

The use of storytelling in tourism destination promotion: 5 successful examples around the world

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Abstract: This work focuses on storytelling as a destination marketing technique. Its purpose is to understand how storytelling can be used effectively in destination marketing to promote a destination and encourage travellers to visit it. Through documentary research, it was concluded that to succeed a storytelling action in the promotion of tourist destination, (03) essential keys must be integrated in the communication strategy of the company: 1/ Integrate strong emotions, 2/ Bet on the authenticity of the story told, 2/ Make the customer (the traveller) the hero of history.

Key Words: Tourist destination, Destination marketing, Promotion, Storytelling

JEL classification codes : Z30, Z33, Z31, M 37

ملخص: يركز هذا العمل على سرد القصص كأسلوب تسويق الوجهة. والغرض منه هو فهم كيف يمكن استخدام رواية القصص بشكل فعال في تسويق الوجهة للترويج لوجهة وتشجيع المسافرين على زيارتها. من خلال البحوث الوثائقية، تم التوصل إلى أن لنجاح عمل سرد القصص في الترويج للوجهة السياحية، يجب دمج 3 المفاتيح الأساسية في استراتيجية الاتصال للشركة: 1 / دمج المشاعر القوية ، 2 / الرهان على صحة القصة التي تروى ، 2 / جعل العميل (المسافر) بطل التاريخ.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الوجهة السياحية، تسويق الوجهة، الترويج، رواية القصص

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1. Introduction :

Storytelling is the art of ‘telling’ real or fictional stories.

Telling stories (Narration) is an ancient mode of communication that has always existed since language has existed.

There are no people without stories in the world. Stories, whether to entertain, educate or transmit social values, are omnipresent in social life and in all stages of human life.

Studies have shown that stories are a privileged mode of communication insofar as they make it possible to better capture attention, promote memorization and create meaning in individuals; The human being remembers information better when it is stated through a story because it touches him directly, not only intellectually but also emotionally and even spiritually (Djamchid, 2010, 9).

So, in marketing, storytelling is about using history to convince a target and change their behavior, rather than classically putting forward brand or product arguments. The technique is increasingly used by brands as a new opportunity to differentiate and enhance their products.

Tourism companies have also understood the importance of storytelling in promoting destinations and increasing the number of tourists.

Tourism consumption is a consumption in *which* emotion and experience play a key role in decision-making and the choice of a destination.

Applied to tourism, storytelling is a technique aimed at changing the behavior of potential visitors through the telling of stories with strong emotional content, in which the client can identify and immerse himself in the tourist experience before even going to the

destination, through the sharing of stories and experiences of other parties such as local inhabitants or former tourists.

The purpose of this work is to understand how storytelling can be used effectively in destination marketing to promote a destination and inspire travellers to discover everything it has to offer?

To answer this question, two other questions will be clarified:

- How important is storytelling as a destination marketing and tourism communication technique? in other words, why should it be at the heart of a destination marketing strategy?
- What could be the risks of using storytelling as a tourist destination promotion tool?

To answer the study questions the following hypotheses are developed:

- By putting the traveler at the heart of the story told and combining emotion and authenticity, the storytelling could have an effective influence on promoting a tourist destination;
- The use of storytelling as a tourism promotion technique could be counterproductive, leading in particular to a loss of credibility if the stories are considered too seductive or too realistic.

To answer the established questions, we have based our theoretical part on a set of documentary resources dealing with the use of storytelling in destination marketing.

Secondly, and given the nature of the research, we supported our theoretical part with examples illustrating the successful use of storytelling in the promotion of country tourism. The countries chosen are: United States, Scotland, Denmark, Peru and Canada.

2. Overview of definitions:

2.1. Destination Marketing:

Destination Marketing can be defined as “all the means of action used to influence consumer behaviour and make them choose a given destination” (BARRET, 2016). It can be a country, a city, or even

a resort or a specific attraction.

