UNIVERSITY OF
GLOUCESTERSHIRE

This is a peer-reviewed, final published version of the following document and is licensed under All Rights Reserved license:

Jones, Peter ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9566-9393 and Comfort, Daphne (2018) Storytelling and sustainability reporting: a case study of the tourism and hospitality industry. International Journal of Management Cases, 20 (3). pp. 44-58.

EPrint URI: https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/5907

Disclaimer

The University of Gloucestershire has obtained warranties from all depositors as to their title in the material deposited and as to their right to deposit such material.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation or warranties of commercial utility, title, or fitness for a particular purpose or any other warranty, express or implied in respect of any material deposited.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation that the use of the materials will not infringe any patent, copyright, trademark or other property or proprietary rights.

The University of Gloucestershire accepts no liability for any infringement of intellectual property rights in any material deposited but will remove such material from public view pending investigation in the event of an allegation of any such infringement.

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR TEXT.

IJMC International Journal of Management Cases

Storytelling and sustainability reporting: a case study of the tourism and hospitality industry

Peter Jones
University of Gloucestershire, UK

Daphne Comfort
University of Gloucestershire, UK

Abstract

Stories, in one form or another, are probably as old as the human race, but in recent years, businesses have increasingly come to recognise the importance of storytelling. The aims of this paper are to provide a range of illustrations of the ways in which some of the leading companies within the tourism and hospitality industry have employed storytelling as part of the sustainability reporting process and to offer some reflections on current approaches to storytelling in sustainability reporting within the industry. The paper begins with an outline of the characteristics of storytelling within the corporate world, reviews the ways storytelling is employed in selected tourism and hospitality companies' most recent sustainability reports. The paper identifies a number of storytelling formats, namely, photographs and images, video clips, personal messages and cameo case studies, used in the selected companies' sustainability reports. While such stories often have a strong human impact and can strike emotive chords, the authors would argue that stories can, in part, be potentially misleading in that they do not necessarily fully reflect a company's sustainability record.

Keywords: Stories, storytelling, tourism and hospitality companies, sustainability reports.

Introduction

Storytelling - simply defined as the cultural and social activity of sharing stories – is probably as old as the human race and is certainly much older than recorded history. Stories can be told in a variety of ways including pictures and photographs, conversations, presentations, letters, audio and visual recordings and increasingly social media, and their power is widely recognised. Osman (2014), for example, argued *'transcending barriers of language and culture, storytelling is one of the oldest art forms in history, utilised to transmit cultural, moral and complex information in a simple, engaging and meaningful manner.'* Storytelling is embedded in people's everyday lives, and in recent years, there has been increasing recognition of the role of storytelling in the business world. PricewaterhouseCoopers (2017), for example, suggested that *'storytelling is one of the most powerful tools available to effective communicators'* and Gupta (2015) argued that *'stories are an effective tool in the strategy process and for communicating and achieving strategic objectives.'* In examining storytelling in business intelligence, Elias et al. (2013), argued that *'stories help us to communicate knowledge, share, and interpret experiences'*, while in highlighting *'the power of storytelling in public relations'* Kent (2015, p. 480) claimed *'stories have the power to inform, persuade, elicit emotional responses, build support for coalitions and initiatives, and build civil society.'* Johansen and Nielsen (2012), explored how storytelling can contribute to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and Garcia-Rosell (2017) examined '*the possibilities and challenges of using stories as vehicles for critically evaluating*

contemporary business practices and testing the moral and political boundaries of corporate social Responsibility.'

There has been growing interest in the power of storytelling within the tourism and hospitality industry, particularly in creating and sharing experiences (Mossberg 2008) and in marketing (Kennedy 2015). Although sustainability and sustainability reporting have increasingly gathered momentum within the tourism and hospitality industry (e.g. Jones et al. 2014; de Grosbois 2016), the role of storytelling within sustainability within the industry has received little or no attention in the academic literature. With this in mind, the aim of this exploratory paper is twofold. Firstly, to provide a range of illustrations of the ways in which a number of the leading players within the tourism and hospitality industry have employed storytelling as part of the sustainability reporting process. Secondly, to offer some reflections on current approaches to storytelling in sustainability reporting within the industry.

Storytelling in the Business World and the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

Storytelling has its roots in the origins of human civilisation and has traditionally been used to share, and pass on, knowledge, values, myths, legends, fables and religious beliefs, from one generation to another and across geographical space. Initially storytelling was conducted though drawings and word of mouth communication though over time the written, and then the printed, word became an increasingly important storytelling medium. More recently, developments in information and communication technologies, particularly social media, have seen storytelling become an increasingly all pervasive and all embracing experience. In many ways, stories inform and illuminate all walks of life and in recent years, storytelling has become increasingly important in the business world and in many of the sub disciplines of business and management.

