

'Welcome to the home of Auschwitz tours': The Online Marketing of Genocide Tourism

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the online promotion by private tour operators of the World War Two Nazi extermination camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau in southern Poland. The chapter contributes to understanding how genocide is commoditised by private enterprise, revealing some of the techniques used to transform 'atrocities' into 'attractions'. Data for the chapter was obtained through content analysis of a sample of twenty five commercial tour operators' websites. Results indicated that a hard sell approach, focused on price, comfort and convenience dominated the majority of the twenty five sampled companies and that companies provide sparse information on the camp itself, with little attempt made to foster experience.

Implications for management, which may arise from increased commodification, are outlined, as the chapter notes further potential threat to the memory of the camp. The chapter highlights the lack of ethical and moral considerations when promoting Auschwitz-Birkenau by private tour operators, resolving that ownership of the camp's memory may come under further threat without intervention.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. To understand the methods used by private tour operators in commercialising the death camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau.
2. To understand the implications for management when dealing with private commodification of sensitive sites.
3. To critique the moral and ethical considerations when promoting sites associated with death and disaster.

4. To identify other sites where knowledge and experience may be effectively transferred.

INTRODUCTION

Between 1942 and 1945, more than one million people, primarily Jews, were murdered at the World War 2 Nazi extermination camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau in southern Poland. This complex of extermination camps, which were designed as part of the Nazi's systematic plan to eliminate the Jewish population from Europe, formed part of a wider network of camps which ultimately murdered approximately three million Jews in Poland (Auschwitz Birkenau State Museum (*hereon* ABSM), 2013).

Since the camp's liberation in 1945, it has been subjected to various 'ownership' claims and threats to the memory of the camp (Young, 2009). Today the camps exist as State museums, and the complex is listed by *Lonely Planet* as one of Poland's must see tourist attractions (Biran, Poria & Oren, 2011). Auschwitz-Birkenau is visited en-masse by national and international tourists, who take part in with regular guided tours, meet survivors and see original artefacts and interpretation material (ABSM, 2013).

The camp has featured prominently in tourism discourse throughout the last decade (for examples, see Lennon and Foley, 2000, Stone, 2006, Biran, Poria and Oren, 2011, Thurnell-Read, 2009), given the large numbers visiting the site and the complexity of the narrative on display. However, as the number of international visitors reaches almost 1.5 million annually, this chapter suggests that the prevalence of private business operating camp tours needs to be addressed carefully going forward. The companies, it would appear, compete on price, convenience and access, rather than one would hope, on interpretation, historical prowess or ethical and responsible standards.

Somewhat surprisingly the marketing of Auschwitz-Birkenau has not been researched in any great detail in recent years. Commodification of Auschwitz-Birkenau has of course been studied before, but it is worth returning to the debate at this juncture, given the increased interest in the site in recent years and the arrival of ever more tour companies offering packaged visits to the camp. While subjecting one of the most notorious sites of human suffering to an empirical marketing analysis is likely to raise discomfort with many, the prevalence of private industry tours to Birkenau is clearly a phenomena worth studying, and thus the focus of this chapter. Given that many private commercial companies offer tours to this most complex of sites, it would be a reasonable assumption that the camp would have featured more prominently in tourism marketing literature. The chapter helps address this gap and contribute to thanatourism literature by analysing and discussing the content of online tour operators' promotional material on the camp. Specific objectives of the chapter are to explore 1) how Auschwitz-Birkenau is promoted online by private tour operators, and 2) assess if the method and scale of promotion of the camp online is likely to threaten the memory of the camp.

DEFINING THANATOURISM

Thanatourism, the preferred term for this chapter, has been variously termed 'dark tourism' (Foley and Lennon, 1996), 'grief tourism' (Blom, 2000) and 'black spots' (Rojek, 1993), but all, in one form or another, describe tourism to sites associated with death and disaster. Although thanatourism is not a new practice (Casbeard & Booth, 2012, Johnston, 2013, Seaton, 1999, Seaton, 2009), it is an increasingly pervasive phenomenon in contemporary society (Stone, 2006). Many notorious global sites with complex and painful history have reported increased tourist numbers in recent years (Stone, 2009), most notably at Auschwitz-Birkenau (ABSM, 2013), which has more than trebled its visitor numbers in the past two decades. Such figures have appealed to the imagination of the tourism academy, and as a result, thanatourism has featured prominently in the literature since the mid-1990s. Travel to Auschwitz-Birkenau, has frequently been situated under the thanatourism

umbrella; a significant proportion of the literature discusses the camp, which has even been termed 'the pinnacle of European dark tourism', Tarlow (2005, p.58).

