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Marketing Transformative Event Experiences: Archetypes for Positive Change

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Marketing Transformative Event Experiences: Archetypes for Positive Change

Highlights

- Transformative experiences are an opportunity for the business events sector
- Symbolic associations with TEs are elicited through visual methods
- Sage, Explorer, and Magician are the main archetypes in transformative events

Abstract

Transformative experiences are increasingly the focus of festival and event designers. In business event contexts, attendees often redefine their mindset, attitudes, and practices following a transformative event experience. Current research primarily examines the factors that trigger transformation and highlights the principles of intentional design for change. However, there is much less focus on the marketing of transformative events. Using a two-step method that involves free-hand image drawing and sentence completion conducted both pre- and post-event, this study explores how transformation is represented in the symbols and words associated with brand archetypes in transformative events. The analysis reveals dominant associations with three of the eight brand archetypes: Sage, Explorer, and Magician. Implications for research and event marketing practice are provided. Using archetype association narratives and transformative imagery represents a novel approach to marketing the unique nature of transformative events.

Keywords

Transformative events; event design; archetypes; marketing; visual methods.

1. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of economic value from goods and services to experiences, and more recently, to human transformations, has been captured in the concept of the transformation economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Consumers in the transformation economy increasingly seek experiences that are not only authentic and meaningful (Rossman & Duerden, 2019), but also potentially transformative and life-changing (Chirico et al., 2022; Kirillova et al., 2017).

Transformative experiences (TEs) enable the fulfilment of personal aspirations and growth, leading to changes in mindset, beliefs, and behaviours (Chirico et al., 2022; Gaggioli, 2016).

Academic authors have mainly studied TEs in extraordinary or liminal contexts that take people away from their mundane everyday lives, such as tourism (Bueddefeld & Duerden, 2022; Sheldon, 2020), leisure (Dillette et al., 2019), and festivals (Neuhofer et al., 2020, 2021). But more recently, the shift toward transformation has also been evident in the meetings, incentives, conferences and events (MICE) sector (Celuch & Neuhofer, 2024a; Neuhofer et al., 2024).

While human transformation sometimes occurs spontaneously and may stem from negative experiences, for instance, as a result of acute stress, loss, or trauma (Chirico et al., 2022), in events the focus is primarily on creating positive emotions, memories and experiences that bring about long-lasting change in participants. TEs in MICE and business events contexts promote well-being, personal growth, and enduring change in attitudes, beliefs, and practices. These changes are often facilitated by attendees being exposed to new ideas, gaining new knowledge, developing personal connections, and becoming part of social networks and communities (Celuch & Neuhofer, 2024b; Neuhofer, 2024; Neuhofer et al., 2024).

Recent studies suggest that event organisers can purposefully and intentionally design and orchestrate certain elements of the event to instil change in participants (Celuch & Neuhofer, 2024b). This can be achieved by adopting design-for-change principles (Frissen et al., 2021),

for example, by providing emotionally-experiential landscapes and spaces for personal engagement, and by carefully developing the mindset and skillsets of the human actors who coach, guide, and facilitate transformative effects across the event journey (Neuhofer et al., 2020, 2024). But while tourism and event researchers increasingly pay attention to different aspects of TEs to better facilitate their design and management, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding the promotion and marketing of transformative events (Celuch & Neuhofer, 2024b).

Storytelling plays a key role in the design, creation, and marketing of transformative event experiences. By crafting narratives that resonate with potential attendees' personal aspirations, storytelling helps convey the purpose and potential outcomes of an event. By linking event marketing to specific archetypes, event organisers can frame archetypal narratives that symbolise self-growth transformation. In the transformative experience realm, recent literature highlights storytelling and symbolism as powerful tools in facilitating self-reflection, mindfulness, and meaningful interactions in tourism experiences (Moscardo, 2020; Sheldon, 2020; Soulard et al., 2021).

According to Dieteren and Neuhofer (2024) carefully crafted communication, so-called framing, is essential in all phases of the event, spanning from pre-event expectation-setting to post-event reflection. Provider-led narratives around expectation setting, briefing, onboarding, offboarding, post-event sharing, and reflection all play a role in ensuring that a transformation can be fully integrated post-event (Neuhofer, 2024). Recent studies (Neuhofer et al., 2020; Robledo & Batle, 2017) suggest that one possible avenue for TE event marketers is to use narratives that work with symbols and archetypes associated with the transformative states.

The positive effect of storytelling in marketing has been demonstrated in various contexts, including destination marketing and tourism (Moin et al., 2020; Moscardo, 2020; Mossberg,

2008). In branding research, storytelling is used to link brands with archetypes (Mark & Pearson, 2001), which through narrative transfer and empathy embed brands in consumers' life contexts (Woodside et al., 2008). In particular, stories that involve eudaimonic narratives have been attracting attention in tourism academia (Heinonen et al., 2024). Eudaimonic narratives encourage readers to explore deeper questions and engage with more meaningful themes (Hamby et al., 2023). When combined with the idea of archetypes and imagery in transformative business events, eudaimonic narratives and stories could help business event organisers craft explicit, powerful messages inviting people to join events designed to trigger change.

