

The dark attractions of literature in Europe - marketing communication of dark literary tourist attractions connected to the two World Wars and the Cold War



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ABSTRACT

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Dark literary tourism is a lesser-known subcategory of both dark tourism and literary tourism, incorporating elements from both in terms of attractiveness and tourist motivations. This study explores the impact of literary works and their film adaptations on the attractiveness of dark tourism destinations, particularly those related to the First and Second World Wars, and the Cold War, such as the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach – combining analysis of the chosen sites’ websites and in-depth interviews with their visitors – the research examines how marketing strategies align with tourist motivations. Key findings show that curiosity and a desire for learning are primary motivations for visitors, with literature serving as a catalyst for a more emotional engagement. The relationship between consuming literary works, watching their film adaptations, and visiting related sites shows the storytelling’s role in shaping tourist behavior. This study provides insights for service providers and Destination Marketing Organizations on optimizing marketing strategies that incorporate literary elements. Recommendations are proposed to enhance historical remembrance through collaborations between book publishers, filmmakers, and tourist attractions, potentially including book tours to ensure the remembrance of the darkest side of history.

1. INTRODUCTION

Traveling to satisfy morbid curiosity has always been part of the human history. People have traveled to watch gladiator games, witch trials, and executions, as well as to watch battlefields, meet with the ghosts of people of the past, and experience human catastrophes (Stone, 2006). In modern times, this phenomenon, commonly known as dark tourism, is the scope of various research (Foley & Lennon, 1996; Blom, 2000; Ashworth, 2002; Stone & Sharpley, 2008; Seaton, 2018; Wang et al., 2021). Dark tourism delves into the exploration of sites associated with death, human suffering, and tragedies (Foley & Lennon, 1996).

While the most prominent examples of dark tourism attractions come from the tragedies of the 20th century (e.g. Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp in Poland, Murambi Genocide Memorial in Rwanda), there are examples from an earlier time (e.g. the city of Pompeii in Italy, Old Christian burial chambers site in Hungary), and from the 21st century as well (e.g. 9/11 Memorial and Museum in the United States, war tours in Ukraine).

The First and Second World Wars, along with the Cold War, mark some of the darkest chapters in human history. It left imprints on Europe and beyond, and deep wounds in humanity. Tourist attractions, such as the Churchill War Rooms in London, the World Heritage Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, and the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum are just three of the countless others that stand as a reminder of these times to educate tourists of the tragedies of human history. The era is depicted in contemporary literary works, where people can learn from, empathize more with the victims, and see the psychology and political motivations behind the atrocities. Some of the works are autobiographical novels, and some are completely fictional, or between the two, depicting the real-life experiences of the author in a fictional setting. Tourist attractions, such as the Anne Frank House connect the literary works, the authors, and the modern tourists in a way that creates a thought-provoking experience for those who are open to it.

Dark literary tourism is a unique sector, connected to both dark tourism and literary tourism. It is a bridge between literature, history, and the tangible landscapes of the time. These places combine elements of dark tourism and literary tourism, creating unique experiences that connect with visitors' diverse interests and motivations. The tourist attractions can employ various marketing communication strategies to attract visitors. They help to attract and engage tourists by creating awareness and interest in the attractions and allow the promotion of unique experiences and connections (Lukáč et al., 2021). Marketing communication can contribute to the economic development of the destinations by increasing tourist visits and supporting the local economy (Rosendhal & Gottschalk, 2015) and can enable the establishment of stronger connections with the literary tradition and local communities, fostering cultural development (Amin & Priansah, 2019). The used marketing communication strategies to attract and engage visitors include creating awareness about the sites and their historical significance, appealing to the emotions and interests of potential tourists through storytelling (Zerva, 2021), and utilizing social media and online reviews to enhance the visibility and image of the attraction.

This research explores literary dark tourism, focusing on the marketing communication strategies employed in the context of World Wars I and II, and the Cold War. It focuses on exploring the emotions visitors feel when engaging with dark literature tourist attractions.

