Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

DISCUSSION

Leveraging folklore and fantasy to promote small destinations: the case of Visit Wales

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses how folklore can be harnessed by destination management organizations (DMOs) and related agencies through story-telling, screen tourism and product development. It presents a two-stage study, which explores policy suggestions proposed at a United Kingdom Parliamentary Committee Inquiry into Wales's international marketing. An online survey was conducted with international students, as representative of tourists open to less familiar destinations and well-represented amongst fantasy fans, to test the appeal of a differentiation strategy for Wales incorporating folklore. Having established the market potential of folklore, a co-design workshop was held with 36 tourism and creative sector stakeholders to discuss the challenges of leveraging legends and fantasy film locations to attract international visitors. The paper discusses the tourism policy and practice opportunities of adopting this strategy for the folklore-rich but resource-constrained small destination of Wales. It concludes with insights, which have relevance for similar national DMOs and related agencies.

Introduction

As folklore genres, myths and legends are deeply rooted in the cultural identity of destinations worldwide, reflecting their history, landscape, and people; myths and legends are themselves part of societies' intangible cultural heritages and give meaning to places associated with them (Logan, 2001). These narratives often embody heroic tales and supernatural elements, captivating audiences and providing a powerful sense of connection to the past and emotional engagement in the present. This is especially relevant to international tourists, who are increasingly seeking unique and immersive experiences that allow them to engage with local culture and heritage (World Tourism Organization, 2018). Folklore, including myths and legends, offers a distinctive selling point, providing

a sense of mystery, adventure, and enchantment (Sofield et al., 2017) and by incorporating these narratives into marketing campaigns, destinations can differentiate themselves and attract a broader range of tourists (Everett & John Parakoottathil, 2018; Ironside & Massie, 2020). Yet, despite the continuing touristic appeal of these folkloric stories, there are few studies focused on the policies underpinning such destination storytelling campaigns, how they can be practically leveraged by destination management organizations (DMOs) or how their success can be measured (Youssef et al., 2019).

Taking Wales in the United Kingdom (UK) as a case study, this paper analyses how myths and legends can be harnessed by DMOs and related agencies through storytelling, screen tourism and product development. The particular contribution of the paper, however, is that it sprang from policy suggestions proposed within the research team at a 2022 UK Parliamentary Committee Inquiry into Wales's international marketing and it explores the feasibility of those policy suggestions. It is a two-stage mixed methods study. Firstly, an online survey was conducted with international students as representative of tourists open to less familiar destinations and well-represented amongst fantasy fans, to test the viability of a differentiation strategy for Visit Wales incorporating folklore. Having established the potential of such a strategy, a co-design day workshop was held in Wales with 36 tourism and creative sector stakeholders to identify and discuss the opportunities and challenges it would pose. The paper discusses the tourism policy and practice implications and opportunities for this folklore-rich but resource-constrained small destination. It concludes with insights, which have relevance for national DMOs similar to Visit Wales.

Literature review

Myths and legends are both genres of folklore; they are oral traditions that have been passed down through generations, involving supernatural or heroic characters, and fantastical events (Bronner, 2016). Whilst they overlap and can be recast over time and societies, there are distinct differences between genres of folklore in terms of their origins, purpose, and cultural significance. Derived from the ancient Greek 'mythos', meaning narrative or fiction, myths are sacred narratives with symbolic or metaphorical meaning typically associated with religious or spiritual beliefs. They are often presented as creation, origin or foundational stories, or are used to convey moral or cultural values, or explain natural phenomena (Baldick, 2015). Legends, in contrast, are embellished accounts of actual people, events and places and are tied to the collective memory of a community or society. Legends frequently reinforce cultural identity and preserve historical knowledge and often reflect the values of a particular group of people, serving as a source of inspiration, or as cautionary tales (Baldick, 2015). These stories are passed down orally between generations to entertain, transfer knowledge, and maintain cultural heritage (Lugmayr et al., 2017), and may change over time as they are retold by different storytellers; indeed, many stories now considered myths or legends may have started as one or the other and evolved over time.

