

DESTINATIONS, EXPERIENCES, AND PLACES: THE ROLE OF STORYTELLING IN TOURISM ADVERTISING

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Abstract

This theoretical essay examines the role of storytelling in advertising communication, specifically focusing on its application to destination branding. Tourism, as a dynamic and intangible sector, faces unique communication challenges. This paper critically analyzes storytelling as a tool to bridge these gaps, emphasizing its symbolic and emotional power to enhance destination image, authenticity, and visitor engagement. By synthesizing tourism communication and place branding literature, this study analyzes Portugal's promotional campaign "Can't Skip Portugal" as a strategic storytelling use in destination promotion. This approach provides theoretical insights and practical implications for stakeholders in the tourism industry.

Keywords

Tourism, Place Marketing, Place Branding, Destination Image, Storytelling, Can't Skip Portugal.



Resumo

Este ensaio teórico examina o papel do storytelling na comunicação publicitária do turismo, centrado-se especificamente na sua aplicação ao destination branding. O turismo, enquanto sector dinâmico e intangível, enfrenta desafios de comunicação únicos. Este artigo analisa criticamente o storytelling como uma ferramenta para colmatar essas lacunas, enfatizando o seu poder simbólico e emocional para melhorar a imagem do destino, a autenticidade e o envolvimento do visitante. Ao sintetizar a literatura da comunicação em turismo e do place branding, este trabalho analisa a campanha promocional de Portugal “Can't Skip Portugal” como uma utilização estratégica do storytelling na promoção de um destino. Esta abordagem avança os conhecimentos teóricos ao mesmo tempo que oferece implicações práticas para os intervenientes na indústria do turismo.

Palavras-chave

Turismo, Place Marketing, Place Branding, Imagem de Destino, Storytelling, Can't Skip Portugal.

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Introduction

Tourism is a significant global economic driver. However, its communication practices are still constrained by the intangible and experiential nature of its offerings. Despite the widespread recognition of storytelling in tourism promotion, the integration of this technique into place and destination branding frameworks remains poorly explored. This study identifies this gap, arguing that storytelling enhances the emotional resonance of destination promotion and addresses key challenges in creating coherent, impactful narratives for diverse audiences. It provides a conceptual framework by aligning storytelling with destination branding theories and demonstrates how storytelling can be used to build authentic, memorable destination identities.

Although defining tourism as a single, consensual concept is challenging (Lai & Li, 2022), this paper adopts the definition of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), which describes tourism as a “social, cultural, and economic phenomenon involving the movement of people to countries or locations outside their usual place of residence for personal, business, or professional purposes” (World Tourism Organization, 2023). Furthermore, tourism can be understood as “the set of lawful activities carried out by visitors during their travels, along with the attractions and means created to meet their needs and the phenomena and relationships resulting from these interactions” (Cunha & Abrantes, 2019, p.14). This indicates that tourism sustains a highly dynamic and complex market composed of diverse products and services catering to various consumer needs. It is driven by consumer preferences, technological advancements, and environmental considerations, playing a pivotal role in global economies and in fostering social and cultural exchanges.

Given the uniqueness of the industry, tourism communication involves diverse processes, including social, informational, and promotional elements. Tourism and its communication coexist in time and space, and how a destination’s image is promoted directly influences visitors’ decision-making processes. Therefore, promotional efforts



must be adapted to meet consumer needs and market trends (Marujo, 2012). This makes innovation in advertising messages not only necessary but imperative to achieve promotional goals. As a result, the tourism industry has implemented new strategies that combine creativity, sustainability, and the development of new products and experiences to contribute to a more positive and robust image of destinations in the global market.

In this context, storytelling stands out as a key advertising tool. This technique, based on intentional narratives, offers a creative revitalization of destinations, providing an ever-growing opportunity to enhance the promotion of tourist destinations, places, products, and experiences.

Although it has been proven that narratives have the power to make individuals feel more human, connecting them to their memories and identities (Ribeiro, 2020), few studies have explored the relationship between storytelling and place branding (Yavuz et al., 2016; Keskin et al., 2016).

