictures supported previous literature that aesthetics is an integral element of tourists’ satisfaction (Alegre & Garau, 2010). These pictures of nature landscape stimulated users’

seeing sense. In the post, Visit Norway put on a performance as a life tutor who was trying to encourage users to fearlessly travel solo and shared attractive pictures of Norway in order to lure users to come to visit Norway that way. The social-cultural context impacted how people think about solo travel. For example, solo travel is not safe, solo travel is not interesting, etc. Visit Norway performatively told users what Visit Norway thought about solo travel. The comment showed that Visit Norway's narrative worked for those users and they showed their admiration of the views in the pictures posted by Visit Norway. This finding supported a previous study that tourists' satisfaction was influenced by the quality of destinations' aesthetics (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000).

In the second post, Visit Norway's storytelling involved users in co-creating Norway's image of "*mei*". Users through sharing their personal stories interactively co-constructed the "*mei*" image of Visit Norway. Users' storytelling presented Norway's aesthetic quality from their personal perspective, which reinforced the storyline of Visit Norway. Visit Norway asked users to share this post with their friends to make this post attract more users on Sina Weibo. This is supported by the theory concerning the importance of virtual mobilities for storytelling (Lund, 2018). Moreover, for those users who shared their past trip in Norway, the users' corporeal mobilities (Lund, 2018) were also applied. Accordingly, by presenting their corporeal mobilities users are able to receive admiration from other users and gain social status (Gössling & Stavrinidi, 2015). Users' co-creation of the "*mei*" image of Norway not only benefitted Visit Norway, but also benefitted themselves. Visit Norway provided a stage for users to put on a performance to share their personal stories about their aesthetic judgement of Norway. These users performatively created their "*mei*" images of Norway from their own perspective. Users' personal preference of the beauty of Norway showed that their aesthetic judgements were different, which is supported by the study of Zhang and Xu (2020) regarding tourists' backgrounds in influencing tourists' judgment of a destination. These users' personal perspective narratives of the aesthetics of Norway also played a role as eWOM with respect to the beauty of Norway. Visit Norway's attention for displaying eWOM of users is also supported by previous studies, which found that eWOM can influence tourists' perceptions of destination, shopping behaviour and their tourism satisfaction (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016; Gerdt et al., 2019; Reyes-Menendez et al., 2020).

This theme indicated the crucial role of aesthetics in destination promotion of Norway. The admiration of users for the beautiful landscapes of Norway was consistent with the Taoist belief



that acquiring the most beautiful view is the ultimate purpose of travelling for Chinese people (Jiang et al., 2019). In order to make Norway stand out from other destinations, Visit Norway needed to present unique selling propositions of Norway as a tourist destination. Given Chinese people's affection for aesthetics, the unique beautiful views of Norway can be a powerful attraction for Sina Weibo users. With the help of social media, it is easier for DMOs to display the aesthetic features of destinations through pictures and videos instead of merely text. It is also easier for users to share their personal perspective of aesthetics toward destinations with other users. Hence, the strategy by Visit Norway to utilise the theme of “*mei*” to encourage users to co-create the brand of Norway as a beautiful destination.

### 6.5 “*Xiang*” about Norway

In Chinese, the character of “*xiang*” (“*xiang*” is “想” in Chinese) can be used to express someone's expectation, wish, hope, and can also be referred to as someone's dream.

Within the dataset, Visit Norway utilised “*xiang*” to tell stories. For example, the post I previously mentioned before, on 24 August 2020 (see Figure 10), the day of China's traditional Valentine's Day, Visit Norway posted “Norway, the romantic destination that is located in the north of the European continent. It is the perfect place for couples to create exclusive romantic memories. Fjords, mountains, auroras, cities ... The romantic view you want is waiting for you and your partner” (Visit Norway, 2020a). Visit Norway asked users to repost, like, and comment this post with @ three friends to say which romantic destination they wanted to visit the most. Five lucky users had the chance to win a romantic gift. Visit Norway posted nine pictures of romantic couples with nature views of Norway as background. Those pictures were taken in the fjords, mountains, under the Northern Lights or by the ocean. In this post, Visit Norway asked users to share the most romantic destination they “*xiang*” (want) to visit in Norway.

