

The Role and Power of Tour Guides as Storytellers in Cultural Heritage Tourism

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Abstract

Storytelling began with the existence of humanity. Today, stories used in different fields play an important role in the formation of destination image, marketing and attractiveness in terms of tourism. In this context, tourist guides, one of the most prominent and key actors of the tourism industry, are the ones who build a bridge between destinations and guests and provide unforgettable tourism experiences to tourists through stories. It can be said that tourist guides use their storytelling role mostly in cultural heritage tours. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of the impact and importance of the storytelling role of tourist guides on destinations and tourists within the scope of cultural heritage tourism. In this direction, a comprehensive literature review and evaluation has been conducted. Finally, some suggestions are presented for both tourist guides and destination managers, tourism marketers and managers to maximize tourists' story experiences related to cultural heritage.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Tourism, Tourism Marketing, Storytelling, Tour Guides.

1. INTRODUCTION

Humans are the only known creatures capable of telling stories. Storytelling is perhaps the oldest form of verbal communication, and it has a significant impact on how people interact in society (McCabe & Foster, 2006). The history of storytelling is significantly older than what can and has been dated today. The Aurignacians are credited with creating the first known cultural art forms. Archaeological finds of ancient art in France's Ardèche area in 1994 were dated to 34 500 BC. The Chauvet-Pont d'Arc Cave (La caverne du Pont-d'Arc) is particularly notable for its over a thousand cave paintings of various animals and hand stencils. The residents' culture demonstrates that they hunted, made jewelry, musical instruments, figurines, and creative works. Musical instruments such as ivory flutes and bird bones indicate that they likely danced as well (Ferraro, 2016). From then until now, people all across the world utilize tale to teach moral imperatives, history, and events that must be passed down from generation to generation. Storytelling is a cultural feature shared by all peoples of the world. Anthropologists discovered that for ages, "stories have ensured the survival and passing down of knowledge and beliefs." (Gensler, 2020).

Academics, thinkers, and scientists believe that storytelling has a transforming impact on cognition, knowledge, culture, and behavior. Humans are natural storytellers (Gensler 2020). Throughout history, people have told each other stories about where they come from, where they live, and where they have traveled. A feeling of location is fundamental to human existence. People like telling and hearing stories. People who dwell in a particular location get extensive experience there and frequently build a strong attachment to it (Bassano, Barile, Piciocchi, Spohrer, Iandolo & Fisk, 2019). Stories are such an integral part of our lives that it is easy to ignore

their critical role in how we connect with one another, interpret and make sense of the world and its events, and preserve our memories (Moscardo, 2010).

Storytelling is a social and transdisciplinary phenomena that piques the attention of academics in anthropology, archaeology, folklore, linguistics, psychology, sociology, marketing, tourism, and behavioral science. The need for memorable tourism has increased in recent years as a result of shifting visitor preferences, the emergence of the experience economy, and technology advancements. As a result, there is a strong need for tales in tourism, particularly tour guiding (Bryon, 2012). Moreover, while tour guides have been for almost as long as there has been travel, their professional competences have gotten relatively little attention in the tourism literature, and there is a scarcity of theoretical literature in this area. It has been observed that the role of storytelling in tourist guiding and its impact on destinations, tourism industry and tourists has not been sufficiently examined and discussed (Lin, Lin & Chen, 2017; Kim, Song & Shim, 2020). Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of the impact of the storytelling role of tourist guides on destinations and tourists within the scope of cultural heritage tourism. In this direction, a comprehensive literature review and evaluation was conducted. In addition, some suggestions are presented for both tourist guides and destination managers, tourism marketers and managers to maximize tourists' story experiences related to cultural heritage.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Relationship between Culture, Heritage and Tourism

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines cultural legacy as characteristics of a group or civilization acquired from previous generations, preserved in the present, and conferred for the benefit of future generations (Santa & Tiatco, 2019). Cultural heritage includes tangible immovable (buildings and cultural landscapes), movable productions (artistic, ethnographic, scientific or technical, archaeological, archival, and bibliographical), intangible creations (oral expressions and traditions, cults, social practices, handicrafts), and natural resources (with specific physical, biological, and geological characteristics). All of these aspects help to shape the identity of a location, region, nation, or civilization (Roque, 2022). The rising desire for cultural experiences, as well as the use of cultural assets to attract visitors to diverse places, have elevated cultural resources to the status of a pillar of travel and tourism competitiveness (Dugulan, Balaure, Popescu, and Vegheş, 2010).