This study discusses, therefore, the success factors of using storytelling to brand a place, looking to the "Can't Skip Portugal" promotional campaign that started in 2017 and contributed to electing Portugal as the World's Leading Destination at the World Travel Awards 2019 for the third consecutive year and consolidating Portugal as an unmissable tourism destination.

Tourism, Communication, and Place Branding

The global tourism industry encompasses various destinations with different products and services tailored to various market segments, each with its motivations and needs. In recent decades, the exponentially increased demand, the emergence of low-cost airlines, and the rise of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), coupled with more discerning consumers, have made this sector increasingly competitive. In addition, the current trend, in terms of consumption, is very focused on experiences. Due to the specificity of the tourism industry, where tourists' experiences are broadly narrated from an individual point of view and easily shared through the countless social media platforms available, differentiating and positioning destinations in such a vast and diverse market poses a significant challenge for tourism stakeholders.

Tourism acts as a driving force for place development by stimulating the creation and expansion of tourism-related offerings and infrastructure. The diversification and specialization of tourism offerings, driven by more informed and demanding travelers, present an opportunity to revitalize and enhance destinations based on their resources, identity, and authenticity (Melo et al., 2016). Moreover, as the tourism industry facilitates a broad spectrum of cultural and social exchanges during the journey (Cunha & Abrantes, 2019), its communication goes beyond mere transmission of information. Its quality and effectiveness are intrinsically linked to cultural awareness, understanding desires and needs, and the communication methods employed (Setiawan, 2023).

Communication is a fundamental component of the viability of tourism activities, enabling the dissemination of information about destinations, products, and services, bridging the gap between supply and demand, shaping the stereotypes of the locations (Duarte,



2014), and connecting visitors with host communities (Marujo, 2012). Tourism communication encompasses all formal and informal processes that take place before, during, and after the visitation experience, playing a key role in relationships between supply agents, public and private tourism sectors, and the development of the tourism industry itself. Consequently, it is crucial for the strategic dissemination and promotion of destinations, the establishment of a destination's image, the provision of information, the interaction between tourists and residents, and the creation of a destination as a message to be interpreted by visitors, whether real or potential (Baldissera, 2010).

As Anholt (2010, p.1) stated, "Places have been promoting their attractions and their images throughout history because they have always needed to attract settlers, customers, visitors, traders, investors and the category of people we today call 'influencers.'" This idea junctions with the brand-building process of places, or place branding, which is understood as the sum of all beliefs, ideas, and impressions that people associate with a place (Baker, 2007), and where tourists themselves play an important and relevant role (Freire, 2006).

The tourism communication system unfolds in three stages: before the trip, through active search for information on destinations, products, and services; during the trip, through the experience of consumption and interactions at the location; and after the trip, through feedback sharing. As such, tourism communication is a "complex, omnipresent, bidirectional, and symmetrical process that is essential for creating, maintaining, or correcting the image of a destination, company, or brand, fostering tourist loyalty, sparking interest, influencing the choice process, and keeping the memory of lived experiences alive to prompt recommendations and repeat visits" (Wichels, 2014, p.29).

Advertising Communication in Tourism

Advertising communication is a very ancient phenomenon (Duarte, 2023) that has evolved with the cultural, social, and technological progress of societies, primarily aimed at persuading target audiences regarding a product or service for commercial purposes. Advertising can be defined as the "placement of announcements and messages in time or space... aimed at informing and/or persuading members of a specific target market or audience about their products, services, organizations, or ideas" (American Marketing Association, 2024) and plays an important role in all organizational sectors, but especially in services, like tourism.

The very nature of tourism products, starting with their intangibility and the volatility of demand influenced by economic, political, health, or social contexts, poses numerous challenges for destination communication and promotion. Tourism communication serves as a powerful tool for promoting places, destinations, and experiences, allowing tourism offerings to be targeted and differentiated from others in the market. This is achieved by promoting the unique attributes of the location or service to generate consumer desire and intent to purchase through the dissemination of positive information and images (Salehi & Farahbakhsh, 2014). Furthermore, the communication skills of service



providers are equally important in ensuring the quality of tourism products and creating a pleasant experience for the visitor (Tankovic et al., 2023).

