Applying the Hollywood Scriptwriting Formula to Destination Branding

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Abstract:

This paper examines the prospects of applying the Hollywood scriptwriting formula to a destination transforming a range of potentially disconnected tourist destination experiences into a more immersive, interrelated narrative and thereby generating a cohesive destination brand that has an emotional and personal bond with tourists. A step-by-step conceptual model, based on Hollywood's scriptwriting formula, is developed, contextualised and employed for the case study destination of Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. The model offers destination management organisations an innovative new method of developing a destination brand centred on storytelling while the findings demonstrate that the scriptwriting approach creates a narrative for the destination that connects the various experiences in an experiential framework which carves out a brand that promises strong emotional and experiential benefits for tourists. This paper provides an original and novel rethink of how to construct the destination experience and formulate the destination brand, employing scriptwriting capabilities, rather than traditional marketing concepts.

Keywords: Storytelling, Hollywood scriptwriting process, experience economy, myths, destination branding

1. Introduction

Storytelling is imperative in branding as it provides brands with a personality that differentiates them through authentic, emotionally engaging stories with interesting characters that communicate their values (Bierman, 2012; Fog, Budtz, & Yakaboylu, 2005; Douglas, 2009). As the purpose of branding is to essentially formulate narratives about the brand essence, personality and positioning which build a relationship with people by appealing to their imagination (Lin & Chen, 2015; UNWTO, 2009) it makes sense to put storytelling at the centre of how brands are created. However, previous research developing destination brand strategies and models (for example Baker, 2007; Yeoman, Durie, McMahon-Beattie, & Palmer 2005; UNWTO, 2009) have been insufficient as they apply traditional marketing practices (such as SWOT analyses, positioning and competitive analyses (UNWTO, 2009) to develop the brand essence and personality. According to Yeoman, Durie, McMahon-Beattie, & Palmer (2005) “the brand essence is a definition of the brand’s true character that binds all aspects of the brand together in a motivating, unique and credible way”, while Aaker (1997, p. 347) defines the personality of a brand as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand”. Such traditional marketing practices deliver outcomes that often boil down to a few key words, which have to be converted back into stories to attract the tourists (see Yeoman et al., 2005; UNWTO, 2009).

This paper argues that destinations should further integrate storytelling into destination branding. As branding centres around stories, they should not be created at the end of the process but rather continually throughout the process. The brand essence and personality should therefore evolve from storytelling structures rather than marketing strategies as stories make experiences memorable and facilitate a bond with tourists on a deeper emotional and personal level. Destination management organisations (DMOs) should reach people and appeal to their imagination by telling engaging stories about a destination. The art of scriptwriting is based on traditional storytelling techniques (Hiltunen, 2002) and it is worth applying this art form to destination branding as a method of infusing storytelling into every aspect of the branding process. Hollywood has developed a scriptwriting formula, a standardised method of telling stories, which has proven successful in making movies (Vogler, 2007). This

scriptwriting formula can be applied to destination branding to strengthen storytelling capabilities and thus experiential and branding efforts.

The aim of this study is to explore the adaptability and application of the Hollywood scriptwriting formula to a chosen destination to create an encompassing and cohesive destination brand personality and essence thereby making the destination experiences more immersive, emotional and interconnected for tourists. A six-step conceptual model is developed through which the scriptwriting formula is applied. The Lithuanian city of Vilnius provides the context for the conceptual model's application and is a means to exemplify the conceptual model's features. The paper has three distinct objectives:

1. To develop a destination experience where the various touristic elements, characters and touchpoints are integrated into one unifying narrative, an experiential framework that stages a hero's role for the tourists to perform.
2. To examine whether the scriptwriting narrative can form a cohesive, personality-based emotional brand essence that represents the destination.
3. To determine whether the storytelling process of the Hollywood scriptwriting formula is a constructive way for DMOs to generate experiential frameworks and brand essence.

The paper thus takes destination marketing through to its logical conclusion in which branding and destination development are fully absorbed into storytelling practices, as branding theory suggests it should be (see Fog et al., 2005; Jensen, 1999; Herskovitz and Chrystal, 2010). Going forward, the paper examines the role of DMOs and the importance of storytelling in developing a destination brand. It then explores and critiques extant brand building models and their limitations, outlining the need for a storytelling approach. This is followed by an appraisal of Hollywood scriptwriting in relation to storytelling and branding in tourism in which we develop three testable propositions that explain why the Hollywood scriptwriting formula can, and should, be adapted and applied to tourism destination branding in lieu of traditional models. After describing the research methods, the various steps of the scriptwriting formula are applied to destination branding of the case study destination of Vilnius. A discussion of our three propositions, followed by the managerial implications and limitations of the study finalises the paper.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Destination branding, storytelling and DMOs

‘The American Marketing Association (2015) defines a brand as a “name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers”. While this definition might be too simplistic, as Kladou, Kavarasitzis, Rigopoulou & Salonika (2017) argue, it still communicates the most central function of a brand, which is to differentiate a product from other products and promise something that incites a belief in people (Kotler & Gertner, 2004; Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009). For instance, Nike promises via their slogan “just do it” that people should not be afraid to venture into new things. A strong brand therefore has a positive reputation that raises expectation of consumers (Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2011). Successful brands should also have a distinct personality, a set of human characteristics associated with them (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009; Aaker, 1997). For example, Apple’s brand personality is about lifestyle, imagination, innovativeness and passion (Marketing Minds, 2016). Finally, they should evoke an emotional connection that induces consumers to return to the same brand repeatedly to experience the same emotions again (Baker & Cameron, 2008).

Similar to product brands, destination brands put forth two important functions, which are identification and differentiation (Qu, Kim & Im, 2011). However, building a destination brand is a more complex process than creating brands for products as it includes capturing the multidimensionality of tourism products and other elements of the destination in a brand (Kim, Stepchenkova & Babalou, 2018; Kumar, 2016). Furthermore, while the identity of a product brand is defined by the sender itself by how they want it to be experienced (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009), the destination brand stems from multiple sources, where tourism marketing is just one of them (Morgan et al., 2011). As Fyall (2012) observe, DMOs have little control over the destination as its ‘amalgam’ nature means that various stakeholders influence the brand. Kotler & Gertner (2002, p. 251) note that the destination brand is “the sum of beliefs and impressions people hold about places”, while Baker (2007, p. 25) suggests that a “destination brand is the totality of perceptions, thoughts and feelings that customers hold about a destination”. It is therefore important to include various stakeholders in the development of the destination brand (Baker, 2007) as the destination brand ought to embody the values and essence of the destination community (Pike, 2004).

It is widely accepted among scholars that storytelling is imperative in branding as it creates a personality due to story characters possessing human characteristics such as

persistence and courage (see e.g. Bierman, 2012; Fog, Budtz, & Yakaboylu, 2005; Lin & Chen, 2015). Brands can differentiate themselves through authentic, emotionally engaging stories with interesting characters that communicate their values (Fog et al., 2005); such stories build a relationship with people by appealing to their imagination (Lin & Chen, 2015). Stories help give brands a personality; they can appear human, as they possess familiar human traits such as persistence, courage and imagination (Bierman, 2010; Herskovitz & Chrystal, 2010). As Douglas (2009) notes, stories can get a brand to work coherently as they help pull together the rational pieces of a picture into a more meaningful whole. Storytelling is at the heart of how brands are shaped; without a special story, there is nothing distinctive about them (Bierman, 2010). Storytelling is therefore essential in destination branding.

