

Dark tourism experiences: The case of witch tourism.

An exploratory study on how co-creation and authenticity take place in dark tourism spaces, with a specific focus on gender dimensions.



Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live
– The Book of Exodus 22:18

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Abstract

Through this thesis, we aim at discovering whether gender differences exist when it comes to online co-creation and experienced authenticity in the context of dark tourism. This study aims to fill in gaps in the dark tourism literature by examining the concepts of tourist digital co-creation and tourism authenticity within a dark tourism context. As the impact that gender may have on dark tourism experiences has not yet been thoroughly examined, these tourism experience concepts are explored with a specific focus on gendered differences. To facilitate this, this research uses the case of witch tourism sites, which are understood as a sub-category of dark tourism. Witch tourism is selected due to the gendered nature of the witch hunt period during which women were disproportionately targeted, the researchers consequently assume that these dark sites may exhibit gendered differences among tourists.

To achieve this, two primary data gathering methods are used, netnography and focus groups, alongside one secondary data method, an examination of the four selected witch museums' websites. The netnography is conducted on Instagram, as we observe the behaviors and attitudes of visitors who share their experience under these four museums' geotags.

The main insights of this study are as follows: witch tourism is profoundly gendered, as women make up the majority of visitors. Performance is a crucial part of the witch tourism experience as a portion of visitors (mostly women) perform the role of the witch when they travel to a witch tourism site, with a number of female visitors strongly relating to the history of the witch persecution on an existential level with a feminist perspective. However, identifying with witches is not done solely from a feminist perspective, indeed, part of our sample self-identifies as witches/pagans and relate to the museums' content from a witchcraft practitioner's perspective. Next, we observed gendered differences in the way visitors co-create their experience online and in the type of authenticity they seek. We further observed that pop culture references and post-tourism attitudes lighten dark tourism experiences. Finally, we noted the versatility of both the tourists, and the museums. Tourists display different motivations and conflicting behaviors when visiting these witch tourism sites, and the museums seem to cater to the needs of different types of tourists.

This study has various implications for relevant organizations and stakeholders, so as to understand the complexity of tourists' subjective dark tourism experiences and to enhance their marketing strategies. This study calls for further research in several areas, as well as the need for similar studies with both online and offline methods.

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1. Introduction

Academic research into the notion of dark tourism is commonly agreed to have begun with Rojek (1993) who observed the sites of famous, violent, or sudden deaths becoming increasingly commercialized and the obsession modern society has with such events (as cited in Hartmann et al., 2018, p.270). To depict this issue, Rojek (1993) relates how people swarmed the sites of contemporary tragic events, such as those of the PanAm103 plane crash in 1988 which killed 270 people, of President Kennedy's assassination, or of James Dean's fatal car accident (as cited in Stone, 2006, p.148). Building on Rojek's (1993) observations, Seaton (1996) introduces the term 'thanatourism' (i.e., death tourism, from the Greek word *thanatos* [θάνατος]) (as cited in Stone, 2006, p.148), and Lennon and Foley (1996) first coin the term 'dark tourism' which they describe as "*the presentation and consumption of real and commodified death and disaster sites*" (as cited in Light, 2017, p.278).

Tourism academia has been attempting to determine precisely what dark tourism is and what motivates tourists to travel to dark sites. However, up to this day, studies investigating dark tourism remain predominantly theoretical, with any empirical studies on the field being relatively recent. The present study is highly relevant to dark tourism studies, as it constitutes an empirical addition to dark tourism literature by examining a particular type of dark tourism experiences, those associated with witchcraft and witch hunt history. Under this prism, two broader marketing concepts will be associated with the dark tourism consumption: tourism experience co-creation and tourism authenticity. Both elements will be tested on how they relate to dark tourism studies, bringing more relevance to the branding issues of this tourism field.

Moreover, dark tourism consumption has not been thoroughly examined from a demographic market research perspective. Which demographic group is the main target audience for dark tourism businesses and organizations? This is yet to be clarified. The present study will attempt to contribute to this gap by employing gender as a main variable for experiencing witch tourism sites. This is again highly relevant for both tourism academia and the tourism business sector.

In conclusion, this study is an attempt to bridge the existing gap between dark tourism literature and dark tourism practice. The problem formulation along with the respective research question and the study's objectives will be articulated in the upcoming section.

1.1. Problem Formulation

As already implied, the current thesis will thoroughly investigate three main theoretical pillars (gender, experience in tourism, and dark tourism) in order to propose a holistic approach towards the dark tourism experience (Fig.1). Of course, each pillar will be further developed in the literature review chapter, along with emergent themes such as pop culture-induced tourism and contemporary touristic identities.



Fig.1. Study's main pillars

Based on this information, the following research question will serve as the foundation of our project:

How do co-creation and authenticity happen in dark tourism spaces with a specific focus on gender dimensions? The case of witch tourism.

The overall aim of the thesis is to answer this research question, so as to understand how value co-creation and tourism authenticity can relate to dark tourism experiences, especially when adding the factor of gender. Subsequently, the objectives of the thesis are presented hereby:

- The first objective is to create novel insights on dark tourism experiences, with a focus on witch tourism.
- The second objective is to understand how two of the most prominent branding differentiation strategies, co-creation and authenticity, can take place in dark tourism spaces.
- The third objective is to understand how visitors relate to the dark period of the witch hunt and to the events presented in or around the witch museums from a gendered perspective.
- The fourth and final objective of the thesis is to contribute both theoretically and empirically to the field of dark tourism.

1.1.2. Thesis Delimitations

Upon clarifying the overall objectives, it is absolutely necessary to delimit the scope of our research project.

The focus area of the current thesis is dark tourism experiences; however, there are two important limitations in regards to this. Firstly, we are not looking into the entirety of dark tourism experiences. The scope of the research is narrowed down to the witch tourism experience, which will grant us useful insights to be associated with the dark tourism industry as a whole. Secondly, the tourism experience is investigated through a digital lens, due to practical reasons (namely, Covid-19 restrictions and limited time resources), a fact that does not allow us to carry out a more thorough and integrated investigation. It is proposed that results may differ if the same research question were employed for a different dark tourism case or if the research design incorporated non-virtual research methods (e.g., field work, in-person interviews, ethnography).

As far as the study's theoretical background is concerned, there are multiple delimitations, since two of the constructs under examination (i.e., gender and tourism experience) are infinite lines of study on their own. When it comes to gender, the delimitation encompasses Judith Butler's (1990) theories on gender performativity and gender normativity, as well as Eger et al.'s (2021) conceptualization on the spectrums of gender, two contributions that will facilitate the analysis on how gendered issues are exhibited in dark tourism spaces. Regarding the tourism experience pillar, two out of countless tourism concepts are selected to be reviewed (i.e., experience co-creation and tourism authenticity) with the aim to make the study more specific on the types of experiences

examined. Dark tourism, being a relatively new academic field, is not as limited in the study as the rest of the theory in use.

Finally, the scope of the study is delimited by the fact that the findings are undoubtedly Western-centric. In addition of both researchers being from Western countries, all museums under examination are located in countries of the Western world, and our focus group participants are all European.

1.1.3. Problem Owners

This section indicates the people, institutions, and organizations that can reap the benefits provided by the research findings, the consequent data analysis, as well as the final discussion.

First and foremost, the academic area of dark tourism studies will be favored since the study aims to theoretically contribute to the entirety of the dark tourism experience by focusing on the case of witch tourism. Moreover, businesses and organizations dealing with dark tourism services will be able to leverage on novel insights, so as to meliorate their marketing plans, both on tactical and strategic levels. Of course, witch tourism sites and museums will be the most positively affected by the thesis' insights. Finally, market research and consultancy companies can benefit from the study's data analysis, in order to enhance their professional services and provide better documented advice to their tourism sector clients.

1.2. Thesis Structure

Our thesis project follows a rather typical empirical paper format (Fig.2). To begin with, the introduction to the thesis topic, along with the finalized research question, is provided. Moving on, an in-depth review of the existing literature on the three aforementioned pillars (gender, tourism experience, and dark tourism) is attempted, trying to include many relevant theoretical constructs per pillar in order to enhance the theoretical foundation and validity of the project. Next comes methodology. Here, all scientific choices regarding the research design will be discussed and the data collection and data analysis methods, as well as the research design's limitations, will be presented.

Subsequently, the reader can go over the findings and analysis chapter. This part consists of three elements: first, the main and sub-findings from all qualitative data collected are provided, second, an explanation of each finding and sub-finding is attempted, and finally, the connection of each group of findings to the theories (theoretical implications) is carried out. The next part is the thesis discussion, where, based on the key outcomes of the thesis analysis the researchers try to elaborate on the research question. Finally, relevant managerial implications and potential future research are suggested.

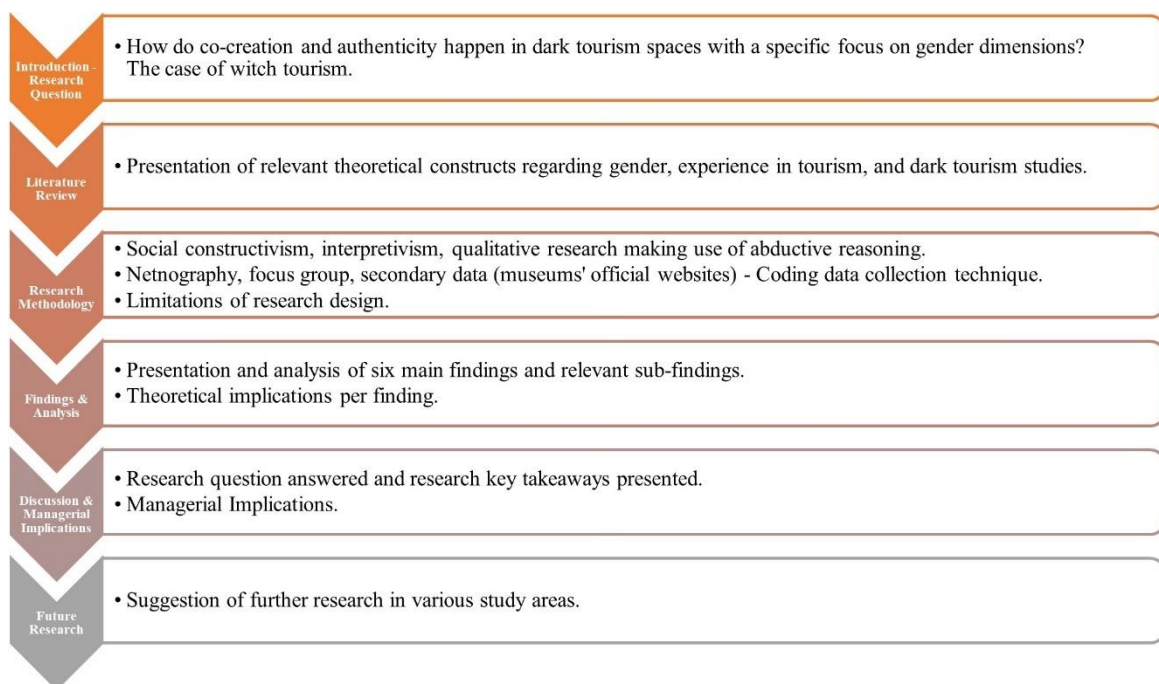


Fig.2. Thesis structure.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Gender

2.1.1. Conceptualizations of Gender

For most people the notion of gender is a familiar part of everyday life, something that is taken for granted, a fact that ‘comes naturally’ and is self-evident, with no need for further contemplation or action (Lorber, 1994). Yet, trying to define gender is neither simple nor straightforward. Even when it comes to social sciences, gender is often included as a variable in numerous research without prior extensive definitions or concrete reflections on why (Lindqvist et al., 2020). This leads to a rather traditional and simplistic use of gender as a binary identification system that is still promoted in most research demographics and findings (p.3), presenting gender as a dichotomous variable characterized by two, mutually exclusive responses (e.g., man/woman, masculine/feminine) (Westbrook & Saperstein, 2015). In order to understand binary gender measurements and the ways that gender is operationalized as a twofold option, as well as the objections around this dichotomy, two key conceptualizations on gender are discussed below.

The suggestion of gender as a binary category is rooted back to the idea that certain behaviors, abilities, and attitudes are pre-determined and precede cultural influences. Biological essentialism prevails in social studies and collective consciousness until the middle of the 20th century, with sex and gender being exclusively or highly connected to anatomy, physiology, and biology (DeCecco & Elia, 1993). Here, gender identity and its expression are both conceived as derivatives of biological mechanisms, with men driven by testosterone and women by estrogen (p.3) or men being ‘katabolic’ (expending body energy), thus appearing as more energetic, adventurous, or competitive and women being ‘anabolic’ (conserving body energy), hence presented as more stable, sentimental, or passive (Geddes & Thompson, 1889, as cited in Mikkola, 2008). These physiological states were (and still are) widely used not only to demonstrate different traits between the sexes, but also to promote certain socio-political arrangements and power structures when it comes to gender issues (DeCecco & Elia, 1993).

Conversely, what used to ‘come naturally’, has nowadays turned into changeable concepts driven by different cultural contexts and social practices (DeCecco & Elia, 1993). Simone de Beauvoir’s quote “*One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman*” (Salih, 2002, p.45) is perhaps the most famous observation on how commonly observed behavioral characteristics associated with the sexes are not caused by biological or anatomical differences but are rather culturally acquired. Gender, like culture, is a human creation that is omnipresent because everybody is continuously “*doing gender*” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, as cited in Lorber, 1994, p.112). Thus, the social construction of gender introduces the idea that gendered behavioral traits are the product of intended or unintended actions within a specific social context (Haslanger, 1995), while gender identity is a historical achievement rather than an absolute truth, which is constantly negotiated and re-invented by each ‘subjectivity’ (Weeks, 1988, as cited in DeCecco & Elia, 1993). How people identify themselves in terms of gender is not always in line with generic gender perceptions and classifications; as Foucault states, the fluidity of the concept should be highlighted and embraced by both society and academia (Diamond, 2002).

It is evident that gender identification is something that results from the perspective one has on the notion of gender. The gender binary serves the need of social identity, as it argues that men and women carry certain positive and negative attributes (that are often complementary), which then formulate a standardized identification system (Morgenroth et al., 2020). Even if determinist views of gender are currently uncommon and severely criticized by social scientists, feminists, and LGBTQIA movements, this dichotomy is still essentialized, as it introduces gender as a social institution, within which humans can be easily organized (Lorber, 1994). Consequently, this binary approach continues to produce beliefs and maintain stereotypical views that are disconnected not only from modern and post-modern theoretical conceptualizations, but most importantly from differentiated gender experiences (Morgenroth et al., 2020).

Inevitably, the above-mentioned conceptualizations on gender lead to a much bigger picture regarding the concept of ideology. Why is the binary notion of gender still dominant, even though the scientific world has made significant progress in acknowledging the fluidity of the variable? As per Anderson (2017, as cited in Eger et al., 2021) when we examine key concepts on gender that reflect the worldview of both individuals and entire societies (e.g., the binary identification system, the nature-culture dichotomy, etc.), we actually escape the borders of science and welcome the entire

realm of society in the conversation. According to the Anderson's normative/ethical approach to ideology and because people have multiple cognitive limitations that do not allow them to experience the world in its entirety, ideologies can operate in both positive and negative ways (Eger et al., 2021). On one hand, an ideology can help us better understand the social world, evaluate it, and ultimately change it according to our goals, beliefs, and hopes. On the other hand, ideologies can perform as tools of suppression, due to their ability to mask societal problems and counter present them as natural or objective truths. This is particularly common when a dominant ideology is in accordance with people and institutions dominating the public sphere, a fact that imposes further impediments to possibilities of becoming (Eger et al., 2021). This negative use of ideology is what reinforces stereotypes, strict categorizations in particular social groups, and unjust behaviors. Furthermore, the addition of objectivist ideologies (objective realities existing independently to cultural elements) narrows the interpretations on what gender is and can be (Eger et al., 2021). Contemporary egalitarian ideological stands (e.g., feminism) that challenge the dominant views on gender and promote alternative models for comprehending the gendered social world is the first step towards both social and epistemological inclusion of a wide variety of gender experiences.

Moving back to the scientific implications, when it comes to gender-related research findings the binary view on the concept creates two major problems. Firstly, treating gender as a binary variable, holds the risk of end result errors (Frohard-Dourlent et al., 2016). While other important variables like age structure, race, or ethnicity have received critical attention in regards to their measurement, diversity in gender identities and gender expressions is rarely depicted, failing to bring forward differentiated gender experiences and leading to inaccurate findings and data (Lindqvist et al., 2020). Secondly, introducing gender as a categorical variable can be perceived as a praxis of discrimination and raise ethical questions when it comes to individuals who do not necessarily fall into one of the two given options (Frohard-Dourlent et al., 2016). Gender identity should be open to self-positioning, utilizing free-text responses or applying a 'third alternative' in contrast to the binary categories of man vs. woman (Lindqvist et al., 2020, p.8).

Trying to overcome these problematizations and enhance the ideological understandings of gender, the theoretical construct will be presented from a non-binary perspective throughout our research proposal. Hence, we will define gender from a performative lens, attempting to de-construct the traditional view on gender identity and what gender expressions (masculinity/femininity) represent. In order to achieve that, Judith Butler's conceptual work on gender *performativity* and *normativity* will be analyzed below.

2.1.2. Judith Butler on Gender Performativity

When researching the concept of gender, Judith Butler's work is virtually unescapable.

Commenting on De Beauvoir's previously mentioned quote, "*one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman*" (Salih, 2002, p.45), Butler affirms that "'woman' itself is a term in process, a becoming" (Butler, 1990, p.33, as cited in Salih, 2002, p.45) with neither a beginning nor an end, and gender is not something we are, but something we do (Salih, 2002). Accordingly, Butler views gender as not being related to one's biological body, thus a female body is not necessarily analogous with feminine qualities and the same applies for the male body and masculine qualities. Either feminine or masculine qualities can be exhibited by both female/male bodies (Salih, 2002, p.45).

In her 1990 book *Gender Trouble*, Butler coins the term *gender performativity* (Salih, 2002). With this concept, Butler conveys that gender is an unnatural construct and is continuously performed through a sequence of acts, gender is "*a doing rather than a being*" (Butler, 1990, p.25, as cited in Salih, p.62). The notion of performativity refers to this sequence of acts, and gender performativity suggests that the gendered body and these repeated acts are not dissociable (p.65), gender is conceived through one's behavior and "*there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender*" (Butler, 1990, as cited in Salih, 2002, p.63). With this concept, Butler states that gender is not preceded by a gender identity, or by a subject, but is rather a discursive and societal construct (p.64). However, people are generally not free to 'do' their gender without restriction, it is done "*within a highly rigid regulatory frame*" (p.63), i.e., the heteronormative norms in place in society.

According to Butler, the gender norms perpetrated in society are done so for survival. People who do not fit into the 'man' or 'woman' archetypes and are thus seen as 'other' are chastised by society for not conforming to heteronormativity (p.66). Butler identifies what she calls the heterosexual matrix as the structure and law maintaining the stable, fixed binary view of gender and the distinctive traits associated with these genders, i.e., male/masculinity and female/femininity (Salih, 2002). Butler further argues that the 'other', while repressed, is in fact produced and needed by the heteronormative norm for the latter to define itself in comparison, and to preserve the status quo (p.60). Christensen (2020) asserts that not unlike gender, norms are performative, and are maintained through their repetition which helps to portray them as legitimate and natural, despite their unnaturalness. These norms' existence, as well as their limitations, are accentuated by the existence of people who deviate from them. Christensen (2020) refers to diversity as everything that

is not congruent with the norm. Thus, the presence of a broad spectrum of gendered identities deviating from the categories of 'male' and 'female' demonstrates the failings in the binary view of gender and the heterosexual matrix.

Judith Butler claims that sex is gender, and both are socially and discursively constructed. Butler refers to the moment when a fetus is allocated a sex/gender as the 'interpellation'. The moment the medical practitioner calls it, the newborn will cease to simply be a baby, and will become a boy or a girl (Salih, 2002, pp.77-78). This follows Butler's claims that language precedes both gender and sex, and that one's identity is formed through discourse. According to Butler, the interpellation is the beginning of the girl being 'girlled', and it will be reinforced throughout their life by different power structures maintaining the binary gender norms (p.77). The designated 'girl', who through being labeled a 'girl' is now a subject, will emulate the femininity required of her by norms, so as to be a viable subject in society (p.89).

Straying from the norm is frequently associated with the concepts of 'queer' and 'queerness'. Dissenting from the binary categorization of gender, queer represents the undefinable, and constitute an "*ongoing movement*" (Segwick, 1990, as cited in Salih, 2002, p.9). While the existing heterosexuality matrix ensures that gender identities are understood through a binary, heterosexual lens to maintain the status quo, queer rejects the stability inherent to norms and dismiss assimilation (Salih, 2002). Queer, by its very nature, cannot be unequivocally defined, and renounces categorical thinking (Christensen, 2020, p.31), consequently queer theory asserts that all gendered identities are unstable (Salih, p.9).

2.1.3. The Spectrums of Gender

Butler's feminist epistemology depicts that gender is much more than a binary choice between two categorical boxes. Throughout her body of work, it becomes evident that it is the social that mirrors the natural; in other words, when it comes to gendered issues, it is not biology that becomes destiny, but culture instead (Salih, 2002).

Based on this, and by recognizing the cyclical character of knowledge construction (i.e. social beliefs shaping scientific philosophies and methodologies and, in turn, research findings re-shaping these same belief systems) (Westbrook & Saperstein, 2015), a recent conceptualization on the spectrums of gender is hereby presented. According to Eger et al. (2021), gender can be explained as a coalition of four elements: sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality (Fig.3). *Sex* has to do with the biological and physiological properties of the human body, *gender identity* represents the feelings and continuous discourses around whether a male, female, or a different identification system is employed by the individual, *gender expression* refers to the behaviors and appearances connected to the notions of femininity and masculinity (both in the case of self-contemplation and the ways that others see the individual) (Magliozzi et al., 2016), and finally, *sexuality* deals with the romantic and erotic feelings towards other humans. The four spectrums can be combined in various forms, allowing for plurality and diversity inclusion (Eger et al., 2021).

Gender includes the spectrums of:			
Sex	Gender Identity	Gender Expression	Sexuality
The biological and anatomical reality of the human body	The personal feeling of identifying with male, female, or non-binary identities	How one presents oneself to others and how one perceives the 'other' (e.g. appearance, style, tone of voice, etc.)	Romantic and erotic feelings and behaviors of humanity

Fig.3. Spectrums of Gender. Adapted from: Eger et al. (2021).

Concluding, this study will focus on two out of the four elements of this purposeful gender conceptualization. The constructs of gender identity and gender expression are of high relevance, as they are both continuously performed through the gendered body, and they can be examined in relation to how they maintain or disrupt gender norms, particularly in the tourism research context. On the contrary, sex and sexuality are considered out of context for our research, since we, as researchers, are not inclined to examine neither the biological characteristics of a sample, nor the sample's sexual orientations.

2.2. Experience in Tourism

2.2.1. Co-creating the Tourist Experience

In order to be successful in any business-related activity, a new economic era must be embraced, where consumers demand highly customized products, services, or relationships and where personal quality experience is a given; this is the ‘experience economy’ era (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). This is particularly true for tourism, as there has been an increasing attention towards conceptualizing and evaluating the tourist’s experience (Park & Santos, 2016). Experiences and their perceived meanings are usually connected with tourists’ high-order needs, such as socialization, self-identification, well-being, and education (Prebensen et al., 2018) which is why they are usually treated as an entry point into the individual’s reality constructions, rather than as momentary or trivial engagements (Arnould & Price, 1993). A tourism experience is an amalgam of embodied cognitive and affective elements, achieved during the pre-travel (anticipation), moving to the site, on-site, and post-travel phase of a given tourism setting (Park & Santos, 2016, p.2). This holistic view on experience is unique for each participant, since each one is involved in it emotionally, intellectually, or physically via their own individual perceptions and backgrounds (Prebensen et al., 2018). Trying to create a superior, extraordinary, or at least memorable experience is a very important goal for tourism industry firms, yet, the uniqueness of each case is a fact that prevents them from offering a standardized experience to all tourists; instead, firms are challenged to create the needed environment in which tourists can develop their own experiences (Mossberg, 2007).

Hence, tourists have begun to gain more control over how a tourism experience can be formulated, as they construct their own narratives and draw away from static notions of experiencing a place or the social ties involved in the procedure (Prince, 2021). Experiences appear as dynamic and constantly negotiated, arising from symbolic interactions and different performances of the various actors involved in the tourism activities (Baerenholdt et al., 2004, as cited in Prince, 2021). This performative turn in tourism studies has encouraged the idea that the perceived value of tourism experience can only be seen when the tourists themselves participate in the creation of the experience (Prebensen et al., 2018). It is therefore suggested that co-creation in tourism experience serves as a paradigm shift in the way that value is created and delivered (Neuhofer et al., 2013a), as the industry is moving from ‘market to’ strategies to a ‘market with’ philosophy, placing the tourist as key

collaborator throughout the marketing process (Cova & Salle, 2008, as cited in Mathis et al., 2016, p.64).

Co-creation systematically proposes close engagement with customers and allows them to construct experiential consumption in ways that suit them best (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004) by utilizing a service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). In addition to organizations focusing on co-creation, customers are also increasingly interested in co-creating. In particular, tourists develop co-creating strategies to successfully achieve their travel motivations (Prebensen & Foss, 2010) and to avoid unexpected, black-box outcomes, since they are not able to attach personal experiential meaning to their self-identities when they are not actively involved in the travel experience (Sugathan & Ranjan, 2019).

Specifically, there are four key building blocks of value co-creation (DART model) proposed by Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004), with *dialogue* in between the involved parties, *access* to relevant tools and information, *risk assessment* towards a customer decision, and *transparency* throughout the communicative process serving as the basis for each co-creative initiative (see Appendix A). In terms of co-creation conceptualization and implementation, the specific model has received a lot of credit within literature. Nevertheless, the model fails to address the role of technology as a key variable of co-creation. Especially in tourism, the relevance of co-creative strategies is steadily increasing due to a variety of technological advances that have opened up new doors to personalized experiences and have facilitated tourist participation in the preparation, communication, and delivery of the tourist service (Neuhofer et al., 2013a). Hence, in order to further extend the experience co-creation space, our study will utilize Neuhofer et al.'s (2014) tourism-specific framework, which not only includes technology, but also recognizes the three main travel phases of the tourist experience (pre, on-site, and post travel) and proposes that technology can and should be integrated in all stages (Fig.4). In conclusion, leveraging on the DART model elements of interaction between the involved parties, both physical and virtual co-creation experiences are recognized with the help of technology (Neuhofer et al., 2012).