Hence, tourism advertising communication is designed to influence visitors' decision-making through persuasion and influence based on emotions, awareness, and perceptions. These promotional actions aim to direct visitor behavior toward the consumption of destinations, tourism products, and services. Its success can be measured by the ability to lead the consumer to visit the destination or purchase a promoted experience, product, or service (Hiekal, 2022). Therefore, tourism advertising must be tailored to the characteristics of each visitor group and the various components of the tourism offering, highlighting the destination's attractions, accommodations, dining options, and events (Souza et al., 2020).

It is also crucial to understand the factors that shape consumer perception and influence their decision-making regarding a particular place, destination, or tourism experience. This understanding enables more efficient adaptation, creation, and management of tourism advertising communication. In this regard, the image of a destination plays a critical role in a consumer's decision-making process when choosing one destination or experience over others. According to Alcocer and Ruiz (2020), the "destination image" is consumers' perceived mental conceptualization, which is directly conditioned by the amount and quality of information available. Additionally, the formation of a destination image, which is closely tied to place branding, results from a cognitive process involving the deconstruction and reconstruction of information from various sources. The image perceived by the consumer is inevitably shaped by individual subjectivity and background and is further influenced by psychological and sociodemographic factors (Lopes, 2011).

The success of tourism communication depends on both the individual values of the target audience (their perceptions, preferences, knowledge, etc.) and the cultural values of the location (its notoriety, history, reputation, etc.). Tourism advertising strategies are based on two main pillars: the content of the messages to be conveyed and the choice of the most relevant communication channels. Advertising has the potential to reduce the perceived risk in destination selection by promoting congruence between the visitor and the destination (Šegota, 2024).

Like most commercial communications, tourism advertising uses various approaches that can be employed individually or together depending on the purpose of the communication. These approaches include slogans, which help establish the message in the audience's mind; logos, which create and reinforce a visual identity that distinguishes the tourist location from others; informative brochures, which serve both an informative and persuasive function by providing information on the place to visit, maps, and points of interest, and digital media, which have gained prominence with the rise of digitalization and include a wide array of tools, such as websites, QR codes, augmented reality, or artificial intelligence (Jurdana, 2024).

Considering the current trends in the sector, including new forms of consumption driven by digitalization, visitors tend to seek more personalized experiences, allowing them to actively create and customize their touristic experiences. As such, the innovation associated with revitalizing tourism offerings retains visitors by providing authentic and transformative experiences. These experiences are promoted through advertising



communication that actively supports the promotion and development of destinations by showcasing their points of interest (Salehi & Farahbakhsh, 2014).

Thus, if advertising is the tool through which persuasive information is provided to the potential visitor, motivating them to visit a destination and encouraging the consumption of its tourism products, services, and experiences, identifying and defining the target audience as accurately as possible is crucial. Both the message and the media used must contribute to the most effective promotion of tourism destinations.

Tourism and Place Brand Storytelling

Swain et al. (2024) used lexicometric analysis to determine the most prominent keywords associated with place branding throughout the years. Between 2016 and 2020, "storytelling" stood out, indicating the importance of this tool. As Youssef et al. (2018) confirmed, its effectiveness in communicating a destination brand. Lund et al. (2020) discovered that storytelling can also be used as an effective way to counter the negative comments of social media users. The impact of these new digital media, called "technologies of power" by Lund et al. (2018), due to their role in shaping social interactions and mechanisms, implies a novel interpretation of how these online social networks generate engagement and stimulate the circulation of destination brand stories.

Even though we can say that advertising has always been narrative (Vizcaíno, 2016), according to López and Gil-Casares (2017), the birth of storytelling in the advertising industry dates to the 1990s in the United States. The reasons behind its appearance are anchored in the fact that advertisers and communication professionals of that time felt the need to use communication forms that, although widely used in everyday life, had not been seen in commercial communications until then.

For Camprubí and Planas (2020), storytelling, which has already been successfully used in product branding (Salomon, 2007), is a tool that tourism destinations can use for place branding.

The essence of tourism is rooted in the social and cultural interactions that occur during a journey, collectively forming the consumer's overall experience. Communication is a practice that coexists with tourism itself (Baldissera, 2010). However, the continuous development of the sector requires ongoing adaptation of the offerings provided by destinations, actively contributing to the revitalization and innovation of communication and promotional processes.

