

Brand Storytelling – the Future of Destination Marketing and Its Influences on Enhancing Destination Brand Value: a Case of Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic

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Abstract

Brand storytelling is a slowly emerging trend in the destination marketing field. Through storytelling, destinations can communicate their culture, values and attractiveness to the market which may enhance the destination in the eyes and minds of the consumers in terms of brand and reputation. This study aims to determine whether the brand storytelling has the potential to be the primary tool for the destination marketing and its influence on destination brand value focused on the city of Karlovy Vary in the Czech republic. Qualitative methodology will be implemented to make sense of the storytelling's influence on an individual's values, perceptions, attitudes and behaviour which eventually has a certain impact on the destination brand. The findings were obtained through semi-structured interviews with the individuals from the marketing and tourism industry and visitors of Karlovy Vary. It has been discovered that brand storytelling has a successful impact on Karlovy Vary as it has a positive influence on the destination image by building a distinctive and captivating narrative line that showcases the town's unique qualities, history and culture. Furthermore, it enhances the brand value of Karlovy Vary through strong and meaningful narratives through which visitors can emotionally connect and develop loyalty towards the location. On the other hand, it is suggested that more exploration about the limitations and techniques and mechanics of building story narratives is needed, as the lack of knowledge in this regard may cause inappropriate or ineffective use of the story telling tool and its implementation with the consequence of opposite outcomes, for instance a misconception of the destination brand value as the worst case scenario.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background Information

According to Wang and Pizam (2011), destination marketing has been significantly contributing to the growth of the tourism industry on a global scale. Furthermore, it belongs to organisational elements such as continuous increase of population, expansion of business, and economic prosperity combined with social factors like the advanced electronic interconnection and globalisation of cultures (Wang and Pizam, 2011). The significance of destination marketing is

strengthened by four main propositions which are connected to global tourism. First of all, Leiper (1979) stated that the actual place of destination is where most of the features of tourism come from. Secondly, the United Nations World Tourism Organisations (UNWTO, 2011) consider tourism destinations as “the fundamental unit of analysis in tourism”. Thirdly, it was assumed by Morgan et al. (2002) that destinations have become known as the largest brands in the travel industry. And finally, because of the current increasing customer need, expectation, and demand for destination marketing, certain measures are being taken. One

of the main strategies to attract the people is destination branding. According to Almeyda-Ibáñez and George (2017), tourism locations are increasingly using branding to communicate the complexity of the experiences they may anticipate from visitors. Furthermore, according to Yavuz et al. (2016) in the tourism industry, storytelling is a powerful tool for promoting a destination's brand. Emotional messages from good stories are straightly retained in memory (Ciapponi, 2022). Therefore storytelling is able to transmit these multiple messages or destination values into interactive communication channels in a way that will be memorable and interesting to the individual. The author attempts to investigate how storytelling in destination marketing influences the enhancement of destination branding in the Karlovy Vary in the Czech Republic. This city is known for having three of the Great Spa Towns of Europe in it. Its spa treatment attracted many famous people which already contributed heavily to the destination branding.

1.2 Rationale of the study

With attempts to enhance and distinguish destination brands, storytelling is now considered an important aspect of marketing strategy in the tourism sector. Youssef et al. (2018), stated that amid increased expenditures in branding of the destinations since the 1990s, little efforts have been used in investigating the theoretical and operational principles that support destination storytelling initiatives, as well as how marketers evaluate storytelling's performance. According to Keskin et al. (2016), several scholars from various fields have been drawn to storytelling as a fascinating phenomenon. However, a particular type of storytelling technique, such as storytelling enhancing the destination brand values has been hardly documented in the literature. The author believes that this research may clarify and provide better understanding of storytelling as a strategic tool in destination branding of the Czech Republic. Furthermore, the research analysis will assist the local government in clearer and better comprehension of the storytelling as such and therefore, highlight the relevance and necessity for it to be used in the most appropriate and effective way in this particular Czech city. Finally, this study will provide the local tourism authorities with results which will contribute to the development of marketing strategies which would enhance the brand image of the destination and therefore attract tourists in an effective way.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to critically examine storytelling in the context of destination marketing and its role in enhancing the

destination branding. A case study of Karlovy Vary in the Czech Republic.

To achieve the aim, the author would like to divide the objectives as below:

- To investigate the driving forces behind Karlovy Vary's destination marketing success
- To explore the influence of brand storytelling on Karlovy Vary's brand value and lovemarks
- To evaluate the effectiveness of storytelling in defining the destination brand of Karlovy Vary

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, theories related to storytelling and destination branding will be manifested. The role and significance of storytelling is going to be explained by using the model adopted from Piciocchi et al., (2011) about place storytelling in a configuration of region. Followed by the model about the elements of destination branding from Kladou et al., (2017) which explicates the influence of brand elements onto the tourist decision making and the destination branding generally. The author will therefore, clarify the contribution of storytelling to destination branding and thus achieving the aim of the research.