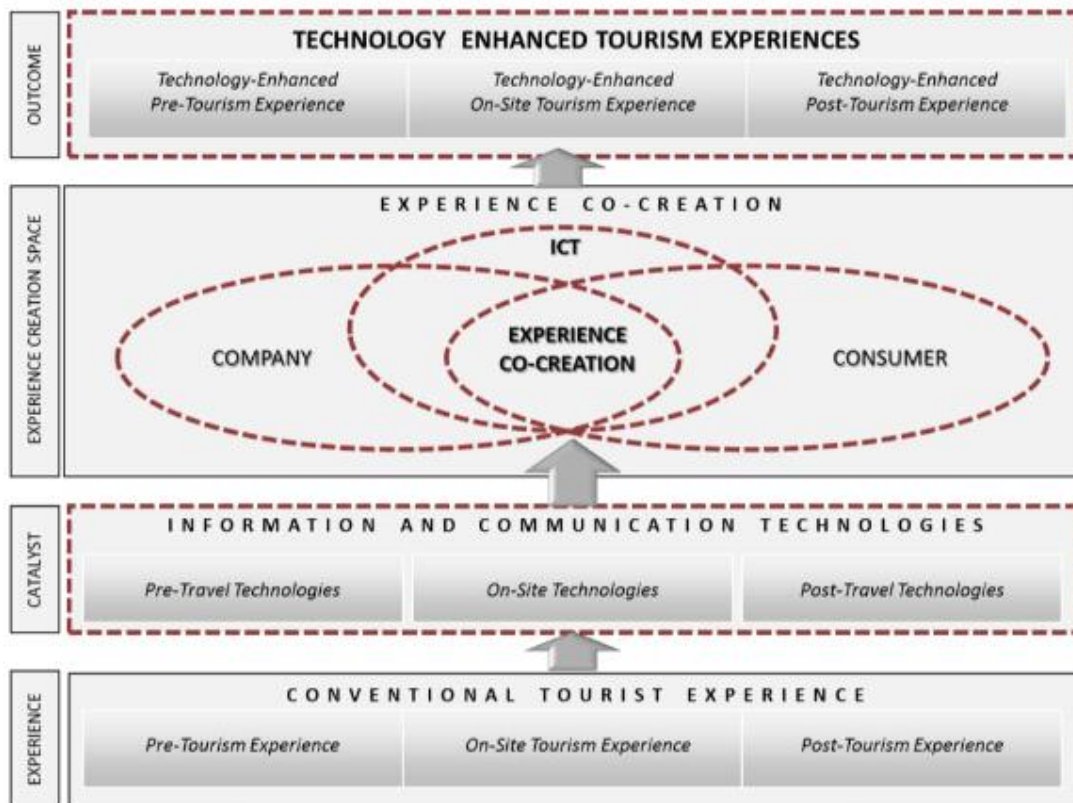


Fig.4. Framework Technology-Enhanced Tourism Experiences.
Adapted from Neuhofer & Buhalis (2012, p.4).

Due to current circumstances connected to the Covid-19 pandemic, the examination of an aggregate tourist experience (including planning, visiting and memory) is not easy to perform. Information systems will help us face this challenge, by focusing on how personalized content generated and shared by the tourists themselves can contribute to an equally dynamic value co-creation process in digital spaces.

2.2.2. Co-creation in Digital Spaces

The rise of information and communication technology (ICT) has led to the establishment of a new form of co-creation: user-generated content (UGC) (Conti & Lexhagen, 2020, p.1). UGC is generally recognized as authentic, as it expresses the creator's perspective (Tuten & Solomon, 2017, p.222). Because the digital space is today readily accessible through one's phone, UGC can be posted and shared at any given moment. Tourists have taken advantage of this technology and use ICT to share their travel experiences (Conti & Lexhagen, 2020). Sharing one's experience online helps co-

create the destination and tourism experience, considering how other users may come across this content when inquiring into a potential destination and use it in their evaluation of the site (Tuten & Solomon, 2017). Through the growing influence of social media, tourists have gained the ability to actively co-create the value of their tourism experience during each stage (pre, on-site, and post travel), and consequently further distance themselves from the passivity of Urry's (1990) tourist gaze (Conti & Lexhagen, 2020, p.3). UGC may generate feedback from other users who may add their own meaning to the original post and thus result in a combination of tourists and users' personal valuation of the experience. This process of ongoing co-creation in digital spaces extends the tourism experience post travel (Conti & Lexhagen, 2020, p.8; Neuhofer et al., 2014). The intended meaning of tourism sites may be altered, or lost, as these sites become part of tourists' online performance through the sharing of photographs (Lo & McKercher, 2015). This online performance may involve modification of the original photographs through photoshop in order to showcase an idealized version of self to their audience (p.105). What unfolds on social media can have real world consequences (Mkono, 2018), and tourists' online content concerning their experience has the potential to significantly affect the tourism sites. Tourists' co-creation power in digital spaces should therefore not be underestimated.

The social media platform Instagram is particularly relevant for tourism due to its focus on photography and images rather than text. Instagram was launched in 2010 and is currently the fifth most popular social network (following Facebook, Youtube, Whatsapp, and Messenger in that order) with over 1.2 billion active users worldwide (We Are Social et al., 2021a) and it is "*the most popular photo sharing application/social media platform*" (Munar et al., 2021, p.6). Instagram's self-expressed goal is to "*bring you closer to the people and things you love*" (Instagram, 2021a). The application's performative disposition has led to it being used as an "*empowering self-representation medium*" (Filieri et al., 2021, p.3) by the younger generations in particular. While it is not the most used social network, Instagram leads the way in user engagement (Tuten & Solomon, 2017, p.6). An important part of Instagram's culture is the influencers and the creation of a personal brand. The influencer phenomenon relates to other users trusting these influencers as reliable sources of information about one or more topics, which can affect people's opinions as well as purchasing decisions (Tuten & Solomon, 2017, p.84). As an important part of the Instagram brand, the influencer culture is supported by Instagram who has an official page to advise 'creators' on how to stand out on the platform, communicate with one's audience, and provide tools for users to build a personal brand (Instagram, 2021b). Celebrities, athletes, and influencers represent the most followed accounts

on Instagram (save for Instagram's own account) (Social Blade, 2021), illustrating the influential power held by these opinion leaders over their community (Tuten & Solomon, 2017, p.84).

On a more technical note, Instagram offers different features. Alongside reels (15-second edited videos with audio and effects), temporary stories, and live streams, posts on one's Instagram page, or feed, can be images, videos, or carousels (one post with multiple images and/or videos). Images largely remain the most used type of posts, followed by videos, and carousels, with a distribution of 68%, 18%, and 14% respectively (Quintly, 2019a) while a written caption longer than 150 characters is added in more than 65% of posts (Quintly, 2019b). As of January 2021, according to a study employing the limited binary notion of gender, Instagram is nearly equally divided between female and male users (50.8 and 49.2% respectively) (We Are Social et al., 2021b) and users aged between 18 and 34 constitute over 60% of users worldwide (We Are Social et al., 2021c).

Travelers are increasingly using Instagram to chronicle their trip and share it with, not only their friends, but also with the larger social sphere of Instagram users (Fileri et al. 2021, p.16). Instagram is a prominent digital space where tourists can make sense of their tourism experience and share their interpretation of it with others (Munar et al., 2021, p.6). The development of the camera technology implemented in smartphones is integral to tourists' co-creation power (Conti & Lexhagen, 2020, p.3). Documenting one's travel through photography has long been a standard part of the tourism experience, tourists can hold on to the significant moments as well as show others where they have been (Lo & McKercher, 2015), and Instagram provides tourists with a space to publicly and immediately document and share every moment of their trip (p.105). Furthermore, some design features of Instagram, hashtags and geotags in particular, facilitate the sharing of one's content with people who have similar interests (p.105). These tags allow users to look through all content related to a specific location or a keyword. This can lead to the creation of communities formed around a common interest, where members can discuss and share on a public forum (Conti & Lexhagen, 2020). Hashtags, tags, and captions can further co-create the tourism experience, as they allow tourists to associate their own meaning and interpretation to the photographs taken at tourism sites (p.3).

Finally, a crucial point when examining the digital co-creation of tourism experiences is the idea of space deconstruction. Except for the three travel phases (pre, on-site, post) as per Neuhofer et al's (2014) framework (see Fig.4, p.18), travel experiences can take place simultaneously in multiple spatial dimensions. Technology and social media in particular have managed to blur the tourism boundaries between dichotomies such as here/there, physical/virtual, presence/absence or me/others

(Munar & Ek, 2015). This fragmentation of space inevitably affects the tourists' online behaviors, who can no longer separate their connection to materialities and their embodied online attitudes. The deconstruction of space through the use of technology is a key factor in understanding the modern tourism experience and how tourists use both on-site and online elements to construct their digital identities (Munar & Ek, 2015). Two contemporary tourism identities highly connected to space multiplicity and digital co-creation are presented next.

2.2.3. Contemporary Touristic Identities

2.2.3.1. *Versatile Tourist*

The increased emphasis on the experiential and performative side of tourism introduces a new paradigm based on the 'lifestyle formation' (Prentice, 2004, as cited in Richards & Wilson, 2006, p.1213), where tourists incorporate a broad palette of attitudes, behaviors, and choices that fit their lifestyle context and do not act necessarily consistently throughout the touristic process (Richards & Wilson, 2006). Ooi (2002) introduces the term 'versatile tourist' to depict exactly this lifestyle approach towards the contemporary touristic product. Deviating from the monolithic concept of tourists who solely select between destinations, purchase pre-determined packages, and behave according to certain tourism motivations, versatile tourists help to create cultural capital in the tourism experiences they participate in (Richards & Wilson, 2006, p.1214) by interacting with the chosen destinations and by desiring to satisfy different needs at different moments in accordance with their unique lifestyles (Ooi, 2002, p.65). Here, the challenge of the sector (touristic sites, firms, etc.) is to take part in the tourism experience as 'culture mediators' (Ooi, 2002, p.66) and intent to symbolically open their products and services up to multiple interpretations, in order to be able to foster the tourists' seemingly incoherent repertoire of social behaviors and lifestyle choices (p.74).

2.2.3.2. *Post-tourist*

The term post-tourism was introduced by Feifer in 1985 to describe a new type of travelers that arose as a consequence of tourism becoming increasingly commonplace as opposed to being an extraordinary activity (Jansson, 2018, pp.101-102). These new tourists are conscious of the inauthenticity inherent to mass tourism and intentionally perform the role of the tourist as portrayed by the media, and they do so in an ironic and playful manner so as to distance themselves from being

associated with mass tourists (p.101). The rejection of mass tourism has also led to the growth of different types of niche and alternative tourism markets, such as dark tourism, in order to escape mainstream tourism (p.103). The concept of post-tourism gave rise to discussions around what tourism is in a post-modern society where touristic behavior is incorporated into people's ordinary life, creating a de-differentiation between tourism and social life (p.102). This concept has only gained in importance with the rise of the internet and social media and the affiliated notion of spreadable media (p.101). The notion of spreadable media, developed by Jenkins et al. (2013) (as cited in Jansson, 2018, p.102), refers to the communication power granted to people by the 'cultural shift' induced by social media and the internet (p.103). This cultural shift has impacted every aspect of everyday life, and tourism is no exception, as Jansson writes that "*social media platforms thus have a growing influence on how sites are perceived, appropriated and constructed*" (p.104). This spreadability is what allows tourists to co-create the meaning of tourism sites on digital spaces (p.102). According to Feifer (1985, cited in Jansson, 2018, p.102), the post-tourists' travel begins at home where they learn of the touristic behaviors through different media so as to perform the role of the tourist on site and online. Jansson (2018) writes that post-tourists may not always exhibit the same touristic behavior throughout their travels, as they may choose to perform mass tourism one day, and alternative tourism the next (p.103). This connects the concept of post-tourism to that of the versatile tourist regarding contemporary touristic identities.

2.2.4. Authenticity in Tourism Experience

When contemplating on tourism experience and the industry's collective efforts towards co-creation, it is highly important to understand what the key travel motivation behind tourists' co-creative efforts is. Why are individuals so eager to allocate personal time, effort, and/or money to participate in the formation of tourism experiences? According to the influential work of anthropologist Dean MacCannell (1976, as cited in Noy, 2004, p.85) the modern tourist's principal motivation when it comes to tourism experience is the quest for *authenticity*. Authentic interactions enhance the process of value co-creation (Prebensen et al., 2018, p.105) and authenticity is presented as a highly demanded commodity, with tourism becoming an "*industry of authenticity*" (Wang, 2000, p.71) within the context of experience economy.

This shift to an 'authentic paradigm' supports that, since the modern world suffers from individualism, mechanization, and alienation, consumers often search for a romantic feeling of

originality, uniqueness, and purity regarding their consuming habits (Noy, 2004). Tourism seems to satisfy this quest for meaningful experiences of being and becoming, since it can perform as “*a remedy for the unpleasant loss of identity that comes with inauthenticity*” of ordinary life (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006, p.306). However, there are various disagreements about the terminology and the concept of authenticity amongst academia, as the definition of what is ‘real’, ‘true’, or ‘authentic’ is extremely difficult to provide (Smith et al., 2010). Focusing on tourism studies, the term is particularly challenging because it can be used in two different senses: authenticity of objects, art, historic events or genuine cultural rituals, and authenticity as an attribute that permits stories of identity to be narrated and transformations of one’s own self to be validated (Noy, 2004).

Based on this categorization, Wang (1999) introduces three different types of authenticity in relation to tourism: objective, constructive, and existential (p.352). Objective authenticity refers to authentic materials, historic objects, art pieces, or genuine events that are difficult to encounter in contemporary society. Consequently, objectively authentic experiences are closely connected to the tourist’s cognition regarding the authenticity of originals, and to a mostly museum-linked usage (Wang, 1999). On the contrary, constructive authenticity reflects on the outcomes of socially dynamic procedures and not on objective qualities of the toured objects. Here, experiences appear authentic due to various symbolizations that are attached to them. The tourist industry, along with the respective media, plays a major role in socially constructing and influencing this type of tourism authenticity, which is projected onto the toured objects in relation to the tourist’s belief systems, preferences, desires, past experiences, etc. (Smith et al., 2010). Finally, existential authenticity is about a potential existential state of being or becoming that can be activated by tourist experiences. Unlike both previously mentioned types, existential authenticity has nothing to do with the toured objects but relates to tourism activities that create a sense of originality and truth to the individual via engaging in non-ordinary, innovative experiences that counterpose to the loss of self-identification in the modern Western world (Berger, 1973, as cited in Wang, 1999). When Brown (1996) refers to an ‘authentically good time’ within the tourist context, existentially authentic moments, free from everyday limitations, are implied.

Concluding, the distinction between these three perspectives on authenticity grants high value to tourism studies and will be thereafter utilized and explained in relation to our upcoming research design.

2.2.5. Gender Differences in Tourism Motivations

Aside from the quest of authenticity, there are numerous motivations around creating and consuming a tourism experience which are worth mentioning. What is deemed as important for the present study is whether significant gender differences in tourism motivations are present. Since “*all aspects of tourism-related development and activity embody gender relations*” (Kinnaird et al., 1994, p.5), tourism literature suggests that the binary view of gender still has a great impact on tourism sites’ image, as well as on the motivations behind visiting these places (Collins & Tisdell, 2002, p.142; Andreu et al., 2005, p.4). Even though we, as researchers, selected to not operationalize the dichotomous view on gender, it is still highly relevant to have an overview of the already examined gendered space in tourism motivations.

According to Andreu et al. (2005, p.11), women demonstrate overall more explicit ‘push’ (i.e., socio-psychological) motivational factors when it comes to tourism experiences than men. Their motives greatly focus on their personal need for relaxation and the need for escaping the boredom of everyday life, which can be easily connected to the existential dimension of tourism authenticity (Wang, 1999). Conversely, men gravitate towards tourism experiences that offer recreational and leisure perks, accompanied by a wide range of activities (Andreu et al., 2005, p.11). Typically, male tourists are more associated with risk-taking activities in the tourism context and seek for adventurous experiences (Mieczkowski, 1990, as cited in Meng et al., 2008, p.448) since such choices can operate as a reaffirmation of their masculinity (Yang, 2017). On the contrary, women’s risk-taking tourism behaviors are usually assessed as negative, conveying a certain amount of bodily gender-urged risk in the sexualized travel space (Yang, 2017, p.90). Hence, female tourists tend to place safety as their key criterion when selecting a tourism destination, seeking for educational, learning, and culture-oriented experiences (Mieczkowski, 1990, as cited in Meng et al., 2008, p.448). Interestingly enough, female tourists under the age of 25 appear to be the most regular participants in entirely educational trips (Collins & Tisdell, 2002, p.142).

When it comes to the ‘pull’ (i.e., destination-based attributes) factors of travel motivations, empirical findings seem to be in line with the ‘push’ ones. Indeed, female tourists get mainly involved in family-friendly experiences tailored by the industry, focusing on tourism supply elements such as culture, comfort, and prestige, while male tourists tend to sign up for tourism experiences that guarantee adventure, offering sports and other social entertainment activities (McGehee et al, 1996,

p.51). Finally, an interesting observation is that household, families, and romantic couples' decisions on tourism are principally accredited to women, making female tourists the 'gatekeepers' of the pre-travel, planning phase of tourism experiences (Mottiar & Quinn, 2004, p.153). Thus, gender specific motivations can undoubtedly influence the selection, production, and consumption of the collective tourism experience (p.153).

2.3. Dark Tourism

Stone (2006), a leading figure in the academic research into dark tourism, defines it as "*the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre*" (p.146). This definition is relatively broad and may consequently include a great number of heterogeneous tourism sites and experiences that do not possess many attributes in common. Consequently, academic literature on the supply side of dark tourism has worked on categorizing dark tourism sites according to defining characteristics.

Stone (2006) developed a dark tourism spectrum in order to help categorize dark tourism sites from *darkest* to *lightest* based on these characteristics and argued that these sites can be plotted on this spectrum according to their varying degree of intensity (p.146). These defining characteristics include the location authenticity of the tourism site. The site being found at a location *of* death and suffering makes the experience *darker*, as opposed to a site that is *associated with* death and suffering but not authentically located, which makes it *lighter* (Miles, 2002, as cited in Stone, 2006, p.151). Further characteristics able to *darken* or *lighten* a site are whether the tourism site puts more focus on education or entertainment (p.148), how long it has been since the events represented at the site, how much tourism infrastructure is in place (p.151). Additionally, the site being based on conservation and commemoration with emphasis on history makes a site darker than one romanticizing a dark situation for a commercial purpose. Moreover, if a site is perceived as authentic it is categorized as darker than one that is perceived as inauthentic by visitors. Finally, whether a dark site was purposefully built for dark tourism or was built for another reason but has since been repurposed for tourism will impact how dark it is (p.151). The dark tourism spectrum can be found in Fig.5.

A DARK TOURISM SPECTRUM: PERCEIVED PRODUCT FEATURES OF DARK TOURISM WITHIN A 'DARKEST-LIGHTEST' FRAMEWORK OF SUPPLY

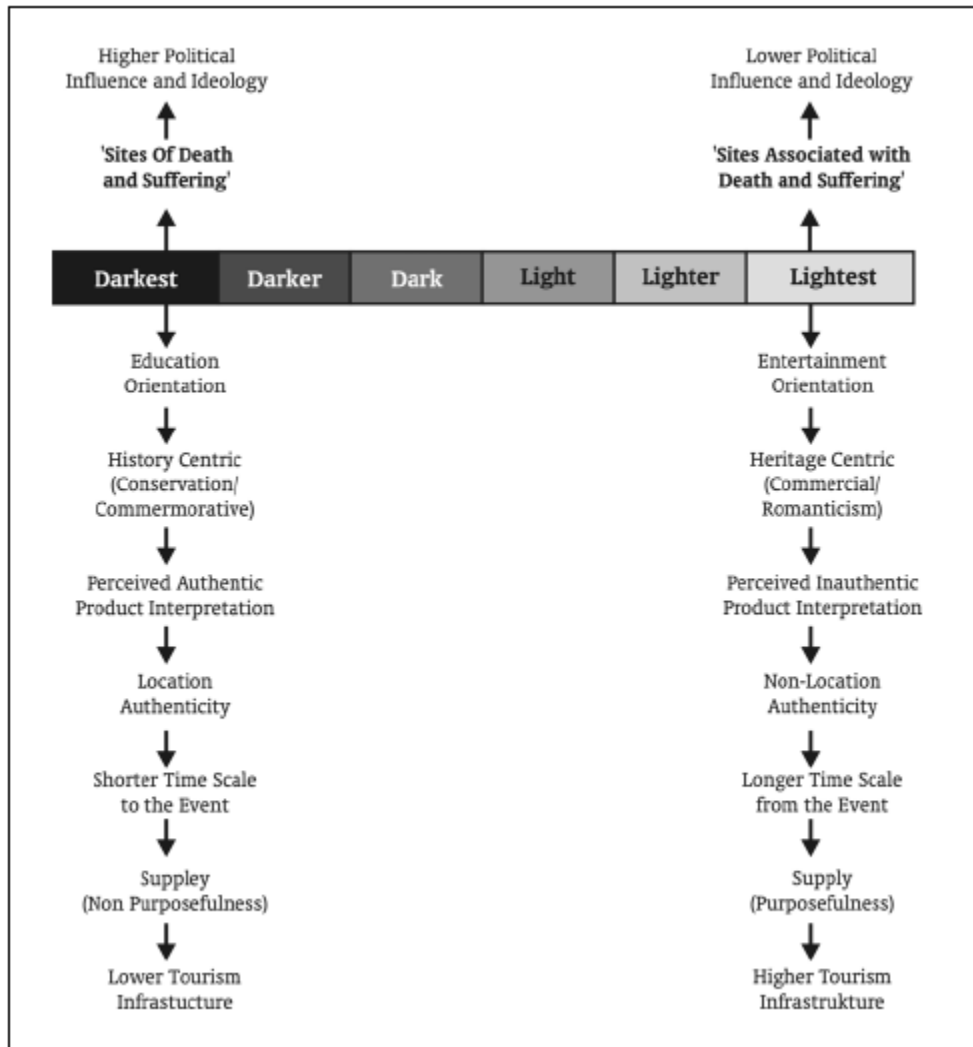


Fig.5. Dark Tourism Spectrum. Stone (2006, p. 151).

In addition to the spectrum, Stone (2006) presents seven categories of dark tourism products which he calls the seven dark suppliers. In the lightest type of dark tourism, Stone (2006) puts the 'Dark Fun Factories' which can be exemplified by the London Dungeon, a site that is not authentically located, has a high level of tourism infrastructure, and uses historical and fictional events for entertainment and commercial gain (Powell & Iankova, 2016). As the darkest category of dark sites, he places 'Dark Camps of Genocide' with the example of the Auschwitz-Birkenau site, which is an authentically located site of death and suffering, focused on commemoration and education regarding events that occurred relatively recently (p.151).

Between these two extremes are sites that possess a blend of dark and light characteristics. The 'Dark Exhibitions' category comprises sites, museums, and exhibitions "which revolve around

death, suffering or the macabre” and exist for educational and commemorative reasons, not entertainment. Regarding the lighter characteristics, these sites are generally non-authentically located, possess varying degrees of tourism infrastructure as well as some commercial intentions (p.153). ‘Dark Dungeons’ are dark sites such as prisons and courthouses that have a somewhat high level of tourism infrastructure but are located in structures not purposefully built for tourism. They further display a relatively high commercial focus and offer a blend of education and entertainment (p.154). ‘Dark Dungeons’ are found at the center of the dark tourism spectrum, as they possess an approximately equal amount of both dark and light features (p.154). ‘Dark Resting Places’ are cemeteries and graves which are toured for different reasons. On one hand some are tourism sites of architecture or urban design and ecology with a conservation objective, on the other hand, a number of these sites have a stronger focus on entertainment and commercialism, such as the advertised tours of celebrities’ graves (p.155). ‘Dark Resting Places’ can thus find themselves on different parts of the spectrum depending on which characteristics they take on. The next category, ‘Dark Shrines’ refers to shrines created for remembrance at or near the site of a recent death, generally a death that is heavily covered by the media. These sites are often heavily toured for a short period of time, nevertheless, a number of these shrines may develop and become a more permanent site at another location, still with a remembrance focus. Stone (2006) places these sites on the darker side of the spectrum (p.155). Finally, the ‘Dark Conflict Sites’ category comprises sites of war and battles that have become tourism sites. These sites are commonly focused on education and history with an emphasis on commemoration, but a number of such sites are growing increasingly commercialized with higher levels of tourism infrastructure (p.156).

Stone’s (2006) dark tourism spectrum and seven dark suppliers categorization are used to examine dark sites from a supply perspective; we must now consider dark tourism from the demand side. According to Biran et al. (2011), *“it is not death or the dead that should be considered, but living peoples’ perception of them”* (p.837), emphasizing that dark tourism should be studied from the tourist perspective. Theoretical dark tourism literature has studied people’s relationship with the concept of death and with their mortality to better understand consumers’ motivations to travel to dark sites. According to Pagliari (2004) (as cited in Stone, 2012, p.1566), in modern Western societies, death is hidden behind unassuming burials, and dying is delayed by medicine advancements and a growing focus on health which creates states of ‘death-denial’ and ‘death-defiance’. He further states that society is today ‘death-deriding’ as death is commercialized, at times with a purely entertainment focus. Stone (2012) contributes to this area of dark tourism literature by introducing

the ‘absent-present death paradox’ according to which, on one hand, ‘ordinary death’ is veiled by medicine and professionally produced burials while, on the other hand, “*depictions of death and dying, including those as represented by the media, in popular culture, and indeed within dark tourism, are near ubiquitous*” (p.1572). The media plays a big role in propelling events of death and suffering to the pop culture sphere which enables death to be consumed by people through different forms (Stone, 2012, p.1572), one of which, as will be examined in a later section, is tourism. Stone consequently (2012) argues that consumers partake in dark tourism to face *memento mori* and death in general in a mediated place with a subdued effect of fear (p.1572). Ten years following the introduction of the dark tourism spectrum, Stone (2016, as cited in Light, 2017, p.282) updated his dark tourism definition and wrote that “*dark tourism is concerned with encountering spaces of death or calamity that have political or historical significance, and that continue to impact upon the living*”.

The theoretical literature implying that all dark tourism experiences are motivated by the presence of death at those sites has been criticized (Biran et al., 2011, p.826). Biran et al. (2011) relate the results of their empirical study that was aimed at understanding the motivations for visiting the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp with four main motivations ‘learning and understanding’, ‘famous death tourist attractions’, ‘emotional heritage experiences’, and ‘see it to believe it’ (p.830). Light (2017) thoroughly reviews the literature on dark tourism and presents findings on the various definitions proposed for dark tourism, the types of dark sites being studied in the literature as well as the methods used to study them, and he presents an overview of the results of empirical studies conducted to determine the motivations for traveling to a dark site. Among these motivations ‘desire for education/learning’ and ‘curiosity’ were the most mentioned ones (p.286). The four motivations uncovered by Biran et al. (2011) are listed by Light (2017) along with others such as ‘remembrance’, ‘important for national identity’, ‘interest in history’, ‘morbid curiosity’, ‘sense of moral duty’, ‘part of an organized itinerary’, and ‘secular pilgrimage’ (p.286). Powell and Iankova’s (2016) research on dark tourism sites in London concluded that a number of such sites are reported as unmissable tourist attractions, thus further demonstrating that not all dark tourism experiences are motivated by the presence of death and/or other dark features at the site and are instead motivated by marketing. The issue of the commodification and commercialization of events of death and suffering has been brought up in the literature. For example, Volcic et al. (2014) examined post-war Sarajevo where the memory of the siege of Sarajevo plays an important part in the town’s tourism branding and found that the media’s portrayal of the local war trauma becomes part of the global perception of the town and is incorporated into Sarajevo’s place branding (p.738).