DMOs are responsible for developing, coordinating and implementing the destination brand and promoting it through various channels (Cox, Gyrd-Jones, & Gardiner, 2014; Morrison, 2013). They are stewards of the destination's reputation (Morgan et al., 2011) and have to cooperate with multiple stakeholders to create a brand strategy. The DMOs' "purpose is to succinctly convey the brand identity in a way that will stand out amidst the noise of other mass communications by rival and substitute brands and be noticed by the target consumer in a meaningful and memorable way" (Pike & Page, 2014, p. 212). Hence, the objective is to gain a strong differentiated position within a competitive market (Datzira-Mazip & Poluzzi 2014) as effective destination branding lies in its potential to reduce substitutability (Hudson, 2008).

However, too many destinations have become 'any country' communicated through marketing clichés (Morgan et al., 2011), promising "...spectacular scenery, good quality of life, friendly people, and a sound business infrastructure... [but] these factors are no longer differentiators, so places need a strong brand" (Hudson, Cárdenas, Meng, & Thal, 2016, p. 366). According to Morgan and Pritchard (2004), the brand winners are the destinations that represent an abundance of emotional meaning, have great conversational value and hold high expectations for potential tourists. A destination brand should also make a promise of a memorable travel experience that is associated with the destination (Morgan et al., 2011). As Kaplan et al. (2010) demonstrate, destinations possess distinct personality traits, which can differentiate them from others if properly branded. This is where the Hollywood scriptwriting formula (explicated later in this study), as a tool in developing and/or enhancing DMOs branding strategies, comes into its own.

DMOs and the tourism industry have to be great storytellers in order to create memorable experiences. As Pine and Gilmore (1999) argue, the service industry is in the

business of selling experiences, and tourist experiences are essentially ‘stories’ about events, places and people (McCabe & Foster, 2006). Therefore, we propose:

Proposition 1: Adopting storytelling as a central component in destination branding could facilitate and enable the creation of immersive, experiential and emotional experiences (into one unifying narrative) with the tourists as central actors/characters, which forms the identity of the destination.

Storytelling can facilitate the design of memorable and rewarding experiences and, thus, the creation of a distinctive brand as it focuses on producing a unique plot underpinned by appealing genres that are based on the history, attractions and character of the destination. The need for a more significant role for storytelling is discussed in the next section where extant destination brand building models are examined.

2.2 A critique of existing destination branding models

Academic literature provides several models and step-by-step guides for building a destination brand such as the brand pyramid (UNWTO, 2009; Morgan and Pritchard, 2004), the destination brand wheel (UNWTO, 2009, Yeoman et al., 2005; Visit Scotland, 2015) and community stakeholder-based models (Hudson et al., 2016; Baker, 2007). These models are viewed as best practice within destination development and branding and are therefore critiqued hereafter.

The brand pyramid (UNWTO, 2009, p. 90) consists of five stages and is a “tool that builds up a brand logically from an assessment of the destination’s main strengths to a distillation of its essence” by establishing the brand personality and its positioning (Figure 1). However, the brand pyramid (UNWTO, 2009; Morgan and Pritchard, 2004), just like the destination branding wheel (Figure 2) (Yeoman et al., 2005; Visit Scotland, 2015; UNWTO, 2009), has a weakness in that the story is created at the end of the process instead of continually throughout the process.

Figure 1. The five-stage brand building pyramid. The model on the left visualises the process in theory, while the model on the right visualises the process in action using the case of Namibia (modified from UNWTO, 2009, p. 91, 93; Vazou and Maskinidis, 2017, p. 8).

On the left, the theoretical process is visualised while, on the right, it is applied using the case of Namibia where the various steps all offer storytelling accounts that subsequently form the brand essence, that is, ‘the destination’s DNA’ (UNWTO, 2009). As seen in Figure 1, the stories are grounded in marketing practices such as a SWOT analysis, consumer research and a competitor analysis, which are useful practices that can be used in support of developing a brand. However, as the objective is to articulate a brand’s personality and essence, the approach seems less than optimal as stories in reality emanate from historical and socio-cultural factors, personalities and emotions rather than from analytical tools.

The UNWTO (2009) states that the positioning statement of the brand pyramid is a technical statement not to be used in talking to the consumers. Rather, it should guide marketing staff and creative employees of advertising agencies to develop their marketing messages. This raises the question, why should creativity, imagination and, consequently, storytelling be left to the final stages of brand building, namely the communication and marketing processes?

The destination branding wheel (Figure 2) (Yeoman et al., 2005; Visit Scotland, 2015; UNWTO, 2009) summarizes the brand essence by looking at the particular emotional and rational benefits tourists gain from having a holiday at the destination. “It is a framework for establishing the links between the essence of a brand, the brand proposition aimed at different target audiences, and the products and features that these audiences will value” (Yeoman et al., 2005, p. 145).

Figure 2. The destination brand essence wheel. Case of Scotland (Yeoman et al. 2005, p. 143)

According to UNWTO (2009), the destination brand wheel enables the whole ‘brand story’ to be viewed at one glance and it provides a clear starting point for writing a succinct creative brief for a marketing agency. However, rather than the story evolving organically from viewing the wheel, terms such as ‘tartan’, ‘bagpipes’, ‘lochs’ and ‘castles’ (taking the case study example of Scotland, as shown in Figure 2), which embody multiple exciting stories, are boiled down to ‘key words’ in this model. As with the Brand Pyramid, there is an inherent disconnect in the process because real life stories are initially summarised into short descriptive terms that subsequently have to be redeveloped back into stories by creative people. The stories are removed even though they are the substance that truly connects the products and experiences with the emotional benefits.

Other models focus on the communities’ and stakeholders’ roles in destination branding. As Saraniemi and komppula (2017) argue, destination brand identity develops during the social interaction of stakeholders. Baker (2007) develops the 7A destination branding process where the brand is built inside-out by consulting various stakeholders, especially communities. Similarly, Hudson et al. (2016) provide a community place brand model that emphasises the community stakeholders’ roles in its development. However, these community stakeholder models describe how the process of community involvement should take place, but

not how the brand should be created from this involvement. Hence, the question still remains about how the brand narrative is written and how its essence and personality is formulated. The analysis of these models leads to:

Proposition 2: Storytelling should be at the centre of how brands are developed and, therefore, should be initiated at the beginning of the brand building process because stories are the substance that truly connects the products and experiences with tourists' emotional benefits, and ergo represent the destination.

There is little doubt that using marketing strategies and practices are essential in developing a brand. However, they should be accompanying practices that support, not drive, the writing of a destination brand narrative. This is where the scriptwriting formula of Hollywood movies (discussed hereafter) comes in, as it provides a documented approach to create engaging stories, which consequently articulates the brand essence.

