

THE POWER OF STORYTELLING IN ATTRACTING VISITORS AND DRIVING SALES

Sanja Stamenić Oštrić

<https://doi.org/10.20867/cromar.29.13>

Abstract

Purpose – In an era characterized by information overload and decreasing tourist and consumer attention spans, storytelling has emerged as a vital tool for destinations and brands seeking to differentiate themselves and build emotional connections with audiences. The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of storytelling on tourism-related companies, tourist destinations, and local communities.

Methodology - The research was conducted using a survey method via an online questionnaire. Correlation and regression analyses were applied to determine whether storytelling affects the financial performance and brand recognition of entities in Croatian tourism. It is also examined the relationships between storytelling channels, storytelling elements, financial performance and brand recognition.

Findings – The results indicate that while most tourism-related entities use storytelling in their communication with tourists, storytelling does not a strong impact on the financial performance and brand recognition; but correlation analysis and regression models did show the significance of certain forms and elements of storytelling in communication and attracting tourists. The number of storytelling channels used also does not influence financial outcomes or brand awareness. However, the number of storytelling elements shows a statistically significant impact on financial performance, though not on brand recognition. The strongest predictors of financial performance and brand recognition are functional/technical characteristics *and* emotional values.

Contribution – This study builds upon previous storytelling research and addresses a gap in the existing literature. It contributes new insights into the relationship between storytelling channels and elements, and their respective impacts on financial performance and brand recognition in the tourism sector.

Keywords storytelling, storytelling channels, storytelling elements, financial performance, brand recognition

INTRODUCTION

In today's saturated global market, where visitors and consumers are exposed to endless streams of advertisements and digital content, capturing and sustaining attention has become a major challenge for businesses and destinations alike. Traditional marketing techniques — centered around product/destination features and price—are no longer sufficient to create meaningful and lasting relationships with customers. In this context, storytelling has emerged as a compelling and effective alternative. Rooted in human psychology and communication theory, storytelling appeals to emotion, memory, and identity, providing a way for brands to convey purpose, connect with values, and inspire trust (Woodside 2010; Fog et al. 2010).

In this evolving landscape, storytelling emerges as a powerful tool for connecting destinations with their target market segment. Storytelling is a universal strategy that resonates strongly with tourists (Xu & Yu, 2014; Krevolin, 2016; Zhou & Cai, 2018; Garmston, 2018), and it is also a significant strategy for tourism destinations to leverage differentiation, convey brand values, and enhance brand equity (Li et al. 2024).

As Mucundorfeanu (2018, p. 50) notes, “from youngest to oldest, all people love to hear stories”. Authentic narratives about local products, people, and traditions are becoming key differentiators in an increasingly competitive tourism market (Chronis 2012a). Tourism in the 21st century is undergoing a paradigm shift—from passive consumption of attractions to active, emotional engagement with people, places, and stories (Richardson 2018). This evolution is the focus of this research through a comprehensive mixed-methods analysis of storytelling’s impact across the Croatian tourism ecosystem. The research aims to answer the question: Does storytelling influence financial performance and brand recognition in Croatian tourism?

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Storytelling and tourist communication

Narrative theory emphasizes the centrality of storytelling in making sense of the world, with tourists interpreting destinations through narrative structures that help frame experiences and assign meaning (Brunner 1991). This cognitive process is fundamental to how tourists perceive and remember destinations, supporting the idea that tourists consume stories rather than just places (Moscardo 2010.). As Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2008) argue, tourists actively seek narrative experiences that allow them to become part of a destination’s ongoing story. This perspective helps explain why destinations with compelling narratives often create stronger emotional connections with visitors.

Storytelling in tourist communication has emerged as a crucial strategy for enhancing visitor engagement, strengthening destination identity, and building emotional bonds between tourists and places. Unlike traditional marketing, which often emphasizes factual or statistical information, storytelling appeals to emotions, values, and shared cultural narratives, thereby making destinations more memorable and distinctive (Moscardo, 2021; Li et al. 2025). Research shows that stories enable tourists to connect with local traditions, heritage, and community life in ways that transform experiences into personal memories. For example, Pachucki et al. (2022) demonstrate that the use of first-person storytelling in online destination promotion increases social media engagement, improves brand image, and raises tourists’ intentions to visit. Similarly, studies on historical storytelling indicate that tour guides who integrate local history and authenticity into their narratives significantly enhance educational and emotional value for tourists, which contributes to higher levels of satisfaction and co-creation of cultural meaning.