2.3.1. The Case of Witch Tourism

As is now understood, the term dark tourism englobes a vast array of diverse experiences. Witchcraft and witch tourism, understood as tourism associated with witchcraft, witch hunt, and the witch trials, can be taken as a subsection of dark tourism. Considering how this study has gender as one of its variables, looking at dark tourism through a gendered perspective is required and it indicates gendered division among dark sites. Due to past wars being predominantly fought by men, battlefields, for examples, are often associated with male and historically masculine characteristics; alternatively, because the witch trials predominantly targeted women (around 80% of those tried were women) (Scarre & Callow, 2001; Breuer, 2009, p.138), dark tourism sites associated to the witch hunt are believed to be more female.

The depiction of witches in media and literature has accentuated the gendered nature of the witch trials and cemented the view of the wicked witch-hag (as dubbed by Breuer, 2009, p.137) and the villainization of the female witchcraft practitioner (p.140). Breuer (2009) relates the long history of “*stigmatizing and punishing (both symbolically and actually) women who do not conform to an idealized maternal norm*” (p.137) and witchcraft accusations were used to justify this punishment as women’s role in society was growing (p.141) and the power in place needed a scapegoat on whom to blame the contemporary troubles (p.142). The portrayal of women and witches in the literature in the 15th century explains in part why the trials predominantly targeted women, as Breuer (2009) writes “[*literature*] told women what behaviors were witchy, and the courts punished them if they didn’t toe the line” (p.142). Long after the trials, the witch was still being depicted as an outcast from the heteronormative view of women as domestic and maternal and was thus vilified (p.145). Countering this narrative, present day reports of witchcraft female practitioners include feminist spirituality and Goddess-worship (Breuer, 2009). The former is described as a way to rid oneself of the harmful identities forced upon women in the patriarchal heteronormative society (Eller, 1993, in Breuer, 2009, p.160), while the latter emphasizes the need to “*transform gender identity by subverting traditional meaning and representation of what it means to be female, simultaneously creating new definitions of appropriate gendered behavior for women*” (Griffi, 1999, p.85 as cited in Breuer, 2009, p.160). Below, three famous sites connected to witchcraft tourism are presented in order to further understand how the witch tourism experience has evolved in the Western world.

Depiction of Salem witches and witchcraft in popular media began as early as 1856, and quickly became commonplace (Gencarella, 2007, p.273). This led to Salem, Massachusetts, experiencing an increase in tourism in the 1880s, and souvenirs bearing the image of witches being sold in the 1890s (p.273). As a result of this growth in Salem's tourism industry, tension and division emerged in public opinion regarding the commercialization of the witch trials and the continuous association of the town to its macabre past (Gencarella, 2007, p.275). The expansion of media and the growing influence of popular culture has continuously impacted Salem's tourism through its depiction of witches (Gencarella, 2007). The early 1970s ushered in the establishment of modern Salem tourism with "*attractions, created specifically to profit from a loose correlation of the Trials with modern witchcraft and the supernatural*" (Gencarella, 2007, p.279). In 1997, *Witch City*, a documentary about Salem, pointed out the inauthenticity of the town and of the business of witch tourism, calling it a "*witchcraft Disneyland*" where the witch trials are exploited for commercial gain (Gencarella, 2007, p.271). History is sensationalized and it results in a "*confusing mix of fact and fiction*" (Gencarella, 2007, p.271). Bristow and Newman (2005) studied Salem's "*established infrastructure promoting the events of the Salem Witch Trials of 1692*" when researching fright tourism, which they describe as a variation of dark tourism (p.215). They relate how the town has capitalized on its dark past and received around a million tourists per year at the time of the study (p.216). The tourism industry in Salem has evolved with time, and what started with a strong focus on moral discourse and historical accuracy regarding the trials of 1692, developed into an industry dominated by a commodification of history for entertainment and financial purposes (Gencarella, 2007, p.271).

Research into witchcraft tourism in Iceland presents a different account of this type of tourism. In Strandir, which Lund and Jóhannesson (2016) describe as having been "*one of the most notorious regions in Iceland for witch-hunts and burning*" (p.653), tourism around witchcraft was induced by the creation of the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft in 2000 in order to boost the region's economy (Lund & Jóhannesson, 2016). Echoing the skepticism of the people of Salem, locals in Strandir had some reservations about shining a light on this dark part of their history (p.771). Lund (2014) relates a tour of the region beginning at the museum with the guide "*dressed up as a sorcerer, performed two of the magical acts featured in the museum and then set up a ceremony, in which we all participated in, to quell a zombie*" (p.774). However, despite what could appear as an amusing start, the author recounts a sincere and compelling time learning about the vast folklore of the region (Lund, 2014). The Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft has reinforced Strandir as a magical

place and much of the regional tourism is focused on its witchcraft history (Lund & Jóhannesson, 2016, p.658).

Denmark also has a long history of witch persecution and trials, with the last recorded mistreatment of a witch occurring in the country in 1897 (Hennnigsen, 1982, p.132). This macabre witch hunt principally happened in the Jutland region of Denmark, with the town of Ribe being most closely associated to this period due to some infamous trials (Hansen, 2019, p.193). According to records of the time, around 90% of those tried for witchcraft in Jutland were women, and two-thirds were recorded as being old (p.135), a fact that is consistent with the previously mentioned targeting of women in these trials. A museum about the European witch hunt in the 16th and 17th century recently opened in Ribe (i.e., Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt). And while the Icelandic museum above mentioned, showcased more of the magical atmosphere of the Strandir region, the Hex! Museum has a stronger focus on the punishments of witches and the prevalent fear associated with the time (Hansen, 2019). The museum has been described as a “*dark attraction understood as a place telling a story of death and suffering*” (Hansen, 2019, p. 194). A study conducted on tourists in Ribe about the museum revealed that for some tourists, a visit at a witch hunt museum sounds like an entertaining, family-friendly day out (Hansen, 2019, p.195), however the Hex! Museum’s official website warns that visits are not suitable for young children, hinting at its potentially frightening dark elements.

Witches have long been depicted as women failing to conform to the normative heterosexual maternity (Breuer, 2009), and the witch has been characterized as embodying what is “*purely and simply the epitome of all that is antisocial and in defiance of society*” (Hennnigsen, 1982, p.132). Consequently, witchcraft tourism is pertinent to research when inquiring into gendered dark tourism.

2.4. Pop Culture-induced Tourism

As we now understand, the media and popular culture impacts dark tourism sites, and relevant to this study, it appears to heavily impact witch tourism through continuous representations of the witch as an outcast woman. It is thus deemed necessary by the researchers to gain an understanding of pop culture-induced tourism.

Lexhagen et al. (2013) investigate the academic research on the relatively recent topic of popular culture tourism and contribute to this field by addressing gaps. As this particular field is still new, the authors explore the related subjects of pop cultural phenomena, tourism consumption as well as destination image (p.16).

Pop culture is a reflection of changes in society and is generally characterized as being a type of entertainment that is consumed daily. Additionally, pop culture is strongly connected to commercial consumption and mass production, as it is readily accessible to a large amount of people (p.16). Its influence on tourism has been associated with the distance between people and the destinations they see portrayed in various pop culture mediums, as these portrayals in TV, movies, literature, etc. are used as references for unknown places (p.16). Because of the complex nature of pop culture-induced tourism, Lexhagen et al. (2013) argue that research should treat tourism as “*an extension of everyday mass culture*” (p.15) instead of as an occasional unfamiliar experience. Building upon Ateljevic’s (2000) work on the impact of culture on tourism, the authors relate the idea of “*co-constructed and co-consumed tourism spaces and [...] interlaced, multilayered and negotiated place narratives*” (p.17). Mediums such as movies, TV shows, and literature can have a substantial impact on a place’s destination image and can increase or induce tourism (p.14), as well as reposition established destinations (p.23). Lexhagen et al. (2013) propose that pop culture tourism is encouraged by a narrative being present in different media concurrently, and the “*synergies across the creative industries*” lead to the introduction of a vast array of products associated with one pop culture phenomenon (p.22). Consequently, the ubiquity of a certain pop culture narrative may result in the establishment of temporary or long-lasting tourism attractions.

Pop culture representations can lead to the rise of fandoms and fan cultures, and fans may take on elements of pop culture narratives and use them as part of their identity, which may lead to them traveling to the locations associated with particular narratives (p.18). Furthermore, fans traveling to pop culture related destinations commonly have an emotional attachment to the location regardless of how realistically that location is portrayed in pop culture (Gyimóthy et al., 2013, p.134). Digital platforms allow fans to communicate around a shared interest, and thus facilitate the creation of active fandoms (p.21). Social media further enables users to assimilate content that was not originally produced for fan culture and alter it to fit with the fandom’s interest, hence engaging in digital co-creation (p.22).

Gyimóthy et al. (2013) examine the use of social media by pop culture fandoms and its consequence on travel decisions. Social media allows for dynamic interactions among fandoms as well as enabling them to access a constant flow of new content related to their shared interest (p.135), thus keeping the fandom alive and active. Pop culture fans use social media to foster a sense of belonging and cultivate their social identity, and the authors further argue that fans do use social media when planning their travel experience (p.154). Tourism decisions are impacted by one's participation in virtual fan communities as these communities tend to have their own culture and characteristics and thus entail high involvement behavior (p.155).

Notable destinations that have experienced pop culture tourism include New Zealand due to the popularity of the Lord of the Rings movies and Romania due to the myth around Dracula (Lexhagen et al., 2013, p.15). Pertinent to this study, Salem, Massachusetts, USA is another destination whose tourism sector has been heavily impacted by pop culture representations (Gencarella, 2007). Destinations involved in pop culture expressions may experience pop culture induced on-site modifications, such as the introduction of props referencing the narrative found in the movies, books, or TV shows (Lexhagen et al., 2013, p.19), and that is the case for Salem. As already touched upon, Salem has a long history of being associated with pop culture representations (Gencarella, 2007). The town as a tourism destination is today a place where one can learn about the historical circumstances that led to the persecution of witches one minute, and immerse themselves in the universe of the pop culture witch, the next. This has been encouraged by local tourism businesses, who, in 1982 launched the 'Haunted Happenings', a month-long celebration of Halloween, and labeled the town the 'Halloween capital of the world', initiating a yearly tourism boom around October which still holds today (Gencarella, 2007, p.281). Alongside historical sites and information, one can find a life-size statue of the main character of the witch-themed TV show Bewitched, as well as attractions dealing with ghosts, vampires, and other supernatural phenomena (p.271). Gencarella (2007) relates the publication of a 1984 Salem tourist guidebook, described as the first to be focused purely on the 1692 trials, which was written out of frustration by a tourist who visited Salem and found it difficult to find historical sites in the midst of the pop culture representations (p.281). The myth of the witch that has long been perpetuated by pop culture expressions has seemingly irrevocably impacted the destination and "*Salem residents lost control in representing their city's historical significance to the public*" (p.282).

3. Research Methodology

The aim of this section is to outline the methodological approach and specific methods that will be applied in the study. Before determining the specific tools that will help us investigate the research question, the study’s philosophy of science will be presented in line with the selected theoretical background. Subsequently, our research design and corresponding methods will be introduced, so as to understand the ways that we will collect, classify, and analyze data towards exploring the relation between the constructs of gender, co-creation, and authenticity in dark tourism experiences.

Table 1 shows an overview of our selected research methodology.

Epistemological Foundation	Social Constructivism
Methodological Approach	Interpretivism
Type of Research	Exploratory & Qualitative
Research Strategy	Abductive Reasoning
Data Collection Method #1	Netnography (278 posts retrieved from four museums' Instagram geotags)
Data Collection Method #2	Focus Group (feedback from six participants for data triangulation purposes)
Data Collection Method #3	Secondary Data (retrieved from museums' official websites)
Data Analysis Technique	Thematic Coding (based on Instagram posts' content and theories presented)

Table 1. Research methodology.

3.1. Theory of Knowledge

When dealing with theoretical concepts and paradigms within a scientific study, important assumptions should be examined in regards to the research of a certain reality (or its perception), the ways that the researcher views the world and how scientific knowledge can be gained and consequently enhance the certain reality (Guba, 1990, p.18). These concepts are best known within academia as ontology and epistemology and serve as the basis for a project’s philosophy of science (Crotty, 1998). This choice is both a matter of practicality (which approach fits best to certain problematizations) and each researcher’s personal belief system regarding concepts such as existence,

becoming, reality, and what constitutes valid knowledge (Saunders et al., 2012). As far as our study is concerned, the focus will be placed on the epistemological aspects of the issues under examination; how the world is understood by us, the researchers, and how valuable knowledge can be obtained in order to best deliberate over the research question.

The epistemological foundation hereby proposed is the perspective of *social constructivism*, so as to underline a subjective, ‘meaning-oriented’ research lens. According to the social constructivist view, a universally acceptable or unique reality cannot exist when it comes to a certain issue because individuals behave differently according to the personal meanings that they assign to their past and present experiences through their interaction with multiple actors (Saunders et al., 2012). The result of those interactions is constantly changing, leading to a dynamic process where perceived realities and corresponding behaviors and cognitions are socially constructed and reconstructed. However, this position towards meaningful realities does not mean that nothing is real (Crotty, 1998, p.63). What it means is that our task as social scientists is not to mirror reality and get access to an always constant, objective truth, but rather to represent it and bring forward the multiple truths expressed by individuals, which are always culturally and historically situated (Pernecky, 2012). Moreover, the acceptance of multiple truths is a source of meaning co-creation that derives from the subject’s social interactions. Hence, the research perspective is considered as highly subjectivistic, but by no means individualistic, as meaning formation depends on each person’s unique experiences and needs but can only be developed and performed within the perpetually converting social context, mainly through language (Saunders et al., 2012).

Tourism studies have traditionally favored positivist/post-positivist epistemologies, trying to conclude on a single objective reality regarding relevant research phenomena (Tribe, 2008). However, it is argued that when choosing to follow this research path, the human context, cultural implications, and subjectivity of experiences are usually undervalued (Conti & Lexhagen, 2020). Trying to overcome this bias, this study will try to encompass an inter-subjective methodological approach based on the assumption that the form of knowledge that we have for the examined phenomena is constructed, especially since the entire theoretical basis of the research (particularly gender performativity and experience in tourism studies) is reflected on socially constructed philosophies of science. This will be particularly explicit when moving to the empirical stage of the research, where scientific knowledge will be brought forward through interpretation.

3.2. Methodological Approach

Moving on, the ways in which scientific knowledge will be acquired, in line with the theory of knowledge, are considered. As already implied, an *interpretive scheme* will be utilized, since reality (including tourism reality) is perceived and experienced differently by each individual (Jussim, 1991). The interpretivist view embraces the complexities that exist within a specific research field and does not pursue to validate ‘objective evidence’ over the discussed phenomena. Instead, this approach is set to expand theoretical and empirical possibilities via the researchers’ interpretations of selected people’s narratives on their personal experiences and the meanings that are attached to them (Saunders et al., 2012). Here, the researchers’ principal goal is to analyze compound situations, discover the meaning behind behavioral and cognitive patterns and access novel scientific findings, while being open to differentiated perspectives and rejecting a ‘unique truth’ mentality, as well as biased monothematic judgements regarding social reality and social perception (Jussim, 1991). In other words, an interpretivist obtains valuable “*knowledge about the meaning of human action*” (Pernecky, 2012, p.1122) via encouraging perspectivity instead of objectivity, scientific relativism instead of realism, and justification opposed to hypotheses verification or rejection (Pernecky, 2012).

Consequently, the selected theory of knowledge supports the exploratory and qualitative nature of this study’s methodology. *Qualitative research* is ideal when trying to understand and describe individual personal experiences. This is the reason why qualitative methods tend to leverage the power of words, images or sounds instead of the accuracy of numbers and statistics (Veal, 2011) and aim to “*form unique impressions and understandings of events rather than to generalize findings*” (Kolb, 2012, p.85). In antithesis to quantitative methods, the focus here is placed on examining specific constructs and relations between variables via the individual’s interpretation of the social world, especially when there are not sufficient, previously tested results regarding the research themes (Bryman, 2004). That leads to the *exploratory nature* of the study, where the emphasis is on generating initial insights on large and relatively unstructured research problems (Veal, 2018). This kind of research enhances an exploratory ethos, where the research team tries to “*assess phenomena in a new light*” (Robson, 2002, p.59) and define themes and particular categories of collected qualitative data for further investigation (Veal, 2018).

Based on the above-mentioned information, a quantitative methodology would be highly challenging in connection to the research question of our study, since there is indeed a vast amount

of literature separately on each examined construct (i.e., gender, tourism experience co-creation, tourism authenticity, dark tourism studies), but extremely scarce scientific knowledge on how co-creation and authenticity happen in dark tourism experiences from a gendered perspective. Going forward with an exploratory qualitative research will grant us the opportunity to use the right toolbox in order to collect, categorize, interpret, and analyze data in a way that serves our problem statement. This is best depicted in the next part, where the selected methods and methodological tools are presented.

Upon clarifying the methodological nature of the study, the research strategy is hereby discussed. Typically, qualitative research is associated with inductive strategies, where the process commences with an observation and then the explanation is induced by extracting useful meanings from the collected data (Bryman, 2004). However, in reality, the majority of research designs also have a deductive element, as it is virtually impossible to problematize and develop research questions or thematizations without some initial knowledge on the selected topics (Veal, 2018). In our case, a combination of both deductive and inductive strategies will be utilized, with the aim of both creating themes for analysis based on selected theoretical conceptualizations, and developing a novel approach on the relationship of gender, co-creation, and authenticity in dark tourism experiences based on empirical data. Hence, an *abductive approach* of reasoning is introduced as the optimum choice for this study. Indeed, the adaptability between inductive and deductive strategies grants a certain amount of freedom and creativity to the research team, so that they are able to move easily between theory and practice in various research stages. This way, it is plausible to combine selected theories and empirical data in the analysis part and produce innovative findings without being confined in a rigid research framework (Reichertz, 2014).

As far as the current research proposal is concerned, different theoretical issues of gender, tourism experience, co-creation, and authenticity in tourism and dark tourism literature are reviewed as a starting point, in order to combine existing knowledge and formulate the research question that will guide this study. During the data collection, testing, and analysis phases, emerging data will help meaning be extracted from dark tourism experiences (focusing on witch tourism) as depicted by users on Instagram, according to specific research methods. The interplay between deductive and inductive strategies will support the synthesis of a wider picture regarding this rather under-examined research topic.

Consequently, two primary research methods will be used in the study in order for the researchers to triangulate the emerging data; netnography and focus groups. Alongside these, a secondary method, the examination of the witch museums' official websites, will be employed in order to complement the scientific data collection.

3.3. Data Collection Methods

3.3.1. Netnography

In order to look into this issue, the netnography method will be used. Netnography is described as a variation of ethnography adapted for research on online cultures and communities (Munar et al., 2021; Sibai & De Valck, 2015; Kozinets, 2015; Tavakoli & Mura, 2018). Conducting research online provides immediate access to vast amount of information (Sibai & De Valck, 2015, p.1), regarding users' behaviors, attitudes, and opinions (Veal, 2018, p.148). Conti and Lexhagen (2020) argue that in tourism research, netnography techniques ought to take human subjective sensemaking into account and not seek to find the objective truth as tourists' subjective interpretation of their tourism experience is essential (p.2). The authors further argue for the recognition of digital space as a "*human and cultural space*" (p.2). This supports the use of netnography alongside an interpretivist approach.

For this research, this method will be conducted exclusively on the social media platform of Instagram due to its reliance on photography as its central element which is used by tourists to share significant moments of their tourism experience (Conti & Lexhagen, 2020) and the visual and textual data available allow for valuable insights into tourist practices (Munar et al., 2021, p.5). UGC on Instagram is not an entirely subjective exercise however, as social media users tend to follow the social norms of the particular platform and hence may adapt their content to suit each specific platform's implicit guidelines that will affect their online performance (Munar et al., 2021, p.5).

Following the researchers' literature review and initial Instagram exploration, several geotags and hashtags were deemed to be most relevant for this study's sample of pictures regarding witch-related tourism experiences. Eventually, geotags of four prominent witch or witchcraft museums will be used, those are the Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt in Ribe, Denmark, the Salem Witch Museum in

Salem, Massachusetts, USA, the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Boscastle, England, and the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft in Hólmavík, Iceland. The total number of images retrieved from the four geotags is planned to be between 250 and 300, while both visual (i.e., images posted) and textual (i.e., captions and hashtags) elements of the UGC will be considered for the data analysis.

As gender is an essential variable of this study, while conducting our netnography, the gender of the visitors posting on Instagram using one of the selected geotags needs to be determined. Therefore, we will identify the gender of the visitors by using three elements. First, we will look for pronouns used on their personal Instagram page. A growing Instagram custom involves writing the pronouns one identifies with in one's Instagram biography, thus, if the visitors communicate their gender identity in this way, we will use it, and if not, an exploration of the page will typically lead to the discovery of pronouns. Second, the visitors' name is generally displayed on their page, and will be used as an indication of gender based on whether it is widely considered to be a woman's name, a man's name, or a gender-neutral name. Lastly, we will use the gender expression exhibited by the visitors as an indication of the gender they identify with.

3.3.1.1. Why these four museums?

We chose the Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt in Ribe, Denmark, for two main reasons, first, its novelty, as it was opened in June 2020, and second, due to geographical relevance; Denmark being where we are conducting this research from. The Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft (or *Strandagaldur* in Icelandic) in Hólmavík, Iceland was selected for comparison purposes as it seemed to have a strong focus on the practice of witchcraft in Iceland in addition to the persecution of witches and the history of the trials. Furthermore, Iceland is one of the few areas where men, not women, were primarily targeted during the witch hunt period (Gragg, 2015, p.145; Kivelson, 2003, p.617) which is a relevant fact when looking at these museums with a gendered perspective. The Salem Witch Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, USA was chosen because of its status, it is the most known museum on this list and is located in one of, if not the, most identifiable witch related cities in the Western world. The Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Boscastle, England was chosen because of its strong Instagram following that was noticed early in the study by the researchers, and because unlike the other three, this museum was founded and curated around the practice of witchcraft or

wicca, rather than the trials. Wicca is a modern Western movement with religious elements, whose followers practice worship rituals and believe in occultism and witchcraft, based on pagan traditions of northwestern Europe (Melton, 2021).

Additionally, the four museums selected are all located in different countries (Fig.6) which will bring comparison to this study. Nevertheless, it should be noted that all four are in Western countries, hence this research will inherently be Western biased.



Fig.6. Geographical locations of the four museums selected.

3.3.2. Focus Groups

Along with netnography, focus groups will be used as another qualitative method. During focus groups the researcher becomes a facilitator of conversation rather than an interviewer (Veal, 2018, p.292). The use of focus groups is valuable when inquiring into the range of potentially conflicting views regarding a particular topic, as well as identifying trends within a particular field,

as both can emerge through group dynamics (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015, p.324). During a focus group, the researcher should not try to interview each participant individually but rather act as a moderator to ensure that all participants are heard and feel comfortable reacting to the other participants' opinions, hence inducing a hopefully valuable back and forth (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015, p.136). Social behavior might cause some participants to monopolize the conversation and others to not dare speak up, thus, the researcher should seek to generate a fair balance in participants' speaking time (p.136). Group interviews are less methodical than one on one interviews, and Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) recommend the researchers use a 'topic guide' aimed at identifying and keeping in mind the central areas of interest that ought to be discussed whilst leaving space for emerging ideas (p.136). Issues with this method can arise if the researchers treat the interviews as a 'data extraction' opportunity rather than as a conversation, as it may lead to participants feeling disengaged (p.140). The topic guide is thus also used to ensure researchers do not overuse field-specific jargon that might not be understandable to participants and consequently potentially alienate them (p.140).

For the current study, one focus group will be conducted. It will be composed of 6 participants to be in line with Veal (2018) who reports that a focus group in tourism research is commonly made up of 6 to 12 participants (p.293). When selecting participants for the focus group, the underlying consideration was the homogeneity of the group and the impact that this would have on the discussion. According to Krueger (1994, as cited in O.Nyumba et al., 2018, p.22), individual willingness to actively participate in the discussion is maximized when the group is perceived as homogenous, hence useful information is more likely to emerge. On the other hand, many researchers challenge the importance of homogeneity, since participants that do not share common lifestyles or are unfamiliar with the examined subject tend to provide more spontaneous and non-biased feedback that can be easily leveraged for data triangulation by the research team (O.Nyumba et al., 2018). Guided by our research question, the main characteristic that we would potentially precheck as common ground between the participants is whether they are interested in dark tourism experiences or are dark tourists themselves. However, we decided to approach the focus group from a non-expert point of view to be able to triangulate the netnographic findings with a random focus group sample. Hence, the 6 participants will be selected, and their tourism experience perspective will be examined, regardless of their familiarity with dark tourism sites. However, all participants have two characteristics in common: they all belong to Generation Y, also known as the Millennials, and they are all citizens of European countries (i.e., Greece, Sweden, Portugal, and Bulgaria).

Since gender is majorly important for the study, we wanted to ensure a polyphonic representation of the certain variable. This led to the formation of a mixed gender group (focusing on the individuals' gender identities and expressions and trying to incorporate people from different gender categories), which is believed to enhance the quality of dialogue (O.Nyumba et al., 2018, p.22) and help us better understand and interpret potential gendered relationships with the rest of the theoretical constructs. The identification of the participants' gender follows the same procedure as the one previously explained during the netnographic study. Here, the participants' names while they introduce themselves and the pronouns used by them during the discussion are examined in order to determine their gender identity. Below, the final gender distribution of the focus group participants is presented (Table 2):

	Gender Identity	Gender Expression
Participant 1	M	Masculine
Participant 2	F	Feminine
Participant 3	M	Masculine
Participant 4	M	Masculine
Participant 5	F	Feminine
Participant 6	F	Feminine

Table.2. Gender distribution of focus group participants.

The focus group is conducted after our netnography in order to be able to use what we learned through our Instagram exploration and plan the discussion accordingly. During the focus group, the participants will be shown four videos (one video for each site examined) presenting each museums' tourism experience and will be asked to comment on what they see, according to their own personal cognitions, feelings, and experiences.

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and its accompanying restrictions, the focus group will be conducted online instead of in person, through the platform Microsoft Teams. The discussion will be recorded in order to be transcribed and summarized.

The transcription of the focus group can be found in Appendix B, the audio of the discussion and the videos shown to the focus group participants can be found as separate attachments.