Additionally, it aims to explore the efficiency of marketing communication strategies of five chosen attractions to gain deeper insight into the topic.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Dark Tourism

Dark tourism is a complex and controversial phenomenon that involves visiting sites associated with death, suffering, and tragedy (Foley & Lennon, 1996). Previous research on dark tourism has focused on a wide variety of topics. These include the background of dark tourism, the various expressions and definitions of the phenomenon (Foley & Lennon, 1996; Seaton, 1996; Blom, 2000; Mavragani & Mandrinou, 2022), and the tourists' motivation behind visiting these places, their beliefs and emotions related to the visits, as well as the correlation between these variables (Biran et al., 2011; Magano et al., 2022). Visitors often seek to understand and learn from historical events, gaining insights into the human condition and the consequences of conflict, while others are driven by a desire for emotional catharsis, confronting and processing historical trauma through direct exposure (Magano et al., 2023). Some people do not even know that they are participating in dark tourism, while on the other end of the spectrum, some people deliberately go to active war zones to see their limits (Lewis et al., 2022).

Other studies have explored the marketing and management aspects (Hoppen et al., 2014; Shekhar & Valeri, 2022) and the moral and ethical dilemmas (Shekhar & Valeri, 2022). They cover concerns about the commercialization of tragedies, the perceived lack of respect for the deceased, and the risk of trivialization of suffering. Additionally, research has examined the impact of dark tourism on the psychology of the visitors, as well as on the local communities (Kim & Butler, 2015). Dark tourism sites can contribute to the upkeep of collective memory, not allowing the dark side of history to disappear. They can serve as tangible reminders of past events, offering educational and emotional influence on the visitors and supplying important socio-political context about certain tragedies.

Research about the categorization of dark tourism explores different ways to group sites together. Within these categorizations, the subcategories this paper's scope focuses on are Holocaust tourism (concentration camps and Holocaust museums, locations like Treblinka extermination camp in Poland), war tourism (sites associated with wars and battles, like the D-Day Landing memorials in Normandy, France) and literary dark tourism (sites connected to literary works, such as Guernsey, the island where the Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society is set) (Visit Guernsey, 2024). The subcategories often overlap in topics and tourist motivations, but all of them are included in the dark tourism umbrella.

2.2. Literary Tourism

Literary tourism encompasses visiting sites related to authors' lives and/or literary works; it involves travel motivated by an interest in literature, including visiting places associated with authors, fictional characters, literary events, and settings from books (Busby & Klug, 2001; Hoppen et al., 2014; Baleiro & Quinterio, 2019; Çevik, 2022). Research on this topic explores the motivations of the tourists, the impact on local communities, the preservation of literary heritage and cultural identity, the controversies around tourist behavior in the destinations, and future opportunities (Brown & Gentile, 2015). Other studies explore the

emotional and intellectual engagement during the literary tourism experience (Baleiro et al., 2022), and the educational function of literary tourism (Çevik, 2024).

Tourism connected to the authors includes the visitation of the author's homes, birthplaces, places where they wrote their books, graves, and mausoleums (Brown, 2015; Watson, 2006; Andersen & Robinson, 2002) to establish a stronger connection with the writer. There are also literary festivals and events dedicated to specific authors, as well as tours that go around the most important places of the author's life (Hoppen et al., 2014; Andersen & Robinson, 2002). Exploring locations that served as inspiration for novels or landscapes that featured prominently in fictional and non-fictional literary works, even if those sites do not exist, or participating in experiences (eg., balls, workshops, gastro-events) is a popular motivation for tourists (Andersen & Robinson, 2002). Several cities and towns are known for their literary heritage, exceptional bookshops, and other related attractions, offering a unique destination for literary tourists.

Literary tourism also has a connection to film tourism (eg. Harry Potter tourism), where the book and the movie locations are either the same or they complement each other (Busby, 2022; Andersen & Robinson, 2002). Additionally, it often involves educational and cultural components, the literary work offering background information and/or a contemporary insight into the customs of the era. Literary tourism can provide insight into the history, culture, heritage, and socio-political aspects of the era the authors depicted (Hoppen et al., 2014). Visitors are motivated to explore these literary sites primarily to deepen their understanding of the writer and their works (Baleiro et al., 2022); consequently, their experiences are significantly influenced by factors such as perceived authenticity, historical immersion, and emotional connections to the author (Baleiro, 2023a)

2.3. Dark literary tourism

The concept of dark literary tourism has evolved over time, by blending the experiences and tourist motivations of literary and dark tourism. It incorporates elements from both forms of tourism, such as paying homage to the authors, empathizing with their sufferings, and commemorating their deaths (Brown, 2015; Çevik, 2023; Stone, 2022). Visiting authors' graves, and prisons where they were held, attending commemorative ceremonies, and going on travels inspired by gothic, crime, horror, and Holocaust fiction are not only part of literary tourism; they all contribute to the dark aspects of it, creating the foundation of dark literary tourism (Çevik, 2023). This type of tourism includes visiting sites connected to death and suffering portrayed in literary works, sites that were shaped by literary narratives as well as their real-world contexts (Baleiro, 2023b).