With the rapid rise in educational attainment among populations in both developed and developing countries, the development of tourism infrastructure prompted by the emergence and growth of mass tourism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and a sustained period of peace, cultural tourism has entered an era of unprecedented growth (Kumar, 2017). Cultural tourism is estimated to account for 40% of all European tourism, with 4 out of 10 tourists choosing their destination based on its cultural offerings. It is safe to assume that most tourist attractions and destinations in the world today are based on cultural heritage (Jelinčić, 2021). Today, with millions of people traveling internationally and domestically to experience either general or personal legacy, cultural heritage has become the essence of tourism in many sites across the world. Cultural heritage tourism is rapidly becoming a development tool, while the use of cultural resources greatly improves overall country competitiveness. The efficient marketing and usage of available cultural resources may greatly boost GDP and job creation in the tourist industry (Agisilaos, 2012).

2.2. Storytelling as a Tool in Tourism and Cultural Heritage Marketing

One of the most effective methods of marketing communication is the use of stories. According to marketing theories, consumers are able to comprehend the advantages of a brand through the use of anecdotes. Destination marketing has incorporated storytelling as a fundamental strategy. The situation in which traveller's decision-making is increasingly influenced by narratives and narration about tourism destinations has been exacerbated by the increased use of new information and communication technologies (ICT) (Youssef, Leicht & Marongiu, 2019). In recent years, a growing number of academics and researchers have acknowledged the critical role of storytelling in the marketing and branding of a destination, product, or service. When executed effectively, storytelling is a substantial element of contemporary marketing that can enhance the product or service. Conversely, the utilization of narratives in branding establishes a robust connection that can foster an enduring relationship between the brand and its customers. In other words, stories are a critical marketing tool that can captivate audiences and convey a message (Ferraro, 2016; Gamil, 2017). Storytelling has an impact on the spirits of consumers. The consumer experience economy is defined by the pursuit of distinctive consumption experiences and products or services that resonate with their emotions and aspirations. Such experiences are fostered by narratives about products or services. The reader is left with a sense of transformation as a result of the "narrative transportation" that stories employ (Youssef et. al., 2019). Therefore, the significance of storytelling as a branding concept has been increasingly recognized, as it plays a critical role in tourism marketing.

Storytelling serves two critical functions in the tourism industry. Initially, it can establish a distinctive competitive advantage for the destination. Secondly, it has the potential to provide the tourist with a valuable and memorable experience (Mossberg, 2008). Storytelling is employed to co-create visitor experiences at the intersection of the tourism system, where the tourist, provider, and community intersect (Campos, Guerreiro & Beevor, 2023). Consumer experiences have become more valuable than the content of a product, which is often taken for granted, as the service economy has evolved into an experience economy. The character of experiences is regarded as "the key to success of tourism development" (Bryon, 2012), as the experience is influenced by aspirations and emotion rather than products or services. Particularly in the tourism sector, there is an increasing demand for the creation of extraordinary experiences for consumers. A method for staging such experiences and achieving success is to connect the experiencescape to distinctive stories through storytelling (Mossberg, 2008).

