

We Believe in Our Story: Using Indigenous Accounts of Migration Experience to Create Promotional Narratives for Diaspora Tourism



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Mass-produced advertisements, concocted by marketing agencies and aimed at enticing the mass traveler, are abundant in the world of tourism promotion. Images and narratives used to promote travel are often superficial, stereotypical, and portray the locals as a resource provided for tourists' entertainment (Buzinde et al. 2006). In advertisements, the most frequently portrayed narrative is some sort of a "national story," or typical imagery, which is expected to draw international eyes to the country (Pretes 2003). While this "nationalism for sale" may work in the global market, it certainly falls short of attracting diasporas – communities of nationals abroad. Having more intimate knowledge of the country and its culture, diasporas find mass advertisement "inauthentic," which discourages travel to their home countries. This type of travel, however, is of great importance.

As immigrants relocate to their new homes and form diasporas that are removed from the "core" national location, they experience a rupture in identity continuity – a connection between who they were before and who they are now. Iyer and Jetten (2011) suggest that the effects of ruptured identity continuity are detrimental to the health and well-being of individuals. For diasporas, these effects include depression, anxiety, addiction, and other psychosomatic illnesses (Falicov 2007). Among traditional methods, therapy (Baptiste et al. 1997; Falicov 2007), as well as social support (Aroian 1992), have demonstrated moderate success. However, scholars have recently begun to see that it may be the diaspora's connection to

national heritage, which Macdonald (2006, 11) describes as “material testimony of identity,” that can help immigrants cope with immigration-related stress by allowing them to maintain the identity that was ruptured in the process of resettlement.

Diasporas’ connections to national heritage may be maintained through keepsakes, upholding of rituals, and ties with relatives; however one of the most powerful avenues of maintaining identity continuity appears to be diaspora tourism (Morgan, Pritchard, and Pride 2002). Also termed “roots tourism” (Basu 2005) or “ethnic tourism” (Ostrowski 1991), diaspora tourism occurs when individuals travel to their homeland. Diaspora tourism brings about cultural and spiritual renewal (Pierre 2009); connects diasporic individuals with political processes in their country of origin (Ostrowski 1991); helps resolve a problematized sense of belonging in host and home countries (Basu 2005); and supports the desire of diasporic communities to maintain a distinct collective identity, despite wide geographical dispersal (Morgan et al. 2002). Van Oudenhoven and Ward (2013, 91) posit that diaspora tourism “may also bolster well-being in marginalized immigrants who could find some comfort by visiting their home country.”

While the benefits of diaspora tourism have been documented, very little attention has been given to the way it should be promoted. Mass-produced advertisements are marginally effective with diasporas, who have emotionally laden connections with their homelands. According to Morgan et al. (2003), the most effective promotional approaches incorporate stories of homecoming, nationhood, and the search for roots. Such stories can be incorporated into advertising through the use of narratives (Oatley and Gholamain 1997).

Communication scholars have found that narratives can influence beliefs (Green and Brock 2000), provide behavioral examples (Slater 2002), and shape individuals’ cultural identities (Jacobs 2002). Since narratives “have been described as a fundamental mode of thinking” and humans tend to think and communicate in the form of stories, narratives were found to more effectively induce an attitude change than didactic and expository texts (Green 2006, S163). Dal Cin, Zanna, and Fong (2004) show the persuasive power of narratives empirically, but recognize that many challenges remain, including understanding the attributes of a “quality” narrative.

Cultural appropriateness is an especially pertinent “quality” indicator when

narratives are used to appeal to immigrant groups. While promotion of a carefully crafted national story may appeal to the international tourist, the same nationalistic myth may feel inauthentic, and therefore not persuasive, to diasporas who have emotional attachments and a national myth of their own. Challenges in building a hegemonic national narrative provide an added layer of complexity; for example, after almost seventy years of nationalism-wiping efforts of the communist party, post-Soviet countries experience difficulties in nation-building and reconstruction of national identity (Palmer 2007). How does a post-Soviet country build a coherent national narrative and promote it to the international market, let alone tailor it to attract its own diasporic community?

To this effect, Larkey and Hecht (2010, 115) suggest a process for creating “culturally grounded” narratives that are instrumental for “capturing the richness of cultural elements that most effectively reaches minds and hearts for...behavior change”. This process of “message development enlists the experience of group members through the stories describing their social realities. Narrative interviews, in particular, are used to invoke a storytelling style rather than didactic discourse by a collaborative orientation” (Larkey and Hecht 2010, 117). Using the indigenous knowledge and experiences of the group in question allows for the creation of promotional materials that speak directly to other members of the group.