There is considerable tourist interest in myth-related places (Nilsson & Blom, 2018) and stories from the past are a convenient and powerful vehicle in place promotion strategies, connecting contemporary tourists to an imagined or sanitized past (Light, 2017). Many locations actively market themselves as the birthplace or setting of famous

myths and legends, offering tours and experiences that allow tourists to immerse themselves in these stories. This not only brings economic benefits but also preserves and promotes the intangible cultural heritage of the destination. The authenticity of the stories is perhaps less important than their appeal since authenticity is subjective (Robinson & Clifford, 2012), so we all have our own version of the authentic experience. Moreover, different versions of authenticity exist (Rust, 2020); it can be existential (Rickly-Boyd, 2013), stimulated (Lovell & Hitchmough, 2019) or socio-spatial (Szmigin et al., 2017), so we connect the experience with the place in which it occurs. Ultimately, tourists will make their own minds up on whether stories are authentic or imagined and in any case, myths have 'no logic, no continuity … with myth anything can become possible (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 429).

Myths and legends continue to influence contemporary storytelling, from literature and film to video and virtual reality games, where they inspire many narratives (Koven, 2003). Video gaming is a sizeable, growing medium that involves interactive stories, which are often inspired by folklore, including Welsh and Irish myths (Laiti et al., 2021). For example, a survey of 1000 fantasy game players across the UK, USA, Germany, and Japan showed that players were familiar with Welsh legends, such as King Arthur and Merlin, and with elements inspired by Welsh myths in games and fantasy series (e.g. *The Lord of the Rings* and *Game of Thrones*) but the stories' origins are not obvious to players and less than one percent of players associated them with the original Welsh source folklore. Interestingly, however, 27% said that they would be encouraged to visit a culture that inspired a video game (Clwster, 2017).

Folklore also inspires many fantasy films, and like other film genres, contributes to movie-induced tourism (Singer, 2008). Such films regularly showcase culturally significant sites of ancient civilizations or the stunning landscapes of imagined ones, sparking their audiences' curiosity to experience these locations firsthand (Beeton, 2005). When viewers are exposed to the rich folklore depicted in these films, they often develop an emotional connection to the locations and gain a deeper appreciation of the destination's wider cultural heritage (Li et al., 2021). Film-induced tourism related to myths and legends also has a widespread economic impact beyond tourism receipts, including film production spending on accommodation, transportation, and local services (Li et al., 2017). Additionally, many destination stakeholders across the tourism, hospitality and creative and cultural sectors organize themed trails, packages and events that celebrate these films, providing an additional platform for economic impact and cultural engagement from tourists who are interested in the mythical and historical aspects of the destination (O'Connor & Kim, 2014).

Folklore storytelling, whether amplified through films and games or not, has thus become a significant vehicle for place branding (Calvi & Hover, 2021), although storytelling needs time, commitment and the right marketing to be effective (Lund et al., 2017). There is now a body of literature focused on the consumption and effects of storytelling on destination branding and marketing (Youssef et al., 2019). For example, previous studies have confirmed the positive impact storytelling has on tourist behavioural intentions and how the communication of destination myths influences perceptions of a destination (Woodside et al., 2007). However, there is less understanding of how stakeholders in the tourism and creative sectors understand the value of folklore in place brand experiences (Hanna & Rowley, 2013). Not only is there a research lacuna

here but strategic and on-the-ground collaboration and cooperation between these two sectors remains underdeveloped and undervalued. As Long (2017, p. 331) comments: 'there is insufficient recognition of critical ideas, professional and cultural practices associated with the 'creative industries' among tourism destination management researchers, practitioners and policy-makers'. This paper not only analyses how DMOs can harness myths and legends but, through its ideation workshop, brought together tourism and creative sector professionals to discuss the feasibility of a folklore-focused destination proposition.

