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A tale of two regencies

—Storytelling for Toraja tourism destination—

Patrice PENDELL, Imanuella ANDILOLO

Nagoya Gakuin University/ University of Mataram

Abstract

This narrative originated from a case study of tourism marketing of Toraja on the island of Sulawesi in Indonesia that revealed contrasts and obstacles, specifically, the disparities of two governmental administrations serving one amazing destination with prosaic tourism promotions. An insider's insight instigated the development of an application of a simple yet compelling approach for tourism promotion for this region. Content rich, the Tale of Two Regencies, combines the tradition of storytelling with content e-marketing accomplishing two goals: first, providing official, unique and compelling tourism publicity and secondly, unites governmental bureaucracy in one goal. This paper will present a brief review of the traditions of storytelling; content marketing; an explanation of Toraja's two regency challenge; and tourism promotion tactics for Toraja.

Keywords: cultural tourism, content marketing, storytelling, Internet identity, Toraja

二都市物語

—インドネシア・トラジャ地方観光における伝統的語り文化の可能性—

パトリス ペンデル・イマヌエラ アンディロロ

名古屋学院大学/マタラム大学

A. BACKGROUND

Toraja is both a region and an ethnic group situated in the highlands of South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Due to its massive size, in order to achieve efficiency in administration and public services, in 2009 Toraja Regency was split in two: Tana Toraja Regency with the capital of Makale and North Toraja Regency with the capital of Rantepao. The split was initially met with apprehension and fear of division of a closed knit ethnic group that was once the second most visited tourism destination in Indonesia after Bali (“Tana Toraja Regency,” 2019). However, culturally speaking none has changed and division only remains in provision of administration and public services.

This paper series seeks to discuss the marketing of tourism destinations of Toraja through storytelling. The impetus for this discussion came from an antidotal survey during a visit to Toraja, a region rich in cultural heritage and natural beauty. Initially planned as an adventure and nostalgic tour led by a native of the region, the circumstances provided the right ingredients for an evaluation and discussions regarding tourism promotion. Through the lens of tourists, research was conducted with questions asked, answered, or found unaddressed. A unique collaboration resulted in the motivation to challenge current tourism marketing methods and discuss potential promotion strategies for this region.

The authors are two researchers who represented a dichotomy: a foreigner and a native. A foreign tourist, Pendell’s research interests focus on sustainable cultural/social tourism and traditional Japanese storytelling. Born in the USA and based in Japan as a lecturer at Nagoya Gakuin University, Pendell has been researching cultural/social tourism and storytelling in Indonesia annually since



What’s the story?

2014. Andilolo is a native of Toraja and having studied in Australia, Netherlands and Indonesia, is currently a lecturer at the University of Mataram in Lombok Indonesia with research interests in marketing, tourism and international development. A fitting and natural consequence of curiosities and stories told, a review and recommendations unfolded from two travelers’ adventures. With an insider’s knowledge and two seasoned professionals, investigators were poised to explore the possibilities.

Tourism marketing methods present a multitude of manifestations including professional photography and content that expounds fun activities and typical attractions. These traditional approaches offer glimpses to destinations and experiences that are usually hosted by commercial endeavors. While these orthodox tactics are effective, in today’s worldwide tourism market competition demands a more persuasive scheme. One strategy is to embellish content marketing with storytelling. Such tourism promotions consider interesting stories, persuasive content, leadership of stakeholders and a framework to help policy makers increase overall competitiveness,

sustainability and performance (OECD, 2012).

This is the introduction of this narrative. Moving from these situational contexts and baseline concepts, an approach is suggested. The Tale of Toraja combines the tradition of storytelling with content marketing to provide unique and compelling tourism promotions and a demonstrative mechanism to engage stakeholders.

B. DISCUSSION

This paper is an exploratory, descriptive and contextual qualitative research on storytelling as marketing means to promote tourism destination in Toraja. As such, it is presented in a narrative that seeks to determine storytelling aspects of the destination to enhance online content marketing. Furthermore, this paper looks at the context of storytelling best presented to promote tourism destination.

Storytelling & Content Marketing- Just a Story

Storytelling is an ancient art and a fundamental activity with no footnote needed as we all recall a good story, whether a class punctuated by a story whose lesson not forgotten, or a childhood story that resonates a family history, or a story we tell others about an amazing experience. Stories share insights, inspirations and are entertaining. It is the stories we are told and tell ourselves through which we interpret the world, and in this inner realm of sense making, a multitude of mechanisms operate including learning, comparing, culture, and ultimately understanding. Stories told give meaning to our lives. Furthermore, storytelling generates pictures in one's mind that are further developed by individual experiences and interpretations. Additionally, stories have the value of not being ashamed of who you are, and also, not to judge people or things by their exterior. Stories told and retold make life deeper and richer.