2.3 The Hollywood scriptwriting formula

The film industry in the USA, personified by Hollywood (which has been global from its beginnings), is very successful at creating and marketing films that are appealing to international audiences (Dancyger, 2011). In 2016, the top seven US film studios had a 58% share of the worldwide box office at cinemas (Tartaglione, 2017). Furthermore, in the Top 100 international, box office highest-grossing movies of all-time only one film (Chinese Wolf Warrior 2 from 2017 at number 55) was not produced by a major Hollywood studio (Box Office Mojo, 2017). The US film industry is privately owned and is not supported by the national government unlike in many other countries (Dancyger, 2011). Consequently, the US film industry has to produce films that are commercially viable and that appeal to a wide audience.

As Hiltunen (2002) notes, Hollywood films are very successful because they use traditional storytelling techniques to bring pleasurable moments to their audiences. They repeatedly adopt the same plot formula, the 'Arch plot', also called the 'Aristotle model', which was introduced by Aristotle 2,300 years ago (Albjerg, 2001). Aristotle analysed the plot structure of dramas to discover what kind of stories bring the greatest pleasure to the audience (Hiltunen, 2002). He found that a successful drama must have a beginning, a middle and an end, usually divided into a three-act structure, in which audiences can find pleasure by identifying with the same emotions as the central character. At the end, when the audience is released from suspense, they will experience emotional pleasure (Ibid).

The Aristotle model is also described by Campbell (2008) in his book *The hero with the thousand faces* in which he discovers how the same standardised story repeats itself in all cultures around the world. Hence, a universal pattern of successful stories exists that is common to all ancient cultures. The typical story involves a myth of the hero, also known as the ‘hero’s journey’, or the “monomyth” in which the mythological hero leaves an ordinary world, venturing into the world of the supernatural where he or she faces the antagonist, wins the decisive victory and returns with a powerful elixir that brings salvation to the community (Ibid). Vogler (2007) later discovers that Campbell’s (2008) monomyth can be found in most successful Hollywood movies and he creates a twelve-step model of the hero’s journey that can be applied to most Hollywood movies. The art of scriptwriting for Hollywood films is essentially a discipline in its own right with several books published on the topic in which it is described as a step by step process (see e.g. Howard, 2006; Dancyger, 2001; Tomaric, 2011). Hence, Hollywood movies are based on a scriptwriting formula grounded in the monomyth.

Mythical stories are appealing to audiences. As Simmons (2006, p. 126) argues “Myths and fables are not only timeless stories. They are stories of your life, from your family, in your work experience that if you told them, would activate a deep recognition in almost any human being in the world”. Myths are thus able to explain the nature of living in society (Gkritzali et al., 2016). Consequently, we can assume that the hero’s journey represents mankind’s idea of a good story as the emotional experience provided is attractive to audiences (Campbell, 2008). By adopting the Hollywood scriptwriting formula in destination branding, DMOs will therefore be able to stand out as they will be able to develop plots, dramas and mythical stories that create an emotional and immersive connection with tourists.

2.4 Justifying the application of Hollywood scriptwriting in tourism

The value of storytelling and the application of dramatic structures in creating tourism experiences and staging destinations have been recognised by various scholars (see e.g. Chronis, 2005; McCabe & Foster, 2006; Woodside & Megehee, 2009). It is therefore relevant to examine how the staging, marketing and branding of tourism experiences share similar components with the development of a cinematic experience i.e. scriptwriting.

Storytelling is deeply embedded in tourism practices. Chronis (2005) notes that storytelling plays a vital role in shaping a tourist’s experience, as destinations are essentially storyscapes where stories can transform otherwise indifferent spaces into attractive and unique tourist destinations. As McCabe and Foster (2006, p. 194) observe: “Stories provide members

of society with a mechanism for escape, becoming immersed in plots, characters, descriptions and accounts contained therein". Just as in scriptwriting, where the heroes undergo a change in the story, the tourists can be transformed into heroes of the narrative they experience at the destination. Hence, destinations are storyscapes holding plots wherein tourists act out various characters.

Tourism marketers should focus on the narrative staging of tourism places where the tourism venue is presented based on a narrative structure (Chronis, 2012). Tourists become the central character in a narrative staged by DMOs and stakeholders, and the latter can utilise the story structure of classical folktales to create, for instance, a dream world that the tourist can become immersed in (Mossberg, 2008). Hence, in staging these narratives, DMOs can be inspired by Campbell's (2008) monomyth and they can utilise Vogler's (2007) twelve steps of the hero's journey. DMOs can adopt story director roles to enable protagonists (the tourists) to enact travel stories successfully wherein they encounter, and overcome, antagonists (Woodside & Megehee, 2010).

Myths and emotions play a vital role in destination branding and tourism experiences. For instance, Myths in destination brands can have compelling characters and resonant plots, which help consumers to make sense of the world (Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008) as powerful brand icons are encapsulated within myths (Holt, 2003). Emotions, on the other hand are a key ingredient in creating engaging stories in tourism as stories come with many touch points to the lives of the listeners, facilitating an emotional connection (Woodside, 2010). Likewise, in creating films, the screenplays evolve around emotions, dramatized through conflict (Frensham, 2009). What keeps the audience emotionally involved in a story is a passionate character that desperately tries to achieve something against all odds (Howard, 2006). Woodside and Megehee (2009) equally argue that DMOs can use storytelling as a way to market the destination as stories centre on protagonists going on a journey, which arouse the audiences' emotions. The creation of immersive emotional experiences, where tourists feel like central characters, is therefore vital for the success of a destination.

It is therefore evident that the tourism industry shares several characteristics with Hollywood. Both are service sectors that deliver stories in the form of memorable experiences that appeal to consumer's emotions (Hiltunen, 2002; Woodside & Megehee, 2009). Furthermore, both industries provide a mechanism for consumers to become immersed into a dream world where they identify with certain characters and escape their normal lives (Hiltunen, 2002; McCabe and Foster, 2006). To some degree, a tourism experience holds the same three act structure as a Hollywood script. The tourists have an experience of Campbell's (2008)

‘hero’s journey’ of the monomyth as they leave home to venture into unknown territory, encounter various obstacles, learn something new and then return home again. Not only do they do that over the course of a holiday, they also do it on a day to day basis, leaving the hotel in the morning and returning home in the evening, enriched with new experiences. Hence, we propose:

Proposition 3: The meticulous storytelling process of the Hollywood scriptwriting formula if applied to destination branding can facilitate the construction of a powerful mythical destination brand as it enables the creation of stories that activate a deep recognition in people.

This Hollywood scriptwriting formula can be applied in developing a destination experience where the various touristic elements and touchpoints are integrated into one encompassing narrative, staging various roles for the tourists to perform and then creating a comprehensive, yet concise and clear brand essence for a destination. The next section develops the conceptual model where after it is applied to the destination of Vilnius in Lithuania.