Study context

Wales, a country of the UK, with a devolved government and a population of 3.3 m, faces challenges common to small destinations. It has low awareness amongst international consumers, travel trade and media and its DMO, Visit Wales (visitwales.com) has a small staff and budget (Pritchard, 2018). Although a constituent country of the UK, a top 10 international destination, Wales has been unable to lever this position and is the least known and visited of the UK's countries, attracting only 2% of its overseas visitors (Visit Britain, 2010). Yet tourism is vitally important to Wales, contributing £6bn (8%) and 12.7% of employment to its pre-pandemic economy. Whilst only 2% Wales's visitors were international at that time, they remain a lucrative market, generating 15% of its tourism spending (Visit Britain, 2019).

Visit Wales (and its predecessor the Wales Tourist Board, 1969–2006) has always recognized the value of overseas tourists, yet has consistently struggled to attract this lucrative and diverse market (Pritchard & Morgan, 2001). Both the Welsh and UK Governments have held Parliamentary enquiries into the promotion of Wales as a global tourist destination in the last decade (Senedd Cymru, 2014; UK Parliament, 2022). One of the key issues discussed in these enquiries was the lack of a consistent and resonating brand identity for Wales as an international destination. The development of such a differentiating brand identity has been a significant element of Visit Wales tourism strategies, especially the two most recent: *Partnership for Growth 2013–2020*, and *Welcome to Wales: Priorities for the Visitor Economy 2020–2025* (Welsh Government, 2020). Despite some of the marketing campaigns developed in those strategies receiving several awards (Welsh Government, 2023), overseas visitor numbers have remained static for some time, in contrast to Wales's key competitors of Scotland and Ireland, which have seen considerable growth (UK Parliament, 2022).

As a country with a living Celtic language (*Cymraeg*), Wales boasts a diverse cultural heritage, including folklore passed down through generations. Wales has long sought to weave its culture into its tourism appeal and marketing campaigns (Pritchard & Morgan, 2001) and Visit Wales even designated 2017 as *Year of Legend* as one of its themed years. It continues this in the current strategy through its 'Bro Y Byd' approach, meaning 'inherently Welsh with a global outlook' (Welsh Government, 2020). However, despite its rich folklore, including Wales's tradition as birthplace of the Druid and magician Merlin (Myrddin), home of King Arthur and the Lady of the Lake (at Llyn Y Fan Fach) (King Arthur's Wales, Camelot Myth | Visit Wales), and inspiration for J.R. Tolkien's Elvish language (Sindarin) in his *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* novels (Tolkien's Wales | Cultural attractions | Visit Wales), Visit Wales makes little direct marketing capital of

its folklore beyond a series of features on its website. In addition to its indigenous folklore, as one of the UK's largest media centres, Wales is home to several well-known film and television productions, including the fantasy productions *A Discovery of Witches, His Dark Materials*, and *Willow* (Creative Wales, 2022). These offer further opportunities to exploit the tourist appeal of folklore and fantasy, as the economic value of popular culture tourism (Lundberg & Ziakas, 2018), especially screen tourism (Beeton, 2005), is well established.

Given its wealth of indigenous folklore and the appeal of film-induced tourism, evidence to the 2022 UK Parliamentary Inquiry highlighted opportunities to capitalize on Wales's associations with folklore and fantasy by appealing to international tourists seeking authentic and immersive experiences. It also acknowledged a lack of data on the topic (UK Parliament, 2022). Having identified this policy and research gap and recognizing its possible value to other small destinations seeking competitive advantage, we explored the extent to which fantasy-prone tourists would visit Wales (see Figure 1: conceptual research model) and identified and discussed with tourism and creative sector stakeholders the opportunities of a differentiation strategy incorporating folklore.

Methodology

A mixed methods approach was employed to explore the potential of myths and legends in promoting Wales as a destination. This approach improved the research insights and validity through a convergence of the findings (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Firstly, an online questionnaire was conducted following approval from the lead author's research ethics committee (Brunel University; ref: 39791-LR-Sep/2022-41603-1). By using questionnaires, complex phenomena can be quantified succinctly (Veal, 2017), whilst a survey strategy facilitates greater control over sampling, improving the findings' generalisability (Bryman, 2016). The survey was conducted during October–November 2022 with international students studying at six English universities.