The use of new media has further expanded the role of storytelling in tourist communication. Travel vlogs, social media, and video platforms allow tourists to

experience stories before, during, and after travel, creating multi-layered connections between destinations and audiences (Li et al. 2025). A systematic review of storytelling in destination marketing confirms that digital channels are among the most prevalent forms of narrative communication, although the methods for measuring their effectiveness remain underdeveloped (Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management, 2024). Importantly, storytelling is not limited to destination managers or marketers—tourists themselves act as storytellers when sharing their experiences, photos, and emotions, often producing authentic narratives that resonate strongly with other potential visitors (Moreira, da Costa & de Sousa, 2024). This shift from top-down destination branding to co-created narratives underlines the participatory nature of tourism storytelling.

Moreover, storytelling contributes to emotional branding and identity formation. Studies confirm that tourists who perceive their travel experiences as memorable are more likely to develop attachment to destinations and to share stories with others, which reinforces both word-of-mouth promotion and destination loyalty (Guleria et al. 2024). Storytelling has also proven effective in specialized tourism contexts, such as dark tourism, where evoking personal and collective memories increases emotional responses and enhances the attractiveness of the site (Tercia et al. 2022). Finally, local communities and cultural actors—including inhabitants, guides, and artists—play a significant role as storytellers who maintain the authenticity of the narrative and reinforce the symbolic meaning of places (MDPI 2025).

Taken together, the evidence suggests that storytelling in tourist communication is a multidimensional process that combines narrative elements, media channels, and stakeholder involvement to shape tourists' perceptions and behaviors. However, gaps remain regarding its direct influence on measurable business outcomes such as financial performance and brand recognition, indicating the need for future growing body of literature confirms that storytelling is not only a marketing technique but also a cultural practice that strengthens the relationship between destinations and their visitors, supporting both sustainable development and long-term brand value.

1.2. Storytelling and brand recognition

Emotional branding builds deep connections with consumers by tapping into values, desires, and emotions rather than focusing solely on product features (Gobe 2001). Storytelling acts as a vehicle for emotional branding, humanizing products and places, and creating lasting bonds between tourists and destinations (Morrison & Anderson, 2002). In tourism, this translates into visitors who become advocates for destinations based on emotional connections formed through narrative experiences (Prayag et al. 2017). These emotional bonds often lead to increased visitor loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and repeat visitation (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010).

Several studies explored and showed that the persuasive power of storytelling, aimed at promoting a product, has been proven to influence consumer trust in brands, brands recognition and their purchase decisions (Nurhayati, 2021).

A research showed that the power of story in storytelling makes consumers emotionally involved with the brand of a product, which in the end is responded to in the form of actions to like, comment, and share stories with others and impacts consumer purchasing decisions (Hari, 2020).

Several studies in consumer psychology and marketing have explored the impact of storytelling on consumer attitudes and behaviors. For instance, research indicates that storytelling can enhance brand recall, as narratives are processed differently in the human brain compared to plain facts or data (Escalas, 2007).

Drawing on concepts of cultural capital and authenticity in tourism, stories rooted in local tradition and history enhance perceived authenticity, elevating the value of the destination in visitors' eyes (Hosany & Gilbert 2010). This theoretical framework supports the finding that authenticity emerges through subjective experiences of connection and meaning rather than objective historical accuracy alone (Morrison & Anderson 2002).

Cohen and Cohen (2012) argue that authenticity in tourism is increasingly negotiated and co-created between hosts and guests. Storytelling facilitates this co-creation by providing frameworks through which tourists can interpret and engage with local cultures (Salazar 2012). As Richards and Wilson (2006) note, destinations that successfully communicate authentic narratives gain competitive advantage in markets where tourists increasingly seek meaningful cultural experiences.

The experiential marketing framework developed by Pine and Gilmore (1999) posits that modern economies are increasingly driven by experiences rather than products or services. This perspective is complemented by Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2004) theory of value co-creation, which suggests that experiences are co-created between service providers and consumers. Marketers using a storytelling marketing strategy can also build brand equity by making it easier for consumers to recognize and remember a brand, influencing purchasing decisions (Rizkia & Oktafani, 2020). Research has emphasized that brands that effectively integrate storytelling and emotional branding can differentiate themselves in a crowded marketplace, enhance consumer loyalty, and drive long-term growth.

In tourism contexts, storytelling helps structure these experiences and invites tourists to become active participants in the narrative, strengthening engagement and personal investment in the destination (Prebensen et al. 2013). As Mossberg (2008) demonstrates, destinations that frame visitor experiences within compelling narratives create more memorable and satisfying tourist experiences. This co-creation of narrative experiences leads to higher perceived value and greater visitor satisfaction (Mathisen 2013).

Destination branding theory (Pike 2004; Anholt 2010) posits that places, like products, can be branded through carefully crafted images and narratives. The story becomes a brand asset, shaping how the destination is perceived and remembered (Hanna & Rowley

2011). According to Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013), place branding is a dynamic process of identity construction that involves multiple stakeholders and narratives.