3.3.3. Secondary Data

In addition to the two primary methods described above, secondary data will be used to provide us with a more comprehensive view of the issue at hand.

Secondary data are existing data that were generated for a reason other than research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015, p.130). Utilizing secondary data sources has benefits, specifically, it allows the researchers to obtain valuable historical data without spending a lot of time and effort. However, the chosen data's reliability still needs to be assessed before being used in research. Because this data was not made for research, it may not fit into the research purpose, researchers should thus keep their research question in mind when using secondary data so as not to stray from the topic (p.130).

For the purpose of this study, the secondary data we will use comprise of the four selected museums' official websites. In this case, this type of secondary data is deemed reliable and beneficial as it offers information about the museums from their own perspective, thus helping us understand these tourism sites from the supply side. These four museums are presented below.

3.3.3.1. Presentation of the four museums

Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt (Ribe, Denmark)

The Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt in Ribe, Denmark is the newest museum in our sample, it opened in June of 2020. The museum relates the story of the fear of witchcraft and related persecutions of witches which peaked in Europe between the 15th and 17th century. The museum explores the reasons that led to this widespread fear of witches and ponders over the people who were persecuted and burned as a consequence (Hex!Museum, 2021; VisitDenmark, 2021; Sydvestjyske Museer, 2021). The town of Ribe was chosen, as it was the epicenter of these trials in Denmark and was home to the most famous witch burning case in Denmark, that of Maren Splidss who was burned as a witch in 1641. Some of the buildings used by the museum are authentic of the time of Maren Splidss, hence, enhancing the dreadfulness of these events (Hex!Museum, 2021; VisitDenmark, 2021; Sydvestjyske Museer, 2021).

The museum has a strong focus on historical accuracy and education regarding this dark period and uses both historical artefacts and reconstruction to tell this story. The Hex! Museum tour offers audio guide and interactive screens and maps for visitors to learn more about this period (Hex!Museum, 2021; VisitDenmark, 2021; Sydvestjyske Museer, 2021). Due to the fact that the exhibition deals with this dark period of history in an authentic way, the Hex! Museum website warns that the visit is not suitable for young children (Hex!Museum, 2021).

Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft (Hólmavík, Iceland)

As was mentioned in an earlier section of this paper, the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft (or *Strandagaldur*) in Hólmavík, Iceland was opened in the year 2000 by Jón Jónsson to promote tourism in the Icelandic region of Strandir. (Lund, 2014, p.771). Strandir has a history of witch-hunting and witchcraft and Lund (2014) describes it as “*a region [that] has always been associated with occult practices*” (p.770). Today, the museum attracts thousands of visitors a year, as it relates the story of the witchcraft craze in 17th century Iceland and the way witchcraft is present in Icelandic folklore (VisitWestfjord, 2021a). The museum has grown over time and so has its number of visitors, welcoming 19 thousand people in their most successful year, and attracting international tourists with 70% of visitors hailing from outside Iceland (Galdrasyning, 2021a).

The Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft is not only a museum but is in fact a non-profit organization that is responsible for the museum’s exhibitions, organizing events, and publishing research on the witch hunt period in Iceland, Icelandic folklore, and the Strandir region (Galdrasyning, 2021a). According to its own official website, the organization’s experts are considered as “*the authority on Icelandic sorcery and witchcraft*” by both the media and scholars. The website provides extensive information aimed for education and provides a “*comprehensive guide to Icelandic sorcery and witchcraft*” (Galdrasyning, 2021b).

When visiting the museums, tourists learn about several known witch-hunting cases as well the practice of witchcraft in more recent times (VisitWestfjord, 2021b). The museum hosts two exhibitions located in two different buildings, the first, in Hólmavík houses objects related to Icelandic folklore, including the relatively famous Necropants (Nábrók in Icelandic), and the second, the Sorcerer's Cottage, is located nearby and presents the living conditions of a 17th Icelandic farmer who practiced rituals for survival (Galdrasyning, 2021c). When recounting her experience, Lund (2014) relates that her tour began with the director of the museum, Siggi, dressed as a sorcerer and

demonstrating the practice of witchcrafts (p.774). The exhibitions feature artefacts required in magical acts along with instructions on how to perform them (p.771). The atmosphere of mysticism is enhanced by the magical landscape of the region (Lund & Jóhannesson, 2016, p.658).

Salem Witch Museum (Salem, USA)

The Salem Witch Museum was opened in Salem, Massachusetts, USA in 1972 (Gencarella, 2007, p.279). It centers on what the museum's official website refers to as "*one of the most enduring and emotional events in American History*", the 1692 witch trials of Salem (SalemWitchMuseum, 2021a).

The museum shows a strong focus on historical accuracy and education about the witch trials as its website features lengthy texts explaining the 1692 trials and its historical context in detail. Additionally, the website offers videos featuring an expert teaching different concepts related to the trials and to witchcraft (SalemWitchMuseum, 2021b). As per the museum's website, the museum experience involves two exhibitions, the first shows the history of the witch hunt and trials as depicted by life-size figures on various stages, and the second focuses on the perception of the witch throughout time, the emergence of the witch stereotype, and the phenomenon of witch hunting (SalemWitchMuseum, 2021a; Dymi, 2007).

However, while the museum itself is history centric, due to Salem's position as one of the best-known witch-related cities in the Western world, the museum is not the only place in town selling products and/or services connected to the trials and the witch, there are in fact abundant (Gencarella, 2007). Thus, the museum, as experienced by visitors, cannot be entirely separated from its surroundings. Gencarella (2007) writes that the town's tourism industry has always been at the center of a struggle between those wishing for historical accuracy and others who wish to be able to commercialize the city's past (p.271).

Museum of Witchcraft and Magic (Bocastle, England)

The Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Bocastle, Cornwall, England was opened in 1960 by Cecil Williamson, who had been passionate about the subject since his childhood. Williamson chose the location because he believed the area to have a magical past and atmosphere (Museum of Witchcraft and Magic, 2021a). Today, the museum offers a collection of thousands of magical items,

books and rituals as well as educational tours and temporary exhibitions on different witchcraft themes.

The museum differs from the three previously described in that it seems to be more actively sharing the practice and history of witchcraft or wicca, rather than to focus on the historical persecution of witches. The museum is very active in organizing a vast array of events, such as holding talks on magical culture, offering magical tours of the region, witchcraft workshops, and candlelit visits. The museum publishes its own journal named *The Enquiring Eye* about “*the topics of witchcraft, magic, folklore, the landscape, paganism and everything in between*” (Museum of Witchcraft and Magic, 2021b).

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

3.4.1. Coding

To sort and make sense of the data gathered, the researchers will apply coding techniques as is customary in qualitative studies (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015, p.194). These codes assist researchers in making sense of large amount of data (p.192). Coding qualitative data is interpretative as it is not used merely to categorize the data, but also to analyze it and observe links within the data (p.194). In order to code the qualitative data, this research uses both deductive and inductive coding techniques as some codes will be predefined based on the literature reviewed (deductive), while others will emerge based on the data surveyed (inductive) (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). It is believed that this will prevent oversights of potentially relevant information. In order to facilitate the coding procedure, NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software package provided by CBS will be utilized. NVivo supports qualitative researchers in organizing and analyzing insights in unstructured or qualitative data, such as the posts retrieved by the netnographic study.

As our netnographic approach makes use of Instagram in an experiential touristic context, we will apply two coding methods that will help us link and categorize the examined posts based on common themes or ideas. Thematic analysis, as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) (in Hartel, 2017, p.84), is a flexible technique used to detect patterns, or themes, in the data gathered (p.84). Our thematic analysis will consist of two stages; at first, a thematic coding based on the content of the

posts will be conducted, meaning that the researchers will point out any relevant information that stand out when looking at the Instagram posts (e.g., people included, location, museum elements, objects shown in the images, etc.). After that, the same posts will be again coded according to a theory-based thematic analysis, so as to identify and analyze the theoretical concepts of the study suggested within the UGC sampled (e.g., gender issues, tourism authenticity, co-creation efforts, etc.).

The gender identities used for our coding analysis are ‘he’, ‘he/they’, ‘she’, ‘she/they’, and ‘they’. These codes were chosen because they were the different pronouns written in the biography of the visitors sampled. It should be noted that during our data finding analysis we grouped ‘he’ and ‘he/they’ as well as ‘she’ and ‘she/they’ so as to facilitate comparison of gendered behavior. Regarding the coding of gender expression, we use ‘feminine’, ‘masculine’, and ‘queer’. Here, the term queer is used to refer to gender expressions that is not congruent with the norms set out by the binary gender system and its associated stereotypes. Christensen (2020) calls diverse everything not in keeping with the norms, and Salih (2002) relates that ‘queer’ is associated with straying from the norm, consequently, the code for the gender expression ‘queer’ is used as it represents diversity when compared with ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’.

Below, the coding table with the final image codes that were used in NVivo software is presented (Table 3). Note that the coding of the focus group conversation in NVivo software is deemed to be redundant by the researchers, due to the transcription’s limited extent that allows for valuable feedback on the key themes to be easily detected. The final NVivo file can be found as a separate attachment.

Thematic Coding (based on posts content)	Thematic Coding (based on literature review)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No people ○ One person ○ Couples (romantic) ○ Group (more than 1 person) ○ Group of girls (girl squad) ○ Museum personnel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ He ○ She ○ He/they ○ She/they ○ They
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender Expression <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Feminine ○ Masculine ○ Queer

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building & Nature Attributes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Museum building ○ Museum sign ○ Museum surroundings ○ Natural landscape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism Experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Expressed emotional investment ○ No apparent emotional investment ○ Visit linked to self-identity ○ Visit not linked to self-identity ○ First visit ○ Not first visit ○ Expressed wish for repeat visit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Historic ○ Exhibition objects ○ Commercial (e.g. gift shop) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-creation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pre-travel ○ On-site ○ Post-travel ○ Expressed evaluation of site ○ Expressed recommendation ○ Caption (text) ○ Caption (no text) ○ No caption ○ Hashtag ○ No hashtag ○ Modification of image
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photography <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Selfie ○ Posing ○ Edited picture ○ Not edited picture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism Authenticity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Objective authenticity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Authentic objects ▪ Authentic events ▪ Authentic locations ○ Constructive authenticity ○ Existential authenticity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appearance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ‘Ordinary’ dress code (not dark or ‘witchy’) ○ ‘Witchy’ dress code ○ Black hat ○ Colored hair ○ Dark dress code (not ‘witchy’) ○ Costume (e.g. Halloween) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dark Tourism Motivations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Curiosity ○ Desire for education/learning ○ Interest in history/culture ○ Connecting with personal heritage ○ Desire to ‘see it to believe it’ ○ Remembrance ○ Pilgrimage ○ Sense of moral duty ○ Morbid curiosity ○ Leisure motives ○ Personal interest in dark subcultures ○ Visit a ‘must see’ tourism site
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Witch Tourism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Expressed feminist connection (ideology) to witches ○ Self-identification as part of the witch community ○ Humorous approach to witch tourism
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pop culture reference

Table.3. Final coding of Instagram’s posts, as used in NVivo software.

3.5. Ethics

Remaining ethical while conducting research is of utmost importance, particularly when it involves human subjects (Veal, 2018). Netnography may pose some ethical issues when it comes to the privacy of the UGC originator (Sibai & De Valck, 2015, p. 1). In order to anonymize and protect the privacy of the uploaders of the pictures we will be using, any picture used will have its username concealed and recognizable faces on images will be blurred. Confidentiality is also an important matter when it comes to the focus groups data and Veal (2018) suggests labeling the data with codes or fabricated names in order to protect the identities of the participants (p.457). The participants will receive an email containing an explanation of the research and its objective, information on how the researchers will handle the data, and guarantee of their anonymity, this email can be found in Appendix C. They will be asked to agree to take part in the focus groups by replying to this email, this will be acknowledged as consent.

To remain ethical, the researchers need to be honest and fair in the reporting and interpretation of their data and if a choice to exclude some material is made, this choice should be stated clearly and explained (Veal, 2018, p.124).

3.6. Limitations of the Research Design

Both researchers fully acknowledge that the present study carries a certain degree of limitations when it comes to the research design and the findings. First of all, the chosen methodological approach inevitably promotes the assumption that our own subjectivities have decisively affected the data's interpretations. It is suggested that another team of researchers with different experiences and cultural backgrounds could have approached the empirical study in a totally different way, due to the exploratory and interpretive nature of the research. However, the use of a solid theoretical background that led to the current research thematization, as well as the presence of two authors that had the chance to contemplate on data interpretation from different perspectives and then co-create the analytical part, managed to partially overcome the aforementioned methodological biases and improve the study's overall merit (Conti & Lexhagen, 2020, p.9).

When it comes to the specific research methods, an important limitation is that tourism experience is examined solely through the lens of the Instagram social network platform. Revisiting Neuhofer et al's (2014) conceptual model of technology enhanced destination experiences (see Fig.4, p.18), it is obvious that the current study does not look into the entirety of tourism experience, but rather focuses on the digital dark tourism co-creation space, utilizing the geotagging of four selected witch museums. Hence, the collected data (posts shared on Instagram using these four geotags) are limited in terms of representativeness of the general population, a fact that encouraged us to collect and observe a big variety of UGC from each museum, in order to diminish this certain bias as much as possible. According to the initial plan, the examined images retrieved from our netnographic process amount to 278, with an effort to equally distribute this number to the four relevant geotags. Yet, as far as the Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt is concerned, a smaller sample of pictures is collected and analyzed due to the limited amount of respective UGC, which is most likely connected to the fact that the museum opened for the public less than a year ago during the Covid-19 pandemic. Our sample is thus composed of 82 Instagram posts found under the Salem Witch Museum's geotag, 80 posts for the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft, 80 for the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic, and only 36 for the Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt. Regarding the total UGC sampled, two things must be noted. Firstly, when encountering Instagram carousels, only the first image is taken into account for the research as the most representative one. This is decided by the researchers due to time limitations that do not allow extended image editing and design to be carried out. Secondly, we came across several languages in the captions of the Instagram posts. While the vast majority are written in English, we have captions in Spanish, Portuguese, Danish, and Italian. These captions are translated by the researchers to the best of their abilities in order to be used for coding and further analysis.

Finally, the netnographic study could have been based on the use of hashtags instead of the certain geotags, so that the data sample would have been even wider and more representative. However, this plan was abandoned following the initial exploration for different reasons. For instance, #witchhunt was explored but being a recognized idiom means that many images have no link to witches or the trials. #witchesofinstagram generated a staggering 6.5 million pictures as it appears to have become a popular movement of modern witches in the age of social media but was ruled out for its lack of tourism related content. Additionally, the tourism related hashtags #witchttourism and #witchexperience were tried but did not have enough pictures attached to be considered admissible. Thus, due to the time restraint imposed on this research, only the four geotags above mentioned were employed to build the final sample of pictures.

As far as the focus group is concerned, a major limitation for our study is again the online nature of the method. Indeed, the focus group was conducted online instead of in person, due to the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions. This may have affected the quality of the dialogue, since participants can be more hesitant to express their thoughts in an online environment, especially when their opinions oppose the views of other participants (Turney & Pocknee, 2005, p.33). Moreover, it makes sense that the participants' eagerness to talk about their feelings and experiences is limited when they have the easy choice to mute their microphone any time they want and be observers rather than active modulators of the discussion. The online nature of the focus group resulted in a limited discussion time as well, making it impossible to include all material initially prepared for display by the researchers. Appendix D shows a slide with four representative pictures published online by each museum that was put together by the research team but did not make it to the conversation. This is due to the fact that a primary concern of the focus group set up was not to exhaust the participants. Hence, we decided to leave the certain piece of museum experience out for time management issues, especially since we already had enough valuable feedback from the previously presented videos. A final limitation concerning the current study is the gendered perspective of the focus group discussion. Even though the focus group sample was randomly selected, with the only pre-checked variable being the equal distribution of gender identities (50% female, 50% male participants), other gender differences (non-binary identifications, queer gender expressions, etc.) were not spotted by the researchers. Again, the online nature of the conducted discussion is not fruitful for a variety of gender performativities to be seen. Moreover, gender issues and gendered behaviors deviating from the norm are particularly difficult issues to touch upon during a video call, especially when the participants have no close relationships with each other.

4. Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents the main findings and sub-findings collected by the aforementioned research design. All findings are conceptually grouped, so that the data interpretation can be transparent, and the research question can be clearly and concisely answered. Hence, in order to facilitate the validity of the researchers' interpretations, each group of findings will be supported by corresponding empirical data based on the netnography and focus group insights. Upon this step, emerging relations and potential contributions to the presented theoretical constructs will be discussed.

To introduce the analysis chapter, the four museums selected for this study will be examined according to Stone's (2006) dark tourism spectrum (see Fig.5, p.26).

The Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt in Ribe, Denmark is placed on the darker side of the spectrum. The museum is authentic in location, it is education oriented, and has a strong focus on history, as it is built upon conservation and commemoration of the events rather than romanticizing the era for commercial gain (p.151). However, the fact that the events related by the museum occurred a substantial amount of time ago makes the dark tourism experience lighter (p.151). This fact is a characteristic that will lighten each museum dealing with the period of the witch hunt. The Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft is similarly dark in that it has an authenticity in location and is education focused and history centric (p.151). This museum might be a shade lighter than the Hex! Museum for the fact that while both have exhibits dedicated to the witch hunt and trials in their respective country, the Icelandic museum also has a focus on Icelandic folklore and features some theatrical elements on past and current practice of witchcraft which brings some romanticism to the dark site. The Salem Witch Museum possesses both lighter and darker characteristics. While the museum itself is authentically located and is focused on education and historical accuracy, the area surroundings is abounding in pop culture representations of witches and other fairytale or Halloween creatures (Gencarella, 2007). As presented in an earlier section, certain pop culture elements tend to lighten dark tourism experience by way of trivialization. In addition, the museum is part of a large tourism infrastructure, which, according to the spectrum, is a signifier of a lighter dark tourism experience (Stone, 2006, p.151). The Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Boscastle, England deviates from the other three museums in that it does not seem to thoroughly explore the historical

persecution of witches but is rather a collection of witchcraft paraphernalia and teachings on witchcraft practice, hence diminishing the darkness of the museum as a tourism site.

As per Stone’s (2006) seven dark suppliers explored in the theoretical section, all four museums would be classified into the ‘Dark Exhibitions’ category as they are all sites based around death, suffering, and/or the macabre and are centered around history and education, albeit at varying degrees, with some commercial features. Stone (2006) writes that “*the multitude of museums which showcase death and associated suffering with an educative or commemorative focus may be classed as Dark Exhibitions.*” (p.153). However, Stone’s (2006) ‘Dark Exhibitions’ are often not authentically located while three of the museums studied are in fact located on sites of witch hunt and trials; the fourth one having a focus on local folklore.

In order to further facilitate the reading process and introduce the reader to the analysis part of our study, Table 4 provides an overview of the main findings and their corresponding sub-findings.

Finding	Sub-findings
<i>1. Witch tourism is gendered</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Women relate the persecution of witches to a feminist ideology, more than men do ✓ Female visitors perform the role of the witch when visiting witch or witchcraft museums ✓ The dark tourism motivations ‘remembrance’, ‘desire for education/learning’, and ‘pilgrimage’ are stronger motivations for women than men and others when it comes to visiting witch museums
<i>2. Witch tourism is lifestyle tourism for self-identified witches</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Witch tourism sites attract more lifestyle tourism aficionados than feminist-related visitors ✓ The two museums putting emphasis on witchcraft practice have more posts by visitors identifying as wiccan or pagan, and the two museums strongly focused on history have more posts relating the museums’ content to a feminist ideology
<i>3. Gender matters when it comes to digitally co-creating the witch museum experience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Female tourists are keener on positively evaluating their witch tourism experiences online, no significant gender differences regarding the sites’ recommendation rates ✓ Non-binary tourists co-create on Instagram during the post-travel phase, female and male tourists prefer to co-create on site

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Technical features of the online co-creation process (captions, hashtags, images modification, etc.) do not present significant gender differences, humorous commentaries prevail
<i>4. Pop culture and humor lighten dark tourism sites</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The Salem Witch Museum is inextricably linked to pop culture
<i>5. Tourism authenticity is both gendered and museum specific</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Female visitors are more engaged in existential and objective authenticity than male visitors, all gender categories score highest in constructive authenticity ✓ The Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Boscastle and the Salem Witch Museum are the leaders for existential authenticity ✓ Tourists visiting the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft embrace constructive authenticity, while Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt in Denmark is perceived as the most objectively authentic museum of all
<i>6. The notion of the ‘versatile tourist’ is of fundamental importance to the witch tourism experience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ There is a continuous interplay between darker and lighter dark tourism attitudes when visiting a witch museum ✓ All witch museums under examination are themselves versatile

Table.4. Overview of main findings and sub-findings.

4.1. Finding 1: Witch tourism is gendered

The first finding we got following our data examination is that witch tourism is gendered as women made up the vast majority of the visitors sampled.

Gender distribution (gender identity)

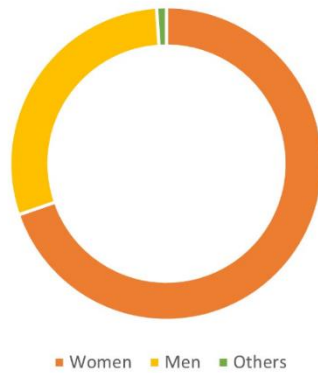


Fig.7. Entire sample's gender distribution.

Gender distribution (per museum)

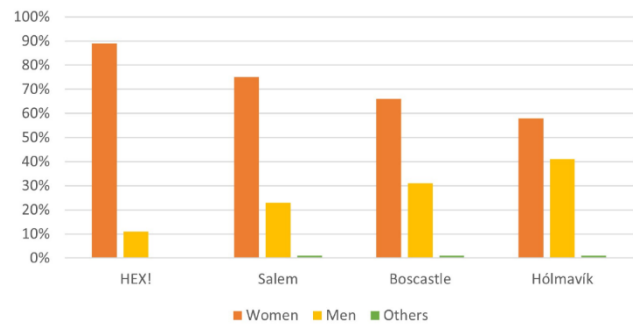


Fig.8. Gender distribution for each museum.

The sample from our netnographic study of Instagram shows a noticeable difference in the distribution of gender in visitors. Our coding analysis revealed that visitors identifying as women made up 69% of visitors, while men represented 29%, and others represented 1%. This is pertinent as Instagram has an equal proportion of male and female users (note that the Instagram survey in question did not take into account non-binary gender identities) (We Are Social et al., 2021b). The visitors' gender distribution is thus not a mere reflection of Instagram users, but a sign of a gendered tourism experience. This thus validates witch tourism sites being gendered dark tourism sites.

From our sample, women were the most common gender identity for all four museums. The largest difference in gender representation is seen for the museums in Ribe, Denmark and Salem, USA. The Hex! Museum in Denmark had 89% of female visitors using the Instagram geotag (and 11% male visitors), while Salem's museum had 75% of female visitors (and 23% men, and 1% others).

As previously argued, the Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt and the Salem Witch Museum have a stronger focus on educating visitors about the history of the witch craze and persecution which disproportionately targeted women, while the other two museums have a focus on sharing information about the practice of witchcraft. It is noteworthy to observe that these two museums have the gendered term 'witch' in their name, this is unlike the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Boscastle, England

and the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft in Iceland. According to the visitors sampled, the museum in Boscastle had a gender distribution of 66% women, 33% men, and 1% others, and the Icelandic museum had 58% women, 41% men, and 1% others.

Out of the four museums, the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft had the highest proportion of male visitors, which is an interesting fact as it is in concordance with Iceland being one of the few countries where more men were put to death for witchcraft than women (Gragg, 2015, p.145; Kivelson, 2003, p.617).

Sub-Finding 1.1: Women relate the persecution of witches to a feminist ideology, more than men do

A sub-finding of witch tourism being gendered is that upon sharing their museum experience online, numerous women, more so than men, shared a caption relating a feminist sentiment to the persecution of witches.

Of the Instagram posts to which we attached the code ‘expressed feminist connection (ideology) to witches’, 94% were posted by women, and the remaining 6% by men. In our sample, no visitors identifying solely as ‘they’ posted such a caption. These numbers should be put in perspective by looking at the entire sample. Out of the total female visitors, 9% posted a feminist reaction to the witch exhibition. This represents 6% of the entire sample regardless of gender. When it comes to men, 1% of all male visitors posted such a comment, representing a mere 0.4% of the entire sample.

An example of these types of captions can be seen in Fig.9. This visitor, identifying as a woman, shared the written caption “*I think we should stop burning (symbolic) witches/women at the stake and instead go to the witch museum in Ribe. But that's just my opinion*” [caption originally in Danish translated by researcher], explicitly making the connection between the historical treatment of the witches presented in the museums and the enduring treatment of women as seen from a feminist perspective. This particular post is from the geotag of the Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt in Ribe, this museum had the highest number of such posts among all the museums sampled, with precisely half of these comments being posted under this geotag. The museum with the second highest number of

such posts is the Salem Witch Museum, in the USA, with 28%. This is not entirely surprising, and it is coherent with the abovementioned findings that these museums had the highest number of female visitors. Additionally, the content of the exhibits and the purpose of the museums in question, the Hex! Museum particularly, are both centered around the historical facts of these dark events (Hex!Museum, 2021b; SalemWitchMuseum, 2021b). Fig.10 shows another post from a Hex! Museum female visitor who chose to emphasize the disproportionate targeting of women by writing that the museum “takes you through a dark period where superstition and fear lead to many, especially women in many countries, horrible executions and witchhunts. Power to the few, suppression for the many.” along with the hashtag #kvindekamp, a danish feminist movement fighting for gender equality (Den Danske Ordbog, 2021). The visitors may then be motivated to post this type of caption by what they have learned during their museum experience.



70 likes
 Synes vi skal stoppe med at brænde (symbolske) hekse/kvinder på bålet og i stedet tage på heksemuseum i Ribe. Men det er bare min mening

Fig.9. Geotag: Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt



15 likes
 The new museum Hex in Ribe takes you through a dark period where superstition and fear lead to many, especially women in many countries, horrible executions and witchhunts. Power to the few, suppression for the many.
 #witchhunt #hexribe #hex #suppression #historyday #ribe #denmark #witchtrials #heksagon #heks #historietime #kvindekamp #wiccan

Fig.10. Geotag: Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt

However, the exhibitions alone are not the only thing that can motivate women to post a feminist comment following their visit to a witch museum. Fig.11 below displays a post found under the geotag for the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft. This museum had 11% of the posts showcasing feminist views, the joint lowest amount with the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Boscastle. In this post, the visitor, a woman, revels in learning that in Iceland, men were targeted more than women, indeed, among the 21 executed for witchcraft, only one was a woman

(Galdrasynning, 2021d). She comments on this situation by writing “*misogyny doing a good job for once?*” and then relating to the witches on an existential level with “*we are the daughters of the witches they fail to burn.*”. Due to the country’s own history with the witch trials, this particular museum’s exhibitions do not put emphasis on the unfair treatment of women, and yet this visitor still posted a caption from a feminist perspective, demonstrating that the content of the museum alone is not the only factor when associating the witch hunt to a patriarchal society. This visitor’s behavior brings in the idea of a ‘glocalization’ of the narratives regarding the witch trials. The term ‘glocalization’ (or ‘glocal’) refers to the local being affected by the global and vice versa (Blatter, 2021). Here, the visitor brought in the global narrative of women being targeted in the witch trials to a local place where that was not the case. She is not alone, another visitor wrote the caption “*only 1 of 21 (officially) was female... hello sisters, in the name of thor, for the love of odin*”, thus, bringing the same global narrative to the local Icelandic museum.