Contemporary tourists are not only interested in purchasing the tourist product, but also in purchasing the stories that underlie it, as they are inclined to participate, learn, and experience (Korez-Vide, 2017). Emotional connections are established and enduring alliances are fostered by well-crafted narratives, which elicit a variety of emotions. Furthermore, storytelling enhances intellectual engagement by providing context and significance to historical events, thereby facilitating the retention of knowledge (Hannam & Ryan, 2019; Pallombini, 2017). Tourists depart from their homes, interact with individuals from their own or other cultures, and return with recollections of their travels (McCabe & Foster, 2006). Conventional data sources may not provide the same level of detail as travel narratives. Narratives have the potential to generate chatter and word-of-mouth regarding a travel experience, which can either attract or detract from the destination's appeal (Hsiao, Lu & Lan, 2013). In addition, it has the potential to generate authentic and memorable tourist experiences that focus on stimulating the visitor's senses, including sight, scent, hearing, and taste. Furthermore, it has the potential to establish a framework for collaboration among stakeholders in the destination (Gamil, 2017). Hence storytelling has the potential to substantially impact the tourist experience as an immersive communication medium. It transcends the mundane transmission of information by involving visitors on an emotional and

cognitive level, thereby elevating their levels of satisfaction and engagement (Leong, Yeh, Zhou, Hung & Huan, 2024). A story that establishes a personal connection with individuals increases their likelihood of recalling the event. Consequently, destination brand managers may employ positive narratives to encourage tourists to visit their destinations (Yavuz, Sümbül, Elpeze Ergeç & Derdiyok, 2016). In this regard, storytelling may provide tourism destinations with distinctive competitive advantages and a means of establishing narrative landscapes.

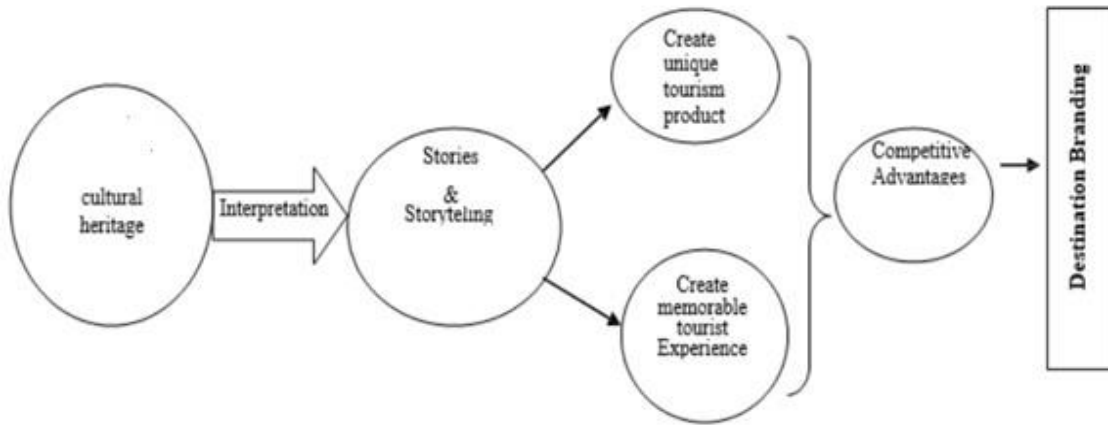


Figure 1. Storytelling as a tool for marketing cultural heritage (Gamil, 2017).

In order to maintain a competitive edge in the tourism market, destinations must exert significant effort to differentiate and personalize their products and services in comparison to their competitors (Mitsche, Vogt, Knox, Cooper, Lombardi & Ciaffi, 2013). In this context, storytelling is essential for promoting the potential of the destinations. Tourism is significantly influenced by the history of destinations (Moscardo & Pearce, 1986). Storytelling has become increasingly popular as a competitive destination branding strategy (Youssef et. al., 2019) and is a valuable approach to engaging with visitors and emphasizing the significance of authenticity (Frost, Frost, Strickland & Maguir, 2020). The storytelling and cultural heritage can be a significant asset to destinations, as they can contribute to the development of a sense of place and identity for both residents and tourists. Furthermore, storytelling has the potential to illuminate the latent and intangible meanings of attractions, thereby attracting new visitors, and to offer a variety of perspectives on the same attractions in various contexts. In this view, the effective interpretation of cultural heritage through narrative is crucial for the preservation and promotion of its value. It should involve stakeholders, local communities, travelers, and individuals who utilize the spaces (Figure 1).

