

Chapter 7

Promoting Tourism Destinations Through Storytelling

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ABSTRACT

Tourism destinations must be encouraged to tell their stories and share them with visitors. The objective of this study is to, firstly, increase the understanding of the role of storytelling in tourism destination promotion and, secondly, to ascertain the impact of storytelling on tourism destination promotion. In this chapter, tourism destinations are approached through the intriguing stories that are told about them. Stories have the potential to enhance and promote the qualities of a destination; hence, the chapter discusses the potential of storytelling as a strategic tool in “wrapping” or promoting destinations. It also provides the platform for discussion between various stakeholders at the destination in finding creative ways of promoting the destination. This chapter also discusses place storytelling and emphasises its relevance in promoting tourism destinations, and how stakeholders such as tour guides are employed as storytellers to promote key attributes of the destination.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism destinations compete to attract tourists to remain relevant and competitive (Mossberg et al., 2010). On the other hand, tourists that visit these destinations hope to have an unforgettable, unique, and superior experience which is largely viewed as very relevant to the strategic goal of tourism expansion and development, particularly concerning destination attractiveness and sustainability (Perovic et

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al., 2018). Generally, destinations are seen as “a well-defined geographical area, such as a country, an island or a town” (Hall, 2000; Davidson & Maitland, 1997). However, it is increasingly recognized that a destination can be considered a perceptual concept, interpreted subjectively by consumers, depending on their travel itinerary, cultural background, purpose of visit, educational level, past experience (Buhalis, 2000), and to a large extent the stories that are told about it.

Most destinations are characterized by iconic structures and buildings like the Elmina castle and Gamla Stan, natural attractions, such as the Ngorongoro Crater and Tsavo East National Park, and amusement parks, like Legoland and Gold Reef City, all serving as a tool in destination development and marketing (Mossberg et al., 2010). In the area of destination promotion, it appears that most places lack major attractions that can become a strong marketing tool for destination promotion; hence there is the need to identify new creative and innovative ways to market the attractiveness of the destination, and to that end the storytelling approach is here analysed.

Stories have become an integral part and a centrepiece in destination marketing and tourism business promotion (Moscardo, 2020). According to Ben Youssef et al. (2019), this is a result of the increased usage of new technologies leading to a situation where travellers’ decision is influenced by narratives and stories about the destination they seek to visit. Several studies have shown that whether a story about a destination is real or fictive, it elevates the uniqueness of the destination and gives tourists a more meaningful and exciting experience (Chronis, 2005; Mossberg, 2008). Destinations can therefore be recognized as *storyscapes*, i.e. “commercial environments where narratives are negotiated, shaped and transformed through the interaction of producers and consumers” (Chronis, 2005, p. 389).

Stories have been featured heavily in many different campaigns for tourism destinations. According to Moscardo (2020, p. 2), in 2016, “Abu Dhabi invited viewers to create their own story in the ‘Your Extraordinary Story’ campaign, in 2018 Booking.com told us ‘These are our stories. What will yours be? Book your next story’, the Korean Tourist Organization invites visitors to ‘Let your story begin’, and Airbnb encourages tourists to tell their stories using the hashtag #airbnb and then selects these guest stories to present in their own social media, adding to the stories from hosts in their website ‘Stories from the Airbnb Community’. Tourism Australia has storytelling as one of nine ‘philosophies’ in its 2019–2020 promotional campaign, which includes selling a book of stories from famous Australians. These examples are focused on stories as a promotional tool and generally include destination stories and sometimes tourist stories”.

According to Choi (2016, p. 1), storytelling is a “combined action of delivering a destination’s story by appealing to a vivid story persuasively through using senses such as vision, hearing, and smell”. Ho and Mi (2008) support the view that destination or place storytelling has a deeper meaning which is embedded not only in the verbal narrative category and folktales but also through nonverbal means as a form of communication which includes movies, dance, dramas relatable to the destination’s offerings. This becomes a significant symbol shared by tourists and locals in creating a unique and memorable tourism experience that can be shared by all. Stories can be employed as a promotional tool for tourism destinations; but in some cases, the co-production or creation process must be considered. The co-creation process is very relevant because the intention of most tourism practitioners is focused on ascertaining and telling stories to tourists rather than helping tourists to create their own stories (Moscardo, 2020).

Research has shown that storytelling is enhancing the value of destinations by stimulating tourism activities (Järv 2010; Akgün et al., 2015). It is not surprising that stories have been given special attention in tourism practice, particularly as a promotional tool for boosting destination image and tourists experience (Moscardo, 2018). The surprise, therefore, is that stories have only recently been examined

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