2.2 Theoretical framework

2.2.1 The power of storytelling in destination branding

In tourism and destination marketing, the power of storytelling has been underappreciated (Baker, 2017). Storytelling is used in almost every aspect of life to help people connect with one another and make sense of their surroundings. Listeners are touched by stories in a variety of ways, allowing for an emotional connection (Woodside, 2010 cited in Lund et al., 2018). Supported by Chronis (2005), places are basically storyscapes in which stories can convert otherwise uninteresting locations into appealing tourist destinations; together storytelling could turn the places to be tangible and become unique (Hsu et al. 2009).

Figure 1. Place storytelling in a configuration of regions as LTSS. (Piciocchi et al., 2011).

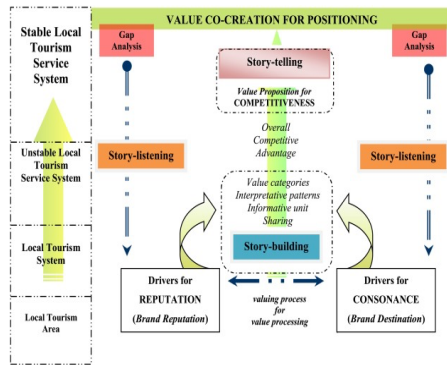


Figure 1 depicts a bottom-up process with a focus to accomplish co-creation of value, this method can be used to identify the drivers and aspects to work on, the dimensions to examine, and the spaces to fill. Storytelling can be a beneficial tool for increasing the significance of a region because of this convergence of views, as well as the circularity and responses of the procedure. Piciocchi et al. (2011), believe that storytelling is a new mode of communication that aligns with a region's image as a system of service. Firstly, a storyline is an example of exceptionally expressive material provided to individuals in a situation where absorbing greater experiences than things is now starting to establish (Lamb, 2008). In reality, storytelling allows places to tell stories that create unique ambience and emotionally engage visitors and potential customers, enhancing their awareness of local belonging and identification. Secondly, stories have a diverse nature wherein their worth is defined by all individuals who interact with them, whether directly or indirectly, and inevitably contribute to determining their interpretation (Grönroos, 2014). This indicates taking into account the existence of local authorities, which have to ensure that all elements share information units and categories of value in order to obtain a common general interpretative model, to be able to communicate uniformly about the place and to keep away from the dissonance within messages. Stakeholders assist the government in regularly reviewing story building in order to satisfy the needs of the audience. That is to say, place storytelling corresponds to the phase when stories are produced, while storylistening relates to the point when stories are consumed, nourishing the cycle of local identity construction for the territorial brand (Kladou et al., 2017).

2.2.2 Destination branding and roles of brand elements

Destination branding is a method of communicating a destination's unique identity by

distinguishing it from its contenders (Morrison et al., 2002). Destination brands can be divided into two parts: identification and differentiation. The definition of "identification" in the branding language is "the explanation of the product's supplier to customers" (Qu et al, 2011). A location as a product is a massive object that is represented by a variety of tangible and intangible aspects, whereas a commodity in principle refers to a physical supply that can be simply adjusted (Florek, 2005). A destination brand distinguishes itself from its opponents not only by its function of identification, but also by the specific meaning and attachment it has for consumers. Anholt et al. (2007) assumed that destination branding is focused on the implementation of branding concepts to places and the adaptation of such ideas to the unique circumstances in which places brand themselves. The most common goal of destination branding is to generate positive connections with the location and set it apart from others (Hanna and Rowley, 2011).

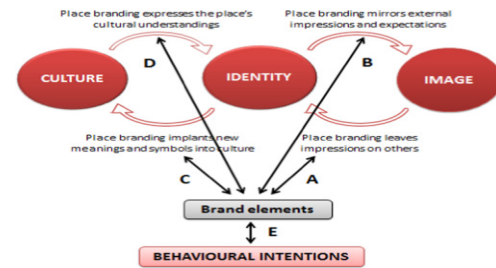


Figure 2. Role of brand elements in destination branding (Kladou et al., 2017)

The model shown in Figure 2, examines the impact of brand features on the branding and behavioural decisions. The brand elements play a role as :

- 1) Indicators for generating memories upon others: Brand elements are important tools in the impressing sub-process, which makes reference to how a brand leaves an imprint on people's minds.
- 2) Identifiers for reflecting others' image: Brand features also aid the reflecting procedure of others' impressions, which relates to how people's perceptions of destination brands are influenced because of what the rest (e.g., their peers) believe.
- 3) Platforms for expressing culture's integrated identity: It is believed that brand components enhance the procedure of reflecting, afterward outsiders' ideas and images impact the core of a destination's identity over time, transforming it into essential components of the destination's cultural comprehension. (Kladou et al., 2017).

4) Instruments for conveying cultural appreciation: Brand aspects are expected to serve as important tools for conveying and communicating the culture of a location. The purpose of the place positioning statement was to determine the potential and acceptability of various brand aspects to represent cultural understandings (Kladou et al., 2017).