2.3. Storyteller Role of Tourist Guides

Tourism is a multifaceted industry and requires the cooperation of various actors. In order to achieve a successful tourism performance in destinations, each actor needs to fulfill their roles and responsibilities in the best way possible. Tourist guides, as one of the most prominent and key actors in the tourism industry, are the bridge and intermediary between destinations and guests. In this respect, tourist guides have many roles to play in addition to their personal and professional competencies. One of these roles is storytelling.

Tourist guides are mentors and advocates for culture. The guide functions as a cultural mediator and interpreter through narration (Holloway, 1981; Cohen, 1985). Recent research has investigated the ways in which tourism attractions and destinations are utilizing storytelling to engage with visitors, emphasize authenticity, and create memorable experiences (Chronis, 2012; Çınar & Toksöz, 2020; Penrose, 2020; Beavor, 2021; Leong et. al., 2024). Storytelling serves as a distinctive destination selling proposition that unites tourism services and attractions and serves as a compass that guides development as it localizes tourism narratives (Doyle, 2018).

The demand for stories has grown significantly due to their capacity to engage individuals on an intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual level (Sole & Wilson, 2002). Guides are increasingly crucial in this process as mediators of meaning (Nilsson & Zillinger, 2020). The influence of storytelling is derived from the human evaluation of heroes, mythologies, and extraordinary phenomena, which can have a direct impact on an individual's emotions (Simmons, 2002). Similarly to a theatrical performance, each guide excursion is an exclusive performance that involves a distinct audience (Holloway, 1981). A compelling narrative is not merely recounted; it captivates the audience through immersion (Ferraro, 2016). During the experience of following, listeners continuously cover narrative gaps, re-contextualize the narrative events in terms of their own experiences, and actively employ their imaginations, which often involved co-creation between guides and tourists (Frost et. al., 2020). In this respect, Storytelling talents are an important component of a tour guide.

In order for the stories conveyed by tourist guides to be interesting, the body language and communication skills of the tourist guide and his/her command of the subject are important. The role of the guide is very important for a story to be told to influence the audience. Given that tourist guides will be addressing a large group of travelers on the majority of their excursions, it is essential that they possess strong public speaking and narration skills in order to influence the group's response to the information they are presented with. They should be able to communicate plainly, control their breathing, and speak calmly and carefully to ensure that everyone understands the message. Information is acquired by individuals through sensory, auditory, or visual processing. To ensure that travelers feel as though they are a part of the narrative, tourist guides should provide information that corresponds to all three categories of processing. It is important to remember that narration is not solely about discussing facts and dates; rather, it is about engaging the audience through narrative and adding captivating events to inspire an interest in learning (İrigüler & Güler, 2017). To achieve a tour experience that is meaningful, a tour guide should share captivating stories that inspire learning (Lim & Aylett, 2007). Moreover, the guide's storytelling and the theatrical elements of the narrative increase the interaction between the tour guide and tourists (Blyablina, 2015). Furthermore, the authenticity of a location is influenced by the interaction between tour guides and the narrative. This implies that a tour guide who is highly experienced can more effectively employ a narrative to create a sense of realism in a location (Leong et. al., 2024).

In addition to the tourist product, visitors are interested in the stories that surround it, as they are eager to learn and engage actively (Mosseberg, 2008). Storytelling has been acknowledged as a potent instrument for enhancing the appeal and intrigue of historical events. Storytelling fosters a sense of authenticity and attachment by sharing stories about the cultural significance and history of a location, thereby deepening the connection between people and the specific location (Doyle & Kelliher, 2023). Tourist guides are storytellers who act as a bridge connecting destinations and visitors. By skillfully narrating stories, tourist guides inform tourists about historical events and cultural heritage, can bring historical events to life, inspire and move them, and entertain them at the same time.

In essence, narratives are emotionally and symbolically potent. The objective of storytelling is not solely to communicate facts and information, but to enrich, enhance, and imbue facts with meanings to construct a narrative that revolves around a concept (Gabriel, 2000). Verbal and nonverbal communication are both components of a guide's storytelling performance (Bryon, 2012). A narrative is not a product; rather, it is an activity, a "craft" form of communication. According to Salazar, van den Branden, Bryon, and Steylaerts (2009), the most effective interpretative storytelling is persuasive because it is personal, pertinent, and meaningful to visitors, and it engages them both intellectually and emotionally. Tourist guides are responsible for enhancing the significance of information through creative interpretation, which involves the integration of amusement into reality, the telling of stories, and the use of wit (İrigüler & Güler, 2017).