Given the recreational and intangible aspects of tourism, coupled with the historical and cultural characteristics of the destinations, there is an increasing need for creative communication about tourism destinations, places, and experiences. In this context, storytelling has become an integral part of communication strategies in the tourism industry to promote and differentiate destination brands (Youssef et al, 2018). A good example is the "*Mediterraneamente*" campaign by the Catalan beer brand Estrella Damm, which not only promoted the beverage but also various tourist destinations in Spain (Álvarez-Ruiz & Patiño, 2021, Rodríguez-Rabadán et al., 2022, Álvarez-Ruiz &



Patiño, 2023). This campaign employed youthful, carefree narratives typically associated with Southern Europe.

Another Spanish example is the city of Girona, used by Camprubí and Planas (2020) as a case study to assess the extent to which the city's myths and legends can be used in a promotional campaign. The authors concluded that traditional stories not only have the potential to be used in storytelling but also to reinforce the values and identity of a city's brand.

In Portugal, cities like Aveiro and Ílhavo, for example, have created museum tourist routes based on monuments and historical places, proposing itineraries that tell tourists local history exclusively through narratives (Maia et al., 2013).

Telling a story makes it easier for you to remember. Not only because of the content itself, its narrative elements, the characters, the images, the context, the action, etc. but also because of the way they are told and how the message is transmitted. Stories are the best tools not only to activate emotions but also memory. On the one hand, stories are essential in activating our mirror neurons (Farran, 2013), which make us identify with a certain situation and immediately relate to it. In this sense, when conveying a story with certain words, images, colors, suggestions, people, etc., that connote certain sensations, this activates certain specific areas of the brain that process the information about the emotion that has been aroused.

On the other hand, all humans are made of stories because everything that happens to us is relatable and, therefore, memorable. Also, as David Herman (2002) reminds us, the more clichés and norms are broken, the more tellable and the greater the attention the story will receive. People want to be surprised. Today's public, whose access to practically everything is more accessible than ever, is eager to experience, live, feel, and participate. When this is not physically possible, use stories to experience this world. We are now fully accustomed to enjoying infotainment experiences, and stories are a fundamental part of this cultural and social process.

Stories also appeal to our playful selves. Faced with several informative messages, stories make us lower our guard about our skepticism and prepare us to enjoy their intrigue, their conflicts, and their characters (Núñez, 2007).

Hence, the power and potential that stories have, whether in the human mind or social relations. A good story, well told, has the power to create a strong (and often lasting) relationship with your target audience, which can awaken aspects that are often hidden in their subconscious and, more importantly, determine their subsequent behavior.

Of course, the impact and relevance of storytelling can vary according to several factors, namely the moment and social context in which the story occurs. In other words, what is narrated in the story may have greater or lesser interest, a greater or lesser impact, depending on the moment in which it happens and is transmitted. For example, a dramatic story about a labor rights activist told on May 1 (International Labor Day) would have greater reception and relevance than if it were told during the middle of August, with much of the population on vacation.



In the context of advertising communication, storytelling is a technique that involves creating and delivering messages through intentional narratives. According to Rodríguez (2017), “storytelling presents itself as an emotional narrative in which a connection is established between the audience and the narrator, which allows the message to last longer for the viewer” (p.6).

This practice connects the axis of the advertising narrative to the current reality, and by enhancing the sensory value of the experience, it fosters a mental association between the stories and the consumer’s personal experience. The effectiveness of storytelling lies in the human ability to store, consolidate, and recall information in the form of stories, with its success depending on how well consumers identify with the narrative (Kang et al., 2019). Storytelling, therefore, is an integral part of promotional strategies in the tourism industry, allowing for the long-term promotion and differentiation of a destination by coordinating all offerings within a single narrative that communicates the destination’s key attributes and values clearly and uniquely. This promotional strategy, which involves, emotional, and conative dimensions, aims to stimulate consumer emotions and requires all destination stakeholders to align with the narrative (Mossberg et al., 2010; Youssef et al., 2018).

Storytelling, by enabling the development of unique narratives, benefits both tourism providers and visitors. Visitors’ attention has increasingly shifted from the consumption of products and services to the experience of destinations, driven by a growing desire for authenticity and meaning (Hosany et al., 2022). For this reason, storytelling narratives must align with the destination’s identity, the chosen theme, and the locations selected for strategic communication development, considering all actors involved in the process.

