

Qualitative Market Research: an International Journal



Qualitative Market Research

**WALKING ON THE LIGHT SIDE: INVESTIGATING THE
WORLD OF GHOST TOUR OPERATORS AND
ENTREPRENEURIAL MARKETING**

Journal:	<i>Qualitative Market Research</i>
Manuscript ID	QMR-12-2016-0123.R3
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper
Keywords:	Entrepreneurial marketing, Qualitative research, Dark tourism, Ghost tours, Bricolage, Co-creation

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3 **WALKING ON THE LIGHT SIDE: INVESTIGATING THE WORLD OF GHOST**
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5 **TOUR OPERATORS AND ENTREPRENEURIAL MARKETING**
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8 **Key words: Entrepreneurial marketing, Ghost tourism, Dark tourism, Qualitative**
9 **research, Bricolage, Experiential marketing, Co-creation**
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13 **Abstract**
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16 **Purpose**
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19 Ghost tours are an important part of tourism in many towns and cities around the world.
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21 Described as light dark tourism, they are a mix of the macabre and entertainment. Ghost tours
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23 are usually small business enterprises. In order for their venture to be sustainable, ghost tour
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25 operators must engage in effective entrepreneurial marketing practices. This study aims to
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27 evaluate the extent to which ghost tour operators employ entrepreneurial marketing within
28
29 their business.
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33 **Design/methodology/approach**
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36 A qualitative bricolage approach is utilised as a way to explore the use of entrepreneurial
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38 marketing practices within ghost tourism; that is, a niche tourism product. Data were
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40 collected using 21 in-depth interviews, participant observation and analysis of venture
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42 websites. This study employed a two-stage data analysis procedure.
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45 **Findings**
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48 Findings reveal that ghost tour operators practice several dimensions of entrepreneurial
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50 marketing that are often simultaneously present and interwoven through the practices ghost
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52 tour operators use, as identified by thematic analysis.
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54 **Originality/value**
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57 This study adds an entrepreneurial marketing lens to the light dark tourism literature.
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Introduction

As night falls in numerous towns and cities around the world a small part of the landscape is transformed into a “lighter” dark tourism playground, where believers and sceptics alike follow the lamplight of a costumed figure through darkened streets and alleyways in an activity known as ghost tourism. As the guide beckons his fellow walkers through the display of “spooky places”, they inevitably pass by bars, cafes and theatres, where tourists, whose preference for the evening’s entertainment, is to stay in the land of the living. In somewhat of a juxtaposition, these walkers seek an experience that brings them closer to the world of the dead, or at least the possibility of it. Indeed, despite this touristscape seemingly transformed by the darkness of night into a place of intrigue and possibility, much has to be left up to the imagination and openness to the power of suggestion. Even then, the chance of seeing a ghost hangs very much in the balance.

Ghost tourism is part of the phenomenon known as dark tourism or thanatourism, pertaining to tourist activities with travel to and experiences of locations and architecture associated with death, dying and disaster (Lennon and Foley, 2000; Stone, 2006). Dark tourism is defined along a continuum of dark to light, with ghost tourism fitting into the lighter shade of the range of dark tourism activities (Brown *et al.*, 2012). With the darkest of dark tourism ascribed to places of large-scale atrocities, death and suffering (such as concentration camps) and by some an ability for recall within living memory (Lennon and Foley, 2000), lighter shades are delivered as a flexible mix of both the macabre and entertainment. Brown *et al.*, (2012) state that although “the postmodern credentials of dark tourism are debatable, what is not in dispute is the part played by marketing. In order to attract visitors, dark places must be packaged, promoted, priced and positioned, just like any other product or service” (p. 198). However, despite the growing popularity of ghost tourism, it is still best regarded as special interest tourism (Dunkley *et al.*, 2011; Warner, 1999), where

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3 market appeal and product delivery requires more than the standard marketing template used
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5 to market mainstream tourist activities.
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8 The purpose of this paper is to examine the phenomenon of ghost tourism through the
9 lens of entrepreneurial marketing (EM); also described as the marketing/entrepreneurship
10 interface. Specifically here the focus is on walking ghost tours of a “Casperian” nature rather
11 than ventures that focus on a scientific experience of paranormal activity and the use of
12 specialist recording and measurement equipment. We use the term “Casperian” in memory of
13 “Casper, The Friendly Ghost” developed in the late 1930s by Seymour Reit and Joe Oriolo
14 and a popular cartoon character during the 1960’s, whose ghostly antics were meddlesome
15 and disruptive but who possessed qualities more loveable than formidable. Previous
16 comments note that seeking out ghostly encounters is not a mainstream activity tourists
17 engage in (Rittichainuwat, 2011). Along with the challenges that may be encountered in
18 delivering an experience in a landscape or built environment most often purposed primarily
19 for another reason and moreover, where the appearance of a central character (i.e. a ghost) is
20 precarious at best, the quality of marketing strategies employed in this service setting are a
21 critical factor for success. It is suggested that this may well be done through the utilisation of
22 EM tenets.
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42 By focusing on the marketing/ entrepreneurial interface this work makes a significant
43 contribution to the literature within the context of dark tourism and more specifically, ghost
44 tourism. Secondly, and most importantly, conceptually EM is considered at an early stage of
45 development, whereby “although entrepreneurship and marketing are individually
46 acknowledged as a major factor in improving firm performance, their dynamics are still an
47 area with limited theory and empirical work being undertaken” (O’Cass and Morrish, 2016,
48 p. 2) and the benefits up for debate (Morgan *et al.*, 2015). This paper addresses a call for
49 more insights into the underlying dimensions of EM and their interactions (Morris *et al.*,
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3 2002). Morris et al. (2002) conceptualized seven underlining dimensions of EM and their
4 framework forms the basis for exploration in the ghost tourism context. Here, through a case
5 study of ghost tourism, work is progressed by exploring these dynamics in an area of niche
6 tourism where the raison d'être relies on an almost purely experiential product, created "in
7 the moment" and contingent on value generated within the guide/ audience dyad through
8 performance and imagination. This study is important to scholars and academics alike, as it
9 demonstrates the application of EM dimensions to the business model of ghost tours, thereby
10 contributing further to the larger research domain of entrepreneurial marketing. EM
11 incorporates the elements of marketing orientation (MO) through the implementation of the
12 marketing concept (Cadogan *et al.*, 2002; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Narver and Slater, 1990;
13 Ngo and O'Cass, 2012) along with entrepreneurial orientation (EO) via factors such as risk-
14 taking, and innovative and proactive behaviours (Baker and Sinkula, 2009; Miles and Arnold,
15 1991; Rauch *et al.*, 2009). In the context of ghost tours, EM is used to build and sustain a
16 viable business through delivery of a memorable experience to tourists, and importantly, the
17 creation of customer value and satisfaction. Ghost tours, like all dark tourism products, rely
18 on a factual basis for generation of the dark or morbid stories featured within the tourist
19 experience on offer (Gentry, 2007; Holloway, 2010; Inglis and Holmes, 2003; Thompson,
20 2010). Therefore, it is feasible to suggest that using EM, ghost tour operators draw upon these
21 facts and past historical events to form a platform for EO activities that support the
22 expression of MO through curation of a "ghostly" customer experience that fulfils customers'
23 needs and wants.