5) Influence on the way of behaving intentions: the ability of the brand to affect consumer behaviour is one of the key justifications for all branding initiatives and the expenditure they need. Kotler and Gertner (2002) stated that the image of a country affects consumer's travelling choices, and destination brands are crucial in enticing tourists to explore specific places (Morgan et al., 2002).

2.3 Review of empirical research

2.3.1 Storytelling in destination marketing

In the tourism industry, storytelling has established itself as an important aspect of the communication strategy. According to Youssef et al. (2019), storytelling requires a dynamic exchange between the storyteller, the listener, and the story. Individual stories have as many versions as there are listeners, and both the storyteller and the listener have their own imaginations and deconstructions of the story (Papcunová et al. 2021). The results from the surveys have shown that this notion has already been encountered by 57 percent of visitors. Whereas the phrase "storytelling" was unfamiliar to 43% of tourists. What is more, up to 53% of travellers have already explored a tourist attraction that incorporates some type of storytelling. Another 27% of tourists had never seen this type of campaign before, and 20% couldn't say whether they had seen it in any tourist destination. In tourism, storytelling is very crucial. It allows locations to differentiate themselves from one another, raises visitor interest in the destination, and allows guests to create unique experiences. However, in today's advanced age, visitors' demands have risen significantly, necessitating the adaptation of individual aspects. Although digital storytelling is extensively utilised across the globe to highlight tourist sites, Slovak places, like the Trenčín region, are just now starting to introduce its aspects. The notion of storytelling is reasonably widely recognized among the responders, according to a research survey, and they've already encountered it when exploring several tourist spots.

2.3.2 The Effects of Storytelling on Destination Brand Value, Lovemarks and Relationship Strength in South Korea

Kim (2012), claims that storytelling could pass on the worth of a good or service to buyers and provide a sense of connection in addition to rational qualities like the product's performance and pricing. It may both express the worth of tourism destinations and provide emotional value to visitors. According to Roberts (2006), lovemarks are defined as "love and appreciation for the brand." Since lovemarks can create and build up emotional bonds among brands and clients, tourism organisations should make more efforts to engage emotionally with visitors. The data collection was conducted through an online questionnaire from which the findings were gathered from 259 people who have participated in tourist storytelling in South Korea. The survey requested individuals to answer questions about their experiences with storytelling at a tourist attraction. The group's demographic details regarding gender are listed as follows: 53.3% for males and 46.7% for females. The age distribution of responses is 39.8% are 20-29 years old, 14.7% are 30-39 years old, 19.3% are 40-49 years old, and 26.3% are 50 or older. According to the examination of the impact of tourism storytelling on brand value, originality, interest, and teachability have a statistically major and beneficial effect on brand value. Sensitivity and descriptiveness, on the other hand, are not relevant. However, all of the above mentioned traits had a beneficial and important effect on lovemarks. Finally, the findings indicate that the influence of lovemarks on relationship strength is highly noteworthy. Jo et al. (2022), concluded that based on the storytelling, visitors view the brand value of the place differently. As a result, it is expected that brand value will increase if the distinctive story structure of each local tourist location is carefully developed to draw in attention while also including educational elements. Finally, the study's findings indicate that a destination's lovemarks strengthen the relationship intensity and brand connection. This suggests that as the strength of the relationship grows, the frequency of tourist returns will be greater than in different locations, and powerful bonds will build.

2.3.3 City branding through storytelling

Keskin et al. (2016) examined how cities may use storytelling as a branding strategy and in which way city marketers can construct the core story of their city brand, based on Fog et al. (2005)'s Laboratory model. Branding of a city has evolved from a strategic tool for promoting a city's competitive strength to a broad procedure for marketing the city's history, value of place or natural and historical assets (Zhang and Zhao, 2009). The procedure of obtaining the fundamental storyline of the city embodies four stages. Beginning with scanning of basic

information where the formulation of a positive and powerful city image is the key approach for city branding, it should be based on an exceptional collection of features and characteristics (Zhang and Zhao, 2009). Scanning is later divided into external and internal. In internal scanning city planners must look into what defines the city's characteristics and values. The purpose of a city's external scanning is to determine its global position and prestige, as well as its strengths, flaws, possibilities, and risks. Its primary purpose, however, is to determine the city's image in the eyes of tourists. Second stage comes after obtaining the needed internal and external information where strategists must concentrate on the basis of what contributes to a city's uniqueness (Fog et al., 2005). The key focus of the storyline is to harmonise the city's identification with its outward perception. Third stage is about the formulation of the core story in which a message needs to be conveyed as a base for the core. The following step is to evaluate the amount of conflict included beneath this message. Later on, a combination of cognitive qualities and subjective impressions is used to assess a destination's relative spot (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Taking advantage of such an opportunity is seen as a fantastic way to send out targeted statements about the city as well as its assets to a large number of individuals (Zhang and Zhao, 2009). Last stage is the Acid Test which checks if the city's fundamental story is unique in comparison to other cities. If the branding is capable of providing city characteristics that are unique, appealing and lasting it is considered successful (Kotler and Gertner, 2002). According to the research, the four phases are the basic concepts of a core story, and these aspects impact the mind and heart of the city's target demographic, resulting in the creation of a distinct and unique city brand.

