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Analysing Cultural Values in Heritage Promotion by DMO Websites. A Methodological Proposal

Heritage is "culture and landscape that are cared for by the community and passed on to the future to serve people's need for a sense of identity and belonging" (Merriman, 1991, p. 8). For its uniqueness and rootedness, it represents one of the most important resources destination stakeholders can offer to domestic or international visitors. While both researchers and practitioners acknowledge the relevance of accounting for culture-bound preferences in online communication, there is little research on how heritage is communicated across cultures. Contributing to the body of knowledge, this research note aims at laying the basis for a quantitative study analysing cultural values in heritage promotion by Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) websites from two culturally distant countries: Portugal and the Netherlands. A methodology for data collection and analysis is proposed. Finally, future contributions and implications are also discussed.

Key words: cultural values, heritage, destination marketing organisations

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Introduction

Given the multifaceted relevance of heritage for the local community as well as for tourists, the European Commission (2018) has designated 2018 as the European Year of Cultural Heritage. Heritage is described by Merriman (1991) as "culture and landscape that are cared for by the community and passed on to the future to serve people's need for a sense of identity and belonging" (p. 8). Within its spectrum, it is possible to distinguish between intangible heritage, like practices and representations, and tangible heritage, like monuments and sites (Ahmad, 2006). Heritage uniqueness and rootedness in the territory make it not only an ambassador of local culture (Timothy & Boyd, 2003), but also one of the most important resources for European tourism destinations (Giraud-Labalte, et al., 2015). While both researchers and practitioners acknowledge the relevance of accounting for culture-bound preferences to increase users' perceived quality of destination websites (Mele & Cantoni, 2017), more research is needed to analyse how heritage is promoted across cultures (Mele, De Ascaniis, & Cantoni, 2015). Contributing to the body of knowledge, this research note proposes a methodology for a future quantitative study on the analysis of cultural values in heritage promotion by DMO websites. Hypotheses and a theoretical framework are proposed following Hofstede's et al. (2010) and Hall's (1976) cultural theories. For data collection, this study suggests to content-analyse texts and images contained in heritage/culture sections in DMO websites from two culturally distant countries: Portugal and the Netherlands.

Research background

Heritage is described by Merriman (1991) as "culture and landscape that are cared for by the community and passed on to the future to serve people's need for a sense of identity and belonging" (p. 8). International organizations like UNESCO and ICOMOS have defined its scope as spanning from intangible to tangible heritage. The first includes representations and

177

artifacts that characterize the culture of communities and groups. Whereas, tangible heritage comprises monuments and natural properties (Ahmad, 2006). Acknowledging their value, heritage promotion and revival aims at bringing heritage to *life* by creating connections with the audience, offering them the opportunity for personal development and self-expression. This also includes leveraging on web 2.0 features to improve prospects' online experience (Egberts, 2014).

With the term "culturability", Barber and Badre (1998) describe the influence of culture on the usability of websites displaying inevitably the "cultural markers" of their society: culture-bound characteristics that affect the online experience of international users. At this regard, research shows that destination marketers are aware of this issue and they tackle it by integrating cultural adaptation activities – also called "localization" (LISA, 2007) – in their online communication strategies (Mele & Cantoni, 2017). Providing the first measurement tool, research by Singh et al. (2003) operationalizes Hofstede's et al. (2010) and Hall's (1976) cultural dimensions to allow researchers as well as practitioners to examine the cultural values expressed by companies' websites in key markets. A subsequent study by Tigre Moura et al. (2014) proposes an adaptation of the same framework for destination websites, which is then further adapted by Mele and Lobinger (*Submitted*) for the analysis of cultural values in tourism visual communication.

Cultural values consist of "broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others" (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p. 9) and they are measured at the national level along cultural dimensions: constructs where countries are virtually positioned according to their culture-bound preferences. For the scope of this research, three of them are outlined here from a tourism perspective. *Collectivism vs Individualism* (COL/IND), one of the most used in marketing and consumer behaviour (Zhang & Nelson, 2016), describes the extent to which multimedia contents reflect the relevance of collective (tourists as "we") or individual (tourists

as "I") experiences when visiting a destination (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014). Positively correlated with COL (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), *Power Distance* (PD) describes relevance of celebrity-related contents and enhancement of social status for tourism promotion (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014). In addition to these dimensions, researchers identify *High Context vs Low Context* (HC-LC) dimension as a highly useful concept in cross-cultural communication (Bae, 2017) and it is theoretically related to COL-IND, namely (Würtz, 2005): collectivist and individualist cultures prefer HC and LC communication respectively. Elaborated by Hall (1976), this construct illustrates the importance of intangible aspects of products or services, like harmony and relationships (HC communication), versus the emphasis on quality- or price-related advantages (LC communication) (Frederick & Gan, 2015). Despite the recognized importance of heritage for destinations and the designation of 2018 as European Year of Cultural Heritage (European Commission, 2018), more research is needed regarding the analysis of heritage online promotion across different cultures (Mele, De Ascaniis, & Cantoni, 2015).