At the macro, level Gill (2015) defined *'corporate storytelling'* as *'the process of developing and delivering an organisation's message by using narration about people , the organisation, the past, visions for the future, social bonding and work itself, in order to create new point-of-view or reinforce an opinion or behaviour.'* At the sub discipline level, in the financial world, for example, Markey-Towler (2017) claimed that *'governments and investors ignore the power of storytelling at their peril. The financial markets are not driven by interest rates and money alone. They are driven by one of the most ancient traditions of humanity – stories. We can lead an investor to liquidity but we can't make them drink without telling them a story about why it is so very tasty.'* Savita et al. (2011), recognised that storytelling in knowledge management is a powerful management tool, and explored the role of storytelling in the context of information systems. Weissenfeld et al. (2017), argued that *'storytelling is used in order to transport a complex content more vividly to the audience and to ensure that the audience remembers the content as long as possible.'* Kent (2015), argued *'storytelling is a staple of public relations, from crisis to branding, to identity to reputation.'* In emphasising the importance of storytelling in marketing, Hammond (2017), argued that *'storytelling is a strategy that brands utilize in order to help their target audiences not only to learn about their products and services but also to form an emotional connection that will lead them to remain loyal to their company for years to come.'*

A number of benefits have been claimed for storytelling within the business world. Storytelling is seen to be important in linking a wide range of business challenges and opportunities to everyday human experiences and in helping to

generate emotional connections with companies and in giving them a human face. Many good, arguably the best, stories are memorable and thus not only the story itself, but also the message behind the story, can help to sustain positive views of a business and its operations and behaviours. Stories can be important in disseminating and sharing a company's values, which may be built on founding philosophies and achievements, and in helping to enhance these values in future business development trajectories. More specifically, stories can be important, not only in developing awareness and understanding of a company's values and commitments to a wide range of stakeholders, but also in helping to engender stakeholders' trust in these values and commitments. Ultimately, and ambitiously, there is the belief that stories can be inspirational and that they can have the power to encourage and stimulate changes in behaviour. In summarising the benefits of *'corporate* storytelling', Gill (2015), suggested that *'stories can be used in organisations as a means to motivate people and create a message memorable enough for people to take cause and action, if there is an identified interest to the listener.'* Further Gill (2015), claimed that stories have *'universal appeal to culturally diverse audiences who have a range of interests and learning styles.*

Within the tourism and hospitality industry, the role of storytelling has been highlighted in marketing and in the creating and sharing of experiences. Kennedy (2015, webpage)) has suggested that *'storytelling'* is *'a key to hotel marketing success'* while Dickinson (2017) outlined *'how to transform your hotel's marketing with storytelling.'* More specifically Dickenson (2017) argued *'by using a storytelling approach in your hotel marketing strategy, you can relate valuable content without actually "selling" your hotel to guests'* rather *'you're showing them why they should choose you over your competitors in an engaging, authentic way.'* Kennedy (2015) suggested that hotel sales professionals *'should incorporate storytelling into their toolbox of presentation techniques'* and should look, for example, to *'tell stories about your area or destination'* and to *'talk about how previous guests who have visited for a group or event, later came back to enjoy the hotel for leisure.'*

A number of researchers have explored the importance of storytelling in helping to understand tourism and hospitality experiences. Moscardo (2017) for example, drew on work in evolutionary, cognitive and social psychology to reveal that stories play a significant role in supporting positive tourism experiences. In looking to convey *'extraordinary experiences through storytelling'* Mossberg (2008) looked at *'conceptualizing tourism and hospitality organisations as stories.'* Further she argued that *'for the consumer to be immersed in the story and to have an extraordinary experience, two preconditions are proposed'*, namely *'the need for the experience to take place in a hedonic service consumption setting'* and *'a servicescape that allows the consumer to step away from everyday reality' (*Mossberg 2008). In addition Mossberg (2008) also suggested that *'involvement and co-creation, as well as a guide, can be used to facilitate a tourist's immersion in a story and a servicescape'* (Mossberg 2008).

Pera (2014), took up the theme of co-creation and argued that *'storytelling as a co-creative behaviour in tourism'* can *'activate a "customer delight" response.'* Chronis (2012) recognised that the *'appreciation of a tourism experience depends on the availability and communication of stories'* but argued that storytelling within the industry has relied almost exclusively on *'marketers and tourism organizers as the main designers and promoters of narratives, ignoring the role of tourists themselves in this*

process.' Using empirical information from a heritage museum Chronis (2012) suggested that *'the success of a narrative presentation in tourism destinations also depends on the tourists' involvement, willingness and ability to actively participate in the storytelling experience.'*

Frame of Reference and Method of Enquiry

In an attempt to In an attempt to illustrate the ways in which storytelling has been employed in the sustainability reporting process within the tourism and hospitality industry, eight major players within the industry namely, Wyndham Worldwide, Intercontinental Hotel Group, Thomas Cook Group, TUI Group, Carnival Corporation, Royal Caribbean Cruises, Restaurant Brands International and Starbucks were selected for study. These companies were selected for two principal reasons. Firstly, that they are seen to be amongst the leaders in their sectors of the tourism and hospitality industry and thus might be seen to reflect cutting edge and innovative approaches to sustainability reporting within the industry. Secondly, these companies published recent annual sustainability and corporate social responsibility reports, while the same was not always true for other leading players in the industry.