In the modern era cultures, communities and common people are challenged by the demands of globalization and instant messaging exchanges- oddly isolating and passive. This paradox serves the application of a very old communication strategy- a good story. A good story resonates and has been a time-honored technique to lead and motivate. Storytelling by nature is the antithesis of isolation i.e., authentic, personal, emotional, inspirational and drive action.

Storytelling applied in tourism marketing not only offers a special appeal differing from commonly used approaches; it provides personal engagement of all stakeholders. Tourism marketing commonly provides displays of beautiful places, unique experiences and great food. These assets and appeals are to be expected. This marketing approach norm, when pitted against global travelers who are adept at Internet research, is like another voice in an already crowded room. Who is listening? When a storytelling approach is used, tangible assets are emotional experiences- transforming Internet

scanners into travelers. These authentic interactions drive action. Tourism destination goods, services and people are the tools to the end- a great story. The appeal focuses on the textured and personal engagement of travelers, local citizens and governments.

Crafting a brand story is not unlike writing any good story where there are three main components plus a fourth: set up the situation; chronicle a conflict or challenge; provide a solution. The fourth, a marketing added feature, is a call to action. The brand stories are about emotions, experiences and relationship the brand and/or products provide. The approach will involve a variety of considerations. First, find out the stories that exist that make the destination attractive- people, culture, food and nature. These ideas are the seed to compelling stories. Second, consider the delivery approach with a mix of media and interactive options. Third, consider authenticity of the experiences as well as appeal to travelers. Multiple-voices and stories can indirectly convey the same compelling message. Engagement of local citizens and governmental support is key. While stories will differ, the overall concept must be shared and reinforced. Manifestations of themes or mottos are examples of threads that weave and unified brand stories. Fourth, the essential core of the storytelling is sharing experiences that appeal to emotions. It is emotion that drive our motivations, frame appeals, and are a call to action.

Content marketing appeal is well established and accordingly, a brief discussion will suffice for this discussion in order to place this concept in our context. An informative review of content marketing can be found in Songming (2015), which includes a literature review and future research directions. Pulizzi (2013) characterizes content marketing as, “the marketing and business process for creating and distributing valuable and compelling content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience with the objective of driving profitable customer action” (p. 5). Another explanation provided by Holliman and Rowley (2014) states content marketing as, “the activity associated with creating, communicating, distributing and exchanging digital content that has value for customers, clients, partners and the firm and its brands” (p. 287). Essentially content is fundamental and can be manifested in three general parameters: task, which depicts new product of service; interaction, such as visual images; and self-oriented content, akin to a story about the company or products (Kim, Spiller & Hettche, 2015).

Storytelling in content marketing has inductive appeals that illustrate what, why and where the rewards are found. Good storytelling is about emotion and the relationship the brands or product provides. Appeals and rewards are creative, often subtle and often indirect. For example, NIKE Equality Campaign is a story about the company’s commitment to social change (Brenner, 2017). This feel good story indirectly sends the message of buying NIKE shoes.

Story-content market for destination tourism can breathe life into culture by conveying information, especially creating a journey of the imagination, which others yearn to experience. Aristotle said, “The soul never thinks without a mental image.” (Hett, Trans. 1957, p. 177). The

synergism of a good story framed in communication marketing is a tactic, which will more fully explain a tourism destination, both inductively and emotionally.

Story-content marketing is engaging and driven by the audience. Consequently, knowing the target audience is critical. This primary framework is augmented by amplifying access through a strong position within the Search Engine Results Pages (SERPS) i.e., search-ability of the sites in order to optimize the availability and appeal in searches and facilitate purchases. Researching what exists and performance as well as checking trends are important to design effective quality content. Ultimately storytelling as an element of content marketing stands out, adds value, and offers different hook to engage viewers. According to a recent article by Wallace on the Drum Network (2020) consider uniqueness, the best on the topic, and content that is not duplicative.