The visitors exhibiting a feminist ideology when going to these witch museums use this ideology to understand the social world around them. Bringing this perspective of the witch craze as a period of persecution against women while in Iceland demonstrates that they perceive it as the ‘objective truth’ and adhere to this ideology wherever they are. Adhering to a particular ideology may lead to stereotyping certain situations (Eger et al., 2021), which may result in visitors being surprised to learn that in Iceland women were not disproportionately persecuted for witchcraft (Morgenroth et al., 2020),

While a number of visitors may not know much about the topic of witches apart from what they learned from pop culture representation, as exhibited by one of the female participants in our focus group (see Fig.12), others go to these museums with an already formed view of this part of history clearly defined in mind, regardless of the local history, as represented by the visitor in Fig.11.



29 J'aime

only one woman was burned for witchcraft in Iceland (sorcery was considered to be a male thing, misogyny doing good for once?). we are the daughters of the witches they failed to burn.

Fig.11. Geotag: Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft

Participant 6:

I just want to say that until now, I was thinking that the witches are something like a fairy tale thing and it didn't really exist in real life and I had no clue about all the things that you were talking about. So I wouldn't go to a witch museum because I would think that it's a fairy tale thing for kids and you know it's something they make just to make money and it wouldn't be interesting, but if I knew that it's something that it used to happen and there is so much history behind, maybe I would be curious and I would be like, okay, let's go and see what it is because I have no clue.

Fig.12.

Excerpt from the focus group's transcription (see Appendix B). Comments made following the showing of the video presenting the Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt.

This first finding, *witch tourism is gendered*, and its first sub-finding of a feminist perspective being brought into this tourism experience were expected by the researchers following the literature review as the different fields of literature examined pointed to this conclusion. Having learned about the extent of the disproportionate targeting of women during the witch trials, it is easy to add the perspective of gender studies, as the binary identification system has for the longest part in history resulted in differentiated gender experiences (Morgenroth et al., 2020), and so it did for the victims of the witch hunt. Additionally, the different movements that emerged as a response to the predominance of the pop culture-supported narrative of the wicked witch-hag (Breuer, 2009) further shows that this finding is quite a logical one.

Sub-Finding 1.2: Female visitors perform the role of the witch when visiting witch or witchcraft museums

The second sub-finding associated with witch tourism being gendered is the discovery that a number of women visiting these museums have a tendency to follow an implicit witch-related dress

code. They perform the role of the witch on the tourism site by taking on some recognizable features of the witch character.

This finding is true especially for the Salem Witch Museum but is also observed at the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic and the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft. During our coding analysis, the code ‘‘witchy’ dress code’ was allocated to Instagram posts showcasing the visitor dressed in this implicit dress code, in total, 9% of all posts were assigned this code. 75% of such posts were found under the Salem Witch Museum geotag, 17% under the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft geotag, and 8% under the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic geotag. The lack of ‘‘witchy’ dress code’ found under the Hex! Museum geotag can be explained by the fact that of the 36 Instagram posts sampled, only one featured a person, i.e., a man, the visitor, who positively evaluates and recommends the museum but does not perform or identify with the witch in any way (see Appendix E). Three posts featuring women who dressed up to visit the Salem Witch Museum and the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft can be found below (Fig.13).



Fig. 13.
Geotags: Salem Witch Museum and Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft

As can be seen, these three women have taken on some physical characteristics of the witch, the first two posts show two women dressed similarly at the Salem museum, they are both wearing dark colors and finished up their outfit with a black hat and are posing for the picture with a similar posture and attitude. The black hat is not a trivial detail, as when we asked our focus group participants

the question *'when you hear the word witch, what's the first thing that comes to your mind?'*, two of them named the witches' hat as one of the main elements that comes into their mind (see Appendix B). Furthermore, the sign of the Salem Witch Museum, in front of which many visitors choose to pose, does feature this image of a witch wearing a hat (as can be seen clearly in Fig.14 found in the next main finding, p.64). The last picture (on the right) shows a woman along with the caption *"Another day at the office"*, and while she is not dressed like the two Salem visitors, it can be argued that she is showcasing an Icelandic version of the *'witchy' dress code'*.

The behavior transpiring from these posts can be related to Butler's theory of gender performativity, understanding gender as an ongoing sequence of acts (Salih, 2002). These women put up a performance putting emphasis on feminine traits as they identify with the witch from the perspective of their gender. They take the image of the witch, from both historical and pop culture representations and publicly perform their gender while incorporating elements of the witch persona, in addition to *'doing'* their gender, they are *'doing'* the witch. The visitor found on the far left of Fig.13 associates this witch performance with the written caption *"Humanity has always been afraid of women who fly, be they witches or free!!!"* [caption originally in Portuguese translated by researcher]. This visitor's post thus combines a performance of gender by the visitor and a connection between the witch trials and feminist views of society, clarifying why some women identify so strongly with witches.

Women are not the only ones who performed in such a way but represent the vast majority, revealing that this performance is in fact gendered. Among the visitors showcasing a *'witchy dress code'*, 92% identified as women, and 8% identified as men. Looking at this behavior from a gender expression perspective, we found that 88% of these visitors were displaying a feminine gender expression, 8% a masculine expression, and 4% a queer expression. Butler argues that feminine or masculine traits can be exhibited by all, regardless of gender (Salih, 2002, p.45). When tourists go visit these types of museums, the behavior and gender performance of some is affected and altered by the site, as they temporarily take on the witch persona as part of their identity. This is due to the fact that the witch is generally pictured as a woman, and the tourism site is not simply the museum, but it includes the visitors' knowledge and opinions on all witch-related topics.

The performance of these visitors illustrates Filieri et al.'s claim (2021) that people use Instagram as a self-representation tool (p.3). By identifying with the witch in such an observable way, these visitors are exhibiting a sense of existential authenticity, and use the witch tourism experience

for self-identification means. This sub-finding is thus coherent with women displaying more existential authenticity as will be explored in a later section.

Sub-Finding 1.3: The dark tourism motivations 'remembrance', 'desire for education/learning', and 'pilgrimage' are stronger motivations for women than men and others when it comes to visiting witch museums

As per the versatile tourist concept, as introduced by Ooi (2002), which theorizes the changing behavior of the tourist and which will be delved into deeper in a subsequent section, we assigned more than one dark tourism motivation per visitor when undergoing our coding analysis. Of the 12 dark motivations used as seen in Table 3 (see pp.47-48) 'remembrance', 'desire for learning and education', and 'pilgrimage' were, in this order, the motivations with the biggest differences between male and female tourists. Of the visitors motivated by 'remembrance', 87.5% were women while 12.5% were men. For 'desire for education/learning', 76% were women, 22% were men, and 1% were others. And finally, for 'pilgrimage', 76% were women and 24% were men.

While 'remembrance' and 'pilgrimage' were not brought up by the participants during our focus group, the 'desire for education/learning' was clearly exhibited by the female participants, but not by the male ones and hence, cohere with the findings from Instagram. As previously mentioned, the Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt and the Salem Witch Museum experienced the highest proportions of female visitors and are the two museums most focused on teaching the history around the witch trials. This distribution of gender among both the museums and the motivations were somewhat validated during our focus group (see Appendix B). Following the viewing of the first two videos, presenting the Hex! Museum and Boscastle's Museum of Witchcraft and Magic, all three female participants expressed that they would rather visit the Hex! Museum because "*it had a sense of reality*", "*it was about something that happened*" (Participant 2), it is more "*factual*" (Participant 5), and they "*would go to the first one to learn something about the witches*" (Participant 6). They perceived the Boscastle museum as "*more creepy (sic)*" and for people "*who like horror and scary stuff*" (Participant 6), Participant 5 mentioned this museum would "*freak [her] out a bit*" as it appears to try to "*convert you to witchcraft*" and that she "*would be more interested in the history parts than in the horror thingy (sic)*".

On the other hand, the male participants showed more interest for the Boscastle museum. Participant 3 started by stating that he “*actually like this much more than the other one [...] I want to visit this one more than the first one*” saying that this museum seemed more “*mystical*” and that he “*did find this more interesting than the first one in Ribe*”. Participant 2 agreed by adding that the atmosphere of this museum, induced by the mystical aura, “*increased [his] curiosity*”. He further mentioned that the two museums offer two different experiences, a historical, factual one for Hex! and a more experiential one for Boscastle, and can therefore not be compared, while still stating his preference for the latter. Participant 1 was in line with the other male participants and told us that he liked “*the creepy part and the darker side*” exhibited by Boscastle’s Museum of Witchcraft and Magic and preferred it over the Hex! Museum as he “*would like to see the very dark side of the whole story*”. This discussion clearly demonstrates the ‘desire for education/learning’ motivations exhibited by the female participants, and a difference in motivations for dark tourism among genders.

The other two dark motivations of ‘remembrance’ and ‘pilgrimage’ are coherent with the upsetting disproportionate persecution of women during the witch hunt period.

4.2. Finding 2. *Witch tourism is lifestyle tourism for self-identified witches*

The next finding we uncovered is that witch tourism is experienced as lifestyle tourism for visitors identifying as a witch and practicing wicca and other pagan rituals. 17% of all visitors identified as part of the witch community, either directly in the post or on their Instagram page.

This is exemplified by Fig.14 found below. In this post, the visitor posing in front of the Salem Witch Museum reminisces over a trip to Salem with her sister, she refers to it as a ‘*pilgrimage*’ and revels in seeing that unlike the ‘*witch hysteria of 1692*’, the town now welcomes ‘*diversity*’ and embrace their history without ‘*trying to cover up the past*’ and concludes that ‘*if you are any type of pagan, gosh you will be welcome here*’. This post includes the hashtag #witchesofinstagram, a hashtag we have encountered countless times while going through the various posts under the museums’ geotags.



██████████ Last year, my sister and I went on a sort of pilgrimage to Salem, MA. Let me tell you that this was one of the most welcoming towns I've ever been to.

The whole place honoured their dark history in a way you don't really see here in Alberta. A far cry from the witch hysteria of 1692, they now embrace education and diversity. They don't try to cover up the past, but use it as a tool to inform the future.

And if you are any type of pagan, gosh will you be welcome here. They have shops and museums and celebrations that evolve purely around earth-based spirituality.

Seeing everyone living their truth and existing "out of the broom closet" really inspired me to lean into my own spiritual journey and do some work on myself.

Once world travel is an option again, I'd highly recommend an adventure there. I know I plan on going back!!

#witchesofinstagram #witchtrials #earthbased #greenwitch #travel #herbalism #inspiration #history #museum

Fig. 14. Geotag: Salem Witch Museum

This visitor likens her trip to Salem as a pilgrimage, however, unlike the secular pilgrimage mentioned earlier that comes from a feminist identification to the witches persecuted, this one is due to the persecution of pagans. When examining Finding 1, we examined the performance that a number of visitors, especially women, put up when going to these museums, they temporarily take on aspects of the witch persona. However, for other visitors it is not a temporary performance but a lifestyle, they identify with the witches because of the rituals, practices, and celebrations they share.

The hashtag #witchesofinstagram cannot always be used to tell the lifestyle tourists from the others, as it is not always used to indicate one identifies as pagan, wicca, or a witch, as it is in Fig.14. In some cases, it is used to signify an interest in dark subcultures, whether that is horror movies, metal music, or Halloween, as we have encountered in our sample of posts. Furthermore, it can also be used simply to reference the witch museum the user visited, or for aesthetic choices.

An Instagram post found under the geotag for Boscastle's Museum of Witchcraft and Magic shares this written caption which encapsulates this community's view on the persecution of witches:

'We sure have come a long way. It wasn't so long ago that we would all have been locked up, tortured, ostracized, burned, or murdered for simply having an affinity with the seasons, herbs, healing, or our very own nature. We still have a long way to go to be fully accepted but we are very lucky to be living in times where we can practice our witchy ways without the fear of death or persecution (in most

countries anyways). So it really saddens me that despite centuries of progress from these dark times, the witchy community can sometimes turn on itself. Cliques, bullying, elitism, shaming. Haven't we faced enough judgment and torment? Every witch is different and has a different path to take. We aren't all going to agree on everything and that's ok. But let's not attack each other and try to bring each other down. We've seen more than enough of that already.' (see Appendix F).

It is not difficult to assume that this visitor chose to travel to a witch tourism site because of her affiliation with what she calls the 'witchy community'. Relating this type of lifestyle tourism to Gyimóthy et al.'s (2013) work on pop culture tourism, we see some similarities. Gyimóthy et al. (2013) argue that fans may take on elements of pop culture narratives in the formation of their own identities, and travel to pop culture related destinations because they have an emotional attachment to it (p.18). While the travel decisions of the two visitors abovementioned were not made specifically due to pop culture representations, the behavior of this 'witchy community' is similar to that of the fandoms Gyimóthy et al. (2013) write about. They travel to locations that are linked to their personal self-identification as witches because they have an emotional attachment to these places. A number of members of this community appeared in our sample, and as we have found, there is quite a substantial witch community on Instagram. As per Gyimóthy et al. (2013), virtual fan communities tend to entail high involvement behavior, and may impact a member's travel decisions.

If we compare this caption to the one mentioned in Finding 1, "*I think we should stop burning (symbolic) witches/women at the stake and instead go to the witch museum in Ribe. But that's just my opinion*" (Fig.9, p.57), we can see clearly the existence of two discourses regarding the persecution of the witches, a feminist one, and a witch or pagan one.

Sub-Finding 2.1: Witch tourism sites attract more lifestyle tourism aficionados than feminist-related visitors

Considering that women made up the majority of the visitors we examined, while going through our sample of Instagram posts during the coding analysis, we were expecting to find a great deal of Instagram posts linking the witch hunt and persecution to a feminist sentiment as women were the victims of the witch trials over eighty percent of the time (Breuer, 2009, p.138). While we did encounter some (as examined in a previous section), they were greatly outnumbered by posts

showcasing the visitor self-identifying as a witch, wicca and/or pagan rituals practitioner, hence relating to these museums' exhibitions not from a feminist perspective but from a non-necessarily gendered witchcraft practitioner perspective.

As mentioned earlier, our sample comprised of far more women than men and others, and there is an observable difference in one's gender identity when it comes to posting a feminist comment. On the other hand, the proportion of genders identifying as part of the witch community remains stable between men and women with 16% of male visitors and 17% of female visitors identifying with the witch community in their posts, while 0% of others did. Comparing these numbers to the entire sample's gender distribution (69% women, 29% men) emphasizes the relevance of this argument. Looking at the gender distribution according to gender expression shows that 20% of visitors with queer gender expression, 17% with feminine gender expression, and 15% with a masculine gender expression identified as part of the witch community either directly in the post or on their Instagram page.

The two posts in Fig.15 and Fig.16 exemplify the two different types of identification to the witches' harrowing fate, and consequently two different discourses found on the topic of the witch hunt period. The visitor in Fig.15 attaches a quote by writer Roxanne Gay, '*Unruly women are always witches, no matter what century we are in.*' which clearly communicates a feminist perspective regarding what constitutes a witch. Whereas the visitor of Fig.16 is celebrating Samhain, an ancient Celtic festival and precursor to Halloween (Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2021). We have come across this celebration a number of times during our coding analysis, it is mentioned by the portion of our sample who identify as part of the witch community, as Samhain is a pagan celebration.



73 likes
 "Unruly women are always witches, no matter what century we are in" -Roxane Gay 🇺🇸

Fig. 15. Geotag: Salem Witch Museum



24 likes
 Blessed Samhain!!! 🇮🇸🇫🇮🇩🇵🇸 In honor of my favorite holiday I am revisiting the Icelandic Museum of Sorcery & Witchcraft! The Museum is located in Hólmavík, a small town in the West Fjords. This wild place houses a small library on the craft, an entire room of ancient spells & grimoires, and accounts of the Icelandic witch trials. Because Iceland was taken over by Denmark hundreds of years ago, all of their writing and literature (including grimoires/spell books) was transcribed and preserved! So unlike the rest of Western Europe we have actual magical works from the ancient witches and sorcerers of Iceland! And let me tell you, some of it is pretty black. I'll post the spells later today! Enjoy your Samhain celebrations! 🇮🇸🇫🇮🇩🇵🇸 #witch #witchcraft

Fig. 16. Geotag: Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft

Sub-Finding 2.2: The two museums putting emphasis on witchcraft practice have more posts by visitors identifying as wiccan or pagan, and the two museums strongly focused on history have more posts relating the museums' content to a feminist ideology

The Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt and the Salem Witch Museum are associated with the highest number of posts containing a feminist perspective, while the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic and the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft have a higher amount of visitors who identify as witches, or pagans. 56% of posts shared by self-identified witches were found under the geotag Boscastle's Museum of Witchcraft and Magic, 22% were from the Icelandic museum, 15% were from Salem, and finally, 7% from the Hex! Museum.

The fact that the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Boscastle appears to be the most attractive for visitors whose lifestyle involve pagan or wicca practices, rituals, and celebrations, was reinforced during our focus group. Participant 5 shared that she would rather go to the Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt than the one in Boscastle because the latter gave the feeling that it was trying to convert the visitor to witchcraft. This feeling she mentioned is logical if the museum is frequently visited by individuals who already practice witchcraft related rituals and partake in pagan traditions.

Furthermore, this museum was founded by a wicca practitioner, and it organizes many witchcraft-related events, one of which is the yearly All Hallows Eve Dark Gathering (see Fig.28, p.84) where tourists and curious onlookers join folk dancers, musicians, and pagans to mark the end of summer and the beginning of winter by way of a folklore festival (All Hallows Gathering, 2021). This event illustrates how invested the museum is in preserving these traditions and why it attracts visitors identifying as pagans or wicca practitioners.

4.3. Finding 3: *Gender matters when it comes to digitally co-creating the witch museum experience*

Following up on Finding 1 of the study (*witch tourism is gendered*), it comes almost naturally that tourists who self-identify as women get more involved in the co-creation process than male visitors. Indeed, as already stated, 69% of our sample is female, 29% is male, and only 1% of the geotagged images belong to people who reflect upon their gender identity from a non-binary point of view (see Fig.7, p.55). These percentages slightly change when considering the sample's gender expressions, with visitors expressing themselves in feminine and masculine ways co-creating at a rate of 68% and 27% respectively, while tourists with queer gender expressions rising to the 5% of the total examined co-creation efforts on Instagram (Fig.17).

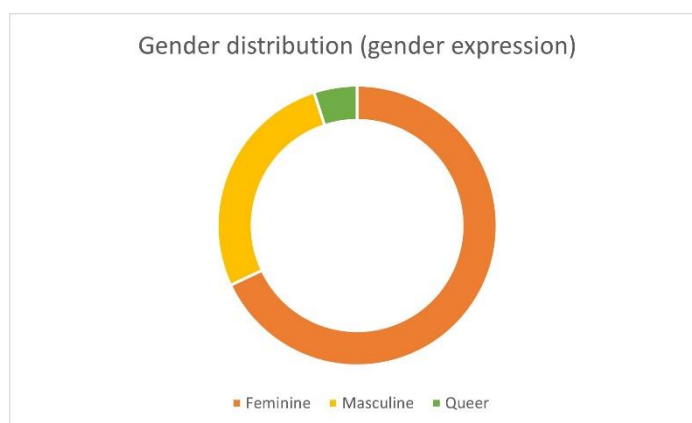


Fig.17. Entire sample's gender distribution. (as per gender expression).

As previously mentioned, Instagram is a non-gendered platform, with female and male representation almost equally divided (We Are Social et al., 2021b). This fact, combined with the numbers presented above, underlines the particular interest that female visitors demonstrate when it

comes to sharing their witch tourism experiences on the platform. Furthermore, it is claimed that this significant gendered result on witch museums' digital co-creation may be very dissimilar if another kind of dark tourism site was to be tested (e.g. holocausts museums or battlefield sites). Some more specific findings on how gender relates to co-creating the witch tourism experience are presented below.

Sub-Finding 3.1: Female tourists are keener on positively evaluating their witch tourism experiences online, no significant gender differences regarding the sites' recommendation rates

The results of the netnographic study showed a great gender gap in the online evaluations of all four museums; 4 out of 5 people that chose to positively evaluate their tourism experience and consequently share this evaluation on their Instagram profile are self-identified women, comparing to 1 out of 5 visitors self-identifying as men. However, there is still substantial potential for the museums to be even more evaluated by both female and male visitors, since only 29% of all women and 17% of all men examined chose to provide an online evaluation. Adding to this, an interesting fact is that female visitors are not so eager to additionally recommend the museums to their followers, with only 9% of the total female sample sharing a recommendation. This percentage signifies that only 1 out of 3 women that chose to evaluate one of the four witch museums was also willing to recommend it. The ratio of evaluations/recommendations is almost the same for male visitors. Hereby, two images posted by female visitors depict the difference between solely evaluating and both evaluating and recommending the touristic site (Fig.18 and 19 respectively).



Fig.18

Geotag: Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt



Fig.19

Geotag: Museum of Witchcraft and Magic

These two pictures are selected due to the fact that both the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Boscastle and the Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt in Ribe are by far the most evaluated ones (43% and 47% respectively), with the Hex! Museum having also the highest recommendation rate of all museums (20% of the examined visitors did recommend the site). On the contrary, the Salem Witch Museum as well as the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft in Hólmavík score both very low in both metrics, with Salem museum being the least evaluated and recommended site (5% of all gender identities have proceeded with an online recommendation and 8.5% with an evaluation).

Both evaluations and recommendations are extremely important for the digital co-creation of the tourism experience, considering that other users are most likely to engage with such UGC and consciously search for as many positive comments as possible when inquiring into potential tourism destinations (Tuten & Solomon, 2017). The fact that female tourists seem to be much more open to evaluate dark tourism sites associated with witch hunt and witchcraft corroborates the gendered nature of these places. Indeed, the identification of female visitors with the symbol of the witch in both performative and feminist dimensions produces personal, affective sensations that translate into positive evaluations of the sites. This process contributes decisively to the co-creation of experience

value (Prebensen et al., 2018, p.242). However, the lack of recommendations from all gender identities is a point that stands out, since we would expect a higher percentage of this metric as far as the female audience is concerned. The researchers' interpretation is that women are much more attached to the witch museum experience, yet the very personal, almost intimate nature of the visit, which is many times directly connected to their existence, does not motivate them to recommend the sites to other people.

As far as the museums are concerned, what is fascinating is that the most evaluated and recommended site of all is the newest museum; the Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt in Ribe, Denmark. As already stated, Hex! Museum is the site with the strongest focus on historical events and education around the witches' persecution, is authentic regarding its location and has very little to do with an induced commercial romanticism about the era of witch trials and witch hunt. It is thus suggested that dark tourists (with a focus on female tourists) are keener on positively evaluating and recommending a site with a clear communication strategy, that aims at historic accuracy and has almost full control over its brand and its destination image. On the other side, the Salem Witch Museum is by far the least evaluated and recommended museum out of the four (for all gender identities), even though it is the most prominent one. It is thus proposed that sites that have no clear control over their brand identity and include wide and expansive cosmologies, being a blend of historical facts and pop culture references about witches (Gencarella, 2007), are not likely to receive visitors' online evaluations and recommendations that will be shared with the rest of the Instagram community.

As Fig.20 shows, Salem museum is perceived as a 'vibe', a feelgood experience, rather than as a touristic experience worth recommending for its educational background and connection to the witch history.

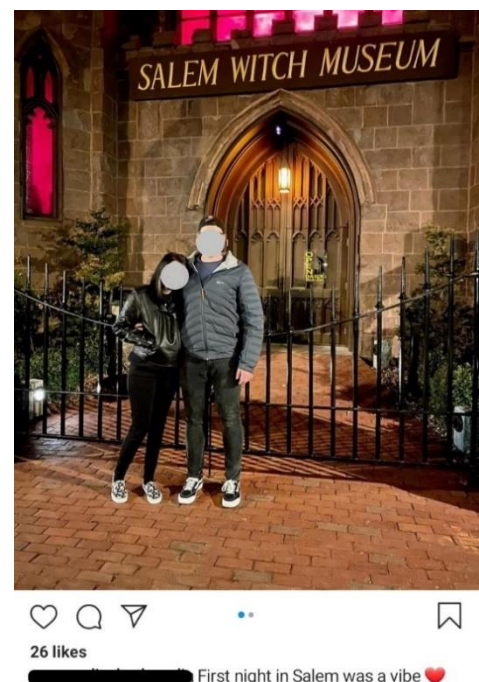


Fig.20. Geotag: Salem Witch Museum

Sub-Finding 3.2: Non-binary tourists co-create on Instagram during the post-travel phase, female and male tourists prefer to co-create on site

Even though the sample of non-binary visitors for all four witch museums is rather low, a remarkable finding is that 100% of these people preferred to share their tourism experience on Instagram some time after visiting the witch museums. Female visitors are the runner up when it comes to post-travel co-creation (15% of total female sample waited to share their experience after their visit) and male visitors come third with a 10% of post-travel Instagram posts. In total, 85% of the examined images were posted on-site and not even a single post referred to the pre-travel stage, unless we refer to the posts that expressed a wish for returning to the site for another visit. In this case, 3.2% of the posts can be considered as pre-travel stage content.

Looking closer at Neuhofer et al.'s (2014) model of technology enhanced destination experiences (see Fig.4, p.18), digital co-creation can and should be promoted in all stages of the travel experience. In our case, on-site co-creation is particularly popular, while post-travel co-creation seems to be extremely important only to people who do not fit into the binary gender identification system. This audience should be understood and encouraged by the tourism sites, since both pre- and post-travel co-creation phases are deemed as 'socially intense phases' (Gretzel & Jamal, 2009, as cited in Neuhofer et al., 2013a, p.549) and have the power to foster "*interaction, engagement and co-creation among tourism providers, tourists and other tourism consumers alike*" (Neuhofer et al., 2013a, p.549). Furthermore, since post-travel co-creation is related to the tourist's memory mechanisms, it is suggested that non-binary tourists present the highest percentage of memorable witch museum experiences, followed by female visitors.