Wyndham Worldwide is an integrated hospitality company, its headquarters are in New Jersey in the US, it has over 50 brands including Wyndham Hotels and Resorts, Ramada, Days Inn and England Country Cottages and it has a significant presence in most major hospitality markets in the world. The Intercontinental Hotel Group, is one of the world's leading hotel companies with over 5,000 hotels and a presence in almost 100 countries and its brands include Intercontinental, Holiday Inn, Crowne Plaza, and Hualuxe. TUI Group, headquartered in Germany, is the world's largest travel and tourism company and its portfolio includes 1,600 travel agencies and leading online portals, 6 airlines with some 250 aircraft, 320 hotels and 15 cruise liners. The British based Thomas Cook Group is one of the world's leading holiday companies, embracing charter and scheduled passenger airlines, package holidays, cruise lines, hotels and resorts, and it operates within 17 source markets and destinations principally in Europe, the US and the Caribbean.

Carnival Corporation is a US based cruise company, it has 10 cruise brands including Carnival Cruise Lines, Princess Cruises, Costa Cruises, P&O Cruises (UK) and the Holland America Line, and with a total fleet of over 100 vessels, it is the world's largest travel leisure company. Royal Caribbean Cruises, is a US based global cruise company, its five constituent brands are Royal Caribbean International, Celebrity Cruises, Azamara Club Cruises, Pullmantur Cruises and CDF Croiseres de France. Restaurant Brands international is a Canadian multinational fast food holding company, which trades as Burger King, Tim Hortons and Popeyes, and has over 24,000 restaurants in over 100 countries. Starbucks is a US coffee company and coffee house chain and it operates from over 27,000 locations worldwide.

While companies have employed a range of methods to report on their sustainability commitments and achievements, publication on corporate websites has become the most popular and the most accessible reporting mechanism (Morhardt 2009). With this in mind, the authors conducted an Internet search for information, using the key phrase 'sustainability report' and the name of each of the selected tourism and hospitality companies. This search was conducted in April 2018, using Google as the search engine, and the most recent reports for each of the selected companies obtained from

this search process were chosen for study. The nature, content and length of the sustainability reports varied considerably. The Carnival Corporation report contained 126 pages, while the corresponding figures for Wyndham Worldwide, Royal Caribbean Cruises, Intercontinental Hotel Group, Thomas Cook Group and Starbucks, for example, were 82, 65, 41, 30 and 24 respectively. At the same time, some of the sustainability reports contained linked highlights and video clips, which expanded their readability. The reports had a range of titles including sustainability report, corporate social responsibility report, responsible business report, global social impact performance report, while the TUI report was entitled 'Better Holidays Better World.' Within the remainder of this paper all these reports will be referred to as 'sustainability reports.'

In reviewing the selected companies' sustainability reports, the authors were essentially guided by loose grounded theory. More specifically, given they were looking to explore how human interest was being integrated into sustainability reporting, they pursued an interpretivist approach in that they looked to select and group the general content of the eight sustainability reports into five broad elements namely mission, vision and strategy statements; graphics; metrics; general structured narrative; and specific storytelling. The storytelling elements provided the empirical material for this paper. The specific examples and selected quotations drawn from the storytelling elements are used for illustrative purposes, with the principal aim being on reviewing the ways storytelling is employed in the selected tourism and hospitality companies' sustainability reports. The focus is not on providing a comparative evaluation of how the selected companies employed storytelling within their sustainability reports. Unless specifically cited all quotations are drawn from the selected companies' sustainability reports.

The paper is based on information that is in the public domain and the authors took the considered view that they did not need to contact the selected companies to obtain formal permission prior to conducting their research. When outlining the issues of reliability and validity in relation to information drawn from the Internet, Saunders et.al. (2009) emphasised the importance of the authority and reputation of the source and the citation of a specific contact individual who might be approached for additional information. In reviewing the sustainability reports, the authors were satisfied that these two conditions were met. At the same time the authors recognise that their study has its limitations not least in that it includes just eight tourism and hospitality companies and that it is based on authors' designation and interpretation of the storytelling elements in these reports. That said the authors believe that their approach is appropriate in what is an exploratory study.

Findings

All the selected tourism and hospitality companies employed storytelling to illustrate their strategic commitments and their environmental, social and economic achievements against these commitments, in their sustainability reports, though there were marked variations in the extent to which stories were used. A number of themes can be identified. Photographs and images were a widely used method to tell a story within the reports and they were employed in a variety of ways. Perhaps the most obvious use was on the frontispiece of some of the selected companies' sustainability reports. The first two pages of the 2016 Royal Caribbean Cruises report, for example, are pictures of a shoal of fish swimming underwater and of a calm ocean. The second of these pages is accompanied by three lines of text with the banner headline *'A*

Commitment to Oceans', which included the statement *'At Royal Carnival, respect for the oceans is not a choice, it is an obligation – and a way of life.'* Here the story is not only that cruising is compatible with nature and the living environment of the seas but also of the company's commitment to sustainability. On the third page of the report this message is reinforced via a four minute video link featuring a conversation between the Chief Executive Officers of the World Wildlife Fund and Royal Caribbean Cruises, in which they *'discuss their common goal of protecting the oceans and explain the ambitious new conservation partnership between the organizations'* and here a major challenge is seen to be *'the need to engage people in the story of the oceans.'*

In a similar vein, if rather coincidentally, the first page of both the Thomas Cook Group's 2017 and the 2016 TUI sustainability reports have a photograph of a hammock strung between palm trees, in the first case the background is a beach at the edge of a lapping waterline, and in the second the photograph also included a person in a kayak and a small sailing boat in the bordering seascape. Half of the first page of the Intercontinental Hotel Group's sustainability report includes a photograph of a member of the company's staff and a young girl casting red beads, or possibly berries, into a watercourse in a parkland setting, which could be the grounds of one of the company's hotels. In all three examples the story is one of tranquility and of people in harmony with their environment. While the images on the first three pages of the Carnival Corporation's 2016 sustainability report emphasise the large size of a modern cruise ship, in one case with a large vessel looking incongruous against the back drop of a partly wooded hillside, images of smiling children, happy couples and a relaxed smiling group of people on a quayside give the impression of people in harmony with the trappings of cruising.