University students, largely Generation Z, were selected as they are active and adventurous travellers, open to exploring less familiar destinations (Robinson & Schänzel, 2019) and well represented amongst fantasy readers (Menadue & Jacups, 2018). International students also travel extensively during weekends and vacations (Huang, 2008;
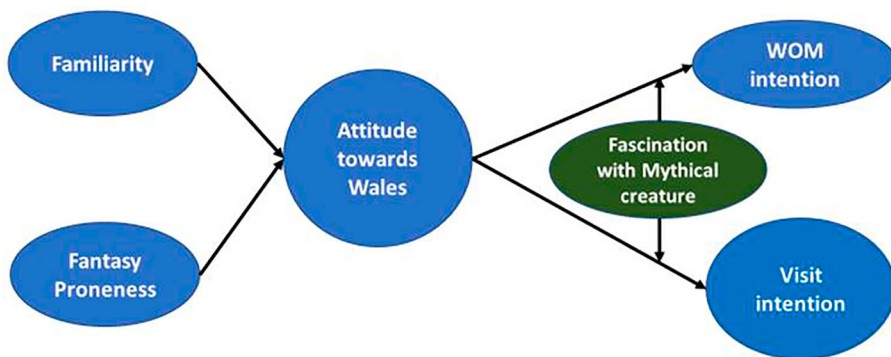

Figure 1. Conceptual research model.

Yen et al., 2018) and their intention to visit a UK destination is closely linked to their tourism behaviour. This phase of the study utilized a non-probability sampling technique with a convenient sampling approach. Based on Roscoe's (1975) rule of thumb, that suggests a sample size larger than 30 and smaller than 500 is appropriate for most studies, the sample consisted of 174 international students (44% male, 56% female; average 27 years-of-age) from India (35%), China (11%), Pakistan (9%), and elsewhere (45%) (Table 1).

The questionnaire measured visiting and word-of-mouth intentions as the dependent variables. For explanatory variables we measured familiarity with, and attitude towards Wales, as well as two novel constructs: fascination with mythical creatures, and fantasy proneness. The former was due to Wales's use of the Red Dragon (*Y Ddraig Goch*) on its national flag and as an identifier across public and private services, institutions and products (https://www.wales.com/about/culture/national-symbols-wales). To understand the impact of Wales's connection with the Red Dragon, we created a one-item scale to capture consumers' fascination with mythical creatures (see Figure 1 for the model and Table 2, which summarizes items adopted from branding and tourism literature). The fantasy proneness scale was adapted from Li et al.'s (2021) study of Dubrovnik (Croatia), a key filming location of the fantasy drama *Game of Thrones*. Fantasy-prone individuals delight in the authenticity of fantastic entities (Li et al., 2021), a trait measured by their tendency to fantasize through association with characters and events in novels, movies, games, etc.

Having established the foundational basis of this research through the online questionnaire, phase two sought to establish whether the Welsh tourism and creative and cultural sectors supported harnessing folklore and fantasy film locations to attract international tourists. We also wanted to discuss how stakeholders would drive consumer engagement with folklore. To address these questions, we used purpose sampling to bring together 28 influential stakeholders from the tourism and creative sectors, plus eight tourism and marketing academics, all of whom are likely to have different expert perspectives on the subject rather than provide a statistically valid sample of the tourism industry as a whole (Cater & Low, 2012). To enable the participants to discuss the key issues freely, we anonymised their names, job titles and organizations (Table 3), and with their permission, the workshop was filmed and written notes taken.

During the workshop, we asked participants to consider three questions. Firstly, would they support harnessing folklore, and fantasy film locations to attract

Table 1. Respondents' demographic information (*N* = 174).