2.4 Conclusion

Storytelling is a major key component in the tourism industry. It is a significant strategic branding tool in destination marketing which has an influence on the enhancement of the destination branding. Storytelling is about attracting tourists to the local place with the help of a story. However, building a destination's core storyline is not simple. To obtain a perfect story that will represent the local place certain stages have to be undergone. These phases involve a proper investigation from local authorities and marketers in order to succeed. The more the story is extraordinary and unique the more the visitors will be engaged and influenced in the decision making about the destination for their travels, getaways, and vacations. Storytelling can be considered as successful once it can convey the

story to the tourist in a clear, unique and attractive way. Furthermore, the principle of storytelling provides the possibility of further studies. Firstly, the suggested models need empirical and experimental exploration since storytelling literature still lacks empirical analysis of the connection between the core story's elements and destination marketing specifically. Secondly, studies are focused solely on the importance of narrative in tourism marketing. The value of a core storyline could be investigated more in the future throughout many contexts.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Aim and objectives

The purpose of this study is to examine storytelling in the context of destination marketing and its role in enhancing the destination branding. A case of Karlovy Vary in the Czech Republic.

To achieve the aim, the author would like to divide the objectives as below:

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- To evaluate the effectiveness of storytelling in defining the destination brand of Karlovy Vary

3.2 Research design

Kuhn (1962) defines a paradigm as a cohesive grouping of key ideas, factors, and issues with matching methodological approaches and instruments. In science term "paradigm" may be utilised in three different contexts: to establish intellectual activity; to describe broad groups of various viewpoints and approaches towards the research of any topic, and to describe broad research paradigms, such as the positivist or interpretive paradigms (Grix, 2010). According to Covey (1989), paradigms that we construct have a significant impact since they shape the way through which we perceive the world. This study fits the interpretivist research paradigm for two reasons, first because of its characteristics which are in accordance with the writer's perspective, and second because the congruence with the type of information sought for in the context of the topic of the research. As described by Hudson and Ozanne (1988), the short definition of ontology is the nature of reality. It is looking for the truth or an explanation to a research problem by showing where certain types of already-existing knowledge could be located. Furthermore, the goal of interpretive research is to comprehend the ideals, expectations, and

interpretations underlying social trends in order to derive emotional understanding of human behaviour or an empathic knowledge of social interactions and experiences (Smith and Heshsius, 1986). Hence, this paradigm will help the researcher to comprehend the influence of brand storytelling on enhancement of the destination brand value. Furthermore, to fully understand the connection between storytelling and brand value, an inductive type of research will be conducted. According to Woo, O'Boyle and Spector (2017), induction is the process of drawing findings from the current observations. As investigations are made, certain patterns are being searched for in the data which is the relationship between characteristics that can be projected from the sample. The researcher has concluded that grounded theory will be utilised as a research design. For the reason that the principal purpose of this study is to find out more about storytelling in the context of destination marketing and its role in enhancing the destination branding. Grounded theory is a methodology that offers step-by-step instructions for obtaining, evaluating, and forming a concept of qualitative information in order to formulate theories. This methodology uses adaptable methods to direct the gathering of qualitative data and especially, its analysis. The grounded theory approach's strength lies in providing logical steps for managing data collection and tools for studying fundamental social and social psychological processes in real - life settings, and strategies for developing intermediate hypotheses.

3.3 Sampling

According to Quinlan (2011), the people, things, or elements that are significant to the research collectively comprise the population. In this case the population consists of people who are directly or indirectly related to brand storytelling or destination marketing itself. Sampling in qualitative research in general is defined as the choice of particular sources from which information is assembled to best answer the study objectives (Gentles et al. 2015). The population is the whole set of examples from which the author's sample is gathered. Therefore, sampling techniques are used to cut down on the number of instances since it is time consuming and there is a lack of resources to analyse the whole population. The researcher has chosen the non-probability sampling method to collect and use the data effectively. Quinlan (2011) stated that the sample in non-probability sampling is chosen to reflect the population, however it is not considered to be statistically characteristic of the overall population. Moreover, choosing specific location, people, or happenings based on the writer's judgement in order to provide critical data

that cannot be gained from other sources is known as judgemental sampling (Maxwell, 1996). According to Vidyapeeth (2019), such a sample would reflect the population of the research the best. Hence the author will use this sampling technique to determine whom to include in this research depending on a range of factors, such as the person's ability and willingness to take part in the study or their level of expertise in the topic of interest. In this research, the participants work in local organisations, institutions which are related to tourism or destination marketing such as local government or travel agencies. Their knowledge and expertise can provide the researcher with necessary operational data which will contribute to the study. Same goes for people indirectly involved in the process who can give an insight into the receiving end of the brand storytelling.