Photographs and images are also widely used to illustrate a number of social, economic and environmental themes within the selected tourism and hospitality companies' sustainability reports. In reporting on its partnerships with a range of organisations, TUI Group, for example, used three photographs, namely, a market stall in Namibia selling traditional fabrics, a group of volunteers working on a landscape improvement project and an African elephant in its native environment. Photographs of an array of solar panels at the Holiday Inn Express in Sao Alto in the US and of the resort and spa at Bora Bora in the Society Islands in the Pacific, which has a seawater air conditioning system, in the Intercontinental Hotel Group's 2016 report were used to accompany the company's commitment to environmental sustainability and more specifically to energy efficiency and the development of more renewable sources of energy. Royal Caribbean Cruises illustrated its regular work with its *'emissions scrubbing system'*, designed to scrub away harmful pollutants before they are released into the air during voyages, with a photograph of two men working on the system on board ship. This section of the report also has a link to a two minute video clip in which the Chairman and Chief Executive of Royal Caribbean Cruises and some of his senior colleagues discuss the company's emissions purification plans.

A number of the selected companies used photographs in reporting on their commitment to their workforce. In reporting on *'Our Colleagues'*, Thomas Cook Group used two photographs, the one of a diverse group of the company's employees, dressed in their uniforms, smiling and seemingly chatting together, the other of two smiling female employees also dressed in uniforms, bearing their name badges. These photographs sit alongside narratives of the company's policies on employee engagement, diversity and inclusion and employee development and are designed to

reinforce the image of a happy workforce and of the company's social commitment to sustainability. In a similar vein the Intercontinental Hotel Group's reported on *'Our People'* and included a photograph of a smiling female employee handing a small carrier bag to a guest. The section of TUI Group's 2016 report entitled *'Care More'*, which focused on people development, engagement, diversity and leadership, was prefaced by a full page photograph of four smiling employees standing in front of Fritz Joussen, the company's Chief Executive, along with the message *'Building the Best Place To Work.'*

More generally within the selected companies sustainability reports, photographs and images were used to tell a range of stories. The Intercontinental Hotel Group illustrated its reporting of its approach to disaster relief with a photograph of the destruction wrought in a residential area of Kumamoto by an earthquake in 2016. TUI used nine photographs, for example, of educational, senior citizen and wildlife conservation projects, to accompany its reporting on the work its *'Care Foundation'***,** which looks to *'collaborate with destinations on the sustainable management of tourism'*. Royal Caribbean Cruises included a photograph of a large number of its employees to accompany its description of the work of its GIVE (Get Involved, Volunteer Everywhere) programme, which looks to *'assist community and non-profit organisations in improving the quality of lives in their communities.'* Thomas Cook Group used photographs of three marathon runners and of children at a school in Thailand to illustrate its commitment to charity while Wyndham Worldwide used a number of photographs of children in schools as part of its reporting on community programmes in China. Throughout many of the selected companies' reports photographs of smiling employees and customers are widely used to convey the image of the selected companies offering a happy work and leisure environment.

Messages from company employees, most commonly, but not exclusively, from senior executives, were a prominent element of storytelling within many of the selected tourism and hospitality companies' sustainability reports. In his *'Message from the President and Chief Executive Officer'* in Carnival Corporation's 2016 sustainability report, Arnold W. Donald, reported that *'2016 was another successful year for our company on many fronts. We continued to operate safely and responsibly, and to produce sustained earnings improvement.'* At the same time he emphasised *'as always, we remain firmly committed to being a responsible corporate citizen and continue to make meaningful progress on our 2020 sustainability goals.'* Daniel Schwartz, Chief Executive Officer of Restaurant Brands International, emphasised *'at Restaurant Brands International, we believe success and sustainability go together',* that *'as one of the world's largest and fastest-growing quick service restaurant companies, we're committed to acting responsibly'* and *'as we continue to grow our three brands, we will keep strengthening our efforts and supporting the people, places and communities that touch our business, every day.'* In his *'Chairman's Statement'* Patrick Cescau, claimed that the Intercontinental Hotel Group *'is committed to ensuring a strong culture of responsibility is embedded across the business and that we deliver our strategy with integrity and in a sustainable way.'* The message from Kevin Johnson, President and Chief Executive Officer of Starbucks, included the statement *'our 2016 global Social Impact Performance Report marks our progress as a company, one that is performance-driven through the lens of humanity.'* Here the story is one of a strong sense of corporate commitment to sustainability, to a responsible way of doing business while also growing the business, and of companies providing the initiatives and framework to deliver on a wide range of sustainable development agendas.