3. Developing the conceptual model of Hollywood Scriptwriting for destination branding

A conceptual model with its different elements (idea, plot, genres/themes, characters, acts and dialogue) has been developed based on the step-by-step scriptwriting process described by Tomaric (2011) in his book *Filmmaking*, and supported by evidence from Hauge (2011), Howard (2006) and Frensham (2003). Tomaric’s (2011) provides a clear overview of the process and we draw on his approach when developing our model. The model consists of six steps (see Figure 3). The study intends to show that meticulously implementing all six steps will enable small destinations such as Vilnius to carve out a coherent and concise and attractive brand that integrates the main themes and stories of the destination. The model is further explained in section 5 when it is applied to Vilnius.

Figure 3: Step by step method for developing the destination brand based on Hollywood Storytelling. Authors' configuration is based on multiple sources (Frensham, 2003; Howard, 2006; Tomaric, 2011).

As evident in Figure 3, carving out a destination brand is dynamic and circular resembling a hermeneutic process as it entails interpreting and understanding both the whole (the brand) and its parts (the steps) (Chessick, 1990). Houser and Thomas (2013, p. 62) state that “Key in the hermeneutic process is an analysis of the component parts and how they interact to form an understanding and picture of what is being interpreted or understood”. Hence, by proceeding through the model, the story unfolds and becomes increasingly more comprehensive; the constant, vigorous analysis of the hermeneutic process that goes back and forth between different steps, and questions what there is and how it should be understood, enables the brand

essence to be fully representative of the whole. Thus, branding a destination is not a linear process but rather a dynamic, circular process.

The circular process has some clear benefits. For instance, while a DMO develops an initial idea and premise for a destination, the next steps (that delve more deeply into genre and plot) might cause the DMOs to reconsider the idea and premise as new knowledge and novel ideas may materialise in these steps. Thus, the initial idea and premise are important as foundations on which to build the story, but brainstorming sessions later on may redevelop these ideas. With each reconceptualization of a particular step, a part of the story may change; it is vibrant, flowing and evolving and the overall whole, i.e. the brand essence, is changing with it.

The conceptual model is especially applicable to smaller destinations with clearly demarcated territories and a foreseeable number of attractions in their product mix. As the destination brands stems from multiple sources of which DMOs have little control (Fyall, 2012; Morgan et al., 2011), it is vital that DMOs can consult with a foreseeable number of stakeholders in developing the narrative. Furthermore, it is easier to create a consistent connected narrative around a limited amount of attractions. While the formula of the conceptual model may also strengthen the branding and experiential framework of larger destinations which already have well-known stories that can appeal to tourists, it will have its greatest impact on destinations where a connected storyline is not visible to the consumers yet. These destinations need the formula most in terms of creating an appealing brand.

4. Research context and methods

4.1 The study context: Vilnius, Lithuania

A variety of reasons motivated the choice of Vilnius as the case study (Robinson, 2014). Apart from the first author's personal connections to the city's tourism sector, which facilitated access to the different stakeholders that were interviewed, Vilnius the capital of Lithuania has always played a very important role in the culture and economy of Lithuania. It has a population of around 544,000 inhabitants of diverse cultural backgrounds (Briedis, 2009; Vilnius, 2018a), which makes it a small sized European capital. 63.2% of the Vilnius population are Lithuanians, 16.5% are Polish and 12% are Russian (Ibid). Lithuania is located on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea and a majority of the population is Roman Catholic. Lithuania has a dramatic history having been occupied and ruled by the Polish, the Germans and the Russians, only regaining its independence in 1990 after the collapse of the Soviet Union through the 'singing revolution',

where Lithuanians gathered to sing together to show their opposition to their occupants. In 2004, Lithuania joined NATO and the EU.

Vilnius is a destination offering mainly historical, cultural and art experiences. It has a large, old city centre called ‘The Old Town’ which is a designated World Heritage Site with many buildings of baroque, renaissance and gothic architectural style. There are cobblestone streets, gas-lights, narrow alleyways, small courtyards and an abundance of baroque churches and cathedrals of various denominations (Briedis, 2009; Nared & Visković, 2014). Vilnius was, therefore, recently the location for a BBC filming of a new version of Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, doubling as Moscow (Gimlette, 2016). Additionally, there is a rich scene of bars and cafés, many of them with unique interiors and themes. Vilnius also has several green parks and the River Neris flows through the city. Around the city centre are several residential areas, most of them Soviet style, functionalist, mass-produced apartment blocks (Žemaitis, 2017).

International tourist arrivals to Vilnius, although still comparatively low, have been growing steadily, rising from only 550,000 visitors in 2010 to 1,030,000 in 2016 (Vilnius Tourism, 2018). Around 1.2 million tourists were expected to visit in 2017 with further growth projected in 2018 (Vilnius, 2018b). By comparison, Riga, the capital of Latvia with a population of 640,000 inhabitants and offering similar tourism products, receives more than 2 million visitors a year (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2017). Vilnius, therefore, still has a large potential for growth. Vilnius’ DMO has an intention to attract more tourists from Germany (Vilnius, 2018b). However, the number of tourists from Germany dropped by 6.8% and 2.6% in 2017 and 2016 respectively (Ibid), even though it had witnessed a steady rise of around 10% year-on-year in the preceding years between 2010 and 2015. Hence, Vilnius still mainly relies on tourists from Eastern Europe with the top five source markets over the last seven years (excluding Germany) being Belarus, Poland, Russia and Latvia (Vilnius tourism, 2018). With a new art museum and new international hotel chains, such as Marriott and Ibis, opening in 2018, which will further improve the tourism offering and infrastructure, a stronger narrative that addresses the needs of the Western European target market is, therefore, required (ibid). Due to its size and concentration of tourism attractions mainly in the city centre Vilnius is an ideal case study for testing the applicability of the conceptual model of the Hollywood scriptwriting formula for destination branding.

4.2 Methods

This study adopted a qualitative case study approach involving the use of both primary and secondary data sources to collect and generate data, that was analysed through a set of

interpretive practices to uncover the social meanings and behaviours of tourism stakeholders in a given setting, situation or context (Vilnius, Lithuania), and make the world visible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). A similar qualitative approach was used to examine the destination narratives created by social media users of Copenhagen, Denmark (Lund, Cohen, & Scarles, 2018).

In this study, the brand of Vilnius was interpreted and composed through interviews, observational practices and analysis of related secondary data (e.g. documents, brochures and other textual representations of the various tourism products in Vilnius). The Hollywood scriptwriting formula, and related process, were applied to Vilnius. The non-quantifiable, subjective nature of human (personal) experiences, coupled with a dearth of research on this particular topic, necessitated the need for a case study that was exploratory in nature (Veal, 2006). A case study facilitates an enquiry into a new phenomenon (Lund et al., 2018) and provides a clearer picture of what is going on in the broader context (Garrod & Fyall, 2011). In this case, Vilnius was used to show how the Hollywood scriptwriting formula can be used at a destination and how other destinations can then copy and adapt such an approach.