3.4 Data Collection

Gibbs et al. (2007) states that data collection is the procedure of assembling and evaluating precise information from a variety of sources to identify solutions to study objectives, possibilities and trends. It is essential for judging the quality of the research and the applicability of its results. The qualitative method for the data acquisition was chosen based on the aim of the author. According to Gill et al. (2008), in qualitative research, interviews are one of the most often utilised ways of gathering data. A qualitative interview is described as an engagement between a researcher and the interviewee in which the interviewer has a strategic framework of investigation (Babbie and Mouton, 2011). Additionally, according to Seidman (1998), interviewing involves a broad range of techniques. In semi-structured interviews, the respondents are given a lot of freedom in the way they respond despite the researcher having a set of questions or very defined areas to cover (Bryman, 2004). Therefore, their flexibility is what makes them strong. From the grounded theory stance, interviews are conducted to tell a group perspective rather than an individual interviewee's point of view. As claimed by Gubrium et al. (2012), the strength lies in the fact that the probability of the researcher delivering incorrect statements or presenting a flawed answer is decreased by gathering a significant amount and depth of data. Hence the author believes that by using this technique respondents can give detailed, relevant explanations of the questioned topic during the verbal exchange that will, in turn, furnish participant information and detail to develop the grounded theory.

3.5 Data Analysis

It is usual in research to obtain qualitative data. However, awareness of methods for effective and

secure qualitative data analysis procedures is less popular. According to Thomas (2006), numerous academic papers have suggested "a general inductive approach" as a tool for analysing qualitative data. There are two ways which can help the author analyse the data. Firstly, there is the inductive analysis which refers to methodologies that primarily use thorough readings of raw data to generate patterns or a framework through interpretations made by an analyst from the findings (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Deductive analysis, on the other hand, refers to studies of data that aim to determine whether findings are in accordance with existing beliefs or concepts discovered or developed by a researcher. The author has decided to use the inductive analysis method for the reason that the major goal is to allow results to arise from the common and dominant patterns found in raw data, free of the constraints placed on established theories. Furthermore, to get the most appropriate and accurate interpretation and summary of the collected data, a coding frame is going to be implemented. Transcripts obtained from the interviews will be coded therefore enabling the creation of groups, which are afterwards going to be developed into broad themes (Jain and Ogden, 1999). The author chose thematic analysis coding to interpret data which would aid in methodically examining the connections to produce a description of the phenomena. The approach produces relevant themes despite the developing theory (Tesch, 1990).

3.6 Trustworthiness

According to Law (2002), proving the reliability of a study boosts readers' belief that the results are significant. Nonetheless, establishing whether a released qualitative academic journal is trustworthy is a challenging task, especially when there is no universally accepted set of criteria to be followed. To ensure that the research study is as trustworthy as possible three specific practices must be implemented. Beginning with an audit trail which is a documentation of how a qualitative investigation was conducted and how authors reached their results. It gives an overall overview of the steps done during a research activity, backed up by an extensive set of relevant paperwork (Given, 2012). Secondly, there is the member-checking approach which includes individuals in the data analysis procedure by giving possibilities for them to view, discuss, and make contributions to the discoveries which increases validity (Curtin and Fossey, 2007). Lastly, triangulation is the implementation of more than one method to investigate a research problem. The goal is to boost confidence in the findings by confirming a hypothesis with two or more independent findings. The combined data

from two or more rigorous methodologies offers an increased understanding of the outcomes than any methodology might have offered on its own (Heale and Forbes, 2013). The researcher has decided to use all three techniques to ensure that the study provides all necessary steps which will not only assure the audience but also the interviewees regarding the validity of this paper.

3.7 Ethical issues

The research methodology takes into account a wide range of ethical constraints that must be expected. Currently, ethical issues can be seen in matters like personal exposure, transparency, and study trustworthiness (Creswell, 2014). In accordance with the whole process of this research there are few potential ethical issues which need to be addressed. At the beginning of the study the aim of the researcher must be explained to the participants and must be conveyed in order to avoid deceiving the participants (Sarantakos, 2005 cited in Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, according to Creswell (2014), taking away meaningful findings or presenting the findings in a way that benefits the participants or the researcher's preferences is dishonest and has later consequences in the credibility and trustworthiness of the final outcome of the study. This means that the interviewer must disclose the complete set of discoveries, as well as those that might be at odds with the concept. Moreover, privacy is another ethical issue that needs to be considered. To conceal the identities of the interviewees in the study, the researcher will use nicknames or pseudonyms for the participants. Moreover, the research will only be conducted with agreement between the participant and the researcher. Hence, a detailed consent form will be set up and signed by both participant and researcher where all details relating to rights and duties of both sides will be stipulated and agreed on. This consent form will, for instance, assure the possibility that the participant can withdraw from the study at any point and with no reason without legally jeopardising the contract.

