



Clarifying the role of mythmaking in influencing emotional engagement and transformation

The case of ANZAC in Gallipoli

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Introduction

In recent years there has been a growing interest in the role of storytelling and heritage tourist sites. Specifically, the literature highlights the influence of storytelling in engagement and shaping tourist experiences (Sigala & Steriopoulos, 2021). This paper explores the significant impact of storytelling on tourists visiting the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) ceremony in Gallipoli (Turkey), a place of significance for Australians and New Zealand. The ANZAC ceremony in Gallipoli, which takes place every year on 25th April, is a special event held annually with thousands attending to commemorate the fallen soldiers near ANZAC Cove, Turkey. The attendee numbers have gradually increased over the years. This commemorative event in Gallipoli has been conceptualised as a transformative experience, where Gallipoli is a place brand and ANZAC, as a heritage brand can influence emotional engagement and behavioural outcomes (Steriopoulos, 2020). Studies have conceptualised the experience as a heritage brand experience where emotional engagement involves mixed emotions (Steriopoulos, Khoo, Wong, Hall, & Steel, 2023).

A large number of Australians continue to visit Gallipoli, the site of so many Australian deaths during the First World War. This visitation can also be described as pilgrimage or secular tourism (Hyde & Harman, 2011); dark tourism (Foley & Lennon, 1996); battlefield tourism (Winter, 2011). Contributions towards the popularity of Gallipoli include the success of movies about 'Gallipoli'. These coupled with the sale of many books on the Gallipoli story by authors and historians prompted tourism companies to take the opportunity to offer new products to their target audiences such as pilgrimages to Gallipoli. The recent funding allocated to Lemnos, the Greek island where the hospital was staged (Greek City Times, 2022) suggests more transformative experiences will be developed in the next few years. These transformative tourist experiences need to consider the individualised needs of visitors to the place.

As a term, ANZAC was derived in 1915 when Australia and New Zealand got involved in the First World War. The term ANZAC has been used in all Australian commemorative events that took place nationally and internationally. Primary motives for Australians travelling to Gallipoli include a sense of nationhood (Slade, 2003); personal connections to the site and national sentiment and a reaffirmation of set beliefs about the First World War (Hall, Basarin, & Lockstone-Binney, 2011). The significance for Australians lies in it being the first military action overseas as a federated nation.

The researcher claims the ANZAC as a heritage brand story offers an individualised transformative experience relating to identities. Consumers value stories as they use them to construct their own identity (Holt, 2004). Consumers who have ancestors that fought in the campaign can relate to the story and empathise with the transformative experience. ANZAC is capable of creating a deep and personal relationship with consumers as it provides meaning via the myth (Batey, 2016; Holt, 2004). Studies refer to mythmaking and storytelling as a way to convey special meanings. In this study storytelling and mythmaking will be used interchangeably. The relationship between the consumer and the heritage brand story will be further clarified under the influence of mythmaking and emotional engagement with ANZAC in Gallipoli. The role of setting is also a key element in the narration of the story (Kotler & Keller, 2012); therefore, Gallipoli, which is the chosen tourism context will be explored together with the impact of the brand story on consumer feelings and behavioural changes.

Myths, stories and personal transformation

The study of mythmaking is important because when consumers engage with heritage tourist brands that have special meaning to them, these destination brands can become iconic (Holt, 2003). The revival of brand stories in recent years has led authors (Tait, 2012) to identify why consumers are attached to these brands. Brown et al (2013) agree brand myths hold special meanings based on myth making but also adds that these meanings can change over time. In the revival of the Titanic story Brown et al (2013) discussed the concept of mythmaking during the centenary commemorations held in 2012. These authors discovered consumers believed what they wanted to believe and that this brought them closer to the brand. They also

concluded that the Titanic is a good example of mythmaking, where the myth may change overtime and consumers adapt the myth to their individual or collective preferences as this creates a sense of belonging for them (Park, 2010). During mythmaking consumers assign special meanings to brands they highly admire as a result of brands symbolising something significant to them (Batey, 2016). The symbolic meanings hidden in the brand myth is what creates the iconic brand's special identity (Holt, 2006). This research adopts the concept of mythmaking by Brown et al (2013) and regards it as the consumer's effort to assign personal interpretations to a brand story, therefore the terms brand myth and brand story will be used interchangeably.

Kotler and Keller (2012) assert brand myths involve a setting, a story, a cast, a narrative and language. In the case of ANZAC, the story is the campaign fought by Australians and New Zealanders as shown above; the setting is Gallipoli, in Turkey; the cast are the soldiers that fought in the campaign and the involvement of female nurses; the narrative is the desired pilgrimage experience to Gallipoli to experience the iconic brand; finally, the language consists of all the historians and experts who narrated the myth and influenced the consumer experience during the pilgrimage.

In this study The ANZAC myth relates to a campaign, which started on 25th April 1915 in which Australians and New Zealanders landed in Gallipoli to fight against the Turkish people. The campaign ended up being a disaster for both sides with a significant number of deaths being recorded: 8,700 Australians, 2,700 New Zealand, 60,000 Turkish, 21,000 British, 8,000 French and 1,000 Indian (Cheal & Griffin, 2013). After the war ended and following the declaration of peace (Treaty of Lausanne 1923), the Commonwealth War Graves Commission spent four years identifying, marking out and constructing cemeteries for the burial of the dead with an initial thirty-one cemeteries and five memorials created (Lagos & Harris, 2012). In 1973, Gallipoli was established as a national park with 33,000 hectares and in 1997 it was included in the UN List of protected areas (Kelkit, Celik, & Esbah, 2010). In 1985, the Turkish government officially named the beach, where the ANZACs first landed in 1915, ANZAC Cove (Wright, 2014).

Based on these concepts it is possible that consumers are influenced from the brand story and they undergo emotional and behavioural changes. These changes may be based on associations from the individualised experience. If exposed to brand stories, consumers may interpret them based on their own understandings and perceptions could be affected. Importantly, if consumers hold similar beliefs about an iconic brand, loyalty could be developed overtime. Story endorsement may also influence consumer personal identity and feelings towards the brand. This paper will clarify the role of storytelling in influencing personal transformation.

Research method

Undertaking a descriptive phenomenological approach by Vagle (2018) the researcher sought narratives from personal experiences that took place during the centenary (2015). Based on Giorgi (2012) the research sought to uncover the essence of the human experiences by exploring the perspectives of the individuals and making it valuable for understanding the depth of the transformative experience. An initial email was sent by a travel agent via a database and respondents who wished to be considered for the interview replied directly to the researcher. Following a semi-structured interview method (Creswell, 2013), stories were unveiled in relation to their lived experience. All evidence was seen from the participants view. This research will provide empirical insights in relation to the individualised transformative experience and the role of storytelling in influencing emotional outcomes.

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