A business network analysis of the Botswana tourism industry

– Putting local ground operators relationships with foreign tour operators in the centre

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Subject: Marketing

Level and semester: Level 3, Semester 6, Fall 2013
PREFACE

I would like to take the opportunity to express my gratitude to everyone making this study possible. Firstly, I wish to thank all respondents in Botswana, for taking your time and showing involvement when sharing your views. Thank you Tendai Chikangaidze, Amina Sebele, Simo Kabasiya, Lucky Mokgowe and Mist Setaung. An extra thank is to Simo Kabusyia, whose hospitality, knowledge and contacts have been invaluable, both before and during my field trip.

This study was possible thanks’ to a grant from SIDA, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, to which I am very thankful. This grant made it possible to gather all the empirical data for the study.

Lastly, I wish to thank Linneaus University for giving the opportunity to apply for the grant, and to its employees for providing me with valuable feedback throughout the research process.

13 January 2014, Kalmar, Sweden

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ABSTRACT

Title: A Business Network Analysis of the Botswana Tourism Industry – Putting local ground operators’ relation with foreign tour operators in the centre.

Course: Final thesis on Bachelor Level, Marketing III, FE505, Fall 2013. Program of tourism, Department of Business Administration, Linnaeus University

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Key-words: ground operators, network, business relationship, trust, dependency, adaptation, culture

Purpose: This study aims to (1) describe and analyse the local ground operator’s role in the network of the Botswana tourism industry, (2) to investigate what factors characterize and influence their relationships with foreign tour operators, as well as (3) to provide implications for improving these relations.

Methodology: This study has been conducted as a case study, where the empirical data was collected during a two months field trip to Botswana. A qualitative research method, and a deductive approach has been used. Five semi-structured interviews were conducted with ground operators to get their perspective of their own situation, and one with a person representing a governmental organisation. Most data was collected through the interviews, but participating observation also served as a source of information. The validity and reliability of the study has been enhanced by defining core concepts, interviewing several respondents, using an interview guide and recording most of the interviews.

Results: Local ground operators play are crucial role in the network of Botswana’s tourism industry, as they are engaged in a high number of business relationships, are bringing the services at the destination together, and are connecting them to the tourists. They play a role as both customers and suppliers. Their relationship to tour operators abroad consists of a lot of resource ties, activity links as well as some actor bonds. Trust is found to be a very essential part of the relationship, and they perceive themselves as being dependent on the tour operators. Culture is not identified as a major influencing factor. As for managerial recommendations, a better communication in expectations and an increased adaptation of products and processes, to create customer dependence, are among the results advised.
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INTRODUCTION

In the initiating chapter, an introduction will be given to the field of study. This is done through presenting the important role tourism plays in developing countries and the increasing role of network and business relationships. The lack of such research applied on tourism, and particularly on the relationship between ground operators and tour operators, is discussed. This ends in two research questions, clarified in three purposes. Lastly, the delimitations of the study are set.

1.1 Background

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. Even though it is difficult to accurately measure the scope of the industry, it is said to be one of the world’s largest industries, accounting for 5.5% of the world’s GDP (Mbaiwa, 2003). Tourism has great impact on the destination, and in poorer regions tourism has much been used as a way to enhance economic development. Tourism is increasingly seen as an industry that can contribute to a country’s economic wealth and development, if done in a responsible way. Bringing tourists to a destination gives employment opportunities, tax revenues, a redistribution of resources, business opportunities and more. For this reason, most destinations try to increase their tourism industry (Mbaiwa, 2003). While environmental and social impacts of tourism have been described in literature, this study will focus on the economic aspects.

To use tourism as a way tool for economic development has been employed by many southern African countries, including Botswana. Botswana is a landlocked country situated just north of South Africa, and the country used to be a British protectorate. The country gained independence in 1968, and is often described as an “African Success Story”. The main reason for this is, together with political stability and responsible management, that the country discovered having diamonds shortly after its independence (Saarinen, 2009).

The country has relied on its diamond mining for a long time, but is more and more realizing the need for a more sustainable industry, as the diamond resources won’t last forever. Therefore, the government has come to see the tourism industry as a very important economic sector, and the country’s tourism has increased a lot. The major tourism attractions in
Botswana are the game reserves, mostly located in the north. The Okavango Delta and the Chobe National park are among the most visited regions (Saarinen, 2009).

Saarinen (2009) describes how the country has received much positive attention for its well planned and managed structure of their tourism industry. Botswana launched its first tourism policy in 1990, and the core point was to focus on a “low volume – high value” tourism industry. This was seen as a way to make sure that tourism resources were used on a sustainable basis, giving as much social, environmental and economic benefits to the country as possible. The policy had a variety of objectives, among others being to encourage tourism entrepreneurship (Saarinen, 2009).

Today we live in a networked world, where no business is an island (Håkansson & Senotha, 1995). Every business is linked to many others, which together form the network. Partanen and Möller (2012) argues how networks have been in focus in both business and literature for a considerable time. What constitutes the network is an interdependency, where firms need to interact with each other in order to deliver their products. In tourism, network is, according to Scott, Baggio, and Cooper (2008), said to be more important than in many other industries. The fact that the tourism industry often consist of small firms, and that they are operating far from their market source, are other reasons making the concept of network suitable for the industry (Scott et al, 2008). Ford and Håkansson (2011), describe how no single business can manage the network itself, but instead explains a need for companies to analyse and influence their own position in the network in order to get the most out of it. Scott et al (1991) explains how one can get access to markets through the management of one’s position in the network.

The tourism industry is predominantly made up of small size firms (Tinsely & Lynch, 2008; Pearce, 2009), and the industry is made up by numerous different actors, such as hotels, transport, tour organizers and more (Page, 2006). One of the core components of the tourism industry is, according to Jensen (2009), the ground operators. They are the ones planning and executing tour packages at the destination level, either using their own resources or combing other resources of suppliers at the destination. These packages can be sold directly to consumers, but also to tour operators abroad. These tour operators sell holiday packages to the customers in their home country (Jensen, 2009). Hence, a relationship between ground operators and tour operators exists.

According to Ford and Håkansson (2011), relationships are the basis of networks. Ryu, Park and Min (2007) describe how a paradigm shift has occurred, where developing and
maintaining long-term business relationship between buyers and sellers has become a core in marketing activities. Mutual interaction, interdependency of outcome, and the ability to produce something that they could not achieve alone, are core features of business relationships, described by Håkansson and Snehota (1995). How to best manage business relations is however debated.

1.2 Problem discussion
It is important to note that while the study of network and business relations have received a substantial level of attention (Håkansson & Ford, 2001), these works have remained on a broad level (see Powers & Reagan, 2007; Ritter, Wilkinson, Johnston, 2003; Håkansson & Senotha, 1995 for examples), or on cases focusing on manufacturing firms (see Mukheji & Francis, 2007; Ryu et al, 2007 for examples). Tinsley and Lynch (2008) describe how the subjects have just recently been applied to tourism, and how its contribution is poorly understood. In the research that has been applied to tourism, a strong focus has been on the collaborative networks and relationships within a destination, such as joint marketing and sales, aiming at increasing the flow of tourism to the destination (see Scott et al, 2008 and Dahles and Bras, 1999 for examples).

Jensen (2009) stresses on the tour operator’s influence on the generation of organized tourism to many African countries, and how they engage ground operators at the destination as their suppliers. This relationship, which is cutting cross geographical boundaries, has been given far less attention in research. Both Jensen (2009) and Andriotis (2003) describe the important and influential position of tour operators, and stresses on the lack of empirical evidence of their relation to suppliers at the destination. As seen in these two examples, the research is not only scares, but also thought of in the perspective of the tour operator. Putting the view of the ground operator’s in center, can therefore greatly contribute to a more holistic picture of the relationship.

To develop and manage successful business relations is not an easy task, and Huemer (1998) clearly states that there is nothing like a typical business relationship; they are all different and they need to be understood in order to be successfully managed. As a way for companies to know what efforts to focus on when improving ones business relationships, Powers and Reagan (2007) suggest using an analysis of the factors influencing and characterizing the business relationship. Many different factors are explained as influencing and characterizing a company’s success in business relations. Since relationships are made out of people, the social
dimensions plays a role in determining how the relationship will work, and it may be through these social interactions that trust can develop (Ford & Håkansson, 2011). For trust to develop, adaptation of products and activities from both parties is needed, and in the same way, trust promotes adaptability (Andersen & Kumar, 2006). This adaptation gives a mutual dependency, since resources are now useful for this specific relationship (Ford & Håkansson, 2011).

Powers and Reagan (2007) outline how some factors are more commonly describes than others in literature, but how this does not mean that there are universally agreed opinions of which ones are most characterizing and influential. What factors are influencing a business relationship is for example related to the nature of the industry. Mole (2003) is one of the authors explaining how different factors will lead to successful business relationships in different regions, which also implies a cultural dimension. Darley and Blankson (2008) state that little is documented about African business and its implication on business marketing. More specifically, Jensen (2009) acknowledges the importance of contextual factors in the relationship between ground operators and tour operators.

1.3 Research questions
In order to understand the situation of local ground operators in Botswana, and their business relationships with tour operators, as well as to contribute in the lack of research of business relationships in tourism, this study aims at giving and understanding of the nature of these relationships. Through this understanding, implications can also be given how to in the future develop, manage and maintain them better. The network approach will serve as a background, putting this relationship in a broader context. As of this, the main questions to be answered are

1.3.1 Question
- What role do the local ground operators play in the network of Botswana’s tourism industry?
- What is the nature of relationships between Botswana’s local ground operators and foreign tour operators?

1.3.2 Purpose
(1) To describe and analyse the local ground operator’s role in the network of the Botswana tourism industry.
(2) To investigate what factors characterize and influence their relationships with foreign tour operators, from the perspective of the ground operators.
(3) To provide implications for improving these relations.

1.3.3 Delimitations
The concept of ground operator can have many names and meanings, such as incoming agent or regional tour operator. Also a tour operator can be describes with many names, and the distinction between the two concepts, as well as other concepts in the tourism distribution chain, are not always clear. Ground operator and tour operator are however the only names used in this study, and definitions are made to make it clearer.

Within the research of business relationship, many more factors than trust, adaptation and dependency are present. This study will however only focus on these. Many of the other factors are however connected to these three concepts and will therefore not be completely neglected. Much of the literature on tour operators and ground operators are in the context of distribution chain management, this will however not be focused on, since the study clearly have its base in relationship management. This can however be seen as one relationship, within the tourism supply chain. Empirically, a delimitation is that the theories only will be applied from the perspective of the ground operators, and not the tour operator.
2. LITTERATURE REVIEW

The literature review presents a theoretical overview, framing the scope of this study. The chapter is divided into two main categories; network and business relationships. The network chapter aims at putting the chosen relationship in a broader context. Focus is therefore rather on the chapter of business relations, and its subchapters of the content of a relationship, influencing factors as well as culture. The model in the ends aims to give a summarizing overview.

2.2 The business network
Ford and Håkansson (2011) describe how the basis of every business is said to be relationships. Without relationships, no firm can access everything needed in order to produce and deliver their products. Through relationships between a company and its suppliers, customers, distributors, development partners and more, this can however be achieved (Ford & Håkansson, 2011). Through the interaction with others outside the firm, companies becomes dependent on each other. This interdependency is what Ford and Håkansson (2011) argues lead to business relationships.

A business relationship is never an island, but one among many relationships in a business network (Håkansson & Snehota, 1995). Håkansson & Snehota (1995), explain how seeing a customer-supplier relationship as an isolated entity give much trouble in understanding it, and suggest how a network perspective needs to be adopted if one aims at capturing the forces shaping relationships. Three researcher that early acknowledged the contextual importance of business relationships are Anderson, Håkansson and Johanson (1994). They strongly argue that a business relationship can only be fully understood if much attention is also given to the context in which the relationship in embedded. Håkansson & Snehota (1995) continues by saying that a relationship’s development and functions can only be understood if one regards the connected relationships. This has further been developed by for example Håkansson and Ford (2011), who also explain how all business relations are connected to other relationships. A relationship between a customer and a supplier will for example be connected to that supplier’s relationship to its own suppliers, and the actions they undertake. For this reason, Ford and Håkansson (2011) argues how what happens in one relationship will always influence other relationships in the network. Håkansson and Ford (2001) point out that it also goes in the other direction, so to say that relationships becomes influenced as well as they influence.
Relationships hence provide an opportunity for companies to influence others (Håkansson & Ford, 2001). Because of this, one can try to influence one’s relationships and role in the network, even though one cannot completely manage it. Strategies shall therefore be developed, aimed at developing, managing and exploiting relationships with others (Ford and Håkansson, 2011). As an example, Dahlen and Bras (1999) describe how it is common for small businesses to develop various kinds of linkage not only with larger firms, but also amongst themselves, and identifies this as a central strategy in the operation and development of small firms, as it becomes a source of capital and serves as an insurance against uncertainties.

Ford and Håkansson (2011) state that a business network, per se, can’t be considered synonymous with a specific industry. This is because the network is much broader, encompassing all that is needed to solve a customer’s problem. Ford and Håkansson (2011) also describes the difficulty in assigning the network’s different companies into neat categories such as manufacturer, wholesaler and retailer, since they might play various roles at the same time, depending on what perspective one is looking trough.

Lastly, Ford and Håkansson (2011) describe the concept of network in a more abstract way, with a network being a structure where a number of nodes are related to each other by specific threads. In a business network, these nodes are business units (e.g. producers, customers, resources, knowledge) and the threads are the business relations. Every node and thread has its content, and is tied together in a variety of ways (Ford & Håkansson, 2011). Similarly, Scott et al (2008) describe the abstract aspect of the network by referring to points and lines, instead of nodes and threads.

2.2.1 Network analysis
Ford (2006) strongly emphasize that a network has no center; it looks different depending from what angel it is looked upon. The authors however acknowledge how this makes it difficult to grasp a picture of one’s position in the network. To solve this, the authors suggest that one defines the content of the network, for every specific analysis. One can still use one point as a focal center when analyzing this point’s position in the network, as long as the wider perspective of a network is acknowledged (Ford, 2006).
To analyse a network one can use what Scott et al (2008) describes as a network analysis. This is an approach where the study of the exchange of resources among individuals, groups and organizations is done, with techniques aiming to find and analyse patterns of relationships and their structures. A network analysis is a useful tool in order to understand these complex sets of relationships. Through the network analysis, the relationships become easier to visualise, as well as analyse. A network analysis can define the actors’ positions in the network, and the relationships among them (Scott et al, 2008). Also, Bezuidenhout, Bodhanyab and Sanjikaa, Sibomanaa and Boote (2012) describes the role of the network analysis as tool to visualise and assess the status of a network and its relationship. Scott et al (2008) describe how there are many methods of visualising a network, and how they all serve as ways to easier explore data and display what the analysis shows. Drawn maps, diagrams and other statistical techniques can be used in the visualization process. When networks are large, it can be useful to eliminate nodes that are too far away from the focal centre (Scott et al, 2008).