Variables	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	62	35.6
Female	78	44.8
Missing	34	19.5
Age		
18 < Age < 20	1	0.5
20 ≤ Age < 30	104	58.6
30 ≤ Age < 40	26	14.9
Missing	42	24.1
Mean (*S.D.*)	26.69 (*4.53*)	

Table 2. Measure items.

Measures	All (N = 174)		Cronbach's α
	Mean	S.D.	
Familiarity	4.07	1.97	NA
Wales is very familiar to me.			
Fantasy Proneness (Li et al., 2021**)**	5.13	1.13	.844
1. I daydream and fantasize with some regularity about things that might happen to me.			
2. I really get involved with the feelings of the characters in a novel.			
3. After seeing a play or movie, I have felt as though I were one of the characters.			
4. When I am reading an interesting story or novel, I imagine how I would feel if the events in the story were happening to me.			
Fascination with Mythical Creatures	5.15	1.37	NA
I find mythical creatures fascinating.			
Attitude towards Wales (Luo et al., 2017)	5.19	1.21	.887
1. Wales is an interesting destination.			
2. I have a positive feeling about Wales as a destination.			
3. I like Wales as a destination.			
Visiting Intention (Lam & Hsu, 2006**)**	5.43	1.23	.808
1. I intend to visit Wales in the next 12 months.			
2. I want to visit Wales.			
3. It is likely that I will visit Wales in the future.			
Word of Mouth Intention (Papadimitriou et al., 2018**)**	5.37	1.19	.926
1. I will say positive things about Wales to other people.			
2. I will recommend Wales to others as a place to visit.			
3. I am likely to encourage friends and family to visit Wales.			

Notes: N = 174; S.D.: Standard Deviation; For all items, answers were based on a 7-point Likert scale where 7 = strongly agree and 1 = strongly disagree.

international tourists? Secondly, how would the tourism and the creative industries collaborate to drive this forward at the levels of policy and on-the-ground development? Thirdly, do tourism destination management practitioners and policy-makers appreciate the importance of the creative industries in developing 'brand Wales'? This approach was suitable for this research since in a dynamic workshop with structured breakout sessions where everyone is encouraged to work collectively, a broad range of perspectives can be incorporated and practitioners can explore issues in depth (Liburd et al., 2017, 2020). In addition to promoting an inclusive, cooperative process and fostering pragmatic collaborative activity (Heape & Liburd, 2018), the

Table 3. Workshop participants.

Organization	Sector	Number of participants
University	Academic	8
Art Gallery	Cultural	1
Local Authorities	Public/Government	4
Museum	Cultural	1
Brand Consultant	Private	1
National Agency	Public/Government	1
Charitable Trust	Voluntary/Third	1
Freelance writer	Cultural	1
Railway Company	Transport	1
Schools	Education	3
Creative/Media Agencies	Cultural	9
National Park	Environment	1
National Conference Centre	Private/Government	1
Graphic Design Companies	Cultural	2
British Broadcasting Corporation	Cultural	1
		36

codesign workshop created a 'synergistic sparking-off' between breakout group members (Cleary et al., 2014, p. 474).

Results

Phase one: online survey

To test expected relationships, we performed the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2015; Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Model 14, 5000 bootstrap samples) with 95% confidence intervals (CIs). Separated analyses were conducted for each dependent variable (visiting intention (Y1) or word of mouth (Y2)). The first PROCESS macro analysis includes familiarity (X1) and fantasy proneness (X2) as the independent variables, attitude towards Wales (M) as the potential mediator, fascination with mythical creatures (W) as the moderator and visiting intention towards Wales (Y1) as the dependent variable.