In this field report, I outline how the indigenous knowledge of Ukrainian immigrants was collected and used to create a culturally grounded narrative promoting diaspora tourism to Ukraine. A two-phased mixed methods approach was used because it allowed the choice of “the combination or mixture of methods and procedures that works best for answering research questions” (Burke, Johnson, and Onwuegbuzie 2004, 17). Here, however, I focus on the first phase: collecting interviews from Ukrainian immigrants.

The purpose of the first phase was to obtain culture-centric narratives about the immigration experiences of the fourth wave of Ukrainian immigrants. This was accomplished by conducting in-depth individual interviews with fourth wave Ukrainian immigrants. The results of the interviews were used to create culturally grounded promotional narratives for diaspora tourism to Ukraine.

Sample. The sample was comprised of fourth wave Ukrainian immigrants living in New York City who arrived in the United States between 1991 and 2014. Initially,

multiple Ukrainian organizations in New York City were contacted (e.g., Ukrainian churches, women's leagues, business associations, and cultural clubs) and asked to distribute recruitment materials (e.g., introductory notes, flyers through e-mail, or newsletters) to their members. Due to low response, a representative from the Shevchenko Scientific Society in New York City was contacted and agreed to serve as a gatekeeper to the Ukrainian community. Mach et al. (2005) recommends that investigators work closely with gatekeepers to gain access, develop trust, and identify potential study participants. Hence, the gatekeeper's assistance was used to identify potential participants and sites where recruitment flyers could be distributed.

The recruitment and interview process, which occurred over the course of a two-day trip to New York City, continued until saturation was reached. Guest et al. (2006) conducted an experiment with data saturation and variability and concluded that twelve interviews are enough to reach saturation on any given topic, but the exact number should be identified by the researcher. Based on the ongoing analysis of the interviews and availability of subjects, thirteen interviews were secured from fourth wave Ukrainian immigrants.

Data collection. During the recruitment process, a gatekeeper's help was secured in identifying and visiting several establishments where fourth wave Ukrainian immigrants worked (e.g., banks, credit unions, deli shops, church groups). He made introductions with potential participants and explained to them that this was part of a research study. This was followed by obtaining verbal consent from participants. Some participants scheduled a meeting on the same day during their lunch breaks or after work, and some filled out a pre-interview questionnaire and shared their phone numbers and availability so they could receive a call at a convenient time.

The following procedures were used with the on-site and phone interviews:

- I introduced (or reminded them about) myself and stated the purpose of the study. I also indicated that the participant would receive a gift at the end of the interview, that the interview was to be recorded on a digital recorder, and that I would like him/her to fill out a consent form or provide verbal consent. A copy of the consent form was sent to each participant after the interview. Participants were asked whether they wanted to speak English or Ukrainian, and the interview proceeded in the

- language chosen by the participant.
- Participants were asked to fill out a short pre-interview questionnaire. For phone interviews, I read the questions and answer options aloud and recorded each participant's answer.
 - Participants were asked one question at a time, supported by follow-up and probing questions when necessary.
 - At the end of the interview, I asked each participant if he/she would like to add any additional information.
 - In closing, I thanked participants and gave them a twenty-five dollar prepaid Visa gift card. Individuals who were interviewed over the phone were asked to share their mailing address so that the gift card could be mailed to them.

Data entry and analysis. After completing the interviews, the recordings were saved as audio files. All respondents chose to speak in Ukrainian, so the interviews were translated into English and transcribed. The translation was verified by an expert fluent in both languages. Data analysis followed Marvasti's (2003) guidelines (i.e. data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing). Data reduction and display involved the researcher and her advisor individually reading the transcriptions, making notes, and highlighting important passages. They then met to compare their findings and to draw conclusions, which were rooted in the displayed data. To make the analysis more manageable, only the data that related to the research questions and the conceptual framework of the project was maintained for further analysis.

In the subsequent steps, I used these interviews to create a narrative that promoted diaspora tourism to Ukraine. In a survey distributed to a wider sample of Ukrainian immigrants, the narrative was consistently rated more credible, informative, and persuasive than a neutral text. This finding supports the notion that use of relatable stories extracted from indigenous knowledge have a much more persuasive effect than mass-produced tourism advertising.

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To view Svitlana's ICIK seminar on Ukrainian immigrants in the U.S., [visit the ICIK website](#).

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