FROM CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE TO A WHALE RIDER: EXPLORING TRADITIONAL TALES IN THE DIGITAL PROMOTION OF NEW ZEALAND

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ABSTRACT

The paper applied a content analysis method to examine how myths and legends have been employed by the promotional organization in portraying New Zealand on the official tourism website. The assessment of the website uncovered six main legends which have been presented in the promotion of New Zealand to potential tourists. These traditional tales have been incorporated into the website chiefly as part of Maori heritage attributes in which purakau (the Maori term for legends) represents among crucial aspects in understanding their worldviews and cultural identities. Legends narrating fishing voyages involving demi gods offers a mythological explanation of the origin of the geological formation of islands of New Zealand were presented more than once on the website. Among the legends presented to readers on the websites encompass stories of Tane Mahuta, which depicts the tale of the sky father, the earth mother, and the creation of the world of light that humans live in today. Another unique legend, Paikea the whale rider, is featured as part of the description of a whale-watching attraction in Kaikoura, Christchurch. The overall analysis uncovered that legendary tales are incorporated into the website as the part historical origin of Maori people and in the promotion of several tourist attractions in New Zealand. From a tourism perspective, the representation of these tales enhances the appeal of destinations and make them stand out to visitors. The inclusion of the purakau offers tourists a deeper understanding of the cultural heritage of this country. Furthermore, Maori worldviews on the creation of the universe and formation of the natural environment are transpired. It is noticeable through these legends that Maori people strongly respect their ancestors and highly appreciated natural resources. Finally, the emphasis on environmental conservation and sustainability as ingrained in the tales further supported the overall promotional tagline of 100% Pure New Zealand and the inclusion of Tiaki Promise a commitment to care for New Zealand, for now, and for future generations on the official tourism website.

KEYWORDS: Myths, legends, New Zealand, tourism promotion, content analysis

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

This paper aims to examine the utilization of traditional tales in the digital promotion of New Zealand or Aotearoa to tourists. Previous studies suggested that incorporating legendary stories has significant roles in tourist destinations, such as enhancing its marketing value, exhibiting exotic features, and promoting environmental sustainability.

Currently, numerous intangible heritage resources have been included in the promotion of New Zealand to potential tourists, and these attractions include the myths and legends of the Maori people. As mentioned in the existing literature, there are abundant myths and legends recounting stories of the “fishing-up” and “throwing-down” in the area of the Pacific Islands, including in New Zealand. Two of

the main tales associated with fishing are the stories of Maui fishing up New Zealand and Kupe, who encountered New Zealand during his voyage to search for a fish (Nunn 2003; 2021).

It is acknowledged that a few past studies (e.g., Hall, Mitchell & Keelan, 1992) have touched on topics related to mythology as part of heritage tourism and environmental tourism development and products in New Zealand. Nonetheless, this paper aims to fill in the gap by investigating how the official tourism organisation of New Zealand has presented myths and legends in the digital promotion of this country.

Specifically, it concentrates on the types of traditional tales which have been selected to be included on the current website and how these stories have been presented to potential tourists.

METHODOLOGY

A content analysis method was adopted to analyze how myths and legends have been presented in marketing New Zealand to the international market via its official website. This method was selected as the assessment carried out in the paper involved examining the content of one type of promotional tool, a tourism website created by Tourism New Zealand.

The process of content analysis has involved undertaking several basic steps. The initial step is the selection of documents to be examined based on the research question formulated. In the context of this paper, the website of Tourism New Zealand has been chosen. The assessment of a tourism website rather than other modes of promotional tools is considered appropriate for the examination carried out in this paper, as many countries and destinations have developed tourism websites for their national marketing purposes. Therefore, it is timely to perform an analysis based on content presented on the tourism website, including research focusing on the portrayal of myths and legends in the area of destination marketing.

The second step was to determine the suitable unit of analysis to be analyzed in which the narrative of myths and legends presented on the website was selected. These tales can be spotted in the promotional material by inclusion of narratives with plots involving supernatural beings and magical occurrences or events that happened in the distant past. The next stage in the assessment process involved the action of identifying how many traditional stories have directly manifested on the website. Then, the type of tales selected to be presented on the website was determined. This is followed by further evaluation of the latent contents of the tales based on the selection of the stories and values embedded in the narratives presented.