Readers may visit these locations for diverse motivations; it allows tourists to gain awareness about their own lives, reflect on the world, and contemplate life as they visit cemeteries and other sites associated with death and suffering (Çevik, 2023). In literary tourism, broadening the reader's understanding of the real world by engaging the author's word view is a main contributing motivation for tourism (Andersen & Robinson, 2002). However, it is even more relevant for dark literary tourists.

Some dark literary tourism experiences, such as "Dracula tourism", may involve imagining fictional places from literature (Light, 2017; Speakman & Garay, 2022), while others are based on true events that were mystified and became quasi-fictional as exemplified by the

case of the unidentified serial killer known as Jack the Ripper (Smith & Tevely, 2023), leading the visitors to undergo on a journey to confront the dark, macabre, and haunting aspects of the stories. Busby and Devereux (2015) examined the influence of literature and film on visiting The Anne Frank House in Amsterdam. The primary visiting factor was the educational reason, however, it is notable that those visitors who read *The Diary of Anne Frank* were more likely to visit the exhibition than those who had not. Similarly, in Light's (2017) research, those who read the classic literature, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, are the ones who are more enthusiastic about visiting Transylvania.

Dark literary tourism is political and dissonant, as it involves encounters with memorialized dead and the consumption of messages about difficult heritage (Stone, 2022). Literary texts and tourism products have the potential to enhance visitors' understanding and recognition of the complex and heavy past. By integrating literary narratives into the tourist experience, these sites can encourage imagination, reflection, and a deeper engagement with the themes of oppression and violence, ultimately contributing to a more informed collective memory and promoting peacebuilding efforts (Baleiro, 2023c).

Overall, dark literary tourism combines elements of literary pilgrimage, dark tourism, and reflection on mortality and the human condition while providing opportunities for reflection, learning, and connection with literary figures. However, it also raises challenges related to emotional experiences and ethical considerations.

2.4. Marketing Communication of Dark Literary Tourist Sites

Literary tourist attractions are commercially significant and are marketed based on the qualities (eg., connection with the lives of writers, settings of a novel, emotional connection to the story) people are drawn towards the sites (Herbert, 2001). Additionally, these sites already have general qualities (eg., scenery, souvenir shops, located near to a "must-see" attraction) that promote their attractiveness (Herbert, 2001). Literary places can collaborate to promote "routes" and connect them through literary figures (Hoppen et al., 2014). Tours and trails promote specific images of literary tourist sites, where one attraction can have different meanings to different visitors. For example, the British Museum can have a different meaning for a Sherlock Holmes fan, than for a cultural tourist. It is argued that the more qualities a literary attraction has, the more attractive it is for tourists (Watson, 2006), while they also seek an authentic experience that represents their own understandings and subjective interpretations of the literature (Herbert, 2001). Incorporating literary elements in tourism narratives can enhance the promotion of tourism in specific regions (Hoppen et al., 2014) and can create an immersive experience for visitors.

The promotional strategies and tools for dark literary tourism are similar to the ones used for literary tourism marketing but with an understanding of the motivations of dark literary tourists (Sama, 2022). Technology, storytelling, and creative interpretation of the combined tangible and intangible heritages can attract visitors to dark literary sites (Wyatt et al., 2021; Mostafa et al., 2021). Additionally, the cooperation between the stakeholders is crucial for the successful implementation of the attractions (Mostafa et al., 2021). Overall, it can be said that promoting the visitor's inner journey and understanding of the real or fictional world can make the attraction more meaningful.

Marketing communication in dark literary tourism focuses on promoting the historical and cultural significance of the authors and their works, creating a sense of connection and empathy with the authors, and providing opportunities for tourists to engage in immersive experiences. The marketing communication efforts aim to highlight the dark aspects of the authors' lives and works, such as their suffering and struggles, while also emphasizing the literary value and impact of their works. Through storytelling, promotional materials, and interactive experiences, dark literary tourist attractions aim to attract tourists who are interested in exploring the intersection of literature and dark tourism (Ünüvar et al, 2022; Sama, 2022; Zerva, 2021).