### 2.2.2 Network analysis in tourism

An industry where Scott et al (2008) argue that it is useful to take use of the concept of network is the tourism industry, since it gives valuable results for the analysis of tourism destinations and organisations. According to Scott et al (2008) tourism is a typically networked industry, where organisations at and outside a destination engage in dynamic cooperation and competition. Tourism often comprises of small businesses far from their source markets, and many of the tourism firm’s resources are used jointly and are community owned. This environment and context for tourism firms serves as a reason for collaborative networks (Scott et al, 2008). Dahlen and Bras (1999) describe how many small service-related enterprises are linked to larger companies through subcontracting relations, and outline an opportunity in these interlinkages.

While, Ford and Håkansson (2011) describe how firms are part of a network regardless they want it or not and that the managerial question is how to cope and use this network and ones position in it, Scott et al (2008) focuses on a more intentionally developed network, where collaboration is central. This view can be found in much tourism destination research, such as Tinsley & Lynch (2008) who describe networks of small scale tourism businesses and their contribution to destination development. Scott et al describe three kinds of networks in tourism; networks of independent commercial operators, public/private networks and
academic networks. Further, a number of purposes that a network can serve in the tourism industry is given, such as gained commercial advantage, joint marketing, increased business activity, a more established market position of the destination and economic development. More practically, networks in tourism also provide a tool for passing tourists from one organization to the other while delivering the tourism experience, and this to the benefit of these organizations. (Scott et al, 2008).

2.3 The business relationship
After examining the network, we can see how all companies simultaneous undertake the phenomenon. The threads, described as relationships, binding these nodes together are essential in a business network. This is why a wider explanation of the business relationship, and a relationship in general, is suitable. Even though Anderson (1994) stresses on understanding the network context, in which each business relationship is embedded in, he is also suggest looking at the network from the perspective of one focal relationship. Håkansson and Snehota (1995) acknowledge the difficulty in grasping exactly what a relationship is, for example it is not evident when dealings between two companies in a market really become a relationship. Tentatively, Håkansson and Snehota (1995) describe a relationship as a mutual interaction between two parties, where both have an orientation towards commitment over time. The interdependency of outcome, and how they produce something that they could not achieve alone, are other core features. A relationship can be described in dimensions of both substance and function. One function is that of a dyad, which relates back to the fact that one can achieve more in the form of a relationship than alone.

According to Gummesson (2008), the classic relationship, is the dyad between a customer and a supplier. It can be said to be the parent relationship of marketing that is founds in the basis of all business. Defined, the customer is the one buying something, and the supplier the one selling something, and this classic relationship can exist both between companies and between a company and an end-consumer. Gummesson (2008) strongly emphasizes on the importance of investing in and maintaining already existing customer-supplier relationships.

Ford and Håkansson (2011) emphasizes on the interdependency in relationships. Since no firm has all resources and skills needed to operate alone, they need other companies in order to meet the needs of the final customer. Business relationships serves as the arena where companies can try to solve their own needs and problems, and in the long run also the
requirements of the consumers. However, not all relations are valued the same. A company’s
customer and supplier to vary a lot in their importance (Ford & Håkansson, 2011).

It is hard to assess the cost and monetary benefits of a relationship, but as they are such an
essential part of business there are many benefits to be found. A relationship can lead to
reduced administration costs as well as lower operational costs. Through a relationships, the
companies involved can easier access other parts of the network, since every company in the
relationship have other relationships (Ford & Håkansson, 2011).

2.4 The content of a relationship
Relationships are not only about simple conversations and negotiations, they also have
substance, and that substance is interacting (Ford & Håkansson, 2011). Håkansson and
Snehota (1995) describe how a method to use when analysing a single relationship within a
network is through analysing their content and interaction, and this theory is further
developed by Ford (2006) and Ford and Håkansson (2011). The three dimensions of this
content are the activity links, resource ties and actor bonds. As seen, it is not only the actors
that are interacting, but also the company’s resources and activities. By Gummesson (2008),
the three dimensions are described as types of connections, which together form a relationship
between a customer and a supplier.

2.4.1 Actor bonds
Ford (2006) and Ford and Håkansson (2011) describe how a relationship is made out of
people, so therefore a social dimension will always exist. The people that represent the
supplier or customer will start the first contact, and through interaction they can learn from
each other, show commitment and create trust. These people, will also influence each other, in
terms of sentiments, norms and values. Ford (2006) explains how the social dimension affects
the way the parts will work together and how they solve problems and reassure each other.
The extent of commitment, openness and influence can vary, but without interaction between
actors a substantial relationship can never develop. When this interaction between actors is
efficient, close actor bonds develop. Even though the actor bonds are very important, a critical
situation can however occur if individuals put their personal aspects of the relationship before
those of the company (Ford, 2006). A risk is, according to Ford (2006), that too close social
bonds might make the actors loose objectivity in their decisions, since they might base them
on the interest of the social relationship rather than in the interest of the company.
2.4.2 Activity links
If business between companies involve interaction among actors, then it is logical that also their behaviour will be linked. Ford and Håkansson (2011) calls this interlocking of behaviour, and is found in many aspects of the operations between a customer and a supplier. The activities that can be linked together may be about design, technology, administration, logistics, marketing and more. When these activities are interacting and are coordinated, activity links are established (Ford, 2006). These activities can be adapted to each other so that their combined efficiency is increased (Andersson, Håkansson and Johansson, 1994). An important question, described by Ford (2006), is what activities a supplier shall link to its customer. What determines the decision may be the nature of the needs of the customer, how the relationship is valued and the supplier’s strategy to deal with this. As with business relationships in general, activity links do not exist in isolation. They are all affected and influenced by other activity links in the network (Ford, 2006).

2.4.3 Resource ties
Apart from actors and activities, there also exist an exchange and sharing of the use of resources in a customer-supplier relationship (Ford, 2006). The resources might be of a physical character, but even more often they are of an abstract character. Knowledge is a resource that is often tied together between customer and supplier, and this through adaptations (Ford, 2006). The adaptation is what makes the resources tied together, and Anderson et al (1994) describe how firms can find new and better ways to combine their resources in order to develop them. A development in a relationship will require investments, and some of this will be done by the suppliers and customers individually. Others will be done in conjunction, and thereby they will be adapted to each other, to suit the specific needs of the relationship. This adaptation gives a mutual dependency, since the resource is now useful for this specific relationship but mostly not for others (Ford and Håkansson, 2011).

When analysing the content of a relationship through the use of these notions, it is useful to interview those involved, and to analyse their offerings and routines gives a good visualization of the nature of the relationship (Ford, 2006). Ford (2006) gives examples of how the relationship between a customer and a supplier can be pictured, depending on the amount of actor bonds, activity links and resource ties that are identified. A relationship can for example be very rich in social actor bonds and the partners know each other well. However, when it comes to integrating and adapting their activities, very little might have been done. In this case, the relationship has probably has more potential than they use. In
other relationships, the focus of interaction might be centred on its activities, but there might instead be few shared resources and the people behind the activities might not interact or know each other (Ford and Håkansson, 2006).

As seen here, all relationships are different, even when they are well developed. Ford (2006) mentions how a supplier’s relation to each customer can be described will vary. The way these actors, activities and resources are interacting with each other is not static and can change over time. The change can be depending on the length of the relationship, other nodes in the network or the overall business context (Ford, 2006). The actor bond, activity links and resource ties do neither exist in isolation, they are all part of a bigger network full of activity patterns, resource constellations and a web of actors (Ford and Håkansson, 2011). Therefore two companies in a relationship need to relate to other relationships in the network when developing its own relationship. Because of the complexity of business relationships, there is always a need to analyse and manage them well (Ford, 2006; Ford & Håkansson, 2011).

2.5 Factors influencing and characterizing business relationships
In literature, many factors are explained as influencing a company’s success in business relationships. However, no universal list or ranking has been agreed upon, and the factors also depends on the nature of the industry (Powers & Reagan, 2007). When the actor bonds, resource ties and activity links of a business relationship were examined in the previous chapter, trust, adaptation and dependency were words present throughout the description. The same words are also present in much literature describing buyer and seller relationships, and what influences them. Gummesson (2008) includes the concepts in what he calls properties of a relationship, through which one can describe the nature of a relationship. Powers & Reagan (2007) include the concepts in his listing of factors influencing successful buyer-seller relationships. Some authors focus on only one or a few of the concepts, such as Kusari, Hoeffler and Iacobucci (2013) and Crotts and Turner’s (1998) articles about trust in business relationships, or Mindlin and Aldrich’s (1975) or Kumar’s (2005) articles about power and dependency in business relationships. Because of the importance of understanding and managing trust, adaptation and dependency in business relationships, they will now all get their full attention one by one. As will be seen, they are however greatly connected to, and influenced by each other.
2.5.1 Trust

Trust has, according to Ruy, Park and Min (2007), on many occasions been proved to have much influence in the development of long term business relationships. Castaldo, Premazzi and Zerbini (2010) states that trust is a precondition for smooth business relations, and they take it as far as stating that business is impossible without trust.

Even in tourism literature, trust has been acknowledged. Crotts and Turner (1999) explains how trust is fundamental in the many customer-supplier relationships existing in tourism. An example given is the package tours, where a company will combine the products of many suppliers. Here both the supplier and consumer need to trust that the other will act in the best interest of each other, as well as in the interest of the end consumer (Crots & Turner, 1999).

Trust is, by Huemer (1998), argued to promote long-term business relations, and the underlying benefits described are many. Heumer (1998) explains how trust is said to positively influence the commitment in a relationship, a fact also described by Barnes, Naudé and Michell (2005). Heumer (1998) continues by claiming trust to be a contributor towards co-operation, even though it might also be the cooperation that leads to trust. To what extent trust leads to a competitive advantage or not is debated, but generally a strong from of trust is considered a competitive advantage (Huemer, 1998).

As trust is a broadly research concept in many areas of business, there is no universal definition (Castaldo et al, 2010). Moorman, Zaltman, Deshpande (1992, pp. 315) defines trust as a “willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence”, and this is, according to Crotts and Turner (1999) one of the most cited definitions. Castaldo et al (2010) have extended the work by compiling the most influential definitions. The conclusion is that the different definitions in literature are circular, and Castaldo et al (2010) are therefore trying to expand the definition by identifying common building pieces used by various researchers when defining trust.

Castaldo et al (2010) explains that one common reference is to describe the nature of trust, such as a willingness or an expectation. The subject involved in a business relationship is also an essential building piece in trust, and this subject can be individuals as well as firms, having special competencies, honesty or other characteristics. The behavioural dimension of trust is described as the object, meaning that the trustor and trustee will act in a certain way to aim for certain positive outcomes. Such a consequences of trust can be that the partner can predict the partner’s behaviour. Lastly there is the characteristics of the relational context, meaning that
trust only plays a role if there is an amount of uncertainties (Castaldo et al, 2010). A similar description of the definitions of trust is made by Huemer (1998), who summarizes three factors underlying trust; characteristics of the object of trust, characteristics of the trustor and contingency of the situation.

Many researchers have also focused on what it is that creates trust, and if it can be created at all (Crotts & Turner, 1999; Huemer, 1998). Although there are many theories of how trust is developed, a summarizing list of factors influencing trust can be found in Crotts and Turner (1999), where communication, cooperation, adaptation, mutual goals, interdependence and social bonds are among the listed factors. A factor influencing trustworthiness is according to Crotts and Turner (1999) reputation, and this has been wider described by Powers and Reagan (2007). A firm’s image and reputation will help an actor to measure the trustworthiness of a partner, and is important in the selection of a new partner. At this point there might not be much information about a supplier or buyer, and the reputation will therefore serve as an important source of information. Andersen and Kumar (2005) are other researchers relating reputation to trust, saying it can be determining when there is not enough other information. However, Andersen and Kumar (2005) state that reputation is a less efficient way of calculating trust than for example evaluating post experience behaviour. This can be linked to Powers and Regan (2007), who claims that reputation is built upon satisfactory behaviour over time, and that performance satisfaction is a core influencer of trust. Performance satisfaction is defined as the extent to which the partners can be satisfied with what the other do and deliver. Trust based on experience of past interactions is also mentioned by Huemer (1998), who calls it knowledge trust. As seen by the definition of performance satisfaction, this reason for trust implies that the relationship is already existing, as opposed to reputation (Huemer, 1998).

To conclude one can see that satisfactory behaviour and reputation both are reasons for trust, as well as they are ways of determining and predict weather to trust or not. Apart from relating trust to the ability to predict the other person’s behaviour, Huemer (1998) further explains three views of this prediction. The prediction might include repetitiveness, which is corresponding to the view of Powers and Reagan (2007), as it means that one believes the other one to behave the same way in the future as in the past. It might also include reliability, meaning a belief that one will reach a certain outcome, but not knowing how. Lastly it might include credibility, meaning a belief that one will do as they say they will. Huemer (1998) carries out the discussion by stating that none of the views alone is enough to cover the
meaning and reason of trust. Other reasons of trust, with a more social angle, are found in Huemer (1998). He claims that trust can develop because of social similarity, shared values, identification with each other or that one trust because one is being trusted by the other. Yet other reasons for trust are dependency or that it would be more costly not trusting.

Trust is often described together with risk and uncertainty, and Huemer (1998) states both risk, uncertainty and vulnerability as preconditions for trust. By trusting, one faces all these concepts. On the other hand, trust is only necessary in and uncertain environment. This means that risk can be reduced by trust, but also one takes risks by trusting Huemer (1998). Stako et al (2007) argues that an actor will take a risk when first deciding to trust, but when the relationship and trust has developed, it instead serve as a way to reduce uncertainties.

2.5.2 Adaptation

According to Brennan & Turnbull (1998) one difference between being in a business relationship with a company, and simply doing transactions with one, is that you no longer only sell standard products, at standard prices, using standard procedures. This indicated that adaptation, by one or both parts, is a necessary condition for a relationship, and one of the defining characteristics (Brennan & Turnbull, 1998). Håkansson and Senotha (1995) states that adaptation is an important process for relationships to develop, and Powers and Reagan (2007) explains adaptation as one of the major influences of business relationship. Brennan and Turnbull (1998) also emphasises on the importance of inter-firm adaptations when managing one’s relationships. As seen, the process of adaptations is both a requirement for business relationships, an influencing factor and a way of managing them.

In all business, adaptation to market forces is necessary. But in business to business marketing this adaptation can often be much farther reaching, since losing one business partner can be very costly (Gummesson, 2008). Business relationships are often long lasting, and they can be seen as a process, where ongoing interaction and exchange is present. As the partners interact, their behaviour will be responsive to the other ones behaviour, which can be in the form of adaptations (Hallén, Johanson, and Seyed-Mohamed, 1991). Håkansson and Senotha (1995) points out problem-solving as the main reason for adaptation. Powers and Reagan (2007) explains how it is expected to adapt throughout the life of a relationship, and that is should contribute to value and strengthen the relationship. That these adaptations in the long run will functions as a barrier of entry for competitors is another reason to make adjustments in one’s business relationships. By improving the products through adjustments one can better meet
the needs of the customer, which will lead to efficiency and more interaction among the partners (Powers & Reagan, 2007).