Lastly, the way these stories have been projected on the website from the perspective of tourism was also assessed. On the whole, the narratives of myths and legends projected on the website were examined from both manifest and latent contents.

FINDINGS

Based on content analysis on the tourism website of Tourism New Zealand, six legends have been featured in its digital tourism promotion. These traditional tales have appeared in the descriptions of background information such as historical origin, cultural heritage resources and promotion of tourist destinations.

One of the legends, the fishing journey of Maui, the demi-god appeared more than once on the website. This well-known legend has been incorporated to supply information to potential tourists on the geological origin of islands of New Zealand from Maori traditional beliefs. This legend is also included in the description of Mount Hikurangi. As a country surrounded by sea, fish and fishing activity are crucial to the seafaring communities of New Zealand in the past. Therefore, it is not surprising that fishing and fish

are parts of the legends found in New Zealand. Another legend describing the fishing adventure of Aoroki and his brothers is included as part of the promotion of Mount Cook situated on the South Island.

The story associated with Tane Mahuta is another prime legendary tale incorporated into the website as part of the description of Waipoua Forest located in the Northland region. Tane Mahuta tale provides an explanation for the creation of the universe or the world of light, which involved the earth mother, the sky father and their offspring, such as the Tane Mahuta, the God of the Forest.

This legend offers some understanding to potential tourists and outsiders of the connection between Maori with their past ancestors and various natural resources. Their strong commitment to environmental protection and sustainability are justified through this legend. Three other legends presented on the website are the tales of Hinemoa and Tutanekai, the New Zealand version of Romeo and Juliet, Paikea the Whale Rider and Pounamu.

The legend associated with Paikea offers a unique explanation of how the ancestor named Paikea successfully travelled to New Zealand on the back of the whale known as Tohorā. This rare tale is added in the promotion of a whale watching tourism.

Lastly, the legend associated with Pounamu, the greenstone of New Zealand has been incorporated into the promotion of Maori arts. Overall, these traditional tales have been employed mainly as parts of the descriptions of tourist attractions in the form of natural resources such as mountains, forests, lakes, rivers and other water-based attractions.

This is not surprising as it is mentioned in the literature review section that natural resources are among the main tourist attractions promoted in New Zealand. In fact, since the early days, the association of tourism with nature was strong, as reflected by the remark made by Bernard Shaw during his visit in 1934. It appears that the presence of myths and legends associated with these natural resources act as a bonus in the tourism promotion. From the viewpoint of tourism marketing, the association of natural heritage attractions with unique legendary tales enhances their appeal to tourists and making them more notable.

CONCLUSION

This paper evaluated how mythological and legendary tales have been employed in marketing New Zealand as a tourist destination by its official tourism organization in the current website. The assessment of the digital content of the website was completed using a content analysis method. The findings of this paper uncovered that six traditional Maori stories have been selected and presented on the website of Tourism New Zealand.

The legend of the fishing adventure of the demi God, Maui, which appeared more than once on the website, reveals the significance of the traditional worldviews of the geological formation of this country. A few of the legends manifested on the website are famous traditional stories often narrated in New Zealand, such as Tane Mahuta, The Lord of the Forest, Hinemoa, and Tutanekai and Paikea the whale rider. Some of the core Maori worldviews and values reflected through the narratives of the legends include upholding respect to their ancestors and maintaining a good relationship with the natural world.

From a tourism perspective, the inclusion of legends or purakau improves the appeal of several nature-based destinations such as national parks, mountains, and lakes. The importance of environmental protection and sustainability of natural resources, which is reflected in these legends, is in line with the

Tiaki Promise, a commitment to care for New Zealand, for now, and for future generations, that has been added to the website recently and the current tagline 100% Pure New Zealand.

CONTRIBUTION/PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this paper contribute to expanding the knowledge in the field of tourism mythology by revealing how myths and legends have been featured is fairly new method to promote tourism, the website, particularly in the context of New Zealand. The type of stories that have been selected and how these tales have been presented in the promotion of tourism attractions have been detailed in the paper. From a practical point of view, the findings demonstrate to destination marketers how Tourism New Zealand successfully integrated Maori legends or purakau into the official tourism website. The incorporation of traditional tales fits the overall image of this country as a tourist destination and the recent pledge for sustainability via Tiaki Promise.

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