

# CONCEPTUALIZING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CONSUMER NARRATIVES FOR DESTINATION MARKETING



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I-CHRIE Annual Conference  
30 July – 2 August 2008  
Atlanta, Georgia USA

# R E S E A R C H   B A C K G R O U N D

Social Media – A surge of interest in the use of consumers' narratives for marketing purposes

Storytelling is one of the most powerful tools for presenting the truths of products, services, or brands

→ DMOs have started to use consumers' narratives for destination marketing

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# PENNSYLVANIA ROADTRIPPERS BLOG

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## Real People/Real Roadtrips

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

HISTORY & HERITAGE

NATURE & OUTDOORS

REGIONAL ROADTRIPS

BLOGGERS

PA PASSAGES



Try to keep up with our 6 roadtrippers as they travel across the state.

ROLLOVER THE ABOVE PHOTOS TO FIND OUT MORE

STORIES FROM THE ROAD →

### What a Long Strange Trip...

During the summer of 2005, lots of people got to know our PA Roadtrippers - their stories circulated far and wide, and their blogs became pretty darn famous! Maybe that's because their adventures were so compelling and (sometimes) downright odd. The first class of PA Roadtrippers were real



GET IN THE KNOW!

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# R E S E A R C H     Q U E S T I O N

How effective is marketing through stories?

→ This study assesses the effectiveness of consumers' stories for marketing tourism and hospitality products by analyzing the influence of **story comprehension** to **product evaluation** and, more importantly, **behavioral intention** of audiences

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# F O U N D A T I O N

Narratives as the most effective device to understand human experience

Narrative is a means to make sense of decision and action  
“Narratory principles” (Sarbin, 1986)

→ There is a potential to **persuade** people by telling a narrative that would encourage them to make desired choice

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# MARKETING THROUGH NARRATIVES



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# NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

“Narrative Connection” (Carroll, 2001): a networked notion of important features to make the narrative understandable

Narrative discourse: temporal ordering, causation, & plot (Carroll, 2001)

Relational organization & temporal dimension (Escalas, 2004a; 2004b)

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# NARRATIVE REASONING

People possess (use and can develop) narrative reasoning – narrative meaning construction

“**Mental simulation**” (Escalas, 2004a; 2004b): imitative mental representation of events

“**Consumption Visions**” (Phillips, Olson, & Baumgartner, 1995): self-constructed mental simulation of consumption

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# H Y P O T H E S E S 1 & 2

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**H1:** The ability to comprehend the narratives of tourists' stories will increase the overall knowledge about the destination.

**H2:** The increased knowledge of a destination will influence the intention to visit the destination.

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# SELF-NARRATIVE CONNECTION

Narrative = “instruction to imagine”

Consumption visions – self-enacting, detailed, product-related behavior

- It is important that audience can **relate to the narrative**:
- (1) they can relate the story to stories stored in their memories (story occurrences in the past)
  - (2) audiences see themselves as similar to the characters

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# H Y P O T H E S E S 3 & 4

**H3:** The increased knowledge of a destination will influence intention to visit the destination under condition of resemblance of the tourists' story with own past positive experiences.