Håkansson and Senotha (1995) argue that the word adaptation indicates that two firms in a relationship have some things in common, and some things that are unique and therefore needs adapting. They further describe adaptation as an organic and natural process, were adaptations are often unplanned and hard to point out. They can even be described as invisible to those not directly involved. What adaptations that have actually been done can thus be more or less well known within the company, and therefore rarely monitored (Håkansson & Senotha, 1995).

So what is it that firms engaged in a business relationship adapt? When Håkansson and Senotha (1995) describe actor bonds, activity links and resources ties, adaptations is only mentioned when discussing activity links. The links of activity are describes as the result of coordination and adaptation, where adjustments to the activities have been made. Example of activities that can be adapted are information exchange, payment routines and production processes. In the chapter of activities Håkansson and Sneotha (1995), however also mentions adaptation of products. The adaption of products is mentioned by many authors, such as Hallén et al (1991) and Brennan and Turnbull (1998). Hallén et al (1991) brings up the concept of social exchange and remarks that there are people who are interacting in the adaptation process, and therefore also the people need to adapt.

Adaptation as an interacting process has been mentioned, and Håkansson and Senotha (1995) is one of the authors explaining that adaptations are done by both the supplier and the consumer, as well as the two jointly. Mukherji and Francis (2008) states that supplier adaptations are usually getting much attention in literature, but emphasize that it can also be from both parties, and names this mutual adaptation. However, he claims that the motives of the buyer and seller might differ, and that the motives of the supplier to adapt are more influenced by economic dependency. Hallén et al (1991) instead see the differences in what the parts are adapting, concluding that suppliers are mostly adapting their productions processes, while customers are mostly adapting their products.

Brennan & Turnbull (n/a) carries out a discussion of how one can see adaptation in different perspectives. The first proposed perspective is that of seeing adaptation as an investment, where the economic calculations are in focus. The description of adaptation as an investment can also be seen in research of Hallén et al (1991) and Mukherji and Francis (2008), even
though the economic focus is found to be less dominant in their research. Instead of a rational investment, it is also possible to see adaptations as the outcome of a *negotiation process*. Focusing on negotiation, power and satisficing is by Brennan and Turnbull (n/a) described as adaptation seen as a *political process*. Adaption can also be seen as a *socialization process*, where firms learn how to behave depending on the context. An example can be when a small supplier needs to learn how to do business with a large customer. Parallels are in this metaphor done to learning a new culture (Brennan & Turnbull, n/a). Lastly a parallel to adaption as an *evolutionary process* is done, focusing on the development process. Adaptation is seen as a process in which the buyer and seller adjust with the aim to serve each other better. These different metaphors highlight different perspectives, but can according to Brennan & Turnbull (n/a), all contribute to a better understanding of adaptation in business relationships.

### 2.5.3 Dependency

As mentioned in the chapter of analysing a single relationship, the sharing of resources is a characteristic of a customer-supplier relationship (Ford and Håkansson, 2011). The resources are often adapted to each other, which creates a dependency since this adaption takes time and the resources now only are useful for this specific relationship (Ford and Håkansson, 2011). Also, no firm has all resources they need in order to function efficiently, and they therefore depend on the resources of other firms. (Ford and Håkansson, 2011). For this reason and more, dependency is a factor that clearly influences and characterizes business relationships between customers and suppliers.

Zaheer and Venkatraman (in Francis and Mukherji, 2008, pp. 156) defines dependency in business relations as “the economic power one firm has over another”, and as opposite to Ford and Håkansson (2011), Francis and Mukherji (2008) state that it is the dependency that leads to adaptation and not the other way around. In Mindlin and Aldrich’s (1975) definition of intra-firm dependency the sharing of resources is in focus, stating that it is in the sharing of resources that dependency develops. When one firm have resources that the other firm can’t obtain or live without, then he is in a dependent situation (Mindlin & Aldrich’s, 1975).

Both dependency of a supplier and dependency of buyer dependency occur (Hallén, 1991). Mukherji and Francis (2008) argues that when a smaller firm is reliant on a larger buyer for a big part of their sales, the supplier is likely dependent on the buyer. It is further explains how a supplier’s dependency on a consumers will depend on 1) How affected it would be by loosing the buyer, 2) How critical the buyer is to the supplier and 3) The existence of
alternative buyer (Mukherji and Francis, 2008). Similar explanations have been made by other researchers, and Hallén et al (1991) describes a measurement of dependency encompassing both supplier and customer dependency. To determine how dependent a supplier is on a customer (supplier dependence) one can, according to Hallén et al (1991) measure how much of a selected product is sold to one single buyer, compared to the total sale of that product. This variable is defines as customer importance. The other variable of a supplier’s dependence is buyer concentration, which measures how much of the total sales goes to the few largest byers (Hallén et al, 1991). In a similar way, one can determine the customer’s dependence on a supplier (customer dependence). The variable of supplier importance is here how much of a selected product a customer buys from one supplier, compared to their total purchase of that product. The supplier’s market share of that product, and the complexity of the products, are other factors determining the customer’s dependence (Hallén et al, 1991). In the results of Hallén et al’s (1991) study, it is concluded that customer importance is the most reliable indicator of a supplier’s dependence, and product complexity the most reliable indicator of customer’s dependency. No consideration has however been taking to industry, size of the firms etc. when coming to these results.

Rogers (2005) introduces the word co-dependency. With the use of this notion, he emphasises on how both parties can gain more value if the relationship is based on dependency on equal terms, as opposed to traditional master and slave roles. This view can be compared to Powers and Reagan (2007), who also states that unequal relationship can only be beneficial in a short term. Dependency is said to nurture trust as well as commitment, and these are the preconditions for co-dependency (Rogers, 2005). Barnes et al (2005) describes how a firm with a high degree of dependency will strongly desire the relationship to last and develop. Gummesson (2008) is yet another author describing a link between dependency ad commitment, saying that when a relationship is important to one or both partners, a dependency exists and the partners must commit to make the relationship work.

It is clear that dependency can affect the behaviour of both parties involved in a relationship. Barnes et al (2005) describes how barging power and the will to adapt are among the things that can be affected when the dependency is not mutual, on the behalf of the weaker party. Dependency can also lead to uncertainties, since the firm in now relaying on the actions and resources of another partner of whom have limited control Barnes et al (2005).

Another link made by Barnes et al (2005), is the one between dependency and trust, who state that an increase in trust can increase the level of dependency. Dependency is often researched
together with the concept of power (Meehan & Wright, 2012; Kumar, 2005; Powers & Reagan, 2007), as they are used in a similar way and influence each other. Hallén et al (1991) explains how power can develop when one firm has resources that the other party need, as well as from that firm controlling the alternative sources of these resources. Powers & Reagan (2007) explain the relationship between power and dependency by stating that if only one firm is dependent on another, that firm will have more power, which will lead to more dependency, which will lead to more unequal power etc. This might lead to the powerful firm taking actions that benefit themselves, without consideration to the dependent part. Their conclusion is that these kinds of unequal relationships might be working for a shorter time, but not be beneficial when developing long term relationships. Also the equal relationships will lead to more agreements, since the parties will be more complaisant.

2.6 Culture in business relationships
Voldnes, Grönhaug and Nilssen (2012) states that what factors are leading to successful business relationships might vary across cultures. They also state that cultural differences easily can lead to misunderstandings of each other’s intentions and behaviour, which might cause conflicts damaging the relationship (Voldnes et al, 2012). Moran, Harris and Moran (2011) takes the risk further, by saying that when cultural aspects are neglected the costs are usually significant.

Ghauri and Cateora, 2010, explains how cultural forces are among the most significant uncontrollable elements in the international business environment. Business customs are different around the globe, and are part of a country’s culture. When dealing with business in other countries, one therefore needs to acknowledge and deal with these differences (Ghauri & Cateora, 2010). Griffith, Myers and Harvery (2006) and Mole (2005) stresses the importance of understanding the influence of cultures when examining and managing international business relationships. The success of interaction, which is what business relationships is composed of, will largely depend on how well the parts understand each other and the context they are in. This is all formed by culture, and one need to be able to deal with it. Mole (2005), states that when people from different cultures come together, they come with different expectations and beliefs of how to work. Culture might look invisible, but only until it meets another culture, this is when differences become visible. In a business environment, things such as the role of the boss, meetings and planning might vary (Mole, 2005). Ghauri and Cateora, (2010) expands the list by adding for example communication, negotiation,
gender and time. Also Voldnes et al (2012) mentions the time dimensions, and adds the difference in expressive and reserved cultures.

Moran et al (2011) tries to give managers an understanding of cultures in different parts of the world. While carefully stating that it is impossible to describe a culture without doing generalisations, Moran et al (2011) still manage to distinguish some characteristics of African business culture. In Africa, trust and confidence are generally essential elements needed for success. Small talk and getting to know each other as individuals is important before getting down to business, as is the development of friendship and socialization. Another characteristic mentioned is the view of time, which is essential in business relations (Moran et al, 2011). In Africa, time is said to be flexible, and to hurry can be a sign of distrust. Time is not limited and people come first (Moran et al, 2011; Voldnes et al, 2012). However, Moran et al (2011) acknowledge that most business managers in Africa is aware of this and try to adapt when dealing with foreigners.

Voldnes et al (2012) state how different factors lead to beneficial relationships in different cultures, and give trust as an example. Close personal relations might be more important in some countries when creating trust, whereas trust deriving from performance satisfaction and from the company itself is more important in others Voldnes et al (2012) further state that trust may be even more important in cross-cultural relationships then domestic ones, since governmental systems might not be valid in the other partner’s state. Trust can thereby be the only way to secure a relationship. However, culture differences might stand as a barrier to the partner’s ability to trust (Voldnes et al, 2012).

The strong influences of culture on international business relationships have now been acknowledged and described. Pressey and Selassie (2002) however state that there is now a growing number of studies acknowledging the limitations of cultural influence on international business relationships, and he questions its importance. As an example, he mentions a study where the researchers failed to find a correlation between managerial skills and culture.

Through Pressey and Selassie’s (2002) empirical findings, it becomes evident that the respondents had different opinions and experiences about the issue. Even those who claimed cultural differences to play a role in international business relations found it hard to pinpoint the exact influence, and many stereotypes were brought up. Instead, another influencing factor was mentioned; that the industry that they operated in plays a significant role, meaning that
each industry have its own customs and product issues (Pressey & Selassie, 2002). To summarize, it is clear that cultures are different in different parts of the world. They affect how we interact and need to be taken into consideration when dealing with international marketing. Weather and to what extent they influence the nature and success of business relations is however not agreed on.

**Bridging theory with empirical findings**

The theories that will be applied in this study have now been described and discussed in detail. A visualisation of their linkage, and the structure of this study, is shown in the model below. The network in the background of the model symbolises how a network perspective of business relationships will give the necessary context to the relationship that will be in focus. Within the network, ground operators and tour operators have been highlighted, as well as the thread binding them together. This as the relationship between the two will be the focus of the study, and as it will be done through the eyes of the ground operators, they have been highlighted in the model. A description of what the relationship consists of will give a deeper insight in the relationship, and this is done through analysing the content of the relationship. Here, actor bonds, activity links and resources ties are essential parts. They are closely related to the three chosen factors influencing and characterizing a relationship. The relationship will therefore be described with the concepts of trust, adaptation and dependency in business relations. Because of the different nationalities of ground operators and tour operators, and the numerous literature on the importance and influence of culture in business relationship, this will end the analysis.
Figure 1: Theoretical Framework
3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the different methods used when conducting this Minor Field Study in Botswana in 2013. It begins with a presentation of the specific condition of this study, followed by a discussion of the research strategy and the decisions that comes along with it. Finally, how the validity and reliability has been ensured is argued.

3.1 Working conditions
With the research focusing on a specific situation, in a specific geographical area, a decision was made to study the research topic as close up on reality as possible, in order to grasp an in-depth as well as holistic understanding. As a result, two months were spent on the field, mainly collecting data. The two months have been spent in the capital of Botswana, as well as in the northern part of the country, in the rural and touristic town of Kasane. Five ground operators have served as objects of study, as well as one representative of a governmental, coordinating tourism organisation.

3.2 Research strategy
3.2.1 Deduction
When making the decision of how to link theory and research, Bryman and Bell (2011) describe two main options; deduction and induction. The most common option of this linkage is deduction. In deduction, the role of theory is to guide and drive the process of collecting empirical data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This has been the role of theory in this study, and the study is therefore using a process of deduction. Patel and Davidsson (2011) describe how deduction means following the path of proving and manifestation, as general theories are used to make conclusions of particular phenomenon. A disadvantage with deductive studies is that the theory might influence the researcher, for example by preventing the identification of new observations (Patel & Davidsson, 2011). To avoid this, an open mind to the empirical data has been kept in mind, as well as a constant review of literature. Using an inductive process, which is the second option, is opposed deduction in the sense that the researcher follows the path of exploration and draft new theories that will derive from particular situations (Patel & Davidsson, 2011). Since this study focuses on a specific location and a specific case, it is not possible to generate new and general theories, and induction was not found suitable. Instead, the deduction gave great possibility to apply general theories onto reality, in this specific case. Both theory of tourism and business relationship management are well developed, therefore I
argue for a need of testing them empirically in a deductive study, rather than developing new theories.

### 3.2.2 Qualitative research
Krishnaswami and Satyaprasad (2010) explain how there are two main approaches to research, namely qualitative and quantitative, and Bryman and Bell (2011) explain how the distinction makes it easy to classify different methods, and serves as an umbrella for further methodological choices. In general, qualitative research is characterised by descriptions of the views of the participants, the use of many different sources of information and for giving space for the cohesions and contexts people are living (Yin, 2013). All in all, Yin (2013) describes qualitative research as being more broad and multifaceted. As a result, data is often collected from the field, and the nature of it is non-quantifiable and concerned with words (Yin, 2013). This is opposed to quantitative methods, which aims at finding general answers and therefore is using a larger amount of data, more concerned about numbers and statistics than words (Patel & Davidsson, 2011).

Corbin and Strauss (2008) give different reasons for using qualitative research. The method is described as allowing the researcher to get an in-depth understanding, acknowledging how meanings are formed in culture. Another reason is that the method gives more possibilities to learn about people. The firms in this study are small, which highlights the presence of the people, and a qualitative method is therefore suitable for this study. Since the focus is on a specific case, it has also been important to use a method that acknowledge situational importance, and the cultural context. Patel and Davidsson (2011) says that the nature of the research question indicate what strategy to use, and questions starting with “what” or which” are suitable for qualitative research. This corresponds well with the research question of this study. A dilemma in qualitative research, described by (Bryman & Bell, 2011), is a risk of subjectivity, since the researcher might rely to the respondents to a high extent. To avoid this, a variety of sources will be used in this study, which is also described as a characteristic of the qualitative research by Yin (2013).

### 3.3 Research design
#### 3.3.1 Case study
Bryman and Bell (2011) explain how case studies are often used in business research, and Yin (2009) describes how they usually are concerned with the complexity and nature of a specific case. Yin (2009) further describes several critical features of case studies. Firstly, a case study is an empirical enquiry that, in depth, investigates a real-life phenomenon, and the boundaries
between this phenomenon and its context are not clear. Multiple sources of information are used, and the study benefits from earlier theoretical work. This corresponds well with the purpose of this study, and in Yin’s (2009) description, I can see similarities to both a deductive method and qualitative strategy.