Under the post, users shared where they wanted to go. The comment of User 11 has already been mentioned previously when discussing the impact of movies or TV series on users. User 11 expressed her/his enthusiastic expectation of visiting Oslo and Norway. For User 11, because of *Skam*, she/he has a romantic expectation of visiting the film set. The second popular comment was from User 17, who shared that since the Northern Lights were in Sommarøy, Sommarøy

was the place she/he wanted to go. Visit Norway replied that “The season of the Northern Lights is about to start, you are welcome to share the post with three of your friends, and a Valentine’s Day gift is waiting for you!” (Visit Norway, 2020). Visit Norway replied to this user with information about the Northern Lights since User 17 really cared and Visit Norway reminded the user to share the post with friends.

The post on 18 July 2018 (see Figure 16) was another example in which Visit Norway asked about its users’ expectations of Norway. On 18 July 2018, Visit Norway posted: “Norway, a top-class road trip destination! Here you can find the world famous Atlanterhavsvegen, Trollstigen and Ørnevegen. The view of the fjord passing by and magnificent glacier and waterfall are also fantastic. Today, follow @visitnorway and forward this post with @ three friends to get the chance to win the most beautiful fjord gift. The announcement of the winner will be posted on 1 August” (Visit Norway, 2018c).



Figure 16 @visitnorway’s post on 18 July 2018, Sina Weibo

In the comments, users shared what they wanted to do in Norway. User 18 shared her/his recent travel story in Norway. User 18 wrote that “I am not writing this for the gift. I just came back from Norway; I was totally impressed by the natural landscape of Norway! Hope you all have the chance to see the beautiful view as I did! Atlanterhavsvegen, Trollstigen and Ørnevegen were so good! The view of the fjord was also pretty! I “xiang” I can spend every summer

vacation in Norway!”. Here “*xiang*” can be translated into wish/expect/hope/dream to. User 18 used “*xiang*” to express her/his willingness of visiting Norway every summer and highly recommended other users to visit Norway as she/he did. User 19 also utilised “*xiang*” to express her/his wish and dream about Norway. User 19 commented that “For me, Norway is the most attractive destination in northern Europe, I “*xiang*” (expect/wish) to go to this beautiful country to see the natural and cultural attractions and bring home a lovely troll souvenir”. User 18 represented tourists who had already visited Norway before and expressed appreciation of the views in Norway. User 19 also represented tourists who had never been to Norway but who had a really positive image of Norway as a tourism destination.

These findings are consistent with previous literature in which the importance of expectations was examined (Morgan & Pritchard, 2004; Skinner & Theodossopoulos, 2011; Chang & Wang, 2019). It is important to know about users’ expectation of Norway, whereby Visit Norway can engage in relevant processes for destination promotion. Visit Norway organised activities to attract users to share their expectations. An emphasis on tourists’ expectations is supported by the theory that holding high expectations for tourists can help destinations stand out from other competitors (Morgan & Pritchard, 2004). Further, expectations of a destination play a crucial role in impacting destination satisfaction (Chang and Wang, 2019). Users’ unbiased personal storytelling attracted other users’ attention, which is consistent with the study of Chang and Wang (2019) that two-way communication of users’ storytelling in comments enable users to have positive confirmation about destinations and can increase tourist satisfaction and tourist revisit intentions.

Visit Norway organised activities to ask users to open up about their “*xiang*” (expectation/wish) about Norway, which agrees with the study by Skinner and Theodossopoulos (2011) that tourists’ expectations are a powerful motivating force. The two selected posts in this section showed that Visit Norway puts on a performance, in which a stage was provided for users to share their expectations and their experiences with other users and their friends. Users were encouraged to act as co-creators of narratives about what expectations users can have about Norway. Users’ personal stories’ performatively co-create the narrative of the expectation that Visit Norway presumed that users had. For instance, User 18 through sharing her/his recent past trip in Norway strengthened Visit Norway’s narrative of the marvellous view of Atlanterhavsvegen, Trollstigen and Ørnevegen in the post. Further, User 18’s expectation of spending every summer in Norway in the future also advocated the narratives of Visit Norway.

Users shared their expectations and expressed their willingness to visit Norway in the future, which agreed with the study that expectations can influence tourists' visiting intentions and their willingness to travel (Maghrifani et al., 2019), and their choice of destination (Larsen, 2007).