In some of the selected reports, there are also messages from both senior, and perhaps to a lesser extent, from more front line, personnel. Emre Berkin, Chair of Thomas Cook Group's Health, Safety and Environment Committee, claimed that during the last 18 months the company had engaged *'meaningfully in the business's sustainability agenda'* and that *'the improving sustainability performance of Thomas Cook – coming at a time when the business is determinedly focused on improving the customer experience – is no coincidence.'* The Intercontinental Hotel Group's Indigo Savanah hotel in Georgia, US, has partnered with the Savanah-Chatham Metropolitan Police Department to run a programme which looks to engage with local young people in an attempt to reduce juvenile crime and to improve employability skills. In the company's 2016 report, Jonas Subaar, from the programme's pre-apprentice business liaison team, stressed *'we want to tell the hotel industry, that what Hotel Indigo Savanah have done by supporting programmes like ours, engaging youth that are desperate to get engaged so that they can get off the streets … that is something all businesses should feel excited to be a part of.'* In a pen picture of Magdalena Golebiewska, the Group's Environmental and Fuel Manager, in TUI Group's 2016 sustainability report, she outlines her work in *'bringing people together internally to continually improve our environmental performance'* and on a *'waste segregation improvement programme'* in Luton. All these stories look to emphasise the companies' commitments to sustainability at all levels in their organisations and how such commitments touch the everyday lives of employees and help to enrich their work experience.

Many of the selected tourism and hospitality companies used cameo case studies as part of their approach to storytelling. Starbucks, for example, employed a case study as part of its commitment to *'sustainable coffee.'* The case study was of Catalina Pacheco, *'a second-generation coffee producer and loving grandmother'* who *'methodically roasts a small batch of coffee from her farm, La Finca San Jose, tucked into the hillsides of Guatemala.'* The case study describes how Catalina's husband and grandson act a guides for a tour of the farm and they suggest that Starbuck's *'One Tree for Every Bag'* commitment, designed to help ensure the long-term supply of coffee and the economic future of farmers, *'has been a gift for our family.'* Here the story is one of the company's role in supporting small local farmers and in fostering economic development as part its wider sustainability strategy. In reporting on its *'approach to animal welfare'* Restaurant Brands International included a cameo case study of an antibiotics workshop, facilitated by the University of Guelph in Canada, designed to build on the company's approach to the use of antibiotics in the supply chain.

Thomas Cook Group used a cameo case study to illustrate its approach to *'operational efficiency'* in its drive to *'conserve natural resources', improve energy security and support efforts to return waste to meaningful use, contributing to a circular economy.'* The case study outlined how the company had worked in Germany, with hoteliers and chefs, to produce a manual about *'Sustainable Food'*, which included a number of practical activities hotels could adopt, including greater use of seasonal food, sustainable purchasing policies, the design of sustainable menus, food presentation, waste management and the implementation of a sustainable food strategy. TUI Group's 2016 report included three cameo case studies of its work in Croatia, Jamaica and Cape Verde, with the Travel Foundation, a charity that works in partnership with businesses and governments to bring better benefits from tourism for people and the environment. In Croatia, for example, the company have contributed to a project

designed to help local businesses benefit from the continuing increase in tourism within the country. In Cape Verde initiatives have been developed to help local entrepreneurs and craftspeople to offer excursions and handicraft to tourists and to improve local environments.

In reporting on *'environmental responsibility'* The Intercontinental Hotel Group, included a cameo case study of waste management and water and energy conservation at the Holiday Inn at Winchester, UK. The case study described that the hotel was built with a number of *'sustainable features'*, including a heat recovery system, LED lighting in all the public areas, that all waste food is processed by anaerobic digesters and that all the water used in the hotel is filtered and reused so that no waste water is returned to the public wastewater system. As part of its approach to *'philanthropy'* Wyndham Worldwide, provided a cameo case study of its charitable donation to a *'community impact'* project in Greensboro, North Carolina, US. The case study revealed that since 2014 $400,000 had been donated to food banks in the Greensboro area to and that the *'Out of the Garden'* project saw the provision of 300,000 meals for 3,900 families and the distribution of over 100, 000 pounds of donated food produce. In its 2016 report, Carnival Corporation provided a cameo case study of how the company responded to an outbreak of the Zika virus in the Caribbean, Central and South America in January 2016. The case study described how the company immediately responded to announcement of the outbreak by introducing preventative measures, including the provision of medical advice for passengers, crew, medical staff and shore based employees, by the issue of appropriate insect repellents on board and during shore excursions and by the application of mosquito prevention strategies both on board and in its ports of call.

Discussion

Increasingly storytelling is seen to be important in bringing sustainability reporting to life and the findings reported above reveal that storytelling is certainly playing a part addressing a range of environmental, social and economic agendas and achievements in the sustainability reports posted by a number of the leading companies within the tourism and hospitality industry. That said four sets of issues merit discussion and reflection. Firstly, many of the stories cited above look to make a strong connection between the tourist and hospitality industry and the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainability and many of them strike potentially powerful emotive chord. The tone of the stories is exclusively positive in painting the selected companies' general sustainability strategies, and more particularly their specific policies, actions and achievements in a favourable light. As such the stories reflect Leinaweaver's (2015) claim, that *'many corporate sustainability reports have perfectly scripted stories – stories told to create a party line.'* Within the social realm stories featuring employees, for example, paint a picture of a committed and caring employer, of the provision of a wide range of development opportunities within the workplace and of a happy and loyal workforce. In a similar vein stories about the tourism and hospitality companies' commitment to the communities in which they operate are very much within the spirit of community building or of fostering resilience and community rebuilding in areas hit by natural disasters. A common thread running through stories with an environmental theme is a commitment to stewardship and to the conservation of natural resources.