Purposive sampling (Ngoasong & Kimbu, 2016; O'Reilly, 2009) enabled the selection of seven Vilnius-based tourism experts with whom 60-90 minutes long, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The seven experts included three tour guides, two tour operators, one DMO manager and one guide book author. Informal discussions with five local residents were also conducted. Whilst seven interviewees and five residents may appear a small number in qualitative research and in spite of ongoing debates over the optimum sample size in qualitative research, the use of a limited number of key informants in interviews is not new in tourism research (see e.g. Sedgley, Pritchard, Morgan, & Hanna, 2017). Gray (2003) notes that a small sample size is very useful where the aim is to elicit in depth expert knowledge and provide clarity about a particular theme or subject that is under-served. In fact Reid, Flowers, and Larkin (2005) argue that there tends to be a diffusion of individual lived experiences and a reduction of the interpretations of participants unique life worlds if there are more participants.

The interviews and discussions covered a range of research relevant themes and the questions were designed to get participants' views, opinions, ideas and personal experiences of Vilnius in general and, more specifically in relation to the destination's marketing. Consequently, key questions covered during interviews with the destination management experts focused on Vilnius's tourism products, its management, marketing and branding strategies, and its plans for the future in an increasingly competitive tourism industry. On the other hand, there was no interview checklist for the informal discussions with the local

residents which took place in their homes or public spaces of their choice, and were recorded as notes by the first author. These discussions which were in the form of open conversations provided keen insights, views and stories of Lithuanian society and culture (Arksey & Knight, 1999) and their experiences with tourism (Ray, 2007).

The interview data were tape-recorded, manually transcribed, coded and rigorously content-analysed (Creswell, 2007) through multiple readings to fully immerse both authors in the data and the participants' stories (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Following this, both co-authors met to discuss their independent readings of the data and agreed to a consensus coding of the transcripts (Sedgeley et al, 2017) bearing in mind the research aim and objectives and the conceptual model developed earlier (see Figure 3). Through this process, important themes, patterns, focal actors, events, and potential sections of transcripts (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011) that could be used to support the discussion of the different steps used when applying the Hollywood scriptwriting formula to destination branding in Vilnius were isolated. Worth noting is that important and relevant contextual (social, historical and cultural) information relating to Vilnius was also elicited from the authors' observations of tourism attractions and facilities, and from the tourists' interactions. All of this data enabled the construction of a narrative that facilitated the development of a destination marketing and branding plan for Vilnius.

Primary data collection took place in Vilnius during July and August of both 2015 and 2017 during which the first author visited, conducted interviews, observed and photographed all the important tourist attractions in the city. All available tourism literature (academic and grey) on Vilnius was also collected during this period. By combining data from the interviews, informal discussions and observations with materials produced officially (by national and regional DMOs, tourism non-governmental organisations and registered tourism service providers) the researchers were able to, firstly, confirm the validity of the information provided by interviewees, secondly, provide a thick description (Mitas, Yarnal, Adams, & Ram, 2012) and, thirdly, cross-validate overlapping data (Decrop, 2004). In terms of transferability (Ibid), the purposive sampling approach adopted by this study opens up the findings to external appraisal and facilitates the transferability of the approach to other destinations of a similar size to Vilnius. The model is applied hereafter.

5. Applying the Hollywood scriptwriting formula

In the following section the conceptual model (see Figure 3) based on Hollywood scriptwriting is applied in six steps. Vilnius provides the context for the conceptual model's application and is thus used as a means to exemplify the conceptual model's features. A full script for the destination is not presented in this paper as it would be too extensive. The brand building models described earlier (see section: A critique of existing *destination branding models*) are applied at specific steps to complement and strengthen the process.

Step 1: Premise

The premise phase of the scriptwriting process decides what the story should be about, its underlying idea or foundation, and is the starting point of the process. Essentially, it articulates the core theme of the destination. As Frensham (2003) states, the theme of a story is a universal statement about the human condition that the writer wants to make. The premise of the destination is thus a representation of the soul of the destination and its emotional and intellectual connection with the audience.

In the premise phase, three aspects should be observed: topic research, the mission and the target market. Tomaric (2011) suggests that the authors should write about something they know and are familiar with. Hence, they should collect relevant information about Vilnius, such as key tourism indicators (visitor numbers, overnight stays and estimated growth). They should create an overview of 'what is there' in terms of tourism infrastructure such as attractions (hotels, restaurants, airports etc.), similar to what UNWTO (2009) would call a 'destination audit'. As part of collecting this information, the local communities and tourism stakeholders should be included. Hence, the suggested stakeholder community models for brand building by Baker (2007) and Hudson et al. (2016) would be worth including at this stage, in some adapted form, as a way to listen to how stakeholders perceive the destination. Representatives of the community and tourism stakeholders should be involved in the writing process throughout the six stages. The DMO could hold workshops at various stages in the writing process where the content of the steps would be discussed and modified by the representatives, which would ensure understanding and support from the communities. The involvement of communities and stakeholders would add to the hermeneutic process as the DMO would, most likely, have to revert to previous steps iteratively to satisfy the demands of the stakeholders.

The mission should also be considered: what the process should achieve when it is finished (Tomaric, 2011). Hence, questions such as: “What are the government’s tourism policies and targets for the next five or ten years?” and “What are the tourism products that they want to develop?” might be included. The story has to reflect the policies and preferred types of tourist activities. According to Vilnius Tourism (2018), corroborated by Interviewee 1 (DMO representative) Vilnius wants to communicate “*the unexpected and exceptional experiences that can only be found in Vilnius, such as the avant-garde experimental art movement Fluxus, street art and literature*”, as well as Uzupis, which is a bohemian and artistic district that has proclaimed itself an independent republic due to its large progressive art community. Interviewee 1 further observed that, “*there are a lot of small designer boutiques in Vilnius where local designers sell their own clothes*”. Vilnius seeks to emphasise that it is developing itself into a capital of art and culture.

Scriptwriters should also define the target audience before they start writing the script (Tomaric, 2011). Any script is developed with a specific audience in mind and should correspond to their demands and needs. As mentioned previously (see section: *The study context: Vilnius, Lithuania*), the number of tourists from Germany has dropped even though the tourism strategy has focused on growing that market. The brand should therefore be developed with German tourists in mind, although it is worth noting that various versions of the script can be written, each with a specific target market in mind, thus leading to multiple versions of the brand. In the brand pyramid of UNWTO (2009), consumer research is utilised to understand the emotional benefits tourists draw from being at the destination. Consumer research can therefore be included at this stage in order to understand the German tourists’ demands and wishes.

In summary, based on the research into the topic, and a full examination of the mission and target markets, a premise for Vilnius is developed. Analysis of interview data shows that Vilnius has been defined for centuries by its heroic struggle for freedom and that this is expressed through its art embodied in its avant-garde culture. This is the essence/theme and foundation on which the destination is formed and the story told. The premise guides the next steps in the scriptwriting process.

Step 2: Genre

The second step aims to establish the genres, or themes, of the story. According to Tomaric (2011), only two or three genres should be picked so that the message does not become blurred.