Additionally, the role of cultural intermediaries, such as tour guides and storytellers, is crucial in shaping the visitor's perception and experience of the attractions (McKenzie, 2022). By effectively implementing these marketing communication strategies, dark literary tourist attractions can attract a diverse range of visitors and contribute to the social and economic development of the visited regions.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining the analysis of the online presence of selected historical attractions with in-depth interviews to gain insights into tourists' perspectives and the marketing strategies employed by these sites. The research specifically focused on attractions related to the First and Second World Wars and the Cold War that are connected to significant literary works.

To examine the online presence of attractions related to the First and Second World Wars and the Cold War with a connection to literary works, a systematic selection of relevant attractions and their websites and social media platforms was undertaken. The selection criteria for sites that have a connection with the 20th century and its historical events are the following:

1. The attraction is tied to World War I, World War II, and/or the Cold War, or is associated with a prominent figure who experienced the tragedies.
2. It has an organized activity designed to cater to tourists.
3. It has a connection to a famous and widely recognized literary work about the issues of the 20th century.
4. It has an existing website and an active online media presence, where it engages with a broad audience.

Based on these criteria, the Anne Frank House, the All Quiet on the Western Front tour, the A Bridge Too Far tour, the Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory and the German Spy Museum Berlin were chosen. In the context of this research, it is important to note that the chosen sites belong not only to the scope of literary tourism and/or dark tourism but also film tourism, heritage tourism, and cultural tourism.

The analysis involved the websites of the five selected sites, their active social media platforms (primarily Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube), and reviews on TripAdvisor. The analysis aimed to understand how these attractions present themselves to potential visitors and engage with their audience. A thematic analysis was employed to evaluate the content of each site's official website and their social media platforms. This process involved

systematically coding the content to identify recurring themes, such as marketing strategies, historical narratives, visitor engagement, current news featured there, posting habits, and User Generated Content (UGC). The thematic analysis allowed for an exploration of how each attraction communicates its significance, visitor experience, and emotional appeal.

The qualitative component consisted of structured interviews with tourists who had visited the chosen attractions. Participants were identified through social media platforms, specifically Facebook and Instagram. Publicly shared posts and photos in which visitors tagged the selected sites were examined. They were invited to participate in the study by sending messages to individuals whose posts indicated their recent visits. A purposeful sampling method was used, targeting individuals based on their engagement with the attractions on social media. While the author reached out to several potential participants, many did not respond. The 18 individuals who were interviewed were those who expressed openness to share their experiences:

- 6 participants visited the Anne Frank House
- 3 participants participated in the All Quiet on the Western Front tour
- 4 participants undertook the A Bridge Too Far tour
- 4 participants visited Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory
- 4 participants explored the German Spy Museum Berlin

A structured interview guide was created to ensure consistency across interviews, featuring open-ended questions covering participants' emotions, motivations, and understanding of the attractions. The thematic analysis process used for the website data was also applied to the interview transcripts. This involved:

1. Familiarization with the data by reading through the transcriptions of the interviews and organizing them according to the specific questions posed during the interviews.
2. Generating the initial codes by identifying significant statements and emotional responses, focusing on participants' motivations related to the attractions.
3. Identifying the themes to reflect on the shared experiences and insights expressed by the participants.
4. Defining the themes to cover the participants' perspectives.

This mixed-methods approach allowed the exploration of online engagement and visitor experiences at dark historical attractions linked to significant literary works. By integrating thematic analyses of both the online content and the interview data, this research aims to provide an understanding of how these attractions communicate their significance and how visitors perceive and engage with them.

4. OVERVIEW

4.1. Introduction of sites

In recent years, Holocaust tourism has shifted from focusing primarily on the collective tragedy to placing more emphasis on the personal, individual stories of victims and survivors, making the historical narrative more emotionally involving for the visitors (e.g. interactive exhibits and survivor testimonies in museums). Novels and films play a crucial role in highlighting these individual experiences while portraying the socio-political climate

of the era. It led to new types of tourism, such as “Schindler tourism” in Krakow, Poland, or “Anne Frank tourism” in Amsterdam, the Netherlands and Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

The common factor among the Anne Frank House, the Oscar Schindler’s Enamel Factory, the Leger Holidays All Quiet on the Western Front tour, the Battlefield Explorer A Bridge Too Far tour, and the German Spy Museum Berlin is their thematic focus on significant historical events related to the World War I and II and the Cold War through the lens of a literature work. Each attraction contributes to a broader narrative that explores different facets of the 20th century, providing educational and personal insights into the complexities of war and its impact on individuals and society as a whole.

In the following part, the individual attractions will be introduced: the short history behind them, the insight into their importance, and the online marketing communication tools they use to attract their visitors.

