

MARKETING PLACES THROUGH FIRST-PERSON STORIES—AN ANALYSIS OF PENNSYLVANIA ROADTRIPPER BLOG

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ABSTRACT. Narrative as digital word-of-mouth has the potential to be an effective way to market tourist destinations. Using narrative structure analysis, this study identifies key marketing elements from tourists' blogs that include characterization, space categorization, and overall product and experience evaluation. The introduction of a blog writer as a personal character allows blog readers to access the picture of lived identities created through actions, attitudes, and values. Space categorization allows blog readers to have a cognitive construction of hypothetical travel scenarios including "rehearsals" of likely future travels. The results of this study demonstrate substantial potential for destination marketing organizations to facilitate and manage the interactive nature of storytelling as part of their marketing efforts.

KEYWORDS. Tourists' narratives, destination marketing, blog

McCabe & Foster (2006, p.194) argue that "storytelling has profound effects on the way in which people interact with others in the society." Much of the social information that people acquire in daily life is transmitted through narrative (Adaval & Wyer, 1998). People create stories to organize their experiences (Escalas, 2004a) and communicate those experiences to others. Additionally, people may use the self-constructed narratives stored in their memory as a basis for judgments of other people, objects, or events (Schank & Abelson, 1995). Thus, it seems that narratives enable people to interpret the world around

them in order to create meaning and to encourage imagination (Escalas, 2004b; Gretzel, 2006).

A tourist is believed to have a *narrativistic* attitude (McCabe & Foster, 2006). Tourists communicate their memories of visiting different places and meeting different people through stories as representations of their lived experiences. Indeed, Robinson (2004) states that writing about travel experience is as old as travel itself. In constructing a story, experiences are presented in thematically and temporally related sequences. Therefore, narrative structure provides a framework for causal inference about the meaning

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of tourist experiences (Escalas, 2004b). According to Graburn (1989), the tourism process begins in the “ordinary,” progresses into “heightened” moments, and returns to the ordinary. Since there is a gap between the tourist’s “actual, onsite, real-time” experience and its representation, the tourist moment is (re)presented, (re)produced, and (re)created through narrative in journal entries, postcards, photographs, and storytelling (Cary, 2004). Today, with the emergence of the Web 2.0 platform and consumer-generated media (CGM, i.e., online content created primarily by Internet users themselves), stories about tourism experiences can easily be found on discussion boards, blogs, social networking sites, customer review sites, and in photo galleries. The narratives typically use a combination of text, images, videos, and/or music to deliver to or share stories about tourism products and experiences with other Internet users through interactive technology applications.

The use of narratives to communicate travel experiences offers the potential for particularly “thick” experiential aspects of a trip (Gretzel, 2006). Lin and Huang (2006) further argue that online travel stories appeal to so many audiences, impress them, and even draw them to plan travel to the destination described within the stories. Hence, destination marketing organizations (DMOs) have started to incorporate the narrative and interactive nature of first-person stories as a feature on their web sites. The first-person stories or blogs act as a digital version of word-of-mouth communication. In the marketing literature, it is referred to as electronic word-of-mouth (*eWOM*). Although the stories are provided by travelers, the main goal of the blog feature on destination marketing websites is to engage potential travelers with a persuasive tale about the destination. Thus, a thorough analysis of tourists’ narratives posted on destination marketing websites will provide an in-depth understanding of the underlying message and persuasiveness of the stories.

The primary purpose of this exploratory article is to examine the structure of personal travel narratives (i.e., blogs) by deconstructing them into meaningful sequences. Based upon these findings, this study then assesses the merits of this approach to destination marketing by abstracting the key marketing elements from the stories. Specifically, it is posited that narrative analysis provides a powerful theoretical and methodological framework for assessing the spatiotemporal nature of narratives and therefore, a useful approach for developing more effective strategies for promoting destinations.