The Tale of Two Regencies

Indonesian governmental structure is divided into provinces (state or prefecture) with the next division being regency. The regency is second level administration sometimes translated as municipality. Regencies are the main governance infrastructure as well as service provider for the local people in Indonesia. Tana Toraja Regency, formed in 1946 by the Dutch East Indies, is a region located in South Sulawesi, 300 kilometers north of Makassar, the provincial capital of South Sulawesi. Tana Toraja is home to the Toraja ethnic community. The history of the areas is one of lordships, colonization by the Dutch and transitions to independence and centralization by the government of Indonesia. While complex and relevant, germane to our topic is the rivalry between groups, derivative from social hierarchies and economic divisions. Even in modern times, regional autonomy and identity prevails in seemingly similar areas. They are not. In 2009 after five years of heated discourse, two regencies were formed from Tana Toraja: Tana Toraja with the capital in Makale; North Toraja with its capital in Rantepao. The regencies are separated by 30 kilometers of rugged forested terrain. Both regencies are rich with nature for trekking or white-water expeditions as well as world heritage sites of Toraja culture, which are mainly concentrated in North Toraja. As a Toraja tourist destination, one cannot separate the regencies, and in fact tourists consider and explore both regencies as one target. This is further enhanced by the fact there is no clear border between the two regencies. From a local perspective, however, the regencies are distinct political identities, and separated by different government administrations and services including tourism promotion. The separate government funding on tourism promotion becomes problematic when there is a lack of synergy between the two, more so when Toraja as a destination is treated as a two headed snake. In terms of tourism promotion, the lack of official government web sites be that a separate, linked or combined site, leaves all to chance for privately run sites that may or may not provide the correct information.

Toraja Tourism

Indonesia, the fourth largest country in the world, is an archipelago of thousand of islands, diverse ethnicities filled with dynamic tourist destinations. In 2018 Indonesia tourism was ranked 20 in the world and also ranked ninth fastest growing tourist sector in the world according to The Jakarta Post (“Indonesia Tourism set to Beat Thailand in 5 Years,” October 23, 2018). Destinations through this expansive country compete for lucrative travel revenue.

In 1984 Toraja was “discovered” as a tourist destination and touted to be the second-best place to visit in Indonesia after Bali. Amazing natural attractions allow options in vast tracks of aboriginal arboreal country or trekking prominent peaks or sparkling rivers to float or challenging white water. Then, there is Toraja culture. Unique in Indonesia, this indigenous culture remains active in its customs today. It is a living, breathing center of vibrant traditions, crafts and distinctive cuisine. Evidence abounds as almost all houses have a *tongkonan*, or traditional structure which embody the past, present and even social standing of the owners. The *tongkonan* houses have a classic boat design with a variety of adornment designs depending of function, yet all are oriented north to south. *Tongkonan* is an iconic image of Toraja. Products from the region are often labeled from Toraja with a *tongkonan* image, for example Key Coffee. The culture of Toraja is also known for the elaborate and expensive death rituals. Burial sites are concomitantly used locally and viewed by tourists. The regional cuisine offers a variety delicious dishes including *pantollo pammarasan* a kind of meat stew flavored with local herbs with a distinctive black color. Elegant crafts including woodcarving and weaving follow Toraja design customs. Suffice it to say the region lives up to its reputation as one of the most interesting places to visit in Indonesia.



Research on tourism promotion was conducted at the regency offices of economic development and tourism in Tana Toraja and North Toraja. Interviews were conducted to determine what promotions and collaborations were in place. The regencies in both cases had limited tourism information and only one regular event was known. In Tana Toraja there is an annual event call *Lovely December* in the last week of the month. While the regency office for Tana Toraja in Makale knew about the event, they had little information. A brief report on the event was found on the ASEAN Tourism Internet site (“Lovely December Toraja,” 2017) that listed the “Government of Toraja Regency” celebrating and the sponsoring organization “Toraja Destination Management Organization.” However, the link listed (www.torajainternationalfestival.com) has been disabled. Continuing the investigation at the Tana Toraja Regency office in Makale about other events or tourism promotions in the regency as well as any collaboration with the neighboring North Toraja Regency edified the dilemma. The official had no knowledge or plans of tourism promotions and indicated the question of funding was an issue. Funding allocation for promotions and/or marketing

maintenance was lacking. Furthermore, there was a reluctance to begin any promotions. Essentially who spoke first would be obligated to pay, so no one was talking. Additionally, past rivalries of money and status, so prevalent when the regencies separated, remain an impediment to possible collaborations.

By comparison, other governments take an active role in tourism promotions such as Gifu Prefecture, Japan (“Visit Gifu,” 2020). The site is easy to navigate, provides current events, and available in eight languages including Indonesian. Current events, special interest stories and links to sponsors combine both friendly and commercial needs. Additionally, the organization uses regular posts on SNS like Face Book, Twitter such that promotions and information is timely as well as serve to broaden the outreach.