3.8 Limitations

Ross and Bibler Zaidi (2019) stated that research limitations are flaws in the research methodology that can affect the study's results and conclusions. The author is required to disclose the full and truthful limits of the study to the readers. In grounded theory designs, as this study envisions, the issue of bias can happen almost throughout the entire research period, but especially during the data collection which is based on an interview with individuals. Even though the participants will be chosen randomly the author might not be able to avoid favouritism or inclination towards

an interviewee due to personality or opinion match. Moreover, the participants consist of people who are working in the field of destination branding therefore they have the expertise which will allow them to contribute more to the research. However contacting them and getting them to participate might be more challenging because it will be time consuming and not all of them might agree to do the interview. For people who will be selected randomly it might be difficult to answer questions due to the lack of knowledge regarding the questioned topic. In addition, the author's own understanding of the topic may be limited as well which could potentially cut off the flow or even jeopardise the final work due to wrongly interpreted answers and codes. As a result, the author is continually looking for audience and expert insights and opinions in order to build a research with a variety of perspectives.

Chapter 4: Discussion

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, the author has come up with various methods and techniques to collect and analyse data such as the semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis coding. In the following chapter the three objectives of this research will be further discussed and answered using the data collected from the secondary research given the fact that no primary research was conducted. The aim of the author is to make sense of the respondents' testimonies while offering a full knowledge of the occurrence under consideration to the readers.

4.2 To investigate the driving forces behind Karlovy Vary's destination marketing success

Destination marketing has made a substantial contribution to the global growth of the tourism industry (Wang and Pizam, 2011). According to Middleton (2009), because of the growing consumer demand and trends, authorities are coming up with different efficient strategies such as destination branding, an essential tool utilised to promote a location and therefore attract more visitors. Furthermore, destination branding aids a tourist place to communicate its identity and values which would strengthen their competitive position in the market (Morrison et al., 2002). However, not all destinations succeed in marketing and branding their travel destinations. It may be for the reason that they do not realise their brand identity or they do not send out a clear message to their audience. In the case of Karlovy Vary, destination marketing can be deemed successful due to its brand identification which is defined as the way a tourist place wants to be perceived (Qu et al., 2011). Karlovy Vary is

known to both international and domestic visitors not only as a popular spa city with focus on well-being and medical tourism but also as a town rich in cultural heritage and events which successfully increases the visitors numbers annually. It is assumed that the second factor is the way the city is trying to communicate with the desired market which is through storytelling. According to Baker (2017), this marketing strategy has been underestimated and not given enough attention because tourism authorities did not notice its power in creating an emotional connection with the consumer. In addition, storytelling increases the significance of the brand by conveying the value of the travel destination (Bassano et al., 2019). Lastly, the involvement of stakeholders may be considered as a contribution to the overall success of this city's marketing. Simon (2001), claims that stakeholder involvement entails all people, organisations, and associations impacted by the growth of tourism participating in deciding the purpose and path of that growth. Karlovy Vary has many collaborations and partnerships with the Czech tourism authorities and agencies from which it gets benefits such as a nation wide platform where it can promote itself while contributing to the country's image at the same time. On the other hand, due to the constant development and change in the tourism industry and its market it is essential to keep monitoring the whole process and reflect on past mistakes or shortcomings. In addition, given the fact that European tourism is significantly competitive, it is recommended that authorities should improve marketing strategies to be able to keep up or adapt to the market. For instance, collecting more data about visitors in terms of age, origin and purpose of visit to make appropriate decisions and provide personalised experiences. Furthermore, with the increasing amount of young people travelling it is advised to implement and invest more in digital marketing as it can reach the audience faster and without extra cost.

4.3 To explore the influence of brand storytelling on Karlovy Vary's brand value and lovemarks

A personalised and unique travel attraction narrative strengthens the location's perceived worth. Jo et al. (2022) claims that it has the potential to represent the significance of tourism places and deliver a sense of connection to travellers. Furthermore, Kim (2012) believes that brand storytelling provides the visitor with the deeper reasoning and meaning behind a merchandise and service which then binds the consumer to the destination. Therefore, it is assumed that the overall visitor satisfaction will be positive, eventually loyalty will be created and thus increase the percentage of return. What is more, brand storytelling can influence a

destination's lovemark as well. Lovemark is interpreted as a visitor's respect and admiration towards the travel location (Robert, 2006). It is expected that the stronger the lovemark is the bigger the impact on the local tourism will be. In the case of Karlovy Vary, its competitive position may be boosted therefore it will not be influenced by its competitors as much. In addition, the city's brand durability might not be impacted by external issues like controversies or recessions in the economy as the loyal travellers would continue visiting. Stories increase the city's brand value which may lead to an increased desire to visit one or few more times and potentially cause a sudden visitor influx. Businesses will begin raising the price for their products and services which would then have a positive impact on the local economy. It is assumed that tourists would still be willing to pay because of the respect and emotional attachment towards the location. Given these assumptions above it can be derived that storytelling is more likely to have a long-term effect on Karlovy Vary's brand worth and image for the reason that a positive and strong psychological association can last for a long time, preserving the town's tourism appeal. Nevertheless, too much storytelling can lead to an overload which can overwhelm visitors and decrease the effect of personal experiences. Putting too much emphasis may result in inconsistency and a shortage of clarification in the brand's reputation which can lead to overall misunderstanding. The author advises that the local authorities should frequently make sure that the narratives do not overlap and correspond with the city's values and goals through evaluations. Combining it with the market's needs is essential as it can potentially attract different segments and offer the latest trending services and products.