In films, there are many genres such as romance, comedy, buddy movie, crime detective story, western, sci-fi, gangster, historical melodrama, suspense-thriller, mystery, horror and road movie (Frensham, 2003). Vilnius is well-known for its thriving art scene. During the first field visit to Vilnius in July and August 2015, the first author observed that there were art galleries on almost every corner as well as shops selling locally produced handicrafts. The old churches, of various denominations, added to the feel of history and originality. Furthermore, according to Interviewee 2 (local student), “...in the summertime, the people from Vilnius often leave the city at the weekends and stay in the forest to sing songs and relax”. Overall, Vilnius therefore signifies the genre of mystery, the unexpected, embodied in the architecture and experimental avant-garde art scene. Vilnius is also a romantic place conveyed via cobblestones, baroque and gothic architecture and narrow alleyways providing a feeling of wandering through a mythical dream world. It also represents a dramatic history where years of oppression, occupation and suffering provide the historical melodrama (Briedus, 2009; Norkus, 2012). As Interviewee 3 (tour guide) points out, “*Lithuanians want to protect their national identity and are not afraid to fight for their freedom*”. The following three genres are therefore selected: Romance, mystery and historical melodrama.

The genres chosen in Step 2 should be representative of the premise of the destination, established in Step 1 i.e., they should further determine what type of destination it is and what type of story the tourists can expect to experience. In this study, the three genres of romance, mystery and historical melodrama nicely represent the essence of Vilnius, which is the heroic struggle for freedom over centuries, expressed through art and singing (Briedis, 2009). The genres are the pillars on which the plot and story structure are built. Defining the genres is also vital to identifying the iconic mythical stories that can activate a deep recognition in tourists and thus connect them with the brand (Hiltunen, 2002; Holt, 2003).

Step 3: Plot

The plot represents the most dramatically effective way of telling a story (Frensham, 2003). It is the backbone of a story (Tomaric, 2011). Every story begins with the question “what if...?”, where the writer thinks of a character or situation and considers what might happen (Hauge, 2011). The plot should have a passionate main character that undergoes a transformation while trying to achieve his or her goals (Howard, 2006). There should therefore be a conflict, otherwise the story would seem meaningless and unfulfilling (Tomaric, 2011). Hence, the plot is about creating an interest within the audience (Ibid) and is, therefore, the most important step

of the scriptwriting process.

There are several types of plots that can give a script a structure. For example, ‘the quest’, where a hero searches for something, or ‘resurrection’ in which a hero is oppressed until events free him/her (Tomaric, 2011). ‘A journey and return’ is the most commonly used plot; it is similar to Campbell’s (2008) ‘Hero’s Journey’, in which the hero undergoes a journey from home and experiences a change in character along the way (Tomaric, 2011). However, through faith, perseverance and intelligence the hero prevails (Ibid). ‘The journey and return’ plot is representative of the basic structure of a holiday, where tourists go on a journey and return home transformed by new experiences gained by overcoming various obstacles (experiences) along the way. ‘The journey and return’ is thus a suitable plot to select for tourists visiting Vilnius.

Based on the observations, interviews and grey literature collected in Vilnius, it can be established that there are two types of ‘heroes’ in the story of Vilnius. There are the tourists who should feel like heroes exploring Vilnius and there are the heroic residents of Vilnius, with whom the tourists can identify. Hence, two parallel stories are developed that intertwine as the tourist ‘heroes’ identify with the ‘Vilnius heroes’. The Vilnius people, including specific characters among them, have their own plot which is ‘resurrection’ (Tomaric, 2011); the people of Vilnius have struggled for freedom since 1579 when the first of the five Russo-Lithuanian Wars broke out (Cummins, 2010). Interviewee 1 (DMO representative) states that: *“Even though small in size and population, Lithuanians have fought alone against powerful enemies. Through their love for music and art, they have prevailed”*. They therefore represent a passionate character fighting the antagonist to achieve resurrection through freedom.

Within a plot there are also subplots, which are additional stories linked to and involving other characters or other incidents that have an influence on the main plot and the ways in which the main characters react (Frensham, 2003). These plots should gradually be formed when the story structure and characters are developed in steps 4 and 5.

Step 4: Story structure

Frensham (2007) notes that a Hollywood film is usually structured in three acts. Act 1 establishes the setting and introduces the characters and conflict. Act 2 develops the main story, which is essentially a sequence of events in the lives of the characters (Howard, 2006); this middle act also establishes obstacles. Act 3 provides a resolution to the conflict. As

mentioned in Step 3, there are two plots, and ergo two different perspectives, from which the three acts can be described when scriptwriting is applied to destination branding.

In perspective 1, a storyline for the tourists' holidays is developed. With inspiration from tour itineraries, guide books and tourist reviews, a script is written for a typical tourist's holiday in Vilnius according to the plotline of 'A journey and return'. In Act 1, the tourist departs from their home country and arrives in Vilnius. In Act 2, the tourist engages in various tourist activities as part of having new experiences and gaining new knowledge. In Act 3, the tourist returns to his or her country a changed person. The description in perspective 1 can be used to imagine and predict the journey and excursions of the tourists; what they encounter, experience and learn while they are in Vilnius. The DMO and stakeholders can utilise this story to adapt their experiential framework (i.e. their infrastructure, services, activities and human touch points) to the wishes and movements of the tourists. It is important that the story appeals to the tourists and that the tourist should feel that every new experience has been created for him/her and is not part of a routine.

In perspective 2 of the story structure, the storyline for the destination is developed, with an introduction to the main attractions and their role in history. The purpose here is to tell an engaging story of the destination that will capture the imagination of the tourists. It should embrace the plot of the 'resurrection'. Thus, in Act 1 there will be an introduction to the main characters, which are the main tourist sites and attractions of the destination. There should be at least three main characters that each represent one of the three selected genres of the destination. If possible, historical or living persons could represent each of the main characters, as they are easier to identify with. The DMO can draw on the destination audit (carried out in Step 1) to identify important characters and conflict. Furthermore, a SWOT analysis can be applied, as utilised in the brand building pyramid, to determine the destination's main strengths and thus main characters (see Figure 1). In Act 2, the story and conflict introduced in Act 1 is developed and this progress adds depths to the characters. In Act 3, the characters overcome the problem(s) and the conflict is resolved. The story formed here will be retold in the marketing material on websites and brochures enabling potential tourists to anticipate and imagine their trip to Vilnius. Hence, this part of the branding process essentially develops the marketing material for the DMO as well as the experiential framework.

The tourists are not explicitly aware that they are participating in a written script and staged narrative. If they knew, it might be seen as manipulative and it could distract them from the story. The storylines are introduced to them in the marketing campaigns and laid

before them in the experiential framework appealing to their imagination and hopefully, they will join in and co-create with the tourism players.

The gasp moment: In most Hollywood storylines, there is a gasp moment, which is a turn in the plot that shocks and startles the audience (Tomaric, 2011). In tourism terms, it can be compared to a unique selling proposition (USP). As Interviewee 4 (tour operator) notes “*the use of air balloons is unique to Vilnius and many tourists get a balloon ride over Vilnius.*” Within the three genres, it can be categorised as both romantic and mysterious. It may also symbolise the historical struggle for freedom, as the air balloons provide a feeling of escape. Therefore, air balloons represent a viable gasp moment as they are a tangible symbol of all three genres and the premise of Vilnius.