NARRATIVES OF LIVED EXPERIENCES

There is a common belief across different disciplines that human experience is a narrative phenomenon best understood through story. Craig (2007, p. 174) suggests that researchers in anthropology, literary theory, psychology, geography, organizational theory, and many other disciplines “have come to recognize narrative as the most likely medium to capture the contingencies of human experience as lived in context and over time.” One of the fundamental assumptions that underpins this research is the idea that human beings and stories are intertwined (Varaki, 2007). Sarbin (1986) proposes the term “narratory principle” whereby people think, feel, act, and make moral choices according to narrative structures. It is claimed that stories are the foundation of human identity (Holstein & Gubrium, 1999); human “selves” and, consequently, lives are “storied” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Eakin, 1999; Andrews, 2000). Therefore, as Connelly and Clandinin (p. 188) point out, “...narrative is the closest we can come to experience,” and recognition of narratives means recognition of the ways people experience the world.

Based on this assumption, it is argued that the process of narrating can be considered as the process of “meaning making” (Gabriel,

2000); people creates stories to make sense of their lives. In other words, narratives and the process of narrating act as a device for interpreting human experience. Drawing on her research in the context of services experience, Mattila (2000) argues that the facts of an experience are constituted by its sequence of events; the act of narrating involves interconnecting these facts into a pattern that is a structure representing the experience. Gabriel explored the mechanisms through which meaning is generated in narratives. The mechanisms represent either a way of making sense of specific parts of the narratives or a way of making connections between different parts. The mechanisms, referred to as “poetic tropes,” are central interpretive devices for storytellers. These poetic tropes include attribution of motive, attribution of causal connections, attribution of responsibility, attribution of unity, attribution of fixed qualities, attribution of emotion, attribution of agency, and attribution of providential significance.

Tourism experience can be considered a “fragment of the overall human experience” that involves sequences of events within space and time. To many people, the tourism experience profoundly shapes life-worlds and therefore telling stories about these experiences is a form of communicating self-identities. Indeed, McCabe and Foster (2006, p. 194) argued that: “[A]n account of tourist experience requires the development of a story, to define, describe and give reasons for touristic events. As such, stories are intrinsic to the development of touristic accounts...”

Further, as indicated by Polkinghorne (1997), Gabriel (2000), and Mattila (2000, 2002), stories are uniquely effective in representing and conveying lived experiences because they offer a logic for the narrators and audiences. Hence, positioning narratives in the viewpoint of tourism marketing, narrative appeals might be effective in communicating the value of tourism and hospitality as experiential products to audiences (Padgett & Allen, 1997; Mattila, 2000, 2002).

LINKING STORIES TO PLACES

Time is believed to be a narrative organizer of events and experiences (Hurwitz, 2002). However, events and experiences occur in particular locations and, thus, the spatial aspect of experiences is an important facet of narratives. A narrative approach has been utilized for research in the field of geography, particularly within the concepts of accessibility, mobility, interactions, and geographic changes (see Potteiger & Purinton, 1998; Dixon & Durrheim, 2004; Soliva, 2007). These studies have one aspect in common: they are based on a belief that narratives are rich in spatial characteristics. Thus, it is argued that stories are an important interpretive device to understand places based on human experiences within and *with* the places over time.

Importantly, tourism experiences constitute spatiotemporal mobility; that is, experiences take place within meaningful spatial and temporal contexts. Tourists derive enjoyment from movement across space and interactions with people and artifacts within the settings they encounter. Edensor (2001) argues that different tourist activities are carried out in particular places, including cities, heritage sites, beaches, or museums. These settings are distinguished, and often organized, by common-sense understandings of the types of activities that should take place in them. The storyline of tourists' narratives is then comparable to a drama interconnecting different performances (i.e., tourist activities) in different stages (i.e., tourist places). Hence, stories characterize places with the experiential values they can afford for tourists, including, but not limited to, the functional, the materialistic, and the aesthetic, sensual qualities of the places. Moreover, tourists' spatiotemporal movement potentially activates spatial networks, linking one place to another in the form of itineraries. Therefore, it is argued that tourists' narratives provide the information necessary to develop a meaningful framework upon which to distinguish places and

their network relationships into different products or brands.