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51 This study draws upon data from five countries (United Kingdom, United States,
52 Canada, Australia and New Zealand). Each have a distinct settlement and development
53 history (albeit from a Western perspective only), thus providing a rich platform for analysis.
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57 The study draws heavily upon the concept of bricolage (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000;
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3 Kincheloe, 2001; Valtonen, 2010) (and in particular at the data collection and analysis
4 stages), a methodological hybridity that allows circumstances to shape methods used and
5 adapt as the study context unfolds (Valtonen, 2010). Exploratory enquiry is relevant for this
6 study due to the limited work available on EM and tourism and where the nature of it is not
7 well established. The overall aim therefore is to understand the extent and processes by which
8 ghost tourism operators practice EM. In order to establish this, Morris *et al.*'s (2002)
9 framework is used as one that has utility, based on its articulation of identifying underlying
10 dimensions of EM that allow measurement. By investigating the phenomenon of EM as it
11 exists within ghost tourism this work contributes to both EM and tourism literature. To guide
12 our study, the following research questions are posed:
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25 RQ1. To what extent do ghost tourism operators practice EM in their business?
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28 RQ2. Are the seven underlying dimensions Morris *et al.* (2002) depict as inherent in EM
29 applicable to the context of ghost tourism?
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33 The remainder of our paper is as follows. First, the background to the study is given.
34 This includes a description of the nature of ghost tourism as a niche tourism product, thus
35 providing a context for the study. The second part of the background section discusses the
36 conceptual perspectives of EM chosen to use as a framework for the study. In the next
37 section, the study's method is laid out: the process by which the appropriate study sample
38 was accessed and identified and how the various data collection procedures were applied,
39 along with the analysis treatments used. The first analysis reported categorises the rich data
40 drawn from the data collection techniques into common overarching themes that encapsulate
41 the world of the ghost tour operator. A reflective analysis follows as discussion that scaffolds
42 information gained in the thematic analysis into the EM arena. Here the themes identified are
43 interrogated by overlaying conceptual dimensions of EM to reveal the extent to which they
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3 are present in the practices of ghost tour operators. To conclude, limitations, managerial
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5 recommendations and future research suggestions are offered.
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8 **Framing literature**

9 *Ghost tourism*

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11 The meaning of the term ghost has varied over the centuries (Davies, 2007). Here, Davies's
12
13 (2007) definition is used as "manifestations of the souls of the dead before the living" (p. 2).
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15 A ghost may be a manifestation of a person or an animal. Whilst those whose ghosts may
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17 well have met chilling and tragic ends, this form of "light" dark tourism is buffered by the
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19 passage of time, as events that have been relegated to history books or local folklore. Despite
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21 ghost tours seemingly fitted best to a quirky or niche market, they do contribute significantly
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23 to tourist offerings most often in the "old town" of modern-day towns and cities. Their
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25 popularity in the mainstream tourist segment shows signs of growth (Gentry, 2007) with even
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27 the United Kingdom (UK) National Trust promoting its own haunted buildings on its website
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29 (UK National Trust, 2013). Today the increasing popularity of ghost tours has been attributed
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31 to a global rise in the interest of the paranormal and a growing public fascination with death
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33 enlivened in part by programmes such as "Most Haunted" featured on mainstream television
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35 (Davies, 2007). Although people's attraction to sightings of ghosts and hauntings has been
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37 evident since medieval times, there have been few documented examples of commercial
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39 marketing of haunted sites before the twentieth century (Davies, 2007). There is some debate
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41 whether this form of dark tourism and the active pursuit of ghosts should really be
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43 entertainment. Garcia (2012) argues in the case of ghost tours that with a focus on
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45 entertainment they "ameliorate the human suffering and gore by linking them to the
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47 paranormal" (p. 18).
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3 Academic research into dark tourism, of which ghost tourism forms part, has been a
4 recent scholarly endeavour, first emerging within geography (e.g., Blom, 2000; DeLysér,
5 1999), and then quickly adopted by tourism studies (e.g., Gentry, 2007; Garcia, 2012; Lennon
6 and Foley, 2000), where it was categorised as a subfield or lighter shade of so called dark
7 tourism (Bowman and Pezzullo, 2009). Gentry (2007) however suggests ghost tourism
8 remains a grossly under-analysed aspect of dark tourism. Whilst the typical methodology
9 employed involves researcher observation and customer interviews or surveys before and/ or
10 after a tour (see Reijnders, 2011; Thompson, 2010), there are few that report on the
11 perspective and experiences of the tour operators and guides themselves and in particular,
12 from the perspective of EM. Furthermore, most of the studies are case studies of only single
13 sites. Ghost tourism also has its own set of activities; where the mix of entertainment, horror
14 and historical authenticity are laced together in a unique tapestry. While tourism studies have
15 sought to generate a clear differentiation between “tours of the picturesque, the romantic and
16 the sublime from those of the disgusting, the abject, and the macabre” (Bowman, 2009, p.
17 187), ghost tourism appears to be between the two, or a hybrid of these. Moreover, the ghost
18 tourist is seen today less as a “disembodied sightseer” but with greater attention paid to the
19 embodied and performative nature of the role. Indeed, there is substantial evidence to indicate
20 that throughout the tour the tourists become active, and a source of ghost tales themselves
21 (Gentry, 2007; Holloway, 2010). In most cases, authors identify entertainment as the main
22 reason behind attending the tour, and place humour as a key aspect of performance and
23 narrative for the effectiveness of tours.
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50 51 52 *An Entrepreneurial Marketing Lens*

53 EM is an emerging body of literature, initially drawing on the marketing and entrepreneurial
54 scholarship that examines how marketing is evolving to meet challenges present in
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3 contemporary business environments (Hills *et al.*, 2008; Miles and Darroch, 2006). Morris *et*
4
5 *al.* (2002) define EM as:

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8 the proactive identification and exploitation of opportunities for acquiring and
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10 retaining profitable customers through innovative approaches to risk
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12 management, resource leveraging and value creation (p. 5).
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15 Many authors agree that EM is particularly relevant to entrepreneurs and small businesses
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17 whose resource constraints and/ or the nature of their business calls for non-traditional or
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19 textbook approaches to marketing (Kocak, 2004; Morris *et al.*, 2002; Stokes, 2000). Stokes
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21 (2000), writing in the early stages of EM development, suggests that entrepreneurs tend to
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23 have qualities of being innovation-oriented and driven by new ideas and intuitive market feel,
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25 rather than customer-oriented, or rigorous assessment of market needs. Stokes (2000) further
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27 suggests “these processes play to entrepreneurial strengths and represent marketing that is
28
29 more appropriate than marketing which is second best, due to resource limitations“ (p. 1).
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33 The theoretical development of EM over time has taken an iterative course, building
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35 on foundations derived from various parent disciplines and schools of thought (Miles *et al.*,
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37 2015). It is fair to say its diverse background and multi-disciplinary contributions have led to
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39 EM’s boundary formation and understandings regarded as ever evolving and complex. Hills
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41 *et al.* (2008) present the developmental milestones EM has “enjoyed” over its course,
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43 declaring that its definition and scope sit comfortably within the broad definition of
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45 marketing. Miles *et al.* (2015) offer a valuable summary of EM’s heritage by providing a
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47 reduction of Hills and LaForge’s (1992) typology, based on 12 schools of marketing thought,
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49 to three, as reflective of the emergence of EM. These are: 1) EM as entrepreneurship in
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51 marketing 2) EM as networks and relationships in the context of SME marketing, and 3) EM
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53 as marketing in entrepreneurship (p. 96). Furthering their investigation of EM’s roots and
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55 evolution Miles *et al.* (2015) also present the locus of EM within firms based on the
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3 persuasiveness of EM as it manifests in a firm. These are: 1) vertical – top management 2)
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5 horizontal - exclusively within the marketing function and, 3) temporal – as a stage in the
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7 evolution of marketing in an organization or a market (p. 102). To conclude, the authors
8
9 propose that based on the evidence, EM is progressing toward theory construction and the
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11 opportunity for testing of its theoretical explanatory and predictive power.
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14
15 In order to describe the underlying elements of EM, Morris *et al.* (2002) developed
16
17 seven underlying dimensions that “capture the interface between entrepreneurship and
18
19 marketing and serve as an umbrella for many of the emergent perspectives on marketing” (p.
20
21 5). These are: opportunity focus, proactiveness, innovation focus, calculated risk taking,
22
23 resource leveraging, customer intensity and value creation. Four of the dimensions
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25 (proactiveness, calculated risk-taking, innovation-focused and an opportunity focus) are
26
27 sourced from other scholarly work on entrepreneurial orientation of the firm. Resource
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29 leveraging, a fifth dimension, is suggested by Morris *et al.* (2002) as the single most featured
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31 dimension in emergent perspectives on marketing. Finally, the dimensions of customer
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33 intensity and value creation reflect the work on market orientation. Morris *et al.*'s (2002)
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35 underlying dimensions framework has been applied to both small and larger businesses alike
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37 (see for e.g., Kurgun *et al.*, 2011; Morrish *et al.*, 2010). Table 1 presents the dimensions
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39 framework proposed by Morris *et al.* (2002) with each identified dimension categorised
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41 according to the level at which marketing is applied. Within the table, the seven dimensions
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43 listed are further elaborated under the headings of what Morris *et al.* (2002) categorise as the
44
45 three levels at which marketing is applied: marketing as culture, marketing as strategy and
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47 marketing as tactics. Morris *et al.* (2002) describe culture as the basic beliefs and assumptions
48
49 a company has regarding their purpose, behaviours and relationship with the outside world.
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51 Strategy, the second level, refers to how competitive advantage would be gained within a
52
53 particular industry and market context. The third level, tactical, incorporates the
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3 implementation approaches that might be employed as tactics and the skills and techniques a
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5 marketer might use to facilitate these.
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8 *Insert Table 1 about here*
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11 To date there has been relatively few studies that focus on EM within the context of tourism.
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13 For example, Crick and Crick (2016) explore the experience of entrepreneurs in the tourism
14
15 industry through a single case study approach, suggesting that the social costs of
16
17 entrepreneurship can be high. A business model that emphasises a strong planning and
18
19 information gathering approach can mitigate some of the ever-present risks of failure. The
20
21 authors conclude that maintaining a work/life balance could be difficult and should be
22
23 included in the planning process, particularly for family firms or those that contain social
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25 relationships. Kurgun *et al.* (2011) examined the interface between marketing and
26
27 entrepreneurship in their work on EM activity within boutique hotels, concluding that there is
28
29 clear evidence of entrepreneurial activity. Using Morris *et al.*'s (2002) seven dimensions of
30
31 EM to investigate the extent to which these are present in the strategies used by boutique
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33 hotels, they conclude there is clear evidence that this practice is being taken up and very
34
35 applicable to the tourism sector. The work of Kurgun *et al.* (2011) provides an opportunity to
36
37 extend Morris *et al.*'s. (2002) seven dimensions to the context of ghost tourism, as these
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39 ventures arguably face many similar challenges to that of boutique hotels in their effort to
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41 maintain sustainability based on niche positioning.
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50 **Method**

51 *Approach*

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3 The choice of a qualitative approach to study EM is appropriate (Hill and Wright, 2000;
4 Martin, 2009). The application of a qualitative bricolage approach, originally coined by Levi-
5 Strauss (1966), brings together a mix of conceptual lenses, data collection techniques and
6 analytical treatments. By using “active and creative use of methods, it allows for
7 circumstances to shape the methods employed and for them to be adapted to the unfolding
8 context of the research” (Valtonen, 2010, p. 129). Bricolage encounters criticism that it
9 “over-theorizes-conceptualizes issues at the expense of a solid, empirically based
10 assessment” (O’Regan, 2015, p. 463) and that mixing and binding methods can be a sign of
11 impurity (Hammersley, 1999). However, as an approach to understand complexity, the
12 bricolage resists “its placement in concrete as it promotes its elasticity” (Kincheloe, 2005, p.
13 325) and is increasingly gaining acceptance within the field of qualitative enquiry (Denzin
14 and Lincoln, 2000; Kincheloe, 2005; Valtonen, 2010). This study is exploratory and requiring
15 first an in-depth understanding of the practices and servicescape tourist operators and guides
16 curate before determining the extent and depth of EM evident. Therefore, using a mixed
17 conceptual overview (dark tourism and EM), range of data collection sources and two-stage
18 analysis, where EM insights can emerge from a rich data flow, is deemed worthwhile. The
19 bricolage approach used in this study may risk criticism by some for being overly descriptive
20 of derived practice themes, where a more direct route to EM identification through targeted
21 data collection would have resulted in greater parsimony. However, the latter approach risks
22 exclusion of important factors and the rich narrative required to extrapolate EM practices that
23 may well be novel or specific to this context and otherwise overlooked.

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Data collection consisted of operator/ guide interviews, website analysis and participant observation during tours. The five countries selected were primarily those where access and travel to several sites was possible. In order to access operators, an Internet search was

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3 carried out to allow for identification of offerings within the targeted areas. This provided
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5 contact details for operators, usually by way of an email address provided on the website. The
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7 request made included an information sheet about the study and contact details for the
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9 researchers. During the targeting phase, sites that advertised a more intense or “scientific”
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11 offering (i.e., hunting paranormal activity using specialised equipment) as their only offering
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13 were avoided as it was thought these tours offered less of a touristic activity in the main. This
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15 direct approach was highly successful and there were few refusals from operators. Once a
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17 positive response had been received, prospective interviewees were sent information about
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19 the study and a follow-up email made to arrange a suitable date and time. The lead time for
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21 interviews could be considered long in some instances (up to three months) as it needed to be
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23 at a time a researcher was travelling to the country concerned.
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29 In total, 21 operators and guides were interviewed. Because of travel distances to the
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31 various sites, interviews were mostly conducted during the same evening participant
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33 observation of a tour occurred. Therefore, of the 21 interviews, 17 were conducted
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35 approximately 45-60 minutes prior to a tour departure. Four interviews were conducted away
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37 from the tour assembly point or office. Each of these were held in a café or bar at the
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39 interviewee’s suggestion. A semi-structured interview guide was used to cover broad
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41 questions, thus allowing respondents to present their thoughts freely without excessive
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43 structure and leading by the researcher. Within the interview guide were prompting questions
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45 that provided opportunity for respondents to talk holistically about their experiences and
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47 marketing-related practices. Interviews were conducted in England: London, Oxford and
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49 Bath, (6), Wales: Cardiff (2), USA: Salem, Boston and Longbeach, California (6), Canada:
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51 Ottawa (1), Australia: Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney (4) and New Zealand: Napier and
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53 Dunedin (2). These countries, although Western in their orientation, have different histories
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55 that have given rise to variation in cultures and values. Hence, in part, different circumstances
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3 around their hauntings exist (Owen 2007; Smith, 2013). All except one operator were male,
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5 ages ranging from the late twenties through to seventies. Guides were also male, with a
6
7 similar age range. In total 16 respondents were operators (owners who also acted as guides)
8
9 and five employed as staff with guide and customer prospecting roles. Where guides were
10
11 interviewed due to operator unavailability at the time, researchers were assured that the
12
13 guides had an intimate understanding of the business model used and how it was
14
15 implemented. Prior to each interview, if the tour or company offering the tour/s used a
16
17 website, these were investigated. This served to both familiarize the researchers with the
18
19 company and its positioning as well as provide opportunity to make pre site visit notes on
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21 tone, purpose and type of information conveyed to audiences. It also provided a further
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23 prompt as to any lines of enquiry that would be beneficial once on site. All except two
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25 offerings had a website.
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30 Participant observation involved membership of tour groups. The guide was aware of
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32 the researchers' presence but fellow walkers were not. This allowed for uninterrupted
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34 spontaneity and best observation of a "natural" state thus providing valuable ethnographic
35
36 perspectives. There was no intentional dialogue with other customers other than what would
37
38 be considered normal conversation a tourist group might have on a one-off walking tour,
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40 where relationships exist only for the time span of that tour. Most often two researchers were
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42 present on a tour. At the end of the tour manual field notes were made. Each researcher then
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44 compared their notes with the other and summarised pertinent remarks. Once on-site perusal
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46 of promotional material available was also undertaken (brochures at tourist centres, sandwich
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48 boards and other ambient material) and recorded as part of participant observation field notes.
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52 *Interpretation*