A case study is not only a design feature, a method of data collection or an approach of analysis. Instead, it is an all-comprising method, covering this and more (Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) also associates a case study with a geographical location. A case study can include single or multiple cases (2009). Even though this study encompass several tour operators, it is not to be seen as a multiple case study. Instead, the case is limited to the geographical area of Botswana, and to the industry of tourism. It is therefore rather to be described as an industry case study.

3.3.2 Field study
The data collection for this study has been conducted during an eight week field trip in Botswana. In qualitative research, the researcher is not looking for distance to the object of study, but rather an opportunity to connect on a human level (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For this reason, the decision to conduct a field study was appropriate. A field study means integrating with the situation and the people that are connected to the field of study, in their own setting (Yin 2009).

Since field studies take part in people’s everyday life, Yin (2009) stresses the importance of showing courtesy and developing good relations. Yin (200) also describes how being on the field also means limitations in deciding one’s own working conditions. Yin’s (2009) advice on adapting and being flexible was taken seriously. As an example, it was necessary to be flexible with appointments for interviews, since the ground operators could be away on tours for long time, and how time is looked upon is different in Botswana than in the home of the researcher. Adaptation and courtesy was also shown in terms of clothing, since it is very important to dress smartly in Botswana if one wants to be taken seriously.

3.4 Collection of data
Patel and Davidsson (2011) explains how there are several ways of collecting data, and how the method most suitable depends on the research question, as well as the means and resources available. As qualitative research is concerned with words rather than numbers, data collection is often done through focus groups, participating observation, text documents or interviews. This corresponds well with Yin’s (2009) description of where data for a case study may be collected. Patel and Davidsson (2011) state that it is common to use several,
complementing sources of information in qualitative research, such as a combination of interviews and observation. The methods used in this study were in-depth interviews and participating observation. The main reasons were that it was the best way to use the resources given to a high extent, and gave extensive amount of qualitative data.

3.4.1 Interviews

Yin (2009) describes how interviews are one of the most important sources of information in case studies. In this study, six semi-structure, focused interviews have therefore been conducted. Yin (2009) describes focused interviews as open conversations, still influenced by a case study protocol, and lasting for about an hour. According to Bryman and Bell’s (2011) description, open questions are posed, and the focus is a certain situation, relevant to the respondent. Qualitative interviews can, according to Bryman and Bell (2011), vary to a high extent in how structured they are. In semi-structured interviews, an interview guide is usually used, but the questions can however be asked in various order, and follow-up questions can be asked. This corresponds well to the format of the interviews in this study, and it was beneficial to have the flexibility of the semi-structure, as all respondents represented different organisations and situations.

The choice of who to interview is, by Trost (2010), described as one of the most important decisions. It is recommended to use only a few respondents in qualitative research, and as the findings don’t need to be generalizing there is no need to find statistical representing respondents (Trost, 2010). For this study, the size of the firm, the amount of employees, the amount of relationships to tour operators etc. varies. Both rural and urban areas are represented, as well as both genders. Because of the focus of the study, they however share similarities, such as all being citizen-owned and not very big. The variety of respondents gave a chance to see general patterns as well as differences, which was helpful when answering the research question. As the study is not a multiple case study, the respondents represent ground operators in general, rather than their specific companies. When formulation questions, this has been kept in mind and expressed when interviewing. Answers specifically relating to their own companies can however also serve as good examples of the situation of ground operators in general. A template of the respondents can be seen below.

Table 1: Presentation of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Company name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tendai Chikangaidze</td>
<td>Maroon Tours &amp; Safaris</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>11/11-2013</td>
<td>Gaborone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amina Sebele</td>
<td>Big Foot Tours</td>
<td>Sales &amp; Marketing Executive</td>
<td>11/11-2013</td>
<td>Gaborone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keitiretse Motlamma</td>
<td>Botswana Tourism Organisation</td>
<td>Marketing Officer</td>
<td>12/11-2013</td>
<td>Gaborone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simo Kabasiya</td>
<td>Armibush Safaris</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>2/12-2013</td>
<td>Kasane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucky Mokgowe</td>
<td>Lucky Adventure Safaris</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>2/12-2013</td>
<td>Kasane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mist Setaung</td>
<td>Dream Safaris</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>4/12-2013</td>
<td>Kasane</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4.2 Participating observation
Since case studies take place in the natural setting of the case, and are dealing with contemporary events, the researcher automatically is given a good opportunity for collecting data by observation (Yin, 2009). This opportunity has been taken in this study, especially during the researcher’s stay in the northern part of Botswana. Living in the same small town as the ground operators, and sharing their everyday life, gave a good basic knowledge of the context, inspiration to what questions were relevant to ask, as well as an understanding of why the respondents answered as they did and what they meant. In some situations, the information given through observation has been directly used as empirical findings.

3.5 Qualitative content analysis
A researcher cannot collect data forever, and Yin (2013) describes how something needs to be done with it to give it significance. Yin (2013) calls this something the analysis, and explains it as a coding, where the researcher interpret the data. Bryman and Bell (2011) mention analysing data as a critical step in the research process. Yin (2013) explains how, in qualitative research, analysis is an interpretive and interactive act, and where the basis of the analysis process is theory. For these reasons, the analysis in this study has been based on the relevant concepts of network and business relationship management. The data collected from the respondents, with the use of the interview guide, has been compared with these theories, as well as with each other. The method of analysis hence follows the deductive approach of this study.

3.6 Validity and reliability
Validity means that the researcher really measures what he/she is aiming at measuring (Ejvegård, 2009). To ensure this, there is a need for definitions of what will be measured, as well as a reliable tool for measurement (Patel & Davidson, 2011). Reliability describes how reliable and trustworthy the tool of measurement is, and whether the same result could be found if repeating the study (Ejvegård, 2009). The tools for measurement in this study, which was mainly interviews, was a tool suiting the qualitative method. To make it more reliable, the operationalization and interview guide were helpful. This is similar to Yin’s (2009) argument, describing how using a case study protocol will strengthen the reliability of a case study. Being explicit in defining core concepts, as well as using multiple sources of evidence, are methods used to ensure validity in this study. The operationalization, as well as interview guide are found in appendix 1.
4. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The views of the six respondents will now be presented in an extensive empirical chapter. The outline will follow the one of the theoretical chapter, in order to give a clear structure. The only difference is however the first chapter, where the respondents are presented, as well as their views on tourism. The views are following a theoretical order, rather than one respondents view at a time, to make it easier to see similarities as well as differences in their answers.

4.1 Presentation of the respondents

Keitiretse, at Botswana Tourism Board (hereafter abbreviated as BTO) introduces the tourism product of Botswana. To him, the main tourism products in Botswana are the safari, the wildlife and the landscapes. Chobe national park and the Okavango delta are described as the most famous areas, and are both situated in the northern part of the country. Tendai, Amina, Simo, Lucky and Mist’s companies all offer safari packages, to consumers directly as well as to tour operators, where visits to the national parks and wildlife management areas of Botswana are present. Other products offered by them are transfers, hotel reservations, and city/village tours. As Simo, Lucky and Mist are located in the northern part of the country, their tours focus mostly on the northern areas, including both Chobe National Park and the Okavango Delta. Tendai, Amina, Simo and Lucky sometimes organise tours including visits to neighbouring countries. Amina’s company is the only one also working with outbound tourism. None of the respondents have scheduled departures, and they all describe how they tailor make tours to suit the needs of the customers.

The northern ground operators (Simo, Lucky and Mist) have their own guide licences and undertake the tours themselves, while Tendai and Amina work in offices in the capital Gaborone. All companies however have their own transportation equipment, and all except Tendai have their own camping equipment. Amina’s firm differs from the other by, also managing two campsites in the Kalahari Desert.

All firms employ between two and fifteen people. Simo and Lucky’s are the smallest, constituting only of themselves and one more person. Amina’s is the biggest, employing fifteen. Temporary staff is however employed when needed for tours requiring more personnel.

Motlamma explains how the role of BTO is to market Botswana, trough activities such as marketing campaigns, public relations, local offices abroad, attendance on trade shows and
more. By stimulating a demand, he explains, entrepreneurship will be encouraged as a consequence. He explains how ground operators in Botswana are the one with the most product knowledge and that they need to market themselves well, for example through partnerships with tour operators abroad.

4.2 Network analysis – with ground operators in the centre
The main asset of the ground operators are equipment, manpower and license (Lucky, Mist) as well as product knowledge (Amina, Lucky, Simo). Combining the answer from all the respondents show that they are however affected by hotels and campsites, transportation companies, customers, other ground operators, banks, hospitals, filling stations, the government and tour operators. Below, a summary of the relations identified is attached, and further on explained in more detail. The row titled “Tour operators” is highlighted as a way to indicate that it is the ground operator’s relationship to them that will further on be the focus of this study. The matrix is inspired by Scott et al (2008), but has been partly modified to suit this study.

Table 2: Who is influencing the business of the respondents?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Tour operators</th>
<th>Banks, hospitals and similar</th>
<th>Transport</th>
<th>Filling stations</th>
<th>Hotels/camps</th>
<th>Other ground operators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tendai Chikangaidze</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amina Sebele</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simo Kabsiya</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucky Mokgowe</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mist Setaung</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All respondents first outlined the actors related to tourism, such as hotels and lodges, and only a few of the respondents (Amina, Mist) continued to mention banks and hospitals. The relationship between ground operators and the government is however mentioned on a few occasions, and is by Tendai described as a challenge. He feels that the government is competing with companies like his own, when it comes to attracting clients. Also Amina stresses that it is very difficult to change the relationship with the government. Other than that, the government is mostly mentioned as encouraging the work of ground operators (Lucky) or being very passive (Amina, Simo). No one mentions BTO directly as influencing them. Later on during interviews, events organised or sponsored by them (Tendai, Mist), or the importance of being on their website (Simo) are however mentioned by Tendai, Simo and Mist.
Amina, Simo and Lucky mention transport as affecting their businesses. Airlines are described as something they are dependent on, whereas other modes of transport are not further discussed. All the respondents have their own cars for transporting tourists. Some of the operators based in the rural, northern areas, such as Lucky and Mist, mentions filling stations as one of the critical actors in their operations, as they can’t do without them. Hotels, campsites and lodges are mentioned by all respondents as they are included in tour packages, but Simo is the only one explaining how he can have an impact on this relationship. He says that bringing a lodge business indicated that he wants a business relationship to start. For Simo and Mist, hotels also serve as a source of clients as they take the clients of the hotels for safari tours.

The relationship among the different ground operators is mostly discussed by those in the northern part (Simo, Lucky, Mist), and is by Simo and Lucky described as their most important relationship. They often rent or borrow equipment and staff from each other, to get a possibility to handle different kinds of groups and to get specialist knowledge when needed.

“Cooperation with other ground operators gives me the possibility to handle big groups, through borrowing equipment, share office space and more.” Simo

Through observations during the field visit, many signs of strong connections among the ground operators them were seen, being all from day to day cooperation, joint discussions of how to improve their marketing as well as close friendship. Simo explains how it is essential to cooperate both because they will all need some help at some point and because it gives all of them more business. Also ground operators in the capital city (Tendai and Amina) mentions other ground operators as actors influencing their business, but they were instead described as competitors. However, Amina also describes that competitors can be partners in some contexts, for example when they book one of the campsites her company is managing.

Most of the respondents, such as Tendai, Amina, Simo and Lucky, acknowledge the influence of tour operators already when they are asked to list who is affecting them. Mist instead explains the relationship and how it affects him later on during the interview. Several respondents (e.g. Tendai, Lucky and Mist) express a wish to have more relationships with tour operators, but find it difficult to develop. Lucky and Mist have both attended the South African trade show Indaba, but still don’t have many tour operators to cooperate with. During the field visit of the researcher, an exhibition held by BTO (Botswana Tour and Travel Exhibition, BTTE) took place. European tour operators were invited, and the aim was to teach
them about Botswana and connect them with ground operators and other actors. Amina, Simo and Mist attended, but so far they say it is difficult to measure the results. Familiarization trips are mentioned by both Simo and Lucky as important when developing a relationship with a tour operator.

Lucky explains that earlier on, ground handling work in Botswana was mainly done by international companies. They made it look very difficult and scared away the locals from trying. Now locals like himself have realized that they can manage the operations as well, even though they face some difficulties and feel that the international ground operators are sometimes better at getting clients (Lucky). Simo mentions the importance of him looking at what the bigger companies do right, in order to learn and improve his situation. During the field visit, the researcher often saw how many of the ground operators expressed that they didn’t understand what the internationally owned ground operators did differently in order to successfully access the international market.

4.3 The relationship between ground operators and tour operators
The challenge in developing business relationships with tour operators has been mentioned earlier by Tendai, Lucky and Mist. All respondents however deal with one or several tour operators abroad, and Tendai explain how relationships are necessary in order to compete successfully.

When the benefits of engaging in business relationships with tour operators is discussed, the respondents agree with each other to a high extent. Lucky says that once you have relationships with tour operators it is easy work, because you only need to deal with one person for many different trips. Further, Lucky and Mist states that the tour operators will do the job of attracting clients once the relationship is developed. Increased exposure and thereby more business is also mentioned by Amina. However she also sees other benefits, such as that working with a tour operator gives trust. By being a ground handler, Amina says that they don’t need to start from scratch when making the client trust, since the client already trust the tour operator in their home country. Also Simo mentions trust, and says it benefits both him and the tour operator. Above all, also he mentions a continuous supply of business as the main advantage with the relationships he has. From Keitiretse’s point of view, a ground operator can increase their market base through cooperating with a tour operator, because clients overseas tend to trust tour operators more.
Even though the benefits of relationships with tour operators seems to be easier to point out, some critical issues have still been identified. Mist and Lucky says that some tour operators want to use them as guides or drivers only, but hide their company names so that the clients feel that they are taken care by the tour operator alone along the whole trip. A point made by both Mist, Tendai and Simo is that by selling to a tour operator, they lose the money they give as commission to the tour operators. Even though this can be seen as a disadvantage, they say that it is worth it because of the benefits mentioned earlier. Simo further explain that a relationship with a tour operator is good as long as you have a good structure. This encompass good rates, and the disadvantage only arises if they have pressed the prices too low. Another issue with developing business relationships with tour operators are the expenses. Tendai, Amina and Simo are amongs the respondents mentioning trade shows as a god arena for creating relationships, but says they are very expensive to attend. For example, Tendai’s company attend Indaba (a trade show in South Africa), but not the one in London, because of the costs.

Simo says that the relationship between his company and a tour operator begins as soon as a tour operator shows any sign of interest. By the time the first deal take place, the relationship will be established. Amina says there is a relationship if a tour operator has clients that enquire about Botswana and they contact her. Mist stresses that a relationship takes time to build. This is also mentioned by Tendai, who says that it can take about two years before a bond is established. Simo says that many emails are being sent when discussing a trip with a tour operator. Also Mist mentions continuous email contact. Tendai explains how he doesn’t only email when there are trips going, but also to remind them of him and keep the relationship alive.