4.1.1. Anne Frank House

It focuses on the life of Anne Frank and her family during the Holocaust, providing insights into the experiences of Jews in hiding during World War II. The Anne Frank House, where Anne Frank hid from 1942 to 1944, has emerged as a prominent tourist destination in Amsterdam and a significant heritage site associated with the Holocaust. It was established in 1957 as an independent non-profit organization (Anne Frank House, 2024a). It serves as a memorial site, an educational facility, and a literary attraction that has drawn millions of visitors. Over the subsequent years, substantial transformations occurred within the site, museum, and the encompassing area. The Anne Frank House evolved into a comprehensively staffed educational center, solidifying its position as a popular tourist attraction in Amsterdam (Hartmann, 2013).

The Anne Frank House effectively utilizes digital platforms - including website and virtual reality - to engage with its predominantly young, international audience (Busby & Devereux, 2015). The museum also introduced a 3D version of the House for those who cannot travel to Amsterdam or for those who cannot visit the real museum because of accessibility reasons (Anne Frank House, 2024b). It has a strong online presence that includes a user-friendly and mobile-optimized website to provide details about ticket prices, opening hours, exhibits, and collections. It also has social media platforms on Instagram, Facebook, X, and YouTube, where the museum has an active presence, posting educational content for the followers, and where the visitors and potential visitors can have a more personal interaction (Anne Frank House, 2024b). Word-of-mouth plays a significant role in the marketing of the museum. Beyond bloggers, vloggers, and influencers promoting the attraction, other tourists also share their experiences from their visits (Instagram, 2024).

The museum offers educational programs online and offline, on history, antisemitism, democracy, and other important topics (Anne Frank House, 2024c). Public Relations is a strong point of the museum, generating press coverage, as they participate in many initiatives to promote tolerance (Anne Frank House, 2022) and ways to help those who need help (Anne Frank House, 2023). They host special events and themed programs to encourage repeat visitors, create news coverage, and attract new tourists.

4.1.2. Leger Holidays – All Quiet on the Western Front Tour

It was inspired by Erich Maria Remarque's novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and it explores the realities of World War I from the perspective of the soldiers on the Western Front. The company offers two types of tours around the key sites of the Western Front, introducing the First World War's battlefields while the participants get to learn about the Great War. The novel is set in the trenches of Flanders during the First World War, and the tour starts in this area. The participants can visit Ypres and Ploegsteert, Belgium, to watch exhibitions, memorials, and trenches; Somme, France, to see museums and memorials; and other sites and graveyards in the surrounding areas to commemorate the dead (Leger Holidays, 2024a).

The tour's online presence is prominent. They maintain a visually appealing and user-friendly website where potential visitors may find information, book tours, and see the itinerary and other important information. The website offers a "call me back" option for easier contact (Leger Holidays, 2024a). Moreover, they share valuable content on the history of the World Wars, heroes, battles, and weapons (Leger Holidays, 2024b). They use Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to appear as a relevant search result for those who are looking for an All Quiet on the Western Front tour. The website is optimized for mobile devices.

Leger Holidays uses the following social media platforms: Facebook, X, YouTube, and Instagram to connect with its audience (Leger Holidays, 2024a). They share visuals, celebrating milestones of the First and Second World Wars, book and movie recommendations on military topics, and updates about upcoming tours. They build and maintain an email subscriber list, to directly contact and reach potential and returning customers with promotional offers, updates, and exclusive information and deals (Leger Holidays, 2024a). The company and the tour are promoted through brochures, online magazines, and travel blogs, as well as through the positive reviews and recommendations of satisfied customers (Facebook, 2024a).

4.1.3. The Battlefield Explorer – A Bridge Too Far Tour

It is connected to the events surrounding Operation Market Garden during World War II, as portrayed in the book and film *A Bridge Too Far*. The tour leads the visitors to the area of the Battle of Arnhem, one of the settings of the novel. The tour offers a unique experience, showing historical locations and presenting the power struggles and strategic choices of the Second World War. The itinerary includes the visitation of the Ginkel Heath, the John Frost Bridge, the War Cemetery, and optionally, the Airborne Museum (The Battlefield Explorer, 2024). The local tour guide enhances the experience, mixing personal and historical facts about the time period.

The tour has a dedicated page on the website, where they provide detailed information about the historical events, pricing, itinerary, and booking options. They optimize the website for relevant keywords regarding historical world war-related tours in the area. The page contains a short introduction from the guide as well (The Battlefield Explorer, 2024).

