

**REPRESENTATIONS OF NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES FOR
TOURISM PURPOSES: THE CASE OF ARIZONA**

0. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Native Americans have been socially marginalized throughout their history and stereotyped by the media and *dominant society* in multiple ways. The main purpose of this research is to examine how Native American tribes in the state of Arizona (United States of America) represent themselves online for tourism purposes and to explore the main reasons that determine these portrayals. Drawing on the Hall's Representation Theory, this study utilizes website content analysis and semi-structured interviews to understand the online self-representation of the Native American communities and how they try to counter existing stereotypes. The findings of this thesis contribute to the existing literature on indigenous tourism and indicate that Native American communities in Arizona tend to portray themselves both as contemporary and traditional societies, with a strong spirit of struggle and resistance, while striving to preserve their culture and heritage, and use tourism as a way to educate tourists and dispel stereotypes. This research shows evidence that Native American tribes in Arizona do not adopt the 'White Man's Indian' identity and do not Self-Orientalize themselves in online representations for their own benefit.

Keywords: Native Americans, Online Self-representation, Stereotypes

1. INTRODUCTION

Native Americans are one of the most disadvantaged ethnic groups in the United States and have been socially marginalized throughout their history. They have been misrepresented and underrepresented in traditional media (Kopacz & Lawton, 2013; Tukachinsky, Mastro & Yarchi, 2015), which has led to the creation of stereotypes by the *dominant society*. Many of the ideas that people create in their minds about social groups are the result of indirect experiences acquired through media rather than in-person contact (Mastro, 2015), which explains its enormous power. Therefore, stereotypes are of particular importance in the context of tourism, as they can have an impact on travel choices because they influence the images and perceptions that potential visitors create in their minds.

Native Americans lack the power and the resources to change media representations and have had to deal with all these misrepresentations and negative stereotypes for a long time. However, the Internet has given ethnic minorities and indigenous communities the opportunity to change the media landscape (Kopacz & Lawton, 2011), allowing them to portray themselves as they wish, and have their own voice and showcase their identity and culture (Mkono, 2016). Reaching a large audience, communities have the chance to counter negative stereotypes that exist about them and influence their image in tourists' minds (Cuillier & Ross, 2007), thus changing their perceptions. Hence, websites represent powerful communication tools (Gaston-Anderson, 2003) for tribes and are unique spaces to examine how Native Americans decide to present themselves (Cuillier & Ross, 2007).

Self-representation of Native American tribes is a relatively under-examined topic within published tourism research and only a few authors, outside the field of tourism, have examined the representation of Native Americans on tribal websites all over the United States (see Cuillier & Ross, 2007; Fair, 2000). This study aims to continue the work of the authors mentioned above and to contribute to the literature of indigenous tourism regarding representations and tourism planning and development.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The main purpose of this research is to examine how Native American tribes in Arizona represent themselves online for tourism purposes and to understand what the main reasons that determine their portrayal are. The case study selected for this study is Arizona (United States of America), as it is a State where twenty Native American tribes are geopolitically located and generally compete for the same inbound tourist market.

The research question that guides this study is as follows: *How do Native American communities portray themselves for tourism purposes and how do their portrayals differ from other Native American communities in the state?* The study indeed has a double focus, as it aims to assess the representation both from a social point of view regarding the social empowerment of tribes, and the marketing perspective concerning the way in which tribes communicate their tourism products in comparison to other neighboring tribes in the State.

3. METHODOLOGY AND WORK PLAN

This thesis is based in qualitative research, as the main aim is to get a deep understanding of a particular phenomenon. The study combines two qualitative research tools, which are website content analysis and semi-structured interviews.

Firstly, this study draws on the content analysis of Native American tribally managed websites, regarding the textual content and visual representations through the images shown in tribal websites, in order to understand how the Native American communities are portrayed. The website content analysis was conducted during the period from December 2018 to April 2019 and included nineteen tribes geopolitically located in the state of Arizona, which were pulled from the *American Indian Tribes* section of the Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT) site. In the mentioned section, there are links to the websites of the twenty-two tribes that are present and marketed for tourism purposes in Arizona. However, for this study, only those that have their headquarters within the boundaries of the State of Arizona were examined, thus excluding Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, located in Needles (California) and Zuni Pueblo, based in Zuni (New Mexico). Therefore, even if a total of twenty-two communities are marketed by the AOT, only the twenty that are geopolitically based in Arizona were taken into account for the study.