2.4. Tourist Guide's Interpretation Skills and Storyteller Roles in Cultural Heritage Tours

Heritage attractions frequently have a distinctive narrative that can be transformed into captivating experiences that capture the imagination of visitors. The historical narrative of these locations frequently encapsulates the social and historic life of the local community, thereby eliciting a significant sense of place identity (Beavor, 2021). Storytelling has the capacity to generate unforgettable experiences that enhance the value of destinations. These narratives may be interpretive and pertain to the fundamental history of the location, as well as to folklore and mythology (Pereira, Silva & Seabra, 2020). The purpose of interpretation is to "increase people's awareness of the places they visit, to provide knowledge that enhances their comprehension, and to foster interest that results in increased enjoyment and potential responsibility" (Herbert, 1989).

Interpretation is a critical component of the experience of a place, as it integrates both tangible and intangible elements (Mitsche et al., 2013). To interpret a destination is to present it in a manner that is comprehensible and relatable to individuals from other cultures or regions of the globe. The practice of interpreting stories has the potential to be an effective instrument for the management and conservation of tourism destinations. Interpretation is significant in various cultural contexts. In this context, interpretation is essentially narrative, which captivates visitors by evoking the essence of a location and immerses them in the culture of the community, thereby encouraging them to acquire knowledge about the destination and its attractions (Cao, 2019). Guides offer tourists new worldviews not only through verbal and non-verbal communication, but also through performances, stories, interpretation and other forms of mediation. Storytelling is also considered as part of a tourist guide's interpretive skills (Weiler and Black, 2015).

The act of storytelling is an ancient practice that has been used to transmit knowledge and culture (Sole & Wilson, 2002) and maintain traditions and customs (Lugmayr, Sutinen, Suhonen, Hlavacs & Montero, 2017). Storytelling in the context of cultural heritage is defined as the "experience built around a continuous, coherent narrative that leverages the interpretation of the available cultural heritage artifacts to develop the essential elements of storytelling: setting, characters, plot, conflict, theme, and a satisfying narrative arc (e.g., setup, tension, climax, and resolution)." This experience is delivered at and meaningfully staged on a cultural heritage site and may or may not explicitly correspond with actual events (Vrettakis, Kourtis, Katifori, Karvounis, Lougiakis & Ioannidis, 2019). Heritage is the representation of history in the context of tourism. Heritage tourism endeavors to offer a realistic reconstruction of the past through interpretation, as history is a contemporary construction that conveys the actuality of the past rather than a direct representation. This interpretation encompasses the site's material and intangible culture (Doyle, 2018).

When the physical remnants of the past have been destroyed, the storyteller can assume a critical role. In this instance, the intangible narrative can only be experienced through the creative narrative of the narrator, who employs secondary elements (such as illustrations and stories) as mediators to provide visitors with a general understanding of the locations that are no longer in existence (Moreira, Costa & de Sousa, 2024). In heritage experiences, the tourist guide may engage in a variety of storytelling techniques, such as historical narratives, mythology, folklore, and legends, as well as dynamic discussions, themed activities, staged performances, re-enactments, visual and digital storytelling, and poetry (Beevor, 2021). A theatrical guided tour is distinguished from any other guided tour by the theater elements, including the guide's performance, anecdotes, interactions between the guide and travelers, and rapport between tour participants. According to Blyablina (2015), tourists experience a sense of belonging and become engaged in the theatrical performance, which enhances the overall experience. Culture, religion, history, fantasy, and sagas are subject to significant interest in the present day. Contemporary tourism and regional development are reliant on culture and cultural heritage (Mossberg, Therkelsen, Huijbens, Björk & Olsson, 2010). All religions and cultures are founded on potent narratives that elucidate their fundamental principles and essential components. A significant role in the preservation of culture is played by these narratives, which are also referred to as mythology and legends (Beevor, 2021). Tour guiding is considered to be of the utmost importance in the heritage experience, as it entails the execution of an educational activity that is intended to convey the value of heritage through the revelation of its significance, a process that is typically referred to as interpretation (Weng, Liang & Bao 2020).