In addition to the purchase and consumption of tourism products, visitors seek to consume the stories behind these offerings. The rising demand for experiences that are based on the intangible aspects of tourism presents an opportunity to revitalize and adapt the tourism market. In this regard, creative tourism offers unique experiences based on direct interaction between residents and visitors, valuing visitors’ self-realization and self-expression through the development of their creative skills (Marujo et al., 2021). The use of storytelling to tell these experiences fosters a sense of belonging among the local community and encourages visitor involvement and interaction. This offers tourism providers the opportunity to transform consumers into loyal followers and active promoters of the tourist experience by involving them in the creative process (Korez-Vide, 2017).

In tourism promotion, storytelling allows for the design and delivery of more effective and targeted messages through strategically developed stories and narratives aimed at specific audiences. Additionally, when properly integrated into a destination’s value proposition, storytelling establishes a coherent information stream that emotionally connects consumers with promotional content. This merges the destination’s identity and authenticity with its advertising communication in a creative manner, contributing to a more favorable consumer perception of the destination, considering the available tourism resources and long-term sustainability goals. However, tourism providers must collaborate continuously to maximize the effects of storytelling and develop coherent tourism experiences for visitors (Yavuz et al., 2016; Kang et al., 2019).



Here's where the concept of *Tellability* arises, which was born in the field of conversational storytelling, that is, telling stories in oral conversations. For Farran (2013), this term encompasses all types of narratives that are worth telling by the sender and, therefore, heard by the receiver. An essential issue for any story, and especially for storytelling with persuasive objectives, is the narrative interest. In other words, the interest must remain intrinsic to the narrative so that there is an interconnection and reciprocity between the story and the viewer. What must be clear is that not everything that is narrated is newsworthy and, therefore, of interest to the public. Just like in films, despite showing ordinary scenes from everyday life, what stands out are the impactful, transcendent, magical, bizarre, different, unusual, or unexpected events. This captures the audience's attention and piques their interest. Likewise, stories must tell something relevant to the audience that somehow connects with them.

Framing the concept of advertising storytelling in the current context, amid the rise of the Internet, big data, algorithms, artificial intelligence, machine learning, etc., it is important to reflect on the fact that advertising communication is increasingly bidirectional. Therefore, brands must provide sufficiently interesting content and engagement to encourage public response. Furthermore, in this way, the consumer becomes an active participant in the brand's content, creating, participating, sharing, and interacting with the message that brands provide, massively increasing their reach and impact. This change in the traditional structure of communication between a brand and consumer is beautifully represented by Opresnik (2017) in his article: "From Bowling to Pinball." For the author, traditional communication worked like bowling, in which a single message (the big ball) is launched into the market, trying to reach as many consumers as possible (metaphorically knocking down as many pins) and whose message does not return to the starting point. In the context of social networks, UCG (User Content Generator), the era of sharing (Dias & Duarte, 2022), a new format has emerged with greater relevance for brands: the pinball approach. This time, the messages (possibly smaller, that is, with smaller budgets) are sent to a market that, upon receiving this information, begins to comment, like, and share it among its members and, often, start a "dialog" with the issuing brand that can, this time, return the message to the market, starting or reinforcing this interactive communication loop. As the public has moved from listening to stories to participating in them, storytelling presents itself as a valuable resource that anyone can advertise.

This tool enhances the emotional connection with the story being told. The different events transmitted translate them into a sensitive world that allows us to identify each character or scene (Atarama-Rojas et al., 2018). The storytelling technique makes viewers feel like they are in the shoes of the characters and interact in one way or another with them, feeling their needs, concerns, and sensations. This is especially relevant when considering tourist destinations.

Storytelling is also a critical element in building a destination's identity and strengthening its brand image in the tourism market. To do so, its approach should incorporate a certain degree of dramatization, depending on the theme and purpose of the narrative, to validate visitors' engagement and interaction with the creative process (Mossberg et al., 2010). For this practice to be successful, long-term cooperation with all tourism stakeholders is necessary, and the narratives must be conveyed through experiences,



places, and characters, organizing all the components of the destination's consumption package. The narrative should convey the destination's core values by incorporating the locations and themes that reflect the place's distinctive and authentic attributes (Yavuz et al., 2016).

