

# Transformational marketing and transformational travel

Marco Martins and Lara Santos

## Abstract

**Purpose** – This research seeks to understand if transformational marketing can be used as a tool that helps destinations to create products that can be individually, or group tailored to result in an enjoyable way to gain self-awareness, spiritual experience and an expansion of consciousness.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This article is exploratory and with it, one intended to raise questions and hypotheses aiming to broaden the discussion scope on transformational marketing as a tool to create products that can not only conquer transformational travelers, but that also helps creating the conditions to expand this niche.

**Findings** – One suggests that destinations' that adopt transformational marketing as a tool will gain not only an advantage over their competitors, but will also, create the conditions for a more sustainable and responsible tourism development. Therefore, destinations that implement transformational marketing-based strategies will see tourism become a catalyst for environmental, social, cultural and economic regeneration.

**Originality/value** – This paper contributes to research on transformational tourism and transformational marketing pointing out some possible paths to be explored. More broadly, this research provides some valuable insights into the future of tourism destinations' marketing and development dimensions.

**Keywords** Transformation marketing, Transformational tourism, Transformational travelers, Sustainable tourism, Destinations' development

**Paper type** Research paper

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## 1. Introduction

After so many years from the Brundtland report's release about sustainable development (WCED, 1987) the world still struggles to become more sustainable, and the need for the travel industry to transform itself is becoming more and more pressing. The model that has led to over-tourism, over-pollution and over-consumption must be abandoned, however, this shift is daunting and can only occur if the ethical values and consciousness of all involved are transformed (Sheldon, 2020).

But, although marketing has been applied to several fields, yet relatively little research attention is paid to the potential of transformational marketing and especially to transformational tourism marketing. Bearing this in mind, in this paper one sought to:

1. Present possible advantages of applying transformational marketing into tourism destinations;
2. To suggest possible future research topics and
3. To suggest how transformational tourism marketing should be implemented

It was intended with this paper to focus on the concept of transformational marketing, explaining how it relates to the transforming travel experience.

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## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Transformational marketing

The notion of “transformational marketing” is relatively new in literature, and it is a response to the need of marketing to be based on core virtues, such as integrity, patience, perseverance and willingness to choose between easy profit and responsible actions that protect the environment and human beings (Hossain and Marinova, 2013).

Perhaps, one of the best definitions of transformational marketing is given to us by Baker (2014), that says that transformational marketing means using marketing knowledge, insights, tools and techniques to communicate how choice and behavioral change can increase individual satisfaction, without having a negative effect on other people, or in the environment which we all share and depend on, for our wellbeing and survival.

Thus, one proposes that transformational tourism marketing should be understood as the use of a set of tools and techniques that help process a changing of mentalities and to promote awareness, aiming with that to influence the behavior of tourists, inducing both attitudes of responsibility toward the environment and respect for the culture of the host peoples.

### 2.2 Transformational travel

In the last two decades, a growing number of studies emerged to reaffirm “transformative travel and tourism” as a mean that has the potential of making the world a better place (Ateljevic, 2020). This shift from the experience economy to the emerging transformation economy has provided a peek into a new economic supply, namely, transformational experiences (Neuhofer et al., 2021), thus, to Kirilova et al. (2017) the transformative potential of tourism is especially valuable considering the evolving of the modern society to the third-generation experience economy (3.0). Therefore, the number of people seeking to engage in experiences that supply emotional value, as well as, a learning process to create long-lasting positive changes, personal growth, inner fulfillment and wellbeing is growing (Ateljevic et al., 2016; Kirilova et al., 2017; Sheldon, 2020).

However, defining transformational travels is not as easy as one could think at first glance. In truth, many travels can fall under the transformational tourism umbrella, such as, collaborative travel (Decrop et al., 2018), spiritual tourism (Heintzman, 2013), the sharing economy (Guttentag, 2019), virtual reality experiences (Riva et al., 2016), mystic tourism (Ponder and Holladay, 2013), wellness tourism (Chhabra, 2021), nature tourism (Wolf et al., 2017) and in events and festivals (Neuhofer et al., 2020).

Attempts have been made to reach a holistic definition, for example the Transformational Travel Council (2021) defines transformation travel as “intentionally traveling to stretch, learn and grow into new ways of being and engaging with the world”, and they carry on stating that they “believe meaningful travel starts from the inside out”. On the other hand, Tomljenovic and Ateljevic (2015, p. 14) give an operational definition proposing that “transformative tourism is a type of tourism where tourists participate in travel that offers a high level of immersion with the host culture.

## 3. Transformational marketing and transformational travel

In the last years markets have realized that greater consumption does not necessarily imply greater contentment; thus, individuals seek experiences that are pleasurable, personally significant and conducive to self-actualization beyond the consumptive encounter (Boswijk et al., 2013). As DeLeire and Kalil (2010, p. 166) put it: “the conventional wisdom that says, ‘money cannot buy you happiness’ is often intended to mean that ‘spending on material goods cannot buy you happiness’”, and producers prefer to sell products that have proved to add happiness and a positive effect, especially as consumers are becoming more and more concerned with their happiness (Veenhoven et al., 2021).

Sheldon (2020, p. 1) points out that “the need to tourism to transform has never been greater”, and one must add that, implementing transformational tourism marketing strategies by tourism destinations, and by the traveler industry is now of the utmost importance since overall the concept of transformational marketing has been globally embraced with success as a guide in designing memorable experiences that succeed in satisfying target consumers (Chang, 2021).

It is then paramount that Destination Marketing Organizations broaden their focus. Without a genuine change of the paradigm “regeneration will fizzle” and an opportunity will be lost to destinations to become a transformative agent (Pollock, 2019).

#### 4. Discussion

One suggests that destinations’ that adopt transformational marketing as a tool will provide products that result in enjoyable ways to gain self-awareness, spiritual experience and an expansion of consciousness, and through this will gain not only an advantage over their competitors, but will also, create the products and conditions for a more sustainable and responsible tourism development. Although there is a clear lack of studies demonstrating it, still, it is possible from current literature to extrapolate that the use of transformational marketing should allow destinations to:

1. Raise awareness
2. Create new diversified tools for attracting and engage with consumers
3. Increase loyalty
4. Establish relevance
5. Encourage interaction and product trial
6. Verify the target audience
7. Build strong and trustful relationships
8. Create new opportunities for developing new tourism business models
9. Develop positive perception and
10. Stimulate a positive word-of-mouth.

However, more deductive studies on these topics should be made to confirm these assumptions. Furthermore, from our point of view, transformational marketing must be implemented through planning to avoid:

1. Targeting the wrong consumers
2. High costs of investment
3. Product issues
4. Organizational issues
5. Brand image issues and
6. Destination image issues.

Therefore, one postulates that destinations that carefully implement transformational marketing-based strategies will see tourism become a catalyst for environmental, social, cultural and economic regeneration.

#### 5. Conclusion

Over the last few decades, the concept of experience marketing and of transformational travel has been transformed, mainly because of the social evolution.

Transformational marketing has proven to be an effective strategy, which uses several tools and techniques to create memorable experiences. This marketing strategy has as significant impact on consumer perception, bringing many advantages for both consumers and destinations (Urdea and Constantin, 2021).

In this article, we sought to study the conceptual aspects of transformational marketing and of transformational travel, exploring the definitions according to the main authors dedicated to understanding the field, moreover one look to understand how transformational marketing applied to the development of transformational tourism development can be beneficial both to destinations and travel operators.

Resuming, one can say basing ourselves in Larocca *et al.* (2020) that implementing a transformational marketing strategy is crucial for affecting how experiences will be perceived and evaluated by transformational travelers.

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