Nevertheless, the underlying message from the stories in the selected companies' sustainability reports stands in marked contrast to a number of rather different stories

about the impact the tourism and hospitality industry is having on the environment, society and the economy in a number of areas of the world. Tourism Concern (2015), for example, suggested that *'the cruise ship industry earns upwards of $36 billion each year'* but that *'the lucrative industry hides a host of human rights abuses, alongside exploitative practices and an appalling environmental record.'* Jennings and Ulrik (2016), researchers for Tourism Concern, tell a very different story of the environmental, economic and social impact of cruise tourism. In addressing economic impacts, for example, Jennings and Ulrik 2016, webpage) claimed that *'local people often derive little or no benefit from the thousands of passengers disembarking from cruise ships'* and posed the question *'do countries visited by cruise ships have any real power to claim a fair share of the profits of such tourism.'* Jennings and Ulrik (2016) also itemised a number of damaging environmental impacts, including greenhouse gas emissions, the discharge of a range of liquid and solid wastes and damage to biodiversity and reef ecosystems, and claimed that *'the legal framework within which the ships operate may mean that pay and working conditions are far worse than for equivalent jobs ashore.'*

Secondly, the selected sustainability reports and the stories that support them are cast within the idiom of continuing economic growth. In his review in Intercontinental Hotel Groups 2016 report, Chief Executive, Richard Solomons, emphasised the company's commitment to *'a culture of responsibility'*, but here the focus was clearly on *'operating and growing in a sustainable, responsible way.*' Stephen P. Holmes, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Wyndham Worldwide, argued *'we believe in the power of travel – the ability to create lasting memories, for business to grow and enrich our understanding of each other in a rapidly changing world.'* Thomas Cook Group's *'vision for sustainable tourism',* for example, suggested that tourism is *'one of the world's biggest employers, and one of the global economy's lead growth sectors'* and argued *'at its most effective, tourism* delivers economic growth.' In a similar vein, Royal Caribbean Cruises' sustainability report noted *'it is estimated that the cruise industry contributed $120 billion to the global economy in 2014'* and argued *'with that growth come demands on destinations, that must be properly managed to ensure future viability and economic development from cruise tourism is enjoyed by all parties.'* Here there is a consistent emphasis on growth, though there is little by way of an explicit attempt to define the terms 'responsible' or 'sustainable', which are often seen to qualify such growth. This, in turn, might be seen to signal recognition amongst the selected companies within the tourism and hospitality industry that while the earth's natural resources are being consumed at an unsustainable rate, sustainability stories *'can actually be a source of inspiration for further growth'* (Storytelling People 2017)

However, such growth within the tourism and hospitality industry will make increasing severe demands on the earth's finite natural resources and on many prized and fragile environments and there are concerns that these demands, and the continuing corporate commitment to growth that drive them, will prove ultimately unsustainable. Such concerns reflect more fundamental questions about whether continuing economic growth is compatible with sustainable development. The World Travel Market (2016) for example, posed the question *'When will the tourist industry start talking sensibly about growth?'* More specifically, Conscious. Travel (2016) argued *'the challenges facing humanity in general and the tourism/hospitality sector in particular stem from a failure to recognise that the current version of the economic system has, contained within it, structural and systemic flaws, that result in success (as in continued growth) becoming the cause of its own demise.'* Furthermore, Conscious. Travel (2016) suggested that *'as*

far as destinations are concerned growth is currently defined in quantitative terms (more visitors, more spending, more GDP, more jobs) but not in terms of net positive outcome for all stakeholders' and that *'success is defined as "more" not as "better" regardless of how that better is distributed amongst stakeholders.'*

Thirdly, there are issues surrounding the relationship between the 'particular' and the 'general', in that the stories in the sustainability reports, focus on specific individuals and events, and as such are specially chosen and choreographed by the selected tourism and hospitality companies. These stories may well have a strong human interest attraction, and many of them certainly have a strong emotive appeal, which may well resonate with audiences on corporate websites and social media, but they cannot necessarily be seen to be representative of a tourism and hospitality company's sustainability agendas and achievements. Indeed, more cynically, leading players within the industry might be seen to be taking the view that such stories may play a valuable role in directing attention away from concerns being expressed in both the mainstream media, on pressure group publications and websites, and on social media about the environmental, social and economic impact of their business activities. That is not, of course, to call into question the voracity and/or the integrity of the stories themselves, but rather to suggest that companies within the tourism and hospitality industry need to more fully address how they draw up their sustainability strategies and agendas and on how they look to verify the achievements they report. Here the key issues are materiality and independent external assurance.