After understanding the essential elements of narrative construction and its purpose, one can understand how storytelling can play a vital role in promoting tourism destinations. Strategic narrative planning that reflects the destination's identity, uniqueness, and authenticity provides a purpose for the visit, positively impacting the tourist experience and influencing both the subjective domain of the visitor and the promotional, persuasive intent of the destination. This practice strengthens visitors' memories of the place while emotionally engaging them with narrative content (Cao, 2019).

Therefore, tourism communication professionals should be encouraged to use storytelling dynamics based on narratives about local culture and heritage because these tend to enhance the attractiveness of the tourist experience and foster emotional bonds with visitors. Strategic storytelling planning is critical for tourism development because it helps enhance destinations, communities, and heritage. Narratives stimulate the inclusion of stories in the visitor's conception, appealing to their creative and emotional dimensions. Moreover, they foster interaction with the local community, its values, and its identity, thereby enhancing and perpetuating the tourist experience in the visitor's memory (Ličaj & Matja, 2015). After all, as López and Gil-Casares (2017) remind us, this was the assumption that led Ashraf Ramy to open an advertising agency in Amsterdam, called "Narrativity", whose slogan was: "People do not buy products, but the stories that these products represent" (p. 79).

Analysis of storytelling applied to the "Can't Skip Portugal" Campaign

As stated by Gertner (2011), the number of publications related to 'place marketing' and 'place branding' has experienced exponential growth in the last two decades, especially after Anholt's article on Nation Branding in 1998. Given this development, the reasons and implications that motivate the success of territorial brands have begun to be scrutinized. The authors state that one of these factors is storytelling, which several destinations have begun to use to promote themselves.

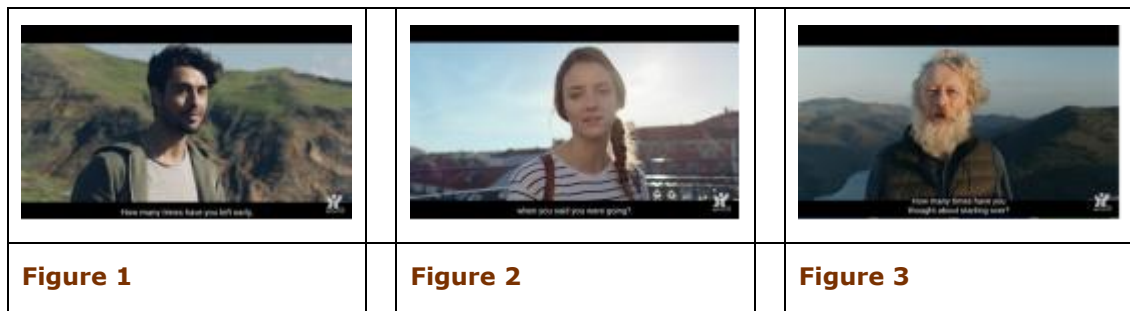
For this article, we used a qualitative methodology based on a single case study (Byrne, 2009) of a promotional campaign for Portugal's tourism. According to Quintela (2021), the "Portugal brand" emerged in 1999 because of the need to differentiate itself from other countries. It underwent several strategic changes depending on the different Governments and political orientations, which resulted in distinct campaigns and positionings over time. In May 2017, Turismo de Portugal presented the "Can't Skip Portugal" campaign to promote the country exclusively in digital media.

The campaign was run in 20 countries, with a common characteristic: their citizens have high purchasing power and, therefore, are better able to take advantage of the multiple and diverse experiences that Portugal can offer, even in the winter.