Sub-Finding 3.3: Technical features of the online co-creation process (captions, hashtags, images modification, etc.) do not present significant gender differences, humorous commentaries prevail

Hereby, some technical features that determine the co-creation efforts and the online performance of the tourism experience are discussed. 93% of all examined users chose to accompany their geotagged images with a text (Instagram caption) expressing their thoughts and emotions over the touristic product, while only 7% preferred to either use no caption at all or add emojis in the place of the text. Even though documenting one's tourism experience through photography is a very

common tactic, these ratios prove that language is equally powerful and is widely linked to digital media and the online co-creation process (Kozinets, 2015). Moreover, in addition to text, 54% of the visitors made use of various relevant hashtags (e.g., #witch, #witchcraft, #magic, #wicca, #witchy, #travel and many more particular ones referring to each location), contributing to the community creation around the common interest of dark tourism and, more exclusively, witch tourism. Finally, we noticed a surprisingly low image modification rate, with only 5% of the visitors editing, adding filters or photoshopping their Instagram posts. All these features carry no significant gender differences, a fact that validates Instagram being a tool used by both female and male users on an equal basis.

Moving on to the content of the shared images and their incorporated captions, and after excluding the more generic comments about the museums' exhibitions or the overall trips' evaluation, what really seems to stand out from the netnographic study is a wide variety of humorous content. This particular behavioral pattern comes as a surprise, since all four sites under examination belong to the dark tourism spectrum, thus are associated with notions such as death, suffering, macabre events or imagery, or past persecution (Stone, 2006). Regardless, 35% of the visitors who co-created via using text captions, did so in a humorous manner. 43% of male tourists that included a text in their post, chose to write something that could be characterized as amusing or witty (Fig.21), while the same percentage for the female tourists is 32%. Even more surprisingly, tourists that self-identify as women preferred to co-create via sharing humorous verbal expressions instead of overtly expressing their connection to the feminist side of the witch tourism experience (only 9% of female tourists that wrote a text caption did it to enhance feminist ideology). 1 out of 3 non-binary visitors also preferred to share a humorous statement. The role of humor in witch tourism experiences, its particular influence on the examined sites, as well as the interesting connection between such unexpected behavior and innovative tourism identities such as the one of the post-tourist will be further analyzed in Finding 4.



Fig.21. Geotag: Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft

Adding to the theoretical contributions around co-creation and further elaborating on Neuhofer et al.'s (2014) approach of technology enhanced destination experiences, what is also notable in the witch museums case is the multiplicity of dimensions during the co-creation process. All aforementioned attitudes and behaviors which are an essential part of the tourists' becoming, along with their digital presence that is not separated from the 'real' self and their co-creation efforts on Instagram, validate the concept that digital technologies do fragment the tourism spaces (Munar & Ek, 2015). Indeed, there seems to be a really strong on-site connection to materialities (including the exhibition objects, the museum surroundings, the global and national history and culture regarding witchcraft and witch hunts), while at the same time there is an online performance that supports the construction of the tourists' digital identities via their gendered bodies (female visitors dressing up as witches, tourists ideologically supporting feminist views, etc.). Space in witch tourism is both factual and virtual in all co-creation stages (pre, on, and post-site), and a separation between them should not be attempted, since co-creating the witch experience takes place in both conditions simultaneously.

4.4. Finding 4: *Pop culture and humor lighten dark tourism sites*

The next finding we will explore is how pop culture representations and references lighten a dark tourism site, and so do humoristic comments regarding the witch museums' content.

A total of 11% of visitors included a pop culture reference when sharing their museum experience online. As expected, the vast majority of these posts, 77%, were posted under the geotag for the Salem museum, while 13% and 10% were found for the Icelandic museum and the Boscastle museum respectively. The Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt in Ribe did not have any, presumably because of its novelty, and because the content of the museum and its surroundings do not encourage pop culture association.

Sharing on Instagram helps tourists interpret and make sense of their experiences (Munar et al., 2021, p.6), and hashtags and captions are used to associate one's own meaning to photographs of a particular tourism site (Conti & Lexhagen, 2020, p.3). The pop culture references are hence used by tourists to help make sense of their witch tourism experience, what they know about this world of witches and witchcraft, they learned from pop culture representations. Fig.22 shows examples of pop

culture references made at the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic and at the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft. The first post references Disney's 1993 movie Hocus Pocus and the second, Harry Potter.



Fig.22.

Geotags: Museum of Witchcraft and Magic and Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft

The movie Hocus Pocus is referenced often and is actually the most common pop culture reference in our sample. The Instagram posts found in the subsequent sub-finding (see Fig.23, p.79) were taken from the Salem Witch Museum's geotag and showcase tourists all referencing the Disney movie Hocus Pocus. There are different potential reasons for this repetition. It may be that the visitors are all Westerners of the same generation, and so happen to hold this particular movie as a personal reference for witches because they saw it in their childhood, and it was fundamental in creating their view of the witch. This argument could be used for the Harry Potter movies for the younger part of this generation. Hocus Pocus and the first Harry Potter movie being released in 1993 and 2001 respectively, suggests that these movies have impacted the members of Generation Y or the Millennials in shaping the image of the witch in their mind. This was implied during our focus group as three participants mentioned Harry Potter when answering the question 'when you hear the word witch, what's the first thing that comes to your mind?' (see Appendix B). Another reason may be that these visitors are influenced by other Instagram users, and are following the Instagram culture and using the references they see others are using so as to feel a sense of belonging.

In these cases, the pop culture references come from the tourists' own associations regarding witches. However, pop culture can also be prompted by the museums, as it is done by the Salem Witch Museum. According to our focus group, this does lighten the dark tourism site. After having watched the video presenting the Salem Witch Museum, in which the pop culture-filled surroundings of the museum were shown, Participant 3 said this when commenting on the mix of history and pop culture in Salem:

“for me [...] there’s two things with witches. There is the actual witch trials and then there is the Hermione Granger witches in Harry Potter. And this one was leaning more towards Hermione Granger and less towards the actual witch trials.” (Participant 3)

As we have seen, the first exhibit of the Salem Witch Museum is about the “*actual witch trials*” Participant 3 mentions, however because of the costumes and the pop culture, it does not appear as dark as it is. Participant 5 mentioned that the theatrical element help communicate “*a dark message in a way that is not so dark*”. She shared that she enjoyed the dark tourism site being lightened in this manner. Participant 3 agreed that pop culture did lighten the dark history, however, he did not believe that this period of history should be lightened in such a way, saying “*I mean because it was fucking dark, and I think it would be valid to showcase that if you want to speak about witch trials*”.

Pop culture references are not the only way Instagram users can make light of their witch tourism experience, 32% of all posts examined contained a humorous comment. 41% of these comments were posted regarding the Icelandic museum, 28% were posted for the Boscastle museum, 24% for Salem, and finally, 7% for the Hex! Museum.

The reason for many of the humorous comments posted at the Icelandic museum is one of their exhibits, the Necropants or Nábrók in Icelandic (see Fig.29 and Fig.31, p.86 and p.89). The Necropants are part of an Icelandic ritual used to gather wealth. To perform this ritual, a sorcerer must find a living man who agrees that upon his death, the sorcerer may dig up his corpse, skin it from the waist down, and wear it over his own skin. One must then steal a coin from a poor widow and place it in the Necropants' scrotum and the wearer of the pants will always find money in the scrotum (Galdrasyning, 2021d). Out of the 80 posts selected from the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft's geotag, 25 either showed the Necropants in the picture or mentioned it in the caption. It evidently makes a lasting impression on the visitors. The Necropants found in the museum is a replica, however it is unclear how many visitors know this as it is only mentioned in one of the posts sampled

‘A sampling of some Icelandic sorcery. Pants made of human skin (replica unfortunately)’ (see Appendix G). As we have understood from our Instagram exploration, the Necropants are relatively well-known, and a number of visitors expressed how they had been looking forward to seeing them in person. The Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft takes the lead in the numbers of visitors traveling there because they are pulled by the motivation ‘visit a ‘must see’ touristic site’. Indeed, out of the total of visitors showcasing the ‘visit a ‘must see’ touristic site’ motivation, 38% were found under this museum’s geotag, compared to 33% for Salem, 15% for Hex!, and 13% for Boscastle. While witch tourism and dark tourism are often considered as niche or alternative tourism (Jansson, 2018, p.102), these pants have the characteristics of a must-see tourist attraction. ‘Came all the way to Iceland to see the Necropants.’, another reads ‘I was on my way to the Icelandic Museum of Sorcery and Witchcraft to visit the Necropants’ and yet another with ‘Saw the necropants!’ (see Appendix H). The story of these pants is a rather dark one, nonetheless many visitors write witty, ironic captions. However, the Necropants are not the only site to generate humorous comments. Table 5 shows examples of such comments found for all four museums.

Humorous comments shared on Instagram	
Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft	The Witchfinder General was NOT PLEASED that he was forced to witness the Necropants!
	#anotherdickpic
	Oh hey, would you sleep on this bloody pig skin, real quick? Kthx.
	Ooh, better be careful, we learned some stuff
Museum of Witchcraft and Magic	never new(sic) liquorice was good for ‘sweetening blood’ ha, ha...
	Where there’s a witch, there’s a way!
	I’m starting a coven who wants in?
	My new D.I.L.F. (Deity I’d like to fuck)
Salem Witch Museum	Out here being spooky nd(sic) shit
	Just a basic witch ;)
	Came to Salem to be burned at the stake [fire emoji]
	This city attracts all the weirdos from your high school that are into conspiracies, voodoo.
	Catching witches today
Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt	[broom emoji] yeah, I held on tight
	Today, we are witching in Ribe
	magic, girlpower and stuff
	[comments originally in Danish, translated by researcher]

Table.5. Humorous online comments per museum.

The behavior exhibited by these tourists with this witty commentary on the tourism sites evoke the concept of post-tourism, according to which, tourists use irony and playful manners to distance themselves from the mass tourist character who is viewed as “*following standardized taste patterns*” (Jansson, 2018, p.102). The fact that nearly one third of our sample exhibited this behavior is indicating that these visitors are by all appearances following a pattern themselves. Additionally, as we have seen, ‘leisure motives’ is the most common motivation pulling these tourists to visit a witch museum, this further corresponds to the behavior of post-tourists as Jansson (2018) writes that these tourists tend to combine different types of tourism experience and seek niche or alternative tourist sites; witch tourism fits that description.

Our study uses social media to examine tourists’ behavior. The increasing influence of the spreadable media has exacerbated the performance component of post tourism (Jansson, 2018). Feifer (1985) (as cited in Jansson, 2018, p.102) argued that post-tourists learn of tourist behavior through the different media available. According to the post-tourism concept, the tourists in our sample may then write such witty caption because they have noticed this behavior online and are imitating it as they perform the role of the tourist.

Sub-Finding 4.1: The Salem Witch Museum is inextricably linked to pop culture

As noted above, out of the four museums selected, the Salem Witch Museum had the most posts with an attached pop culture reference. This is not surprising in the slightest, as the Salem Witch Museum appears to be inextricably linked to pop culture.

During our focus group, following the showing of a video presenting the Salem Witch Museum, the participants likened what they saw to a “*theme park*” or a “*Harry Potter event*” and described the museum as appearing “*very Americanized and very commercialized*” (see Appendix B). Pop culture representations of the witch are unavoidable when visiting this museum as the town has used its past to fuel its tourism industry. This immersion in pop culture results in the museum being a dark tourism site experiencing a crossover of witch tourism and pop culture tourism.



Fig.23.

Hocus Pocus references in Instagram posts from Salem Witch Museum's geotag.

As we mentioned earlier, the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft which is located in Hólmavík, a small town of fewer than 400 inhabitants, was founded in order to bring tourism to the remote and sparsely populated region of Strandir (Lund & Jóhannesson, 2016). We can thus assume that a significant portion of tourists travel to Hólmavík so as to visit this unorthodox museum. In contrast, it is probable that most tourists do not go to Salem specifically to visit the Salem Witch Museum, they travel to Salem because of the wider attraction of 'Witch City'. The Salem Witch Museum has been an integral part of the city's witch theme, and in fact the museum's owner was part of the business leaders who launched the month-long Halloween celebration, Haunted Happenings in 1972 (Gencarella, 2007, p.281). This has been widely successful, and Salem sees half a million tourists visiting in October, which represents 30% of the town's annual tourists (Hines, 2019). Furthermore, the museum's official Instagram page is filled with reference to pop culture, as they frequently share the #HollywoodWitchChallenge, during which Instagram users recreate the looks of witches found in movies and TV shows.

This peculiar atmosphere resulting from the blend of historical facts on the witch trials and pop culture representations of witches and other mystical creature was noted by a tourist who

captioned her post ‘*For a town where the premise was there really were no witches, there seems to be a lot of magic here. History is weird.*’ (see Appendix I).

As revealed in Finding 3, the Salem Witch Museum is the least evaluated museum of the four selected. This may be due to something that became apparent to us when going through the posts linked to the Salem Witch Museum geotag, namely that not all the Instagram users posting under this particular geotag actually visited the museum. Indeed, as illustrated by the two posts below (Fig.24), a number of Instagram users posted images with other Salem attractions under the Salem Witch Museum geotag, such as an actor dressed as the Frankenstein’s monster, and the statue inaugurated to celebrate the 40 years of the TV show *Bewitched*.



Fig.24. Geotag: Salem Witch Museum

This further exemplifies how inseparable the museum is from pop culture and shines a light as to why the town was labeled “*Witchcraft Disneyland*” in the 1997 documentary, *Witch City* (Gencarella, 2007, p.271). In fact, one of our focus group participants echoed this Disneyland comment:

“We have the children in front of the museum in costumes, people walking around in witch costumes, it’s a little bit like in Disneyland, when you go there and you have all these toys and stuff that you can buy and also people walking around in costumes.” (Participant 4)

For both Participant 1 and Participant 4, the pop culture element that is ubiquitous to the Salem Witch Museum is present because it is an American museum. Participant 4 sees this ‘*theme park*’ around the museum as robbing it of its authenticity, and as authenticity is a factor regarding how dark a site is perceived, it does lighten the witch tourism site.

“But the [Salem Witch Museum] does not really connect with me in terms of authenticity in the sense that, it’s in America and like any other American thing, they try to make money out of it, and it just loses this authenticity I think.” (Participant 4)

Participant 6 agreed with the theme park atmosphere, telling us that “[seeing] *women dressed like witches [...] would feel like it’s something like Tivoli promotion(sic)*” however, she stated that it would not bother her, and that was still one of her preferred museums, along with the Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt.

4.5. Finding 5: *Tourism authenticity is both gendered and museum specific*

The quest for authentic touristic moments turns out to be paramount when it comes to dark tourism experiences and more specifically the witch tourism ones. Results from the netnographic study show that only 15% of all examined Instagram posts did not entail some form of implicitly or explicitly expressed authentic interactions with the sites. All gender identities and expressions seem to be rather involved in pursuing original and truthful touristic occurrences (more than 80% of visitors per gender category). What appears to be significant is the difference between the types of induced and perceived authenticity that each gender category presents. Below, the three perspectives of tourism authenticity proposed by Wang (1999) will be utilized in order to argue why authenticity is a universal tourism commodity yet appears in different ways as far as both the gender variable and the four different witch museums are concerned.

Sub-Finding 5.1: Female visitors are more engaged in existential and objective authenticity than male visitors, all gender categories score highest in constructive authenticity

All gender identities and gender expressions under examination score highest in constructive authenticity. This finding does make sense, since this type of authenticity is mainly museum-induced and can be also widely influenced by industry factors and mass media coverage (Smith et al., 2010). In our case, various symbolizations, exhibitions, and installations about witchcraft, witch trials, or even folk narratives around the witches' lifestyle and practices assign an authentic feeling in the touristic experience, even if the exhibited objects are not real in an objective sense. The gender group that stands out when examining constructive authenticity is men, 39% of whom are inclined to follow such authentic experiences. The same percentage for female visitors drops to 24%, mainly because women seem to be also closely connected to existentially authentic moments when visiting such museums. Indeed, existential authenticity is almost as frequent as the constructive one for women, with 22% of the examined female audience expressing feelings of self-completion or originality and reflecting on their own existence and the meanings attached to them. Moreover, women are keener on demonstrating an 'authentically good time' (Brown, 1996) when sharing their witch tourism experiences online. The same metric for the male audience is plainly lower (16%). Finally, women are also more interested in objective tourism authenticity than men, especially when objectivity focuses on historic events regarding the witches' persecution and the witch trials (17% of female tourists shared content regarding authentic past events). It is worth mentioning that visitors with a queer gender expression seem to follow the same patterns regarding tourism authenticity as the female visitors (constructive and existential authenticity scoring very close, objective authenticity coming third with a strong focus on historic past events).

Upon presenting the relevant netnographic findings, the following question arises: Why do male visitors score so high in constructive authenticity, while female visitors, as well as tourists with both feminine and queer gender expressions are also invested in existential and objective authenticity? There can be various interpretations and explanations when looking into this inquiry, the main one being that visitors that self-identify as men are not so personally and emotionally attached to the museums' historical themes and are more intrigued by museum elements that challenge their curiosity or that relate to more generic leisure motivations (Fig.25). The few men that do demonstrate signs of existential quest during or after their visit to a witch museum are either people that are attracted to

the dark ethos of these places, thus contemplating on notions such as suffering, death, and their connection to the living (Fig.26), or that identify themselves as part of contemporary wicca communities, hence feeling a deep connection to the heritage of touristic sites that have to do with witchcraft traditions (Fig.27).

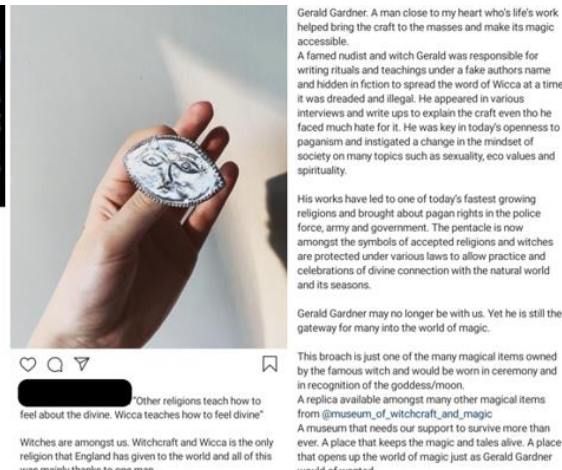


Fig. 25 Fig.26 Fig.27
Geotags: Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft and Museum of Witchcraft and Magic

On the contrary, women are much more connected to existential and objective authenticity than men, mainly due to the espousal of a more performative approach towards this kind of tourism sites. What this signifies is that witch tourism experiences mean much more to women than just the toured objects and the mere representation of horrifying past realities. Female visitors seem to escape their everyday limitations via many different paths when visiting the examined witch museums; self-identifying with the witches on an ideological (feminist) level, being open about participating in contemporary witch and pagan communities (both online or offline), being members of other dark subcultures and interested in dark aesthetics, or simply engaging in performative acts concerning their gender expression. Butler's (1990) affirmation that gender is "a doing rather than a being" (as cited in Salih, p.62) puts flesh on the bones of witch tourism existential authenticity, since women are motivated to state their femininity in innovative, non-ordinary ways, that seem to (even momentarily) neglect the normativities imposed by various gender stereotypes. Also, female visitors having an 'authentically good time' is a usual result of our netnographic study, and most of the times shared images of having fun seem to be inspired by the symbolization of the witch as an independent, strong, and non-conforming woman, or by pop culture references around the witch imagery. Both elements are reflected on various online tourism performances (as already explained in previous findings) that

help existentially significant moments to be revealed (e.g., witchy dress code, power posing in front of the camera, empowering content, etc.) (see Fig.13 from Finding 1, p.60). In parallel, objective authenticity seems to be a more feminine and queer need when it comes to witch tourism, since there is a deeper connection to the historic part of the witches' persecution, a deeper thirst for learning about the objective truths around the dark period of witch trials and a feeling of personal heritage attached to these events due to the gender identification.

The analysis will be further extended in the following sub-findings, that propose that tourism authenticity is not only gendered, but also museum specific.

Sub-Finding 5.2: The Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Boscastle and the Salem Witch Museum are the leaders for existential authenticity

The Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Boscastle, England is by far the most existentially authentic museum of all, with 31% of its visitors expressing signals of originality and freedom from the ordinary when it comes to the museum tourism experience. Here, existential authenticity is actively expressed mainly due to the connection of the museum to contemporary wicca communities and the organization of various annual events and rituals that celebrate the practice of witchcraft. The most representative one is the All Hallow's Eve Dark Gathering (Fig.28), a welsh folklore festival organized by the museum, that takes place on the Saturday before Halloween each year and includes various happenings (Museum of Witchcraft and Magic, 2018). Such extraordinary and memorable events, that also embrace elements of touristic performances, help tourists escape their everyday boredom and at the same time, facilitate actual wicca practitioners to feel interconnected and cultivate a sense of belonging.

The Salem Witch Museum is the runner up for existential authenticity, with approximately 20% of the examined Salem tourists sharing corresponding feedback. Impressively enough, the netnographic analysis reveals that this particular museum is not perceived as authentic in any



Fig.28. Geotag: Museum of Witchcraft and Magic

other sense (objectively or constructively), even though it has a strong focus on history and learning regarding the witch trials in the USA. As already stated, tourism in the region has been heavily impacted by pop culture, thus the association of the museum with authentic objects, events and facts is not probable. Male focus group Participants 1 and 4 confirm the above netnographic result.

“I would agree with [PARTICIPANT 3] that it [Salem Witch Museum] was very Americanized and very commercial and to make people spend their money to see this perspective of the witches. I don’t know. I wouldn’t go. Maybe I’d go if it was free, but maybe not if you want to learn what was actually happening in these days” (Participant 1)

“...the third one [Salem Witch Museum] does not really connect with me in terms of authenticity in the sense that, it’s in America and like any other American thing, they try to make money out of it...” (Participant 4).

However, the performances around the museum, the strong female participation (being the second most visited museum by women) and the pop culture element of the site, are things that reproduce the sense of an existentially significant tourism experience. In contrast to Participants 1 and 4, female focus group Participant 5 claims that the museum of Salem is more likely to offer a pleasant and playful touristic experience than the other sites, mainly due to the different performativities hosted in the area: *“...I really liked it. I also don’t disagree with the looking more like a theme park, but it didn’t come to mind when I was watching. Now that you mentioned, I can understand but I really like it because I also tend to like things where there’s some roleplay and theatre.”* (see Appendix B).

Sub-Finding 5.3: Tourists visiting the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft embrace constructive authenticity, while the Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt is perceived as the most objectively authentic museum of all

As already stated in previous findings, the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft is the most popular witch museum amongst the examined male audience. Hence, it seems coherent that the results of the netnographic study showcase the museum’s great focus on constructive authenticity (almost half, 49%, of the museum’s visitors promote this kind of authenticity in their Instagram

posts). This feeling of constructed, museum-induced authentic moments is even more intense due to the main exhibition of the museum, the notorious Necropants (Nábrók in Icelandic) (Fig.29), which is by far the most co-created experience in the Icelandic museum by all gender categories, despite the fact that the exhibit is a replica and not a historic object. Even so, the perceived authenticity is extremely high and is projected onto the entirety of the museum's toured objects (Smith et al., 2010), a fact that is also cross-checked by the focus group findings.

Focus group Participant 4 states: "...It didn't feel like they were even trying to impress you or affect you in any way [the Icelandic museum curators], because the pants are affecting you enough. Themselves are enough (sic) even though they're not real...". This feeling is explicitly noted in a post from our sample where the visitor writes 'the most shocking and remarkable piece is easily the so-called "necropants" which is the dried skin of a man from the waist down' and calls them 'horrifying leggings' and implied by another visitor with 'If these don't terrify you, then nothing will' (see Appendix J).



66 likes
 "Necropants" from the Icelandic museum of witch craft. Said to give the sorcerer unlimited wealth when worn and a stolen coin kept in the scrotum. Google search for the details and ritual.
 #necropants #iceland #museumofwitchcraftandsorcery

Fig.29. Geotag: Museum of Iceland Sorcery and Witchcraft

Finally, the Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt in Ribe scores highest in objective tourism authenticity, with 36% of its visitors commenting on the authentic past events of witch hunt in Denmark and 33% pointing out that the museum is located in a region that was indeed one of the most battered by the witch persecution and deaths on the continent.

Concluding, sub-findings 5.2 and 5.3 are deemed as highly important by the researchers, as they propose two contributions to the main theoretical framework of dark tourism; Stone's (2006) dark tourism spectrum (see Fig.5, p.26). First, dark tourism sites (and in particular witch museums) that exhibit **lighter characteristics** of the dark tourism spectrum (e.g., Boscastle museum) have a greater potential to reinforce **existentially authentic tourist** experiences for their visitors. Second, dark tourism sites with a strong focus on historic events that showcase **darker characteristics** of the dark tourism spectrum (e.g., Hex! museum) are more likely to be perceived as **objectively** authentic.

Hence, all dark tourism sites can be equally authentic regardless of their position in the dark tourism spectrum. Yet, they are expected to showcase different types of tourism authenticity.

4.6. *Finding 6: The notion of the 'versatile tourist' is of fundamental importance to the witch tourism experience*

As already understood by previous findings, there is a broad palette of different tourism motivations, behaviors, and ultimately experiences that can be encouraged and hosted by witch tourism sites. For instance, the examined witch museums can simultaneously satisfy people that go there for plainly touristic purposes (leisure motives), others that are more interested in learning about the witches' history and culture, and visitors that score very high in morbid curiosity and are particularly interested in the museums' darker elements. However, what seems to be rather fascinating and was not expected by the researchers prior to the netnographic analysis, is the fact that one single tourist can exhibit multiple behaviors when co-creating a witch tourism experience on their Instagram account, behaviors that initially may seem inconsistent or even antithetical. Following the lifestyle paradigm in tourism studies (Prentice, 2004, as cited in Richards & Wilson, 2006, p.1213) and based on the netnographic and focus group findings, the key antitheses in tourism related social behaviors and choices are presented below for each gender category (the focus here being the spectrum of gender expressions). Witch museums under examination should attend to the individual versatility of their tourists, so as to continuously meliorate their tourism experience.

Sub-finding 6.1: There is a continuous interplay between darker and lighter dark tourism attitudes when visiting a witch museum

This sub-finding is valid for all gender categories, yet is manifested in different ways. To begin with, tourists with feminine expressions that enjoy the theatrical approach of witch tourism are also interested in learning about the historical facts. Indeed, 1 out of 3 examined posts of feminine tourists performing their gender via dressing up as witches, posing dynamically in front of the camera or holding/wearing witchy props, demonstrate a strong desire to learn more about the witch hunt period and understand the history behind the persecutions (Fig.30). This is supported by the focus group findings, with female Participant 4 emphasizing the roleplay element and the opportunity to learn about witch-related history and culture in Salem Witch Museum:

“I really like it because I also tend to like things where there’s some roleplay and theatre. And this one I think it communicates a dark message in a way that is not so dark... For someone that is interested in knowing the history but also don’t get it too creepy about it(sic), I think this is actually super nice and I really like because it also gives you the atmosphere of witches...”. (Participant 4)

The same participant comments a bit later, when referring to another museum, that her general inputs on witch tourism may appear a bit inconsistent: *“I hope I’m not being inconsistent with my replies, but I really like this one because...”*. This realization of continuous change according to one’s lifestyle choices and experiences is exactly what the versatile tourist (Ooi, 2002) represents in tourism studies and practice.



