THE FACES OF THE NARRATIVE IN SOCIAL MEDIA: THE ROLE OF THE NARRATIVE TRANSMEDIA IN THE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: The journalist Robert Fulford used to say that "we can say about stories the same thing we say about books: perhaps some of them were forgotten wrongfully, but none of them were remembered wrongfully" (Fulford, 2001) and this idea is used as a central point for many of the marketing strategies with whom the specialists in Communication and Publicity are trying (and often succeed) to make the link between the product and the story in order to make the consumer get attached to the product.

The above rule applies successfully in the case of things that can transform into what we already call "Long – lasting tourist destinations", validated spots that stir the curiosity of tourists. Local branding and the construction of firmly contoured identities for communities and places are parts of the construction of any real and efficient strategy to promote an area and to transform it in a popular tourist sight. All of this can't be dissociated from narration, from storytelling, understood as a form of "transmitting information trough narration, that is trough events told in a logical order" (Şerbănescu, 2007), and recently from digital storytelling, defined by prof. Nick Couldry as being " a whole variety of personal stories, which are told to a potential public, using digital resources" (Couldry, 2008). We must accept the fact that the internet offers the most information and arguments to someone who wants to choose a holiday destination. We must also understand that a big part of the tourist's motivation has a narrative substratum that is very powerful and emotionally efficient.

Keywords: narration, digital marketing, promoting, social media.

Touring promotion trough narration and social media

Every place is strongly bonded to his stories, the stories of the people who live in that area, to the perceptions that the strangers of the area are transmitting, trough narration. Without doubt, the human is a "profoundly narrative animal", and narration in itself has a strong "epistemological role, that is to know the world", as analyst Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks have proved at the end of the previous century, so that the two idea can't be ignored by those who want to offer other good reasons to explore new horizons.

To understand how narration can contribute to the consolidation of *traveling myths* we will start from the definition of the term. We will start from the classical definition promoted by the history of literature manuals and

encyclopedias who used to say that "Narration/ storytelling is the exposition mode that brings to someone (reader/ listener) an haphazard or a succession o events, real or imaginary, which are attributed to characters are and are presented in their order" and that they impose "a series of events that happen in a time and space", but we should also take in account Umberto Eco's idea that supports the theory that storytelling requires a series of "*characters that do actions, and the readers that wants to know how they do those actions*" in order to understand that actually the *curiosity* and *wish for more* make narrations durable and attractive. Moreover, we can talk about a superior level which follows "the interest for narration": the level of implication, of "story immersion", of participating in the story, which can be considered as being one of the most important elements to convince people to transform into tourists and to choose certain places in favor of others.

A well-known supporter of storytelling, instructed at the American School of Storytelling, journalist Chris Jones, explained during a conference named *The Power of Storytelling* that the story is constructed in time and based on some principles. The *Esquire* editor is certain that the best stories are about something more profound than what they present the surface. The big narratives of the press or transmedia are about ideas, honor, sacrifice, etc. This is why they have the gift of attraction, of ground gaining and of convincing people to take action. The principle of Jones is applied to the mass – media but it has been increasingly accepted and used by the specialists of transmedia or of social networks to build successful stories on the purpose of attracting the sympathy and support of the digital storytelling consumers and who implicitly chose their travel destination based on the virtual cognitive experience that they have. A good story, told on the right media, at the right moment can attract an undeniable reputation to a certain geographic area (ex. Horea Township after the accident in the Apuseni, Prislop church after the narrative explosion about the myth of Arsenie Boca, etc)

What is transmedia? It is what Henry Jenkins defines as a "way of communication that can adapt in different media types that contributes to offering the consumer relevant, distinct and diverse information". Transmedia communication that includes writing, image, video materials and seldom audios is specifically to principles of hypersociability, associated with social networks, Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, Google+. The More Jones's principle, that good narratives are about ideas, honor, sacrifice and include strong emotions, combines harmoniously with the theories that Jenkins exposed, about a story created for different medias, the more impact we can see on consumers.

The impact of stories over traveling amateurs is even more obvious as blogging, understood as an activity of those who chose to "develop electronic journals, has already developed a special category called "traveling blogging" dedicated in principal to amateurs. As a curiosity, *John Barger*, a American

merchant who used for the first time "blog" for his webpage was remarked for the fact that most of his stories were related to the journeys he made to hunt.

Travel blogging, which includes stories written by the travelers, is developing and is constructed with the help of "narrators", who become characters of their own stories. Such a case is the one of the Romanian blogger Raluca Mureşan, a young lady who appears in the social space with her blog "Ralu travels" and mostly with her facebook, instagram and twitter accounts that have that name. Raluca Mureşan is the first Romanian travel blogger and she tends to become a recognized authority in the domain so her narrations will probably contribute to the attraction of potential tourist to the places she presents, tells about and recommends.