Materiality is concerned with how the environmental, social and economic sustainability issues deemed to be most important to the company, and crucially to all its stakeholders, are determined. While some of the sustainability reports, including those published by Royal Caribbean Cruises, Intercontinental Hotel Group and Wyndham Worldwide, provided information on how stakeholder engagement contributed to the assessment of how stakeholders perceive and helped to identify the sustainability challenges facing these companies, this was not the case for all the selected companies. In the absence of information to the contrary, the identification of material issues by some of the selected companies might be seen to represent the executive management's thinking and to favour corporate business continuity goals, rather than to reflect the potentially wider concerns of the company's other internal, and many external, stakeholders. As such, the stories used to illustrate a number of the sustainability issues identified in the selected companies' sustainability reports might be also be seen to reflect strategic corporate thinking rather than wider stakeholder concerns.

Within the business community commissioning independent external assurance of the information contained in sustainability reports is becoming an increasingly common element within the reporting process. The sustainability reports published by Royal Caribbean Cruises, Carnival Corporation and Wyndham Worldwide, included independent assurance statements, though these statements did not cover all the environmental, social and economic issues covered in the reports, but the six other selected companies did not report on commissioning assurance exercises. Here again while specific stories were used to illustrate many of the environmental, social and economic issues in the selected companies' sustainability reports, their more general applicability might be seen to be called into question by the lack of independent external assurance.

Finally, and more generally, in many ways the selected tourism and hospitality companies' sustainability reports reviewed in this paper, are traditional and conservative in style in that there is, at best, only a limited attempt to harness rapidly evolving developments in information and communication technologies in the reporting process. Amesheva (2017), for example, suggested that technological innovations that *'enable real-time data collection and reporting, new methods of communication and number-crunching is set to transform the world of corporate social responsibility.'* In a similar vein Morin and Muruganathan (2017) argued that new developments in information and communication technologies offer *'creative ways to share sustainability stories'* and to create *'real human stories for a wide audience.'* More specifically, Morin and Muruganathan (2017) suggested that companies can now *'liberate the content in their sustainability reports'*, for example, by improved accessibility, the development of engaging content, digital videos and documentaries and data visualisation tools. However, how far many large companies will choose to go in embracing such innovations and in effectively providing wholesale and transparent public access to sustainability data remains very much to be seen. That said such innovations will surely provide exciting new vehicles for storytelling within sustainability reports and such innovatively presented stories may find a receptive audience amongst many stakeholders who are increasingly conscious of, and receptive to, sophisticated methods of communication and reporting. Such an approach may allow companies to illustrate their sustainability achievements with seemingly compelling stories that seem so seductive and vivid that they effectively mask the bigger, and possibly less appealing picture.

Conclusions

Storytelling has grown in importance within the world of business and it is now commonly employed, for example, in public relations, communications management and marketing. More specifically stories are increasingly used as an integral element in corporate sustainability reporting. This paper reviews the ways stories have been used in the sustainability reports published by some of the leading companies within the tourism and hospitality industry and identifies a number of storytelling formats, namely, photographs and images, video clips, personal messages and cameo case studies. Within the tourism and hospitality industry, stories can play a vital role in helping to bring sustainability reports to life. However, while such stories can offer a powerful human appeal and can strike emotive chords, the authors would argue that stories can, in part, be potentially misleading in that they do not necessarily fully reflect a company's sustainability record. More contentiously, positive stories with a potentially powerful emotive human appeal might be seen to mask a more accurate record of a company's sustainability achievements. That said Sutton's (2017) argument, that there is no role for storytelling in sustainability reports, might be considered extreme and seems unlikely to find favour amongst the leading players within the tourism and hospitality industry. More positively, it is important that a range of stakeholders including investors, employees, consumers, the media, governments and pressures groups, as well as academic commentators, look to rigorously review corporate sustainability reports and the sustainability reporting process. The authors recognise that this exploratory paper has a number of limitations, as outlined earlier, but they believe it provides an initial commentary on storytelling in the sustainability reports posted by some of the leading players within the tourism and hospitality industry and that, as such, it provides a platform for future research. Looking to the future academic research might profitably look, for example, to include studies of how other companies

within the tourism and hospitality industry employ storytelling within their sustainability reports, of how sustainability stories are identified and developed within companies, and how, customers' perceptions of, and responses to, sustainability stories influencing tourism and hospitality buying behaviour.

References

Amesheva, I. (2017) *Five Technology Trends in Defining the Future of Corporate Sustainability*. Retrieved 6 November 2017 from http://www.eco-business.com/opinion/five-technology-trends-defining-the-future-of-corporate-sustainability/

Chronis, A. (2012) Tourists as Story-Builders: Narrative Construction at a Heritage Museum, *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, 29 (5), No. 5, 444-459

Conscious. Travel (2016) *Towards Opening a Sensible Debate on Tourism Growth.* Retrieved 15 May 2016 from https://conscious.travel/2016/04/22/towards-opening-a-sensible-debate-on-tourism-growth/

de Grosbois, D. (2016) Corporate Social Responsibility Reporting in the Cruise Tourism Industry: A Performance Evaluation using a New Institutional Theory Based Model. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 24 (2), 245-269

Dickenson, S. (2017) *How to transform your hotel's marketing with storytelling.* Retrieved 6 April 2018 from https://www.hospitalitynet.org/opinion/4083890.html

Elias, D., Aufarne, M-A. and Bezerianos, A. (2013) Storytelling in Visual Analytics for Business Intelligence. In Human-Computer Interaction – *INTERACT 2013. Lecture Notes in Computer Science* (Volume 8119)