Simo and Lucky often mention the importance of the tour operators coming to Botswana, to see the country and what the ground operators can offer. This is also a way to ensure that they understand the product, and thereby complains can be avoided. During the interview, Amina mentions that such a trip would take place the following week, organized by her company. By this trip she hopes to gain relationships with at least some of the tour operators attending the BTO trade show the week after. Keitiretse says familiarization trips are usually organized by BTO, and then any ground operator can volunteer to host them. As mentioned, trade shows are another arena for interaction used by the majority of the respondents. One of the reason of
attending trade shows is to meet tour operators from abroad that they can cooperate with later on. Luck and Simo however feel that this is difficult to achieve (Lucky, Simo). The only one mentioning that she finds it a well working strategy is Amina, who attend at least eight shows a year, she is also the one stating that relationships with tour operators is her main reason for attending the shows. BTO usually organizes a stand in which every interested company can pitch in to be a part of (Keitiretse). Keitiretse says they help to make the ground operators visible in this way, but that they need to make appointments with tour operators themselves. Keiriretse also describe how they can promote ground operators through their website and through BTO offices abroad, but that they can’t favour any operator.

4.4 The content of the relationship
4.4.1 Actor bonds
“It is very important to actually meet, in order to get to know each other. Trade Shows are where you can meet tour operators and start building a relationship, then maybe after 2 years you have a bond.” (Tendai).

As seen by this quote, Tendai, stresses the importance of meeting the people working for the tour operators, in order to develop relationships. He says he often emails the tour operators even when there is no business, just to make sure they remember him. He mentions Facebook as a good way of keeping the social bonds alive. Simo is very clear about what comes first. It is the business that binds him and the tour operators together, not the personal contacts. Even though Simo is confident that friendship is not reason enough for a business relationship and that business always comes first, he finds it important to know the person behind the company. If one person at a tour operator quits, he would have to get to know the new person first, before trusting (Simo). He also explain that the importance of friendship and knowing the people can vary depending on the organisation he is dealing with.

“If it’s a small one, close bonds can develop. But it is the organisations who are having a business relationship, not the people. But when the owner is the whole organisation then the organisation can be seen as a friend” (Simo).

Mist chooses the word “business friends” to describe the relationships, later expanding it in a similar way to Simo. Amina says that she consider some of the tour operators as friends, but that the friendship is just a bonus. To meet on a social level is however something she finds important in order to get a relationship started. This socialization takes place in a business context, as she attend many trade shows as a way to meet tour operators. This is opposed to most of the other respondents, who only have the financial means to go to the trade show
Indaba in South Africa (Tendai, Simo, Lucky, Mist). They all mention attending Indaba as a way for them to develop business relations with tour operators, but Lucky and Mist explains difficulties in going from socializing at a trade show to developing real business relations.

4.4.3 Activity links
Mist says that the tour operator is the one doing the administrative work, while he is the one carrying out the practical part. Simo instead says that he is the one doing both the practical and administrative activities, and that the tour operators are only doing the payments. Further he states that in the relationship between him and a tour operator, he takes care of about 95% of the activities needed for the product. What is done by the tour operator is the marketing, but he does most of the rest. He also explains how the tour operator is the one setting and communicating the expectations in terms of standard, while his role is to fulfil these expectations on site.

The process of planning a tour involves making an itinerary, and to what extent the itinerary making is made by the ground operator, the tour operator or them jointly varies from the respondents, and also from what tour operator they are dealing with. For Mist, who has his main tour operator in South Africa, the itineraries are usually put together alone by the tour operator. He rarely suggests amendments, and the core role is instead to fulfil what is in the itinerary. Tendai instead explain itinerary making as a process made by both parts together.

“When putting together an itinerary no part is just accepting. Sometimes we propose and the tour operator adjust, sometimes it is the other way around” (Tendai)

Lucky mentions the importance in synchronizing what the ground operator know that the clients can experience (in terms of service, chances of seeing animals etc.), with what the tour operator markets and tells its clients. He says that a lack of this will cause problems later on. Simo states that more interaction of this kind is needed when the tour operators doesn’t know Botswana very well, so this information can be communicated. None of the respondents book long haul flights, but they take care of all the transport on site. Neither do any of them communicate with the clients before they come to Botswana. The tour operators are the ones giving them information about dietary requirements, quality expectations and alike, and then the ground operator make sure this is fulfilled on site (Tendai, Simo).

Payment is one of the activities most frequently mentioned. When and how payment is done, and who it is that decides when payment should be done varies, and for example Tendai, Simo and Mist are amongst those who mentioned difficulties connected to payments.
4.4.2. Resource ties

According to Lucky, the main resource that he has is his equipment. Without his vehicle, tents and guide licence he wouldn’t be able to do his operations. Without this, he also says, a tour operator cannot complete its tour, since they would not be allowed in to the park. What the tour operators have, that Lucky feel he needs, is access to clients as well as good marketing skills. Thereby, it is through that resource he feel that he can gain use of a relationship between the two. A little similar, Mist describes how the tour operators are the one giving access to clients, while he as a ground operator provide the manpower. Also Simo says that the tour operator’s main asset is that they have the skills to attract customers, since they are from the same country as their clients. As a ground operator, he claims to have better local and product knowledge. As an example he says that he has seen itineraries made by tour operators abroad and that they don’t make realistic ones because they are not familiar with the area. Instead, he know how far one can drive in a day and what areas are of interest. He says that sometimes a tour leader from the tour operator will accompany and do the guiding or translation, and sometimes he will do that alone.

4.5 Factors influencing and characterizing the relationship

Below a description of how the respondents perceive trust, adaptation and dependency characterize and influence a ground operator’s relationship with a tour operator. Their answers are first given as an interview in Table 3. The abbreviation GO here stands for ground operator.

Table 3: Properties of the relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>Adaptation</th>
<th>Dependency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tendai Chikangaidze</td>
<td>GO is the trusting ones</td>
<td>GO is the adapting one</td>
<td>Equal amount of dependence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amina Sebele</td>
<td>Equal amount of trust</td>
<td>Equal amount of adaptation</td>
<td>GO is the dependent one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simo Kabasiya</td>
<td>GO is the trusting ones</td>
<td>GO is the adapting one</td>
<td>Equal amount of dependence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucky Mokgowe</td>
<td>Equal amount of trust</td>
<td>GO is the adapting one</td>
<td>GO is the dependent one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mist Setaung</td>
<td>Equal amount of trust</td>
<td>GO is the adapting one</td>
<td>GO is the dependent one</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5.1 Trust

The concept of trust is mentioned on many occasion during each interview with the ground operators, both when discussing the notion intentionally as well as when discussing other concepts. For example Tendai says that it is a challenge to gain trust, Lucky that is a way to keep tour operators loyal and Simo that it is very critical when it comes to payment. Many of the ground operators (Tendai, Amina, Simo, Lucky) mention that trust is necessary for a good relationship to develop. Amina stresses its importance by saying that
“Without trust, there is no way they can give us the money” (Amina)

Tendai and Simo says that for a tour operator, trust is to know that they as ground operators will fulfil their promises. As an example Simo says that the tour operators need to be able to know quality won’t be sacrificed for quick profits or because a problem wasn’t solved. For a ground operator, Simo instead argues that trust is to know that the tour operator will be honest and fair with prices. He explains how tour operators will sometimes say that their clients are looking for budget options to get low prices, and then put high mark ups, which will give a high final price resulting in expectations of luxury. Also Lucky mentions that trust is about telling the truth, he as a ground operator needs to tell the real conditions of the roads and chances of seeing animals, and the tour operators shall not change this information to their guests to sell more.

Amina is very clear about that her company can easily trust the tour operators they are working with, and the other way around. Most of the other respondents (eg. Simo, Tendai) however explain difficulties in trusting as well as gaining trust.

“It is hard to build trust. /.../ Some African dealers are not serious, they rip of clients and that gives all of us a bad reputation”. (Tendai)

Tendai argues that the only way to rely on a tour operator is toough letting them prove that they are trustworthy by action. He says that trustworthy behaviour is what builds trust, and that no empty talk can achieve the same. For this reason, he is less trusting in the beginning of a relationship. To allow no surprises in behaviour, is a similar description, said Lucky. Lucky also emphasises of the need for good communication to build trust; the right information needs to be given. This is similar to Amina’s way of building trust: her company have policies and make sure they make things clear for both parts. This view is shared by Mist, who says that trust is found in the contracts they have. However he also finds trust in people who he’s been working with before, since “It takes a journey to build trust” (Mist). Simo argues that trust is found in the people working together. If the person at a tour operator quits, trust for the company need to be gained again through the new, replacing person.

The main benefit with trust, described by Simo and Lucky, is that it makes the relationships lasts longer. They describe that through trust they get to know each other, and therefore they will get less complaints, leading to more business. Mist mentions an acceptance for mistakes and a greater possibility to correct them when trust is present.
“When you trust each other, then when anything goes wrong you can easily sit down and discuss it to correct it easily”. (Mist)

Simo explains how trust becomes a way to tie the tour operators to oneself when many ground operators can offer the same products (Simo). Tendai mentions referentials as the main benefit with being trusted. When a tour operator trusts him, they are more willing to tell other people about him and it becomes a way of indirect marketing. Mist explains how he will be more flexible with someone he is trusting, for example when it comes to payment and negotiation of prices.

Examples of trust from both parts are mentioned; Tendai says that he needs to trust the tour operators since they are the ones in a higher position, while Simo says that it is more important for the tour operator to trust him since he is the one carrying out most of the operations and activities linked to it. Amina, Lucky and Mist combine the two by saying that trust is equally present and necessary for both parts.

4.5.2. Adaptation

All respondents are explaining how they tailor make tours. The destinations they tailor make tours to are however similar, and Lucky acknowledge that he sells the same products as his competitors. Mist and Simo acknowledge that they have standard tours, and that they resemble to the ones of their competitors. How their own tours differs from one another, they all explain, is shown in the price and the service. The clients of different tour operators have different budgets and requirements of standard and length of stay. When these expectations are communicated through the tour operators they, as the ground operators, put together a tour accordingly (Simo, Lucky, Mist). As an example, Tendai says that:

“If they want 5 star, we need to make sure the quality of everything is 5 star” (Tendai)

When putting together the itineraries for the tours for a tour operator, the process differs between the respondents. Tendai says that no part is just accepting when itinerary making is done, sometimes the tour operator is the one suggesting it and he will suggest how to amend it, and sometimes it is the other way around. On the contrary, Mist says that his company usually accept the itineraries the tour operator suggest. Both Tendai and Simo says that this process is easier when the tour operator knows Botswana, since they then know what they are looking for.

When it comes to payment, both Tendai, Simo and Mist explain how some tour operators pay before the trip and some after, and both says that getting paid afterwards is a risk they need to
take. They also agree that trust is needed for this, and that if it is the first time to work together, this trust is not existent and they therefore prefer to have the payment directly. Mist however says that he can influence when he gets the payment to some extent.

In general, the respondents find it hard to explain how they don’t do any adjustment, but later on in the discussion says that they are adjusting more than the tour operator is doing. Also, many adjustments were instead mentioned when discussing other concept, such as trust or culture. Simo says that adjusting your products and the way you work with a tour operator gives you greater flexibility as it allows him to work with tour operators looking for luxury and budget, and with small and big groups. In other words he says, it increases the sales. He mentions that BTO wanted to classified ground operators into different grades, like hotels, but that ground operators together opposed, as it would decrease their flexibility.

Mist mentions increased trust as a benefit of adjusting his products and behaviour. He says that by getting to know each other and thereby changing behaviour, trust will appear. He also mentions how he behaves differently with old and new tour operators. As an example, he says that he is more flexible when setting prices to old agent then to new ones. He more generally explain it by saying:

*You can’t behave the same way with an old tour operator and a new one. With a new one, the behaviour will be different. In the way that you can trust the old one, but you can’t trust the new one.*

(Mist)

So far, the focus has been on how the ground operators feel that they are adjusting to meet what the tour operators want. The reason is that all of the respondents except Amina said that they are the ones adjusting the most. As an example, Lucky says that they need to adjust the most because they are the ones looking for business. Similarly, Tendai gives that they are in a lower position as the main argument. Even though Amina says both parts are adjusting equally, she says that it is the tour operator that knows the clients, and she therefore needs to be flexible.

Lucky says that there are risks in saying yes too often, when being asked to change things according to what a tour operator wants. He mean that one needs to know how to say both yes and no in a professional way. Simo says that there is especially a risk when negotiating prices, because if the other tour operator finds out what prices you given everyone they might feel cheated on. Mist also says that if one is too flexible with the price in the beginning, they might just go through the same process with another operator next time, instead of staying loyal. To Mist, the risk becomes apparent when discussing payment. He explains how it can
be dangerous to be too persistent in asking them to pay before the trip, as they also have their
own principles. This might make them choose another ground operator to work with.

4.5.3 Dependency
Earlier on, it has been explained how the ground operators feel that the tour operators have
good access to the clients (Simo, Lucky, Mist), trust (Amina, Tendai) as well as a knowledge
about marketing (Simo). They also express that they as ground operators have the equipment
(Lucky, Mist) and the product knowledge (Amina, Lucky, Simo). When asked what it is that
makes them dependent on the tour operators, and the other way around, these factors are not
mentioned. Simo says that every ground operator can put together the same product, therefore
it is instead the personal bonds and the trust connected to them that makes them dependent.
Tendai’s answer is similar, and he says that to build trust and offer the best service is a way
for him to tie the tour operator to him. Mist explain it by saying

“*It is the trust again. The trust is a big word, there is a lot of things that comes from trust, and trust is
the umbrella.*“ (Mist)

The amount of tour operators they are having a business relationship with vary; Tendai has 3,
Amina around 20, Simo has 4 outside Africa and 5 in South Africa, Lucky has 3 within Africa
and Mist has one within Africa. Tendai explains how about 75% of his business comes from
these tour operators together, and for Mist the only tour operator he is dealing with him gives
him 30% of his business. Simo, on the other hand, receives 25% of his bookings through his 9
tour operators. When asked how affected they would be if one of the relationships ended the
answers vary. Simo says that there wouldn’t be a big loss, because the tour operators only
give around one trip a year, and he is therefore not so dependent on them. Also Tendai says
that it wouldn’t be too serious if one pulls out, and that he tries to avoid being dependent on
them. Lucky admit that it would give consequences even though he doesn’t get much business
from them, and argues that every client is still important. Also Mist acknowledge that it would
make an impact and he would therefore need to adjust to the new situation, but says he would
keep surviving. He however later mentions that a risk with being in a business relationship is
that you need to start over from scratch if one pulls out. Amina sees it as a big loss, saying
that:

“*The consequences of losing one would be very big, because as I said it is not an easy market to
penetrate. If you have a relation together with someone and work well together, then you need to hold
on tight to that one!*“ (Amina)

Tendai says that there are many ground operators that a tour operator can chose between when
selecting a partner. Similar voices are heard from Lucky and Simo, who says most of them
sells the same products, and they therefore need to focus on quality and trust to make the tour operators stay. Simo mentions the trade show Botswana Travel and Trade Exhibition (BTTE), where the tour operators were presented many options of similar ground operators to work with. Mist says he doubt it would be easy for a tour operator to start working with a new partner, by crediting trust.