4.4 To evaluate the effectiveness of storytelling in defining the destination brand of Karlovy Vary

Establishing a destination brand of a city is not simple as it requires many thorough steps and decision makings. Storytelling plays a key role in shaping a city's destination brand. That is why the more it is customised to the location's unique traits and aspiration the higher chance of effectiveness (McLellan, 2002). As mentioned above Karlovy Vary is known for being a spa town with mineral springs with many stories about its healing capabilities which not only attracted royalty but also other influential figures in the past. Furthermore, the city's historical and cultural presence was also boosted through narratives about the local legends or real past events surrounding specific historical buildings or places. What is more, marketing stories about the town's nature, relaxation and escape from daily routines have made Karlovy Vary into a soothing

and peaceful destination. Given the three examples mentioned above it can be derived that the city has a lot to offer from history, recreation, nature to entertainment. It is assumed that the tourism authorities are aware of the town's unique selling points and that they are promoting all of them through storytelling. Therefore, the storytelling strategy used by Karlovy Vary is considered highly effective due to the reasons that it successfully created an exclusive destination identity by highlighting a variety of the products and services that the town has to offer. Aside from that, the city's image was enhanced by stories emotionally connecting with the consumers and which may have eventually provided the initially wanted personalised experience. However, like any other famous city with an exceptional and successful marketing strategy, there may be a high chance of mass tourism which would negatively influence the town culturally and environmentally given the fact that the town is newly trying to adapt sustainable practices. It is recommended that the local authorities come up with specific measures to cope with the over tourism such as avoiding promoting already known attractions like the film festivals and instead encourage tourists to visit less known places in the city especially during the high season period and promote evenly throughout the whole year.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, after discussing and evaluating the objectives, it can be derived that brand storytelling plays a major role in destination marketing in Karlovy Vary and that it efficiently and successfully reaches the audience with its unique and meaningful stories. As a marketing strategy it promotes most of the city's attractions and services in a proper manner without overlapping or lacking attractiveness. The local authorities are aware of the city's strengths and unique selling points as well as the objectives they want to reach therefore it is easier to convey the marketing message to the potential visitors in an effective way. In spite of that it is still advisable to keep monitoring the current situation and movement in the tourism industry and customer's demands in order to keep up with the competition and maintain its competitive advantageous position.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Finally, throughout the entire study, much valuable information explaining the relation between brand storytelling with destination marketing and branding has been found and will be further explained. It has been discovered that it is essential to firstly understand the value and strength of the destination to be able to properly

brand it. In the case of Karlovy Vary, the local authorities are aware of the destination brand identity and its advantages, therefore they could build an appropriate story and brand image. Secondly, it is essential to choose a suitable marketing tool which can reach a wide audience in a short period of time. Through storytelling strategy Karlovy Vary paints itself as a healing spa town with a rich historical culture while being the host for the international film festival therefore providing entertainment as well. However, involving the stakeholders is significant as well for the marketing to be stronger. As they can provide a wider platform for promotion and evaluation and insight of the whole process as well. Karlovy Vary has many collaborations with Czech tourism organisations both public and private therefore the city is being promoted successfully internationally and domestically. Furthermore, other than conveying a destination's story, brand storytelling also boosts the existing brand value of Karlovy Vary or even creates an additional one. For the reason that it can create an emotional bond where the visitor can unite with the local culture, leaving a long lasting impression which could form loyalty and thus consumers will be motivated to visit other attractions and invest their time and money. Moreover, these travellers are more likely to come and support the city even if its going through a challenging period such as a scandal or Covid-19. All the points mentioned above prove that the brand storytelling is a key player in Karlovy Vary's destination marketing strategy. What is more, it heavily contributes to the destination brand value and overall image of the city. Through brand storytelling, Karlovy Vary is known not only as a place which provides typical products and services but also personalised experiences which are achieved through emotional bonding between the visitor and the city.