The twenty tribes that qualify to be included in the research are the following: Ak-Chin Indian Community, Cocopah Indian Tribe, Colorado River Indian Tribes, Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, Gila River Indian Community, Havasupai Tribe, Hopi Tribe, Hualapai Tribe, Kaibab-Paiute Tribe, Navajo Nation, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, Quechan Tribe, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, San Carlos Apache Tribe, San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe, Tohono O'odham Nation, Tonto Apache Tribe, White Mountain Apache Tribe, Yavapai-Apache Nation and Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe.

One of the tribes included in the list provided by the AOT website, the Fort Yuma-Quechan Tribe, is directed to the Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona (ITCA) website. However, the tribe has its own website, which is the one that has been considered for the study, instead of the ITCA one. Besides, the Tonto Apache Tribe was excluded from the study, as the Tribe did not have a website at the time of the research (February to April 2019).

The final sample for the study comprised the websites of nineteen Native American tribes. The website content analysis began by reading all the tribal websites several times to get familiar with the text and to ensure it was well understood by the researcher. The coding process was conducted by a researcher who is not of indigenous or Native American heritage. During this process, which was used to have a clear picture of the concepts that were coming up and to identify the most recurrent ones, words that were mentioned in each website were highlighted in different colors, using color coding as described by Lacey and Luff (2001). An Excel spreadsheet was created and filled with the different keywords, where the topics were contextualized and summarized in a table, in order to categorize the codes into themes to facilitate its subsequent analysis.

Once the data was organized in themes, axial coding which is defined as “the process of relating categories to their subcategories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.123) was used. After conducting a deep and thorough analysis of the content on Arizona based tourism promotional websites, three themes were identified, namely, *Historicizing the Destination*, *Addressing the Tourist* and *Tourism Activities*. The *Historicizing the Destination* included three sub-themes: *Cultural Pride*, *Inter-cultural Relations* and *Struggle*. The sub-themes linked to the *Addressing the Tourist* theme included: *Salutation to Tourists* and *Code of Conduct*.

Regarding the visual representation, a few tribes also have photo galleries available with pictures of the community members taking part in different celebrations and events, besides the pictures shown in the websites. However, the analysis of the visual representation of Native American website only took into consideration pictures shown in the websites, and not the ones that appeared in the newsletter or in photo galleries, as they have been considered by the researcher to be directed towards the community members instead of tourists. Pictures were classified according to the presence or absence of traditional clothing and accessories, insignia and cultural products; the type of landscapes shown on the pictures classified in natural or built; and the foreground and background shown in the pictures. Besides, information on whether the tribal websites had links to their social media accounts was also added.

Secondly, semi-structured interviews with Native American tribal representatives and key tourism officials were useful to comprehend the tribes’ perceptions on tourism

planning and development and the main reasons behind their website portrayals. Although the initial aim was to interview only tourism officials from the tribes, sometimes it was not possible due to the small size of the tribes or the fact that they did not have a defined tourism department in their tribal structures. In those cases, other members of the tribal council who are responsible for tourism and other development were interviewed. A total of 10 interviews were conducted either in person (6), via email (2) or on the telephone (2) during the months of April, May and June 2019, and the duration ranged from 10 to 40 minutes. The interview questions focused on the following issues: the involvement of the tribe in tourism; the tribe's will to give potential visitors insights about their historical and cultural background; the tribes' tourism-related goals and challenges and the attempts made by the Native American tribes to counter the negative stereotypes; and their relationship with the AOT and other tribes in Arizona.

The research is informed by the constructivist paradigm, which assumes that "the world is constituted of multiple realities" and that there are several explanations for a particular phenomenon (Jennings, 2010, p.40). In terms of positionality and reflexivity, the researcher's background greatly influences several aspects of the investigation, such as the researched areas, the methods used, the findings considered most relevant and the framing of conclusions (Malterud, 2001). The author of this thesis is a young European woman with a university-level education, who has never been in a situation of marginalization but is concerned about the social, economic, and power inequalities that exist worldwide. Her experiences in developing countries have raised her interest in indigenous tourism and the ways in which tourism can contribute to the economic development of a country, region or local communities.