Another way of expressing narrativity in the virtual media is the one specific to social media. This is probably the most popular face of the current narrative and it's the one most charged with emotions, grandiosity and spectacular. The fact that a photo "means a thousand words" is a recognized universal demonstrated by the project of Magda Săvuică, a young lady from Bucharest who composed one of the most spectacular stories of the current internet, with major implications for the identification and authentication of special tourist destinations in Romania: *273 places that you should see before you leave Romania*.

The project of Magda Săvuică has drawn the attention of over 430.000 people with facebook accounts and it has managed to convince them to involve in the project by liking and sharing (a high level of involvement), comparable only to the one of the big stars of the country telling one of the most painful stories of Romania: the one of the emigrants. With the invitation to explore and by sharing stories of places, Săvuică manages to contribute to the consolidation of local identities and to what we call the creation of viable tourist destination trough visual storytelling using photos, and recently, video materials. In this system where the smart-scale stories – *the stories at a mini scale-* as they are named by theoretician Knut Lundby proliferates "273 places" and other similar projects on the network, Romania, Visit Romania or One million places to see in Romania, which are based on "capturing moments of life" and manage to built communities "honoring an remembering people that no longer live, stories, memories that are important to the teller and to others for the laid effort, relevant elements or for feelings". All these conclude to the publicity of subtle auto-representations, in which each of us finds themselves and start the need of action.

This aspect of narrative auto – representation from the transmedia, media and from social networks contributes to the boost of already mentioned tourism. Mentioned by Lindbey and noticeable are the numbers and official tops presented by agencies which keep track of visitor for certain areas of the world. Taking into account the last numbers given to publicity from the National Institute of Statistics Romania, presented on economica.net, the most foreign

tourists came from Germany. On the following places in the same top we have: Italy, Israel, France, United States of America, United Kingdom, Hungary, Spain, etc.

Interesting enough is the reason why the came to Romania and what attracts them here. The first places in the top are taken by Transylvania, Parliament Palace and Danube Delta. The link between the number of tourists in a country and the tourist spots is done by the expectancy horizon, by identification and understanding created by the nations, the big nations and mostly the small-scale stories from the virtual media, social media who are an open invitation to involvement and feed-back. This way, the model press institutions from a developed country are going to promote some narrative patterns, their viewers are going to search for them in their trips too. That is why we can notice that if BBC and the anglo-saxon media along with the media institutions from Germany promote stories about "adventure, discovery, natural" to which they associated the key-image of the Prince of Wales to some places from Transylvania the interest of the tourists to this area was much higher. At the same time, the French and Italian affinity for leftist ideologies and for the concept of heroism and sacrifice brings them to Romania in search of mostly places that can ba identified with the dramas of communism like the Parliament Palace, the most visited spot by Italian and French people according to the last data from the National Institute of Statistics.

Behind the little stories from the press and social networks there still are big stories which have an overwhelming role in contouring the image, identity of a place. These can be found in movies, publicity campaigns of some companies or in the common opinions about a place. The story of Dracula and the one of communism are defining for Romania and this is why they interfere with the perception of foreign tourists who chose as a destination this area. The narrative paradox in tourism is that each of us searches for journeys where we can find ourselves so that trough traveling we can make an "entry in the story". More precisely, the myth of Dracula, created by Bram Stocker includes elements of defining for the anglo – saxon culture and too little "decipherment keys" for the Transylvanian culture. This way, the count is nothing alike Vlad Țepeș, who served as a model to the writer, but he can be easily understood and accepted by those affiliated to an anglo - saxon culture to whom he resonates from a cultural, mental and action-wise perspective. In fact, the Dracula myth covers other narratives on *a small scale* that contribute strongly to the creation of a mythic space in the purest sense: the story of the haunted castle, the story of the magic birthstones, metamorphic stories – of vampires, time, etc. These one are at least as important as the narrative umbrella that covers them because accordingly to Vladimir Propp, the richness of stories gives weight to a mythological place. That being said, little narration, created in the same register, real stories who complete each other and intermission can contribute

in a decisive way to the defining of some holiday destinations that are durable and real for tourists from Romania and all around the world.

When we talk about *small smart stories* from social media we must remember something very important: the virtual space is opened especially to people under 55, to youngsters with medium and over the average income. Blogs and social networks are seen as important for information by 40% of internet users and they can contribute to decision-making in 23% of the cases, according to a study publishes by iSense Solutions. The biggest percentage of info consumers from the virtual media, and especially from social networks, is constituted from women younger than 45 who are mostly attracted to narrative texts, rather than argumentative ones or of other genres. We must also know that when it comes to traveling women have the decisive word. Having all of the above in mind it's easy to understand why the importance of the storytelling, of narration in the promotion of holiday spots is decisive and indubitable.

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