For Visit Norway, knowing users' expectations can help Visit Norway to satisfy potential tourists' desires by sharing more related stories. For users, by reading other users' expectations, they can gain more new ideas of things to expect. These points concur with Maghrifani, Li and Liu's (2019) study that for tourism institutions, factors related to experience expectation can assist institutions to have more control in tourists' satisfaction. For Visit Norway, acknowledging users' expectation is crucial for destination promotion processes. Depending on users' expectations, organising future posts and strategies for promotion can help practices go more easily. Especially during the pandemic period of COVID-19, physical travel to Norway for Chinese tourists is impossible. But tourists' expectations of visiting Norway should still continue to be established. In this situation, holding the promise (Lund, 2018) of the brand is important. Fulfilling the promise that Visit Norway makes for users can maintain tourists to keep choosing Norway as their destination instead of turning to other places (Miletsky & Smith, 2009).

## **6.6 Longing for “*lixiangguo*”**

“*Lixiangguo*” is “理想国” in Chinese, which can be translated as fairyland, wonderland or utopia in English. “*Lixiangguo*” refers to an ideal and almost perfect place to which people can escape. On 12 December 2018 (see Figure 17) and 25 February 2019 (see Figure 18), Visit Norway posted two sequential stories about the topic of “Does “*lixiangguo*” (utopia/wonderland/fairyland) exist or not?”. These two posts received many comments and likes from users.

On 12 December 2018 (see Figure 17), Visit Norway attached a video and wrote in the post that “What makes you worried is the hometown where you were born and raised. It is the place that the person who is travelling far away from home misses most. Where we are living right now makes us bored and we always want to run away from it. The intangible place in your mind, where you have no idea, is called “*lixiangguo*” (utopia). The “*lixiangguo*” is where our

soul is going to. Have you ever wanted to look for “*lixiangguo*”?” (Visit Norway, 2018d). This post attracted 1,153 comments and 1,810 likes. The attached video was played over one million times (Last updated: 7 April 2021).



Figure 17 @visitnorway's post on 12 December 2018, Sina Weibo

The video contained interviews with four Chinese people. The first interview question was “Do you think “*lixiangguo*” (utopia) exists?”. Interviewee 1, who was a Michelin chef, believed that utopia existed. Interviewee 1 thought it was a place with delicacy. As an outdoor adventure expert, Interviewee 2 agreed that utopia existed and believed it was an adventurous place. Interviewee 3 was a contemporary art designer. He considered that utopia as a place where people can challenge themselves to see if they can make it or not. Interviewee 4 was an author and film writer. For interviewee 4, utopia was a place where you can realise self-value. Within the four interviews, the stories of Interviewee 2 and Interviewee 4 were related to Norway and the other two were about other destinations. Therefore, here I only focus on the stories of Interviewee 2 and Interviewee 4.

The second interview question was “What label does utopia have?”. Interviewee 2 thought it was “surprise attack at night” and “desolated and uninhabited”. He believed that only in those conditions, you can integrate with nature. Interviewee 4 thought it was “bright and clean”. With all the architecture framing together, it was full of humanistic nature and harmony between humankind and nature. Utopia was supposed to have mountains and sea, and proper social distance between people. People there had an uncrowded environment, but they were not indifferent people.

The third question was “Would you go to utopia without hesitation?”. Interviewee 2 expressed his determination of going to utopia. Interviewee 4 showed her willingness to go to utopia once a year.

The fourth question was “which moment is closest to your utopia?”. Interviewee 2 thought it was when he was hiking among mountains and climbing to the top of mountains and cliffs, he felt his reverence for nature. Interviewee 4 believed it was the moment when she was watching a whale in Norway. She felt the surroundings looked like she was not on Earth anymore when they were driving the boat to the place for watching whale. She saw three whales come out of the water, and they looked like a family: two parents with a kid. She said she cried when she saw the whales. At that moment, she was close to her utopia.

Under the post, users shared their opinion about utopia. Many users believed that utopia existed, but it just was not easy to reach there. For example, User 22 commented that “the utopia does exist but probably I cannot reach it in my whole life”. Visit Norway replied to the user with inspiring encouragement that “the reason why utopia is an ideal place is because it is not easy to reach but there is still hope to access there”. Visit Norway also utilised the interviewees’ stories in the video to encourage User 22 that one day she/he can also reach her/his utopia like those interviewees.

