

DIGITAL VS. VERBAL STORYTELLING IN TOURISM MARKETING: EFFECTS ON EMOTIONAL AROUSAL AND DESTINATION CHOICE INTENTION

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19106897>

Keywords

Storytelling; Digital Storytelling; Verbal Storytelling; Emotional Arousal; Destination Choice Intention; Tourism Marketing; Experimental Design

Article History

Received: 15 January 2026

Accepted: 27 February 2026

Published: 16 March 2026

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Abstract

Storytelling has become an important communication strategy in tourism marketing. Destinations often use narratives to attract potential tourists and create emotional engagement with places. However, the influence of different storytelling formats on tourist responses is still not fully understood. This study examines the effect of storytelling format (digital vs. verbal) on tourists' emotional arousal and destination choice intention. An experimental research design was employed in which participants were exposed to either digital storytelling or verbal storytelling related to a tourism destination. Data were collected from 768 participants and analyzed using independent samples t-tests. The results showed that storytelling format did not significantly influence destination choice intention. However, a significant difference was found in emotional arousal between the two storytelling formats. These findings suggest that storytelling format plays an important role in generating emotional engagement among potential tourists, but it may not directly influence their travel decisions. The study contributes to tourism marketing literature by providing empirical evidence on the comparative effects of storytelling formats. The findings also highlight the importance of emotional engagement in tourism communication strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism communication has now adopted storytelling as a significant tool. Tourism sites tend to make use of narratives to expose culture, history, and experiences to prospective tourists. Stories also enable the tourists to conceive the place they are going to see. This process may have a bearing on the way they are going to feel about the destination, and whether they desire to travel to this destination. Storytelling has become a popular marketing tool in tourism marketing in recent years and via digital media

like social media, websites, and short videos (Xu and Chen, 2024).

Meanwhile, digital media are not the only places where storytelling is possible. According to bantering, verbal narratives presented by tourist guides, locals, or presenters are also instrumental in the tourism experiences. These stories have the ability to form emotional touch and attach significance to the destination to the tourists. Scientists have proposed that storytelling can assist tourists to experience destinations in an emotional way and form memorable opinions

(Ko et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the manner of the story-telling can affect the response of the tourist.

Digital storytelling is a mixture of visual and narrative features like videos, images and web information. These formats are able to enhance destination messages immersive Ness and interactivity. Research indicates that digital stories have the ability to capture the interest of potential travelers and boost interest level (Gan et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the old verbal storytelling may also produce the same effect and evoke the same emotions due to the fact that it is sometimes more natural and personal.

Although the use of storytelling in tourism marketing has been increasing, little empirical study has been done to compare the various forms of storytelling. Specifically, the extent to which digital storytelling is more successful than verbal storytelling in influencing tourist behavior is not yet clear. According to previous research, storytelling has the potential to shape the feelings and perception of a destination, yet there is less understanding of how it can change the destination choice intention (Leong et al., 2024).

Another psychological influence in decision making in tourism is also emotions. Emotional arousal may be arousal like excitement, curiosity or inspiration when people are exposed to interesting stories about destinations. Emotions usually influence the sense of tourists and may affect their behavioral intention (Hosany et al., 2022). Nonetheless, emotional involvement is not necessarily directly related to real travel choices.

Consequently, the objective of the proposed research is to study the level to which storytelling format (digital or verbal) affects the responses of the tourists. In particular, the research questions are whether the format of storytelling influences destination choice intention and emotional arousal. Through the comparison of two forms of storytelling, the study will attempt to get a better insight into the way narrative

communication influences psychological responses and travel intentions of tourists.

This study is relevant to the existing literature on tourism marketing in two aspects. First, it presents empirical results of comparison of digital and verbal forms of storytelling. Second, it discusses the influences of storytelling on emotional reactions and behavioral intentions of tourists.

2. Research Objectives

To examine whether storytelling format (digital vs. verbal) influences tourists' destination choice intention.

To examine whether storytelling format (digital vs. verbal) influences tourists' emotional arousal.

3. Hypothesis

H1: Digital storytelling has a stronger positive effect on tourists' destination choice intention than verbal storytelling.

H2: Storytelling format (digital vs. verbal) significantly influences tourists' emotional arousal levels.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Storytelling in Tourism Communication

Telling of stories has emerged as a significant communication tactic in the tourism industry. Destinations no longer simply offer information. They also attempt to produce stories that enable prospective tourists to envision the destination to visit and have it in their minds before travelling. Stories can help destinations to appear more beautiful, touching and memorable. Due to this fact, tourism marketers resort to storytelling in advertising campaigns more often (Xu & Chen, 2024).