Tour guides are frequently asked about the appropriate portrayal of a site, particularly when the interpretive topics pertain to historical events. Topics that are focused on historical events and heritage values frequently have a diverse impact on individuals. Tour operators may opt to concentrate on the specific historic event at a specific location and discuss fewer other events or locations. The fragmentation of narratives is detrimental to the interpretation of archaeological sites; it fails to align with the visitor's learning requirements or accurately represent the site's significance, as numerous archaeological sites are not entirely comprehensible through a mere tour (Ababneh, 2018). Conversely The efficacy of storytelling in tour guide interactions is further bolstered by the use of a variety of techniques to engage and captivate the audience. Tour operators create a more authentic and immersive experience by engaging in compelling narration that animates historical events and figures (Leong et. al., 2024). The impact of historical narrative can be substantially increased by incorporating elements of humor, entertainment, sarcasm, exaggeration, and other colorful delivery methods. Tour guides cultivate a more profound connection to the historical narrative and enhance their overall engagement by incorporating these captivating components, thereby generating an immersive and unforgettable experience for visitors (Dennis & Sampaio-Dias, 2021). The tourist must engage with the guide and participate in the performance in order to have a memorable experience. The experience is enhanced by the enjoyment and excitement of the tourists who are involved (Blyablina, 2015).

3. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

This study aims to contribute to the understanding of the impact and importance of the storytelling role of tourist guides in the context of destinations and cultural heritage tourism. "Storytelling" is not limited to the personal narratives of travelers about their experiences, as evidenced by the literature. It can serve as a significant strategic instrument in the marketing of consumption experiences, particularly tourism experiences. Travel guides, magazines, documentaries, informational labels, guided excursions, and internet sites are just a few examples of the many marketing communication media that can be used to tell stories and enhance the appeal of a destination. Museums, galleries, theme parks, heritage sites, historic areas,

battlefields, and archaeological sites are among the numerous tourism contexts in which "storytelling" can be particularly effective as a marketing instrument. Therefore, it is self-evident that the construction and dissemination of narratives should be a significant consideration in the field of travel and tourism marketing (Chronis, 2012). Storytelling is an important factor in the sustainable development of cultural heritage tourism and a tool for transmitting it to future generations.

It is possible to make a number of suggestions for maximizing tourists' story experiences of cultural heritage. First and foremost, local authorities should use storytelling more effectively for destination identity development, branding and marketing. In this context, in cooperation with travel agencies, hotels, restaurants, entertainment venues, etc., the use and/or staging of themes reflecting the stories of the destination verbally or visually in both venues and social media platforms should be encouraged. In addition, gamification applications with artificial intelligence and augmented reality technologies can be used in appropriate venues for tourists to learn the stories in a more entertaining way. Presenting information on tours through storytelling will make the narrative effective and entertaining. In this respect, travel agencies and tourist guides need to be aware of the power of storytelling, to include storytelling more effectively in tours, to involve tourists in the process and to make experiences memorable. In this direction, tourist guides should also be able to make animations to strengthen and color their narratives. Therefore, it can be suggested that tourist guides should receive creative drama training. In addition, in order to make the tour more fun, for tourists to connect with the stories and have unforgettable moments, tourist guides can also give them various roles, just like a theater director. On the other hand, tourist guide professional organizations can organize practical specialization trainings in different destinations to improve the storytelling of newcomers to tourist guiding. This way, young guides can be better equipped with the history, cultural heritage and stories of the destination. In these trainings, guides can also be taught engaging storytelling methods.

Finally, recommendations can be made for future research to contribute to the literature on storytelling in tourist guiding. First of all, it may be suggested to examine the storytelling role of tourist guides for different types of tourism other than cultural heritage tourism. In addition, researchers can adopt qualitative and/or quantitative methods to examine the effects of storytelling on tourist behavior in guided tours.

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