Findings show respondents with relatively higher familiarity with Wales exhibited a more favourable attitude towards Wales (Coeff. = 0.311, 95% CI [0.235, 0.386], $p <$ 0.001). Respondents with relatively higher fantasy proneness exhibited a more favourable attitude towards Wales (Coeff. = 0.276, 95% CI [0.144, 0.408], $p <$ 0.001). Holding constant familiarity and fantasy proneness, the effect of attitude towards Wales on visiting intention was significant (Coeff. = 1.075, 95% CI [0.667, 1.483], $p <$ 0.001), which means that respondents with relatively higher attitudes towards Wales are more likely to visit Wales. Importantly, this relationship is moderated by the fascination with mythical creatures (Coeff. = −0.099, 95% CI [−0.178, −0.021], $p =$ 0.013), specifically, for respondents with a relatively higher (vs. lower) fascination with mythical creatures, this effect (from attitude to intention) will be weakened. Additionally, the moderated mediation effect was significant (index = −0.031, 95% CI [−0.063, −0.009]), meaning the indirect effect depends on the fascination with mythical creatures.

The second PROCESS macro was conducted by using the word of mouth (Y2) as the dependent variable. All other variables are identical to the first analysis and the results are consistent. More concretely, respondents with relatively higher familiarity with Wales, as well as relatively higher fantasy proneness exhibited a more favourable attitude towards Wales (Coeff.$_{familiarity}$ = 0.590, 95% CI [.01, .16], $p =$ .043; Coeff.$_{fantasy\ proneness}$ = 0.276, 95% CI [0.144, 0.408], $p <$ 0.001). Holding constant familiarity and fantasy proneness, respondents with relatively higher attitudes towards Wales exhibited a greater tendency

Table 4. PROCESS analysis results (D.V = Visiting Intention).

	Attitude towards Wales (M)		Visiting Intention (Y1)	
	Coefficient	95% CI	Coefficient	95% CI
Familiarity (X1)	0.311**	0.235, 0.386	−0.066	−0.154, 0.021
Fantasy Proneness (X2)	0.276**	0.144, 0.408	0.255**	0.069, 0.441
Attitude toward Wales (M)			1.075**	0.667, 1.482
Fascination with Mythical Creature (W)			0.493*	0.064, 0.921
M * W			−0.099*	−0.178, −0.021
Constant	2.513**	1.825, 3.201	−1.018	−3.099, 1.063
	$R^2 = 0.380$		$R^2 = 0.433$	
	$F (2, 171) = 52.464, p < .001$		$F (5, 168) = 25.605, p < .001$	
Moderated Mediation	Index = −0.031			
	95% CI = −0.063, −0.009			

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.

to recommend Wales to others (Coeff. = 1.031, 95% CI [0.654, 1.407], $p < 0.001$). Moreover, for those with a relatively higher (vs. lower) fascination with mythical creatures, the relationship between the attitude towards Wales and word of mouth becomes weaker (Coeff. = −0.114, 95% CI [−0.186, −0.041], $p = 0.002$). Lastly, the moderated mediation effect was significant (index = −0.035, 95% CI [−0.074, −0.010]) (Tables 4 and 5).

Phase two: ideation workshop

Phase one established that our respondents with relatively higher familiarity with Wales, as well as relatively higher fantasy proneness exhibited a more favourable attitude towards Wales. Phase two sought to establish whether and how the tourism and creative and cultural sectors would support harnessing folklore and fantasy film locations to attract international tourists. Participants were then asked to consider the relationships between tourism destination management practitioners and policy-makers and the creative industries. On the first point there was overwhelming consensus. Participants thought Wales lacks a coherent brand identity and there was no agreement on its unique selling point but there was agreement that it is very rich in folklore. There was also recognition that one of its key indigenous legends, that of the druid/magician Merlin and his protégé King Arthur, was contested and often associated with Cornwall in England. Thus Wales is not definitively nor uniquely associated with the Arthurian legend but nonetheless it has global traction. Almost all the stakeholders felt that Visit Wales and other national agencies could better leverage Welsh folklore as a differentiator but that the brand could not be confined to this and should be broader. One of the branding consultants summed up the general feeling, commenting: 'Myths and legends can be a pillar of the brand but not the pillar as it is too narrow'.