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3 The three main data collection modes were interpreted and systematically integrated into an
4 overall set of themes (Bazeley, 2015). This process involved a coding scheme for interview
5 and observation data developed by the researchers using the approach suggested by Campbell
6 *et al.* (2013) that was also consistent with extant literature on ghost tourism and reflected the
7 interview guide. The first step involved each of the two researchers deriving codes they felt
8 collectively represented a holistic view of potential items. The researchers then came together
9 and through a process of negotiation reduced a larger pool of codes into a less complicated
10 system and where codes were mutually exclusive. As coding progressed, reliability was
11 tested based on stability, accuracy and reproducibility (intercoder reliability) (Campbell *et al.*
12 2013). Likewise, a coding scheme was organised for the websites (including look and feel,
13 use of colour, animation, historical accounts and narrative, positioning and tone, ticket sales,
14 memorabilia for purchase, user generated content [UGC]). This provided a template for
15 recording themes and commonalities/ differences amongst websites. Information from the
16 content analysis of websites was synthesised into the emergent thematic analysis through
17 triangulation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000), checking for convergence of interpretations and
18 researcher perspectives. Establishing themes from the rich integrated data as a first stage led
19 to a rich understanding of what describes and encompasses the environment and practices of
20 ghost tour operators. To begin, and as a starting point, it was intended to loosely tie themes
21 for presentation here according to aspects within Morris *et al.*'s (2002) definition of EM
22 adopted for the study. It became apparent, however, that themes contained a marked
23 interweaving of several aspects of the definition simultaneously, so a decision was made to
24 lay this aside.

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Once the themes had been established, a second deliberative phase (framed as
discussion) involved scrutiny of the themes to identify and qualify EM dimensions as laid out
in Morris *et al.*'s (2002) framework. To further reassure researchers that EM dimensions

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3 implied within the themes were essentially the true voice of the respondents and other data
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5 collection modes, as necessary, transcripts and field notes were returned to for re-reading.
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7 The rationale for using a two-stage mixed analysis approach was that it was felt that applying
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9 the EM framework principles directly to the raw data simultaneously with categorisation of
10
11 emergent practice themes could potentially force or privilege interpretation of data and lead
12
13 to untended oversights or bias regarding the nature or plenitude of EM present. Furthermore,
14
15 given the experiential services nature of ghost tourism, marketing is intrinsically embedded in
16
17 the frontline interactions with customers (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988; Wilder *et al.*, 2014).
18
19 Therefore, consideration of those issues follow in the discussion section where the interaction
20
21 of EM and ghost tourism is addressed and the themes interrogated. Comment is then made
22
23 here as to the extent in which EM dimensions are identifiable in the practices and decisions of
24
25 ghost tourism operators. Emergent themes are now presented.
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27
28

30 **Findings: Emergent themes**

32 *1). Essentials for walking on the light side: passion, ghosts and atmosphere*

33
34 Ghost tour operators are passionate people. Their entry into ghost tourism can be a result of
35
36 childhood experiences or memories of a family member's storytelling shaping their interest
37
38 and creating a passion for the history of an area. Many of the operators conduct tours in the
39
40 locality they grew up in and have been familiar with the local stories of ghosts and hauntings
41
42 for much of their lives. For some, experiences of ghost tours they took while travelling
43
44 themselves have convinced them to create a similar product around their own home location.
45
46 Others became aware of an unfilled niche while conducting historic tours of buildings during
47
48 the day and recognise they were continually being asked about ghosts and hauntings at the
49
50 site so decided to design a ghost tour to meet the market. Overwhelmingly operators could
51
52 recite their reasons why the popularity of tours was increasing and felt that they were almost
53
54 certainly "riding the crest of a wave". Two operators entered the market because of
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3 redundancy from other employment. They were aware of local legend or a long standing
4
5 reputation for haunting around potential sites which provided the impetus for setting up a
6
7 ghost tour venture. For one Brisbane operator, the decommissioning of a prison site due to it
8
9 being no longer fit for purpose provided opportunity for entry into the market. Stories and
10
11 experiences were often readily available from previous employees such as security guards or
12
13 staff who had been working on site alone or during the hours commonly associated with
14
15 haunting.
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18
19 In some cases, popular culture had also gentrified ghost hunting or the “dark arts” into
20
21 something that could be explored if it was for entertainment or curiosity. For instance, in
22
23 Salem, a town notorious for an association with witch trials, the donation to the town by TV
24
25 Land, (an American cable channel), in 2005 of a statue of Samantha from the popular 1960’s
26
27 fantasy series “Bewitched” had resulted in tourists flooding into the town. This had ultimately
28
29 led to the town’s tourism focus changing from one of festivals and avoidance of its witch
30
31 history to one that embraced and capitalised from it.
32
33

34
35 The two most common shared values are interest in history and storytelling. There are
36
37 few barriers to entry for ghost tourism, particularly where licensing is not required. In some
38
39 locations, particularly English centres, competition can be fierce with up to two or three other
40
41 companies working the route in the same evening. Access to certain sites may be hard to
42
43 achieve, particularly if local councils or landowners see the tour as not setting the right tone,
44
45 or cheap entertainment. Local authorities may not provide access and take some convincing.
46
47 One operator discussed how he had to wait some time before he obtained access to the
48
49 grounds of a castle. It was not until his tour was awarded an excellence in tourism award
50
51 from Trip Advisor that the local authority saw his offering as worthwhile and provided
52
53 access. A similar barrier can exist where tours cross over burial grounds where the site is still
54
55 consecrated. Sometimes there has been no formal refusal, so the tour proceeds:
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5 The walk takes place on church property, so I wrote to the church. There was no
6
7 reply from the church that they are not OK with the tour, so I contribute to the
8
9 church fund instead to keep them on side (Interviewee: England).

10
11
12 2). *Designing and delivering the product: an eclectic but convenient curation*
13

14 Ghost tours draw together a group of tourists most often in the early part of the
15 evening. Meeting at a nominated place the tour proceeds with a guide, who may or may not
16
17 be costumed and remains “in character” throughout. An in-character guide certainly
18
19 heightens the performative/ theatrical qualities of the guide but arguably also brings about a
20
21 more fantastical rather than reality-based aura to the performance. All interviewees
22
23 emphasised that a rundown of rules and a safety briefing (footwear, traffic safety) is essential
24
25 prior to commencement. During this time the guide may also provide a little information
26
27 about themselves - occasionally in-character - but more often of themselves and their
28
29 credentials as a guide. The safety briefing ironically never provides information on self-
30
31 protection or actions to take if an encounter with a ghost turns nasty, perhaps providing the
32
33 more nervous members some assurance that if this were a likely outcome, it would surely be
34
35 included in the brief. Once the “admin part” of the evening is over, the guide sets about
36
37 establishing the atmosphere of the tour.