Fig.30. Geotag: Salem Witch Museum

Moving on to visitors with masculine expressions, there seems to be a mix and match of people with extremely dark tourism motivations (e.g., morbid curiosity, particular interest in the dark side of the museums due to belonging in other dark subcultures) and in parallel, funny, almost comical attitudes. The netnographic analysis shows that 36% of masculine tourists who showcase such dark, death-related motivations, bring a sense of humor to the table when sharing relevant content on Instagram (Fig.31), perhaps to demonstrate a lighter sense of their visit to their followers and to be consistent with their post-tourism need to departure from everyday ‘boring’ touristic moments. Likewise, people with a queer gender expression utilize funny comments in various occasions, and many times these comments just complement the most basic, leisure motives of visiting the museums.

Such behaviors do make a lot of sense separately for all tourists under examination. Nevertheless, when combined, they enhance acts that are not necessarily consistent, and point out the versatile needs that a single tourist can have at different moments during the tourism experience. The comprehension of the versatile tourist is indeed fundamental for the witch tourism sites.



Fig.31. Geotag: Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft

Sub-finding 6.2: All witch museums under examination are themselves versatile

Upon commenting on the versatile tourist, the versatile museum comes next. It is notable that all four museums seem to showcase signs of versatility and seem to understand the urgent need to foster multiple motivations and differentiated behaviors.

The Hex! Museum in Ribe fosters tourism motivations that revolve around 'interest in history and culture' (53%), 'leisure' (50%), and 'desire for education/learning' (42%), while being the most objectively authentic museum of all, with a strong connection to feminist ideology. The Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Boscastle strongly focuses on its visitors' leisure motivations (69%), hosts people with a particular interest in various dark subcultures (40%) and has a flair for 'history and culture' (39%). At the same time, this museum is the leader in existential tourism authenticity and is the place to be for contemporary wicca community members. The Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft in Hólmavík also focuses on 'leisure' (75%) and welcomes visitors with a strong 'curiosity' factor over the site's exhibits (36%), while satisfying motivations of 'desire for education and learning' (34%). In parallel, the Icelandic museum is the most constructively authentic and fosters its visitors' humorous disposition. Finally, the Salem museum is perhaps the most versatile one, since it is part of a wider cosmology. Upon satisfying 'leisure' and 'must see' tourism motivations, the site gives the floor to people identifying with dark subcultures and pop culture, others that select to

perform their gender and is the second most important museum when it comes to existential authenticity. Below, Table 6 provides a synopsis of the elements that make each museum versatile.

The ‘versatile’ witch museum
Hex! museum: history & culture, leisure, desire for education/learning, objective authenticity, connection to feminist ideology
Boscastle museum: leisure, visitors interested in dark subcultures, history & culture, existential authenticity, home of wicca communities
Icelandic museum: leisure, desire for education/learning, touristic curiosity, constructive authenticity, humorous sentiment
Salem museum: leisure, ‘must see’ site, visitors interested in dark subcultures, existential authenticity, pop culture, gender performativity

Table.6. Versatility demonstrated by the museums.

According to Ooi’s (2002) conceptualization on the versatile tourist, the examined museums act as culture mediators for their visitors, trying to listen to their continuously changing needs and open their experiences up to multiple acts and interpretations. This way, the co-creation of the tourism experience is enhanced, and multiple tourists’ motivations and behaviors support the configuration of the ‘cultural capital’ (Richards & Wilson, 2006, p.1214) for the witch museums. Whether this effort by the four museums is enough and whether more things can be done without versatility hurting their brand, are points that will be discussed in the next chapter.

5. Discussion and Managerial Implications

The present chapter involves a discussion of the key insights of the project. These insights are the product of the previously analyzed association of the qualitative empirical data to the theoretical background of the project. This analysis has been conducted in order to deliberate on the thesis' research question:

How do co-creation and authenticity happen in dark tourism spaces with a specific focus on gender dimensions? The case of witch tourism.

Upon discussing the key takeaways of the research, relevant managerial implications will be presented. Finally, potential future research will be suggested.

5.1. Discussion

- [Performance, and not ideology, as shaper of the witch tourism experience](#)

Our research gave an emphatic response to whether witch tourism is gendered; yes, it is! As shown before, dark tourism sites associated to the witch hunt and witch history are dominated by female visitors, a fact that does not seem to change even for the few places around the world where women were not disproportionately targeted during the witch hunt craze of the 16th and 17th century (in our case, the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft). Women, as consumers of this touristic product, bring a global narrative to their witch tourism experiences, even if this means that they sometimes ignore the sites' local narrative. What is more important than the 'sense of reality' is the emotional connection and self-identification to the witches.

This gendered perspective can be seen in almost all examined aspects of the authentic tourism experience co-creation. Women are by far the main co-creators of the online tourism experience (at least on Instagram), they provide positive evaluations of their visit to the witch museums, are more emotionally charged on their comments, self-identify more with the idea of the witch on many different levels, and are much more immersed into pop culture elements around witchcraft than men.

Moreover, they connect on an existential level with the authentic feeling of the museums, while men connect mostly with the authenticity of the toured objects and the symbolizations behind them. Finally, women have stronger motivations to learn about the witch hunt history, educate themselves around the witchcraft period, and seem to be motivated to pay a tribute to the past atrocities the witches had to go through ('remembrance'), while men appear more curious about this kind of tourism.

All these gender differences came as no surprise to the researchers, based on the examination of the relevant theoretical constructs. What stands out when examining the ways that gender relates to the co-creation of the authentic tourism experience is the fact that witch tourism is more of a performance than an explicit ideological choice, even for visitors that self-identify as women. The deep feminine connection to the museums' services is mainly expressed via a wide variety of experiential and performative acts that encourage the formation of certain lifestyles (Richard & Wilson, 2006), and not so much via ideological stands on the history of "*stigmatizing [...] women who do not conform to an idealized maternal norm*" (Breuer, 2009, p.137). Indeed, online tourism performances are the most common occurrence when examining the co-creation of the witch tourism experience; from women temporarily performing the role of witch by emphasizing on the feminine traits of the witch persona, to self-identified wicca practitioners taking part in pagan rituals and festivities, and post-tourists performing the role of the tourist, the construction of the tourists' digital identities via multidimensional co-creation efforts are omnipresent. A visit to all four witch museums examined nurture possibilities of becoming, but most of the times this is not done from an ideological need to understand and change the unjust views of the world, but from a performative perspective, a 'doing' in order to 'become' and an existential need for transformation of one's own self (Noy, 2004).

Christensen (2020) argues that, like gender, norms are performative and can be established through repetitions. The recurrent 'witchy' dress code' and the observed behavior of visitors 'doing' the witch may be perceived as part of the norms associated with the witch tourism experience. These norms may be reinforced by Instagram's culture and own social norms wherein users emulate the content they see. Visitors featuring this behavior when co-creating their museum experience online may thus be emulating the content they previously saw on Instagram, and by posting it themselves, they are further reinforcing this behavior as 'natural' in this context and helping establish these norms.

- Witch tourism is part of the ‘authenticity industry’

As already mentioned, a major gender difference within witch tourism derives from the fact that authentic touristic moments are experienced differently by each gender category (see Finding 5, p.81). However, both netnographic and focus group findings demonstrate that almost all visitors, regardless of their gender, demonstrate the need to have some kind of authentic interaction when partaking in witch museum visits. All museums under examination showcase significant signs of tourism authenticity, with the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Boscastle and the Salem Witch Museum attracting more visitors with feminine and queer expressions as far as authenticity is concerned, while the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft being perceived as highly authentic mostly by male visitors. It is evident that, regardless of the type of induced authenticity, the niche market of witch tourism as a whole would not be facile to promote nor to present a positive ROI, if it was not for its strong connection to the ‘quest for authenticity’ motivation (Noy, 2004). Taking into account that such niche markets allure tourists that reject the inauthenticity of mass tourism and support touristic efforts positioned as genuine and unconventional, a main audience to be targeted by witch museums and sites can be people following post-modern tourism attitudes.

Indisputably, witch tourism should place its focus on authenticity that enables stories and versions of one’s identity to be uncovered. Existentially significant experience is by far the most important authenticity aspect for female visitors (the principal demographic targeting for all witch museums), while objective and constructive authenticities are also important, but easier to achieve due to their object-oriented character. Nevertheless, it should be clear that tourism in general and witch tourism in particular cannot perform as a universal substitute for moments of deep questioning within one’s self, as there will always be some people that do not seek a sense of originality not found ‘at home’ when traveling (Wang, 1999) and join in tourism activities from a leisure perspective. Hence, the industry’s role is rather the one of a catalyst for existentially important moments to arise (Brown, 2013).

- It is all about dark tourism, but... where is death?

Fig.32 shows the most important points that synthesize (at varying degrees) the witch tourism experience, as revealed by both the netnography and the focus group findings. As witch tourism falls

under the umbrella of dark tourism, some of these elements are logical as per the theory, while some others are rather novel additions to the theme under examination. However, the one thing that was expected to be found amongst the key components of witch tourism, but is almost entirely absent, are the notions of death and one's mortality.

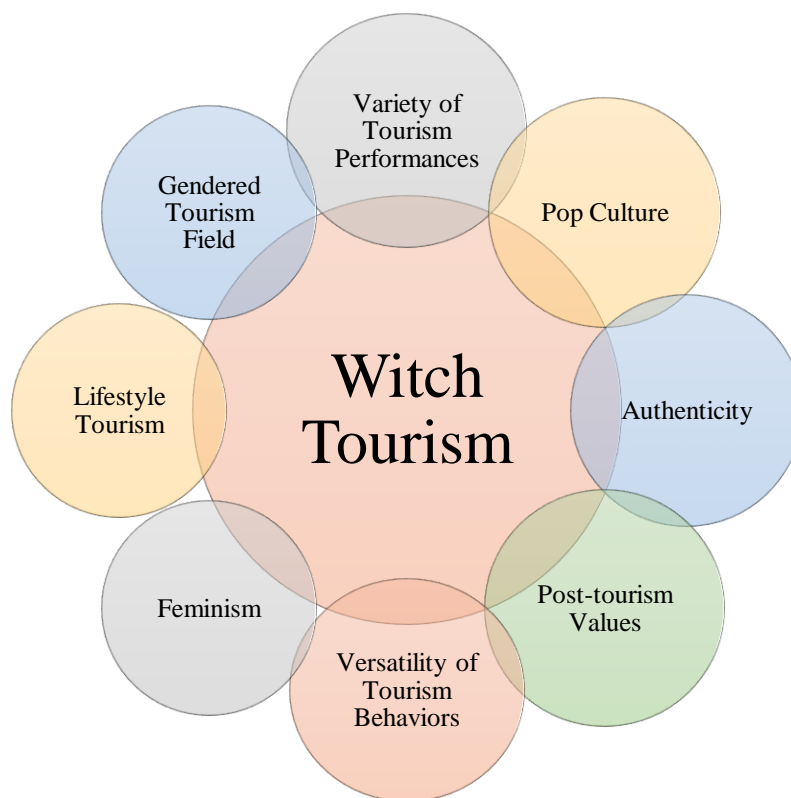


Fig.32. Components of Witch Tourism.

According to Stone (2006), dark tourism sites are places of death and suffering or sites associated with death and macabre circumstances (p.146). This results in visitors reflecting on “*both life and death through a mortality lens*” (Stone, 2012, p.1582) and in dark tourism serving as a modern mechanism for the self to construct ontological meanings around mortality (i.e., the human existence being connected to death). In our case, witch tourism sites are connected to past violent deaths of the witch hunt and trials and display a *memento mori* atmosphere, heightened by the fact that these deaths were the results of prejudiced persecution. However, both netnographic and focus group findings suggest that the vast majority of tourism experiences examined did not include any contemplation on the ontological perspective of death, nor any particular thanatological interest connected to the narratives of witch deaths. Why is that? Is death still expressed in other, more covert ways, or is it entirely out of context for the witch tourism experience?

Here, the extraordinary death of the witch as recreated for tourism consumption is probably affected by both elements of tourism performance and ideology (both concepts discussed above). On one hand, lifestyle tourism and pop culture references (as expressed by the tourists' online performances) create a social imagery around the notion of the witch, which dominates the tourism experience and does not allow for a plethora of ontological questionings to come into view. On the other hand, for the rest of the sample, the quest of the authentic witch history creates a thematic allegory for the tourists, who contemplate on these past deaths from an ideological perspective rather than from an ontological one. This means that the people visiting the witch museums care more about the injustice of those past violent deaths when digitally co-creating their dark tourism experience, rather than the deaths themselves and what this means for their own mortality. The representative caption of Fig.10 (p.57) from the Hex! Museum underlining that the museum "*takes you through a dark period where superstition and fear lead to many, especially women in many countries, horrible executions and witchhunts. Power to the few, suppression for the many*" depicts in a very clear way this important connection of death to the individual's ideological beliefs, without putting emphasis on the ontology of death.

- [Post-tourism behavior as a signifier of a 'death-deriding' society](#)

Pagliari's (2004) proposition of a 'death-denying' and 'death-defying' society which has now developed into a 'death-deriding' one due to the commercial and trivial manner we consume death for entertainment (as cited in Stone, 2012, p.1566), is observable within our study and can be linked to the concept of post-tourism. We now know that tourists do not necessarily go to dark tourism sites specifically because of the presence of death, as has been suggested by theoretical literature, and that the notion of tourists partaking in dark tourism to face a *memento mori* is virtually absent. However, the death element is still present in more covert ways, it is consumed through pop culture associations and/or with post-tourism behaviors. Pagliari (2004) argues that our society is 'death-deriding' because "*death is mocked*" (as cited in Stone, 2012, p.1566) and the comments as those found in Table 5 (see p.77) exemplify this attitude. Death and tragedy are omnipresent within the media and popular culture, the post-tourist attitude we have identified being present at dark tourism sites may be a signifier of the desensitization and/or dissociation in regards to the concept of death and hence why we did not observe an ontological perspective on death and one's mortality.

5.2. Managerial Implications

Adding to the theoretical contributions, the study encompasses various managerial implications for businesses and marketing teams in the witch tourism industry, as well as for other stakeholders within the dark tourism field. The research analysis endorsed the gendered character of the witch tourism experience, a fact that places the demographic group of female tourists as a main target audience for all organizations under examination. This is also supported for sites that develop their marketing strategies with an emphasis on more masculine characteristics, for two main reasons. Firstly, women seem to approach local witchcraft histories from a global narrative around female witch persecution, contributing to the ‘glocal’ character of the museums. Secondly, women are presented as the ‘gatekeepers’ of the touristic product as far as household and couples travel decisions are concerned (Mottiar & Quinn, 2004, p.153), meaning that they can decisively affect the travel choices of a group of people that do not necessarily identify with the feminine traits of this kind of tourism. These two facts combined corroborate that female tourists should be the cardinal point of the witch museums’ marketing plan.

On another note, the digital co-creation of the witch tourism experience should be further enhanced. As the majority of tourism experiences examined point towards performative ways of co-creation, witch tourism sites can leverage on that and offer more opportunities for various touristic performances to appear. This can be done with a different scope per occasion that is in accordance with the brand identity and brand image of each site. Hence, it is not suggested that sites such as the HEX! Museum of Witch Hunt organizes events where tourists will be invited to dress up in Halloween costumes, since such irrespective offerings might cannibalize the brand and corrupt the message of education and historical importance. What is instead proposed is that each site utilizes its USPs (i.e., unique selling points) to encourage various performativities to be shown, repeated, communicated and finally, co-created by the visitors in the digital co-creation space. Moreover, all stages of co-creation (see Neuhofer et al’s (2014) conceptual model, p.18) must be catered to, since the netnographic results depict a clear preference on on-site co-creation. Pre- and post-travel phases are equally important and can offer multiple branding benefits to the museums due to their social intensity (Neuhofer et al., 2013a). However, witch and dark tourism organizations in general should always keep in mind the increasing relevance of deconstructing the co-creation space. Space in such niche markets is both actual and virtual in all co-creation stages, blurring the lines between tourism reality

and online identity constructions. Businesses of the sector should try to embrace the multi-dimensional becoming of the tourists and create mechanisms that will enable this transformation, rather than try to control it. Ultimately, this means that witch tourism sites should move away from a product management paradigm to a relational paradigm (Louro & Cunha, 2001, p.855), whose multilateral perspectives place every consumer as the key element of value creation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004). Finally, on a more platform-specific note, witch sites could offer incentives to its visitors to share more relevant UGC on Instagram and other social media, as well as invite them to express their positive comments when posting, in order to achieve higher evaluation and recommendation rates.

Inspired by the Necropants in the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft, we propose that an incentive for visitors to share their experience online could be having a standout exhibit that will affect the tourist and consequently prompt them to share it on social media. For museums with a relatively known brand, tourists may share their experience online with photographs of the sign of the museum to show that they were there, however, for more unknown museums, an unexpected or surprising standout piece may work to increase digital co-creation of the site.

Next, industry agents should direct their efforts towards the maximization of the authentic feeling around the witch tourism experience. As it is clear from both netnographic and focus group findings, most visitors examined demonstrate constructed (museum-induced) authentic moments, yet the examined female audience deems existential authenticity as highly important, followed by the objective authenticity of the toured displays. Museums that are not performing so well in existential authenticity (such as the the Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt and the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft) should try to keep up with their main target audience needs for existentially significant encounters. Here, a variety of initiatives based on the emerging components of witch tourism (e.g. lifestyle tourism, pop culture, gender performativity, feminist ideology, etc.) can be tested. A certain freedom for testing different authenticity tactics derives from relevant research findings, suggesting that tourists that long for existential authenticity tend to be far more forgiving towards the brand in comparison to mass tourists, since they are ready to embrace the chaos of a novel tourism experience (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). Moreover, existential authenticity is cultivated best within a family context or a like-minded group of visitors (Wang, 1999), a fact that can be the vehicle for promoting special packages and offers for families or groups that share common interests. Finally, an important task for the museums' market research efforts is to identify and target tourists that want themselves

to be deeply authentic (e.g., people with post-tourist attitudes) instead of wasting their marketing budget on large audiences that prefer mass tourism products and services. Authenticity is not only about the validation of the transformed self (Noy, 2004) but is also embedded in the relationships between the firm and the consumer. The entirety of dark tourism sites should absolutely move away from a “*forced smiles of airline personnel and travel agents*” approach (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006, p.314) and invest in genuine relationships that consider the individual's unique tourism experience.

Finally, the versatility of the tourists' behaviors should be a focal point of the sites' marketing mix. The current research showed that a single tourist can present multiple, and even antithetical behaviors while visiting a witch tourism museum. The broad spectrum of different consumer needs and attitudes is what leads the sites themselves becoming increasingly versatile. However, a key difference of the witch tourism experience in comparison to the general dark tourism experience is the absence of the ontological view on death, which does not appear as a key behavior in the versatility palette. It is thus clear, that the marketing message of witch museums should not evolve around the concept of death and its relation to the living, even if this would be an ideal message for another dark tourism site (e.g. a concentration camp).

6. Further Research

Following the conclusion of this study, we suggest further research in several areas.

In order to study differences among genders regarding the behavior exhibited by tourists on dark tourism sites, a similar netnographic study could be performed with an equal number of people of each gender identities, this would allow for easier comparison, and to discern gendered touristic behavior patterns. In general, empirical studies on the gendered nature of dark tourism destinations are almost entirely absent, thus any further research on the issue (e.g., comparative online performance analysis with a focus on gender, gendered dark tourism motivations, etc.) will be of great academic importance.

The discovery of two distinct discourses used by visitors to relate to the treatment of witches during the witch hunt period, a feminist one and a witchcraft practitioner one, calls for further research. This study requires methods that would assist the researcher in gaining valuable insights into the thought process of these visitors. In-depth interviews with both types of visitors would allow for a more thorough understanding of these visitors' motivations and relation to these dark tourism sites. Focus groups composed of both visitors relating the persecution of witches to a feminist perspective, and visitors relating it to a pagan perspective, could reveal valuable insights into the co-existence of these distinct discourses on similar sites. Moreover, a study conducted with a sample consisting of only women would help understand the complex and at times paradoxical condition of identifying as both a woman and a member of the witch community and how this relates to a witch tourism site. This research could add insights into the existential authenticity exhibited by these visitors at witch tourism sites.

The concept of post-tourism was brought up during this thesis as we encountered witty, humorous captions in a dark tourism context. Post-tourist behavior involves bringing a playful and ironic demeanor to tourism sites, such a behavior at a site either 'of death and suffering' or 'associated with death suffering' can appear peculiar or even inappropriate to some. To the knowledge of the researchers, no study has been conducted on post-tourist behavior at dark tourism sites, and we believe it is a topic worthy of more attention. Regarding the study design, a netnographic approach, as we did, could be used as it would allow for the gathering of a large amount of both visual and textual data produced by the tourists themselves. The social media platform of Instagram has proven

itself valuable in our study and revealed varied insights on tourist behavior, lifestyle, decision-making, and attitude towards the tourism site and can consequently be used to study the phenomenon of post-tourism attitudes at dark tourism sites. Using Reddit in addition to Instagram may offer new insights into the social world of dark tourists as this platform involves users discussing in virtual communities centered around a similar interest, such communities exist for practically any topic (Jamnik & Lane, 2017, p.2). Thus, while Instagram may at times offer pictures without much written content putting them in context, Reddit would add insights into dark tourists' thoughts, lifestyle, and attitude as users discuss the topic at hand.

Finally, the importance of pop culture in dark tourism experiences can be further investigated. In this case, field research could prove really useful, as the researchers can collect data on-site, with the aim of observing firsthand the ways that pop culture affects the tourism experience, interact in real time with tourists and understand the depth of the dark tourist's immersion into pop culture elements. Whether pop culture references are present at the dark site such as in Salem or if they are brought there by the visitors, they are a part of not only witch tourism experiences, but tourism as a whole. Therefore, further research into the interconnection between dark tourism and pop culture could be used as a basis to update Stone's (2006) dark tourism spectrum to reflect the pop culture components present during a number of dark tourism experiences.

7. References

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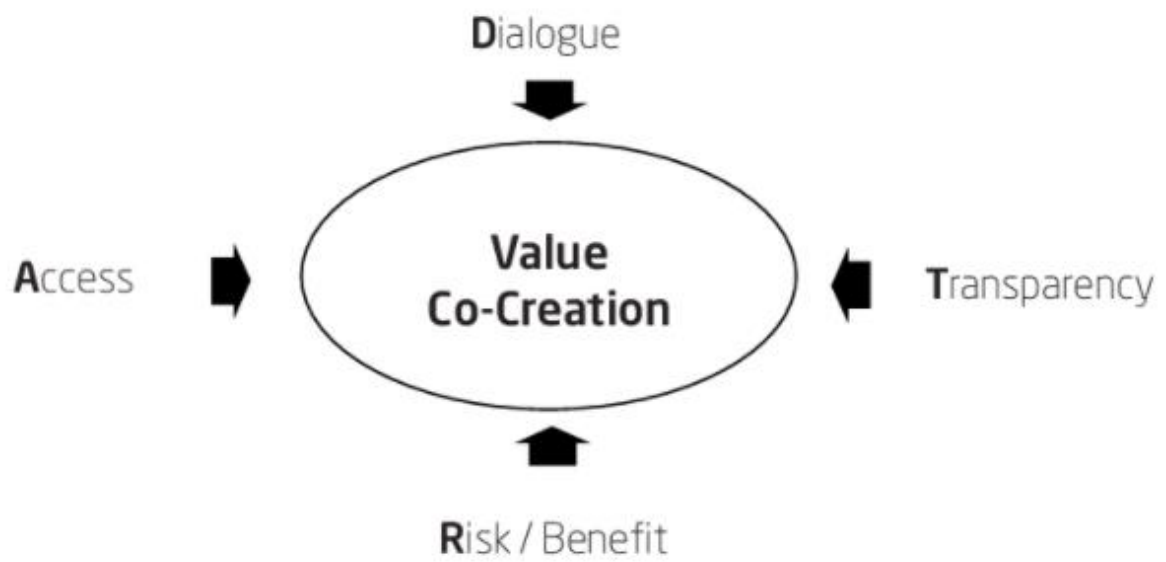
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8. Appendices

Appendix A: DART model.

Adapted from: Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004).



Appendix B: Focus group transcription.

Researcher 1:

Our thesis project is about witch museums, first of all. We are examining four different witch museums, three of them are located in Northern Europe, and one is located in the US.

The agenda for this focus group will be very simple. We will just show you four videos, one for each museum. This part will take almost 30 minutes, a bit more maybe. You will watch the video and then you will provide some feedback on what you saw, and we will ask some questions quite generic about the experience that you had watching that. Then we will proceed, hopefully we will have the time to do that. You watch four pictures, again, one by each museum and we will comment on those. And that's it.

Okay, before sharing my screen and showing you the first video, we want to ask you one question which is this: 'when you hear the word *witch*, what's the first thing that comes to your mind?'

Participant 1:

A woman riding, you know the classic, riding a broom. And secondly, Harry Potter.

Researcher 1:

[PARTICIPANT 2], yes ?

Participant 2:

I guess it's the same as [PARTICIPANT 1]. But then again, the long hat, the tall hat.

Participant 3:

I actually think about, like, the witch burning you know? The thing with a bonfire and a witch is burning to death and all that.

Researcher 1:

So, you think about this image of a witch burning, okay.

Participant 4:

What comes to mind is also the same as [PARTICIPANT 2], what she explained. But also, what comes to my mind is this, it's almost like a mythological creature of Baba Yaga. I think it's Bulgarian, and Ukrainian, and Russian. With the folklore and yeah, that's something that comes to my mind, although I can't really explain how it looks. It's just the idea of it. And then I also think of some historical figure like Jeanne D'Arc, I think that was her name. Yeah, that's about it.

Participant 5:

Okay, so I don't have much to add because my first three things would have been the broom, the hat, and Harry Potter. It has been mentioned.

Participant 6:

And for my side, it's just an old ugly woman, like very horrible looking. No Harry Potter, no broom.

Participant 1:

A bit racist for the witches.

Researcher 1:

We want to hear your honest opinions and feelings so no wrong answers here. Okay, so now, we watch the first video. The videos are presenting the museum, so we will not do it, the videos will do it. Okay, so, share my screen. Can you see my screen? Good.

The first one is from the danish museum. The name is Hex! And it's in Ribe, quite close to Copenhagen I think. No? The other island. Okay, let's watch it.

[video 1]

Researcher 1:

Okay, that was it. Quite short. Okay, just a minute, unfortunately we cannot see you while we are sharing our screen. But now we can, okay. Sorry, did you ask something?

Participant 6:

Yes, I was saying what is the witch trials and she was saying it was most witch trials per citizen?

Researcher 2:

It was especially in Europe, in the 15th to 17th century, when people were accused of witchcraft and then if they were found guilty, they would usually be burned. Like the witch burning that [PARTICIPANT 3] mentioned earlier, this was the result of a witch trial.

Participant 2:

And how did they decide if someone is guilty?

Researcher 1:

Well, I don't the procedure actually, but then I know that there were some judges, most of them I think were religious leaders.