On 25 February 2019 (see Figure 18), Visit Norway posted another eye-catching video, and wrote that “#Does utopia exist or not# Go all the way to the north, go to the end of the world to find the real utopia! Here is quiet, white, warm.....how utopia will look like? The winter season of fjord tours is launched and waiting for you to come!” (Visit Norway, 2019f). Although this post did not receive as many comments and likes as the post on 12 December 2018, it still received over 300 comments and was the most popular post in February of 2019.



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#理想国真的存在吗# 一路向北，去世界尽头寻找真正的理想国吧！这里是静谧的，白色的，温暖的……如果理想有灵魂，会是什么样子？挪威峡湾新赛季已上线，等你来触摸！#挪威，大自然的赋予# [挪威国家旅游局的微博视频](#)



☆ 收藏

📄 568

💬 324

👍 50

Figure 18 @visitnorway's post on 25 February 2019, Sina Weibo

At the beginning of the video was a busy city view of Beijing, China. There were crowded streets and traffic and the narrator said, “Do you want to escape from the city and find a place that belongs to you?” (Visit Norway, 2019g). Then the scene shifted to Norway. A seagull was flying away, pretty Norwegian fjords were displayed, and people were skiing. The narrator then said “If people walk fast, you should walk slower. If people are keen to show off, you should calm down and pay attention to your inner self. If people are afraid of losing something, you should be brave and seek the adventure. If people go all the way north, you should go further, where you can find the end of the world.” (Visit Norway, 2019g). After the motivating narratives, the scene turned to a train driving through the fjords. The winter view of Norwegian fjords was presented. It was an enormous contrast between the busy city scene at the beginning of the video and the peaceful view of Norway that was showed in the latter part of the video. Then, the narrator talked about the wintertime landscape of Norway and the clips of the video provided stunning views of both nature and the cities in Norway. Visit Norway introduced many attractions of Norway for audiences. For example, the marvellous nature, Nordic cuisine, city view, story told by local people, outdoor activities, and so on. Visit Norway encouraged audiences to come to Norway in winter to make their own special memories.

The peaceful vibe of Norway and the beautiful view displayed in the video were appealing for users who were experiencing busy life and noisy surroundings. User 23 commented that “Norway looks so pretty in the video; I am really looking forward to visiting Norway again.” User 23 expressed her/his compliment of the view of Norway in the video and her/his wish to visit Norway again. This indicated that User 23 visited Norway before and implied that she/he was satisfied about the trip and this video. User 24 commented that “the video was so great! I just came back from Norway, and I really want to revisit Norway”. Same as User 23, User 24 was also a tourist who had visited Norway before and wanted to visit Norway again. Both of them spoke highly of the video.

Users’ enthusiastic responses to these two posts with the storyline of “seeking utopia” is consistent with previous studies related to utopia and escapism. Visit Norway sought through storytelling to promote Norway as a utopia and a place to which tourists could escape. This is supported by two studies that suggested escapism is one of the most crucial motivational factors for Chinese outbound tourists (Kau & Lim, 2005; Skivalou & Filippidi, 2017). The important role of escapism for Chinese tourists enables the storytelling of “seeking utopia” to be used as an attractive topic to construct narratives about Norway in order to promote Norway. The success of the “seeking utopia” topic is consistent with Macbeth’s (2000) study that people have an interest in things that are more and better in their lives and something which can enrich and enliven them. Utopia is a place that people believe is better than they already have now.

In these two coherent videos, Visit Norway showed clips of Norway’s nature and cultural attractions from tourists’ perspectives, which utilised the mobility of videos’ footage to vividly present Norway as a utopian destination. Branding Norway as a “*lixiangguo*” in reality builds the emotional connection between users and Norway as a tourist destination. In the videos, there were city scenes with people sitting in cafés and people walking in the street and kids playing in playgrounds. There were also mountains, fjords, ocean views, and breath-taking nature views of Norway. Visit Norway put on a performance as an interviewer or narrator in these two posts and videos. Visit Norway encouraged users to “escape from the city and to find a place that belongs to you” (Visit Norway, 2019g). In the first video, the interviewees’ personal stories performatively built the image of Norway from their perspective, which adds their personality into Norway’s brand narrative. In the second post, Visit Norway performatively built Norway as a utopia in real life to which everyone can escape. Comments like narratives of User 23 and



User 24 reinforced the narrative of Visit Norway's video that Norway has beautiful views and sceneries. Their comments were eWOM that can advocate the brand narrative of Visit Norway and the users' revisit intentions also endorsed Norway as a perfect tourism destination.