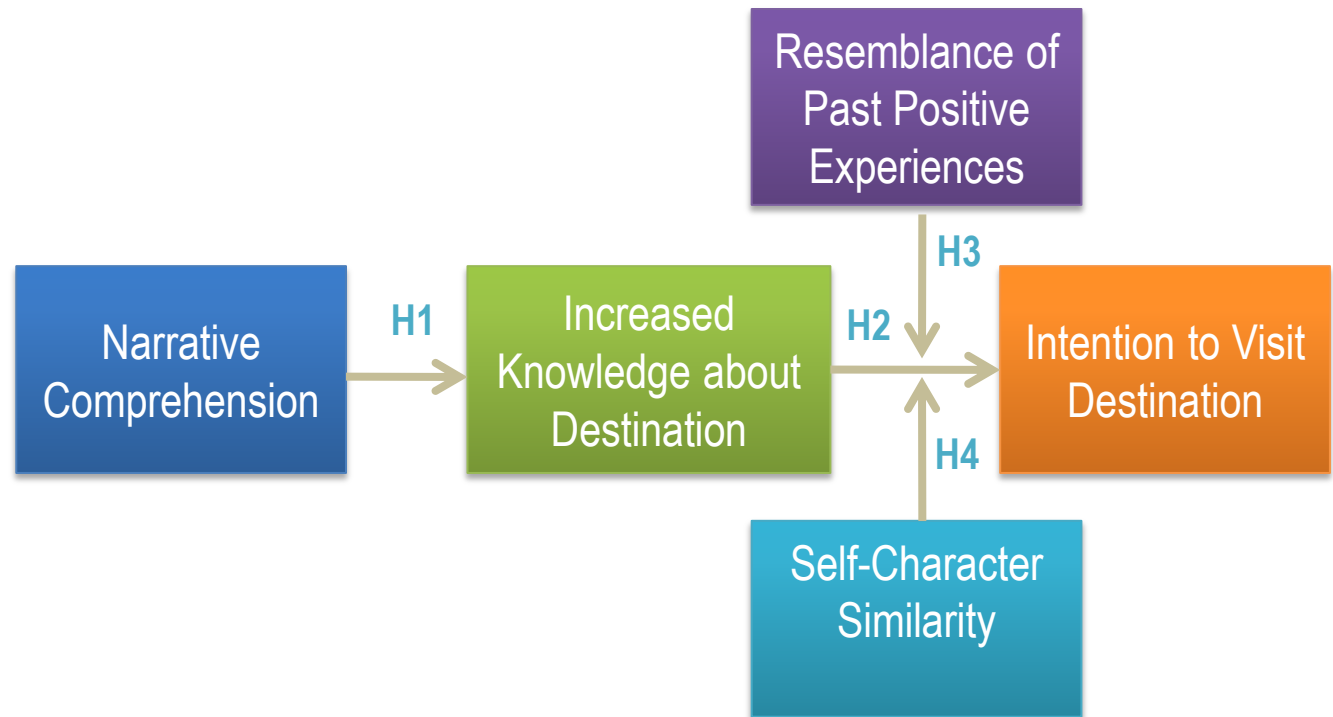
**H4:** The increased knowledge of a destination will influence intention to visit the destination under condition of similarity between the self and the character(s) in the story.

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# C O N C E P T U A L M O D E L



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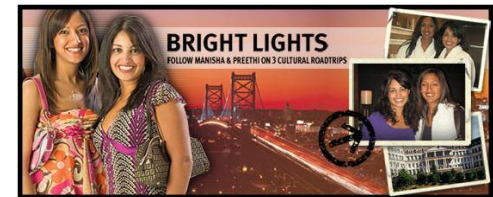
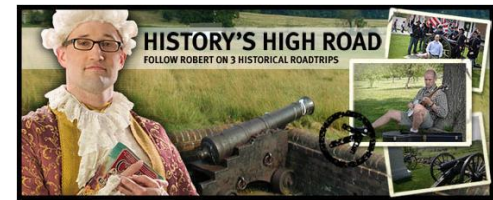
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# R E S E A R C H C O N T E X T

## Conditions:

- (1) written by actual tourists
- (2) portray tourism experiences
- (3) made available to audiences for marketing purposes

The blog section of *visitPA.com* entitled “**Roadtrippers**” and themed “Stories from the Road”



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# RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

## Questionnaire:

- (1) Story comprehension
- (2) Increased knowledge
- (3) Resemblance of past experience
- (4) Self-character similarity
- (5) Visit intention

1 - 5 Likert-type scale

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# DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

## Respondents:

126 Students enrolled in four introductory classes in tourism in Spring and Fall 2007

## Data Collection:

Take-home assignment - All students were required to read the whole series of stories thoroughly - 85 valid responses