38
39 All operators seem to apply a similar structure to their tour. Whether the environment
40
41 walked through is outdoors around a built up landscape (buildings and open areas), a
42
43 cemetery, or a single site such as a hotel or decommissioned building, the tour offers a
44
45 minimum of at least eight ghosts, or put more succinctly, at least one every ten minutes of the
46
47 average 60-80 minutes spent walking. At pre-designated stops along the way at sites
48
49 notorious for ghostly manifestations, the guide will draw the walkers in and describe events
50
51 that precipitated a haunting. The ghost is “introduced” to the group, along with descriptions
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3 of known reports of manifestations. The ghost is usually adult who when seen, is dressed in
4 the costume of its day. Very occasionally the ghost may be an animal, such as a dog. The
5 showcasing of the ghost of a child is rare, although in places where there has been
6 widespread death through disease such as plague, the ghost of an abandoned or lost child may
7 feature. The era of the ghost will also vary, but generally, they belong to eras before the 20th
8 century. One English operator has “no ghosts after the Victorian period”. He puts this down
9 to the rise in popularity of ghost stories in the Victorian period. In Salem (USA) an operator
10 suggests that unlike England, American history has not been recorded so well and this can
11 lead to a shortage of ghosts. He goes on to state that in Chicago there is much more emphasis
12 on gruesome murders than actual ghosts on tours. New Zealand, a country with a decidedly
13 shorter history than the other countries, has mainly early 20th century hauntings to report;
14 perhaps reflective of the relative youth of the country and the absence of devastating plagues
15 and battles that led to widespread death.
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32 A contained tour length of 60-90 minutes stops people becoming bored and
33 ‘wandering off’ and secondly in recognition that tourists have often walked for long periods
34 of time during the day and may fatigue easily. Safety concerns influence both the route and
35 any theatrical additions. As almost all walks start in fading light and then carry on in
36 darkness, walking can become dangerous, particularly as some sites are reached through
37 narrow passageways, gates, and rough terrain or busy locations. In many of the locations,
38 buildings are flush with the pavement. Here, operators battle with traffic noise and passers-by
39 to be heard. This limits the amount of “fright” that can be created, as operators are very
40 cognisant of the possibility of startled customers jumping back onto a busy road or uneven
41 pathway.
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54 Customers are diverse. Some operators prefer bookings whilst others are happy with
55 ‘turn-ups’. Often, purchase decisions are via impulse, after a meal for entertainment before
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3 returning to accommodation for the night. When asked what type of customers are more
4
5 difficult groups under 30 years or “hen’s parties” are not always desirable because of the
6
7 possibility that the tour becomes, in the description of one operator, a “screamathon”.
8
9 Intoxication is not tolerated due to safety and potential nuisance value.

10
11 Atmosphere and mood are critical to the success of a tour. Many of the sites are
12
13 imbued with their own atmosphere; whether through the patina of age on buildings or natural
14
15 elements that come together to create an aura of mysteriousness or intrigue. One operator
16
17 reports an early visit to a neighbouring town where he now conducts nightly ghost tours:
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19

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21
22
23 I was visiting with my son and walked a path that I hadn’t seen before near the
24
25 rugby pitch. It was dripping in atmosphere: feeling old and overgrown with trees.

26
27 If I was ever going to see a ghost it would be here, it was a track, not an official
28
29 path. A few weeks later I found a book that described the area where I had been
30
31 with my son. We had been walking the ‘road of the dead’, the road where the
32
33 bodies were taken a century before from the village to the Cathedral
34
35 (Interviewee: Wales).
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37

38
39 Guides aim to set the mood or tone before the walk begins. This may mean setting rules; no
40
41 photography, mobile phones, people with ghost hunting equipment (which cause
42
43 distractions). Different tactics are used to stop people from talking and focus their attention.
44
45 Lighting is used to create atmosphere. Particularly when the walkers are asked to share their
46
47 own stories the lights are turned off.
48
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50

51
52 The atmosphere provides the greatest connection to the ghosts. At night it's very
53
54 atmospheric: a wooded lane overhanging trees, mist is rising off the fields and it's
55
56 quiet. People are not allowed to have any light on during the stories. Stories are
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3 in the dark and the customers are given torches to light their way (Interviewee:
4
5 Wales).

6
7
8 For the two hotels included in the respondent group (one a conversion from a historic
9 quarantine station and the other a floating hotel [ex-luxury passenger liner]) a large site
10 provides areas or rooms that are locked off to non-ghost seeking hotel patrons, or open only
11 during set daylight hours. These include derelict hospital wards, mortuaries, and engine
12 rooms and even for the floating hotel, a decommissioned first class swimming pool
13 resplendent in its art deco styling despite being observed by lamplight only. These spaces
14 remain to ensure the historical integrity of the site but due to their relative limited use by the
15 living, ample opportunity for ghosts to lurk is assured. Additionally, entering sites with keys
16 held on the guard, whether an empty building, passage or church burial ground, increases
17 suspense and the sense of being somewhere one “should not be” in real life, when one is not a
18 ghost walker.
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32 33 *3). Packaging the possible: Storytelling in the shadows*

34
35 Underlying the success of all the tours is storytelling; a key to holding the enthusiasm and
36 interest of the audience. All operators interviewed highly regard their skills in the art of
37 storytelling without forgoing authenticity and view this as a critical success factor. For them,
38 ghost tourism presents a unique occasion where adults can learn and be entertained through
39 stories, particularly in an age where science has stripped imagination and become the
40 dominant accepted way of knowing or regarding truth. One of the tour websites spells this out
41 clearly on its landing page as “visit some of the nation’s most historic haunted sites with the
42 art of ancient storytelling”. Ghost tour operators regard themselves as the keepers of a lost
43 art. Performance is an integral part of storytelling. The extent to which performance is used
44 on the tour along with “gimmicks” and humour depends often on the personality of the
45 operator. Operators believe that a good sense of humour will draw the audience to you. When
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3 an operator employs guides, the tour will often be scripted to ensure historical accuracy and
4
5 ensure an element of consistency. “Jumping out”, a tactic used to surprise or scare, is not
6
7 often used (six of the 16 operators only using this). First it can be very unsafe (one operator
8
9 recalled having to call emergency services for a customer when a costumed staff member
10
11 jumped out while the group was standing inside a mausoleum engrossed in a gripping story)
12
13 and second, most of the interviewees regard their tour as “scary enough” without the need for
14
15 gimmicks. Fifteen of the 21 interviewees dress in costume (Jack the Ripper is common)
16
17 fitting for the tone of the tour, but only three stay “in character” throughout. Dressing up
18
19 allows them to “stand apart” from the walkers but still be “with the living”. Guides can be
20
21 drawn from backgrounds in history, theatre and sometimes because of their knowledge of
22
23 local history. Guides are sought for their specific qualities; someone that will “mentally
24
25 embrace the audience, someone that shares intrigue, is open minded, enthusiastic, a good
26
27 storyteller, engaging but not theatrical, more subtle and who will keep the audience on their
28
29 toes” (Interviewee: USA). One operator avoids employing actors, since in his mind, they are
30
31 trained to rely on scripting and once a script has been exhausted, an actor can be “at a loss for
32
33 what to say”.