Storytelling plays a crucial role in this process by providing coherent frameworks for communicating destination identity (Lichrou et al. 2010). As Baker (2007) argues, successful destination brands are built on authentic stories that resonate with both visitors and local communities. These narratives not only attract tourists but also foster community pride and stakeholder buy-in (Zenker & Braun 2017).

Together, these theoretical lenses support the central argument of this paper: storytelling is not only a communication tool but also a strategic mechanism that shapes tourist behavior, brand value, and community development.

Storytelling has become one of the most powerful strategies in building brand recognition across tourism and related industries. Unlike traditional promotional approaches that rely on descriptive or factual information, storytelling creates an emotional and symbolic framework that makes a brand more memorable and distinctive (Escalas, 2007; Gobe, 2001). Through narratives, destinations and tourism companies can translate abstract values into concrete experiences that resonate with tourists on both cognitive and emotional levels, thus increasing the likelihood of brand recall and recognition. Research consistently shows that stories enhance information processing and memory by activating narrative transportation, which allows consumers to immerse themselves into the brand's world and connect with its identity (Escalas et al. 2008).

In tourism, brand recognition is particularly important due to the intangible and experiential nature of services. Tourists often face information overload when choosing among similar destinations, and storytelling serves as a differentiator that captures attention and establishes emotional bonds. Studies demonstrate that emotionally charged narratives increase consumers' ability to remember brand messages and associate them with positive affective responses (Delgadoillo & Escalas 2004; Brechman & Purvis 2015). Moreover, destination branding research indicates that stories rooted in local heritage and cultural authenticity enhance tourists' perceptions of brand uniqueness and foster higher recognition in competitive markets (Chronis 2012b; Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013).

The digital era has further strengthened the role of storytelling in brand recognition. Social media platforms, travel blogs, and video storytelling enable both destinations and tourists themselves to act as storytellers, co-creating narratives that shape brand visibility and memorability (Moreira et al. 2024; Li et al. 2025). Research suggests that user-generated storytelling has become a central factor in reinforcing destination image and strengthening brand recognition, since peer-to-peer stories are often perceived as more authentic than official marketing messages (Pachucki et al. 2022).

Despite its potential, empirical findings remain somewhat mixed regarding the direct financial outcomes of storytelling. This suggests a research gap and highlights the need for further exploration of mediating variables such as loyalty, trust, and word-of-mouth that may link storytelling to financial success. Nonetheless, the evidence consistently confirms that storytelling strengthens brand recognition by embedding destinations and

tourism brands into tourists' personal memories and cultural identities, thereby reinforcing long-term brand equity.

While the existing literature extensively establishes storytelling as a powerful tool for creating emotional connections, enhancing tourist engagement, and strengthening destination branding, a significant gap remains in empirically verifying its direct, quantitative impact on key business performance and brand recognise.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed quantitative research which includes online survey with 116 tourism stakeholders (destination managers, business owners and managers in enterprise and employees in local self-government).

The majority of respondents in the study were business owners or managers (52 participants or 44.8%), followed by employees or mid-level managers (41 or 35.3%), representatives of destination management organizations (DMOs) (18 or 15.5%), and five representatives of local government (4.3%). Participants possess significant experience in their current roles within their respective organizations. Nearly 57% have over 10 years of experience, while a notable portion (23 participants or 19.8%) report between 4 and 6 years of experience.

Respondents were drawn from 10 Croatian counties. The largest share came from the Primorje-Gorski Kotar County (55 or 47.4%) and Zadar County (23 or 19.8%). A total of 100 respondents (86.2%) represent Adriatic Croatia, while 13 (13.8%) are from Continental Croatia.

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of respondent characteristics

	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Role in organization	Business owner / manager	52	44.8
	Employee / mid-level manager	41	35.3
	DMO representative	18	15.5
	Local government representative	5	4.3
Experience in current role	Less than 1 year	3	2.6
	1–3 years	13	11.2
	4–6 years	23	19.8
	7–10 years	11	9.5
	More than 10 years	66	56.9

Table 1 (continued)

	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
County of operation	Primorje-Gorski Kotar County	55	47.4
	Zadar County	23	19.8
	City of Zagreb	13	11.2
	Split-Dalmatia County	7	6.0
	Dubrovnik-Neretva County	6	5.2
	Istria County	5	4.3
	Šibenik-Knin County	3	2.6
	Slavonia-Baranja County	2	1.7
	Lika-Senj County	1	0.9
	Međimurje County	1	0.9
Region of operation	Adriatic Croatia	100	86.2
	Continental Croatia	13,8	13.8
	Total	116	100.0

Source: Autor

The survey was conducted between May and June 2025, targeting tourism businesses, destination managers, and relevant stakeholders across different Croatian regions. The survey instrument consisted of the following sections: 1) demographic and organizational characteristics (e.g., respondent roles, business region, experience), 2) storytelling channels, 3) financial performance, and 4) brand recognition.