However, the terms 'thanatourism' and 'dark tourism' are contested and their usefulness is being increasingly questioned. Seaton (2009), for example, argues that 'dark tourism' has pejorative connotations and is loaded and subjective. Poria & Biran (2012) argue that thanatourism is not in fact a new form or appropriate classification tourism, and is instead simply a form of heritage tourism, while others question if it really is a discourse worth furthering at all, specifically by questioning the appropriateness of the application of the label 'dark' to tourists. Biran et al (2011) and Bowman and Pezzullo (2010) further argue that although a site may be 'dark', the sought or actual experience of the tourist may be a socially 'bright' one, or at the very least one not motivated by a desire to contemplate mortality.

While the majority of early publications in the field tended to focus on the supply side characteristics of the phenomenon (Stone, 2009), recent research has discussed the motivations for visiting thanatourism sites and the impact thanatourism experiences have on tourists. Biran *et al* (2011, p.836), for example, study tourist motivations to visit Auschwitz-Birkenau, resolving that 'motives are varied, and include a desire to learn and understand the history presented, a sense of "see it to believe it," and interest in having an emotional heritage experience'. However, it could be argued that whether or not thanatourism is a supply or demand driven phenomenon is not yet resolved (Seaton, 2009), despite the recent publications. Further to this, Seaton (2009) laments the lack of empirical data in the thanatourism field more generally. He argues that the rush to theorise, model and categorise the tourism industry's reproduction of death, and subsequent tourist consumption of death, has been of detrimental value in how we understand the broad concepts of thanatourism. It would appear self-evident that analysis of promotional material can make a contribution to this debate.

As a result of its history and pervasive nature, thanatourism has attracted multi-disciplinary attention since it was coined as a term by Seaton (1996). Contributions have come from tourism scholars (Biran *et al*, 2011), legal scholars (Simic, 2009), geographers (Ashworth, 2004), sociologists (Stone, 2006, 2009) and many other social scientists, yet, as noted previously, are surprisingly absent from marketing, beyond appearing as a fleetingly example in conceptual marketing discourse by Brown, McDonagh and Schultz (2012), who theorise consumption of death within a 'dark marketing' framework. Brown *et al* propose that dark marketing 'is the application or adaptation of marketing principles and practices to domains of death, destruction and the ostensibly reprehensible' (2012, p196).

However, beyond Brown *et al*, thanatourism appears to have been subjected to little empirical analysis in marketing discourse. This is surprising. It would seem that marketing should be an important area of consideration for the management of difficult sites, given the inherent dangers of the increased commodification of sites of suffering, and especially the danger of losing 'ownership' of the memory tragic events. Friedrich and Johnston (2013), for example, in relation to the Rwandan Genocide, warn that 'negotiating complex history within the expectations of the demanding tourism industry creates many management and interpretation challenges. Thus, a great deal of thanatourism literature focuses on how genocide is (re)produced for tourist consumption' (p 304). Further to this, as a result of the cross disciplinary attention, labelling discontent and history of the phenomenon, tourism to sites of death has been theorised within a variety of frameworks, including Orientalism, (Seaton, 2009), secularisation (Stone, 2009), as being congruent with wider societal interest in death (Walter, 2009) and Romanticism (Seaton, 2009). Most controversially, the phenomenon is often situated within a postmodernist frame of reference, whether explicitly, as it is in Lennon and Foley's (2000) *Dark Tourism*, or more by implication, as it is in Rojek's (1993) chapter on *Fatal Attractions*.

While there is arguably some merit to drawing on postmodern theory to interrogate the late twentieth and early twenty-first century growth in thanatourism - such as, as suggested by Lennon & Foley, (2000), through consideration of society's discomfort with the project of modernity, society's misuse of rational planning, and the growing influence of the mass media – the notion of thanatourism being either temporally or phenomenologically postmodern has been challenged by several (see Casbeard and Booth, 2012, Johnston, 2013, Seaton, 2009). Seaton (2009), one of the strongest opponents notes that since travel to sites of death has existed throughout history, the postmodern frame of reference is rendered inaccurate, or, as Casbeard and Booth put it, 'incoherent and unhistorical', (Casbeard and Booth, 2012, p. 6).