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39 *4). What if we really do see a ghost?*

40
41 On every tour it seems someone will ask “will I see a ghost tonight?” However unanimously
42
43 operators and guides concede that their customers don’t really expect to see one. What they
44
45 do expect however is an atmosphere where the sensation of anticipation prevails. Operators
46
47 themselves seem reticent about their belief in ghosts, with “I sort of do”, or similar, a
48
49 common response (18 of the 21). However some report being scared out of their wits at
50
51 times, so much so one operator recalls abandoning a tour when everyone became convinced
52
53 “something was there”. In regard to sensations such as prodding, scratching or tapping, more
54
55 were forthcoming that they have felt these from time to time. At the end of many tours,
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3 walkers are asked if they want to share their stories. This may be done at the end point of a
4
5 tour. Lights are turned off and the customers in a sense become co-creators or prosumers,
6
7 where they add to the suspense and intrigue of the night. Invariably many in the group can
8
9 recall a paranormal experience.
10

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13 5). *Authenticity*

14 Overwhelmingly, authenticity is considered a vital component of the quality of the tours.
15
16 Operators, are familiar with local folklore and nine of the 16 reported undertaking substantial
17
18 formal research (library and historical documents searches) into the history of the area and
19
20 how the ghost stories have evolved. They seem to take a great deal of pride in their
21
22 knowledge. Stories are not invented and all have a basis even with maybe a little
23
24 embellishment. One operator reports:
25
26

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29
30 It would be stupid to tell them crap as often as you are talking they are hooked to
31
32 the Internet on their smart phones looking it up (Interviewee: New Zealand).
33

34
35 Tours also often have locals present in the audience group who are well versed in local
36
37 history. As well as the stories of ghosts and hauntings, guides need a broader knowledge. One
38
39 operator recalls how walking through a historic burial ground he is often asked about several
40
41 other graves that are not included in the tour. He believes being able to share a good
42
43 knowledge of those adds further to the tour's authenticity.
44

45
46 Tour operators however know "the tricks of the trade" and while most are disparaging
47
48 of them, some will use a little "magic" if the situation calls for it. One interviewee spoke of
49
50 the fascination people have with orbs appearing in photographs walkers take:
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3 We all know if you shake up the carpet half an hour before the walk comes
4
5 through you'll always get someone capturing an orb in their photo (Interviewee:
6
7 USA).

8
9
10 *6). Assuring a ready supply of the living (a.k.a. customers)*

11
12 In the main, the businesses are small scale with one to two operators only conducting
13
14 one night tour most nights of the week. Some of the ventures offer variety in the choice of
15
16 tour. For instance a walking tour around the surrounding area might set off at the same time
17
18 as a tour walking to a single site such as an old prison. Variety is not always to meet a
19
20 growing market demand, but more often simple opportunism, where a site or building had
21
22 become available. Small overheads and relatively small staff costs mean that there is not the
23
24 constant demand for steady sales or growth. One operator reports that although he likes most
25
26 of his customers pre-purchasing tickets through the Internet, he relies heavily on turn-ups. If
27
28 no one comes, he just goes home. Although the winter does show a slowdown, as tourists are
29
30 less keen to be out in the weather at night, tours continue, rather moving them to an earlier
31
32 start. Seasonality can affect operations like any tourist enterprise. In larger operations this
33
34 allows for extra promotions, especially with Halloween and even Christmas. Ironically, in
35
36 areas where authenticity or associated reputation is strong, this seasonality can be
37
38 problematic. In Salem, one tour operator says he closes down on Halloween, rather than face
39
40 or try and operate amongst the hordes of party goers who come into the town that night.

41
42
43 Some operators promote through tourism centres using conventional media such as
44
45 pamphlets. This is dependent on acceptance by these centres to promote ghost tourism
46
47 alongside more mainstream tourism (five operators reported resistance by local tourism
48
49 organisations to carrying their promotional material). For many, word of mouth and customer
50
51 testimonials are critical. Banners or sandwich boards in locations (dependent on local council
52
53 rulings) with heavy tourist traffic during the day also work well for the spontaneous purchase.
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3 In areas where competition is high, costumed guides are on the street early in the day where
4 tourist traffic is heavy in an effort to engage with potential customers who might consider
5 coming back in the evening to join a tour. Traditional word of mouth (WOM) works well for
6 the local tourist market, but e-WOM as positive testimonials and UGC (both narrative and
7 photos) on both owner sites and external sites such as Trip Advisor are increasingly key.
8 Websites are diverse in their offering and fall along a wide spectrum of sophistication. Many
9 use imagery to convey meaning; photography, animation and narrative to inspire. Very often,
10 the characteristics and attributes of the tour guide are noted, this being an important aspect of
11 the service encounter. A spooky but fun time is generally emphasised.

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23 Larger operations, in particular the two hotel respondents, show evidence of clearer
24 segmentation, targeting and positioning strategies. Both believe that offering ghost tours
25 alongside their more usual hospitality offerings; a night's sleep and food services, did not
26 cause conflict or customer resistance, as it was clear on the website that this was the case;
27 also, here more diversity of tours could be offered. For instance, those for children and
28 promoted as "family-friendly fun". Both hotel sites also offered paranormal investigation
29 experiences but these are contracted out to specialist paranormal "experts". However, they
30 all agreed that ghost tour offerings as part of the wider product bundle offer were contingent
31 on the current positioning of the hotel/ hotel chain and positive customer feedback.

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44 *7). Respecting the sacred amongst the profane*

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46
47 Operators are very aware of past human suffering as a basis for their commercial opportunity.
48
49 Many operators report the need to record and re-tell these stories sensitively at the same time
50 as meeting the expectations of those whose interest is primarily a paranormal experience or
51 fun. In Salem (USA), one operator discussed how his tour must tactfully integrate the history
52 of the witch trials of the 1690's as they are now a key reason for the prosperous tourism
53 industry there and cannot be ignored. Likewise, in England, there are stories told of children,
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3 for example, being locked in and abandoned to die alone during the plague who appear as
4
5 ghosts at a window. This would be expected to impact on the emotions of all but the
6
7 extremely hardy. In New Zealand, Maori have a deep connection with the land and their
8
9 ancestors (Amoamo, 2007). One walking tour site is built on land important to ancient Maori.
10
11 The tour operator discusses how before each tour commences, a short time of reflection is
12
13 held in the group. In this way, the spirits of the dead are respected. This is the only location
14
15 where “intercession” to show respect is a formal part of the event and may suggest a different
16
17 cultural interpretation of connection with the dead, compared with other locations and
18
19 countries in the study.
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26 **Discussion: EM dimensions identified**