On the question of how the tourism and the creative industries would collaborate to drive this forward at the levels of policy and on-the-ground development, stakeholders felt more strategic partnership was required. In particular, more industry engagement was required from Visit Wales so that stakeholders could more effectively support and augment their marketing. Practically, creating immersive storytelling experiences was seen as key to enhancing tourist engagement with myths and legends. This was discussed as potentially being achieved through educational programmes, interpretive materials and signage, guided tours, visitor centres and interactive exhibits, and live performances,

Table 5. PROCESS analysis results (D.V = Word of Mouth).

	Attitude towards Wales (M)		Word of Mouth (Y2)	
	Coefficient	95% CI	Coefficient	95% CI
Familiarity (X1)	0.311**	0.235, 0.386	0.121**	0.040, 0.202
Fantasy Proneness (X2)	0.276**	0.144, 0.408	0.040	−0.132, 0.212
Attitude toward Wales (M)			1.031**	0.654, 1.407
Fascination with Mythical Creature (W)			0.688**	0.292, 1.083
M * W			−0.114**	−0.186, −0.041
Constant	2.513**	1.825, 3.201	−1.134	−3.055, 0.787
	$R^2 = 0.380$		$R^2 = 0.485$	
	$F_{(2, 171)} = 52.464, p < .001$		$F_{(5, 168)} = 31.665, p < .001$	
Moderated Mediation	Index = −0.035			
	95% CI = −0.074, −0.010			

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.

allowing visitors to experience these narratives firsthand. Innovative, immersive technology was seen as playing a big role in storytelling; as one person from a multi-agency/cross border pilgrimage trail initiative commented, 'the technology exists now to tell stories in situ' through mobile phone apps. Another participant referenced 'the storytelling houses of Ireland [as] … a great example of how it can work'. Other suggestions included creating a digital story-bank and a cadre of storytellers to relate Welsh legends in key locations. Social media was discussed as the crucial vehicle to achieve global visibility, with agencies potentially recruiting prominent actors, musicians, etc., who have their own global platforms and audiences, as ambassadors to narrate vignettes of Wales and to share positive experiences of working and/or living in Wales. Alternatively, ordinary people could become social media storytellers of Welsh folklore, which would convey authenticity.

Workshop participants were extremely supportive of harnessing the creative and cultural sectors to market Wales, and the comment was made by a film producer that Welsh artists 'have global cut-through on stage, screen and in music'. Another media executive suggested that Wales needed to 'do more to use the creative industries as a way of building places'. Exploiting screen tourism and video games was hugely supported and participants were aware of several major fantasy productions currently being shot in Wales and of the country's burgeoning games technology sector. It was generally thought that more needed to be done to promote film locations on the Visit Wales website and to create more film location tours and packages in partnership with the public and private sectors. One suggestion, which emerged in the breakout sessions, was to develop augmented and virtual reality experiences of Welsh legends, the former to 'bring to life and tell the legends of our castles and landscapes' (media consultant), possibly through downloadable apps, and the latter to constitute a new visitor attraction.

On the third question of whether tourism destination management practitioners and policy-makers appreciated the importance of the creative and cultural industries in developing 'brand Wales', participants were generally of the opinion that they did not. Most called for greater partnership at a strategic and operational level. One senior conference marketing executive commented that 'we can be more powerful if we collaborate to create a larder of knowledge'. Others, especially from the media and creative sector, made the point that a broad definition of creativity should be taken, so that Wales's expanding games technology industry was included. Finally, participants also considered that more needed to be done to leverage Welsh as a minority language and a key differentiator for Wales. As one academic commented, 'our advantage is we speak a global language in English and have a minority language, which is different'.