The questions were based on previous research (Baker, 2007; Mossberg, 2008; Woodside, 2010; Fog et al., 2010; Prayag et al., 2017; Zenker & Braun, 2017) and adapted to fit the specific context of this study. The questionnaire included open-ended, semi-open, and closed-ended questions. Respondents could select from predefined options or provide their own answers where none of the offered options applied. Open-ended questions were used to identify the respondent's business region. Statements regarding respondents' perceptions of storytelling (e.g. key elements of effective storytelling, its influence on business performance, emotional engagement, and brand recognition in the tourism market) were evaluated using a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 = not important → 5 = extremely important; 1 = strongly negative impact → 5 = strongly positive impact; 1 = strongly disagree → 5 = strongly agree).

The survey results were analyzed using correlation and regression analyse.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Storytelling occupies a significant place in the business strategies of Croatian tourism enterprises. According to Kvítková and Petrů (2021, p. 426), managers tend to prefer stories over abstract arguments or statistical data. The research findings show that the majority of participants were already using storytelling in their communication with current and potential tourists at the time the survey was conducted—92 respondents

(79.3%) reported doing so. The importance participants assign to storytelling is evident in its long-term use. As many as 53 participants (45.7%) have been using storytelling for more than five years, while 24 participants (20.7%) have been using it for between three and five years (see Table 2).

Tables 2: **Descriptive Analysis of Storytelling Use in Tourist Communication**

Characteristic		Frequency	Percentage
Duration of storytelling use	Currently not using	24	20.7
	Less than 1 year	12	10.3
	1–2 years	13	11.2
	3–5 years	10	8.6
	More than 5 years	57	49.1
Storytelling channels used*	Written stories (brochures, websites, etc.)	73	62.2
	Social media posts	56	58.6
	Oral storytelling (tours, presentations)	45	48.3
	Video content	68	38.8
	Physical environment/design elements	11	19.0
	Mobile applications	14	12.1
	Interactive exhibits	22	9.5
	Total	116	100.0

* Multiple answers allowed

Source: Autor

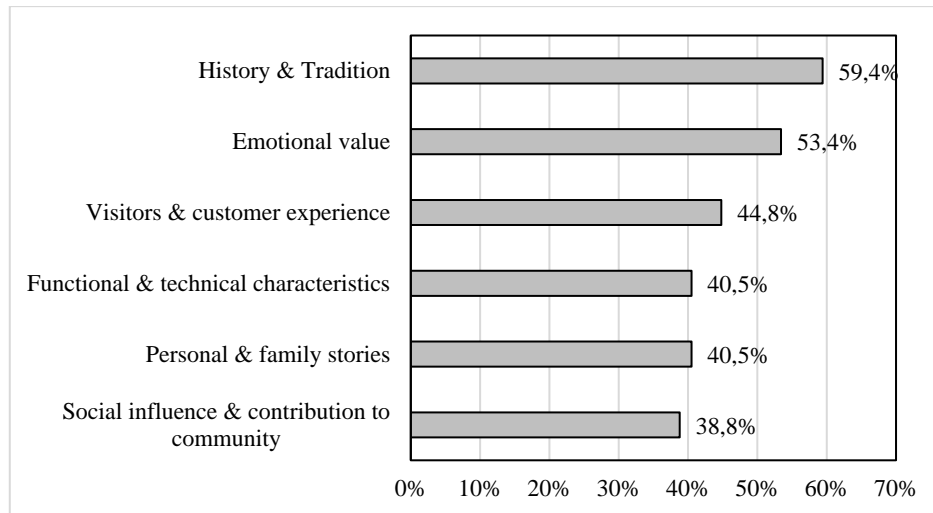
Participants indicated that their businesses use multiple storytelling channels. The most commonly used is written storytelling—such as brochures and websites (62.2%)—but oral and interactive forms, like guided tours and live presentations (48.3%), also play a significant role.

As Drischel (2018) notes, new media forms are creating new ways for stories to be communicated. In this context, digital storytelling, such as social media posts, is represented in 58.6% of Croatian businesses. However, mobile applications remain underutilized, with only 12.1% of respondents reporting their use.

Visual-auditory storytelling, through video content, is present in 38.8% of businesses, while interactive exhibits—as experiential storytelling tools—are the least used (9.5%). When asked about the key elements used in their storytelling (see Chart 1), respondents indicated the use of multiple components. The most frequently cited was "history and tradition" (59.4%), followed by "emotional values" (53.4%).