Researcher 2:

It was basically, if they couldn't find a logical explanation for someone's erratic or weird behavior, then the next logical thing would be, she must be a witch or he must be a witch. That's the only reason that this person does not fit into society.

Researcher 1:

And why they mostly associated that with the devil. Those people were named 'witches' is because they were not fitting into some very proper and religious behaviors.

Participant 2:

Okay, because this video made me feel like they were treating these people unfairly, you were just different, so you had to be burned. Actually, it didn't look like a museum that I would like to visit.

Researcher 1:

Okay, so actually you just replied to both our questions, without knowing. What did this video made you feel or think? And if you would visit this place? So yeah, you replied. Anyone else?

Participant 4:

So of course first I was surprised that there is a museum like this in Denmark because I didn't know that there were cases of witchcraft trials in Denmark. But yeah, I usually, I'm open to all sort of things so I'll be quite curious to visit this museum should I go close to that city. I'm generally always interested in seeing all sorts of museums. I wouldn't say it made me feel scared or anything, it just made me feel curious.

Researcher 1:

Nice. [PARTICIPANT 5], yes, please.

Participant 5:

So, I find it a bit creepy that they used to burn the witches. But as [PARTICIPANT 4] said I'm all very interested in knowing things and the museums are always interesting and I don't know, I really like, for example, things related to Auschwitz and it's very dark, but it makes me really think about other people's realities. So, it creeps me, but at the same time it's really interesting to see how messed up some things are. So, I think I would be very curious to visit and I know a bit more of like why would they be burnt and things like that.

Participant 1:

I have a question actually; I don't know if you know. Do you know if they treated all the witches in the same way, did all the witches ended burning in the different countries? If they were put to death in the same way in different countries, I guess it would be the same, I don't know, maybe in Scandinavia, Denmark and Sweden and so on. But if there are any infos about different places in the world, where they would treat the witches in some other way.

Participant 3:

I can just jump in because I know in Sweden, they had one of many ways they figured out if the woman, I only know of female witches, I don't know if they were male, but to figure out if she was a witch or not. One way to do it was to, kind of, I don't know if they put her in a coffin or just bounded her and then dropped her in the lake or in the sea and if she was able to, you know, get loose and escape, she was a witch and then she was burned, if she died she was not a witch, but then you know, she died anyway.

Participant 1:

Okay, so in both ways she dies

Researcher 1:

Exactly! Actually, also in Iceland, because Iceland also is a very well-known place for witchcraft and witch hunting etc. and they would do the same, but they would say that if the woman float on the water, if she floats then she's a witch, if she comes to the surface you know. They were basically just following nature laws and physics laws, and they would say that if she does that, or if he does that, he's a witch, then we should just burn him, which is quite interesting.

Participant 6:

I'll say something as well from my side.

Researcher 1:

Yes, please.

Participant 6:

I just want to say that until now, I was thinking that the witches are something like a fairy tale thing and it didn't really exist in real life and I had no clue about all the things that you were talking about. So I wouldn't go to a witch museum because I would think that it's a fairy tale thing for kids and you know it's something they make just to make money and it wouldn't be interesting, but if I knew that it's something that it used to happen and there is so much history behind, maybe I would be curious and I would be like, okay, let's go and see what it is because I have no clue. So, that's it for my side.

Researcher 1:

Good, nice. Okay, someone else? No, we're good. Okay, let's go to the next one, then and okay just to let you know that the next one is a bit darker. So, sorry for that. And the quality is not very good, but I think you will get the feeling. Okay this one is located in the UK, a region called Boscastle.

Researcher 2:

It's in Cornwall.

Researcher 1:

The town is called Boscastle. Let's see. It's again a witchcraft, a witch museum but from a different perspective. Can you see my screen? Yes, good.

[video 2]

Okay, I think that's enough because it's a long one. Okay, stop sharing. Okay, any thoughts? Also, compared to the previous one? Yeah, [PARTICIPANT 3], let's start with you.

Participant 3:

Yeah, I like this. I actually like this much more than the other one, like, I want to visit this one more than the first one, and I think that they made it more, like, mystical. With the background sounds and also this song that they were singing, the chorus. It kind of reminded me of a childhood song, that we used to sing. I don't know if it's actually a connection, you know, just a random similarity. But I did find this more interesting than the first one in Ribe.

Researcher 1:

Good, okay. Hey, [PARTICIPANT 4], you raised your hand?

Participant 4:

So, I do agree with [PARTICIPANT 3], in the sense that this video felt a bit more mystical compared to the previous one, because the one from Denmark was kind of, you know, formal. They were looking at it with a very objective perspective. Anyway, you know these witch trials, that's a historical thing. The second one was a bit more mystical, and it just created this atmosphere, and it just increased my curiosity, which reminded me that I have been to a similar museum here in Denmark. It wasn't about witchcraft, but it was kind of dark and just had like that mirror that they just showed in the video. You go inside and then you can kind of see yourself from a different perspective and that's kind of interesting. So, it reminds me of the museum here in Denmark, in Copenhagen actually.

Researcher 1:

Good. [PARTICIPANT 2], yes please.

Participant 2:

I disagree with both [PARTICIPANT 3] and [PARTICIPANT 4]. I found the previous one more interesting because it had a sense of reality, so it was about something that happened and the way that the video explained it, it made me more interested into visiting the museum than this one that was more mystical. I couldn't really engage with the video to be honest. I didn't know about the mirror that you mentioned or nothing actually. So, if I had to choose, I would go to the first one.

Researcher 1:

Nice. [PARTICIPANT 5]?

Participant 5:

Yes, actually, I'm with [PARTICIPANT 2] on this one. For some reason, I don't know, the first one at least it's a bit more factual and I'd like to know the facts and very much descriptive where you learn about the procedure and everything. And this one, is almost like trying to convert you to witchcraft. That's what I felt like, really putting you into the mood of it, and then that would, I think maybe freak me out a bit. And yeah, it would be more an experienced and learning I would say and I would be more interest in the history parts than in the horror thingy.

Participant 2:

I totally agree with what [PARTICIPANT 5] said.

Researcher 1:

Yes, [PARTICIPANT 4].

Participant 4:

Yeah, actually now that you mentioned this about experience? I want to clarify that, speaking for myself, I wouldn't say that one is better than the other, you know, two things that offer different experiences. One is more factual and the other one, as you said, is more experiential in a sense.

Researcher 1:

It's a matter of personal taste, that's what you're saying.

Participant 4:

To an extent, of course yes. But because these two things are two distinct, different types of experiences, you know. I wouldn't go and say that one is better than the other, it's just two different things. It's a matter of personal preference.

Researcher 1:

Good, yes. [PARTICIPANT 6] yes?

Participant 6:

I just want to say that I agree with the girls, both [PARTICIPANT 2] and [PARTICIPANT 5] on that one. I also felt that the second one, it was a bit more creepy or it could be like a horror corner in an amusement park where you go and there are all these witches around. Whereas the first one it felt more like a museum. Given the fact that I had no clue about all those witches and stuff, I would go to the first one to learn something about the witches. The second one, it was more like to go with my brother who loves horror and scary stuff.

Researcher 1:

Okay. [PARTICIPANT 1] any feedback or no?

Participant 1:

I think it's a boys versus girls thing. I would go with the boys. I like the creepy part and the darker side of the second video. So, if had to choose, I would go to the second one and it also had this feeling of I don't know, maybe more information on death and how were the witches were killed. Yeah, I think I would like to see the very dark side of the whole story.

Researcher 1:

Okay, thank you very much and let's move to the third one. The third one is from probably the most well-known witch museum in the world. It's from Salem in the US. Can you see the screen? Yes? Good.

[video 3]

Okay. Women reactions, all the girls want to talk! Okay, [PARTICIPANT 2].

Participant 2:

I have found this was like a combination of the first and the second one. So, there is this informative notion of like giving you facts about witches in the past, but then with what's happening now, that witches are sometimes good or you know, not these weird creepy personalities. But then with the presentation and the circles, and these lights, and then there some like kind of dolls like witches, it was a bit spooky and creepy. But I think that I would go to this one. So, not like the second one that didn't get my attention at all, but I think it's also the way that the video is structured because the first and third were communicating the message in a very clear way while the second one I couldn't really engage as I mentioned before. So, I would visit this one. But if I had to choose between this one and the first, it would be a really hard decision, but probably this one.

Researcher 1:

This one, okay. Why this one and not the first? Is it the combination that you said or something else?

Participant 2:

It's the combination but it's also that they mentioned that it is the most popular museum for witches, so I guess if people that are interested in the subject and I'm not one of them in this group. So, if they say that it's the most popular, then I guess this one provides more information and the best experience for someone who doesn't know anything about this stuff.

Researcher 1:

Okay, nice. Yes [PARTICIPANT 4]

Participant 4:

So yeah, I do agree with [PARTICIPANT 2] that it combines the factual and experiential part. But what I've also notice is that this one, compared to the previous ones they were small and confined, whereas this one is sort of like theme park in a way you know. We have the children in front of the museum in costumes, people walking around in witch costumes, it's a little bit like in Disneyland, when you go there and you have all these toys and stuff that you can buy and also people walking around in costumes. So, it resembled quite a lot a theme park, but it's still getting all this factual thing, but also experiential because you could see the atmosphere of the museum.

Researcher 1:

This thing that you mentioned about the museum being a theme park, would that interest you as a tourist? Would you go to experience something like that for example?

Participant 4:

Actually, that's an interesting question because maybe it would motivate me less because as a theme park I would expect to have some things that are going to catch your attention excite you, but you won't learn as much because it has this theme park, it won't feel authentic enough in the sense that it wouldn't be dark enough. Because now it's made for children and they won't be showing too disturbing things, because I think this one, they had props, whereas in the previous one, they had actual bones and they had animals. Again, it's a different experience, I wouldn't say it's a better one, but this one will actually motivate me less to go.

Researcher 1:

Okay, I see that [PARTICIPANT 3] is very emphatic over there.

Participant 3:

I had the exact same feeling that this was more like a theme park and it was very Americanized and very commercialized way of looking at it and just felt weird like I mean, for me, witches are, there's two things with witches. There is the actual witch trials and then there is the Hermione Granger witches in Harry Potter. And this one was leaning more towards Hermione Granger and less towards the actual witch trials. In my opinion, I mean because it was f***** dark, and I think it would be valid to showcase that if you want to speak about witch trials. So yeah, I can only agree I would be less motivated and even distracted when I would see women dressing up in Harry Potter style witches costumes outside and with the f***** tip jar and things like that. Yeah, just my opinion.

Researcher 1:

Of course, good. [PARTICIPANT 5] you raised your hand.

Participant 5:

I also think this was somewhere in between the more factual, and maybe boring for some, museum and a very dark one. So, I really liked it. I also don't disagree with the looking more theme park but it didn't come to mind when I was watching but now that you mentioned, I can understand but I really

like it because I also tend to like things where there's some roleplay and theatre. And this one I think it communicates a dark message in a way that is not so dark. So, I guess, for people that are interested in very dark experience then it could be too childish or something. But for someone that is interested in knowing the history but also don't get it too creepy about it, I think this is actually super nice and I really like because it also gives you the atmosphere of witches but not the one that has like people whispering in your ears and really giving a dark thing. So, I really like this one. This would be my favorite so far.

Researcher 1:

Okay, [PARTICIPANT 6] have you raised your hand?

Participant 6:

Yes, I raised it. Okay, so I agree with what people have said so far. I think the most important thing is what [PARTICIPANT 2] mentioned that each of the videos has a different perspective. And the way that it has been recorded like the first and the third, it was more like someone informing you about the museum whereas the second one it was like a promo video from another point of view. I think that's important. And about the experience part that the third video highlighted most, I, personally, wouldn't bother. I actually like having an experience while being in a museum, I think it's quite nice. Would it made me feel that it's more like a theme park? If I go outside in the street and see women dressed like witches, yes, it would feel like it's something like Tivoli promotion. I also think if I had to choose at the end, the fact that [PARTICIPANT 2] mentioned if someone was telling me it is the most famous one, maybe I would prioritize it, but on the other hand, since, as a person, I really don't care about this topic I would go to the one that is cheaper. Now I could have this more learning experience as well, just to also get to know a bit about something apart from playing around.

Researcher 1:

But if it wasn't about the financial perspective, you would go to Salem, that's what you're saying?

Participant 6:

Maybe yes, but again it's very close with the first one.

Researcher 1:

Okay [PARTICIPANT 1].

Participant 1:

Yeah, I just want to say that we actually didn't see the inside of the museum, so we really don't know if it's very commercial or if it's darker than it looks to be. But I would agree with [PARTICIPANT 3] that it was very Americanized and very commercial and to make people spend their money to see this perspective of the witches. I don't know. I wouldn't go. Maybe I'll go if it was free, but maybe not if you want to learn what was actually happening in these days. Actually, the girl said some important stuff about the witches but we don't know what was happening inside, so it was giving the feeling that it was a Harry Potter event or something like that. Yeah, not dark enough.

Researcher 1:

Hey [PARTICIPANT 2] you want to add something?

Participant 2:

Yeah, I want to because I didn't realize until after [PARTICIPANT 3] said that these girls dressed up like witches with the tip jar outside the museum was part of the museum. So, I think they should just fire them, it's not attractive at all. I was more focused on what's happening inside, so I didn't really pay attention to the fact that these women are dressed up like witches and are outside of the museum just to attract people. Is this correct?

Researcher 1:

There are some people who work in the museum that dress up like that, but there are also a lot of visitors that actually go there dressed like this.

Participant 2:

That's what I thought that people were dressed up like this and went to the museum. But if there are people from the museum that do this and they have this jar and stuff, I find it very unattractive.

Researcher 1:

Yeah, good. [PARTICIPANT 4] last comment on the video and we move on the final one.

Participant 4:

Yeah, now that people mentioned this thing with the tip jar, I actually didn't notice it, but it just made me think about the authenticity fact. In the sense that the first two videos, the museums, even though they offered different experiences, they seemed authentic in what they want to achieve in terms of experience. But the third one does not really connect with me in terms of authenticity in the sense that, it's in America and like any other American thing, they try to make money out of it, and it just loses this authenticity I think.

Researcher 1:

Okay, good. Let's move on to the final video. It's the museum of Iceland, and maybe then we will just wrap because we don't have enough time to show you the pictures. But we do have enough feedback so we're really, really pleased. Okay, this is the Icelandic museum.

[video 4]

Can you hear me? Okay.

Participant 3:

Are you okay [PARTICIPANT 2]?

Participant 2:

I actually knew about these pants before because we discussed with [RESEARCHER 1] and [RESEARCHER 2], and I was just expecting that they wouldn't show this video.

Researcher 1:

But it's the main thing in the museum.

Participant 2:

That's why I would never go there, it's the fourth on my list. I mean, in the end.

Researcher 1:

Why?

Participant 2:

It's disgusting! I didn't find any information that I would like to know about witches in general, but then, presenting this as the main, is it the main reason people visit the museum? These pants?

Researcher 1:

It is the main exhibit actually.

Participant 2:

Okay, yeah, I don't find it interesting.

Researcher 1:

Okay. And [PARTICIPANT 1], do you want to speak?

Participant 1:

Yeah, I would say that where do we get the ticket for this museum? Yeah, the difficult thing is that it's in Iceland, it's far away from here but I mean, I would really like to see this whole process and what the guy was saying on the video. I think that this comes closer to the reality on what was happening back in these days with all these people, so I guess that if you really want to see the feeling and try to get close to that, this video was a good approach for this.

Participant 4:

Just a quick question, were those like real pants made of skin?

Researcher 2:

The museum says it's a replica, not real skin. But it's the most famous part of the exhibition and a lot of people go there because they believe it's a real thing.

Participant 1:

You shouldn't have told us that. Maybe I'm not going now.

Researcher 1:

But it is true, it was a custom of the Vikings, sorcerers. Yeah, [PARTICIPANT 5]?

Participant 5:

I hope I'm not being inconsistent with my replies, but I really like this one because what I think the main difference between this one and the second one is that the second one, is that the second one was just, like, typical whispering in your ear, and that just tries to almost convert you. But this one I really like and reminded me a bit of Auschwitz, where they also they are very visual and I've also been in a place in Cambodia where it was about the Khmer Rouge and all like how the people were killed and it was very visual with skulls and parts of bodies, but I really like it because it shows exactly how it was. I don't know, I think it's the most interesting part to know exactly how they do it and how it looked like and this one, although a bit impressive, for me it's not as spooky because it's not trying to scare me, but it's showing exactly how it is. So yeah, this is my favorite and then the third one, then the first, and then the second one. Just because the second I feel is just like very dark, and not adding that much, and this one would be really the best equilibrium, and I would be really very interested in going maybe with [PARTICIPANT 1]. Yeah I really like it, it's very good.

Researcher 1:

Good. [PARTICIPANT 6]?

Participant 6:

I agree with [PARTICIPANT 1] and [PARTICIPANT 5]. I also like that one I think the most and the reason why is because it feels more adult museum meaning that it provides also the facts as the first did, but it also gives some part of the experience, but not in a childish way, more in another way. And I think maybe there are not so many kids around. And so, I agree that I would say I would prefer maybe that one and the first thing that drew my attention was the BBC logo on the top left. Only by seeing this in the beginning, I felt like okay, this is a serious one, it's not a promo trying to attract the tourists or something like that.

Researcher 1:

Okay. Yeah [PARTICIPANT 4]?

Participant 4:

Yeah, I would also agree that it kind of combines elements with the first and second museums in the sense that of course the first one is presenting facts you know you could easily disconnect from reality, you know, look at it in an objective way. Whereas the second one was trying to affect you in an

experiential way and then the last one seems like, it's presenting reality but it's also able to affect you on an emotional level. Compared to the third video or the theme park or the theme museum, it didn't feel like they were even trying to impress you or affect you in any way, because the pants are affecting you enough. Themselves are enough even though they're not real, although not that many people know as you mentioned.

Researcher 1:

[PARTICIPANT 3]? Do you have any feedback since it's your Scandinavian heritage? Do you have some interesting perspective from your side? Or not?

Participant 3:

Yeah, I mean no, I've never heard about these pants thingy, so of course that's interesting and I didn't really draw any connection with [PARTICIPANT 5] towards the Killing Fields in Cambodia, but I guess there's some resemblance there. For me, the second one was absolutely the most interesting, I don't really know why. But this last one, it didn't do much for me to be honest. I found it a bit weird with this old Icelandic guy when he was juggling his three stones and then just dropped it. But yeah, I don't really have any opinion actually about this last one.

Researcher 1:

Thank you. [PARTICIPANT 2]?

Participant 2:

Yes, I want to add something now that [PARTICIPANT 5] mentioned Auschwitz. So, first of all, one question. The man said in the video that when someone dies, he should give his consent for this f***** thing to happen, right? It's not torturing people

Researcher 2:

Yes. It was a man who said yes, once I die you can do this to my body.

Participant 2:

Okay, so the difference that I found between this thing and Auschwitz and all the bones that are there, is that in Auschwitz of course you get the feeling, and you get very emotional, and you cry, and real stuff are being displayed. But the bones are a natural evolution of us, right? So, when we die, bones are the only thing that will stay but this thing is not something natural. It's something you have to do

to the human body and that's why I find it very disgusting. But on the other hand, I have been to Auschwitz and I would love to go again. So, I mean, that's the difference between these two museums for me, that it's something not natural and on the other hand, it's a story and I don't know. Of course, the one with the witches is also a story but for me there are different things, they are distinct. I stick to my opinion; I wouldn't visit this one in Iceland.

Researcher 1:

Okay, any additional comments?

Participant 4:

Now that [PARTICIPANT 3] mentioned the guy that was throwing the stones. Actually, you know, I hope that that guy is not really doing this in real life when people are going there because then that would kind of lose the authenticity part. It would remind of the theme park, the museum in America. But from what I remember looking at the website, it seemed like the cottages were quite authentic, at least they were made to look so. So, I really hope that this guy is not doing this, or unless he's living there and he's actually practicing unless I would find it a bit inauthentic.

Researcher 1:

Okay, good. So, I think that you all kind of answered which museum you would rather visit, so I think this is clear and do we have something more to add? I think we're good. Good, okay. We won't show you the picture because then it would take half an hour more, and we don't want you to go through that. But we already have enough to work with.

Researcher 2:

Thank you very much.

Researcher 1:

Thank you very much for participating and good luck with your projects.

Participant 5:

Thank you, it was very interesting.

Researcher 1:

You may not realize it, but it was very helpful for us, so thank you for taking the time.

Appendix C: Invitation sent to focus group participants.

Dear all,

We would like to invite you to take part in a small discussion group (focus group) for our master thesis, on **Saturday 1st of May** at **12.00**. The focus group should last around one hour in total and will help us gain useful insights on the tourism experience regarding four witch hunt and witchcraft museums that we are currently examining.

If you want to you may have a quick look at the websites of the four museums that will be the focal point of our conversation, but know that it is voluntary and not a prerequisite for participation in the focus group.

- [Salem Witch Museum, Salem, Massachusetts, USA](#)
- [Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt, Ribe, Denmark](#)
- [Museum of Icelandic Sorcery & Witchcraft \(Strandagaldur\), Hólmavík, Iceland](#)
- [Museum of Witchcraft & Magic, Boscastle, England](#)

No further background information or preparation from your side is needed in order to be part of our study - just your positive energy and your active participation during the call! 😊

Please know that anonymity is guaranteed for all participants.

Hereby you can find the link to the Microsoft Teams meeting invitation:

Click here to join the meeting

If you consent to take part in the focus group, please let us know by replying to this email.

Thank you in advance!

Kimberley Ibsen & Dimitra Papadopoulou

PS. Following the discussion, in case you feel the need to, please feel free to contact our master thesis supervisor, Ana Maria Munar, Ph.D, Associate Professor, at anm.mpp@cbs.dk.

Appendix D: Slide of pictures for focus group use.

Four representative pictures published online by each museum that was put together by the research team but did not make it to the conversation due to time limitations.



'Trepanned Skull'
at Hex! Museum of Witch Hunt,
Ribe, Denmark



'All Hallow's Eve Dark Gathering'
at Boscastle's Museum of Witchcraft
and Magic



'The Necropants' (Nábrók)
at the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery
and Witchcraft



The cast of 'Never Land Theatre' entertaining the visitors at Salem Witch Museum

Appendix E: Post under the Hex! Museum geotag.

Tourist that positively evaluates and recommends the museum but does not perform or identify with the witch in any way.



186 likes

██████████ Vi har besøgt det nye museum Hex! i Ribe og kan give vores varmeste anbefaling. Hex! er en visuel stærk oplevelse og fortæller på en levende måde om mange århundredes jagt på hekse. 🧙

.....

We have visited the new museum Hex! in Ribe and can only give them our very best recommendations. Hex! is a visually powerful experience which tells the story of centuries of witch hunting in an exciting way. 🧙

Appendix F: Post under the Boscastle Museum geotag.

Tourist encapsulating the pagan community's view on the persecution of witches.



476 likes



It's Witchy Ways week over at @witch.with.me which got me thinking. I thought about my own witchy ways, which are in a constant state of evolution, but I also got to thinking about witchy ways of the community.

We sure have come a long way. It wasn't so long ago that we would all have been locked up, tortured, ostracised, burned, or murdered for simply having an affinity with the seasons, herbs, healing, or our very own nature.

We still have a long way to go to be fully accepted but we are very lucky to be living in times where we can practise our witchy ways without the fear of death or persecution (in most countries, anyway).

So it really saddens me that that despite centuries of progress from these dark times, the witchy community can sometimes turn on itself. Cliques, bullying, elitism, shaming. Haven't we faced enough judgement and torment?

Every witch is different and has a different path to take. We aren't all going to agree on everything and that's ok. But let's not attack each other and try to bring each other down. We've seen more than enough of that already.

#witchycommunity #witchesofinstagram 🌙🧿
#witchwithseptember #witchwithme #witchyways
#witchhistory #museumofwitchcraftandmagic
#witchystuff #traditionalwitch #ukwitches #witchyfriends
#instacoven #instawitches #witchlife 🧿 #devonwitches

Appendix G: Post under the Icelandic Museum geotag.

Tourist commenting on the Necropants being a “*replica unfortunately*”.



33 likes

██████████ A sampling of some Icelandic sorcery. Pants made of human skin (replica unfortunately). Weird baby face totems you attach to nipple you make out cutting a flap of skin on your leg. Lots of runes painted with various human and animal body fluids. About 20 men and one woman were burned for witchcraft in the 1600s. One guy for something so tame as using witchcraft to make his sheep behave better. Five were blamed with one pastor's wife Helga getting sick a couple times. Damn Helga, take a Benadryl.

Appendix H: 3 posts under the Icelandic Museum geotag.

Tourists sharing their 'must see' motivation for the main exhibit of the Icelandic museum; the Necropants.



103 likes

Here's a #ThrowbackThursday and #FolkloreThursday Hybrid for you! Almost a year ago exactly, I was on my way to the Icelandic Museum of Sorcery and Witchcraft to visit the Necropants and to learn about how the Icelandic witches incorporated hair into their spells. This particular box of hair wasn't used for anything. It was just kind of just...sitting there? For decoration, I assume. But you can learn all about The Necropants and the use of human hair in The Seamouse spell (both are said to bring you great riches!) on YouTube. I have two really fun and weird videos about this really fun and weird trip, and I would love it if you would join me as I recount the tale!



7 J'aime

Came all the way to Iceland to see the Necropants.



45 likes

Saw the necropants! 🤩👻

Appendix I: Post under the Salem Museum geotag.

Post commenting on the blend of historical facts on the witch trials and pop culture representations of witches.



10 likes

For a town where the premise was there really were no witches, there seems to be a lot of magic here. History is weird.

Appendix J: 2 posts under the Icelandic Museum geotag.

Posts about the museum's toured objects perceived authenticity being extremely high.



259 likes

I tend to gravitate toward the strange and unusual locations not found on typical road maps. One of my bucket list items was to gaze upon the glory of the #necropants, and my quest was fulfilled in 2018!

From @atlasobscura: At Strandagaldur, the museum of Icelandic sorcery & witchcraft, these times of magic and fear are remembered in often shocking detail. The museum focuses on the elaborate and esoteric spells and rituals that the regional magic called for which would provide such effects as conjuring a creature to steal goat's milk or making someone invisible. The collection features a number of artfully displayed artifacts and displays such as rune-carved pieces of wood, animal skulls, and a number of Icelandic magical staves. However, the most shocking and remarkable piece is easily the so-called "necropants" which is the dried skin of a man from the waist down. These horrifying leggings were used in a spell that would supposedly bring the caster more money.



30 likes

Happy Halloween from the Necropants! If these don't terrify you, then nothing will. Back in the 17th century a sorcerer would make a pact with a man that after he dies he could dig up his dead body and skin it from the waist down. The sorcerer would then step into the skin which would immediately become one with his own. He would then have to steal a coin from a poor widow and then keep it in the scrotum. This apparently drew wealth for the sorcerer for the rest of his life. Happy dreaming!