Visitors are encouraged to share their experiences online, and it was awarded Tripadvisor's Travelers' Choice in 2023 (The Battlefield Explorer, 2024). The Battlefield Explorer is active

on Facebook, X, Instagram, and YouTube, sharing updates, and historical information, engaging with the audience, and showing visuals about the tours. The A Bridge Too Far Tour does not have many tagged posts, but there are still posts about the locations. The posts about the tour itself include interesting facts about the historical significance of the attractions (Facebook, 2024b). The followers' engagement with the posts is significant.

4.1.4. Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory

It centers around the story of Oskar Schindler and his efforts to save Jewish lives during the Holocaust, specifically through his enamelware factory in Poland. It is located in Krakow as part of the Historical Museum of the City of Krakow, a historical site associated with the actions of Oskar Schindler during World War II. He saved the lives of over a thousand Jewish workers by employing them in his enamelware and ammunition factories. His efforts were later popularized in Thomas Keneally's novel *Schindler's Ark* and Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List*. The factory now serves as a museum and educational center, raising awareness of the brutality of the Holocaust and honoring the individuals saved by Schindler (MK, 2024a).

The museum portrays the life during the Nazi occupation, emphasizing the factory's role during the Holocaust. It incorporates multimedia exhibits, including audiovisual presentations, photographs, artifacts, and the testimonies of those who lived through the period. This provides a deeper understanding of history and creates a closer emotional connection to the topic. The museum offers temporary exhibitions to engage with the community and to promote tolerance and remembrance, and guided tours for the visitors. Previously, visitors could buy their tickets online, but now it is available only for groups (MK, 2024b). The factory is part of Muzeum Krakowa, and its website is also part of the bigger group. The factory's website lacks certain elements (eg. "Memory Trail" (MK, 2024c)), but it contains all the necessary information about the factory, its history, and visitor details. The opening hours and accessibility are visible on the page. The museum also utilizes social media platforms to share pictures and videos about the factory and posts about the historical context. They connect with their audience and promote upcoming events through Instagram, Facebook, and X (MK, 2024b).

4.1.5. German Spy Museum Berlin

The German Spy Museum Berlin is a unique cultural institution situated in Berlin, Germany, dedicated to the world of espionage. It explores the history of espionage and intelligence activities during various historical periods, including the Cold War era, focusing on Berlin's role as a "Capital of Spies". It shows the development of spying, intelligence operations, and covert technologies, offering visitors an immersive experience of the secret world of espionage. The exhibits include artifacts, interactive displays, games, and multimedia presentations that delve into the methods, tools, and stories of spies throughout history (Deutsches Spionage Museum, 2024a). While the attraction is not strictly about the *Strangers on a Bridge* nor the *Capital of Spies* novels, it still includes a part where it mentions the literature and the movie adaptation.

The museum has a distinctive identity, centered around the theme of espionage, and uses an attention-grabbing green color. The interactive exhibitions and games – such as finding the hidden bugs in a room in a specific time frame – encourage visitors to share their

experiences on social media platforms. Out of the chosen sites and tours, this generates the most UGC content about the museum itself. The Spy Museum organizes special events, such as readings, lectures, and premieres related to espionage and data protection, attracting audiences who wish to learn more about these topics (Deutsches Spionage Museum, 2024b). They positioned the museum as both an entertaining and educational destination, appealing to a broad demographic. They use a dynamic pricing strategy: buying tickets online is cheaper, and the earlier a visitor buys the ticket, the more affordable it is. This way they can control the number of visitors in each time frame (Deutsches Spionage Museum, 2024c). Other than booking the ticket, visitors can find out more about the museum itself, the history of espionage, opening hours, and ordering merchandise from the online shop on the website.

They are present on social media sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, and X, posting pictures, videos, and blog posts in German. The followers of the museum are engaging less with the posts, than the other sites' followers. However, the visitors still showcase their experiences and leave great reviews on the museum (Facebook, 2024c).

4.2. Results of the interviews

4.2.1. Emotional responses

The exploration of emotional reactions during and after visits to historical attractions revealed differences and similarities between the participants. Their emotions played a vital role in shaping the overall visitor experience, with individuals expressing a blend of sadness, fascination, admiration, horror, and empathy. The examination of these emotional responses offers valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of the attractions' impact on visitors.

