



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Destination Marketing & Management

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jdmm

Research Paper

An exploratory multimodal discourse analysis of dark tourism websites: Communicating issues around contested sites

Jayne Krisjanous

School of Marketing and International Business, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 10 February 2016

Received in revised form

20 June 2016

Accepted 26 July 2016

Keywords:

Dark tourism websites

Contested places

Tourist consumer behavior

Multimodal discourse analysis

ABSTRACT

Dark tourism is increasing in popularity world-wide. For many of these ventures, the tourist experience on offer provides an authentic link back to a site or heritage that is contested. Dark tourism ventures' websites are an important means to communicate with target markets. To date, there is little exant literature on how dark tourism websites are constructed so that the pre-experience tourist obtains information and shapes expectations, so that once on site an authentic experience is gained and the contested elements of the site and its heritage understood. This study evaluates 25 dark tourism websites from several countries, ranging from the darker offerings, such as holocaust museums and battlefields, to lighter options, such as ghost tours or curated museums or performances of the macabre. To do this, a multimodal discourse analysis approach is used. Findings reveal that dark tourism websites are a deep reservoir of multimodal meaning. Discussion debates the role of the website in creating engagement with the visitor pre-visit, thus increasing their motivation to visit, informing, shaping expectations and signaling behavior appropriate for the site. This is important particularly insofar as many of these sites offer little in the way of usual tourism structures and cues.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Dark tourism is by no means a new phenomenon. For centuries, the idea has been a definitive reason for travel within many cultures and groups, with increasing popularity of the practice observed in recent years (Hartmann, 2014; Logan & Reeves, 2008; Stone & Sharpley, 2008). Today, dark tourism locations make up numerous regional and/or national tourism offerings around the world, with few countries exempt from human tragedy over time. Indeed, this type of travel to 'dark places' provides much welcome and significant tourism revenue and traffic for providers, as aptly put by Dann and Seaton (2001) when describing the relationship between southern USA's past history of slavery and its tourism: 'whatever the notoriety of the former, increasingly it is bestowing marked benefits on the latter' (p. 2).

In the wider domains of heritage and cultural tourism, reference has been made by several authors to the contested nature of tourist sites. For example, safety of tourists can be an ongoing issue where the desire to keep a local tourism industry buoyant is constantly under threat due to political volatility or violent disturbances (Buda, 2015). In addition, problems that arise with regard to tourist numbers and the need to balance the attraction of

tourist revenue against protection and preservation of sites of national or global significance are causing increasing problems worldwide due to the fragility of their natural or built landscapes, historical, cultural and/or religious importance (McKercher, Weber, & du Cros, 2008; Reeves & Long, 2011). In the case of Luang Prabang, as a World Heritage Site, significant pressure is felt due to the influx of tourists into the region (Billard, 2007; Reeves & Long, 2011). Likewise, dissonant historical perspectives or cultural differences associated with a site can cause tensions between interested stakeholders or parties, such as tourism operators, governments and indigenous keepers of the land (McKercher et al., 2008). Stakeholder issues leading to conflict include the 'meaning' of the land; emotional impacts and legacies of local history; stakeholder or keeper beliefs about the natural landscape and corresponding rituals or restrictions associated with the sites; and the nature of tourist consumer behavior. Any one of these may cause tensions leading to problems over issues such as access and gateways for tourists. McKercher et al. (2008) suggest that although academic research in this area amounting to some 30 or more years is most often grounded in conflict theory, goal incompatibility and value clash, stakeholder conflict may not be the most appropriate framework and that several relationship styles exist that give rise to difficulty.

In regard to indigenous beliefs and sacred meanings attached to land, Digance (2003) suggests 'the natural landscape,

E-mail address: Jayne.Krisjanous@vuw.ac.nz<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2016.07.005>

2212-571X/© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

particularly mountains, is an important locus for sacred sites, including Schama's (1995) concept of landscape's cultural memory and Tuan's concept of geopiety (Knowles, 1992)' (p. 145). Uluru (also known as Ayers Rock) in Australia has been a major tourist attraction for non-indigenous travelers since the time of European settlement. However, divergent social and cultural beliefs and value sets between stakeholders give rise to contest. Visitors climbing the rock walk through sacred sites of the Aboriginal people, in particular 'dreamtime paths', has led to specific requests that the site not be climbed (McKercher et al., 2008). Likewise, New Zealand Maori beliefs hold the head as sacred. This extends to mountains, where being seen as ancestral beings, climbing to the top (or head) is *tapu* or forbidden. This causes conflict between Maori and the numerous local and international tourists wishing to climb as part of their tourist experience (Wilkinson, 2016). Dark tourism ventures are not immune to issues outlined here, as many tourist experiences encompass an authentic link back to a site or heritage that is contested or has a controversial history (Isaac, 2015), whether from past eras or of more contemporary origin. In addition, the inherent fragility of many dark tourism sites means that conflicting interests of stakeholders or threats borne from risks to the landscape (natural and built) and sustainability are at play.