Destination marketing is not only used by tourism businesses but also by tourism offices in some countries or regions to attract more visitors to boost the local economy and establish itself as a holiday destination prized.

Destination marketing relies on a variety of tools:

- Media advertising;
- Relations and press trips;
- The salons;
- The webinars;
- Email marketing or newsletter;
- The storytelling;
- Use flagship events;
- Social media;
- The use of influencers;
- Etc.

2.2. The tourist destination:

A tourist destination is defined as a territory marketed which translates specific cultural and territorial directions. It can be analysed as a brand since it consists of a number of activities and processes involving consumers and producers (in Robinot, 2017, p. 144)

To differentiate itself from other competitive destinations, attract tourists and influence their decisions, a destination must assert its assets to ensure the best reach of its offer.

However, the prosperity of a tourist destination does not depend solely on its assets and the diversity of the products offered; attracting and retaining tourists also implies the implementation of effective marketing efforts and tools. Destinations should have “the ability to attract more visitors while providing satisfying memorable experiences, doing so in a cost-effective manner, while enhancing the well-being of the destination’s residents and preserving the natural environment,

destination capital for future generations” (RITCHIE & CROUCH, 2003, p. 2)

There are several marketing tools that help promote a destination and impact its tourist traffic.

3. The storytelling in tourism:

Storytelling – narrative communication – is a communication technique based on telling stories.

According to the Larousse dictionary definition (dictionary, s.d.), storytelling is a “Political, marketing or managerial communication technique that consists of promoting an idea, a product, a brand, etc., through the narrative that one makes of it, to arouse attention, seduce and convince by emotion more than by argumentation.

Storytelling is a communication technique of the oldest, it has always been used by civilizations to transmit knowledge, values, to entertain, educate and preserve cultures. Since language has existed, narration has contributed to the social bond between human beings.

In management, storytelling, as a tool for communication and team management, had a comeback in the 1990s with what Christian SALMON calls the “narrativist turn’ (BORDET-VOLAY, 2015, p.206). It is from this period that a narrative literature developed in the different fields of management (Djamchid, 2010, 10)

In marketing, storytelling is a brand content tool that tells stories, anecdotes, experiences...etc. in order to convey a message, influence the audience and change its behaviour or/and perception of a brand or product.

In the context of tourism and destination marketing, storytelling is about telling stories, especially in the form of experiences, in order to engage potential travellers and get them to choose a tourist destination.

Before presenting the contributions and positive effects of storytelling for the promotion of a tourist destination, we will first try to

show the reasons that make the strength of storytelling as a tool for tourism communication.

3.1. The reasons behind the strength of storytelling as a communication technique:

a. The story has a strong emotional content:

Telling a story about the destination, its hidden landscapes and beauties, its culture, its people not only entertain those who listen to it but also allows them *to play on their emotions: the story differs from the informative message by the emotional content it conveys*, and a successful storytelling manages to touch the heart by triggering the emotions desired by the brand.

b. The story is easier to remember:

Triggering strong emotions makes story more memorable, and that's one of the main features of storytelling.

By playing on the senses and emotions, a story is more easily retained than a simple transmission of information or a descriptive advertisement promoting the characteristics of a destination to make it attractive.

Indeed, in a context of over-information where persons are constantly solicited by an increasing number of messages that they find difficult to decode and remember, studies seem to show that narration, unlike descriptive information, figures and quantitative analysis, presents itself as a privileged mode for increasing attention, creating meaning and memorizing information.

c. The creativity of history:

The strength and success of a destination story is based on the creativity of those who create it: Storytelling is an excellent tool for promoting a tourist destination by using creativity to highlight the destination and making its most hidden elements visible through an inspiring narrative.

d. The storyteller of the story:

The strength of storytelling also lies in the way it is told by the narrator. As Julie JONES O'LEARY explains, the power of storytelling comes from the speaker's ability to tell the story. Researchers have found that it is in the interaction between the teller and the listener where the meaning of the story, the understanding, occurs "(in BORDET-VOLAY, 2015, p. 208)

Those called the great "narrators" are able to connect with their audience (or readers) and convey the message and values they wanted to convey, stirring images at home, sounds, smells and by giving birth or reviving strong emotions, through their stories or stories.