Research shows that storytelling fosters emotional connections and deepens the appreciation of local heritage (Khater et al. 2024), highlighting the importance of these elements in tourism narratives. The least represented element was "social impact or community contribution", cited by only 38.8% of respondents.

Graph 1: The representation of specific elements in storytelling



*Multiple answers possible

Source: Autor

Following Mossberge et al. (2011, VI), all companies involved in storytelling and storyline development can gain visibility, regardless of their size, economic status, or reputation. However, the Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.066$) indicates a weak and positive relationship between the use of storytelling and the business performance of entities in Croatian tourism, but it is not statistically significant ($p=0.481 > 0,05$). According to Cohen (1988), a p -value < 0.10 suggests a weak, almost negligible effect of storytelling on the financial performance of tourism businesses in Croatia.

However, when examining the relationship between the use of storytelling and brand recognition, a positive and statistically significant correlation was observed at the 0.05 level ($p = 0.048 < 0,05$; $r=0.184$) (Table 3).

Table 3: Correlation matrix of use of storytelling, financial results & brand recognition

		Use of storytelling in tourist communication	Use of storytelling in financial results	Use of storytelling in brand recognition
Use of storytelling in communication of tourists	Pearson Correlation	1	0,066	0,184*
	Sign. (2-tailed)		0,481	0,048
	N	116	116	116

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Autor

Regression analysis showed that an increase in the number of storytelling channels does not lead to a statistically significant increase in financial performance ($R = 0.125$, $R^2 = 0.016$, $p = 0.179 > 0.05$). The R^2 indicates that 98.4% of the variance depends on other factors (e.g., content quality, targeted market segment, etc.). None of the storytelling channels showed a statistically significant impact on financial performance, except for 'written stories (brochures, websites, etc.)' ($\beta = 0.183$, $p = 0.077$), whose use has a slight positive effect on financial performance, although the statistical significance is at the 0.01 level. The number of storytelling channels is also not statistically significant for brand recognition ($R = 0.013$, $R^2 = 0.000$, $p = 0.886 > 0.05$). None of the storytelling channels showed a statistically significant effect on the financial performance of the subjects in the study.

The Pearson coefficient shows that there is a positive and statistically significant correlation between a higher number of elements used in storytelling and the financial performance of tourism subjects at the 0.05 level ($p=0.019$; $r = 0.217$), as well as between a higher number of elements used in storytelling and brand recognition at the 0.01 level ($p = 0.006$; $r=0.253$) (Table 4).

Regression analysis shows a weak positive linear relationship between the number of elements used in storytelling by subjects in Croatian tourism and revenue ($R = 0.217$, $R^2 = 0.047$).

Table 4: Correlation matrix elements of storytelling, financial results and brand recognition

		Storytelling elements	Storytelling influence on financial results	Storytelling influence on brand recognition
Use of storytelling in communication with customers & tourists	Pearson Correlation	1	0,217*	0,253**
	Sign. (2-tailed)		0,019	0,006
	N	116	116	116

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Autor

The model is statistically significant ($p = 0.019 < 0.05$), from which it is concluded that the number of storytelling elements affects the financial performance of the subject. The model equation is:

$$\hat{Y} = 3.718 + 0.136 \cdot X$$

which means that for $x = 6$, the expected rating of the impact of the number of storytelling elements on financial performance is 4.5 (on a scale from 1 – strongly negative impact, to 5 – strongly positive impact). Furthermore, regression analysis showed the strongest influence of the predictor ‘functional/technical characteristics’ ($\beta = 0.230$) on the financial performance of tourism subjects in Croatia. The next strongest is ‘emotional value’ ($\beta = 0.174$). These two predictors have a statistically significant impact on financial performance ($p = 0.016 < 0.05$ and $p = 0.092 < 0.1$, respectively), while the other predictors do not show a statistically significant effect on the perceived impact on financial performance (Table 5).

Table 5: Regression model coefficient storytelling elements and financial results

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Stand. Coeff.	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.677	0.184		19.964	<0.001
	Functional & technical characteristics	0.407	0.166	0.230	2.456	0.016
	Emotional value	0.304	0.179	0.174	1.699	0.092
	History & tradition	0.019	0.172	0.010	0.108	0.914
	Visitors and customers experience	-0.057	0.176	-0.033	-0.326	0.745
	Personal or family stories	0.185	0.181	0.104	1.023	0.308
	Social influence and contribution to community	0.078	0.168	0.043	0.463	0.644

a. Dependent Variable: Assessment of influence of storytelling on financial result

Source: Autor

Model equation is: $\hat{Y} = 3.677 + 0.166 \cdot X_1 + 0.304X_2$.