For a dark tourism venture, a website is one medium through which some of the complexities around the dark tourism experience generated from contested interests over landscape or history can be addressed to some degree. Potential negative effects of some of the factors that give rise to issues may well be mitigated or reduced through well-informed and positively attuned tourists pre-visit. To do this, effective multi-sensory communication through a venture's website, especially targeting consumers during the planning stages of their visit, is a good first step. By communicating the positioning of the site or experience and effectively managing expectations pre-visit, potential visitors can have an understanding of the nature of the site and what it offers, boundaries and restrictions around access can be signaled, and behavioral norms and etiquette shaped. In addition, visitors can arrive onsite appropriately prepared for any physical difficulties that might be encountered at the site (e.g. queues, rough terrain or weather) or en-route if the experience is mobile such as a walking tour (e.g. reduced visibility or traffic).

Whilst there have been several studies on the use of Web 2.0 in tourism (e.g. Hallet & Kaplan-Weinger, 2010; Ip, Law, & Lee, 2011), there is a relative lack of research on the nature of websites in dark tourism, particularly from the perspective of how a venture communicates these spaces as contested and how resources are used to construct and communicate meaning. Although Heuermann and Chhabra (2014) conducted a study on dark tourism websites this is limited to sites within the US and only from the perspective of authenticity. Therefore, to address a gap in the literature, this exploratory study evaluates a range of dark tourism websites to determine the ways in which they are constructed. A key objective of the study is to identify and understand the nature of contest as it is portrayed on a website through interaction and assemblage of multimodalities and their implicit semiotic meanings that influence attitude formation and signal expectations of appropriate behavior during the planning stages of the tourist experience and before physical arrival at the venture's site. To aid interpretation, a multimodal discourse and social semiotic (Kress, 2009) lens is applied as the underlying conceptualization. Evaluation is made of a sample of websites drawn from various countries and regions and ranging from the darker offerings such as holocaust museums and battlefields, to lighter orientations such as ghost tours or curated museums or performances of the macabre.

This paper is arranged as follows. In the background section, the conceptual framework used for the study is described. Next

the foundation supporting the relationship between contested spaces and dark tourism ventures drawn from the literature review is provided. This section incorporates discussion of the inherent nature of the dark tourism product along with perspective on the customer and interaction with dark tourism that impinges on how issues of contest might be played out. In addition the use of Web 2.0 utilities to communicate the nature of dark tourism offerings is discussed as part of study background. Next the method section is described: identification of websites for data capture and the multimodal analysis framework applied (and also in which findings are incorporated into). To conclude, managerial recommendations, limitations and suggestions for future research are given. This study makes a contribution in two ways. First, it investigates how dark tourism websites deal with the potentially vast array of issues of contest on websites. Second, it makes a small step forward to apply a multimodal analysis lens over dark tourism websites, thus acknowledging the complex context and interplay of semiotic resources that can exist in the relative newness of contemporary multimedia genres.

2. Background

2.1. Conceptual framework

Multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) is a relatively new set of concepts and approaches that extend the study of language to combine interpretation of the construction of meaning with the other phenomena that materialise within a communication structure, such as image, music, gesture, symbols (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, 1996; O'Halloran, 2011; O'Toole, 2010) and, increasingly, multimodal analysis annotation (O'Halloran, 2009, 2011). Within the context of MDA, these tools are described as sensory modes or modalities: the range of meaning-making phenomena that draw together as inter-related systems and structures (Halliday, 2004) and more than they would realize alone (Lemke, 1998).

The origins of MDA are found in and built upon the earlier works of authors such as Halliday's (1978) semiotic-systemic language theory and O'Toole (1994) as an early contributor to understanding how semiotic resources integrate to create meaning. Today the increasing application of social semiotic resources — essentially different to language yet critical in conveying meaning — give rise to a view from authors such as Machin (2007) and O'Halloran (2011) that interpretation based on linguistic models alone is inappropriate in many situations. Furthermore, the increasing presence of interactive digital technologies such as websites expands the significance of understanding how each modality creates semiotic meaning singularly and together as a 'multiplicative' system within the social context or reality in which they are used (Bateman, 2011; Djonov, Knox & Zhao, 2015; Halliday, 2004; Kress, 2009).

Clarity around some issues on the use of MDA at this stage remains incomplete. For example, how the multimedia phenomena should be ranked and prioritized in terms of access and integration is unresolved (Bateman, 2008; Martinec, 2005; O'Halloran, 2011). Furthermore the 'multiplication of meaning' can lead to a complex and confusing 'multidimensional semantic space', where meanings may be compressed or divergent. (O'Halloran, 2011). Nevertheless, MDA has good utility as an approach to underpin this work and as a lens through which to understand meaning transmitted to audiences from dark tourism operators via their websites. A multimodal discourse analysis approach used to examine the discourse of contest within dark tourism websites also acknowledges that confronting such issues, creating appropriate tourist attitudes, guiding behavior and managing

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5108316>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5108316>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)