Thus, the way the story is told matters as much as its content itself.

3.2. Why should storytelling be central to destination marketing strategy?

Besides these elements that make the strength of storytelling as a communication tool, **why is it important to integrate it at the heart of a strategy to promote a tourist destination? What contribution does storytelling have to tourism?**

a. Attracting Travellers:

Beyond simply transmitting information or entertaining, the purpose of telling a story is to capture the reader's or listener's attention, to persuade him and arouse a desire for action.

According to Georges LEWI (2014), the purpose of storytelling is to defend a cause, to direct history towards a political, commercial, personal or other goal, in order to lead to membership. Its purpose is to change one's mind, to make one think, to change the attitude and the behaviour of the person to whom it is addressed» (in BÖRNER, 2016, p. 7).

In the same context, GERBER & al. (GERBER, 2013) consider that storytelling plays three functions called by the authors the "3Cs":

- Capture attention:

It is a matter of catching the audience with a beginning of history, an emotion, something unexpected in order to attract them to the world desired by the narrator;

- **Captivate:**

It is a matter of making the reader or the listener more and more attentive to the development of the story;

- **Convince:**

In the end it is a question of convincing the public by rational arguments and not by emotion.

Using storytelling in tourism is an original tool to capture the attention of potential visitors, it allows them to interact in an unusual way for the purpose of convince them to visit the destination.

Through captivating stories, travellers' experiences, anecdotes and portraits of inhabitants, the storytelling encourages the visitor to reflect on the destination, and through the emotions and sensations that it gives birth to, it aims to put the visitor in a situation and to imbue him with the atmosphere of the place before going there. The goal is to inspire him, seduce him, offer him a tourist experience that would make him want to visit the destination.

b. Reassure travellers of their choices:

Storytelling conveys information that allows reasoning about the choice of destination.

Tourism is a sector which cannot be tested beforehand, therefore, the testimonies of tourists who have already visited the destination, their experiences in the destination in question, as well as the view of the inhabitants, considered experts of the destination, are important to realize a choice.

Storytelling is an excellent tool to reassure travellers about their choice of destination and develop their commitment.

Through the stories of other customers, potential travellers have greater confidence in the information they have been able to gather

about the chosen destination.

a. Retain Visitors:

Past experience plays an important role in the tourist's decision-making as it could affect the destination image perceived by the potential tourist, which in turn would affect future choices and behaviour.

In this context, storytelling can be used during the stay to mark the memory of the visitors and promote the construction of pleasant and memorable memories that would push them to return.

For example, stories told by or about the locals; their products, activities, traditions, stories told by local expert guides and stories about the travelers themselves-They will also mark the visitor and help build a memorable travel experience and trigger positive emotions when sharing their experience and inspire them to return.

b. Create attachment to destination:

The storytelling aims to encourage the involvement of future visitors, to create lasting relationships of attachment with them.

The stories and anecdotes told by the inhabitants help create links between the future tourist and the inhabitant and increase their motivation to visit the destination.

Incorporating strong emotions into the story also helps building relationships between the client (future traveller) and the destination.

As we have seen, one of the main characteristics of the story (whether real or made up) is that it has a strong emotional content. The emotion created makes the information transmitted through the storytelling longer and easier to remember. "Indeed, when a person is exposed to a story, not only the parts of the brain related to language are activated but also other parts are stimulated as if they were experiencing the events of the story" (Kévers, 2018, p. 12).

The emotion triggered through the story makes so that the customer fully projects in it and lives the tourist experience well before

going to the destination. Later, he will unconsciously associate the emotion felt with the tourist destination in question.