Storytelling in tourism marketing can be of a various format. It can be sent online via the social media or videotapes, blogs or destination websites. It may also be orally when one is guided or presented by the presenters or the locals who relate stories about the place. Both types of forms are intended to establish interaction and

emotional involvement with the viewer. The past studies indicate that storytelling assists the tourists in building the meaning of destinations and intensifies their imagination of travel (Chronis, 2012). Well presented stories can impact on the perceptions of people towards destinations.

It is also demonstrated in recent studies that digital storytelling is gaining a stronger role in tourism promotion. Videos online, brief media and social networks enable destinations to produce immersive stories that appeal to prospective travelers. These stories have the potential to attract more interest and develop an urge to visit the location (Gan et al., 2023). Nonetheless, verbal narrative is still popular in tourism experiences and cultural presentations. Other scholars state that verbal narratives are more real and that they can establish stronger emotional bonds with listeners (Ko et al., 2022). Although these advances have taken place, it is yet not fully understood what the relative effectiveness of storytelling formats can be. According to some researchers, digital stories telling can be more effective because of the visual appeal, and some scholars suggest that a verbal story is more personal and meaningful. Consequently, it is significant to compare the forms of storytelling with the purpose to comprehend the impact of narratives on the reaction of tourists.

4.2 Emotional Arousal during Tourism Experiences.

Tourism experiences are more dominated by emotions. Excitement, joy, curiosity, or inspiration are some of the emotions that most people are likely to associate with tourism. Such emotional behaviors may arise when the tourists are exposed to beautiful information about the destination or stories. Emotional arousal is a state of mind where people experience stimulation, excitement, or get emotional about a stimulus (Hosany et al., 2022).

Emotional arousal is a psychological response that is regarded as vital in tourism marketing research work. The more the tourists become emotionally involved with a destination story, the more they will recall the experience and get interest to visit the destination. Some attitudes toward destinations and tourism products may also be affected by the emotional responses. Indicatively, there is research that indicates that storytelling, and experiences of narratives have the capacity of arousing emotions that reinforce the perception of tourists towards destinations (Leong et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, emotional reactions do not necessarily result into behavioral choices. A destination story can emotionally involve a tourist yet they can still choose not to visit it on other grounds like cost, distance and personal preferences. Consideration should, therefore, be given to the emotional arousal independent of behavioral consequences like destination choice intention.

4.3 Destination Choice Intention.

Destination choice intention entails the probability that a tourist chooses to visit a destination in future. It is also commonly adopted as a predictor of possible tourist behavior. Most tourism research studies focus on intention owing to its factuality in expressing the intention of tourists to travel prior to the actual travel.

Destination choice intention can be influenced by a number of factors. These are destination image, perceived value, emotional involvement and the information portrayed by marketing communication. Storytelling has recently been also found as one of the factors that can influence the perceptions tourists have of destinations and their intention to visit them (Xu & Chen, 2024).

In the case of digital tourism marketing in particular, narratives have become more significant. The use of online stories, videos and content on social media enables the destinations

to show experiences that may generate interest in traveling. Studies indicate that narrative-based destination marketing has the potential to affect the intentions to travel, particularly when the narrative evokes emotional appeal and vivid visualization of the destination (Gan et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, it remains uncertain as to whether the format of the story telling itself has much influence in the decision to travel. A few of these researches indicate that visual digital information can have a stronger persuasive effect, whereas others emphasize the fact that authentic human narratives are highly valuable. Due to these inconclusive results, more studies are required to determine whether digital storytelling in fact increases behavioral response more than verbal storytelling.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative experimental research design to examine the effect of storytelling format on tourists' emotional arousal and destination choice intention. Experimental research is commonly used to test causal relationships between variables because it allows researchers to manipulate a stimulus and observe its effect on participants' responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In this study, the independent variable was storytelling format, which had two conditions: digital storytelling and verbal storytelling. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions. Random assignment helps reduce bias and increases the internal validity of the experiment (Field, 2018). The experiment followed a between-subjects design, where each participant was exposed to only one storytelling format. This design is often used in tourism research when comparing the effects of different marketing stimuli (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017).

5.2 Population and Sampling

The target population of this study consisted of potential tourists who consume tourism-related media and travel information online. Because it is difficult to access the entire population of tourists, the study used a non-probability purposive sampling technique.

Purposive sampling allows researchers to select participants who meet specific criteria relevant to the study (Etikan et al., 2016). In this research, participants were selected based on their interest in travel and their ability to understand tourism-related narratives. A total of 768 participants took part in the experiment. They were divided into two groups based on the storytelling format they were exposed to. Experimental studies often use similar sample sizes to increase statistical reliability and ensure meaningful comparison between groups (Hair et al., 2019).

5.3 Experimental Stimuli

Two types of storytelling stimuli were developed for the experiment.