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28
29 This section turns now to discussion of the extent to which EM is a feature of ghost tourism
30
31 in order to address the research questions more completely. In order to do this the seven
32
33 underlying dimensions of EM suggested by Morris *et al.* (2002) are applied to the earlier
34
35 themes and as a framework to guide the way in which the data is read. As previously
36
37 discussed, there was marked interweaving of the aspects within Morris *et al.*'s (2002)
38
39 definition of EM observed during thematic analysis. This interweaving is also noted when
40
41 applying the discrete EM dimensions. However, direct dimension-theme links are provided
42
43 below where appropriate. To refresh, the themes presented in the previous section are 1).
44
45 Essentials for walking on the light side: passion, ghosts and atmosphere, 2). Designing and
46
47 delivering the product: an eclectic but convenient curation, 3). Packaging the possible:
48
49 Storytelling in the shadows, 4). What if we really do see a ghost? 5). Authenticity, 6).
50
51 Assuring a ready supply of the living (a.k.a. customers), and 7). Respecting the sacred
52
53 amongst the profane. Each of the seven underlying dimensions of EM suggested by Morris *et*
54
55 *al.* (2002) found to be evident of EM within the themes are discussed in turn below.
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3 *Dimension 1). Opportunity driven:* Ghost tour operators have capitalised on the
4
5 Western global trend of increased interest in the paranormal. As entrepreneurs, ghost tour
6
7 operators identify opportunities as they appear and move rapidly to secure ownership or
8
9 access to them (*Theme 6*). Being in tune with the architecture and history of the land they are
10
11 able to determine if something is a worthwhile proposition for inclusion and as Stokes (2000)
12
13 points out, are intuitively driven. This may be taking advantage of a space or place that has
14
15 become vacant or recently available. For example in Brisbane, knowledge that a prison being
16
17 decommissioned had an existing history for being haunted within the local community meant
18
19 that one operator pursued access and permission to use the site as a key component of his
20
21 product offering (*Theme 1*). Likewise, the operators whose tours were based in hotel sites
22
23 made use of spaces that no longer had a current function or usage (for example in one, the
24
25 original first class swimming pool). Opportunities are also realised from a location's unique
26
27 history and tours designed to incorporate that. For instance, a town associated with gruesome
28
29 murders will offer tours built around that theme, such as Jack the Ripper tours in London.
30
31 Where once past tragedies or brutal historical events may have been viewed by local
32
33 inhabitants as a stigma or legacy to avoid, ghost tour operators maximise this to harness the
34
35 touristic potential (*Theme 1*). While acknowledging the historic events as misconceived or
36
37 regrettable, tour operators incorporate the history to create atmosphere and interest whilst
38
39 maintaining authenticity and ultimately turning the past to advantage for product
40
41 development (*Themes 2 and 7*).
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48 *Dimension 2). Proactiveness:* Flexibility and ability to adapt to a changing
49
50 environment is evident through the findings (*Theme 1*). With few barriers to entry
51
52 competition can be intense. Holding market share can merely be the quality of storytelling or
53
54 the way the guide engages its audience (*Themes 3, 5 and 6*). One operator states that
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3 protection from competitive forces comes from ensuring that you are known for maintaining
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5 quality:
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9 Yeah, there a no barriers to entry really. With the whole paranormal thing
10 kicking in it just went crazy. You could put up a sign tomorrow and start. So you
11 have to adapt. The strength lies in being solid. Essentially we're story tellers. The
12 guides don't just stand and point, they re-enact it. In a small place like this, no
13 one can really gain a foothold, as they know I have it and that I'm good.
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19 (Interviewee: USA).
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26 *Dimension 3). Innovation-focused:* Ghost tour operators design innovative products to create
27 value for their customers. A landscape, whether bricks and mortar or a natural setting may
28 well have an "atmosphere" inherent to it, but it is the tour operator who maximises the blank
29 canvas to create a servicescape that meets expectations and satiates the hedonic thirst of
30 customers (*Theme 2*). The core product, essentially a short walk in the dark, becomes an
31 experience aimed at exhilarating and heightening feelings so that the customer group
32 becomes for a time at least, acutely aware of what might be "in the shadows". Tours are
33 adjusted as a result of customer feedback and new tours or promotions added as opportunity
34 avails itself (*Themes 1, 3 and 6*).
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46 *Dimension 4). Customer intensity:* Operators know the importance of getting a group
47 to gel at the beginning of a tour. Likewise aspects of practice discussed under value creation
48 as co-creation are equally applicable here as "marketing as tactics", where creative
49 relationship management is employed through the encouragement of imagination or
50 suspension of disbelief. A shared excitement and enthusiasm is also recognised as necessary
51 for success. This can be difficult to achieve within the first few minutes, given the group can
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3 be from a wide range of demographics, some potentially with limited knowledge of the local
4
5 language. While authors talk of the need to control for drunkenness or other forms of
6
7 disruptive behaviour, boredom within the group or people wandering off can be equally
8
9 disturbing (*Themes 1, 2, 3 and 4*).

10
11
12 *Dimension 5). Risk management:* Although there are fewer barriers to entry and
13
14 capital requirements to set up a ghost tour enterprise, there are risks. Access, withdrawal of
15
16 permission from a landowner or local council to a key site, or changes in regulations and
17
18 licencing requirements are all factors that can rapidly come about and are therefore regarded
19
20 as a constant potential risk (*Theme 1*). Likewise, if an operator has a contract with another
21
22 business for access to a site, such as a hotel, a change in strategic direction or product focus
23
24 could also lead to loss of what is essentially the main asset of the business. For instance, a
25
26 hotel may decide to try and shed its reputation for being haunted and focus on more lucrative
27
28 ventures such as weddings, considering the two as non-compatible ventures to accommodate
29
30 on the one site (*Theme 6*). In some areas, ghost tourism may still be stigmatised and not
31
32 considered a bona fide tourism activity. If a local tourist network decides to exclude
33
34 promotion of ghost tourism, or even if costs are prohibitive, this leaves the operator outside
35
36 of many of the usual ways of communicating with potential customers and reliant on more
37
38 creative ways to connect (*Theme 6*).

39
40
41 *Dimension 6). Resource Leveraging:* As small business ventures, ghost tour
42
43 businesses are often established and sustained on limited budgets with extremely lean
44
45 infrastructure. This means that staff attributes such as passion and the ability to capture
46
47 audience imagination and intrigue through story telling is critical to success. Consequently,
48
49 for the storyteller as owner, or as an employee guide possessing the desired skills (passion
50
51 and knowledge) are a critical resource (*Themes 1, 2 and 3*). Local folklore also provides
52
53 opportunity for resource leveraging. It is often through folklore that stories of haunting are
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3 passed down. By capitalising on this, understanding the roots and origins of the stories and
4
5 then referring to additional sources for information (such as libraries), operators provide an
6
7 authentic re-telling of the event behind the ghost encounter. To harness what the environment
8
9 offers, operators capitalise on what they “see” as potential to curate a ghost tour touristscape
10
11 (and that others often cannot) and the communication skills possessed within themselves or
12
13 staff to produce commercial profits (*Themes 2, 3 and 5*). As one operator reports, landscape
14
15 that has little value commercially for any other business can be considered as gold to a ghost
16
17 tour operator:
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23 We tour around the [] cemetery. It’s a Victorian Gothic cemetery with lots of
24
25 well-known early locals buried there. It’s such a place nobody really cared about
26
27 and had lots of gory stories associated with it. I said, we’ve got to go there, it’s
28
29 just stunning. (Interviewee: New Zealand).
30
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35 *Dimension 7). Value Creation:* Creating value for customers through satisfying experiences is
36
37 vital. The needs and wants of customers are a top priority (*Theme 6*). As it is highly unlikely
38
39 the full force of a “real” ghost will be encountered en route, what constitutes customer
40
41 satisfaction must be clearly understood. Therefore providing the “chance” of seeing a ghost is
42
43 the value within the exchange. For this to occur, the creation of atmosphere and effective
44
45 storytelling about historical “others” that brings to the fore human emotions that resonate
46
47 within the lifeworld of present day walkers is essential. On the tour, customers also work
48
49 together to co-create the value of the intangible component of the tour (*Themes 2, 3 and 4*):
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3 People on the tour, I think they're completely normal. I don't have many
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5 fruitcakes on the tour. If they share their experiences the whole thing is more
6
7 convincing for everyone. It's made me a believer (Interviewee: England).
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12 This co-creation can also be made more formal by the guide encouraging group members to
13
14 share their stories at the end of a tour:
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18 Stokes (2000) found that entrepreneurial marketers rely heavily on customer word of
19
20 mouth or customer recommendation to increase their customer base. Encouraging UGC on
21
22 tour sites or external travel sites such as Trip Advisor with shared tour photos and any
23
24 "ghostly encounters" captured (orbs, shadows, unusual shadows or figures captured in
25
26 images) creates engagement, credibility and interest within the prospective customer group
27
28 and works toward building community and establishing brand value (*Theme 6*). This is
29
30 especially important in a tourism offering that is essentially an experience-based pure service.
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37 **Conclusions, Managerial Recommendations and Future Research**