Methodology

To examine heritage promotion across cultures, this research note suggests to content-analyse images and texts in sections dedicated to culture/heritage attractions in local, regional and national DMO websites from Portugal and the Netherlands. These two are among the most collectivist and individualist countries respectively (relative distance) (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010) that have joined Europa Nostra (2018), the leading heritage organization in Europe with 49 state members. Following Hofstede et al. (2010), the Netherlands appears among the four most IND countries (cultural score = 80), with a relatively low score on PD (cultural score = 38). Whereas, Portugal is closer to the opposite COL pole (cultural score = 27) and scores higher on PD (cultural score = 63). In addition, the Netherlands and Portugal

represent LC and HC cultures respectively (van Everdingen & Waarts, 2003). Given their relative distance on these dimensions, it is hypothesized that such differences will be reflected by the degree of presence of specific cultural values in heritage/culture sections in Dutch and Portuguese DMO websites respectively.

The sample of the study will consist of 17 Dutch and 21 Portuguese DMO websites at the national, regional, and city level: sections dedicated to culture/heritage in the local languages will be analysed. Their selection has been guided by the national tourism websites of the Netherlands (NBTC Holland Marketing, n.d.) and Portugal (Turismo de Portugal, 2013), which promote a list of Dutch provinces, Portuguese regions and cities for tourists. To test the hypotheses, this study envisages a content analysis of texts and images in culture/heritage sections of the sampled websites. Starting from the assumption that the most important heritage attractions will be displayed in menu options dedicated to culture/heritage, the object of research does not include possible references from other sections. This delimitation allows the study to focus exclusively on how the most important intangible/tangible heritage (from a supply viewpoint) is promoted by DMO websites in the local-language version. Two coders will perform the content analysis, using a framework based on those developed by Tigre Moura et al. (2014) and Mele and Lobinger (*Submitted*). This will be composed by three cultural dimensions (see above) operationalized in cultural categories. The analysis of heritage images will be conducted by accounting also for three *Mise en Scène* (*layout*) categories adapted from Mele and Lobinger (*Submitted*): angle (from "low level" to "bird eye"), scale (from "extremely long" to "close up"), and composition (from "no person" to ">4"). For every picture, the presence of cultural categories will be evaluated on a 5-point scale, ranging from "not at all depicted" to "extremely depicted." Each image can express multiple cultural categories, which will be coded accordingly. Following Barthes (2001), texts embedded in pictures will be treated as part of visual communication and coded accordingly. The categories belonging to the

representational dimension of *Mise en Scène* will be reported with nominal variables. As for visual content, each coding unit (i.e. a sentence or a group of sentences) in the textual content analysis can contain multiple categories. Moreover, also here the presence of cultural categories will be evaluated on a 5-point scale (see above). The free statistical software Jamovi (2018) will be used to report the presence of cultural values within all sampled images and texts. As done by Tigre Moura et al. (2014), a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) will be employed to examine differences between the Netherlands and Portugal on the selected categories for what regards images and texts. Two-way ANOVAs will be used to check for significant differences on each of them.

Conclusion and discussion

This research note outlines a methodological proposal to analyse *what* and *how* cultural values are expressed in heritage promotion by Dutch and Portuguese DMO websites, using COL-IND, PD, and HC-LC dimensions – widely used constructs in cross-cultural communication and marketing research – and *Mise en Scène* (*layout*) categories. The main theoretical contributions of the future study include findings on how heritage attractions are promoted by culturally distant countries and an empirically validated framework for their analysis. From a managerial viewpoint, this research will provide destination marketers with insights on cultural preferences to adapt heritage tourism promotion; and with a useful model for the analysis and optimization (from a cultural viewpoint) of heritage-related contents in DMO websites dedicated to international key markets.

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