“I doubt it would be easy, because the trust that we have now. We are flexible and they would not change because of convenience.” (Mist)

Amina, Lucky and Mist are the ground operators claiming that they are more dependent on the tour operators than the tour operators are depending on them. The main reasons is that the tour operators are the ones coming with the business. By being so dependent, Mists says that there is a risk to become too flexible. The only occasion that Simo can see a risk in dependency is when a tour operator will ask to have a ground operator on sole use. This, he says, will decrease the flexibility as be a risk as the agreement might not be renewed. Simo and Mist both discuss problems with pricing, saying that some operators will negotiate cheap prices, but instead of building up a relation, they will do the same to another ground operator the following year, or putting high mark ups when selling it to their clients.

Simo and Tendai say that both parts are equally dependent on each other. Simo explains that being dependent on each other means that you will be committed to continue this relationship, and a longer relationship will develop. Even though Mist says he is the most dependent part, he acknowledge they are still dependent on each other. He can also identify benefits with this dependency, the main one being trust. He says that the parts are so dependent on each other that they started trusting.

4.6 Culture in business relations

According to most of the respondents (Simo, Lucky, Mist) cultural differences does not influence their relationships with tour operators abroad, and they cannot come up with examples of when misunderstandings of each other’s culture have created problems or conflicts. Tendai and Amina mentions some differences and how they deal with them. Tendai says that the more one is in the industry, the more one will learn about the behaviour in different countries. During his time, he has for example learnt what tour operators in different countries request; British tour operators always have a lot of dietary requirements, while American ones never have it, Germans always wants to be at the airport two hours in advance etc. Another example mentioned by him is that Japanese agents don’t usually share their opinions, instead they just leave the relationship if they are not happy. To avoid problems
caused by culture Tendai stresses on the importance of constantly learning from each other. He is always asking a lot of questions in order to cater accordingly. The Japanese tour operators are also mentioned by Amina, who is explaining them as extremely sensitive and reserved, while she describes the German ones as talkative and that they like to create social bonds. When she goes to a trade show she will therefore acknowledge these differences and modify her behaviour.

According to Amina, Japanese are very strict when it comes to time, while she express how there is no rush in Africa. As everything is relaxed in Africa, she says she needs to adapt to the Japanese when it comes to time. The difference in perception of time is also mentioned by Tendai, who says they need to make sure they are always on time, and sometimes the tour operators don’t trust that they can do that. When it comes to communication Tendai mentions that one needs to answer an email from a European agent straight away, but in Botswana it’s not needed. He will however still answer straight away, because they are the ones needing the business. Keitiretse mentions language barriers, by saying that tourists are not always comfortable in English, and that is where tour operators can be the bridging partner. Amina mention that Germans can be a bit reserved, and assume language barriers are to blame.

To conclude, Tendai says that the role of the tour operator is to be the middle part, bridging the culture of the ground operator and the culture of the tourists. The tour operator needs to be the one understanding both cultures, and tell its consumer what to expect. Simo stresses the importance of tour operators to visit Botswana so they can communicate what to expect to their consumers.

During all the interviews, as well as throughout the field visit, trust is an often mentioned word. Simo states that it is harder to build trust with tour operators abroad than with partners within Botswana, but that it is more needed. Simo has had problems with tour operators not paying him money after a trip on several occasions, and if the company would have been from Botswana they would have been easier to trace. As seen in the chapter of trust, the respondents have different views of what induces trust, ranging from fulfilling promises through proving it (Tendai), honesty (Simo, Lucky), that you know each other (Mist) and more. Simo, Lucky and Mist says it is the people who trust each other, whereas Amina says it is within the company.

Not all the respondents agree that culture influence their relationships with tour operators. From the perspective of BTO, Keitiretse says that culture is never a problem between ground
operators and tour operators, and that they always strike a good deal. When interviewing the ground operators in northern part, common thoughts are:

“Tourism companies speak the same language worldwide, the differences can only be seen at a consumer level” (Simo)

“We all speak the same language, the tourism language. Meaning we understand each other” (Mist)

Simo and Mist feel that there is a certain culture within the tourism industry, and that this culture is stronger than the national culture. Mist says what make them put their own culture aside is because they are all in the same boat and instead need to focus on the protocols. Further he says that once in the industry, one needs to adapt to that environment. Simo takes the matter outside the tourism industry and says that even business language is the same worldwide, and that the differences in how one works is only shows on a personal lever.
5. DISCUSSION

In the discussion, the empirical data is compared to the theoretical framework, in order to analyse them in relation to each other. First, the network of the ground operators is analysed, followed by a more in-depth discussion of their relationship to tour operators. The discussion follows the same outline as the previous chapters, not to confuse the reader.

5.1 Network analysis – with ground operators in the centre

No firms have everything they need within the company, for example when it comes to resources and customers. Therefore they all need to interact with other firms, creating the interdependency that constitutes (Ford and Håkansson, 2011). This is well shown in the empirical findings. The main asset of the ground operators are equipment, manpower, licenses (Lucky, Mist) and product knowledge (Amina, Lucky, Simo). When combining the views of all the respondents it shows they are affected by many other actors in their daily operations. As an example they are dependent on hotels to give tourists accommodation, airlines to transport the tourists to the destination, and the tour operators to bring them clients. As the hotels, airlines and tour operators are in turn depending on their payment and other resources, one can confirm that there is an interdependency between ground operators and many other actors. It is also possible to confirm Ford and Håkansson’s (2011) view that a business relationship can be with a supplier, customer, a partner and more.

Scott et al (2008) states that one can define one node’s position in the network, by identifying the relationships it is surrounded by and engaged in. According to Ford and Håkansson (2011) one needs to manage ones position in the network and one’s business relationships. They also state that a network can go beyond the borders of an industry. Both Lucky and Simo identify other ground operators as their most important relationships. Hotels are also mentioned as more important (Simo), as well as tour operators (Amina). Simo explains how he can start and influence them, while Lucky and Mist says it is difficult to start relationships with tour operators. Amina mentions how hospitals and banks are connected to her business, and Mist and Lucky mentions how they cannot work without filling stations. The government is mentioned as affecting them, but they can’t affect the government (Tendai, Amina).

The network of ground operators can thereby be seen as including both actors in and outside the tourism industry. One can also identify that they are having closer relationships with tourism firms, but for actors outside the industry the relationship is more described as a
dependency. It also shows how the network does not only consist of close business relationship, but also interdependencies described as only influencing them, rather than a relationship. Since the ground operators express possibilities as well as challenges in influencing business relationships with tour operators, I argue that this is one of the relationships that are important to learn how to manage.

According to Ford and Håkansson (2011), no business relationship is an island. Instead, they are all connected to each other, and what happens in one end of the network will affect others. Connected to this, he argues that one can’t assign firms into stable roles in the network, as they might vary depending on the situation. This theories can be confirmed by looking at the relationship between the relationship between ground operators and hotels. The hotels are acting as suppliers to the ground operators, but Simo, Lucky and Mists also get clients from the hotels. Here, the ground operators are assigned the role of both supplier and customer within the same relationship. Another example is when Amina mentions how a competitor might book one of their campsites, and their role can now been seen as a supplier rather than competitor.

Scott et al (2008) describes tourism as a very networked industry, one reason being that it is often built of small businesses far from their source markets, and how collaborative networks are common in tourism. This can be well compared to the relationships existing between the ground operators in the northern part of Botswana.

5.2 The relationship between ground operators and tour operators
Mutual interaction, where the parts are aiming for a long term commitment, as well as the fact that they can now produce something they couldn’t do alone, are mentioned as features of a relationship (Håkansson & Snehota, 1995). Simo and Amina, are the two who can define when they have a relationship with a tour operator; it starts right when a tour operator shows interest. The others find it hard to pinpoint, but several respondents (Tendai, Simo and Mist) says that relationships take time to build. The lack of answers can be seen as confirming the difficulty in grasping what a relationship is, described by Håkansson & Snehota, (1995). I also argue that the respondents focus on the transactions when looking at the relationship, rather than the features described by Håkansson and Snehota (1995). The possibility to produce something unique is for example not mentioned at all, and commitment is also absent as a requirement. The closest feature found is that of showing interest, mentioned by Amina and
Simo. That they mention that it is a long process however indicates that there is the long term aspect.

A firm can achieve more when in a relationship than on its own, because of the access to resources in the relationship (Håkansson & Snehota, 1995). Business relationship thus becomes an arena to solve problems of the firm, and thereby also the consumer (Ford & Håkansson, 2011). Benefits of business relationships mentioned by Ford and Håkansson (2011) are reduced administration costs, reduced operational costs and a way to reach new parts in the network. Simo, Lucky and Mist says that that tour operators have the capacity of reaching and attracting clients that they need, and give them a continuous flow of business. When comparing this to literature, one can see how the problem of attracting customers can be solved with the help of a tour operator and its resources. Through a business relationship, they can reach consumers they wouldn’t otherwise, which can be compared to the benefits of reaching new parts in the network, described above. Clear indications of reduced administration and operational costs cannot be identified from the empirical data. A core benefit mentioned by Tendai, Amina, Simo and Keitiretse is that consumers will more easily trust them when they come through a tour operator. Since trust has been described as a challenge to create (Tendai, Simo and Mist), one can see the relationship as an arena where the problem can be solved.

5.3 The content of the relationship
5.3.1 Actor bonds
Business relationships are said to have substance; meaning that the content of a relationship is a mixture of interaction between activity links, resource ties and activity links. Ford and Håkansson (2011) describe how relationships are made out of people, and when they interact, social bonds develop. Simo and Mist describe how their relationships with tour operators are based on business and not friendship, and Amina says friendship is just a bonus. Tendai and Simo however also stresses on the importance of meeting and getting to know each other. Trade shows are mentioned as an arena for this, as well as for initiating relationships (Tendai, Amina, Lucky). The empirical findings thereby show that actor bonds exists and are valued, but that it is not always of highest priority. Simo and Mist say that trust is found in the people, and not in the tour operators as organisations. Ford and Håkansson (2011), describe that the role of the social dimension is that people are the ones initiating the contacts in a relationship, and the ones creating trust (Ford & Håkansson, 2011). This can be confirmed from the
empirical findings, and their view of trust implies that there is a larger presence and importance of social bonds than they first acknowledge. Ford and Håkansson (2011) warns that too close social bonds might give subjective decisions. Because of the respondent’s view of friendship, no such risk is found.

5.3.2 Activity links
Ford and Håkansson (2011) describe that when the behaviour of the actors in a relationship is interacting and is coordinated, activity links are present. These links can be about design, technology, administration, logistics, marketing and more (Ford & Håkansson, 2011). The mentioned activities related to the relationship between ground operators and tour operators are itinerary making, payment, marketing, communication and execution of tours (Tendai, Amina, Simo, Lucky and Mist). As a result, both similarities and differences to those activities described by Ford and Håkansson (2011) can be seen. Within the relationship, marketing is done by the tour operator (Tendai, Simo, Lucky, Mist), and execution of tours by the ground operator (Simo and Mist). In these activities, no links are therefore to be found.

When a ground operator (e.g. Amina) describes the payment routines for tour operators she deals with they sometimes differ from one to another. Many emails are always sent before the itineraries and connected arrangement are complete (Simo). This indicates that payment and itinerary making are coordinated and adapted to suit that specific relationship, and activity links therefore exists. Lucky explains a difficulty in making sure that the tour operator gives their clients the right expectations of the tour when they market and sell it, since these are the expectations he needs to fulfil when executing the tour. Therefore a need for coordination of the giving and fulfilling of the expectations is identified, aiming at reducing the problem, through a stronger linked activity. This argument can also be anchored in Andersson et als’ (1994) view, who means that adapted activity links can increase efficiency.

Ford (2006) describes how it is important to choose which activities to link, and which not to link, within a business relationship. The decision is for example influenced by the needs of the consumer (Ford, 2006). For some ground operators, itinerary making is a process involving both them and the tour operators (Tendai, Amina and Simo). The reason for Simo to do it together, is that the tour operator has the knowledge about the clients and their preferences, while he has the knowledge about the destination. For Mist, it is an activity only done by the tour operator, since he is based in South Africa and therefore know the area. I can see that the activities are less linked in Mist’s case, and the reason can be interpreted as similar to the one
described by Ford (2006). As activity links will add substance to a relationship (Ford, 2006), I can however see a danger in not linking the activity.

5.3.3 Resource ties
Within a relationship, there is a more or less extensive exchange and sharing of resources. When these resources are difficult to substitute, for example because they are adapted for each other’s needs, resource ties exists (Ford, 2006). The main resources of the tour operators, which they need from the ground operator, are marketing skills and access to the market (Amina, Simo, Lucky). Their own resources, that the tour operators value, are the equipment (Lucky), manpower (Mist) and product knowledge (Amina, Simo, Lucky). This shows that resources are used and needed jointly by both parts to a high extent, and resource ties therefore exists. Without each other’s resources, they could not complete their operations. Ford (2006) states that these resources can be both of a physical and abstract character, and that knowledge is a resource that is often tied together between a supplier and a customer. This can be confirmed though the empirical findings. Lucky and Simo says that what differs one tour from another is the service quality the tour operator requests, and that serves as example of how resources are adapted to suite each specific relationship.

To conclude, both actor bonds, activity links and resource ties are identified when analysing the relationship between the ground operators and tour operators. As there are many firms with many relationships involved in this study, the substance might vary amongst them. I interpret the results as generally showing how the sharing of resources constitutes most of the substance of the relationship. The relationship also content a high degree of activity links, as they tailor make tours and have a lot of communication. Social bonds are described as less present, but at the same time described as useful when initiating relationships. Since trust is found to be important in the relationship, and trust is found in social bonds, they still play a crucial role in the relationships.

5.4 Factors characterizing and influencing the relationship
5.4.1 Trust
Ruy et al (2007) and Huemer (1998) states that trust influences and promotes long term business relationship. Castaldo et al (2010) calls it a precondition for the relationships to be successful, and also Crotts & Turner (1999) stresses the fundamental role trust plays. Trust is by Heumer (1998) said to promote commitment and cooperation. All the respondents mention trust many times throughout all interviews, and stresses its importance. Most respondents
(Tendai, Amina, Simo and Lycky) call trust a necessity, and Lucky says that the tour operators become loyal by trusting him. That the relationship lasts longer when trust is present is mentioned by Simo and Lucky. It is therefore possible to confirm the importance of trust in the development of long term business relationships between ground operators and tour operators. Commitment and cooperation are not mentioned by the respondents, instead indirect marketing, an acceptance for mistakes, increased flexibility and a possibility to tie the tour operator to oneself are mentioned. I can therefore see that the benefits of trust found in the data collection are more than the ones found in the literature discussed. All these benefits can however be seen as yet other reasons to confirm the importance of trust for successful business relations.