The theoretical framework used for this study is based on Stuart Hall's Representation Theory (Hall, 1997a), which discusses the portrayal of minority groups and the negotiation of stereotypes, which will be key to understand the tribes' online representation and the renegotiation/dispelling of existing stereotypes. Although Hall's Representation Theory (Hall, 1997a) has been used in several studies in the fields of media, literature and identity, its application in the tourism field is relatively new and this thesis might be among the first ones to use it. Hall (1997b, p.257) states that stereotypes are the result of representation, social difference and power and "reduce people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by nature". He also builds

on Said's Orientalism concept (1978), which highlights the imposed stereotypes, by European conquerors, on the Orient that spreads an idea of European superiority and subordination of non-European peoples and cultures. In some cases, it is argued that ethnic minorities might take advantage of the image and stereotypes that have been created by the *dominant culture* and use them for their own benefit, to empower themselves and commodify aspects of their culture (Said, 1978).

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The findings of the online representation of Native Americans regarding the website content resulted in three main recurrent themes, namely, *Historicizing the Destination* (includes *Cultural Pride*, *Inter-cultural Relations* and *Struggle* as sub-themes), *Addressing the Tourist* (includes *Salutation to Tourists* and *Code of Conduct as sub-themes*), and *Tourism Activities*. The findings show that Native American communities in Arizona tend to portray themselves as culturally rich communities proud of their heritage and their arts and crafts, which resonates with previous findings that consider tourism a tool for Native American cultural revitalization and cultural identity (Browne & Nolan, 1989) and a way to preserve Indigenous cultural heritage (Ruhanen & Whitford, 2019) and the lifestyle, traditions, language and values of indigenous peoples (Whitney-Squire, 2015).

Another relevant aspect is that indigenous communities in Arizona place a lot of importance on their history and their social empowerment. They portray themselves as tribes with a strong spirit of struggle and resistance to fight oppression and seek sovereignty and land rights, while striving to preserve their culture and heritage. In their websites, indigenous communities show a great variety of the tourist activities available in their lands, which vary from culture to nature, leisure and adventure-based attractions, showing that most of the tribes are willing and ready to attract visitors. Moreover, they also show great admiration for the beauty of their lands and the stunning nature surrounding their homes, which they use to attract tourists, emphasizing "otherness".

The online representations findings can be linked with the Todorov's Narrative Theory (1969), which suggests that all narratives are aimed at solving a problem, which in this case show how Native American groups are indirectly combating misrepresentations and

dominant narratives in the construction of their own content. Todorov proposes that all narratives follow five different stages to explain a given story, which are the *equilibrium stage*, *disruption of equilibrium*, *recognition of the disruption*, *attempt to repair the disruption or damage*, and *the new equilibrium* (Theories of Narrative, online). Indeed, each of the recurrent themes identified through the website content analysis and mentioned previously unfold the story of the Native American communities in Arizona, each of the themes being assigned to a different stage.

The interviews with the representatives and key tourism officials from the Native American tribes revealed some important aspects regarding both the tribes' perspectives on tourism and tourism planning and development in Native American lands. Tourism is perceived as a development tool for Indigenous communities worldwide (Abascal, Fluker & Jiang, 2015) and this study confirms that tourism is perceived in a positive way by indigenous communities, because of the economic benefits that it brings. Almost all Native American tribes in Arizona, included in this study are involved in tourism to a higher or a lesser extent, and most of them became involved in tourism through their casinos, which still represents one of the most common tourist attractions amongst the tribes.

The tourism-related goals and challenges that tribes are currently facing widely differ among the communities, depending on their location and the resources available. Some of the goals include attracting more tourists and developing more tourism products and the most common challenges concern financial resources and lack of infrastructure. However, one of the most common goals is related to raising awareness and educating tourists about their culture and who they are as a community.