Regression analysis did not show a statistically significant effect of the number of storytelling elements on the subject's brand recognition ($R = 0.13$, $R^2 = 0.000$, $p = 0.886 > 0.05$). However, the predictors 'functional/technical characteristics' and 'emotional value' show statistical significance in the regression model. The predictor 'emotional value' has the greatest impact on brand recognition ($\beta = 0.220$, $p = 0.033 < 0.05$), while the predictor 'functional/technical characteristics' shows a significant potential impact on brand recognition ($\beta = 0.172$, $p = 0.067 < 0.1$). Other predictors do not show a statistically significant effect on the perceived impact on brand recognition (Table 6).

Table 6: Regression model coefficient storytelling elements and brand recognition

Model		Unstandardized Coefcients		Stand. Coeff.	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0,016	0,167		24,059	<0,001
	Functional & technical characteristics	0,278	0,155	0,172	1,848	0,067
	Emotional value	0,350	0,162	0,220	2,160	0,033
	History & tradition	0,142	0,156	0,088	0,910	0,365
	Customers / visitors experience	-0,005	0,159	-0,003	0,975	-0,321
	Personal or family stories	0,081	0,164	0,050	0,495	0,622
	Social influence and contribution to community	0,113	0,152	0,070	0,744	0,458

a. Dependent Variable: Assessing the impact of storytelling on brand recognition.

Source: Autor

The model equation is: $\hat{Y} = 0.016 + 0.278X_1 + 0.350X_2$, which shows that for each unit increase in the predictor 'functional or technical characteristics,' brand recognition increases by 0.278, and in the case of the predictor 'emotional value,' it increases by 0.350.

Storytelling's greatest contribution is likely realized through mediating variables such as emotional connection, brand credibility, and word-of-mouth. The research findings partially support this assertion, as 'emotional values' emerged as a key predictor for both financial performance and brand recognition. It can be inferred that storytelling's true impact may only materialize once it successfully builds these deeper relationships—a process that requires time and one which a cross-sectional study design could not fully capture (Prayag et al., 2017). Furthermore, the mere presence of storytelling is not

sufficient in itself. Quality, authenticity, and the manner in which a story is delivered become critical factors that differentiate successful from less successful cases. The research results show that 'history and tradition' is the most commonly used element, indicating a potential market saturation with similar narratives. Finally, the methodological context of the study may have diminished the perceived impact. The respondents were managers and DMO representatives who possess a broad and complex view of the factors influencing the success of their organization or destination. For them, it is difficult to attribute financial success exclusively to a single marketing activity, such as storytelling, despite their belief in its value. This 'managerial perspective' naturally diminishes the perceived strength of an individual tool when compared to other, more powerful factors such as pricing, service quality, the geopolitical situation, and general economic conditions.

CONCLUSION

The research highlights the importance of storytelling in tourism. Although the study's results did not indicate a strong impact of storytelling on the financial performance and brand recognition of the entities involved, correlation analysis and regression models did show the significance of certain forms and elements of storytelling in communication and attracting tourists.

The results also demonstrated that the number of storytelling elements has a statistically significant impact on financial performance, but not on brand recognition. The greatest influence on both financial performance and brand recognition comes from 'functional/technical characteristics' and 'emotional values,' while other predictors lack statistical significance.

Furthermore, the research suggests that storytelling accounts for only a small portion of a company's financial performance and brand recognition. This implies that, despite the contribution of storytelling, other factors are significantly more important for the financial success and brand visibility of the participating entities.

This research builds upon previous storytelling studies and fills a gap in the existing literature. Its contribution is also evident in providing new insights into the relationship between storytelling channels and elements on one hand, and financial performance and brand recognition on the other. A limitation of the study is the small sample size and the distribution of participants across only 10 counties. Future research should focus on a larger sample and broader coverage across Croatia and even internationally, to make the measurement scale applicable in diverse contexts. It is important to note that the impact of storytelling is location-dependent. A tale about a historical site may resonate differently than one for a sunny beach destination. Consequently, future research should take into account the specific characteristics of the regions being studied.

Given that the study did not show statistical significance of the impact of the number of storytelling channels and elements on financial performance and brand recognition, future research should focus more on qualitative rather than quantitative aspects.

Additionally, in future research it should be focused on customers/ tourist opinions, it would make a better insights into the real-world impact. This would be a really strong path for any future research.

Achieving success requires systematic implementation, ongoing measurement, and alignment with genuine cultural narratives rather than superficial marketing messages. A review of the literature revealed a lack of previous research on the elements and channels of storytelling in relation to financial performance and brand recognition.