Step 5: Characters

The next step is to form the main characters of the story and thus the destination’s character. Stories are about people, not explosions or car chases (Tomaric, 2011). Characters should be three dimensional; they should contain actions, emotions and personality (Frensham, 2003). They come alive if we recognise what makes them tick by understanding their personal backgrounds, family histories and their personality traits, what they love and hate (Howard, 2006; Tomaric, 2011). Especially important are their emotions, dramatized through a quest where they can gain or lose something, where there is something at stake (Frensham, 2003; Howard, 2006).

In developing the characters, there are three primary categories that each have a specific role in driving the story forward (Tomaric, 2011). The three categories are: the protagonist, the antagonist and the supporting character. The protagonist is the story’s central character who advances the story and undergoes a personal transformation, which is the arc of the story (Howard, 2006). As mentioned in Step 4, there can be more than one main character, each representing one of the three genres of the destination. However, one of the characters should take a leading role and become an icon of the whole destination. The protagonist can be seen from two viewpoints- one protagonist is represented by the inhabitants of Vilnius while the other protagonist is represented by the potential tourists. For Vilnius, an important character that can act as the main protagonist is the Iron Wolf, which stands as a mythical symbol of the Lithuanian unbending spirit.

The antagonist is the other main character and he/she represents obstacles and challenges that the protagonist has to overcome (Tomaric, 2011). The antagonist represents the

conflict. While it can be a person, it can also be a system or the government, bureaucracy, local society, country as a whole or a political or social movement; any one of these can become an obstacle for the protagonist (Howard, 2006). For Vilnius, the antagonist is represented by the years of struggle for freedom; for the tourists' experiences, the antagonist is symbolised by the positive challenges that tourists face when they explore a new destination and try to get behind the facade to see the true Vilnius.

The third primary category for driving the story forward is the cast of supporting characters that work with the main characters, but never eclipse them (Tomaric, 2011). The supporting characters interact with the protagonists and have a significant effect on the plot or main characters (Ibid). They add colour, atmosphere or comic relief; deliver messages, and generally contribute to the world of the story (Frensham, 2003). There are two sub-categories of supporting characters. The first sub-category is the tourist sites, places of interest, the hotels and modes of transportation; all their stories should support the overall story of the destination. The second sub-category is the human 'touch points', which could, for instance, be the hotel receptionists, the tour guides or the bus and taxi drivers. These touch point characters can be included in the marketing material, so that tourists will feel they already know the local people and, therefore, will be more likely to feel comfortable to choose Vilnius.

Step 6: Dialogue

According to Tomaric (2011), dialogue is the most difficult part to write and the quality of the dialogue determines how well the audience identifies with the characters. It is important to keep the dialogue short and representative of the characters' personality. In marketing terms, dialogue can be compared to copywriting, which in its essence is about attracting a consumer's attention to the destination and selling them a product. A destination's dialogue is presented within its marketing material such as on websites and in social, and other, media. However, the dialogue is also the stories, and sub-stories, written for each of the main characters. It creates the individual stories for each of the main experiences in the experiential framework. The dialogue is what is communicated to the audience (the tourists) before and during travel, and consequently transforms into their experiences.

5.1 Creating the brand essence

The process of the six scriptwriting steps leads to the creation of a brand essence (for the German target market). However, as mentioned earlier (see section: **Error! Reference source**

not found.) carving out a destination brand is a dynamic, circular process, similar to a hermeneutic process, as it entails interpreting and understanding both the whole (the brand) and its parts (the steps) (Chessick, 1990). Hence, as the process progresses, the DMO will return to previous steps to reconsider and re-write the destination brand as new insights and ideas unfold. The writing process is therefore not linear but circular, as indicated in Figure 3. The brand description should be the sum of all the stories, characters, genres and plots delivered in the six steps, and should be presented in the form of a short story rather than key words, as key words cannot present the full meaning.

Establishing a brand consists of three parts: personality, promise and essence. The brand personality mainly evolves from the main character(s) and protagonist(s) identified in steps 4 and 5 as these characters represent the characters of the destination and are very likely to be icons. Hence, the brand personality comes organically from the scriptwriting process rather than being added at the end of the process, as seen in other brand building models discussed earlier (see Figure 1 and 2). The promise (or proposition) of the brand is also derived naturally during the six steps of the scriptwriting process. The plot, described in Step 3, embodies what attracts, thrills and captivates the audience to follow the story. In this case study, the plot is about resurrection; about how the Vilnius citizens' love for music and art spurred them on in overcoming their enemies. The promise is, therefore, that tourists will feel like heroes as they identify with the powerful, historical struggle for freedom. Finally, the essence of the brand is created. As a short story, it will evolve from the various steps of the scriptwriting process, holding the values and meaning of the first three steps and summarising the main stories developed in the three later steps. It therefore grows naturally from the stories presented in the six steps.

It is important to note that various marketing practices are integrated into the branding process, thereby aligning the marketing process with the branding process instead of maintaining the two as separate activities. Hence, the messages and promotional text of the marketing practices are affiliated with the story of the destination, its experiential framework and the values and essence of the brand. This creates a strong connection between the experiential framework, the brand narrative and the marketing strategy and, thus, strengthens the marketing campaigns as they are grounded, and grow out, of the destination's brand essence.

6. Discussion and implications

6.1 *The three propositions*

Three propositions were presented in this paper and these are now discussed based on the findings and in relation to the attainment of the research aim and objectives set out at the start of the paper.

Proposition 1: Adopting storytelling as a central component in destination branding could facilitate and enable the creation of immersive, experiential and emotional experiences (into one unifying narrative) with the tourists as central actors/characters, which forms the identity of the destination. The literature review underscores that experiences derived from stories and can provide brands with a personality and give them emotional appeal (Douglas, 2009; Woodside, 2010). Furthermore, the analysis of extant brand building models demonstrates that storytelling is vital in defining the position statements, brand personality and emotional benefits (see Figure 1) that construct the brand essence. Finally, the step-by-step approach of the conceptual model shows how the ingredients of a typical story (such as plot, genre, story structure and characters) develop the experiential framework of the destinations and put together the identity of the destination, leading to a brand essence. The findings therefore support Proposition 1.

Proposition 2: Storytelling should be at the centre of how brands are developed and, therefore, should be initiated at the beginning of the brand building process because stories are the substance that truly connects the products and experiences with tourists' emotional benefits, and ergo represent the destination. The existing brand building models critiqued in the paper show that whether the models are based on the concept of pyramids, wheels or community consultation, brand development is an intricate process, involving long-term planning and strategy, that depends on various stakeholders, analyses and approaches (UNWTO, 2009; Yeoman et al., 2005). However, the implementation of the conceptual model based on the Hollywood scriptwriting formula demonstrates that brand building ought to consist of an extensive scriptwriting process which should be initiated right at the start of the brand building exercise, with input from the key stakeholders and supported by various analytical tools and extant brand building models grounded in marketing practices. Essentially, the process of the six scriptwriting steps leads to the creation of a brand essence by carving out a destination brand through a dynamic, circular process, similar to a hermeneutic process (Chessick, 1990).