The emotion thus creates attachment to the destination; each time the future visitor feels this emotion, he will think of the destination, and this will make him want to go there to live the experience told in the story.

4. The limits of using storytelling as a destination promotion tourism tool:

Despite its multiple advantages for the promotion of a tourist destination, storytelling presents, like all marketing tools, limits that, through inappropriate use, can lead to unfavourable situations for the brand.

For POTHAIN and TAPIRO, storytelling can lead to loss of credibility if it becomes too excessive, too “surreal”; this happens when some companies try to make the consumer dream too much (in our case the potential tourist), excessively embellishing the truth. (POTHAIN, 2011)

In the context of creating advertising videos (but this is also valid for creating storytelling videos), Adam LISAGOR (TrainingAid, 2022) gives the following advice "If you can allow the viewer to project him or herself into a mental state of experiencing the product and having a positive reaction, it can go a long way toward convincing them that they should take the next step toward having it. If you try to make the response to a product seem bigger or have a larger impact than people intuit what it would, it'll have an adverse effect on your brand. People don't like to be lied to".

People don't like to be lied to, so to be successful in storytelling, it's crucial to tell destination stories that allow the customer to mentally project himself into the travel experience and have a positive reaction, without trying to make him believe in a surreal

experience that does not correspond to reality. This will have a negative effect on the brand.

Sébastien DURAND also says that storytelling is effective as long as it is credible and as long as the audience to which it addresses is ready to give it that credibility.” (GERNET, 2014).

In the same context, writer and social scientist Christian SALMON, storytelling has become “a machine for making images and shaping minds”. The author explains how, in large companies, communication techniques have shifted, in about fifteen years, from product to logo, then from logos to «stories». “Brand history and narrative footage have now replaced brand image and advertising campaigns” (BORDEAU, 2008, p. 95)

According to the author, through storytelling, companies are not only trying to convince the consumer, but to make them identify with a character by immersing him in a story of which he could be the hero. Thus, people who are receptive to this kind of communication buy the stories and image that the Organization wants to give to its product rather than the product itself.

Storytelling thus plays on the emotions of consumers by leading them to be guided only by their emotions, and forgetting to remain attentive and vigilant to what sometimes seems to be surreal.

Storytelling has thus become for him a technique of deception, of manipulation «a formidable weapon of disinformation» “Stories have become so compelling that critics fear they will become a dangerous substitute for rational facts and arguments” (BORDEAU, 2008, p. 95).

5. The keys to a successful use of storytelling in tourism destination promotion.

Setting up a successful storytelling for the promotion of a tourist destination involves the following steps:

a. Know the hearing:

The first step in the use of storytelling in the promotion of a destination is to know the target in order to know what kind of story it will be sensitive to: average age of visitors, professional situation, reasons for stay, obstacles, modes of stay (family, couple, for the weekend, for the week...), channels and sources of information used....

The more one gets to know and understand its-potential- visitors and what interests them, the easier it will be to design and transmit a story that resonates with what they are looking for. Like any type of tool marketing, storytelling starts from a need and offers solutions to satisfy it while creating the desire to adopt them.

b. Identify differentiation points:

It is a matter of taking stock of what we want to highlight in order to generate emotion and attachment on the part of prospects vis-à-vis the tourist destination.

This is about identifying all the unique assets and aspects that differentiate the destination from other jurisdictions.

c. Building an imaginary:

Based on the points of differentiation, it is a question here of identifying which story to tell to highlight the strengths of the destination, make the potential traveller dream and trigger his imagination.