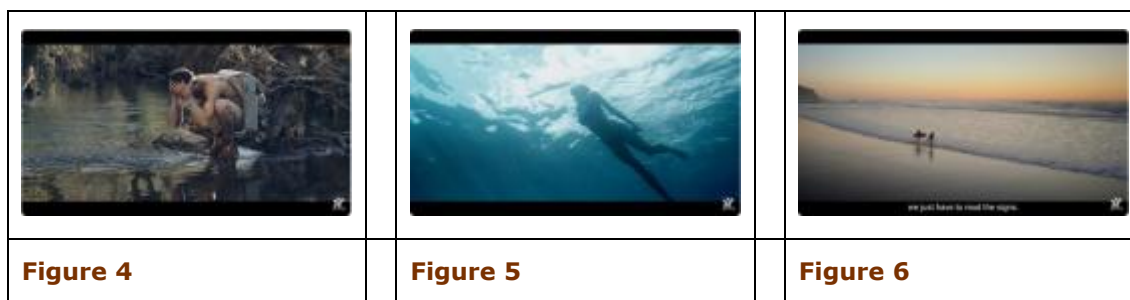
Initially, this campaign consisted of four videos, always starting from a common central narrative idea (Can't Skip Portugal) but varying in the final specification: "Can't Skip New Beginnings"; "Can't Skip Inspiration"; "Can't Skip Freedom"; and the last one, which gathers the three stories: "Can't Skip Us". The use of storytelling was justified as this technique empowers brands and tourism destinations to differentiate themselves from competitors, thus gaining a positive advantage (Yavuz et al., 2016).

There were three protagonists who "lived" Portugal in many other films: actor James Palmer (Figure 1), in the role of a top executive but tired of the fast-paced life; a young French woman (Figure 2), bored with routine life and a German retiree (Figure 3), for whom getting older is a way of living longer and therefore seeks "new beginnings".



Source: Canal Youtube: VisitPortugal

The last film in the series brings together the three main characters as they return to the emotions and regions of Portugal (Figures 4, 5, and 6). The objective is to show, through these stories, personal but also transversal to so many people, that Portugal is a destination for everyone who wants to visit and experience intensely everything the country has to offer.



Source: Canal Youtube: VisitPortugal

Through these videos^[1] - all filmed in the middle of winter (Figure 7) to prove that it is also possible to have an unforgettable vacation at this time - whose messages are based on an exciting, positive, and aspirational narrative, the aim is to promote the destination, approaching and raising awareness of potential tourists through images of nature, history, culture, and fascinating beauty, but also through the story, which is told by the three characters looking directly at the camera (see Fig. 1, 2, 3).



Source: Canal Youtube: VisitPortugal

The strength of these testimonies corroborates the writings of Chronis (2012, p. 445), who states that “a story transforms what would be an indifferent and unimportant space into an attractive tourist destination” by involving the intended target audience and questioning them, directly, about their own lives, ambitions, and aspirations, encouraging them to follow their dreams, to start again, to travel, to get to know Portugal (Figure 8, 9). This strategy is in line with the arguments of Akgün et al. (2015), who stated that storytelling helps tourists create bonds of empathy with places, because it generates positive emotional responses and behavioral intentions toward travel destinations. These authors also concluded that the “storytelling approach can be used as a marketing tool in tourism companies, and it may motivate consumers for behavioral intentions such as word-of-mouth and visit intention” (p.585). Escalas and Stern (2003) corroborated this by proving that storytelling affects audiences’ feelings and good stories have an impact on future traveling decision-making. Wirtz et al. (2016) added that empathy, together with sympathy in advertising communication, plays an important role in consumer persuasion.

Once the starting point of storytelling is the construction of narratives to create affective bonds between the stories, their characters, and the audience for whom they are intended, thus increasing their ability to attribute meanings and facilitate understanding and assimilation of messages (Barbosa e Souza, 2021), its use to promote Portugal as a tourist destination is evidently understandable.

Recent studies argue that storytelling works as a key element in valuing tourist destinations, as today’s tourists are increasingly looking for unique and/or authentic experiences (Hartman et al., 2019; Su et al., 2020), and this campaign also fulfills this request. Framed within the theoretical framework of the competitive advantages of nations by Michael Porter (1993), the competitive identity proposals by Anholt (2007), and the so-called strategic “niche” generation of place marketing by Moilanen and Rainisto (2009), the campaign “Can't Skip Portugal” explores the unique characteristics of Portugal (sea, nature, tradition, gastronomy, history) through an engaging, emotional, and authentic narrative.