Situated in the emerging transformation economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2011), this study seeks to contribute to the theoretical understanding of event experience management by demonstrating how transformative events can be effectively communicated through symbolic archetypes and storytelling. The research addresses a critical gap in the literature by offering a new perspective on how event marketers can communicate transformation as a core outcome of an event, thereby advancing transformative experience marketing research in events. Adopting a qualitative visual methods approach (Soulard & McGehee, 2021), we draw on a combination of visual and text-based data provided by the participants of an international conference in Poland. This study seeks to answer the following questions: What are the symbolic archetypes and imagery that business event participants associate with transformative events? And how can these archetypes be used to customise the messages and narratives that link business events with transformational outcomes?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. From events marketing to TE event marketing

Looking at the development of events research within tourism studies over the last three decades, Duignan (2023) points out that events have gone from being dominated by

managerial agendas that prioritised issues such as economic impacts, visitor motivation and satisfaction, through perspectives that emphasised their social impacts and destination development role. More recently, events have begun to tackle more contemporary issues, including their role in ritualistic rites of passage and liminal spaces that enable transformative outcomes for individual attendees (e.g., Neuhofer et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2020). Parallel to this, event marketing has also seen a considerable shift (Celuch & Neuhofer, 2024a).

Traditionally event marketers focussed on maximising visitor numbers and ticket sales, with publications highlighting integrated marketing communication (IMC), promotion, advertising and public relations as key tools to attract attention and motivate people to attend (Hede & Kellett, 2011; Hoyle, 2002). Since the late 2000s, consumers have been seen as immersed and actively participating in co-creating their event experiences and value outcomes (Vargo & Lusch, 2006), whereby the role of the event marketer shifted from 'selling' value through the 4Ps of marketing (Masterman & Wood, 2006), toward facilitating value co-creation with attendees (Rihova et al., 2018).

The latest marketing perspectives on events concern issues such as how to co-create brands and increase brand engagement through experiences (Davey et al., 2024). Accordingly, event design and management textbooks have seen an increased interest in the experiential perspective, with event marketers building on Schmitt's (1999) idea of sensorial and affective aspects of event experiences tapping into consumers' emotional 'hot buttons'. Authors describe events as optimal, memorable, extraordinary, and co-created experiences (Berridge, 2007; Orefice, 2018), suggesting marketers should emphasise creativity, collaboration and relationships, immersion/absorption, visual imagery, authenticity, and indeed, transformation, as key features of experiences that will appeal to the emotional persona. Through understanding these key features, events can be more effectively designed and staged to facilitate positive outcomes, and, ultimately, personal change (Berridge, 2007; Frissen et al., 2021; O'Sullivan & Spangler, 1998).

Experiential features and triggers of transformation have been explored in recent TE studies from tourism and events contexts, suggesting possible avenues for communicating specific transformative outcomes. For instance, Teoh et al. (2021) highlight challenge and novelty as important TE features, with positive, but also negative emotions such as stress and anxiety as transformation catalysts. As Chirico et al. (2022) note, challenges can mean turmoil and disruption but afterwards can lead to positive change through posttraumatic growth. In tourism experiences, including festivals and other leisure events, transformation is typically associated with moments of awe, an a-ha moment, or an epiphany that triggers individuals to expand personally and epistemically (Kirillova et al., 2017). Such peak experiences characterise moments of fulfilment and happiness, leading to subsequent transformation. Additionally, events are conceptualised as liminal spaces, in which a strong sense of community and belonging leads to individuals' transcendence of the self (Neuhofer et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2020). Coined by Turner (1982), liminality represents an 'in-between space, an immersive time-out-of-time experience that exists outside of the ordinary and where sharing the same space with other like-minded individuals contributes to the creation of *communitas*. Participation in these communities, be it temporary or long-lasting, can become a source of value for many festival and event attendees (Rihova et al., 2018).

Focussing on TEs in the context of the MICE sector and conferences specifically, Celuch and Neuhofer (2024b) found that participants express a sense of transformation through the attainment of new knowledge (pertaining to both attendees' professional skills and knowledge of the self), and indeed, through the building of interpersonal connections and a feeling of belonging to a greater community. Along with a small number of other authors, Celuch and Neuhofer suggest that marketers could utilise symbols, imagery, and strong narratives to communicate these and other features to particular audiences (Celuch & Neuhofer, 2024a; Robledo, 2024; Soulard & McGehee, 2021). However, there remains a surprising gap in the literature regarding how explicitly events with transformative outcomes

should be marketed and how transformational symbols and imagery can be effectively integrated into event communication.

2.2. Symbolism and archetypes in transformative experiences

Robledo and Batle (2017) map the tourist's transformation as a hero's journey, which begins in the everyday world and leads to a new place where many challenges are faced, followed by the hero's return with a new perspective on the 'old' life. Similarly, participants in Celuch and Neuhofer's (2024b) study of TEs at business events drew people and non-human figures as key protagonists in a magical or spiritual way-finding journey that brings everyone together in an inclusive communal experience. Such stories see the protagonist descend into the unknown, face challenges and temptations, and die (figuratively or literally) to then be reborn and transformed as a fully integrated person ready to share his or her learning with the community (Campbell, 1993).

The hero persona originates from the concept of archetypes, first defined by the psychologist Carl Jung. Jung (1959) identified the self, the persona, the shadow, and the anima/animus as the four primary archetypes; i.e. behavioural programmes that humans implement throughout their lives and that are linked to specific desires, goals, emotions and fears. More recently, Pearson (1998) proposed six main archetypes that exist within each person and can help to solve challenges leading to inner transformation. The author offers detailed descriptions of the characteristics of each archetype, including a plot (i.e. a sequence of events) for each character's 'backstory'. The archetypes include: 1) the Orphan associated with the power of resilience and the suffering/survival plot; 2) the Wanderer associated with independence and the escape/wayfinding plot; 3) the Warrior associated with courage and the plot of achievement/ the defeat of enemies; 4) the Altruist associated with compassion and the plot of self-sacrifice; 5) the Returned Innocent associated with the power of faith and the plot of

finding the promised land/ happiness; and 6) the Magician, whose special gift is power and the plot revolves around self-transformation and changing one's world.