MARKETING PLACES THROUGH STORIES

Extensive research indicates that the narrative power of a story has the ability to “manipulate” mass audiences (Boje, 1999) in that a story can act as a contributing value justification for human action (Cragan & Shields, 1998). Storytelling in marketing concerns the use of stories to communicate messages that reflect positively on a brand (Fog, Budts, & Yakaboylu, 2005). Previous research on eWOM as a marketing tool for consumer goods categorize narratives into product attribute and product benefit information (see Moore 1999; Park, Kim, & Han 2007). The latter category is more user-oriented and includes peripheral cues such as product popularity and trends. Escalas (2004b) notes that the meaning of a brand to a consumer is based on the narratives that she has constructed that incorporate the brand. She argues that the self-brand connection may be formed based on the perceived psychological benefits from the product. In this context, a consumer might link the brands in a narrative to the achievement of self-related goals. The connection is a result of a process of mapping the goal-action-outcome structure within the narrative with self-related stories in the memory. This mapping process can be achieved through the association of self with the narratives. Indeed, for marketing consumer products, Learned (2007) suggests that a rich narrative that gives context to daily life help brands to connect more empathically with the buying minds of customers. In the case of marketing tourism as an experiential product, it is of crucial importance that the consumers associate themselves with the stories and recognize the value of the experiences afforded by the tourist places.

Based on these considerations, key elements for destination marketing are

proposed as a theoretical foundation for this study. Specifically, the following three key elements from tourists’ stories provide a conceptual foundation for the strategic use of tourists’ narratives in destination marketing:

1. Narratives should associate consumers to a brand; tourists’ stories should indicate the meaningful spatial and temporal characteristics of a tourism experience.
2. Narratives must contain a positive evaluation of the brand (Fog, Budts, & Yakaboylu, 2005); tourists’ stories (or parts of the stories) should suggest the benefits and value of the tourism experiences.
3. Consumers should be able to map the benefits of the brand in the narratives to the achievement of self-related goals (Escalas, 2004b); audiences should be able to relate to the tourists’ stories.

METHODOLOGY

This study analyzes the narrative structure of first-person stories (blogs) posted on a DMO in order to provide key marketing elements that will be strategically beneficial for marketing a destination. Green & Brock (2000) suggest that stories persuade via *narrative transportation*, which constitutes immersion in the text. Hence, understanding the persuasive nature of a story can be accomplished by analyzing the textual corpus of narratives. Specifically, data were selected from stories about visits to Philadelphia from “visitPA Roadtripper,” a blog feature on the Pennsylvania Tourist Office website (*visitPA.com*). Three different travel genres were selected from six available Roadtripper stories of visits to Pennsylvania: History Buff (two stories), Culture Vultures (three stories), and Hipster Roadtrippers (three stories). The stories were compiled into single textual documents and were then analyzed qualitatively. The analysis includes story deconstruction (i.e., decomposing

narratives into unique quotations and episodes), coding (i.e., assigning particular themes to the quotations), and interpretation of code and quotation networks. This procedure was performed using ATLAS.ti software.

This study applies narrative analysis through the deconstruction and *emplotment* of stories (Boje, 2001) following the concept of narrative structure suggested by Escalas (2004a). Escalas (2004a, 2004b) suggests that the narrative structure of stories consists of two elements: chronology (temporal dimension) and causality (relational organization). The temporal dimension of a narrative process is based on the idea that events occur over time, which is configured as individual episodes and can be organized in terms of occurring during the beginning, middle, or end of the narrative. The relational organization of a narrative process is configured as episode schema. Schema, in turn, structures elements into an organized framework that establishes a relationship between the story's elements and allows for causal inference (i.e., goal-directed action-outcome sequences). The results of the narrative analysis are then organized in order to propose a set of marketing elements that can be used to effectively promote destinations.

THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF PENNSYLVANIA ROADTRIPPER BLOGS

The blog section of the Pennsylvania Tourist Office website (*visitPA.com*) entitled "Roadtrippers" and themed "Stories from the Road" was introduced during the summer of 2005. The agency offers the opportunity for travelers to Pennsylvania to share stories about their experiences within the state of Pennsylvania on the website. However, the feature is not an open platform; interested members of the public can submit their stories (i.e., a submission form is provided on the website), but the Pennsylvania Tourist Office selects which stories will be published and also moderates some of the stories. As a result, the blog

features selected writers and stories beneficial for the marketers and does not represent the openness nature of typical social media. Nevertheless, in explaining the storytellers feature on the blog, the website states that "...PA Roadtrippers were real people, not actors or advertising types, and they filed their dispatches faithfully so that their audience could experience the State of Independence through their eyes" (*visitpa.com/visitpalroadtrippers.pa*, 2007).