## **Chapter 7 Conclusion**

This chapter starts by summarising the contributions of my study. Second, I provide answers to all the study's sub-questions. Then, I present recommendations for Visit Norway based on my study. Finally, I discuss the limitations of my study.

By analysing the posts and comments of Visit Norway on Sina Weibo from 2018 to 2020, my study adds new understandings of how Visit Norway uses storytelling to promote Norway as a tourist destination on the Chinese social media platform, Sina Weibo. My findings identified five storylines that attracted the most attention from users as well as gained the most responses from users. Additionally, the findings also suggest that the use of the four technologies of power made stories more effective. The five storylines and the use of technologies of power provides a useful guideline for Visit Norway or other counterpart DMOs to develop their narratives on Chinese social media platforms in order to effectively promote their destinations. I outline the answers to the six sub-questions of my study respectively in the following six paragraphs.

The first question was how the use of the four technologies of power could make the co-created stories more effective. My study was inspired by Lund (2018), who stated that the use of the four technologies of power can empower a story and develop its influence. These same four technologies of power were used in the analysis phase of my study. Those technologies were storytelling, mobilities, performances and performativities. The findings of my study showed that when a story possessed all the four technologies of power, the story was powerful. On the other hand, stories lacking the use of the four technologies of power declined in power and were not supported by users.

The second question was how the use of celebrities' stories work in the co-creation of stories about Norway as a tourist destination. My findings indicated that utilising celebrity endorsement noticeably attracted more attention from users. When the storytelling contained actions and feelings of celebrities when they were in Norway, users actively showed their love for the celebrities and their advocacy of the destination that the celebrity had endorsed. But, when storytelling only concentrated on celebrities without accounts about information of destinations, the power of creating the brand's narratives shifted to users. Users focused only on the celebrity and overlooked the attractions of Norway, consequently the promotion of destinations were undermined.

The third question was how the content of movies or TV series impacted the co-creation of stories about Norway as a tourist destination. Storylines around movies and TV series was a popular theme on Visit Norway's Sina Weibo account. Through such stories, the users got to know Norway more vividly with the help of real scenes from videos. Presented as the background settings in movies or TV series, users could be familiarised with scenic and cultural aspects of Norway. By using popular movies or TV series filmed in Norway, Visit Norway utilised them to reinforce the narratives of the tourist attractions of Norway. My findings also suggested the indispensable role of *Skam* in the promotion of Norway as a tourist destination.

The fourth question was how Visit Norway utilised Chinese people's affection for aesthetics in co-created stories. Visit Norway produced narratives that presented the beauty of Norway via text, pictures and videos. Pictorial representation of Norway's spectacular landscape provided tourists with plenty of aesthetic pleasure, and the users were attracted to the beauty of Norway. The use of videos and pictures by Visit Norway presented a better view of Norway and improved the promotion/message, which helped the promotion process. Visit Norway's activities and gift giveaways encouraged users to co-create narratives of the beauty of Norway. Users' participation in describing the beauty of Norway from their own perspective added more personal and trustworthy eWOM for advocating the beauty of Norway.

The fifth question was how the expectation of tourists influenced the co-creation of stories about Norway as a tourist destination. Visit Norway encouraged users to share where they wanted to travel in Norway and what they wanted to do while there by sharing attractive stories and organising activities. In order to learn more about users' expectations, Visit Norway facilitated tourists to tell intriguing stories that empowered tourists to speak out about their expectations.

The sixth question was how Visit Norway utilised Chinese tourists' longing for utopia through co-created stories. Visit Norway constructed two coherent stories to build up the image of Norway as a "*lixiangguo*" (utopia), a place to which tourists could escape. These two stories were displayed in videos. Through the first video, those four interviewees' idea of "*lixiangguo*" were presented, which also triggered other users' longing for "*lixiangguo*". Users' responses to the video indicated their interest in the topic of "*lixiangguo*" and where "*lixiangguo*" could be found. The second video was directly named Norway as the "*lixiangguo*", a place to which

people could escape. The comments of users to these two videos indicated their admiration of the beautiful views that were shown in the videos. Visit Norway sought to construct Norway as “*lixiangguo*” in reality. The success of these two coherent storytellings showed that Sina Weibo users indeed have an interest in content regarding higher spiritual pursuits.