The archetypes framework has been adapted for different purposes, although recently it has been used by marketers to help identify and frame brands around a leading archetype consumers can identify with on a deeply emotional level (Xara-Brasil et al., 2018). Mark and Pearson (2001) proposed 12 archetypes based on human drives, grouped into four categories: "belonging and enjoyment" (Lover, Jester, Everyman); "stability and control" (Creator, Caregiver, Rules); "independence and fulfilment" (Innocent, Explorer, Sage); and, "risk and mystery" (Hero, Outlaw, Magician). Houraghan's (2018) framework further elaborates on Mark and Pearson's archetypes by providing a comprehensive summary in terms of the archetype's 'personality', drivers and motivators, inhibitors/fears, and a guiding principle or strategy. The author gives examples of each archetype and their personification in brand slogans, fictional characters, and an associated colour palette that marketing practitioners can apply in promotional materials and communication channels.

Brand archetypes are typically connected in marketing research with storytelling, imagery, and symbolism as tools to access and influence customers' brand perceptions (Woodside et al., 2008). Brand stories create and reinforce positive brand associations (Lundqvist et al., 2013), meaning the verbal or visual descriptions of a brand that reflect largely nonverbal sensory impressions (Supphellen, 2000). Through narrative processing, a link is created between the brand and the self as consumers attempt to map information from adverts onto existing stories in memory (Escalas, 2004). Brand archetypes are then anchored in memory in the form of emotional responses representing dominating determinants of choice in consumer decision-making (Woodside et al., 2008). Archetypal stories can also work through narrative transportation, or the extent to which the customer 'gets lost' in a story, and empathy, as the story plot is evoked in consumers' imagination (van Laer et al., 2014). It is therefore important to create immersive stories with strong archetypal characters and plots that would

engage the consumer at an emotional level and let attendees anticipate the transformational power of an event.

While brand archetypes are primarily used in marketing to establish emotional connections between brands and audiences (Mark & Pearson, 2001), they also serve as symbolic representations of universal psychological themes related to self-actualisation and transformation, including human motivation, needs, and self-fulfilment (Houraghan, 2018; Maslow, 1954). This concept is further reflected in Campbell's (1993) Hero's Journey, an archetypal representation of transformation that has been applied to various contexts, such as transformational tourism (Robledo & Batle, 2017). In the context of transformative events, these archetypes provide a framework to evoke emotions, facilitate meaning-making, and communicate the deeper themes of transformation.

A particularly suitable approach to storytelling of TEs in business contexts is that of eudaimonic narratives. Eudaimonic communication has been adopted in advertising and is centred on elements such as personal growth, accomplishment, fulfilment, the pursuit of happiness, and positive affect, with stories that centre on themes such as human virtues (e.g. kindness, courage, generosity), the human condition, and a higher purpose in life (Hamby et al., 2023). As with other types of stories, empathy is a key vehicle through which the audience connects with the character who, through engagement in enjoyable activities, seeks some higher purpose and meaning in life (Heinonen et al., 2024). By linking eudaimonic communication with archetypal features specific to transformative events, a deeper and longer-lasting connection with audiences can be created, inspiring them to embrace personal growth and transformation. Rather than associating events with specific brands, the archetype framework allows event organisers to develop narratives that align with attendees' deeper psychological aspirations for personal and professional growth.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is guided by the constructivist stance that draws on qualitative data to emphasise an emic perspective of the research participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). A combination of visual and text-based data collection techniques was used to gain insights into the complex topic of transformative experience. The use of visual approaches has a long tradition in the social sciences, and visual methods have been increasingly used in tourism and events research (Celuch & Neuhofer, 2024b; Rakić & Chambers, 2012; Soulard & McGehee, 2021). As human experiences of transformation are complex, subjective, and often non-linear, imagery and drawing represent an alternative mode of expression that allows for better representation of this complexity (Soulard et al., 2021).

For example, Zaltman's (1997) metaphor elicitation technique (ZMET) has been utilised to explore the nature of experiences and the symbolism attached to these (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2010). ZMET is based on the premise that much of human communication relies on often image-based non-verbal cues (Zaltman, 1997). Metaphors build on similarities with our daily experiences and can play an important part in human thinking. Studies where participants are shown images that represent visual metaphors can capture memories, perceptions, and experiences that individuals find difficult to articulate through more conventional methods (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2010). This approach was used for instance by Butler et al. (2014), who asked their participants to choose an image representing a contextualised figurative character to elicit their perceptions of workplace identity.

Another type of visual elicitation tool utilised in qualitative tourism and events research builds on participants' original drawings, rather than working with existing images and photos. For instance, Soulard and McGehee (2021) investigated tourists' transformation by asking participants to create freehand drawings depicting themselves both before and after a transformative tourism experience. These drawings served as a basis for interviews, during

which participants could talk about the meaning of their images. Others have used freehand drawings to investigate embodied and emotional aspects of workplace interactions and organisational change (Renaud et al., 2021), and to analyse different transformative states upon entry to and exit from a business event (Celuch & Neuhofer, 2024b).