To make readers or listeners want to visit the destination, the story told can appeal to popular references: places, heroes and characters of novels, films, TV series, cultural or historical anecdotes... etc.

d. Creating emotions:

As we have seen, for a successful storytelling, the brand must focus on emotions. A story must bring out strong emotions for the listener or the reader. The goal is to get him to associate the desired emotion with the destination in question. To do this, it is important to use details related to the emotional sphere: words, actions, images,

sounds, smells... The more these details are calibrated, the more interactive and engaging the experience will be.

e. Make the customer (traveller) the hero of the story:

Sonia SIMONE explains it clearly "Some marketers like the idea that 'the brand is the hero.' In other words, the company is the star of the show. But you're almost always better off making your customer the hero of your story." (TrainingAid,2022), in storytelling (destination in our case), it is not a matter of a company talking about itself and how extraordinary the destination it promotes; a story that manages to have a positive impact on the potential visitor and change his behavior is a story in which he manages to see himself, to identify with his main character.

It is a story that helps the traveler to discover and live his own travel experience in the promoted destination.

For this, knowing your target is therefore essential in order to create story characters that resemble travellers and to which they manage to identify.

f. Build on the authenticity of the story:

To reach its target, it is important to include details that highlight the authenticity of the story to characterize the destination.

Increasingly, travellers are looking for authentic local experiences in the destinations and communities they visit; they are looking for a meeting with the locals, wanting to project themselves into the ambience of a destination and live the experience upstream.

For this, nothing better than local stories and experiences of travelers to overturn the hearts of readers or listeners.

Immersing yourself in local life allows you to build inspiring stories about travel experiences, transmitting values, and highlighting local experiences, initiatives, artisans, cultural or historical events, past and present traditions, important or mythical figures of the destination, hidden corners that only the inhabitants know... is the best way to

guarantee the authenticity of a story, earn the confidence of potential travellers and nourish their desire to travel.

g. Spread the story:

Finally, it is now a matter of choosing how to disseminate the story through the different communication channels (especially online): blog article, podcast, posts, series of images, stories or Reels on social networks that create more proximity with the customer, video report, interactive map that traces the places of history... at each medium its audience.

Multimedia storytelling incorporating visual elements such as photos and videos is an excellent tool for sharing stories that ignite the imagination of the potential traveller, inspiring them rather than informing them and giving them their own travel experience.

6. Successful examples from around the world:

The use of storytelling as a destination marketing technique is full of successful and inspiring examples.

In the framework of our work, we have chosen to illustrate with (05) examples of countries (or regions) that have used this technique to promote destinations.

The first illustrative example is the “Adirondack region” in New York State, where there is a clear understanding of the importance and impact of **sharing lived experiences in promoting the region**.

For this, ‘Visit Adirondacks’ has used storytelling to promote tourism in this region, through the broadcast of short videos, in the form of episodes, featuring visitors and residents who share their passions, experiences, with the goal of inspiring the potential visitors and creating an emotional connection between them and the territory.

On the YouTube channel (Visit Adirondacks) it says ***that it is the experiences in the region that make it so special and unique*** “What makes this region so special are the experiences people have here, whether visiting for a few days or living here full time.”

The video presented here is an example of episodes posted on the YouTube channel 'Visit Adirondacks': (Real Adirondack Stories: Farming in the Adirondacks, 2017)

The second illustrative example is that of Scotland.

Indeed, many destinations have understood the importance of storytelling to create an attachment to their destinations. They also understood the importance of **using lived experiences**; most travellers are motivated by experiences, so it makes sense to market a destination in this way.

Scotland is one country that has used storytelling to promote its tourism by calling on the locals as experts in their regions. Instead of focusing on the attractions in the destination, Instead, it has been promoted to show how people experience them by telling **authentic stories** that will imbue the potential traveller with an emotionally charged experience and give them meaningful moments before they even get there.

On their web site (Visitscotland) people have been invited to become ambassadors in Scotland through sharing their photos of the special places they have visited and telling their stories through videos, which we present below (02) examples shared on the YouTube channel:

- **(Sculpting the Kelpies: Andy's Story,2016)**

- **(Exploring the Scottish Canals : Tim's Story, 2016)**

The third example we present is that of the Faroe Islands in Denmark; A great example of destination storytelling that combines creativity, originality and **authenticity**.