There have been many studies done with the topic of storytelling and destination branding however, little to none has been made with connection to the Czech Republic or Karlovy Vary. Therefore, the author encourages the future researchers to be patient and flexible with the already existing studies. What is more, theories and models related to storytelling may seem simple and easy to understand however as time goes it may have additional changes. Therefore, the scholars have to properly comprehend the core function of storytelling before data collection. Furthermore, the author has decided to conduct interviews with both people from the tourism and marketing sectors and with ordinary individuals to get point of view from both sides. Nonetheless, it is recommended that the future researchers focus only on one group of people to get more accurate results and avoid disorganisation. For instance, investigating the

topic using the group of individuals from the field can provide better understanding of the whole process and reasoning behind certain actions and whether they succeeded or failed. Whereas collaborating with the locals or tourists who do not have much knowledge about the topic can give a deeper insight about how they perceive the storytelling procedure and whether it really did have any affect on their decision making process. In addition, this study can contribute to the growth of academic knowledge about destination branding in relation with storytelling. For example, it can strengthen the already existing theories and models about tourism, marketing and branding by considering storytelling as the crucial element instead of it being utilised only as a minor tool. It has been noticed that there are certain gaps in the models about the correlation between storytelling, destination marketing and tourism in terms of the initial purpose of the construction of the narrative, its progress and final impact on the industry and the decision making process of the visitors. In reference to story building, more research should be done on the potential risks of assembling it in an incorrect way instead of only showing ideal ways of the construction. For instance, carelessness and ignorance can lead to cross-cultural conflicts as the campaign story might offend other nations due to lack of research and preparation. Therefore, future academics can further explore these above-mentioned points to deepen their understanding about the core function of brand storytelling and its influence on destination marketing, branding and emotional impact it has on the visitors which would then lead to certain consumer behaviour.

¹ For instance, numerous nations, countries, and cities across the world believe that sponsoring an organisation which promotes tourism locations such as the Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) will help them advertise the travel destination (Middleton et al., 2009 cited in Soteriades, 2012).

² Stories have been utilised as a source of entertainment, engagement, instruction, and communication since the initial people still sat around a fire and told their hunting adventures.

³ The tourist will be emotionally engaged if the story is expanded and incorporated into the events, services, and goods.

⁴ Major events such as food and film festivals are also being held there which attracts many domestic and international tourists annually.

⁵ Simmons (2011) stated, by telling a story, people are more likely to pay attention and stay longer in their memories.

⁶ Hence, Gunelius (2013), assumed that brands only make differentiation to set themselves apart, by telling true stories about compelling characters who are based in the product's actuality.

⁷ "Stories speak to both elements of the human mind — its reason and its emotion," McLellan says in this regard. [...] tales disclose patterns and expose significant information that might be overlooked and untended" (McLellan, 2002).

⁸ What is more, this perspective postulates a strong coherence within the LTSS therefore, a search for internal consonance must be done.

⁹ This allows all elements to work together to create a common location storyline.

¹⁰ Aaker, (1996); Konecnik and Go (2008), assumed that consumers should make a connection with a certain brand built on the perceived brand identity by creating a value proposition that either includes benefits or establishes trust for that brand.

¹¹ Baker (2007) believes that in general, tourism locations place a premium on points of parity, such as high-quality lodging, excellent food establishments, and/or well-designed constructed public areas.

¹² The symbolic parts of the brand (i.e. the name, logo, and slogan) are said to be able to leave their imprints on people's impressions of the branded location.

¹³ Furthermore, in the context of an organisation, a link has been shown within brand features and reputation characteristics (visibility, distinctiveness, authenticity, transparency, and consistency) (Bosch et al., 2005).

¹⁴ It should be noted that, looking through Hatch and Schultz (2002) 'full stakeholder' point of view, visitors are considered as a significant part of the destination structure and can be thought of as elements of the location's heritage.

¹⁵ As a result, it is inferred that brand characteristics have a part in this and impact behavioural intentions to a certain level.

¹⁶ The components of the story that the listener remembers are modified by his own experiences, judgments, and ideas.

¹⁷ Traditional storytelling, which we are familiar with via tour guides' interpretations or theatre scenes, has long been used in tourism.

¹⁸ Furthermore, Bassano et al. (2019), stated that storytelling can be applied as a marketing technique to draw travellers to specific locations.

¹⁹ To help participants comprehend the tourism narrative, both the definition and instances were provided at the start of the inquiry.

²⁰ Such as historical, physical, socio-cultural, demographic, economical, and political aspects.

²¹ It concerns the city's vision, mission and values, key historical events and the locals' stories.

²² In this situation, marketers may decide sectors that should be focused on in upcoming communication to act the city's identity and image together by extracting essential data from internal and external information.

²³ According to Kavaratzis (2004), a conflict is not necessarily negative, but instead a driver for creating a unique brand.

²⁴ Large events, in particular, may have a significant impact on branding a city due to its long-term interest and unforgettable experience (e.g. Milan fashion week and Cannes Film Festival).

²⁵ Ontology thereby primarily addresses the phenomenon in the context of the nature of its existence.

²⁶ The phrase "grounded theory" refers to the idea that a theory must be created through a methodical examination of empirical data (Smelser, 2001).

²⁷ It is unlikely that the writer will be able to gather information from every occurrence in order to address the study questions.

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