Kotzé P., Marsden G., Lindgaard G., Wesson J., Winckler M. (eds) Human-Computer Interaction – INTERACT 2013. INTERACT 2013. Lecture Notes in Computer Science, Vol 8119. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg

Garcia-Rosell, J-C. (2017) *Corporate Social Responsibility Learning Through Collaborative Storytelling.* Retrieved 24 October 2017 from http://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/29699/7/EuroTEFI_2017_Proceedings_11_Aug_2017.pdf

Gill, R. (2015) Why the PR Strategy of Storytelling Improves Employee Engagement and Add Value to CSR: An integrated literature Review. *Public Relations Review*, 41: 662-674

Gupta, M. (2015) *How Strategic Leaders Use Storytelling*. Retrieved 24 October 2017 from http://www.strategicthinking.eu/how-strategic-leaders-use-storytelling/

Hammond, K. (2017) *Storytelling in Your Marketing Efforts*. Retrieved 24 October 2017 from http://www.business2community.com/marketing/importance-using-storytelling-marketing-efforts-01831875#YeSmy3K6qtSLCYum.97

Jennings, H. and Ulrik, K. (2016) *Cruise Tourism What's Below the Surface*, Retrieved 15 April 2018 from https://www.tourismconcern.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Cruise-Ship-Report-final-draft-3.pdf

Johansen, T.S. and Nielsen, A. E. (2012) CSR in Corporate storytelling- legitimacy as a question of differentiation and conformity. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*. 17: 434-448

Jones, P., Hillier, D. and Comfort, D. (2014) Sustainability in the Global Hotel Industry. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 26 (2), 5-17
Kennedy, D. (2015) *Storytelling – a Key Hotel Marketing Success.* Retrieved 16 April 2018 from http://www.hotelnewsnow.com/Articles/27112/Storytelling-a-key-to-hotel-marketing-success

Kent, M. L. (2015) The Power of Storytelling in Public Relations: Introducing 20 Master Plots. *Public Relations Review*, 41: 480-489

Leinaweaver, J. (2015) 'Storytelling for Sustainability: Deepening the Case for Change', Abingdon: Routledge

Markey-Towler, B (2017) *How Storytelling Drives Finance and Economics*. Retrieved 24 October 2017 from https://theconversation.com/how-storytelling-drives-finance-and-economics-71813

Morhardt, J. E. (2009) Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting on the Internet. *Business Strategy and the Environment.* 19: 436-452

Morin, I. and Muruganathan, K. (2017) *Innovation in Sustainability Reporting: New Design Trends and Digital Solutions for Powerful Storytelling*. Retrieved 23 October 2017 from http://www.eco-business.com/opinion/innovation-in-sustainability-reporting-new-design-trends-and-digital-solutions-for-powerful-storytelling/

Moscardo, G. (2017) Exploring mindfulness and stories in tourist experiences. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research,* 11(2), 111-124

Mossberg, L. (2008) Extraordinary Experiences through Storytelling', Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism. 8(3), 195-210

Osman, K. (2014) *Telling Tales - Storytelling as a Marketing Technique for the Travel, Tourism and Hospitality Industry.* Retrieved 6 April 2018 from http://www.travel-ink.com/telling-tales-storytelling-as-a-marketing-technique-for-the-travel-tourism-and-hospitality-industry/ (Accessed 6 April 2018)

Pera, R. (2014) Empowering the new traveller: storytelling as a co-creative behaviour in tourism. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 20(4), 331-338

PricewaterhouseCoopers (2017) *Storytelling in Business*. Retrieved 24 October 2017 from http://www.pwcacademy.lu/Pages/courses/storytelling.aspx

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2009) *Research Methods for Business Students*, Harlow**:** Pearson Education Limited

Savita, K.S., Hazwani, H. and Kalid, K. S. (2011) The Development of a Narrative Management System: Storytelling in Knowledge Management. *International Journal of Computer and Information Engineering*, 5, 262-266

Storytelling People (2017) *Corporate Storytelling*. Retrieved 3 November 2017 from https://storytellingpeople.nl/en/corporate-stories/corporate-story-sustainability/

Sutton, J. (2017) *Why There Is No Role for Storytelling in Your Sustainability Report*. Retrieved 3 November 2017 from http://www.sustainablebrands.com/news_and_views/marketing_comms/jeff_sutton/why_there_no_role_storytelling_your_sustainability_report

Tourism Concern (2015) *Floating Abominations: Exposing the Cruise Ship Industry.* Retrieved 18 March 2016 from https://www.tourismconcern.org.uk/floating-abominations-exposing-the-cruise-ship-industry/

Weissenfeld, K., Abramova, O. and Krasnova, H. (2017) *Understanding Storytelling in the Context of Information Systems.* Retrieved 25 October 2017 from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316554102_Understanding_Storytelling_in_the_Context_of_Information_Systems

World Travel Market (2016) *When will tourism industry start talking sensibly about growth?* Retrieved 12 May 2016 from http://news.wtmlondon.com/blog/responsible-tourism/when-will-tourism-industry-start-talking-sensibly-about-growth/

THE AUTHORS

Peter Jones and Daphne Comfort work in the Business School at the University of Gloucestershire.