## 7.1 Implications

Based on the answer to the sub-questions, I would like to suggest six recommendations that Visit Norway could implement in order to construct more powerful storytelling in their promotion on Sina Weibo or on other similar social media platforms in the Chinese market:

1. Constructing more stories regarding celebrities’ actions in Norway and their feelings for Norway could endorse the destinations even more. Such celebrities’ stories need to be tightly connected to Norway’s attractions in order to keep users’ eyes on the attractions. Since users expressed their willingness of following celebrities’ footsteps, Visit Norway could post more detail about celebrities’ journeys, and thus attract users to respond to the narratives of Visit Norway.
2. Constructing more stories based on movies or TV series that have been filmed in Norway could more easily attract users’ attentions. In particular, the TV series *Skam*. Even though *Skam* is no longer broadcasting, there are still opportunities for Visit Norway to dig and delve into this TV series for promoting Norway. It is crucial to dig and delve deeper into the works to make new promotion stories instead of ‘dishing up the same old stuff’. Moreover, building emotional and personal bond with users via the storyline in movies or TV series can be . For example, stories that happened at the filmed sites, which have never been talked before, or main actors’ personal life in Norway, content like these can be catching destination promotion narratives.
3. Displaying more beautiful landscapes of Norway through pictures and videos could stimulate users’ sensation of the beauty of Norway even more. When constructing storylines for and with tourists, aesthetic features of Norway would add to the value of a well-presented story. Compared to Visit Norway’s narrative, users’ accounts of the beauty of Norway from their own perspective could be more powerful and yield persuasive narratives to reinforce the beauty of Norway and thereby further develop the promotion of Norway. Therefore, producing attractive stories that encourage users to participate in the co-construction of narratives regarding the beauty of Norway is important. Encouraging users to share more high quality and emotional pictures, especially videos need to be taken into

consideration by Visit Norway.

4. Through creating storylines around online activities and gift offering, Visit Norway could encourage users to share their expectation of Norway even more. Encouraging users to co-construct the image of Norway could help Visit Norway to get to know users' preferences and give them new ideas for their future storylines. Personal story sharing would then play a more central role in Visit Norway's eWOM, thereby reinforcing the narratives of Norway as a tourist destination.
5. Instead of tangible attractions in Norway, meeting tourists' psychological needs has also been considered important for tourists. Users showed great interest in stories that aroused their desire to escape from their daily life and to find an ideal place to relax. For Visit Norway, constructing more stories that could meet users' psychological needs could attract users' attention and help Visit Norway in its destination promotion. Making stories that can cause emotional resonance and reflection of their life enable the story achieve more
6. In addition to these five popular themes, it is crucial for Visit Norway to utilise the four technologies of power to make their stories more attractive and influential. Therefore, when producing stories, Visit Norway first needs to pay more attention on picking up a popular theme for stories. Second, Visit Norway needs to use mobilities to make interesting stories, which could be the corporal mobilities of celebrities, normal tourists, or other sources. Moreover, virtual mobilities could also be used in stories that draw on the online influence of individuals to play an important role in online destination promotion. Accordingly, for Visit Norway, encouraging users to share posts with their friends is an effective way to develop the influence of posts. Third, on Sina Weibo or social media platforms, Visit Norway needs to put on a performance as a storyteller or a host who tells stories about Norway and who is in charge of running the online activities for destination promotion. Even though users can freely share their opinions, it is still vital for Visit Norway to lead and instruct users to post contents that can support the brand narratives of Visit Norway. Last but not least, when creating stories, it is crucial for Visit Norway to follow the norms and discourses of Chinese social media and society.

## **7.2 Limitations**

There were three limitations to this research. First, this research only sampled the most popular post for each month, some well-organised posts with good stories might then have been overlooked because they did not have the most comments for that month. Moreover, this study merely sampled the top three most popular comments of each post. Some good storytelling

could then have been excluded if the comments were not liked by other users. Third, this study acknowledged the role of images and videos in co-creating storytelling but did not focus on examining the different effects of text, images and videos. Recognising the effect of different forms of storytelling could make future promotion campaigns more effective.

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