To date, the website features six different story genres; a story genre contains three to four trips to different parts of Pennsylvania and each trip contains several stories about daily tourism experiences (i.e., one blog entry represents one day of experience). Apart from text, the blog also features photographic images associated with the stories. On average, a blog entry features at least one image that is placed within the text. Due to the small number of the images available on the blog, this study focuses only on the narratives represented through text. The narrative structure analysis of the stories includes characterization, a temporal dimension, relational organization, and space categorization. An analysis on overall product evaluation was also conducted to identify the benefits communicated through the stories to the target market.

Characterization

One important determinant of the travel genres introduced on the Roadtripper Blogs is the characterization (i.e., the introduction of the "hero" and "heroine") within the stories. Characters are important in the process of understanding stories, as the effectiveness of a story relies on its ability to present structured characters' action sequences. Moreover, characters in a story are lived identities to which people can relate in real life. The Roadtripper Blogs introduce and label their stars with titles related to, and images corresponding to, the travel genres: History Buff, Culture Vultures, and Hipster Roadtrippers. Hence, the characterization is strongly associated with the product that they (the PA tourism office) are trying to sell

(i.e., different types of tourist attractions and trip itineraries). The identities of each character are presented both in the blogger's bio, which includes age, marital status, residence, and occupation; and within the stories themselves as self-generated keywords related to preferences, perspectives, tastes, and values. They are:

- **History Buff:** Robert (37), Married. *Keywords:* book, city living, history, tradition, kids, parents;
- **Culture Vultures:** Manisha (26) and Preethi (27), Singles. *Keywords:* second-year business students, top tier school, clueless about direction, bridal shower, dress, makeup;
- **Hipster Roadtrippers:** Mike (29) and Tamara (30), Married. *Keywords:* Mexican (food/spot), cool spot, drinks, music, game, history walk.

Several differences can be identified from the stories in terms of character representation and structure. The History Buff represents one leading "actor," with his family members acting in supporting roles, while both the Culture Vultures and Hipster Roadtrippers feature multiple leading actors. All stories have a single narrator; one (representative) leading actor describes the whole experience throughout the trips. However, the self-generated keywords identified within the stories reflect the role of each narrator within his or her groups. Robert (History Buff) writes more about his own perspectives and feelings, supported by the drama he has with the other members of his group. Preethi (Culture Vultures) and Mike (Hipster Roadtrippers) tend to describe their shared perspectives, goals, and tastes (i.e., using the term "we") with the other leading actors in their groups. The introduction of multiple characters in a story, whether composed of one leading character with supporting actors or multiple characters, is important for audiences' sense-making process, since they are able to understand the narrative plots by connecting the narrative parts from the characters' interactions with each other.

Temporal Dimensions: Identifying Episodes of the Visitor Experience

The narrative structure of the Roadtripper blogs can be deconstructed based on the chronology or temporal dimension of events. Since all narratives represent tourist experiences, the stories can be interpreted chronologically from the tourists' movement through space and time, whereby the characters move from one place to another during a certain time interval (Xia, Ciesielski, & Arrowsmith, 2005). Tourists' movements can be seen as a dynamic process that is characterized by spatial and temporal references and attributable components (i.e., the nature of the place visited). Since a story represents experiences within a day, the temporal sequences of the characters' movements were identified based on three time intervals: morning, afternoon, and evening. Time references in journal entries were identified by finding exact matching words (e.g., "in the morning," "in the afternoon"), words designating a point in time (e.g., "at 9:00 a.m."), and words with reference to other activities or situations (e.g., "after lunch," "right when the store opened"). However, the time intervals do not reflect episodes; the stories may have more than one episode within one time interval and one episode may last for more than one time interval. The sample of the story chronology deconstruction is illustrated in Figure 1.

In this study, the History Buff-based stories contained five episodes on the first day: (a) strolling along the mall between Independence Hall and the National Constitution Center (afternoon), (b) walking over to Arch Street and visiting Ben Franklin's cemetery (afternoon), (c) going back to the hotel and swimming (evening), (d) having dinner at the hotel room (evening), and (e) watching fireworks over Phillies' Stadium from the hotel window (evening). Six episodes were recorded on the second day: (a) the National Constitution Center tour (morning), (b) the Betsy Ross House tour (morning), (c) lunch at City Tavern (afternoon), (d) strolling around

Whalebone Alley (afternoon), (e) the Mummers Museum tour (afternoon), and (f) visiting the Eastern State Penitentiary.