Despite such challenges to usefulness of such an approach, Brown *et al* (2012) posit that thanatourism can be situated presented within a postmodern frame of reference for several reasons. Firstly, the compression of time and space, is frequently investigated in the sub-discipline of thanatourism (for a recent example, see Stone's 2013 paper on Chernobyl as a heterotopia). This chapter further draws upon such a frame of reference, examining as it does, the relationship between internet marketing and genocide tourism, which allow immediate and virtual consumption of an 'attraction' from a distance. Secondly, given that 'increasingly blurred boundaries between education and entertainment' often feature as a tenet of postmodernism (Brown *et al*, 2012, p197), tourism at a notorious site like Auschwitz-Birkenau – a place which should have deep educational value –is often categorised as postmodern. This notion gives rise to the overall aim of the chapter; to exploring the marketing of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

A large volume of the work on memorialisation, camp conservation and management examines the complex relationship between tourism and memory at Auschwitz-Birkenau, particularly in relation to who 'owns' the site (e.g. Charlesworth, 1994, Cole, 1999, Pollock, 2003). During the Cold War, for

example, Polish communists used the camp to espouse nationalist beliefs (Young, 2009), a role which changed in the early 1990s with the end of the Cold War and the subsequent arrival of international visitors and particularly descendants and survivors. The camp has also been contested by the Catholic Church and various Jewish groups (Cole, 1999), with each laying claim on particular memories and narratives.

Since the end of the cold war, the camp has received great numbers of visitors and has thus featured prominently in social science literature, incorporating work from geographers, sociologists, historians and many others. Studies related specifically to the management of Auschwitz-Birkenau have focused on a variety of themes, including morality (Charlesworth, 2004), ecology (Charlesworth & Addis, 2002), education (Charlesworth, 1996), interpretation (Miles, 2002), memorialisation (Keil, 2005), tourist motivations (Biran *et al*, 2011). While Auschwitz-Birkenau dominates thanatourism literature, studies at other Shoah sites related to tourism, include research in Buchenwald (Beech, 2000), Yad Vashem (Cohen, 2011) and Nuremberg (Macdonald, 2006), among others.

Despite the breadth of empirical material, little has been published related to site marketing. Observations from the authors on the methods and numbers of companies promoting tours to Auschwitz-Birkenau provoked questions relating to the marketing and promotion of the site by private enterprise. To date there is little existing literature containing empirical data on the scale or methods of companies who promote genocide as an attraction. Further exploratory analysis of this area gave rise to the first objective of the chapter; to examine how Auschwitz-Birkenau is promoted online by private tour operators.

The second objective for this chapter grew from consideration of the large volume of existing material on thanatourism and the management Auschwitz-Birkenau. With reference to dark tourism, Stone (2012, p. 1573) posits that it 'may engender personal meaningfulness and ontological

security', or in other words, visits to sites of death can be exceptionally powerful experiences, which may have deep personal impacts on a tourist. Such impacts are particularly evident at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Charlesworth (1994) for example, notes the educational potential of a visit to the camp and the impact a visit had on some undergraduate students.

Based on this material, a second objective emerged concerning the threat to camp 'ownership', the dangers of commodification and (mis)interpretation and the ethics of cashing in on tragedy. This is an especially important and timely question, given the rapid and likely future increases in tourism to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

THANATOURISM AT THE AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU EXTERMINATION CAMP

The Auschwitz-Birkenau Extermination Camp comprises three main sites; Auschwitz-1, Auschwitz-II Birkenau and Auschwitz-III Monowitz. Between 1942 and 1945, until the camp was liberated by Soviet troops, some 1.3 million people were killed at the site, the vast majority of whom were Jewish (Cole, 1999). Today the Auschwitz camps are preserved as memorials to the victims of the Holocaust. The sites are managed by the Auschwitz Birkenau Memorial State Museum (ABMSM), which employ 300 guides, working in 20 languages to meet the needs of the large numbers of visitors. In 2012, 1.43 million people visited Auschwitz; 446,000 from Poland where the camp features on the high school curriculum, followed by large numbers from Britain (149,200), the United States (96,900), Italy (84,500), Germany (74,500), Israel (68,000) and other countries (ABMSM, 2013). Biran *et al*, (2011, p. 837) term the camp 'the symbol of dark tourism'.