Hence, the brand essence is the sum of all the stories, characters, genres and plots delivered in the six steps of the scriptwriting formula. The findings hereby confirm Proposition 2.

Proposition 3: The meticulous storytelling process of the Hollywood scriptwriting formula if applied to destination branding can facilitate the construction of a powerful mythical destination brand as it enables the creation of stories that activate a deep recognition in people.

The Hollywood scriptwriting formula is based on a standardised story popular with all cultures as it provides pleasurable emotional moments to the audience. Inspired by Campbell's (2008) monomyth and Vogler's (2007) twelve steps of the hero's journey, DMOs should focus on the narrative staging of the destination and adopt story director roles in order to enable tourists to enact travel stories encountering and overcoming antagonists as part of their escape from normal lives. The destination has to provide some challenges or obstacles that the tourists find appealing as part of playing the hero and they can thus be transformed into heroes as part of their quest to explore the destination.

The Hollywood scriptwriting formula enables a mapping out of the main characters and genres of the destination with whom the tourists can connect (Howard, 2006; Tomaric, 2011). It provides an experiential structure to the destination and thus pinpoints the main experiences and supporting experiences that tourists should encounter. The focus on a specific plot provides the tourists with a quest, a mission for visiting the destination, in which they can transform into the role of a hero. The formula thus facilitates the creation of a narrative for the destination in which the tourists can become immersed, identifying with certain characters and thus feeling a connection with the destination's cultural and historical make up and its people. It, thus, locates the core story of the destination that forms the mythical brand. The personality-focused brand naturally emphasises on the destination's people, their struggles and victories. This therefore provides tourists with an opportunity to empathise and feel part of the destination as it activates a deep recognition in people. Proposition 3 is therefore confirmed.

6.2 Managerial implications

The managerial implications of applying the Hollywood scriptwriting formula of the conceptual model are threefold. First, DMOs finally have the opportunity to put storytelling at the core of their marketing and branding efforts. The importance of storytelling has been stressed in recent years, but storytelling practices have not been thoroughly embedded in DMOs strategies as of yet. The scriptwriting formula enables a strengthening of their

storytelling ability. Second, the scriptwriting formula facilitates connecting the main experiences into a unified narrative. These interconnected experiences are offered to the tourists who encounter related stories with genres, plots and characters while at the destination. It thus enables the tourists to become immersed in an ongoing sequence of related events that are linked by an overall narrative. The interrelated experiences and their stories should also be presented in the marketing of the destination and through various communication channels. Hence, the narrative should appeal to potential tourists' imaginations and curiosity and attract further tourists to the destination. Third, in the conceptual model, DMOs now have a practical step-by-step guide that can be implemented for their destination. The process of the scriptwriting formula facilitates the creation of a structured story, identifying the central characters, genres and sub-stories of the destination and ultimately the brand essence. As the original purpose of the formula is to write popular stories with a mass-appeal, the brand essence deriving from the process will reflect the most engaging and exciting version of the destination. However, while it is a commercial story created to attract tourists, it is also grounded in the most prolific stories of the historical, cultural and societal make-up of the destination. Hence, the formula creates an authentic, yet commercially appealing, brand. The storytelling process of the Hollywood scriptwriting formula is therefore a constructive way for DMOs to generate experiential frameworks and brand essence.

The scriptwriting formula is ideally implemented with the cooperation of all tourism players. This is also why a smaller destination is preferred where there is a manageable amount of tourism players. Often at smaller destinations there is already a strong cooperation between tourism players in order to do marketing, branding and creating synergies. Hence, working together on a scriptwriting formula would not be a foreign concept to them. It is especially important that the visitor attractions participate in developing the script for the destination as they are the ones that hold the most important stories and they play a vital role in attracting the tourists. It cannot be expected that every hotel and restaurant is involved in the creative process. If not all the attractions wish or have the resources or time to participate, the DMO can develop the script gradually in stages, involving the willing tourism players initially. Creating the script and carving out the destination brand is a dynamic, circular and ongoing process and thus further attractions can be included later as the brand evolves. Furthermore, while some tourism players, specifically attractions, might not be involved, the DMOs should make sure that their particular stories may still feed into the script and thus become part of the brand and experiential framework.

7. Conclusion

The paper offered an original and novel idea of DMOs writing a script for their destinations in order to strengthen the destinations' experiences and brands. The findings demonstrate that the Hollywood scriptwriting process can potentially carve out a cohesive personality-based brand essence that provides a strong emotional and experiential benefit that engages and attracts tourists. It also offers an experiential framework and an interconnected narrative for the destination through the structured storytelling process. It becomes a destination experience where the various touristic elements, characters and touchpoints are integrated into one unifying narrative that stages a hero's role for the tourists to perform. This paper, therefore, provides a fundamental rethink of how to construct the destination experience and formulate the destination brand, employing the capabilities of scriptwriting to do so, rather than the traditional marketing concepts that are employed in existing brand building strategies. DMOs in charge of smaller destinations can utilise it as a helpful tool in re-writing the story of their destination to make it more appealing to tourists. Authors have long called for DMOs to become storytelling directors staging narratives (see Chronis, 2012; Woodside & Megehee, 2010) and the scriptwriting formula developed in our conceptual model makes it a realistic option.

The findings of this study however fall short of giving an answer to how tourists will respond to the scriptwriting formula. A key question is whether their experiences of the destination will be fundamentally changed. Further research should therefore follow the implementation of the conceptual model at a destination and observe its impact in terms of marketing practices and tourist experiences. It would also be interesting to see whether tourism players are eager to participate in the creation and implementation of the scriptwriting formula. Furthermore, the practical implications of the study are not discussed in depth and the script of the destination has not been presented as it would have made the article very long with a risk of deviating from its core essence i.e. applying the Hollywood scriptwriting formula to destination branding.

Possible future research could assess how the conceptual model is positioned in a DMO's marketing practices, while another study could investigate how other parts of the filmmaking process can be applied to marketing. For instance, the storyboards of filmmaking might be applied to a destination's website, where users are guided through the storyline of the destination. This would also mean that, instead of having a marketing expert creating the website, the DMO could hire film directors or scriptwriters who understand the methods of

storytelling and how to catch the attention and imagination of the audience. Destinations sell dreams, fantasies and escape, and therefore creativity and artistic competencies are as much in demand as a marketing background.

Our choice of interviewees, heroes and genre based on purposive sampling limits our qualitative research design, and this might have led to expectancy results. Future qualitative research can either repeat our study with a nonprobability sample or use a probability sample to explore how the Hollywood scriptwriting formula may be applied for example, in the design of museums, theme parks and heritage sites, where appealing storylines and characters are equally important in engaging the audience (Chronis, 2005). This will increase the creditability of our conclusions (Bernard 2012). Equally, the formula may work well in tour package design, specifically tours where tourists are visiting several attractions and/or destinations over a period of time. A storyline is created in which the tourists is the protagonist encountering various adventures. Such tour packages already exist, for instance, at Leger Holidays (2020), and it could be interesting to study if they apply scriptwriting methods, and whether they do or not, if their storylines can be strengthened via the Hollywood scriptwriting formula.

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