The first stimulus represented digital storytelling, which included multimedia content such as visual images and narrative text presented in a digital format. Digital storytelling often integrates audio-visual elements that make the story more engaging for viewers (Xu & Chen, 2024).

The second stimulus represented verbal storytelling, where the same destination story was presented in a spoken narrative format without digital visual elements. Verbal storytelling mimics traditional narrative communication often delivered by tour guides or presenters in tourism contexts. Both storytelling formats contained the same core information about the destination to ensure that differences in participant responses were due to storytelling format rather than content variation.

5.4 Measurement Instruments

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire after participants were exposed to the storytelling stimulus. The questionnaire consisted of items measuring emotional arousal and destination choice intention. Emotional arousal was measured using a Likert scale, where participants rated their emotional engagement after viewing the story. Emotional responses such as excitement, curiosity, and inspiration are widely used indicators of emotional arousal in tourism research (Hosany et al., 2022). Destination choice intention was measured by asking participants to indicate their likelihood of visiting the destination in the future. Intention-based measures are commonly used as predictors of travel behavior in tourism studies (Ajzen, 2020).

5.5 Data Collection Procedure

Participants were invited to take part in the experiment through an online survey platform. After providing informed consent, they were randomly assigned to either the digital storytelling condition or the verbal storytelling condition. Participants first viewed the storytelling stimulus related to a tourism destination. Immediately after exposure, they completed the questionnaire measuring their emotional arousal and destination choice

intention. Collecting responses immediately after exposure helps capture participants' immediate psychological reactions to the storytelling stimulus (Hair et al., 2019).

5.6 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were first used to summarize the characteristics of the sample. To test the research hypotheses, independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare the responses of participants in the digital storytelling group and the verbal storytelling group. The independent samples t-test is appropriate when comparing the means of two independent groups (Field, 2018). Levene's test for equality of variances was also examined to determine whether the assumption of equal variances was satisfied before interpreting the t-test results.

6. Data Analysis and Results

6.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were first examined to understand the overall responses of participants toward storytelling formats, emotional arousal, and destination choice intention. The mean and standard deviation values provide an overview of participants' perceptions.

Table 6.1

Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Emotional Arousal	768	3.78	0.84
Destination Choice Intention	768	3.61	0.89

The results show that the average emotional arousal among participants was relatively high (M = 3.78, SD = 0.84). Similarly, destination choice intention also showed a moderate to high level (M = 3.61, SD = 0.89). This indicates that participants generally responded positively to the storytelling stimuli.

6.2 Hypothesis Testing

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare the responses of participants exposed to digital storytelling and verbal storytelling.

6.2.1 Effect of Storytelling Format on Destination Choice Intention (H1)

H1: Digital storytelling has a stronger positive effect on tourists' destination choice intention than verbal storytelling.

Hypothesis

Table 6.2

Independent Samples t-test for Destination Choice Intention

Variable	Variance Assumption	Levene's F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Destination Choice Intention	Equal variances assumed	0.451	0.502	1.374	766	0.170
	Equal variances not assumed			1.374	753.004	0.170

Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant ($F = 0.451, p = .502$), indicating that the assumption of equal variances was satisfied. Therefore, the equal variances assumed results were interpreted. The independent samples t-test showed that the difference in destination choice intention between digital storytelling and verbal storytelling was not statistically significant, $t(766) = 1.374, p = .170$. This indicates that participants exposed to digital storytelling did not significantly differ from

those exposed to verbal storytelling in terms of their intention to choose the destination. Therefore, H1 is not supported.

6.2.2 Effect of Storytelling Format on Emotional Arousal (H2)

Hypothesis

H2: Storytelling format (digital vs. verbal) significantly influences tourists' emotional arousal levels.

Table 6.3

Independent Samples t-test for Emotional Arousal

Variable	Variance Assumption	Levene's F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Emotional Arousal	Equal variances assumed	0.950	0.330	-4.915	764	0.000
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.913	754.022	0.000

Levene's test indicated that the assumption of equal variances was satisfied ($F = 0.950, p = .330$). Therefore, the equal variances assumed results were interpreted.

The independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in emotional arousal between the two storytelling conditions, $t(764) = -4.915, p < .001$. This result demonstrates that storytelling format

significantly influences participants' emotional arousal levels. Participants exposed to one storytelling format reported higher emotional engagement compared to the other format. This finding suggests that storytelling presentation plays an important role in shaping emotional responses among potential tourists.

Accordingly, H2 is supported.

6.3 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Table 6.4

Summary of Hypotheses

Hypothesis Statement	Result
H1 Digital storytelling has a stronger effect on destination choice intention than Not verbal storytelling	Supported
H2 Storytelling format significantly influences emotional arousal	Supported

The findings indicate that while storytelling format significantly affects tourists' emotional arousal, it does not significantly influence destination choice intention. This suggests that emotional engagement may occur without necessarily translating into immediate travel decisions.