## Analysis:

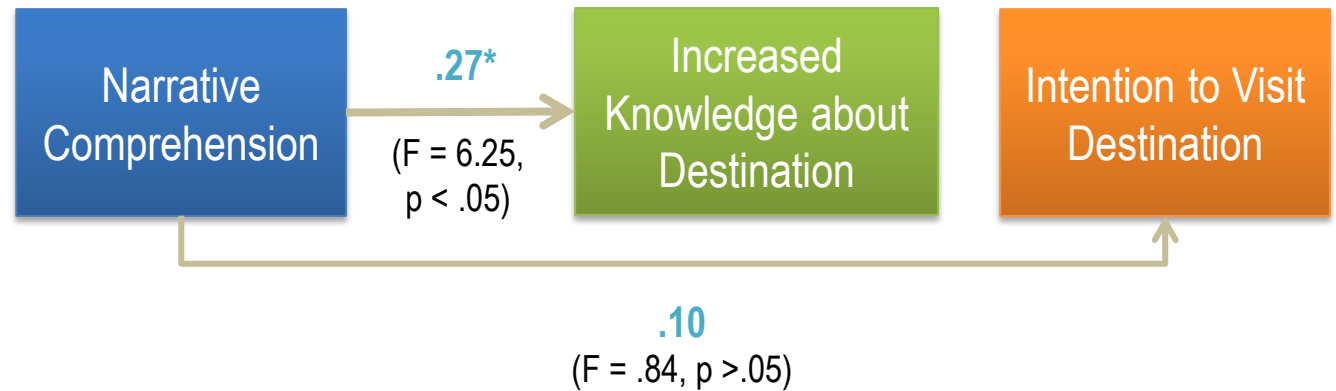
Linear & Multiple Regression Analysis

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# FINDINGS : HYPOTHESIS 1



→ The ability to understand the narrative of tourists experience is important to grasp the information and develop knowledge about the destination

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# FINDINGS: HYPOTHESES 2, 3, 4

	Model 1		Model2		Model3		Model4	
	Beta	P	Beta	P	Beta	P	Beta	P
Increased Knowledge about Destination (KD)	.22	.049	.17	.140	.12	.223	.43	.135
Resemblance of Past Experiences (RPE)			.22	.049	.021	.835	.27	.464
Self-Character Similarity (SCS)					.57	.000	.80	.034
Interactions								
KD x RPE							-.33	.497
KD x SCS							-.31	.537
	Model 1		Model2		Model3		Model4	
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	.05		.09		.37		.38	
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.04		.07		.34		.34	
<b>F</b>	3.99*		4.07*		15.09***		9.26***	
<b>Degree of Freedom</b>	1		2		3		5	

Note: \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\*p<.001

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# FINDINGS: HYPOTHESES 2, 3, 4

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## Model 2 and 3:

while the effect of resemblance of past experience is positive and significant, the impact of self-character similarity is much stronger

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# C O N C L U S I O N

For audiences to gain an understanding of the consumption settings through a story is by relating themselves to a story

The ability to relate to a story will be stronger when they can identify themselves as, or similar to, the story character(s)

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# L I M I T A T I O N   &   S U G G E S T I O N S

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The sample size may not be enough to generalize the results (more survey on-going)

Research instruments: some of the variables has only one question each

However, the results support the conceptual framework and research instruments – This research opens a pathway to similar theoretically grounded research investigating the innovative use of social media for marketing purposes in tourism and hospitality business.

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# THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

Support that the narrative structure is an important device to aid the narrative reasoning and narrative processing to gain knowledge about the characteristics of experiential products.

Suggest the vital importance of identification of self with the story characters to aid to story persuasion

Mental simulation and consumption visions can be formed when audiences experience the **present non-self-referencing narrative processing** that leads to **future self-referencing imagery**.

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# M A N A G E R I A L   I M P L I C A T I O N S

Tourists' stories as a form eWOM; useful for novice/inexperienced travelers to obtain information and to make decision

Give the positive notions of the different places at a destination and the sense of plausible itinerary

Start with choosing the right (story) character(s) that match the target market; Introduce different travel stories for different market segments

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**T h a n k      Y o u**



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