PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MARKETING: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF DESTINATION BRANDING NARRATIVES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Abstract

Tourism destination marketing narratives encode deeper philosophical assumptions about the nature of experience and the good life yet these assumptions remain unexamined in marketing scholarship. This study applies a deductive and inductive qualitative content analysis to the official English language digital marketing materials of the ten most visited tourism destinations globally, selected on the basis of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation inbound arrival rankings for 2024. A coding framework grounded in existentialism (Heidegger and Sartre), pragmatist philosophy (Dewey) and the capabilities approach (Nussbaum and Sen) was operationalised into discrete thematic indicators and applied to 165 meaning units across ten destination marketing organisation websites. Findings show that the pragmatist orientation is the dominant framing across nine of the ten destinations with a corpus mean of 53.0 percent, foregrounding travel as a vehicle for experiential learning, practical enrichment and active discovery. The existential orientation was dominant in one destination only (Italy at 45.5 percent) driven by the #LiveItalian campaign narrative of authentic encounter with everyday excellence. The eudaimonic orientation, linking travel to community wellbeing, ecological responsibility and inclusive access, accounted for a corpus mean of 17.3 percent and was confined in most destinations to supplementary sustainability sections rather than primary brand narratives. The hedonic orientation was the least prevalent at a corpus mean of 5.1 percent. These findings reveal a structural marginalisation of community oriented and ecological values in mainstream destination branding and suggest that genuinely sustainable destination marketing requires the integration of eudaimonic framing into core brand narratives rather than its treatment as a supplementary concern. The theoretical contribution is a philosophically grounded typology of destination branding orientations. The practical contribution is a proposed eudaimonic reorientation framework the applicability of which warrants empirical testing in future research.

Keywords: destination branding, philosophical orientations, qualitative content analysis, sustainable tourism marketing, eudaimonia