Figures from the Auschwitz Birkenau State Museum reveal that 72% of the 1.43 million visitors in 2012 were classified by the museum as 'young', meeting the desire of many for genocide education to 'penetrate the youthful fabric of society' (ABMSM, 2013, p.7). Motivations to visit the camp have been recorded by the museum as seeking 'knowledge of the history of the camp' (33.2%), in

'remembrance of the victims' (19.6%), 'paying tribute to the victims of the camp' (13.7%) and 'curiosity' (12.6%), (ABMSM, 2013). While entry to Auschwitz is free of charge without a guide (ABMSM, 2013), and public transport to the museums is low cost and frequent (ABMSM), many private companies sell tours to Auschwitz. Departing from the nearby cities of Krakow or Katowice, but often from much further afield and even overseas, these tours include budget offerings of guided group tours and transport for less than €20 per person, to private tours with limousine transport and personalised itineraries. The investigation of the online promotion of Auschwitz by Polish tour companies represents the first main objective of this chapter.

METHODS & MATERIALS

The use of the Internet as a marketing tool has been broadly accepted in tourism literature, while the assessment of website effectiveness has been supported by academic researchers for some time (Lepp & Lane, 2010). Thanatourism does not circumvent this movement, but it must be questioned if marketing scholars have dealt fairly with this 'hot topic', or has it been considered as simply just the marketing of yet another tourist attraction. As Brown *et al* (2012, p.12) write, 'all marketing, to put it in an admittedly contentious way, is dark marketing'. Regardless of the experience fostered by websites, the Internet has increasingly become the most relevant communication channel for tourism attractions. It has allowed both suppliers and consumers to produce and disseminate information, conduct financial transactions and share tourist experiences to a global audience (Xiang & Gretzel, 2009).

RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to examine the online promotion of private company tours to Auschwitz Birkenau, a cross-sectional content analysis of websites was employed (Kassarjian, 1977). Content analysis represents a widely accepted and reliable method to investigate the depiction of websites elements, and validated across varied research contexts involving websites (Singh & Boughton, 2005; Tang, Choi,

Morrison, & Lehto, 2009). With the purpose of enhancing the internal validity of the investigation, a triangulation process of investigation was conducted. The three judges were academics with postgraduate qualification and experts in the fields of online marketing and thanatourism.

The content analysis encompassed qualitative and quantitative approaches. The quantitative method of analysis to investigate web-content was conducted through a numerical coding scheme, where the depiction of thanatourism content was ranked on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Prominently depicted” to “Not depicted at all” (Singh & Boughton, 2005). Through a systematic approach of evaluation, the written and visual web-content related to thanatourism and the promotion of Auschwitz tours were identified, evaluated and quantified, as the content analysis prerogative recommends (Kassarjian, 1977). This exact same approach has previously been validated, including, for example Murphy, Forrest, Wotring, and Brymer (1996) who applied it to evaluating hotel website features, producing a set of evaluation factors. Additional recent studies have also evaluated websites using only the numerical coding scheme, including Law and Leung (2002) who modified Liu and Arnett's (2000) model and Blum and Fallon (2002) who assessed 53 Welsh visitor attraction websites using a checklist that was originally produced by Dutta, Kwan, and Segev (1998). In the case of this present research, evaluation factors were modified by the researchers to fit the analysis of Auschwitz tour promoting websites, analysing websites under company profile, services offered and website features.

Complementary to the systematic quantification of web-content, images from the websites were also subjected to rigorous qualitative content analysis, using a method adapted from Rose (1996) to analyse image content, audience and production. Analysis focused on the analysis of signifiers of the information presented on the websites, including the type of image used by the website, e.g. barb wire fences, the ‘Arbeit macht frei’ gate, gas chambers, etc., image production methods and

content, including use of colour, vantage point and components, etc. and finally, the audiences for the images, including circulation methods and storage. Each element was analysed

Thus, the unit of analysis of the investigation involved all webpages of the websites. This allowed a comprehensive and holistic investigation of online dark marketing practices, through the use of a mix-methods approach and represents a significant contribution of the chapter.