Data for this study were collected at the annual Business Meeting Planner Summit conference in Poland in 2023, which brought together over 120 predominantly Polish business event planners and marketing professionals. The sample consisted of a homogenous group of corporate event planners who attended the Summit to gain new perspectives, practical tools, and skills for creating more engaging, impactful, and transformative events. The Summit was designed as an immersive, participatory experience, featuring a programme that combined diverse formats such as keynotes, interactive workshops, personalised learning experiences, and social spaces. These formats enabled attendees not only to gather new knowledge but also to shift their mindset on event design (DreamEvents, n.d.). The event invited participants to step outside their routine work environments, embrace new design examples, and reflect on their own design practices. These features have been shown to lead to transformative outcomes in MICE contexts (Neuhofer et al., 2024), rendering the conference a suitable context for this study.

A two-step metaphor-elicitation technique inspired by Soulard and McGhee's (2021) **methodology** was used, combining visual and textual data. Event attendees were approached by the research team at the start of the conference and invited to take part in the study. A set of worksheets was manually distributed that included a space for the attendees to draw their state of being at the start and the end of the transformative event, with a specific focus on documenting any change and transformation they may have experienced. The drawings helped to link the TE to relevant, but taken-for-granted, values, norms, relationships and facts that could otherwise not be observed or clearly articulated (Renaud et al., 2021). A speech bubble further prompted participants to reflect on and write in short sentences about how they

1 felt, what they thought, said, and did at that specific point in time, both at the start and at the
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 4 end of the event. By doing so, participants were offered a space for their own narrative
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 6 interpretation of the image (Butler et al., 2014).
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 9 Additionally, a sentence completion exercise was used to uncover symbolic archetypal
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 11 associations within the potentially transformative experience. This relatively underutilised
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 13 approach in tourism research has been applied to study experiences in situ (Celuch &
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 15 Neuhofer, 2024b; Soulard & McGehee, 2021). As a projective technique, it affords
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 17 participants greater freedom of expression compared to direct questioning (Pich et al., 2015).
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 19 The post-event worksheet contained a section in which participants were invited to complete
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 21 sentences related to the event. Specifically, they were asked to associate the event with an
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 23 adjective/noun, a colour, emotion, animal, fairy tale, magical creature, magical power,
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 25 spiritual entity, and a painting (e.g. "If the event were an animal, it would be..."). Such
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 27 stimulus objects in the narrative forms have potentially rich associative networks and served
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 29 to facilitate the surfacing of archetypal symbols (Houraghan, 2018; Mark & Pearson, 2001),
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 31 sensory experiences linked to colour associations (Schmitt, 1999), and other features relevant
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 33 to personal transformations and the emotions linked to these (Dyken et al., 2007; Soulard et
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 35 al., 2021).
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41 The final dataset consisted of a total of 107 worksheets that were submitted at the end of the
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 43 conference. The demographic data suggested that the vast majority of participants were
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 45 Polish event professionals, with 76% being female between 31-34 years old (19%) and 40-44
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 47 years old (37%). 36% of participants were marketing professionals, 23% worked in event
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 49 management, and the remainder were engaged in a variety of roles, including human resource
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 51 management, business administration, PR and communications, sales and finance, education,
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 53 and local government. All participants were assigned aliases to preserve anonymity and
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 55 confidentiality.
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1 The data were analysed using MAXQDA in an iterative multi-step process based on the
2 principles of qualitative thematic analysis (Bazeley, 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, the
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4 hand-written responses were transcribed into a digital format, translated from Polish to
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6 English using a translation programme and checked for accuracy by two native speakers. As
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8 a first analytical step, the researchers familiarised themselves with the collected material
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10 containing both visual and textual data and screened and discussed the dataset. The images
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12 and accompanying speech bubble text were then given descriptive codes and organised in a
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14 coding tree in an inductive analytical process that focussed on eliciting how attendees saw
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16 themselves as characters in the context of the event, both during and after the conference.
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23 Second, a deductive coding process followed. Using Houraghan's (2018) brand archetypes as
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25 an apriori analytical framework, the word associations as well as the drawing-based codes
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27 were plotted against the twelve archetypes, focussing particularly on storyline/plot
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29 descriptions, personality characteristics, power, drives, desires, and colours for each
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31 archetype. Frequency counts were used to identify the most prevalent themes in the dataset
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33 (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The analysis was finalised through a final round of sorting,
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35 cleaning, and clustering, with the research team engaging in constant memo writing and
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37 frequent discussions to ensure consistency (Bazeley, 2009). Analysis identified eight
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39 archetype themes: Outlaw, Magician, Hero, Innocent, Sage, Explorer, Creator, Everyman,
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41 summarised in Table 1 and discussed below in detail.
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4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The two-step analysis process examined the symbols and associations participants used to describe TEs. By plotting the codes from images, participants' own statements, and word associations against the archetype framework, it was possible to discern which archetypal plots and symbols were prevalent in the context of business event TEs. The findings are presented by first, discussing the three most prevalent archetypes (Sage, Explorer and

Magician), followed by a discussion of the less dominant secondary archetypes (Outlaw, Hero, Creator, Everyman, and Innocent). Examples from the visual data (drawings) and textual data are provided to illustrate the themes. To offer an overview of the findings, Table 1 has been developed that integrates the symbolic archetype-based visual and word associations into a framework for event marketing and communication.