Stuart Hall's representation theory states that stereotypes "tend to occur where there are gross inequalities of power" (Hall, 1997b, p.258). Native Americans have been marginalized by the *dominant society* and have been depicted by media as historical figures (Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez & Fryberg, 2015) and as alcoholics, lazy, super citizens who receive financial aid from the government, uneducated and violent (Merskin, 2001; Tan, Fujioka & Lucht, 1997). Native American communities in Arizona are well aware of the pervasiveness of stereotypes created by the media and the misconceptions that exist about them. They use education to escape from some media sources controlled

by the *dominant society* that have portrayed them as people who live in the past (Merskin, 1998). They educate tourists through the cultural attractions that they have in their communities, such as museums and cultural centers and through their websites, where they portray themselves both as contemporary and traditional societies. This finding resonates with other studies that have concluded that other indigenous communities worldwide use several forms of resistance to challenge stereotypes, such as presenting themselves as members of the modern and contemporary societies to change tourists' perceptions (Bunten, 2011; McIntosh, 2003) or traditional and living societies (Seiver & Matthews, 2016) which are constantly evolving (Abascal, 2019, p.279).

The textual and visual content shown in the tribal websites showcase that communities portray themselves as contemporary societies, showing aspects of sovereignty and tribal organization, their accomplishments and their efforts to achieve economic development, and showing pictures of tribal members wearing modern attire. Moreover, most of the tribes showcase pictures of arts and crafts, other cultural products, and tribal members wearing traditional attire, which show that they have a rich cultural identity that they are proud to preserve, besides giving information about the most relevant historical facts and aspects of their culture.

All in all, through the visual and textual online representations, tribes try to counter the different stereotypes that exist about them and prove that they are not a *timeless* society but rather a contemporary one, very proud of their culture through which they strive to maintain their traditions and heritage. Indeed, portraying themselves as contemporary societies and educating tourists about their history and culture, online and through their museums, are two of the main ways used by Native American tribes to dispel negative stereotypes about them.

Therefore, this research shows evidence that Native American tribes in Arizona do not adopt the 'White Man's Indian' identity and do not Self-Orientalize themselves in online representations for their own benefit. Therefore, this finding disagrees with previous studies (*e.g.*, Cuillier & Ross, 2007; Fair, 2000) which concluded that the adoption of the 'White Man's Indian' identity is common among some Native American tribes directed towards large audiences or involved in the gaming sector. Instead, the findings of this thesis resonate with De Bernardi (2019), who stated that Sámi tourism companies'

websites in Scandinavia portray authentic Sámi heritage by showcasing traditions and they also represent the Sámi as a contemporary community that lives a modern life, thus showing that “modern and traditional aspects of Sámi culture are an expression of an evolving heritage and identity” (De Bernardi, 2019, p.257).

5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This research highlights the ways in which Native American communities in the state of Arizona represent themselves and how several tribes counter stereotypes imposed by media and the *dominant society*. The findings of this thesis contribute to the existing literature on indigenous tourism, and more specifically to the representations of minority groups for tourism purposes and the main issues that these groups face regarding tourism development.

Further research in this field might include the analysis of the participation of community residents in tourism development as well as an audience reception of Native American representations by drawing on Stuart Hall’s media Reception Theory. From the tourists’ perspectives, it would also be interesting to examine the visitors’ motivations to visit Native American lands.