PRE-TEST AND SAMPLE

Prior to the final data collection, a pre-test was conducted amongst three researchers with the objective of familiarizing them with the objects of investigation and to provide insights to possible modifications needed to the data collection instrument. A total of 15 dark-tourism related websites were analysed by each researcher, thus characterizing a triangulation procedure. Following this, results were cross-compared and inter-judge reliability results were over 80%, considered highly satisfactory (Kassarjian, 1977). Furthermore, whenever findings were inconsistent and when any discrepancies arose, consensus was achieved through group discussion. This allowed judges a much greater familiarity with the method used and provided the basis for a more rigorous final data collection.

The initial step of the final data collection consisted of the delimitation of the sample. Thus, a vast sample of enterprises promoting tours to the camp was first identified using multiple search engines, through the use of the following keywords: 'Auschwitz tour' and 'Auschwitz guided tour'.

After the initial list was created, the sites were screened in accordance with their suitability to the study, based on the availability of thanatourism content. Thus, the final sample of investigation comprised a total of twenty-five websites, from various countries, including Poland and the U.K. However, only the English versions of the sites were investigated. The final data collection was conducted from March to April 2013.

RESULTS

A number of key themes emerged from the analysis of the websites, primarily related to company profiles, website design and website visual and textual content. In relation to the first objective of exploring the scale and methods used by private tour companies to Auschwitz-Birkenau, it was observed that a hard sell approach, focused on price, comfort and convenience dominated the majority of the twenty five sampled companies. All twenty five offered online booking facilities, of which 40% (n10) highlighted that they were licensed companies, 56% (n14) noted that Auschwitz was a UNESCO World Heritage Site and 64% (n16) included customer reviews to boost company reputation and credibility.

The majority of tours included transport from Krakow to Oswiecim, where Auschwitz-Birkenau is located, with a guided tour of the camp. Several companies offered premium tours to the camp, such as offering limousine transportation, private guides, and in-transport documentaries for customers. Some tours included lunch, while others offered it as an additional extra, or the opportunity to stop for a break at the customer's request. 28% (n7) of the companies offered tours to Auschwitz-Birkenau as part of a package deal, where tours to the camp could be purchased for a discount when purchased as part of a day trip to other local attractions, most commonly the Wieliczka Salt Mine. 44% (n11) additionally sold accommodation, while 96% (n24) offered other tours beyond Auschwitz, including organising stag parties, shopping excursions, pub crawls, shooting, go-karting and airport transfers.

In relation to the second objective of the chapter, concerning the threat to site ownership, ethics and interpretation, it was observed that the websites offered little information on Auschwitz-Birkenau itself and interpretation of the Holocaust was limited or non-existent for many.

Additionally, any information which was offered by websites was frequently contradictory or vague. Figures related to the number killed at Auschwitz Birkenau, for example, varied from 1.1million to

'millions'. Although it is acknowledged that numbers do indeed remain contested, many of the websites offered no contextualisation of the figures. Further to this, 52% (n13) made no mention of the origin of victims. Only one website advertised its tours primarily based on guides' expertise and only two through offering customers greater levels of privacy or intimacy. Reflection on the 'appropriateness' of touring Auschwitz as an attraction was very limited, with only one website negotiating the paradox of consuming death as an attraction.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Should one visit Auschwitz? It is a difficult question, and a deeply personal one.... And certainly, having seen the camps (regardless of how many other groups are also filing through) few will regret the experience. The camps and their legacy are an indelible part of today's world, and visiting them is both sobering and edifying.

(Krakow Tours, 2013)

While the commodification of death for the tourism industry has long been recognised (Seaton, 2009) and the trivialisation of difficult heritage is an equally established discourse in geographies of tourism literature (Ashworth, 2004), it is nonetheless likely the pervasiveness and marketing methods of Holocaust tour companies may surprise many. The scale and methods revealed by the analysis present very little concern or empathy with memory, interpretation and the ethics of commodifying genocide. One company, for example, goes as far as categorising Auschwitz-Birkenau under 'theme parks' in its website structure; in what is arguably one of the least subtle exemplifications of Disneyfication a social science researcher will encounter.

Although trivialisation of Auschwitz has been discussed before (see Cole, 1999, for example) the majority of work related to site guardianship and management has focused on contestations related to governance, funding and memory, site ownership, political collaboration and religious tensions.

Continuation of such approaches in future - at the expense of exploring the highly prominent online role of private enterprise - could be to the detriment of understanding some of the new economies and contestations emerging at the camp. This chapter does not suggest that the rapidly increasing demand to visit to the camp (ABSMM, 2013) is solely a result of the increased number tour companies, but there is a clear argument that such companies are assuming increased responsibility in delivering the camp to international audiences.