7. Discussion

This research was aimed at investigating the effects of the format of narrations on the emotional reaction and the intention to visit a destination in tourists. There were two formats of storytelling found and compared: digital storytelling and verbal storytelling. The results of the research are quite interesting in the way storytelling is functioning in the field of tourism communication. The findings indicated that the format of story telling had no significant effect on destination choice intention. This implies that the intention to visit the destination was not significantly higher in the participants who were exposed to digital storytelling as compared to those who were exposed to verbal storytelling. This observation indicates that the content of storytelling in itself may fail to influence the travelling behavior of the tourists. Tourists might need more information, including cost, access, safety, or destination image, before making a decision on whether to visit a place or not.

The findings are in line with other studies that have proposed that travel intention depends on numerous factors and not one marketing stimulus. In the following case, cognitive appraisal of destination attributes and individual constraints are frequently used in tourism

decision making (Ajzen, 2020). Storytelling may generate interest or curiosity but still the tourists can weigh other factors before deciding on the final travel decision. The results however indicated that storytelling format had considerable influence on emotional arousal. The study showed that the emotional involvement was found to be higher with the participants that were exposed to one storytelling format than with the other format. This outcome shows that presentation of stories is significant in creating emotional reactions in potential tourists.

This conclusion is corroborated by past studies into tourism that emphasize on the importance of emotions as determinants of tourism experiences. There might arise emotional responses including excitement, curiosity, and inspiration when people are exposed to captivating destination narratives (Hosany et al., 2022). Storytelling, in both digital and oral forms, may evoke emotions since it enables the audience to visualize themselves being in the destination.

The second potential reason why this was the case is that storytelling mostly affects affective reactions and not behavioral choices. This is to say that the stories can have the effect of affecting the response of the tourists on the destination first before it impacts their travel choices. In the past, it has also been hypothesized that emotional involvement can lead to a memorable tourism experience and destination attachment (Kim and Fesenmaier, 2017). The results hence indicate that storytelling could be a useful mechanism of generating emotional involvement though it

may not necessarily be converted to destination choice intention. Potential travelers can develop emotional interest and destination awareness through storytelling, which can be of benefit to tourism marketers.

In general, the paper emphasizes the significance of storytelling in tourism marketing, however, it also demonstrates that the connection between storytelling and travel decision making might be more complicated than one may assume. It turns out that storytelling format can be involved in emotional responses, whereas the intention to visit a destination can be determined by a wider range of factors.

8. Conclusion

The current research discussed how the format of storytelling influences the emotional arousal and intention to visit the destination among tourists. There were two types of storytelling that were compared: digital storytelling, and verbal storytelling. The findings present valuable information on the role of storytelling on responses of tourists. The results indicated that storytelling format did not have any serious impact on destination choice intention. This implies that the effectiveness of digital storytelling was not considerably different with verbal storytelling in influencing the decisions of tourists to make in order to visit a destination. This finding implies that, the process of making decisions about travel is multifaceted and it is usually affected by many factors other than marketing stories.

The study however revealed that the format of storytelling had a significant role in emotional arousal of the respondents. This implies that presentations on storytelling can be significant in arousing emotional interests on tourism destinations. Excitement, curiosity, and inspiration are emotional responses that may arise in the minds of individuals when they are exposed to interesting stories.

On the whole, the findings indicate that storytelling is practical in building emotional

content but it will not necessarily be converted into instant travel choices. Storytelling can alternatively be used as an influencing tool during the initial stages that determine the perception and the emotional attachment of the tourist to a destinations. The research work has made contributions to the body of literature in tourism marketing by offering empirical data on doing comparisons between the digital and verbal narratives. It also emphasizes on the significance of emotional reactions in tourism communication plans.

9. Recommendations

The results of the present study allow making a number of recommendations regarding the future research and the practice of tourism.

To start with, further research ought to investigate other psychological factors that can determine the association between storytelling and tourist behavior. Other elements, including destination image, perceived authenticity, and the previous traveling experience might serve to elucidate the impact of storytelling on travel choice.

Second, one can consider alternative variants of storytelling, including immersive narration, virtual realities, or interactive online narration. These formats could create more impact and appeal to the tourists in another way.

Third, the impact of storytelling in other tourism settings, e.g. cultural tourism, adventure tourism, or heritage tourism could be studied in the future. Storytelling can do well or fail to do well, depending on the kind of tourism experience that is being advertised.

Lastly, longitudinal research can also assist in the realization of whether emotional involvement developed in the process of storytelling can be converted into the actual travelling behavior as time goes on.

On the whole, more research works should be conducted in order to learn better the complicated connection between storytelling, emotions, and tourism decision making.

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