Chapter 15

Recreating the Place: Video-Sharing Websites and the Promotion of Domestic Tourism in the Concurrent Trend of Popular Media-Induced Tourism and Local Mascots in Japan

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ABSTRACT

The development and uptake of information and communication technologies have provided tourism industries innovative opportunities to interact with potential tourists. Instead of focusing on the development and implementation of new technological tools with which much E-tourism research is concerned, this paper examines a case of tourism promotion in Japan made possible by the spread of video-sharing websites. The case shows a nontraditional, non-intuitive strategy. It reaches potential tourists and gains nationwide visibility at a relatively low cost by producing videos featuring an unappealing character who symbolizes the destination: Hakodate City. This strategy of promoting domestic tourism was preceded by other two popular strategies of tourism promotion in Japan, and the case is compared with them: popular media-induced tourism, particularly anime tourism, and local mascots.

INTRODUCTION

The availability of information and communication technologies has provided tools for E-tourism to revolutionize “…the entire value chain as well as the strategic relationships of tourism organizations with all their stakeholders. The internet allows tourism organizations to interact with all their stakeholders, including potential and loyal customer, local groups and public authorities” (Buhalis & Deimezi, 2004, p. 107). Concerning the relationship of organizations of tourist destinations with their potential visitors, this paper focuses on a strategy of using video-sharing websites. This should not be overlooked in E-tourism research, for attracting potential tourists by using information and communication technologies is an important item on the agenda of E-tourism. Although using video-sharing websites is a DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8577-2.ch015
Recreating the Place

common strategy, what is special in this case is its nontraditional and non-intuitive way. It therefore can be differentiated from, and also compared to, a trend which can be identified as its predecessor, popular media-induced tourism.

In recent years, popular cultural products such as films, TV programs, and novels, have been significant in influencing people’s motivation for visiting tourist destinations, a phenomenon characterized as “popular media-induced tourism” (Iwashita, 2006, p. 60). The phenomenon is so significant that in Japan, official departments have acknowledged the influence of animations on tourism, and have been actively facilitating linkages between the two (Yamamura, 2011, p. 5). This trend has been made possible by the current post-industrial and post-modern condition: people come to know a place they have never been to by the representations presented in media. They then manage to personalize their “experience” of the place in a specific way that makes the experience meaningful to them (Macionis, 2004, p. 87).

In popular media-induced tourism, media content itself is sufficient to make locations, such as places featured in an anime (Japanese term for film and television animation), for example, destinations of tourist visits. A place needs not be special in order to become a tourist destination. In such cases as that mentioned above, the story and characters of the anime make the otherwise ordinary place meaningful for potential tourists. As meanings can be constructed in various ways, other forms of meaning construction are also used to promote tourism, for example, an emphasis on a local culture which claims distinction from the cultures of other places. Recently, in Japan, this has been manifested in the use of local mascots. Mascots which personify foods, products, or the historical figures of cities or regions are used as symbols of these places. Local mascots, like characters in anime, are able to provide meanings and rationale for potential tourists, and have been used for tourism promotion for more than a decade in Japan. This paper examines a special case in which a squid-like mascot is used to promote the tourism for Hakodate City, Hokkaido. Qualitative interview is used to obtain knowledge about the case from the main protagonists. The case shows how a combination of popular media—short anime films, in this case, and local mascot, has been successful in promoting Hakodate City at a relatively low cost. As a somewhat idiosyncratic case which combines anime and a localized mascot, its further development and its influence on promotional strategies taken for local tourism are worth tracing, and worth comparing with other local mascots and sites of anime tourism.

ANIME TOURISM

Although anime tourism has grown in popularity in recent years, its history can be traced to earlier decades. Anime tourism begins with potential tourists’ experiences of watching anime, reading manga (Japanese term for comic books), or playing video games. The streets, buildings, and landscapes shown in the above-mentioned media inspire some of the audience willing to travel to the place, thus turning these consumers of anime-related contents into tourists. The late 1980s saw, for example, stores using cartoonists of local origin as a selling point and also for town revitalization. Physical models of characters from certain manga written and drawn by those cartoonists were put on streets, trains and buses were decorated with images of manga characters, and events related to either those cartoonists or characters of their creation were held. For some thirty recorded instances of anime tourism in Japan, most took place at places where certain cartoonists were born or where stories unfolded (Yamamura, 2011, p. 25).

The spread of information technology and social network software help to fuel anime tourism by creating a group of young internet users who not only consume but also create messages on the internet.