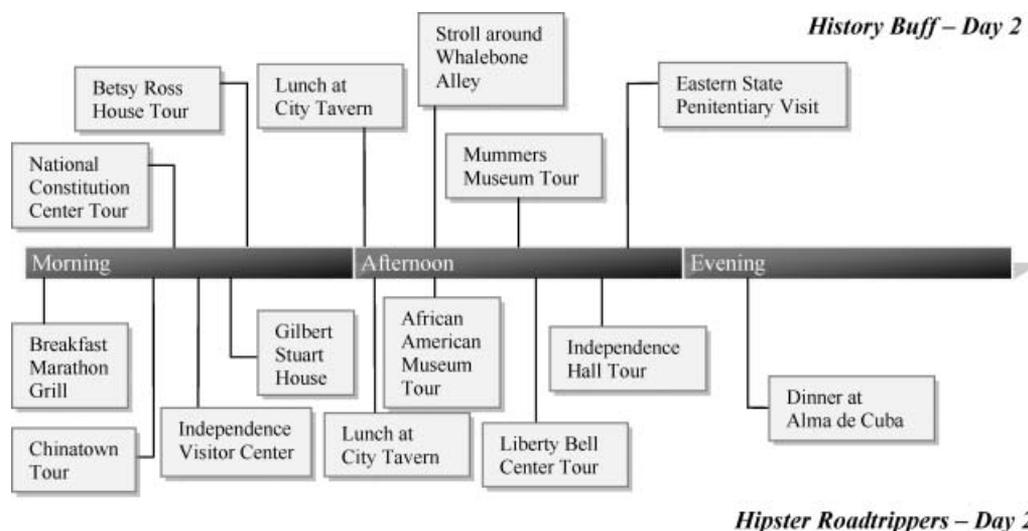
The stories produced by the Hipster Roadtrippers contained six episodes on the first day: (a) a stop at New Hope (afternoon), (b) walking around and shopping in Rittenhouse Square (evening), (c) dinner at El Vez (evening), (d) walking around the Old City (evening), (e) drinking at Tangerine (evening), and (f) listening to hip-hop music at Mint (evening). The second day contained nine episodes: (a) breakfast at Marathon Grill (morning), (b) the Chinatown tour (morning), (c) a visit to the Independence Visitor Center (morning), (d) the Gilbert Stuart House tour (morning), (e) lunch at City Tavern (afternoon), (f) the African American Museum tour (afternoon), (g) the Liberty Bell Center tour (afternoon), (h) the Independence Hall tour (afternoon), and (i) dinner at Alma de Cuba (evening). Five episodes took place on the third day: (a) breakfast at Little Pete’s (morning), (b) a history walk to the Irish Memorial (morning), (c) the Betsy Ross House tour (morning), (d) the National Constitution Center tour (morning), and (e) the Congress Hall tour (afternoon).

Last, the stories provided by the Culture Vultures included five episodes on the first

day: (a) shopping at Bloomingdale’s, King of Prussia Mall (morning), (b) lunch at the food court (afternoon), (c) continued shopping at the mall (afternoon), (d) driving to Philadelphia (evening), and (e) dinner at Buddakan (evening); four episodes on the second day: (a) heading to New Hope, brunch at a bakery in Rice’s Market (morning), (b) driving around the town and shopping at different stores (afternoon), (c) wine tasting at the New Hope Winery (afternoon), and (d) going back to Philadelphia, dinner at Pod (evening); and four episodes on the third day: (a) brunch at the Tenth Street Pourhouse (morning), (b) walking through South Philadelphia and the Italian Market (morning), (c) shopping on South Street (afternoon), and (d) shopping at Rittenhouse Square (afternoon).