REFERENCES

- Anholt, S. (2010), *Places: Identity, image and reputation*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Baker, B. (2007), *Destination branding for small cities: The essentials for successful place branding*, Creative Leap Books, Portland, OR.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984), *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006), "Using thematic analysis in psychology", *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 77-101 <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Brechman, J.M. and Purvis, S.C. (2015), "Narrative, transportation and advertising", *International Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 34, No. 2, pp. 366-381 <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2014.994803>
- Bruner, J. (1991), "The narrative construction of reality", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 1-21 <https://doi.org/10.1086/448619>
- Chronis, A. (2012a), "Between place and story: Ethnographies of tourism spaces", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 39, No. 2, pp. 777-796 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2011.09.005>
- Chronis, A. (2012b), "Tourists as story-builders: Narrative construction at a heritage museum", *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, Vol. 29, No. 5, pp. 444-459 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2012.691395>
- Cohen, E. and Cohen, S.A. (2012), "Authentication: Hot and cool", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 1295-1314 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2012.01.007>
- Cohen, J. (1988), "Set correlation and contingency tables", *Applied Psychological Measurement*, Vol. 12, No. 4, pp. 425-434 <https://doi.org/10.1177/014662168801200410>
- Delgadillo, Y. and Escalas, J.E. (2004), "Narrative word-of-mouth communication: Exploring memory and attitude effects of storytelling", *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 31, pp. 186-192.
- Escalas, J.E. (2007), "Self-referencing and persuasion: Narrative transportation versus analytical elaboration", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 421-429 <https://doi.org/10.1086/510216>
- Escalas, J.E. and Bettman, J.R. (2005), "Self-construal, reference groups, and brand meaning", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 378-389 <https://doi.org/10.1086/497549>
- Fog, K., Budtz, C. and Yakaboylu, B. (2010), *Storytelling: Branding in practice*, Springer, Berlin.
- Gobe, M. (2001), *Emotional branding: The new paradigm for connecting brands to people*, Allworth Press, New York.
- Guleria, D., Joshi, J. and Adil, M. (2024), "Storytelling and emotional branding in tourism: Exploring tourist attachment and loyalty", *Journal of Tourism Futures*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 145-162 <https://doi.org/10.1108/JTF-07-2023-0123>
- Hanna, S. and Rowley, J. (2011), "Towards a strategic place brand-management model", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 27, No. 5-6, pp. 458-476 <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2011.545790>
- Hari, H. (2020), "Customer engagement influences on buying decision in an online context – A review", *Think India Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 23, pp. 77-83, available at: <https://thinkindiaquarterly.org/index.php/think-india/article/view/14136> (accessed 13 February 2026).
- Hosany, S. and Gilbert, D. (2010), "Measuring tourists' emotional experiences toward hedonic holiday destinations", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 49, No. 4, pp. 513-526 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287509349267>
- Kavaratzis, M. and Hatch, M.J. (2013), "The dynamics of place brands: An identity-based approach to place branding theory", *Marketing Theory*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 69-86 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593112467268>