A discussion based on Castaldo et al’s (2010) work has been carried out about what trust really is. A willingness and confidence, as well as a subject in the form of a person or company, is necessary. So is the fact that the parts will act in a trustworthy way. Also the possibility to be able to predict the behaviour is present. Also, trust needs a context of uncertainty. Tendai argues that the only way to rely on a tour operator is through letting them prove that they are trustworthy, by action and not through what they say. Mist and Tendai says they find trust easier in the people he’s been working with before, since they know how they behave. Lucky mentions that trust is about telling the truth, and emphasises on the need for good communication. Tendai and Simo says that for a tour operator, trust is to know that they as ground operators will fulfil their promises. Amina and Mist says trust is found and built in their written policies and contracts. Many respondents (Tendai, Simo and Mist) mentions payment as a risk, where honesty and trust is greatly needed. When comparing the definition of trust with how the ground operators view trust one can see that every building pieces can be identified when compiling all answers, even though no respondent includes all pieces alone. This shows that trust is a broad concept, and a parallel can be made to Castaldo et al, who also needed to compile the definitions of many authors to reach an all-embracing definition.

One determinant of trust is the ability to predict future behaviour (Heumer, 1998). This can be done through repetitiveness, reliability and credibility. When looking at the empirical findings above, one can identify that all these three concepts are present, even though repetitiveness and credibility are dominant. Some critical voices to credibility are however found; as example by Tendai saying that one cannot simply believe that people will do as they say, it needs to be proven by actions. Reputation (Anderson & Kumar, 2006), social
similarity and identification (Huemer, 1998) are other reasons for trust that have been mentioned in literature. These are less present in the empirical findings. For example Lucky states that it is easier to trust a company abroad. Reputation is mentioned rather as a benefit of trust (Tendai). One can therefore draw the conclusion that Anderson & Kumar’s (2006) view of reputations as a less efficient way to assess trust way than for example repetitiveness is correct. Nerveless, I argue that it can still be used when repetitiveness cannot yet be shown. The difficulties in building trust are expressed by all respondents except Amina, and this is thereby identified as a core challenge in the relationship between ground operators and tour operators. How respondents stress the importance of trust, and the fact that many of them say that trust is equally important for both parties (Amina, Lucky and Mist), indicate that it is still a key characteristic of the relationship, and that much work needs to be done to manage it.

5.4.2 Adaptation
Mist, Simo and Lucky all say that they have standard tours, and that their tours resemble to each other’s tours. They say, differences are shown in the service and price, depending on the budget and requirement of the tour operator. When putting together the itineraries for these tours, some do more amendments than others. For all the ground operators, except Amina, payment routines differ depending on who they are dealing with. Brennan & Turnbull (n/a) says that indications of adaptation is when firms no longer sell standard products, at standard prices, using standard procedures. In this study, the products of the ground operators are found to be only partly adapted. The extent to which production and payment procedures are adapted varies, and mostly adaptations are shown in the prices. All the ground operators, except Amina, states that they are adapting more than the tour operators adapt. Mukherji and Francis (2008) acknowledge that supplier adaptation often is in focus, and that the supplier has the economic motives. These motives can be confirmed by the empirical findings, where Simo and Lucky gives being in a lower position and being the one needing the business as reason for being the most adapting part.

The respondents often found it hard to identify how they adjust their product, activities and personal behaviour. Many adjustments, such as price and personal behaviour, were instead mentioned when discussing other concept, such as trust or culture. This confirms Håkansson and Senotha’s (1995) statement that adaptations often are natural, unplanned and hard to point out.

Håkansson and Senotha (1995) points out problem-solving as the main reason for adaptation, and Power and Reagan (2007) similarly points out adaptations as a way to better meet the
needs of the consumers. A stronger relationship, and a barrier of entry for competitors, are other benefits with adaptations (Power & Reagan, 2007). For Simo, the core benefit of adjusting his behaviour and his products is greater flexibility, while for Mist the benefit it is that trust is developed through adaptation. Håkansson & Senotha (1995) and Power & Reagan’s (2007) arguments are therefore not immediately confirmed. However, one can see being flexible (e.g. to group size, quality requirements, destinations) as a way to better meet the needs of the consumers, and to solve problems, which in turn can confirm Power and Reagan’s (2007) and Håkansson and Senotha’s (1995) argument. Equally, trust can be seen as a way to strengthen the relationship, and the researcher’s arguments can therefore still be identified in the empirical findings. Ford (2006) describe how a risk in adaptations is that the adapting part becomes too dependent on the other part. Many of the respondent (Simo, Lucky and Mist) says there is a risk in being too flexible with payment requirements and when setting prices, as they might lose the tour operator is being too presisten. I interpret that as the risk they perceive when adapting can be compared to dependency, but even more to economic insecurity and a vulnerable power-position.

Brennan & Turnbull (n/a) carries out a discussion of how one can see adaptation in the perspective of an investment, a negotiation process, a political process, a socialization process or an evolutionary process. The earlier mentioned difficulties for the ground operators to pinpoint the adaptations made, indicates that the adaptations are often done without strategic awareness I therefore interpret it as parallels can be drawn to the evolutionary process. When it comes to adjusting prices and payment routines, the answers are however more similar to what Brennan & Turnbull (n/a) calls the negotiation process.

5.4.3 Dependency
Ford and Håkansson’s (2011) argument of how resource sharing is common in business relationships was discussed in the chapter of resource ties. The resources are often adapted to each other, which thereby creates a dependency (Ford and Håkansson, 2011). In the corresponding empirical chapter, marketing resources, product knowledge and equipment are among the mentioned resources that tie the parts together. Therefore, an existing resource dependency can be identified, similar to the resource ties. Simo and Mist however describes that it is rather the trust and the personal bonds that makes them dependent on each other, since they say that they all sell similar products and have similar equipment. Barnes et al (2005) says that an increase in trust can give an increase in dependency, and the theory can in this case be confirmed. In the analysing chapter of the content of a relationship, it is seen how
the ground operators and tour operators are linked together through activities. I therefore interpret that dependency is found in both the resources, actors and activities.

Francis and Mukherji (2008) state how dependency is the economic power one firm has over another. Hallén et al (1991) define a supplier’s dependence on a customer as supplier dependence, and vice-versa. Amina, Lucky and Mist mentions how the tour operator is the one with the clients, and the one paying. I compare this to the tour operator having the economic power. A supplier dependence is therefore visible. This also confirmed by fact that three of the ground operators (Amina, Lucky and Mist) feel they are the most dependent part in the relationship.

Hallén et al (1991) explains that both supplier dependence and buyer dependence exists, and describe many ways of determining this dependency. The number of tour operators each ground operator has relationships with varies from one (Mist) to 20 (Amina), and while Simo says each tour operator only book very little, Tendai says booking from tour operators account for 75% of the business. Two of the variables indicating high dependency, described by Francis and Mukherji (2008), are few alternative buyers, as well as much negative effects of losing one. It is however not easy to completely confirm the relevance of these variables. Two different cases will serve as examples. Amina is the one having relationships with the highest number of tour operators, she is expressing very negative effects of losing one of them and she is perceiving being in a dependent position. Simo is receiving little of his business from tour operators, don’t perceive much effects of losing one and says he is not more dependent of the tour operator, then the tour operator is on him. In these cases, the Francis and Mukherji’s (2008) first variable can be confirmed, while the second one cannot. Because of the respondents variation in answers it is however difficult to generally confirm or deny the theories, as well as claiming how dependent the ground operators are.

Variables determining customer dependence are the amount of a selected product a customer buys from one supplier and how complex the products are (Hallén et al, 1991). Since the empirical data only covers the ground operator, this is difficult to evaluate. However, it is never expressed that a tour operator works with several ground operators at the same time, which if true indicates high customer dependence. From observation, safari packages are complex products, including many parts. If analysing through Hallén et al’s (1991) theories, a customer dependence exists. This is opposing most of the respondent’s thoughts, as only Tendai and Simo express mutual dependence. Simo, Lucky, Mist acknowledge that they all sell similar products, and I therefore argue that by making their products more unique and
complex, they can enhance the customer dependence. As mentioned, Simo and Mist feel that it is the trust and the personal bonds that make it difficult for a tour operator to change partner. These are variables absent in theories of customer dependence, but I argue that they can still be of great use and importance.

Rogers (2005) introduces the word co-dependency, meaning that unequal relationship can only be beneficial in a short term. This can be compared to Tendai and Simos arguments that they and the tour operators are equally dependent on each other. Also, Simo mentions how being dependent on each other means that one will be committed to continue the relationship, and it will make it long lasting. This is also similar to Gummesson’s (2008), linkage between commitment and dependency.

Barnes et al (2005) describe how barging power and the will to adapt are among the things that can be affected when the dependency is not mutual, on the behalf of the weaker party. Simo and Mist both discuss problems with negotiating pricing. Also, by being dependent, Mists says that there is a risk to become too flexible. An example given is when accepting to receive payment after a trip. The risks and disadvantages found are similar to those described by Barnes et al (2005). There is however a difference in what ground operators perceiving themselves as highly dependent and those describing the risks with dependency.

5.5 Culture
Business customs are different around the globe, and are part of a country’s culture (Ghauri & Cateora, 2010). Moran et al (2011) warns of negative impacts on business relationships if attention is not paid to cultural differences. Amina describes how German tour operators are talkative, and Japanese reserved, and that she changes her behaviour accordingly. Apart from that, not many examples of cultural impacts or adaptations were expressed. Meetings, planning, the role of the boss, (Mole, 2005), communication, negotiation, gender and time (Ghauri & Cateora, 2010) are among the elements that might vary in different business cultures. In the empirical findings, time has however almost been the only element identified and discussed. That the other elements of culture are not existing can however not be denied, since it can also be cause to lack of empirical data and the difficulty in pinpointing culture. According to Moran et al (2011), the view of time is essential in business relations, and in Africa, time is said to be flexible. Tendai says time is more important abroad, and Amina says there is no rush in Africa. They both however say they adapt and make sure to be in time. Both of Moran et al’s (2011) statements can therefore be seen as relevant. One can also see
how Tendai and Amina have avoided the negative impacts of culture that Moran et al (2005) warns about.

Moran et al (2005) also mention how trust, confidence and getting to know each other as individuals is often needed for success in Africa. Throughout this study, quotes and empirical descriptions has shown that the respondents value trust a lot and that it is often connected to personal bonds. Although no generalisation can be done to all of Africa, the importance of trust, as well as the individual aspect of it, can be confirmed in this case.

Simo states that it is harder to build trust with tour operators abroad than with partners within Botswana. Because he’s been cheated a lot, and it is difficult to trace international cheaters, he finds trust to be of even greater importance in these relationships. His thoughts are well corresponding to Voldnes at al (2012), who states that trust is sometimes more important in cross-cultural relationships, because one belongs to different governmental systems, as well as that cultural differences might stand as a barrier to the partner’s ability to trust.

Pressey and Selassie’s (2002) brings up the growing number of studies acknowledging the limitations of cultural influence in international business relationships, and that belonging to a specific industry, with own customs might instead play a significant role. The lack of examples of cultural differences as well as Simo, Lucky, Mist’s view that cultural differences does not influence their relationships with tour operators abroad confirm that cultural differences have limited influence. Simo and Mist’s opinion that there is a certain culture within the tourism industry, stronger than the national culture is also confirming the argument. Another explanation can however also be found in Mole (2005) and Pressey and Selassie’s (2002) et al argument; that culture is invisible until meeting another one, and that its influence is difficult to pinpoint.
6. CONCLUSION

In this closing chapter, the answers to the two research questions are be presented. Through this, the purposes of the study is fulfilled. Further, this chapter also presents practical implications, which can be of use for managers as well as researchers. Proposals for further research topics are also given here.

6.1 Answer of the research questions and purpose of the study

The importance of tourism in Africa was well known before the initiation of this study, as was the growing numbers of studies focusing on business relationship management. Combining business relation management and tourism was inspiring the study. Local ground operators are essential components of the tourism industry, and their relationship to tour operators has been poorly researched through the theoretical framework of business relations. This has led to the wish to closer examine this relationship, and a wish to examine how these relationships can be described and what influences them. Because of the network context that is present in much business and tourism literature today, such a perspective was also desired to include. This resulted in three research question, with corresponding purposes. To improve the relationship at the destination, a third purpose dealing with practical implications was also added.

Research questions
- What role do the local ground operators play in the network of Botswana’s tourism industry?
- What is the nature of relationships between Botswana’s locally owned ground operators and foreign tour operators?

Purpose
1) To describe and analyse the local ground operator’s role in the network of the Botswana tourism industry.
2) To investigate what characterize their relationships with foreign tour operators, from the perspective of the ground operators.
3) To provide implications for improving these relationships.

6.1.1 What role do the locally owned ground operators play in the Botswana tourist industry network?

Through this study a clearer picture of how the local ground operators are playing an important role in the tourism industry network of Botswana has appeared. By bridging
different parts in the network together, they are holding an essential position. The strategic networking amongst ground operators is also descriptive of their situation.

The ground operators have both abstract and non-abstract resources (e.g. knowledge, manpower), which are sought after by other firms, such as tour operators. These resources are however not enough in order to operate a successful business. They for example need hotel rooms, petrol for the trips and clients, which they receive through interaction with other actors. The ground operators are thereby having the position of both consumer and supplier in the network, depending on what relationship one is looking at. It is also clear how an interdependency between the ground operators and various actors is highly present, which is what Ford and Håkansson (2011) argues make up the business network. As the clients arriving through the tour operator will also sleep on hotels that the ground operator has organized, the different relationships are affected by each other, with is also a feature of the network described by Ford and Håkansson (2011).

Ford and Håkansson’s (2011) view that a network has no centre has been described in this study. With this in mind, one cannot to argue that ground operators are the centre of the network. When defining the network as the tourism industry of Botswana, I however claim the ground operators to play a crucial role. This is mainly because of their many interdependencies with other organisations, resulting from the resources they have and that they need.

Because of the many interdependencies identified, I can see that the role of ground operators in the tourism industry in Botswana primary is to connect tourists, hotels, tour operators, community project and other industry players with each other. As several respondents describe interdependencies to non-industrial player, the ground operators’ role is also to link tourism with other part of the economy. Without the ground operators undertaking this activity of bridging demand with supply, into one organized single package, the destination would most likely be less attractive. Without their linking work, where they for example take tourists to hotels, many tourism firms at the destination would suffer as less clients would find them. The tour operators and direct consumers abroad would also suffer, since they would have to do more work in making practical arrangements, and trust several suppliers instead of only one. As seen, a tourism network in Botswana without ground operators would have severe consequences, as they are the ones holding the different pieces together, and this proves their essential role. For these reasons, Scott et als (2008) description of how networks
are important and characterizing for tourism can be seen, as well as Jensen’s (2009) argument of how ground operators are a core component of the tourism industry.

A point worth mentioning in the description of the different relationships the ground operators expressed to have, is the one amongst the ground operators in the northern part. I argue that how they value and use the relationships they have between each other to such a high extent, indicates that they see themselves in a network perspective, where all can benefit from efficiently linking each other’s resources. This networking is similar to Scott et al’s (2008) description of network as something planned, rather than Ford and Håkansson’s (2011).