Tired of not having Street View on Google Maps, the inhabitants of these islands have launched an operation called "**SheepView360**":

A collaboration between actress Durita Dahl Andreassen and the website "Visit Faroe Island" developed the SheepView360

operation, using a distinctive feature of this destination: its sheep (many sheep in the area).

Thanks to the sheep, the team photographed beautiful places on the Islands and also posted videos where it is possible to discover the Faroes in 360 degrees: (sheep view 360, 2017)

Thanks to the media success of the campaign, Google finally added the Faroe Islands to Google Maps.

Another example of successful storytelling, and a good example of **a traveller-centric storytelling**, is the campaign launched by Peru in 2012: (Marque Pérou : campagne de lancement international 2012)

Through a 03-minute video, the destination projects the traveller into the future, in 2032, then plunges him back into a 20-year-old Peru travel experience, the journey of a lifetime, the one that changed him when he was younger,

This video in which anyone caught up in the excitement of life and work could identify is a real invitation to live this unique journey in this country with infinite experiences; a country that the traveller will never forget. This is what the storytelling aims at: building a lasting and unique relationship with the target audience.

The last example is ‘YUKON’ (Canada), a beautiful example of storytelling used by destinations that have chosen to focus on **authenticity**.

The ‘Yukon Now’ campaign is a project that illustrates the contribution of local people to promote the destination. The campaign includes two initiatives: the first is a documentary showing different aspects of Yukon life: (**Episode 1: The secret life of a dog musher (Hors des sentiers battus), 2015**), and the second component of the ‘Yukon Now’ campaign includes a content creation project that invites visitors and Yukoners to share their favourite photos, videos and stories about the region.

7. Conclusion

The objective of this work was to understand how, in a destination marketing context, storytelling could be used effectively to promote a tourist destination.

Following a documentary review on the use of storytelling in destination marketing, we conclude that:

1. Storytelling is recognized today as an effective influence technique for promoting a tourist destination;
2. By putting the traveler at the heart of the story told and combining emotion and authenticity, the successful storytelling offers the destination an exciting opportunity to differentiate itself from other destinations.

Using storytelling to promote a destination is not about displaying the extraordinary characteristics of a destination. A story that convinces the potential visitor and changes their behaviour is a story in which they see themselves, identify themselves and help them feel the travel experience as if they had it in person,

The creation of emotion is a key factor in the success of storytelling; the story differs from the informational message by the emotional content it conveys and a successful storytelling manages to touch the heart by triggering the emotions desired by the brand.

By playing on emotions, a story is more easily retained than a descriptive information or advertisement promoting the characteristics and attractions of a destination.

Through **the emotions** and sensations, it creates, the storytelling succeeds in seducing the traveler by impregnating him in a significant tourist experience that would make him want to visit the destination and create attachment to the destination.

The other key to success is **the authenticity** of story and **shared experiences**: Increasingly, travellers are looking for authentic, real local experiences in the destinations they visit. For example, instead of focusing on attractions in the destination, the focus is on showing how

people experience them.

3. The use of storytelling as a tourism promotion technique could be counterproductive, leading in particular to a loss of credibility if the stories are considered too seductive or too realistic.

People don't like being lied to, and the consumer today is increasingly aware of brand practices. For example, in order to successfully promote your destination through storytelling, it is crucial to ensure that destination stories are told that allow the customer to mentally experience the travel experience and have a positive reaction, without trying to deceive him and make him believe in an experience that does not correspond to reality. It is true that storytelling is essentially based on the creation of strong emotions, but it is not about selling a tourist destination by manipulating the public and trying to make them believe in false stories and experiences.

A company that takes the risk of selling false realities would jeopardize its reputation and image. Of course, it is not always about telling real stories; storytelling can be based on fictional, invented stories, but in this case the public must be able to understand it quickly.

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