All writers, except Robert, wrote the narratives in chronological order; Robert wrote a flashback episode in his first-day story. Most of the episodes from the stories occurred at different places, which is important for the space categorization of the narratives and the characterization of the travel itineraries. Nearly all episodes contained activities that occurred at a particular place, without much emphasis on the movement between places. The narrators used

FIGURE 1. Characterization: Access to Lived Tourist Identities (*Source. visitPA.com*)



phrases such as “Our next stop was...” or “We continued our way East and stopped at...” Some exceptions can be found from the first-day story of the History Buff, where Robert described the term “stroll around” in the first episode and emphasizes that it was a primer of the next-day’s activity. In episode 4 from the first-day story of the Culture Vultures, Preethi explained the activity of driving from King of Prussia Mall to downtown Philadelphia, emphasizing the times they were lost or confused by the directions. This suggests that throughout the stories the narrators tried to communicate “fragments” of their experiences taking place at different interesting spots in the city with little emphasis on the experiences of “moving” between places in the city.

Relational Organization: Episode Schema

Narratives can also be deconstructed by their relational organization of goals-actions-outcomes. To interpret the relational organization of the narratives, a keyword search was conducted within the text of each episode identified in the chronological deconstruction process. Extract 1 is from the third-day story of Manisha and Preethi (Culture Vultures).

Extract 1

Preethi: We walked around for quite some time, but finally decided that we wanted to do some serious shopping. So we jumped in a cab and headed down to Rittenhouse Square. Rittenhouse Square is an upscale section of Philly that is known for great boutiques and stores. Manisha and I spent a couple hours walking up and down the streets, stopping at various stores and trying on clothes. Manisha was looking for a dress for her upcoming bridal shower so that was the focus of our shopping adventures today. After searching

for hours, we still had not found the perfect dress.

Preethi states that the focus of the experience was “serious shopping.” However, this statement is not the real goal, but a contextualization of the episode. Preethi reiterates the goal of the episode, that Manisha was having a bridal shower and needed a dress. The actions that were expressed in extract 1 include “going to Rittenhouse Square,” “stopping at various stores and trying on clothes,” and “searching for hours.” Finally, Preethi closed the episode by stating the outcome as “...had not found the perfect dress.”

Extract 2 is from the first-day story of Mike and Tamara (Hipster Roadtrippers). The goal of this episode, as expressed by Mike, was “to find a bar or a club where we could get a drink and hear some music.” The actions were to “take a walk through the neighborhood.” As can be seen, the outcome of that episode is expressed in the last three lines.

Extract 2

Mike: The locals told us Old City was the place to find a bar or club where we could get a drink and hear some music. The streets were lined with different bars and restaurants so we decided to take a walk through the neighborhood. There were lots of people out; some heading to the bars and some seated at outside tables enjoying dinner. We came across a Jazz band playing on a street corner. We stopped to listen to the music and watched children dance in the street. The band could play, and T (*Tamara*) contributed to the arts and spotted them a 5.

The relational organization of the stories enables blog readers to understand the plot by associating the process of justification in their minds: why and how well the characters perform their actions. What is more, the blog readers can derive the “meaning” of the experiences introduced in the stories; the

relational organization acts as the sense-making device, which also strengthens the process of relating the characters and their actions to real life.

Space Categorization

Based on the episodes and episode schema, the experiences represented in the narratives can be plotted into spatial movements. The story episodes reflect the temporal nature of the movements (illustrated in Figure 1). Because a tourist's position can be derived at the point of location in time, tourists' travel patterns can be conceptualized as spatial movements within a network. In this system, the nodes of the network are attractions or other points at which tourists stop; the edges of the network are the routes that tourists choose to travel between the two places. When plotted spatially, the attractions and places visited by each blog character and their movement patterns signify the space categorization of each travel genre.

Figure 2 illustrates the spatial patterns of the episodes identified from the story of the Hipster Roadtrippers (second day). The episodes (illustrated chronologically in Figure 1) are represented by the attractions and places as nodes. The intertwined spatial and temporal patterns of all episodes make up the whole story as a description of a tourism product, a day-trip experience.

PRODUCT EVALUATION

Product evaluation (i.e., overall quality of the experience) can be informed by interpreting the positive and negative feelings of the writers from the blogs. For example, words such as "sad," "bad," and "uneasy" represent negative feelings toward the experience, while "good," "delicious," and "fantastic" describe positive feelings. In some cases, blog writers also used cynical words to express negative feelings (e.g., "spectacular mood"). Several aspects were considered, such as general statements about satisfaction, the quality of attractions visited and facilities

used, the level of information available to make decisions concerning the itinerary and scheduling, and knowledge gained from visiting the various Philadelphia attractions.