Table 1 Integrative framework for TE event marketing

| Archetype | Key features | Syboic associations for marketing transformative event |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Sage (Primary) | Wise, knowledgeable, analytical | Illuminated, Knowledge, Wise Man, Gandalf, Athena, Buddha, God Apollo, God, Unicorn, Nature, Question |
| Explorer (Primary) | Adventurous, independent, curious | Interesting, Adventure, Journey, Curiosity, Tiger, Wandering Cat, Lemur, Bison, Wilderness, Flight in the clouds, Aladdin, Exploration, Lightbulb |
| Magician (Primary) | Transformative, mystical, visionary | Enchanted, Dragon, A magical reunion, Magic wand, A Fairy, Transformation, Phoenix, Wizard, Hypnosis, Immortality, Witchcraft, Telepathy, Flying, Spells |
| Hero (Secondary) | Courageous, strong, goal-oriented | Excitement, Success, Professional, Tiger, Parrot, Power, Force, Infinite happiness, Lion, Lion King, Brave, Force, Absolute strength, Goal |
| Outlaw (Secondary) | Rebellious, disruptive, unconventional | Dynamite stick, Revolution, Blood Red, Fire, Change into, Chaos, Zorro, Puss in Boots |
| Creator (Secondary) | Imaginative, inventive, expressive | Inspiration, Illumination, Visionary, Growth potion, Flower meadow, Sunflower, Creation, Bringing joy, Art, Color park, Mosaic, Picasso, Abstract, Colorful parrot, Money |
| Everyman (Secondary) | Relatable, simple, humble | Humble, Dog, Nice, Pleasant time, Simple, Relaxing, Landscape, Merry people, Winnie the Pooh, Casper the Firendly Ghost, School, Breakfast on the Grass |
| Innocent (Secondary) | Pure, optimistic, hopeful | Joy, Hope, Innocent, Pure, Optimistic, Fairy, Little Riding Hood, Seven Dwarfs, Fairy tale, Angel, Good Spirit, Love, Cinderella, Snow White, Paradise, Happiness, Unicorn, Flying bird, Goodness, Sunrise, Flowers |

(Source: Authors)

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4.1. Dominant archetypes in TE business events

The most prevalent symbols in the data were associated with the **Sage** archetype. Participants used word associations such as Illumination, Wisdom, Knowledge and Wise Man, revealing that the event was primarily transformative due to its capability to expand personal knowledge. Participants described the event alluding to mythical god-like characters and deities, such as Gandalf, Athena, Buddha, God Apollo, and God. The keywords associated with the Sage archetype indicate that the attendees see the event as an opportunity for intellectual growth and self-reflection, with wisdom and new understanding as the main outcomes. This is in line with the qualities of transformative experiences often characterised by personal and epistemic expansion on an emotional, cognitive, spiritual and physical level (Chirico et al., 2022; Gaggioli, 2016; Neuhofer et al., 2021).

Additionally, several images depict participants and a range of cognitive symbols. These include lightbulbs, question marks, and books, which suggest associations of change through cognitive engagement and the acquisition of new ideas, information, and wisdom. Some participants drew exclamation marks and ‘Aha’ as well as ‘Eureka’ expressions, indicating a breakthrough for new ways of thinking, which is a common occurrence in transformative experiences that lead to sudden epistemic insights (Chirico et al., 2022). One example shows an individual who appears thin before the event and fuller afterwards, with the accompanying comment suggesting the process is filled with new emotions and knowledge. In a similar vein, another participant’s image depicts an individual gaining muscle, signifying increased empowerment and strength gathered from the event (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Growing wiser



Furthermore, the analysis indicates a large number of associations with the **Explorer** archetype. The Explorer stands for an adventurous and independent spirit on a quest for discovery. Participants used words such as Interesting, Adventure, Curiosity, Flight in the clouds, and Exploration to describe the event. The drawings depict individuals next to roads, highlighting their openness to embark on new destinations and expand their horizons, symbolising a journey of discovery. Other drawings show stairs and arrows, representing transformative themes of rising, evolution, development and personal growth (Figure 2). The Explorer speaks of participants' sense of openness, freedom, independence, and their aspiration to expand their horizons and perspectives. It also requires participants to leave their comfort zones and discover something new. This archetype uses associations connected to curiosity and novelty, two common characteristics often found in transformative experiences (Kirillova et al., 2017; Sheldon, 2020).

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Figure II Embarking on a journey



The third most prevalent was the **Magician** archetype, exemplified in word associations such as Enchanted, Transformation, Magic wand, Flying, Telepathy, and Witchcraft. These associations illustrate attendees’ sense of awe and wonder, which is indeed one of the main indicators of transformation in events (Chirico et al., 2022; Neuhofer, 2024). Participants feel awed and enchanted with what they experience and see the potential for transformation through this experience. Symbols and characters in this archetype refer to classic storytelling and well-known fairy tales and fantasy figures. Participants mentioned, for instance, the Wizard, the Phoenix, and the Dragon, all symbols of magic, strength and profound transformation.