The storytelling structure presented in the different campaign films encompasses narrative fragments from different testimonies while presenting the elements that the country intends to highlight. In an almost informal, relaxed way, told in the first person by each of the participants, Turismo de Portugal manages to involve its target audience



in a way that is simultaneously symbolic and mobilizing. Symbolic, via the emotional appeal of feelings such as evasion, escape, travel, freedom, dream, belief, and future. All these elements have a transformative and powerful symbolic charge, which is in line with the writings of McCabe and Foster (2006), who also understand storytelling as a way of obtaining symbolic status, stating that the peculiarity of the technique lies in its ability to offer individuals ways to escape the real. And mobilizing, through an appeal to individual values, unique experiences, and unrepeatable feelings lived by each of the characters, who describe their emotions not in a commercial, eminently persuasive way but, on the contrary, in a fluid, inviting, and truthful way, which captures attention and facilitates availability to retain the message. As Palacios and Terenzo (2018, p. 201) wrote, storytelling “has the ability to create a situation in which the receiver is interested and has their attention fully focused on the message”.

In line with the findings of Youssef et al. (2018), who conducted 25 semi-structured interviews with communication practitioners to conclude that, in the context of destination marketing, storytelling, by involving cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions, helps to define a destination’s identity and shape a distinct positioning, this campaign positioned Portugal with a clear branding image of an ideal place for travelers.

Conclusion

Recognition of the financial importance of the tourism industry in recent decades has led to unprecedented growth in this sector combined with specialization in demand and has significantly increased competition between destinations. At the same time, the era of exponential growth in the creation and sharing of information, combined with the emergence and development of new technologies, has generated an overdose of data that far exceeds the human capacity to process, understand, or even pay attention.

It is in this context of scarce attention, the multiplicity of channels, excessive information, and accelerated technological development that organizations, brands, places, and other advertising entities feel the need to find new ways of connecting with these new consumers, increasingly dispersed, inattentive, unfaithful, and eager for new things and experiences, which the tourism industry cannot be left out of.

Therefore, storytelling emerges as a response to many of these needs. Together with a strategic and holistic vision of communication and business, requiring the integration of all tourism entities and their respective stakeholders to create coherent value and positively consolidate the destination’s image among consumers, this approach can stimulate consumer desires and help visitors not only understand the information but also interact and engage with it.

If place branding is believed to be a way of making places famous (Anholt, 2010), storytelling can be seen as a shortcut to accelerate this process by involving people in a (usually) emotional narrative that touches the human values of the target.

As tourism demand shifts toward transformative, innovative, participatory, and authentic experiences, storytelling as an advertising tool allows the development of more creative, more engaging, and more relational communications. In this way, tourist promotional



communication not only improves the image of the destination and its tourist offers, and has the potential to connect this imagery to the visitor's emotional involvement, creating strong, lasting, and memorable sentimental bonds.

Storytelling reveals itself, from the outset, as a valuable tool for influencing consumer decision-making through communicating the unique attributes of a destination, distinguishing its offer from the competition appealingly and engagingly. On the other hand, it aligns the promotional content with the purpose of the narrative, by considering themes, images, speech, characters, and all other elements with the dissemination channel itself, thereby enhancing the strength of the message. The communication narrative can also be associated with broader destination promotion objectives, including attracting or retaining visitors, improving cultural heritage, and/or developing, for example, sustainable tourism practices.

Although the effectiveness of storytelling always depends on several factors, such as the audience's degree of identification with the narrative, the elements used, the context in which it is produced, or the media in which it is conveyed, its creative and emotional aspects, when strategically transmitted through appropriate channels, they contribute positively to the visitor's involvement, to improve their entire experience, and to increase the notoriety and future memory of the destination. Storytelling can, therefore, play a crucial role in developing tourism promotion, offering countless opportunities for this industry, whether in destinations, products, or experiences, that no operator or destination can afford to waste.

In short, based on what was previously discussed and analyzed, one can state that the use of storytelling in the promotion of tourist destinations is an increasingly used technique whose main objective is to affect the behavioral intentions of tourists but also to generate greater involvement and empathy with visitors, contributing to destination branding, as is the case with the "Can't Skip Portugal" campaign, which contributed not only to increasing the number of visitors to Portugal but also to growing its prominent position in the global tourism sector.

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