The participants in this study had shown a combination of different emotions, prominently featuring an undercurrent of sadness triggered by the exhibits. Participants reflected on a combination of sorrow and thoughtfulness, accompanied by a deep-seated shame linked to historical ignorance. This highlights the transformative potential of historical attractions, not only in evoking empathy but also in challenging personal perspectives. Besides sadness, excitement, and thrill emerged as a prevalent emotional motif, as well as a sense of relief. This suggests that, for some visitors, the allure of historical attractions lies not only in the somber acknowledgment of the past but also in the cathartic process of engaging with and honoring that past. In the context of military and intelligence technology, fear emerged as a contemplative reaction to the unsettling surveillance capabilities showcased. Additionally, the participants expressed a sense of disgust towards humanity, to the stark realities presented. Beyond the individual experiences, there emerged a collective emotional response characterized by a reflection on contemporary global situations prompted by historical parallels, making them worry about the way the current situation shapes the future. This broader emotional engagement serves as a testament to the enduring relevance of historical attractions in fostering a deeper understanding of current global dynamics.

The majority of participants recounted visiting these sites only once, with many expressing the emotional weight of the experience as a potential barrier to revisiting. Some participants, however, expressed a desire to return under specific conditions, such as

having more time for exploration or attending special events, suggesting that deeper, more personalized experiences could potentially encourage repeat visits.

The emotional responses documented among participants highlight the multifaceted nature of historical exploration. From nuanced combinations of sadness to the complex interplay of fear, curiosity, and excitement, each emotional response contributes to their engagement with the site. These findings not only shed light on the individual experience but also emphasize the broader societal implications of historical attractions in shaping collective perspectives on the past and its resonance with the present.

4.2.2. Influence of marketing

The knowledge of historical sites can come from various sources of information, including educational resources, social media, personal recommendations, and digital content. The study examined the factors shaping visitors' decisions to explore historical attractions. While the channels that raise awareness among visitors are diverse, participants reported that traditional advertisements did not significantly impact their decisions. Only a few saw traditional promotional materials, typically brochures and leaflets, or encountered incidentally through other sources (e.g. school programs). While advertisements for these sites exist, they are not impactful enough to be remembered. Instead, the interviews highlighted the key role of online platforms - such as social media - in shaping their awareness of historical attractions, indicating that their understanding was significantly influenced by these digital sources. This finding contradicts participants' beliefs that marketing had little effect on their choices. This suggests that online platforms, particularly social media and blogs, subtly inform users without them perceiving it as marketing tools. Personal - or seemingly personal - recommendations are essential in shaping travel decisions, as they are seen as more trustworthy.

Websites, blogs, and social media platforms, especially Instagram, were the primary sources of information. The decision-making process behind visiting a historical site is a mixture of having previous knowledge about the place, online information, personal recommendations, and the uniqueness of each attraction. Understanding these factors provides valuable insights for site management and promotional strategies, emphasizing the need for a multi-channel approach to reach diverse audiences and raising awareness of these historical sites. A resounding theme was the willingness of participants to recommend the visited attractions to others. This endorsement stemmed from various factors, including the perceived educational value, interactive elements, and the unique opportunity to gain profound insights into historical events.

"Of course, I would recommend visiting them! On the one hand, for anyone who is hesitant to believe in the Holocaust, and on the other hand, for high school students with a trusted adult, with whom they can discuss what they have seen and the political and societal background"
(Female, 60)

Online platforms enable users to share experiences and insights in an accessible, authentic way. Visitors are often drawn to the powerful stories associated with these sites - tales of Anne Frank's resilience, Schindler's moral choices, and Cold War espionage stories - which create a strong emotional resonance. It is shown that visitors appreciate a blend of

education and engagement, so tailoring marketing messages can broaden the appeal of dark literature sites.

With the internet as the leading source of information, having a strong online presence through official websites, reviews from satisfied visitors, and social media platforms is critical. The low recall of advertisements suggests that traditional ads might not be highly effective for these sites. Attractions might benefit from investing in targeted digital ads or unique content that might be more memorable and engaging. For attractions, maintaining updated, engaging online content that is easily discoverable could increase visitor numbers. Given that recommendations are highly influential, tourism managers should consider partnerships with local influencers, or visitor engagement campaigns that encourage people to share their experiences.

Marketing campaigns should highlight the emotional and educational aspects, positioning dark literature sites as valuable learning experiences. Targeting specific audiences, such as readers of relevant novels, history enthusiasts, or those interested in immersive experiences, can enhance the effectiveness of marketing efforts. By emphasizing unique narratives, interactive experiences, and a mix of promotional channels, these sites can attract a broad audience seeking meaningful tourist attractions.