Magician associations further suggest altered realities, overcoming ordinary limitations, and embracing an ‘anything is possible’ mindset. This is an interesting finding, as magical qualities are not typically found in business events. This archetype speaks to the mystical and visionary qualities of transformation, suggesting that an event could be a life-changing encounter with the potential to alter one’s realities and ways of thinking and being. Participant narratives revealed recurring magical symbols and themes, such as ‘being on a

journey,' magic, and wizards, which suggest transformative mechanisms akin to those described in Campbell's monomyth (Campbell, 1993). Participants leave behind everyday life, enter a magical third space to experience change and return with a magical elixir. This is in line with the latest studies on events and festivals, which highlight the role of events as liminoid spaces to trigger personal change and offer a transitional space between an individual's old and new identities (e.g., Neuhofer, 2024; Neuhofer et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2020).

4.2. Secondary archetypes in TE business events

Among the less dominant associations was the **Hero** archetype, a type that conveys strength and courage. Participants used several word associations, such as Excitement, Tiger, Lion King, and The Force, to describe themselves as a strong protagonist who attends the event for further self-improvement and achievement. Several heroic themes could be identified in the dataset, for instance in words such as bravery, absolute strength, goal, success, and professional. This archetype aligns with the notion of transformative experiences being occasions for embracing challenges, overcoming obstacles, gaining new skills and power, and emerging as a new, stronger person, as seen in tourism transformation research (Robledo & Batle, 2017). Here, the symbolic associations speak to an audience that wants to feel strong and empowered to join an event that might be positive but could also be packed with challenges, making them feel like the hero in their own hero's journey (Campbell, 1993).

In terms of the **Outlaw** archetype, characterised by its rebellious and disruptive nature, participants mentioned associations and words that symbolise this type, such as a Dynamite stick/fireworks, Revolution, Blood red colour, Fire, and 'Change into'. These associations capture participants' feelings of breaking free from conventional ways of being and doing. The Outlaw archetype represents an event that not only aspires to change but also brings radical transformation that is felt by its participants. It has a whirlwind nature, described

1 simply as ‘chaos’ by one participant. It reflects the attendees’ desire for personal upheaval,
2 breaking old habits, and embracing the new. It highlights transformation through the rejection
3 of the status quo by embracing a transformative event through a novel, unconventional, and
4 rebellious spirit. Chaos, and disequilibrium are themes that have been strongly linked with
5 TEs, and have been shown to lead to powerful transformative outcomes (Neuhofer, 2024).
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13 The **Creator** archetype speaks to the imaginative and inventive nature of a person. Several
14 participants associated the event with words, such as Inspiration, Visionary, Art, and
15 Abstract. They underlined that transformation is a creative endeavour and the event
16 encourages participants to express and develop their creative potential. Compared with other
17 archetypes, this theme appears more playful. Participants further described the event using
18 expressions such as Bringing joy, Mosaic, Flower meadow, and Sunflower. They also
19 associated it with the famous painter Picasso.
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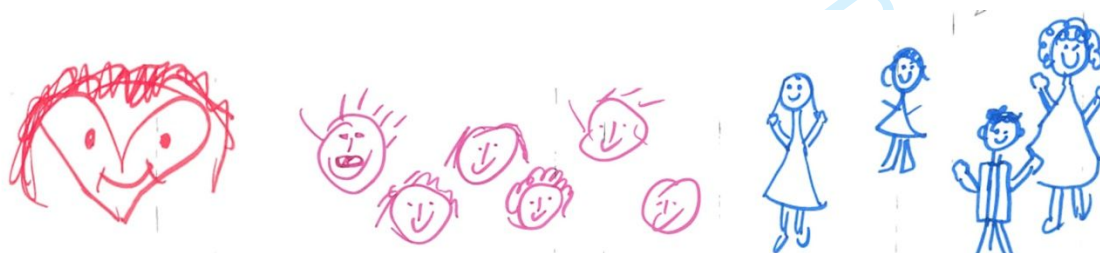
30 Several participants have also indicated some concrete output of their creative endeavours.
31 One participant has shown a question mark, time, and a dollar sign, signifying the change
32 from questions that can be, with time, turned into a potential return of investment or financial
33 gain. Several other participants have drawn currency signs, indicating their vision that ideas
34 turn into concrete financial impact (see Figure 3). But in general, the Creator archetype
35 relates to the event as a place of creative inspiration that nudges participants towards tapping
36 into their expressive potential and by doing so, transforming themselves. This is also
37 confirmed in a study on the Burning Man festival, where artistic expression and art
38 installations by attendees play a key role in the transformative power of the event (Neuhofer
39 et al., 2021). This is a worthwhile archetype to promote events with, as the Creator archetype
40 suggests the idea that transformative experiences allow one to be inventive, and create new
41 ideas.
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Figure III Creative output



The **Everyman** archetype represents a relatable, humble, down-to-earth person, and several participants described the event in this way, using associations, such as Humble, Simple, Relaxing. For these participants, the event conveyed the idea of a nice, pleasant time, with one participant comparing the event to Manet's 'Breakfast on the grass'. Winnie the Pooh was often named as a fairly-tale association. Looking at the drawings, figures with faces signalling themselves and their emotions and thoughts, as well as figures representing other participants, were commonplace (Figure 4). Image analysis reveals predominantly people smiling, indicating positive emotions. While some images depict individuals with neutral expressions, potentially indicating anticipation or nervousness, the majority of the represented images show a positive, communal experience. Several participants drew hearts at the end of the event, indicating positive regard and a joyful experience.