Discussion

The findings show that international tourists who are more familiar with Wales and score higher on fantasy proneness (Li et al., 2021) tend to hold a more positive attitude towards Wales as a destination. This finding highlights the importance of awareness, since those who are more familiar with Wales are more likely to hold a positive attitude towards Wales, emphasizing the importance of higher brand recognition (Lam & Hsu, 2006; Shen et al., 2017). In addition, it shows that Wales can appeal to tourists who are imaginative and relate to characters in stories, films and games, demonstrating the potential of

fantasy and folklore for tourism marketing. Visit Wales already partners Creative Wales (creative.wales), a Welsh Government agency established in 2020, to market the country as a film location and could do more strategically to engage fantasy screen tourists and leverage Wales's folklore in international markets. The most visible representation of this folklore is the Red Dragon. Visit Wales could appeal to international tourists' fascinations with mystical creatures by further emphasizing Wales's national symbol, thus creating a virtuous circle of intention, visit and recommendation (Papadimitriou et al., 2018). A test bed for this could be a social media campaign aimed at Generation Z international students studying in the UK, who are frequent travellers (Yen et al., 2018), consume and create more content than average (Forbes, 2018) and have the time, budget and proximity to visit Wales.

In policy terms, our findings indicate an opportunity to develop closer and more strategic working relationships between DMOs and cultural and creative industry agencies and organizations, since museums, art galleries, festivals, etc. are crucial curators of intangible heritage. There seems a particular untapped connection between tourism, folklore and fantasy video games, as over a quarter of game players are interested to visit a culture that inspired a video game (Clwster, 2017). In tourism development terms, firstly there is potential to create more film location tours and packages in partnership with the public and private sectors. Secondly, there seems capacity to establish new exhibitions, attractions and trails showcasing Wales's folklore to international tourists, in partnership with organizations such as CADW (Cadw.gov.wales), Welsh Government's historic environment service, or the National Museum of Wales (museum.wales). More can certainly be done to address the division, which exists 'between tourism and the creative industries at the levels of policy, communities of practice and also research … ' (Long, 2017, p. 332).

Conclusion

Folklore, notably myths and legends, has the power to captivate tourists and create a deep connection to the past and an emotional attachment in the present. This is particularly true of international tourists, seeking unique and immersive experiences (World Tourism Organization, 2018). Incorporating these narratives into tourism marketing campaigns and product development can create a distinctive selling point and provide a sense of mystery and enchantment (Sofield et al., 2017). This paper, which emerged from evidence given at a UK Parliamentary Inquiry, has provided some preliminary insights into the marketing opportunities of folklore, video games and fantasy screen productions. This has marketing and branding potential not only for Wales, the case study here, but for other small destinations acting as screen locations and/or with folklore with international appeal.

The results of the online questionnaire suggest that these connections require further exploration and testing, both within the international Generation Z market, as discussed here and beyond. For Wales, this could take the form of a trial social media campaign. In addition, the stakeholder workshop highlighted numerous opportunities and recommendations to develop existing and new exhibitions, attractions and trails showcasing Wales's myths and legends and film locations to international tourists in partnership with agencies such as CADW, Creative Wales, the Royal

Commission on Ancient Monuments Wales, and the National Museum of Wales, plus innumerable private and public sector tourism attractions and hospitality businesses. The workshop demonstrated an appetite amongst a wide range of tourism and cultural organizations for collaboration with national agencies and local communities, businesses, and educational institutions to develop comprehensive marketing strategies that incorporate and showcase Welsh myths and legends. This collaboration would ensure authenticity, foster community engagement, and maximize the potential of these folkloric narratives.

Continuous research and innovation are crucial to identify emerging tourism trends and accordingly adapt marketing strategies. DMOs must invest in market research, visitor surveys, and data analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of leveraging myths and legends in attracting international tourists. Our research provides some initial insights into the opportunities presented by Wales's indigenous folklore and its locations for fantasy screen productions. As with any study, ours has limitations. It is exploratory, with phase one being limited numerically and demographically to a small number of international students and phase two based on one workshop, albeit with a broad range of relevant organizations and knowledgeable experts. Despite these caveats, it has demonstrated that the policy suggestions proposed within the research team at the 2022 UK Parliamentary Committee Inquiry are at least worthy of further exploration, whilst there are marketing and branding insights here for similar destinations with globally-appealing mythologies.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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