It has further been argued that great educational potential exists at Holocaust sites (Charlesworth, 1996). While Cohen (2011) suggests that 'dark' tourists who find their experience challenging are those who are most likely to find it fulfilling, this chapter suggests that private companies running Auschwitz-Birkenau tours do not attempt to foster challenging experiences and instead compete on pricing, convenience and comfort variables. The role played by such companies in relation to Auschwitz-Birkenau raises many ethical questions; for example, should one visit one of the most notorious sites in the world, hosted by a company which specialises in stag parties?

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is an established notion that tourism turns culture into a commodity, and even though in the case of this research it is a thanatourism product under investigation, death is packaged and sold to tourists in the same way other products have been commodified for tourism. Research to date on tourism at Auschwitz-Birkenau has been relatively diverse to date encompassing many moral debates. Yet questions remain surrounding managerial responsibility at genocide sites. Is there a responsibility on the supply site that should encourage an understanding of the moral and ethical values attached to a place in order to allow it to shape the minds of the tourist rather than the tourist shaping the identity of a place? One way of thinking in tourism studies is that the commodification of culture for consumption renders the resulting practices inauthentic. By comparison, other schools of thought have asserted that such transactions between tourists and the

place generate new cultural configurations which are both meaningful and authentic to their participants. As post war generations will be the visitors of Auschwitz-Birkenau in the future, the camp will doubtless further evolve and be re-interpreted. This means that the 'raison d'être' of Auschwitz-Birkenau as a monument and remainder of a dark past might be under threat in the future.

In other words, responsibility is implicitly placed on tour operators to create awareness of the background and historic importance of the place to maintain it as the symbol that it is for future generations. As mentioned previously, Brown et al (2012, p.12) state that, 'all marketing, to put it in an admittedly contentious way, is dark marketing' but it might be added that certain norms have to be fulfilled when handling sites that are irreversibly connected to death, grief and mourning and that have been established in a historic context.

In many ways the museum deals with the incoming visitors relatively well – group tourists take part in a compulsory standard site tour on arrival (Young, 2009). However the museum has equally been criticized by Young for failing to present the full site, glossing over certain periods of the camp's history and managing opening hours and large numbers of visitors poorly. Young also notes that distorted emphasis on certain artefacts, such as the *Arbeit Macht Frei* gate, which has been moved from its original location and now can configure the tourist's visit. Management is likely to become significantly more complex in future if visitor expectations are configured by online promotion material, such as the websites identified in this article.

One could argue that the representation of these websites might simply follow the rule of the market which is demand and supply, which might explain the perceived simplicity of the websites. Tour operators might, for example, have acknowledged the fact that people are looking for increased value when booking their trips, which led to the offering of lunch packages etc.

Considering the number of interested parties at Auschwitz-Birkenau, how can a tour operator sell this place of historical significance without ambivalence? The interpretation of an image is highly dependent on the audience, so people will attach various meanings and interpretations to the website, which makes including certain moral and ethical guidelines quite difficult as again their interpretation is down to the individual. Only a shift in demand or guidelines provided by the majority of stakeholders could thereby lead to a reconfiguring of these websites.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

In view of findings and the novelty of the topic, the results provide the basis for a wide spectrum of future research streams. Future studies should focus on broadening the samples to encompass the promotion of other extermination and concentration camps and identify generalizable practices and also case specific practices. Furthermore, studies should compare thanatourism attractions which have happened in different times in history, with the intent of identifying whether time influences the perception and promotional of dark related attractions. Also, the results yield the need be complemented by an investigation of the point of sale, in order to contrast the congruity between the online practices with the offline service and the role of employees on the delivery of the thanatourism experiences. Finally, there is timely gap which must be addressed in relation to the visitors' perceptions of the online promotional practices of such attractions. Cross-cultural studies may suggest the need of a cultural customization to minimize risk perceptions, moderated by culture, religion and personal connection with the attraction.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the pros and cons of promoting Auschwitz-Birkenau online as a destination for those interested in the history of the Holocaust.
2. Discuss the feasibility of closing Auschwitz-Birkenau entirely to tourists. What implications would this have for regional tour operators?

3. Suggest methods by which museum management could reduce the influence of private tour operators in interpretation of the site.
4. How can tourism to Auschwitz-Birkenau be promoted ethically and responsibly?

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