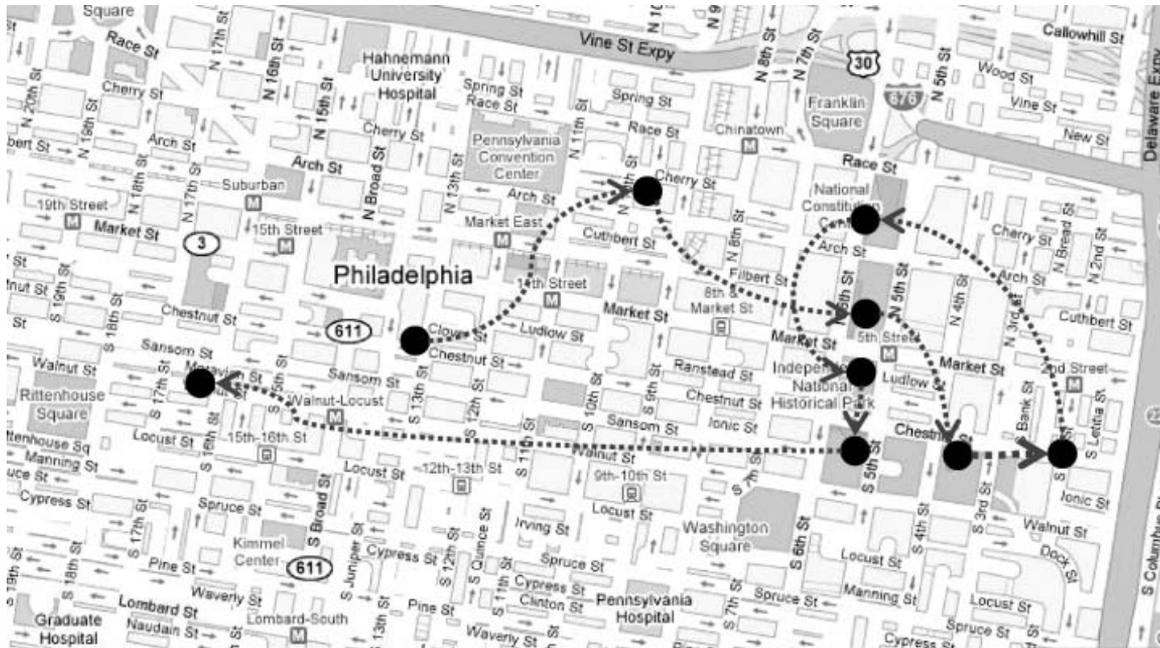
Extract 3 comes from one of the episodes of the story of the Hipster Roadtrippers, when Mike and Tamara were having lunch at the City Tavern (located in Old City, Philadelphia). Mike expresses a positive evaluation of the restaurant and expresses excitement right after reading the menu, even before the waiter arrived. Then, the excitement continued after the appearance of the waiter. Finally, Mike stated his positive evaluation of the food, expressed by the words "indulged" and "enjoyed."

Extract 3

Mike: At that point lunch was in order, and we found it at the City Tavern, the only place in the world where we could experience authentic 18th century American culinary history, as the menu described. Not even in New York could we order a "Salmagundi," better yet pronounce it correctly. Other items included liters of Thomas Jefferson or George Washington ale. I was starting to get excited. Then our waiter approached. Just like the food, he was 18th century style, clad in black shoes, long white socks, a long sleeved white collared shirt and a black vest that seemed true to history. He even seemed to speak a little bit of 18th century accent. We indulged in the trip back in time and enjoyed it all. T did her thing while I had some chicken noodle soup just like George W., the original, used to enjoy.

Most of the stories, as expected, contain positive product evaluation. However, a few negative notions of the experiences were identified from several episodes in the stories. Most of these were the result of negative outcomes in their attempts to achieve certain goals and were not directly

FIGURE 2. Story Episodes: Temporal Dimensions



related to the quality of the products. An example of a negative experience is presented in extract 4, which is an episode of the Culture Vultures on the third day. As shown, Preethi expresses her negative feelings by using the words “very sad” as a result of her lack of success in getting tickets.