6. REFERENCES

- Abascal, T. E. (2019). Indigenous tourism in Australia: understanding the link between cultural heritage and intention to participate using the means-end chain theory. *Journal of Heritage Tourism, 14*(3), 263-281.
- Abascal, T.E., Fluker, M., & Jiang, M. (2015). Domestic demand for Indigenous tourism in Australia: Understanding motivations, barriers, and implications for future development. *Journal of Heritage tourism, 10*(1), 1-20.
- Browne, R., & Nolan, M. L. (1989). Western Indian reservation tourism development. *Annals of Tourism Research, 16*(3), 360-376. doi:10.1016/0160-7383(89)90050-9
- Bunten, A. C. (2011). ‘The paradox of gaze and resistance in Native American cultural tourism: an Alaskan case study. *Great Expectation: Imagination and Anticipation in Tourism, Berghahn Books, New York, NY*, 61-81.
- Cuillier, D., & Ross, S. D. (2007). Gambling with identity: Self-representation of American Indians on official tribal websites. *Howard Journal of Communications, 18*(3), 197- 219. doi:10.1080/10646170701490781
- De Bernardi, C. (2019). Authenticity as a compromise: a critical discourse analysis of Sámi tourism websites. *Journal of Heritage Tourism, 14*(3), 249-262.
- Fair, R. S. (2000). Becoming the white man’s Indian: An examination of Native American tribal web sites. *Plains Anthropologist, 45*, 203–213. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2052546.2000.11932006>
- Gaston-Anderson, C. (2003). American Indian tribal websites: A review and comparison. *The Electronic Library, 21*, 450 455.
- Hall, S. (1997a). “The work of representation”. In *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, edited by Stuart Hall, 13–74. London: Sage.
- Hall, S. (1997b). “The spectacle of the ‘Other’”. In *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, edited by Stuart Hall, 223–290. London: Sage.
- Jennings, G. (2010). *Tourism Research* (2nd ed.). Australia: John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd.
- Kopacz, M., & Lawton, B. L. (2011). The YouTube Indian: Portrayals of Native Americans on a viral video site. *New Media & Society, 13*(2), 330–349. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444810373532>

- Kopacz, M. A., & Lawton, B. L. (2013). Talking about the YouTube Indians: Images of Native Americans and viewer comments on a viral video site. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 24(1), 17-37. doi:10.1080/10646175.2013.748406
- Lacey, A., & Luff, D. (2001). *Qualitative data analysis*. Sheffield: Trent Focus.
- Leavitt, P. A., Covarrubias, R., Perez, Y. A., & Fryberg, S. A. (2015). "Frozen in time": The impact of Native American media representations on identity and self-understanding. *Journal of Social Issues*, 71(1), 39–53. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12095>
- Malterud, K. (2001). Qualitative research: Standards, challenges and guidelines. *The Lancet*, 358(9280) 483-488. doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(01)05627-6
- Mastro, D. (2015). Why the media's role in issues of race and ethnicity should be in the spotlight. *Journal of Social Issues*, 71(1), 1–16.
- McIntosh, A. J. (2004). Tourists' appreciation of Maori culture in New Zealand. *Tourism Management*, 25(1), 1-15. doi:10.1016/S0261-5177(03)00058-X
- Merskin, D. (1998). Sending up signals: A survey of Native American media use and representation in the mass media, *Howard Journal of Communications*, 9:4, 333-345, DOI: 10.1080/106461798246943
- Merskin, D. (2001). Winnebagos, Cherokees, Apaches, and Dakotas: The persistence of stereotyping of American Indians in American advertising brands. *Howard Journal of Communication*, 12(3), 159-169.
- Mkono, M. (2016). Sustainability and Indigenous tourism insights from social media: worldview differences, cultural friction and negotiation. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 24(8–9), 1315–1330. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2016.1177066>
- Ruhanen, L., & Whitford, M. (2019). Cultural heritage and indigenous tourism. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 14(3), 179-191. doi:10.1080/1743873X.2019.1581788
- Said, Edward W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Seiver, B., & Matthews, A. (2016). Beyond whiteness: a comparative analysis of representations of Aboriginality in tourism destination images in New South Wales, Australia. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 24(8-9), 1298-1314.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tan, A., Fujioka, Y., & Lucht, N. (1997). Native American stereotypes, TV portrayals, and personal contact. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 74(2), 265-284.

- Theories of Narrative (2019). *Tzvetan Todorov's Theory of Narrative*. Retrieved July 20, 2019 from: <http://theoryofnarrativepropp.blogspot.com>
- Todorov, T., & Weinstein, A. (1969). Structural analysis of narrative. In *NOVEL: A forum on fiction* (Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 70-76). Duke University Press.
- Tukachinsky, R., Mastro, D., & Yarchi, M. (2015). Documenting portrayals of race/ethnicity on primetime television over a 20-year span and their association with national-level racial/ethnic attitudes. *Journal of Social Issues*, 71(1), 17-38. doi:10.1111/josi.12094
- Whitney-Squire, K. (2016). Sustaining local language relationships through indigenous community-based tourism initiatives. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 24(8-9), 1156-1176.