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40 The use of a bricolage qualitative approach provided a unique opportunity to investigate
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42 ghost tourism from the perspective of tour operators as they conduct marketing within their
43
44 business. As their products are overwhelmingly service and customer experience-based
45
46 (common to many small tourism ventures), it is not easy, or appropriate, to investigate
47
48 marketing strategies and tactics they use as an isolated dimension of their business. Rather
49
50 marketing engaged in was considered as a complex intertwining of factors conceived and
51
52 delivered both outside of and inside the ghost tour itself. From the interpretation of the data
53
54 and the themes drawn from it, whether ghost tour operators practised traditional marketing in
55
56 a textbook prescribed fashion or whether there was strong evidence that satisfied the
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3 dimensions of EM was considered. To do this the seven underlying dimensions laid out by
4
5 Morris *et al.* (2002) were used and applied to the broad themes identified through primary
6
7 and secondary data collection. Whilst a relatively prescribed formula has been identified
8
9 across the tours and as Garcia (2012) suggests, a homogenisation of offering, the study
10
11 concludes that strong elements of EM are observed. In particular, each of the EM dimensions
12
13 were found: opportunity driven, proactiveness, innovation focused, customer intensity, risk
14
15 management, resource leveraging and value creation present and interwoven throughout the
16
17 practice themes.
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21 It can be further concluded that the EM dimensions proposed by Morris *et al.* (2002)
22
23 identified in this study exist mainly at the cultural and tactical levels of the framework.
24
25 Factors suggested as relevant to marketing as strategy within the framework are less
26
27 prominent in our findings. This may be because the vast majority of the operators are sole
28
29 traders or owner-operated with few staff, and therefore, do not have a strongly articulated
30
31 company marketing strategy. For example, a slim infrastructure and absence of company
32
33 bricks and mortar may reduce the influence of resource leveraging at the strategic level.
34
35 Likewise, arguably value-creation is embedded at the tactical level rather than a clearly
36
37 developed strategy due to the intensely experiential nature of the ghost tour product with its
38
39 heterogeneous and co-created sources of customer value.
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44 In regard to managerial recommendations, it is important that ghost tour operators
45
46 recognise the often entrepreneurial nature of their business and the importance of effective
47
48 marketing for sustainability. For many of these operators traditional marketing is not
49
50 effective (Kocak, 2004; Morris *et al.*, 2002; Stokes, 2000), and other evolutionary forms of
51
52 marketing, such as those the EM dimensions framework brings together appear favoured. An
53
54 understanding of these, and how to generate value created by them, is essential. Although EM
55
56 harnesses the exploitation of resources and creativity to maximise commercial opportunity
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3 and profits provided by tragedy, such a strategy remains a much contested issue in dark
4
5 tourism (Garcia, 2012) and one from which entrepreneurial marketers cannot be exempt. In
6
7 ghost tourism, entertainment and embellishment of stories are a strong component of
8
9 innovation-focused and value-creation dimensions. However, operators need to be mindful of
10
11 the fact that they are important keepers and re-tellers of stories around human suffering and
12
13 tragedy, which may impose limitations on the exploitation of resources that ethically should
14
15 be leveraged to build and promote their products.
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20 Future research could apply the framework in more detail to identify and discriminate
21
22 what parts of the dimensions make up the cultural, strategic and tactical layers more
23
24 specifically. The appropriateness of Morris *et al.*'s (2002) framework to examine tourism
25
26 ventures that operate with extremely lean organisational structure or focus heavily on
27
28 entrepreneur/ customer value generation co-created in the moment would be worthwhile.
29
30 Research into the dynamics of EM and evolving conceptualisations of S-D logic (Vargo and
31
32 Lusch, 2004, 2008; Vargo *et al.*, 2008.) is emergent (see Whalen and Akaka, 2016) but would
33
34 be valuable in the context of experiential products such as ghost tourism. A study focusing
35
36 solely on ghost tour ventures that are incorporated as part of a service bundle of organisations
37
38 with larger infrastructure, such as hotel chains, would be helpful in eliciting EM dimensions
39
40 at the "marketing as strategy" level for special interest tourism. In addition, this study has
41
42 been limited to ghost tours and may not be generalisable to other dark tourism ventures,
43
44 particularly those of a darker nature on Stone's (2006) spectrum. Examination of EM across
45
46 the broader context of dark tourism, particularly incorporating ventures of a darker nature, or
47
48 those with more institutionalised or government-sponsored support would also be valuable.
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54 To conclude, this study contributes to a focus on EM in the context of tourism; in
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56 particular, to understanding the interactions between EM and the marketing of experiential
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58 products. Further research in the area is welcomed.
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Qualitative Market Research

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Table 1: Applying Entrepreneurial Marketing at Three Different Levels

EM Dimension*	Level at Which Marketing is Applied		
	Marketing as Culture	Marketing as Strategy	Marketing as Tactics
Opportunity driven	A philosophy of continuous recognition and pursuit of opportunity without regard to resources controlled	Strategies focusing on new products and markets based on expanded opportunity horizon	Real-time intelligence to find untapped opportunities; Alternative methodologies to discover unmet needs; Rapid learning from market experiments so as to redefine opportunities
Proactiveness	Action orientation, organisation as agent of change, redefining industry practices and challenging assumptions	Defining new market positions; leadership of customers and markets	Speedy development and launch of new products and marketing approaches; Ongoing experimentation with untested guerrilla and viral tactics
Innovation-focused	Philosophy that promotes new and different solutions; leading the customer, and firm as innovation factory, spirit of healthy dissatisfaction	Continuously redefining the product and market context, strategy to manage a portfolio of innovations	Active participation of marketing on teams developing major innovations; Highly inventive approaches to new product and service development
Customer Intensity	Reinforce passion for the customer; Marketer as agent for the customer	Strategic customer-focused interaction, bringing the customer into the firms planning and operations	Customisation via segmentation and niche marketing, creative relationship management tactics, incentives to encourage organisational learning
Risk management	Comfort level with random variance and ambiguity	Managed risk through higher levels of innovation and more rapid organisational learning	Employment of initiatives to mitigate risks through alliances, test markets, trial launches, lead user research
Resource leveraging	Resourcefulness in doing more with less; marketer as middleman tapping a network of non-imitable competencies	Leveraging drives strategic decisions regarding core processes, outsourcing strategic alliances	Exploit underutilised resources and skills, creative methods for contracting, bartering, sharing, borrowing, renting, outsourcing
Value creation	Vigilance in seeking novel sources of value from throughout the firm	Value-based strategies designed around customer intimacy	Continuous exploration for novel sources of customer value in each element of marketing mix

Source: Morris, Schindehutte, and LaForge (2002) Table 3, p. 10

*Heading adapted from original source