Figure IV People and community



'Everyman' is an important archetype in the context of business events, as transformative events are sometimes perceived as challenging and highly disruptive to one's life, potentially causing negative emotions and turmoil (Chirico et al., 2022). On the contrary, this finding

1 suggests that transformative outcomes in business events could also be connected with
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3 themes of comfort, humility, community, and belonging. Therefore, promotion using words
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5 suggesting comfortable, down-to-earth experiences and social sharing may create a level of
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7 safety and familiarity in the unknown. This archetype showcases that while a transformative
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9 experience can be liminal, extraordinary, and heroic, it can also happen in the context of
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11 ordinary events, everyday life, and personal relationships.
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15 The last archetype to emerge from the meta-analysis is the **Innocent**, which embodies purity,
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17 optimism and hopefulness. Participants mentioned a wide variety of associations relating to
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19 this archetype, including Joy, Hope, Fairy, Love, Pure, Good spirit and Happiness. The
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21 primary implication is that the event is a source of joy and optimism. Attendees also
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23 mentioned characters such as an Angel, Cinderella and Snow White, as well as nature
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25 symbols, such as Sunrise, Flowers, and Birds. These themes convey a pure, nature-based
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27 characteristic. Nature themes were also evident in the drawings; images included clouds,
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29 trees, flowers, and birds (Figure 5).
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35 *Figure V Nature themes*



48 What makes this archetype stand out is that transformation is about a sense of inner peace and
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50 a positive outlook towards the future. Symbols linked with the Innocent appear more peaceful
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52 and reflective, which is common in transformative experiences that cause a disequilibrium of
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54 one's current status quo that requires reflection, tranquillity, and focus on oneself for change
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56 to take root (Neuhofer, 2024). Rather than promoting the forceful power of transformation
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58 (e.g. see Hero, Outlaw, Creator), this archetype conveys the reflective nature of personal
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development, growth, and renewal, linked to deep inquiry about life and profound environmental and human connectivity (Sheldon, 2020).

4.3. Discussion: Integrating archetype associations for business events communication

While there was evidence of eight archetypes in the data (see Table 1), the findings are in line with a study by Xara-Brasil et al. (2018), which highlights the role of the Sage, Explorer, and Magician as key archetypes in branding that are potentially associated with self-improvement, discovery, and growth. These outcomes have been previously identified as crucial in the context of business events (Celuch & Neuhofer, 2024b) and as such could be used most effectively in their marketing. Nevertheless, features of other archetypes (Hero, Outlaw, Creator, Everyman, Innocent) identified in the dataset also represent interesting opportunities for transformative event marketers. Transformation is a highly subjective and personal experience (Chirico et al., 2022), and therefore each archetype elicits and resonates with different aspects of personal development and transformation. Marketers can choose which particular transformative features of the event they wish to emphasise and adjust their efforts accordingly.

Event marketers can borrow the above visual and textual elements that represent the core DNA of the different types of transformative outcomes, in order to communicate more effectively what kind of transformation their event aims to achieve. This will be crucial as transformative events are on the rise globally making it vital for event organisers to differentiate themselves (Celuch & Neuhofer, 2024a). In fact, what this research shows is that there may be different kinds of transformation that emerge from one event with varied granular components that might be perceived in distinct ways by the event participants.

Stories and narratives with interesting, immersive plots and potential for emotional engagement serve as an effective channel and approach for branding and marketing (van Laer et al., 2014; Woodside et al., 2008). But TE business event marketing and communication

require a distinct form of transformative storytelling with eudaimonic narrative features that highlight the more meaningful outcomes of the event experience, such as a higher purpose in life (Hamby et al., 2023; Heinonen et al., 2024). For instance, the Outlaw's rebellious spirit speaks to participants wishing for radical change, while the Magician taps into the awe of transformation. The Hero archetype appeals to potential attendees in pursuit of courage and challenges, whereas the Sage attracts individuals who seek knowledge and wisdom. An event communicating in the language of the Creator focuses on imagination and creativity, while events for the Explorer emphasise curiosity and discovery, both important aspects for leaving one's comfort zone towards personal growth. The Everyman archetype highlights a sense of an ordinary community, creating an inclusive space for everyone, including first-time attendees or repeat attendees. Lastly, the Innocent archetype's main communication needs to be about hope and optimism, which speaks to idealistic participants seeking inner peace and renewal.

Communicating and promoting a transformative event through one or a combination of these archetypes empowers event organizers to craft personalised messages that resonate with different participants, no matter where they are on their transformation journey. By tapping into the emotional, psychological, visual and symbolic frameworks offered by these archetypes, event marketers can ensure the right message reaches the right audience.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Theoretical and methodological implications

By eliciting data on participants' expressions of personal transformation, the study aimed to inform transformative event marketing by investigating the symbols and associations linked with TEs at business events. **Several theoretical and methodological contributions are offered.** The study's main theoretical contribution is to the growing body of research on human transformation. While the latest research in tourism (Bueddefeld & Duerden, 2022; Sheldon,

2020), festivals and events (Neuhofer et al., 2020, 2021), and leisure (Dillette et al., 2019) has outlined the granular components of transformation, this study adds new insights on the MICE event context. Grounded in the brand archetype lens (Houraghan, 2018; Mark & Pearson, 2001), this research not only illuminates the personal factors of transformation but creates a nexus to marketing and communication. This study thus contributes to the theoretical understanding of event experience management by bridging the gap between transformative experience research and event marketing strategies. It offers insights into how symbolic archetypes, traditionally used in branding, can be adapted to capture and communicate the transformative potential of an event.