Toraja is being promoted, and one can find a myriad of pretty pictures and tours on the Internet. But who is doing the promoting? Options abound with sites sponsored by tourism providers and commercial organizations. While this is useful, the perception and enticements are made to book tours, hotels and so on. Some Internet sites include: Tana Toraja South Sulawesi, (2019); Tana Toraja, (2018); Visit Toraja, (2018); Events in Toraja, (2018); Lovely December Toraja, (2017). Noticeably absent on these Internet sites were “time stamps” or real time updates/links. There were errors as well as little on current events indicating that web maintenance is minimal. While linking a destination from tourism providers is helpful, and information the likes found on Wikipedia does provide background, generally these sites rely on standard schemes. Pretty pictures, good prices, all-inclusive and easy booking with the ultimate message, come to our shop. The lack of an official stamp also brings question to mind the authenticity of such information. Quick research on the Internet reveals that many privately run sites are incorrect in its descriptions. Such traps left unchecked may at the least lead to disappointments.

The natural and cultural features of Toraja make for some unbelievable photographs. Simply search the Internet and a plethora of pictures are available. As in many popular tourist destinations, there is no lack of interesting and spectacular images. The encounters promised by these photogenic ploys while unique, remain voyeuristic and superficial.

A Tale for Toraja

This paper focuses on creating content marketing with storytelling for on-line tourism promotions that will serve two regencies- providing identities and a catalyst for the stakeholders. Tourism promotions for these two regencies have a shared goal: expounding the cultural and environmental cornucopia of options in Toraja.

Beyond another set of pretty pictures, the values of a place are in its stories. Toraja is abounded by symbolism. Each of its designs represents something. Each tells a story. Events or gatherings in Toraja can be separated into two categories: *Rambu solo'* and *rambu tuka'*. *Rambu solo'* describes smoke blowing downwards that symbolizes sad events or funeral ceremony, and *rambu tuka'* describes smoke blowing upwards to symbolize happy events such as a wedding or most typically entering new house. The description of such events is abundant and can be seen from many different medium, be that print, video or online narratives. A good story is made when the right angle is captured.

A wedding where families travel miles to attend and eat together is a story like many others. A traditional Toraja wedding, however, tells a story of a young girl wearing a traditional dress adorn with colorful beads that are interlaced symbolizing unity and creating unique patterns. As with the proverb Torajans live by: *Misa' kada dipotuo, pantan kada dipomate*. In unity we prosper but divided we fall.



Another example is the story of the infamous funeral ceremony whereby buffalo fighting is an essential event. This too has been told and retold countless times. As Torajan lives are so intertwined with symbolisms, the bowed heads of buffaloes prior to plowing is described in an old adage- bowing before plowing. This symbolizes how one must be calm and not boastful before making an attack.

The abundance of tales provide for opportunities of story-content-marketing rooted in Toraja culture and for ensuing on-line identity that provide the synergy needed to boast tourism in the area. However, stories published in official government sites have the responsibility for not be misleading. Therefore historians and traditional storytellers must be consulted and clear indications must be given to distinguish folklore, legend and/or descriptive narrations.

The two regencies of Toraja share stories about culture, nature, people and place. Much like the instrumental nature of a story itself, by seeing and telling shared stories, future collaborations are possible. By seeing, one can find new ways.

C. CONCLUSION

Tourist destinations worldwide offer a wealth of choices. In this highly competitive market competition is keen. Destinations and organizations are vying for this business through a variety of e-marketing strategies. Eye catching, targeted and technically optimized web sites are a key feature. Moreover, an official web site provides the security and validity of the information shared. Additionally, omnipresent cell phones make tourist destination Internet marketing essential to attract

tourists near and far. Consequently, e-marketing and Internet identities are routine for tourism promotion.

A story-content approach for tourism Internet identity creates the back-story behind images that stimulates the imagination. Furthermore, these anecdotes are more than a sound bite or a fleeting image that one scrolls by. Stories are the stuff that connects us as one and in the same moment as different. This substantive content takes form in humorous, odd, or spiritual stories in a variety of length, which in the telling, provide additional information and questions- questions that lead to motivations. It must however be stressed that storytelling provided through an official government web site must be verified by historians as to the nature of the story and be addressed as such.

Real time reports, antidotal stories can move a marketing maneuver to an experiential event creating emotional invested stakeholders that synergizes all participants. The depth and texture that is Toraja cannot be conveyed in a few photographs and expletive text. An antidotal story takes travelers to the underbelly of culture and place. These stories are not commonly told, not found on Lonely Planet and are certainly beyond a selfie. A story provides wisdom for understanding, the joy in simple humor and a memory for life. It is here in the stories we are told and in-turn retold where meanings are made in this adventure of life. Story-content marketing is compelling and sets its self apart and above the usual suspects.

This narrative is just a beginning. We look forward to further research: cataloging stories from the region; identification of stakeholders; leadership facilitation and securing funding. Most of all, we look forward to creating a more insightful and at the same time grassroots Internet Identity through story-content marketing that represents and shares the tourism texture that is uniquely found in Toraja.

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