6.1.2 What is the nature of relationships between Botswana’s locally owned ground operators and foreign tour operators?

As several ground operators have been interviewed, and they all have several different relationships, many aspects and opinions of the relationship have been identified. This has given a broad picture of it, but sometimes also led to a difficulty in defining a common pattern of opinions. Ford and Håkansson’s (2011) descriptions of how firms need resources outside their firm to solve their problems, and the thereby existing interdependency has been identified. The main purpose and value of the relationship is found in how the ground operators contribute with local knowledge, equipment and manpower, while in turn they receive a source of clients from the tour operators. They are therefore solving each other’s problems, so they both can operate more successfully. All aspects of the relationship are however not perfect, and things can be improved.

The content of the relationship: Looking at Ford’s (2006) description of the content in a relationship, all parts are identified and the relationships can most often be described as high in substance. This is both in the form of both actor bonds, activity links and resource ties. Resource ties are found to constitute the biggest share of the content, of both abstract and non-abstract forms. Much linkage of activities is also identified, but because the actual product being sold and bought (a tour) is an activity in itself it is sometimes difficult to make a clear distinction between the activities of the tour and the activities in the relationship. Social bonds appears to represent the smallest share of the relationship content. Looking at how the respondents value trust and to meet in person, however indicates that the social bonds are stronger and more important to the respondents than they might realize themselves.

After analysing the content of the relationship I can see a linkage to the three factors described as influencing and characterizing a relationship. Social bonds can be further
analysed through trust, activity through adaptation and resources to dependency. All factors however relate and influence each other.

Trust: Castaldo et al (2010) and Crotts and Turner (1999) are only two of the many researchers stressing on the fundamental role trust plays in a business relationship, and it’s relevance in this relationship is confirmed in the empirical findings. It is over and over again described how much the respondents value trust, and how the relationship could never work without it. Trust is also the factor that is described as most mutual by the respondents. As a conclusion, trust is a highly influential factor, and it characterizes the relationship a lot. This is also shown in how trust is associated with positive words such as: loyalty, long lasting relationships, indirect marketing, acceptance for mistakes and flexibility. That the positive outcomes the benefits associated with it are more than those found in literature, by for example Huemer (1998) and Barnes et al (2005), is also worth attention. At the same time, the respondents describe trust as a challenge to create, and therefore improvement is needed.

Adaption: Almost all the ground operators strongly feel that they are the ones who are the adapting part in the relationship. Even though examples of adaptations were not easy to identify, it is still a present factor in the relationship between ground operators and tour operators. The factors is influencing the relationship in both positive and negative ways. The difficulty in identifying the adaptations, indicates that they are often made unintentionally, or at least not with a clear strategic purpose, which corresponds with Håkansson and Sneotha’s (1995) descriptions of adaptations. If the ground operators becomes more aware of the, by Powers & Reagan (2007) described benefits of adaptations, such as trust, long term relationships and barrier of entry for other companies, it may become more motivating to improve them. An increase in adaption can however lead to a dependent position, therefore caution needs to be taken. I argue that, if adaptations are done strategically, it can also be used to make the tour operator dependent on them, which Hallén et al (1991) name customer dependence. Another observation made is that while adaptation can lead to trust and dependency, the study also shows how a ground operator will adapt depending on the level of trust and dependence perceived, and the connection is therefore both-ways.

Dependency: Mindlin and Aldrich’s (1975) explains how a sharing of resources gives a dependency, and as of the content of the relationship in this study, a dependency exists. Three out of five ground operators feel that they are more dependent on the tour operators than the other way around. They all express a strong wish and need for these relationships to develop, since they need their resources in the form of clients. I argue dependency to be a much
characterising and influencing factor of the relationship between the ground operators and the tour operators, and the dependency is both desired and connected with risks. Mindlin and Aldrich’s (1975) define dependency as the economic power one firm has over another. Even though the access to clients and being in the position of a supplier are the main reasons for feeling dependent, the reasons of trust and social bonds are also mentioned, and these non-economic aspects are absent in literature. The variations in answers about dependency and about how they perceive the ending of a relationship, makes me argue that dependency is not something that can be easily measured and quantified in the way Mukherji and Francis (2008) and Hallén et al (1991) suggest. It is instead strongly influenced by one’s set of mind and a way of looking at relationships. For this reason, it is difficult to really answer how present dependency is in the relationship in general.

Culture: Ghauri and Cateora (2010) explains how business differ around the globe, and Voldnes et al (2012) warns about the risks in not understanding the partner’s culture. The most identified example is time, which Moles (2005) state is flexible in Africa, and confirmed by the respondents. A few respondents describe how they are influenced and adapt to cultural differences, which can confirm the theories. Pressey and Selassie (2002) however question the influence of culture. Due to the fact that several respondents claim cultural differences not to influence their relationships to tour operators, it can be argued that culture is not something that shape and characterize the business relationship to a high extent. On the other hand, two of the respondents come up with example of such influence, and in literature it is described how culture is hard to pinpoint. The conclusion can therefore also be made that cultural differences exist, more than realized. The existence of an industry culture is brought up both empirically and by Pressey and Selassie (2002), and I argue the tourism industry culture to be much influential in the relationship.

To summarize, the relationship between citizen-owned ground operators in Botswana and tour operators abroad is multifaceted. The relationship is high in content, with resources ties and activity links being dominant. When looking deeper into the relationship, focusing on what factors are influencing and characterising them, it becomes evident how both trust, adaptation and dependency are relevant. The factors are all connected with each other, but trust is identified characteristic perceived the most by the ground operator. The majority of ground operators perceive themselves as the most dependent and adapting part in the relationship. From these conclusions, some practical implications to the ground operators will be given in the following chapter.
6.2 Practical recommendations for the ground operators

Network perspective: Because of the benefits the interdependency in the network gives, it is advisable to see oneself in a network perspective and to work towards more and closer business relationships with every organisation having resources that can be of use. The position of the ground operator can be strengthen by better matching their resources with what other firms need, and by actively and strategically initiate business relationships with these firms, such as tour operators. Because of the empirical as well as theoretical discussion, I argue that the collaboration between small ground operators at a destination shall be encouraged and expanded.

Content of the relationship: To make the relationship stronger, and thereby harder for the parts to exit, I recommend an increase in both resource ties, activity links and social bonds. If a ground operator is proactive in sharing his local knowledge, by for example suggesting amendments in an itinerary proposed by a tour operator, both activity links and resource ties will be improved. An increase in social bonds, for example trough attendance on trade shown or familiarization trips, can contribute to stronger trust, which can keep the tour operators loyal. As the decision of what activities to link shall be based on the needs of both parts, I see a point in strengthen the activity of communicating the expectations of the relationship and the tours to each other, it is described as a source of problems at the moment.

Trust: Because of the high relevance and positive associations to trust, combined with the perceived challenge of building it, it shall always be in focus when working with tour operators. Policies, good communication, previous trustworthy behaviour, social bonds, reputation and referrals all have been mentioned as encompassing or indicating trust in the theoretical and empirical chapters. All these points can therefore be used to enhance trust in their relationships.

Adaptation: An increase in both product and process adaption is encouraged, as it can make a relationship more unique and strong. Examples of how a ground operator can achieve this is by offering activities that are not in the regular itinerary, engaging a local guide speaking the same language as the tour operators, better meet and communicate the expectations of the guests. An evaluation however always needs to be done to secure the adaptation is leading to a positive kind dependency for both parts, and not to a weak position.

Dependency: To make both parts dependent of each other, I believe adaption needs to be made, in order to create the product complexity that can bind the tour operator to them. As the
respondents mentions, trust and social bonds can also be used to increase the dependency. Since that dependency will be less based on economic reasons, it might feel like a more fair and equal kind of dependency and one that is hard to copy. Finally, in order not to become too dependent on a tour operator a solution is to develop many different relationships, and spreading the source of clients. To focus on non-economic reasons for dependence, such as trust, is also advisable.

*Culture:* As culture is difficult to point out, but can give severe consequences if misunderstood, I see it as a necessity not to neglect its presence and influence. To meet and develop social bonds, to make sure one is adapting to meet each other’s needs, to communicate all kinds of information and expectations and to adapt to the “tourism industry culture” can all be ways of reducing the risk of negative cultural influence.

**6.3 Further research**

The delimitations outlined in the introduction chapter reveals that there are other perspective from which the relationship between ground operators and tour operators can be seen, and that other relevant theories exists. Because of the important role of tourism in Africa, and the essential role the ground operators are holding in the tourism industry, an expansion of research about their relationship with tour operators is advised.

Firstly, as this study is based on the perspective of the ground operator, it could be of interest to make a comparative study of the same relationship, but from the view of the tour operator. Much research is done on the stages of a business relationship (see Ford & Håkansson, 2011, Ring & Van De Ven, 1994, for examples), and it would be of interest to see whether the nature of the relationship between ground operators and tour operators is different in different stages. The cooperation between small firms in tourism, in the form of strategic networks, has been widely discussed in literature, and briefly mentioned in this study. The ground operators in northern Botswana serves as a good empirical case, if further research on the topic is to be done.

**Methodological issues and constrains**

Since the respondent’s answers were aiming at give an insight in the situation of citizen-owned ground operators, rather than the situation of each and every single firm, it would have been interesting to let their views meet in reality, for example in the form of a focus group. The ground operator’s busy schedules, and that they were in two different town made it difficult to conduct focus groups. By interviewing them separately, the risk of them
influencing each other’s answers was however avoided, and a wider variety of answers were hopefully given.

Throughout the field trip, a flexible and adaptable attitude has been used. Problems however sometimes arose when making appointment for interviews, where appointments were often decided three times before they eventually took place. Sometimes the respondents didn’t have any relationships with tour operators abroad, even though this was opposite to what was expressed beforehand. The problems was avoided by having many alternative respondents to interview instead, and by spending much time at the destination. Larsson (2009) explains a risk in the respondents giving an idealizing picture of the situation, and this is something that occurred in the study as some respondent’s wished to make a good impression and sell their product. To avoid this to influence the study, the interview guide was sometimes followed more strictly, and what data to use was selected carefully. An example of such respondents was Keitiretse at BTO, and his views have therefore been a little less present in the study. Spending time at the destination and getting to know the respondents made them more eager to tell about both good and bad things. Because of geographical distance and time schedule, the first interviews were conducted early in the research process, before all theoretical data was complied. This led to a few theoretical arguments not being covered by all respondents. It, on the other hand, gave a good opportunity to identify relevant theories and improve the interview guide throughout the research process.

Since this is a qualitative case study, findings are not to be generalized too extensively. As the purpose state, the study aimed at describing the situation of local ground operators in Botswana, and a generalization for such companies can therefore easily be done. The importance of context in case studies however implies that the results can be used in similar settings, such as other developing countries where tourism is a dominant industry. As much of the literature is from broad studies or studies focusing on manufacturing firms, and then compared to tourism, some of the results might also be used for further research in business relationships in tourism. An assessment however needs to be done for each situation.
Sources of reference


Appendix 1 - Operationalization process
To get a general understanding of the respondents, and their work, questions 1a – c are asked.

Network analysis
The basis of network is said to be relationships, since no business is an island. The businesses are all connected to each other, and influence each other. In a network analysis, one can try to find patterns of relationships and position its actors.

This has lead to the questions 2a – d.

Business Relationships
It is difficult to determine when dealings between two parties becomes a relationship, but long term orientation and interdependency is said to be a preconditions. The benefits of business relations are many, such as more efficient problem solving and easier access other firms.

This has led to questions 3a-c.

Content of relationship
All business relationships are different. Some might have stronger social bonds, in others it is the shared use of resources that binds the parts together. Yet other relationships might be based on activity sharing. To analyse the content of a single relationship, these notions are often used.

This has led to the questions 4a- d.

Trust
Trust have much influence in the development of long term business relationships, since it enhance commitment and cooperation. It is complex to define trust and it has many building pieces, and it what it is that creates trust has been debated. This has led to question 5a- i.

Adaptation
Adaptation is necessary in a business relationship, since it is what makes it unique. The adaptations can be made by both parties and include both products and activities. Several reasons for adaptations exists, and one can see the adaptation process in several perspectives.

This has led to question 6a-f.

Dependency
The sharing of resources as well as the economic power one firm has over another can indicate dependency. A supplier can be dependent on a customer, as well as the other way around, and different variables can be used to determine the level of dependency. Both risks and benefits with dependency exists.

This has led to question 7a-f.
Culture

Business customs are different around the globe, and are part of a country’s culture. Way of communication, formalisation, the view of time and more is different in different cultures and affect the ways business is done. To what extent culture influences business relationships is debated.

This has led to question 8a-e.
Appendix 2 – Interview Guide

The respondents
1 a) What is your position in the company?
   b) What products do you offer?
   c) How many people are employed?

The tourism industry network in Botswana
2 a) Who is affecting your business, and who is affected by your business?
   b) What are your main business relationships?
   c) What can you as a company gain by taking part in all these relations?
   d) Can you influence how to use these relationships, and who to engage with?

The relationship between local ground operators and tour operators
3 a) When does a tour operators becomes considered as one that you are having a business relationship with?
   b) How do you benefit by engaging in business relationships with tour operators?
   c) Are there any disadvantages with engaging in business relations with TOs?

The content of the relationship
4a) What are your main assets that the tour operator needs, and what do they need from you?
   b) Which operations/activities do you do in cooperation with tour operators, and which do you do individually?
   c) What relation do you have to the persons working at the tour operators you are working with?
   d) What is it that binds you and the tour operator together?

Trust
5a) What does it mean to trust someone?
   b) What role does trust play in a business relationship?
   c) How present is trust in your relations with tour operators?
   d) What is it that makes you trust them?
   e) How can you make the tour operator have trust in you?
   f) What do you gain by trusting a tour operator?
   g) Are there any risks in trusting them?
   h) Is it the tour operators as a company or a person working there that you are trusting?
   i) Who is trusting who the most, between you and the tour operator?

Adaptation
6a) How are you and the tour operators adjusting your products and ways of working to each other?
   b) Are you working differently and create different product for different tour operators?
   c) What are the reasons/benefits for these adjustments?
   d) Who initiated these adjustments?
   e) Can you see any risk is adjusting your behaviour to suit the needs of a tour operator?
   f) Who is adjusting to who the most, between you and the tour operator?
Dependency

7a) How many tour operators are you co-operating with?
   b) How big would the consequences of losing one of them be?
   c) Would it be easy for the tour operators to cooperate with another ground operator instead?
   d) What is it that makes you dependent on each other?
   e) What are the risks and benefits of being dependent on each other?
   f) Who is depending the most on who, between you and the tour operator?

Culture

8a) Are there variations in how your company work and how tour operators abroad work?
(For example in the way time is seen, the way of communicating, informality)
   b) Do these differences influence how you are working together?
   c) Have these differences ever caused problems for you?
   d) What is important in your culture that foreign companies should know about?
   e) Do you find it easier to work with, and trust, companies that you work with in Botswana then abroad?
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