The study contributes to the still relatively underdeveloped consumer perspective on brand archetypes (Xara-Brasil et al., 2018). By matching observed characteristics, plots, and other attributes of TEs with the semiotics of brand archetypes (Houraghan, 2018; Mark & Pearson, 2001), we offer new insights into the marketing of events as brands that could lead to transformational outcomes for consumers. Moreover, we emphasise that archetypes in transformative events extend beyond traditional branding literature. These archetypes are not about associating events with specific brands but about using the symbolic and psychological value of an event and its inherent archetypal imagery to communicate the essence of transformation. This is in line with studies discussing the power of storytelling and symbolism in creating meaningful and memorable tourism experiences (Moscardo, 2020; Sheldon, 2020). By linking storytelling and archetypes to event design, this study aims to offer a new lens for integrating a variety of transformational outcomes on an emotional, cognitive, and symbolic level into event management, thereby strengthening the potential of long-term transformative outcomes (Neuhofer, 2024).

This study makes a methodological contribution, particularly by addressing the limited use of participant-generated visual data (Rakić & Chambers, 2012) and the reliance on post-experience retrospective forms of data collection (Scarles, 2010). It contributes to the

underexplored application of visual methods as standalone approaches (Rakić & Chambers, 2012) in that it highlights the value of capturing live, on-site insights from participants. Responding to calls for more innovative and visual methods in tourism and events TE research (Soulard et al., 2021), the study **used and recommends for future research a visual two-step method. This method combines** free-hand image drawing and sentence completion, to capture participants' first-hand experience of their transformation on-site and the archetypes reflected in the word-based and visual metaphors of personal transformations. Furthermore, building on recent transformative tourism research based on visual data (e.g., Celuch & Neuhofer, 2024b; Soulard & McGehee, 2021), this study adds to the knowledge of how the combination of visual symbols and narratives can capture and express personal inner change. It is interesting to observe how triangulating the image- and word-based data captures similar insights. The findings highlight the power of visualisation and metaphors (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2010) that afford transformative experience communication, particularly when words alone cannot fully express the ineffable characteristics of the deep changes participants undergo (Celuch & Neuhofer, 2024b; Heinonen et al., 2024; Soulard et al., 2021). Through drawings and sentence completion, individuals identify a wide range of symbols that give insights into their transformation, underscoring previous research on the long-term shifts in mindset, knowledge, and behaviours (Chirico et al., 2022; Gaggioli, 2016).

5.2. Practical implications

This research offers novel insights that apply to the MICE industry, the business event sector specifically, and the wider tourism sector. The study's main practical contribution is to aid event designers and marketers in leveraging the associations with archetypes, such as Sage, Explorer, and Magician, to create powerful messages around transformative experiences.

Archetypes not only represent brand associations (Supphellen, 2000), **but also afford an in-**

depth exploration of the emotions, meaning-making, and the deeper themes of transformation experienced by event participants. Through storytelling, it is possible to create stronger memories and emotional impressions in the minds of the prospective event participants (Mossberg, 2008). By using eudaimonic narratives with the archetypal symbols that this study's participants shed light on, event marketers can better communicate the transformative potential of their events, fostering authentic and participant-led communication and engagement (Heinonen et al., 2024; Xara-Brasil et al., 2018). Additionally, event marketers can create more engaging value propositions, specifically when considering the broader impact of business events. Storytelling has the potential to persuade audiences to adopt new perspectives and change their behaviour and actions (Lundqvist et al., 2013). By highlighting for example, the Creator- or Innocent-based archetypes in transformative business events, marketers could effectively link the event with important community impact and sustainability outcomes (Tinnish & Mangal, 2012).

This study adds to previous work on TEs in tourism, highlighting the need for effective communication of transformation to ensure its successful integration over time (Neuhofer, 2024). By providing relevant symbols that inform communication strategies throughout all event stages (pre-, during, and post-event), event marketers can create awareness, set expectations, target the right audience, guide individuals on their journey, and facilitate long-term integration (Neuhofer, 2024). The findings suggest that the archetypes most commonly associated with TEs in business events correspond with the human needs for independence and fulfilment, and risk and mystery (Mark & Pearson, 2001). This is key for transformational event marketing, as these motivational aspects could feature in visual communication and social media strategies. For example, business event marketers could represent the event as a journey full of magical challenges and obstacles, and successfully overcoming these will lead to personal fulfilment, freedom from conventions, and the discovery of new horizons.

5.3. Limitations and future research

This study is not without limitations. While the adopted elicitation method is innovative, future research might opt for mixed methods or utilise the ZMET approach to incorporate full follow-up interviews after the event to interpret the participant drawings in more depth. This study has shown the value of visual and metaphor-based approaches in providing insights that talking-based methods might not be able to capture. Transformative research requires innovative methods to make the ineffable explicit; thus, more creative research designs are needed. We acknowledge that our study's focus was primarily on determining general archetypal narratives present in a transformative event. Our study does not conclusively determine whether individual conference attendees embody one specific archetype or multiple archetypes. Future quantitative research through a survey is recommended to test the extent to which individuals identify with one or more archetypes.

Future studies could also consider longitudinal perspectives to follow up with the event attendees a year later to understand what personal transformation took place since the event and if the symbolic event associations have changed. More studies are needed to map out different types of events, especially expanding on business and impact event formats that aim to instil change in society. It would be interesting to explore how both creative festivals such as Burning Man (Neuhofer et al., 2021) and more traditional types of business events could use the archetypes, including Magician and Outlaw, to create magic, design Hero's journeys, and encourage Explorer activities.

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