- Khater, M., Ibrahim, O., Al-Salim, F. and Faik, M. (2025), "Tkanje priča: Utjecaj pripovijedanja u turističkim vodičima na kulturno uranjanje" [Weaving stories: The impact of storytelling in tourist guides on cultural immersion], *Tourism Recreation Research*, pp. 1-16 <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2024.2448887>
- Kim, J.H. and Youn, H. (2017), "How to design and deliver stories about tourism destinations", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 56, No. 6, pp. 808-820 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287516639741>
- Kvitková, Z. and Petrů, Z. (2021), "Approaches to storytelling and narrative structures in destination marketing", *ToSEE – Tourism in Southern and Eastern Europe*, Vol. 6, pp. 425-438 <https://doi.org/10.20867/tosee.06.28>
- Li, H., Zeng, S. and Tay, K. (2025), "Tourism storytelling research progress and trends: A systematic literature review on SDGs", *Journal of Lifestyle & SDGs Review*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 1-23 <https://doi.org/10.47172/2965-730X.SDGsReview.v5.n01.pe02231>
- Lichrou, M., O'Malley, L. and Patterson, M. (2010), "Narratives of a tourism destination: Local particularities and their implications for place marketing and branding", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 134-144 <https://doi.org/10.1057/pb.2010.12>
- Lund, N.F., Cohen, S.A. and Scarles, C. (2019), "The power of social media storytelling in destination branding", *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, Vol. 12, pp. 29-37 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2019.01.002>
- MacCannell, D. (1976), *The tourist: A new theory of the leisure class*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.
- Mathisen, L. (2013), "Storytelling and story staging: Co-creating value in tourism", *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 60-74 <https://doi.org/10.1080/15022250.2013.768286>
- Morrison, A.M. and Anderson, D.J. (2002), "Destination branding", paper presented at the Missouri Association of Convention & Visitor Bureaus Annual Meeting.
- Moscardo, G. (2010), "The shaping of tourist experience: The importance of stories and themes", in Morgan, M., Lugosi, P. and Ritchie, J.R.B. (eds.), *The tourism and leisure experience: Consumer and managerial perspectives*, Channel View Publications, Bristol, pp. 43-58.
- Moscardo, G. (2021), "Stories and tourism: Narratives as a tool for sustainable development", *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol. 29, No. 9, pp. 1417-1433 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1849234>
- Mossberg, L. (2008), "Extraordinary experiences through storytelling", *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 195-210 <https://doi.org/10.1080/15022250802532443>
- Mossberg, L., Therikelsen, A., Huijbens, E. and Björk, P. (2011), *Storytelling and destination development*, Nordic Innovation Centre, Oslo, NICe Project No. 08041.
- Mucundorfeanu, M. (2018), "The key role of storytelling in the branding process", *Journal of Media Research*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 42-54 <https://doi.org/10.24193/jmr.30.4>
- Nurhayati, A. (2021), "Analisis implementasi visual storytelling marketing dan brand trust serta pengaruh terhadap minat beli kosmetik wardah pada mahasiswa di Purwakarta" [Analysis of visual storytelling marketing implementation and brand trust and their influence on purchase intention of Wardah cosmetics among students in Purwakarta], *Eqien: Jurnal Ekonomi Dan Bisnis*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 108-116 <https://doi.org/10.34308/eqien.v8i2.242>
- Pachucki, M., Grohs, R. and Scholl-Grissemann, U. (2022), "First-person storytelling in destination marketing: Effects on engagement and visit intention", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 90, 104491 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2022.104491>
- Pike, S. (2004), *Destination marketing organisations*, Elsevier, Oxford.
- Pine, B.J. and Gilmore, J.H. (1999), *The experience economy: Work is theatre & every business a stage*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA.
- Polkinghorne, D.E. (1988), *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY.
- Prahalad, C.K. and Ramaswamy, V. (2004), "Co-creation experiences: The next practice in value creation", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 5-14 <https://doi.org/10.1002/dir.20015>
- Prayag, G., Hosany, S., Muskat, B. and Del Chiappa, G. (2017), "Understanding the relationships between tourists' emotional experiences, perceived overall image, satisfaction, and intention to recommend", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 56, No. 1, pp. 41-54 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287515620567>
- Prebensen, N.K., Vittersø, J. and Dahl, T.I. (2013), "Value co-creation significance of tourist resources", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 42, pp. 240-261 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2013.01.012>
- Richards, G. (2018), "Cultural tourism: A review of recent research and trends", *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, Vol. 36, pp. 12-21 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2018.03.005>

- Richards, G. and Wilson, J. (2006), "Developing creativity in tourist experiences: A solution to the serial reproduction of culture?", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 27, No. 6, pp. 1209-1223
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2005.06.002>
- Salazar, N.B. (2012), "Tourism imaginaries: A conceptual approach", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 39, No. 2, pp. 863-882 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2011.10.004>
- Stake, R.E. (2006), *Multiple case study analysis*, Guilford Press, New York.
- Thompson, C.J., Rindfleisch, A. and Arsel, Z. (2006), "Emotional branding and the strategic value of the doppelgänger brand image", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 70, No. 1, pp. 50-64
<https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.70.1.50.qxd>
- Tussyadiah, I.P. and Fesenmaier, D.R. (2008), "Marketing places through first-person stories—An analysis of Pennsylvania roadtripper blog", *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, Vol. 25, No. 3-4, pp. 299-311 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548400802402354>
- Wala, H.H. (2015), *Meine Marke. Was Unternehmen authentisch, unverwechselbar und langfristig erfolgreich macht* [My brand: What makes companies authentic, distinctive and successful in the long term], 7th edn., Redline Verlag, Munich.
- Wang, N. (1999), "Rethinking authenticity in tourism experience", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 349-370 [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383\(98\)00103-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(98)00103-0)
- Woodside, A.G. (2010), "Brand-consumer storytelling theory and research: Introduction to a Psychology & Marketing special issue", *Psychology & Marketing*, Vol. 27, No. 6, pp. 531-540
<https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20342>
- Woodside, A.G., Sood, S. and Miller, K.E. (2008), "When consumers and brands talk: Storytelling theory and research in psychology and marketing", *Psychology & Marketing*, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 97-145
<https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20203>
- Yin, R.K. (2018), *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*, 6th edn., Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Zenker, S. and Braun, E. (2017), "Questioning a 'one size fits all' city brand: Developing a branded house strategy for place brand management", *Journal of Place Management and Development*, Vol. 10, No. 3, pp. 270-287 <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPMD-07-2016-0045>

SANJA STAMENIĆ OŠTRIĆ, PhD
Solana Nin
Matuljska cesta 19, Matulji, Croatia
sanja@solananin.hr