5. DISCUSSION

All attractions contribute to a broader narrative exploring different facets of the 20th century. They share a historical and educational significance related to the chosen wars and conflicts. While all attractions are part of literary tourism, film tourism, heritage tourism, and cultural tourism, they differ in their specific focuses. The common theme within the interviews regarding their experiences was to seek more knowledge and context that complements their previously existing awareness about the topic.

The effectiveness of marketing communication tools and especially their online presence is evident from the interviews. Attractions like the Anne Frank House utilize a range of digital platforms, including a user-friendly website, virtual reality experiences, and active engagement on social media. The visually appealing websites, social media presence, and direct communication channels like email to connect with their audience not only provide information but also contribute to the emotional appeal of the attractions. Some of the participants indicated that they are open (or they already visited more of the attractions) to visit historical sites they read about in novels. This could offer an opportunity for cross-promotion among heritage, film, and literary tourists and sites with similar themes. Collaborative efforts can create comprehensive tourist experiences and attract a broader audience interested in different aspects of history.

The data indicates that tourism marketing for these sites currently relies more on organic internet reach and recommendations than on paid advertisements. Tourists seem to value accessible online information and trusted recommendations more than direct advertising. As a result, for tourist attractions to improve visitor engagement, they may need to focus on enhancing their digital presence, encouraging word-of-mouth promotion, and refining their ad strategies to make them more engaging and memorable.

During the marketing strategy, dark literary sites should emphasize the emotional impact of the stories associated with the sites, highlight the unique narratives, personal experiences, and the depth of historical content to resonate with visitors and connect the literary work to the site. Target specific audiences such as readers of relevant novels, history enthusiasts, and those interested in immersive experiences where they can learn about the shared human history. The visitors' involvement in the site can also lead to positive word-of-mouth endorsements, which are powerful tools for attracting new visitors. It is also important to ensure that attractions have a strong online presence with user-friendly websites, engaging social media content, and immersive experiences since most of the interviewed people indicated that they knew about the site from the internet. Utilizing virtual reality could be also a good way to reach a broader audience, including those who may not be able to visit in person.

6. CONCLUSION

This research explored the effectiveness of marketing communication strategies used by historical and dark literary tourism attractions, examining how online platforms, storytelling, and emotional appeals contribute to attracting diverse groups of visitors. The literature review contextualized the study within the fields of dark tourism, literary tourism, and dark literary tourism. Through a mixed-methods approach combining website analysis and participant interviews, the research aimed to uncover the perception of marketing strategies, thus offering insights into how marketing efforts resonate with the visitors. Curiosity, educational desire, and emotional engagement emerged as significant themes, with literature serving as a powerful catalyst for fostering historical curiosity and empathy. The findings underscore the impact of digital channels, particularly social media and blogs, in shaping visitor awareness and interest.

This study's small sample size and focus on specific sites limit its generalizability. Reliance on the social media participants may have lead selection bias. Many visitors who might have interacted differently with these attractions may not have been represented. Additionally, the lack of focus on the impact of traditional or offline marketing channels suggests an area for further study. Future research could expand this study to deepen the understanding of dark literary tourism and its evolving role in the field of tourism. A larger and more diverse sample across multiple regions and demographics would help with a more representative picture of visitor motivations and preferences. Additionally, examining the effectiveness of specific marketing approaches across different types of media could offer insights into optimizing visitor engagement strategies.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the research on dark tourism by examining how visitors' engagement with literary works influences their interest in historical sites. It shows that literature can enhance the appeal of destinations by providing a narrative framework that deepens visitors' emotional connections to these sites.

The results support Baleiro and Coelho-Florent's (2023) findings that literature, film, and personal recommendations play an essential role in fostering cultural understanding and historical remembrance, especially in dark literary tourism contexts where stories of resilience, moral courage, and loss are central.

Moreover, this study provides practical insights for site managers and marketers, emphasizing the importance of a multi-channel marketing strategy that emphasizes social media, personal endorsements, and emotionally resonant narratives. Experiences that invoke strong emotional connections and offer educational value have lasting impacts on visitors, increasing the likelihood of personal recommendations. To capitalize on this, attractions could consider collaborations with authors, filmmakers, and publishers to create immersive book or film tours – or heritage routes –, potentially broadening their reach and attracting a wider audience seeking meaningful and educational experiences. By highlighting unique narratives and combining digital and social influences with traditional marketing channels, historical and dark literary tourism sites can successfully attract diverse audiences while helping a deeper appreciation for cultural and historical heritage.

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