Extract 4

Preethi: We had originally reserved today to spend at the Philadelphia Museum of Art but we had both been there several times and the Dali exhibit, which we desperately wanted to see, was sold out. We tried for weeks to get tickets but were unsuccessful. After studying Spanish art in Madrid, Dali had become one of my favorite artists. Having seen a majority of his artwork in Spain, I knew this exhibit would be great and was very sad to miss it.

Since the essence of marketing through narratives is to communicate the positive

notions of products to consumers, product evaluation in the stories became one of the most important elements of the blog. Tourists’ problems resulting from negative experiences, however, are equally important in the process of creating tourists’ drama that might appeal to the readers. Preethi’s story about her disappointment in not getting the ticket for the Dali exhibit suggests that the product offered by the City of Philadelphia is of extremely high value, and that missing the chance to experience it is a substantial loss.

KEY MARKETING ELEMENTS

Several key marketing elements were identified as destination marketing tools based on the narrative structure and product evaluation found on the Pennsylvania Tourist Office’s website; the three most important are:

1. *Develop tourist identities using different travel genres.* This approach can be regarded as customization in advertising;

the message about the product (bundles of products) is delivered differently to different segments. Since blog readers will relate to the lived picture of a character in the story, introducing characters with different tastes, preferences, and backgrounds can be effective in stimulating empathy among different readers. Readers sharing similar characteristics with the “hero” and “heroine” understand how the characters made decisions and act, and perceive the benefits enjoyed by the characters. Therefore, the readers can be persuaded to experience the same trip as the characters in the stories.

2. *Introduce drama by presenting multiple characters.* Characterization with multiple actors allows blog readers to follow the drama resulting from interactions among the characters. The drama helps readers achieve a sense of “realness” and character believability, which will lead to sympathy and empathy as emotional responses. Sympathy and empathy, in turn, lead to the “ad attitude” (Escalas & Stern, 2003)—in this case, intention to visit.
3. *Encourage the discussion of spatiotemporal movement as product characteristics.* The temporal and spatial sequences of the trips extracted from the stories enables blog readers to have a cognitive construction of the hypothetical travel scenario. However, placing more emphasis on the activities related to movement between places, and not limited to activities at particular places, would enrich the stories and strengthen their power to communicate the travel scenario.

CONCLUSION

This research investigates tourists’ journal-like stories (i.e., written in a first-person perspective) utilized by DMOs to promote tourism destinations. Since this form of

narrative marketing has recently been embraced by many organizations in travel tourism, this research significantly contributes to the latest development in tourism marketing by providing a better understanding of the important drivers of success of using narratives in destination marketing. This research posits that a well-written travel story (i.e., a nicely structured narrative) can increase audiences’ knowledge about a destination. The chronology and causality within a story particularly add to the detailed information about a particular tourism activity within a period of time. It is suggested that narratives seem to be able to present multiple interrelated information about particularities of a tourism destination, including, but not limited to, attractions, facilities, infrastructures, and a more abstract value such as the overall atmosphere. Further study, however, is needed to better understand the various mediation effects of narratives on how potential visitors interpret these stories.

This study identifies key marketing elements from the narratives provided by the Pennsylvania Tourist Office’s website. These marketing elements include characterization (i.e., the introduction of “hero” and “heroine”), space categorization (e.g., types of attractions), and overall product and experience evaluation. Characterization and space categorization are determinants of travel genres. The introduction of a blog writer as a personal character implies the notion of tourist identity; it allows blog readers to access a picture of lived identities created through actions, attitudes, and values. Space categorization presents the evaluation and result of the narrative sequences; it allows blog readers to have a cognitive construction of hypothetical travel scenarios, including rehearsals of likely future travels.

This research suggests some implications for DMOs. First, it is argued that narratives as a digital form of word-of-mouth provide a solid foundation upon which to effectively market a destination. Since the story format is easy to comprehend, a travel blog may help novice travelers to obtain information

and to make the decision to visit the destination. Second, introducing different characters and story genres has a potential to be an effective customization strategy in destination marketing. This way, the message about the destination (i.e., bundles of tourism products) is delivered differently to different market segments. Providing different stories will be effective to suggest diverse hypothetical scenarios of travel for potential visitors with different tastes, preferences, and travel styles.

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