

EXPOSURE TO PROMOTIONAL FILMS WHILST ON VACATION AND ITS EFFECTS ON TOURISTS' EVALUATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Destination authorities should spend public sources effectively and create innovative ways in order to attract attention of visitors and generate bonds with them. A quasi-experimental study was conducted to explore whether tourists exposure to promotional material whilst on vacation could alter their perceptions of a destination and stimulate favorable behaviors. Comparisons between the pre and the post-exposure scores show that such exposures may positively alter perceptions and induce positive behaviors whilst at the destination. Implications for marketing are discussed.

Keywords: Purchase reinforcement, destination marketing, advertisement

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Introduction

Advertising/promotion campaigns can generate advertising awareness among the target audience, and generate awareness of the destination as an acceptable place to visit (Siegel & Ziff-Levine, 1990). These campaigns can create a positive image of the destination *vis-à-vis* its competitors, motivate consumers to travel to the destination in the near future, and influence travel behavior by converting those motivated by advertising to actually visit the destination (Siegel & Ziff-Levine, 1990). Authorities responsible for destination marketing are thus striving to apply effective tactics in order to foster their image and increase market share. Conventional marketing efforts however are mostly transactional and sales oriented, not relational (Woodside & Sakai, 2001): "No efforts or budget is planned for development of an ongoing relationship with the inquiring prospective visitors" (Woodside & Sakai, 2001, p. 378). Marketing opportunities are not truly exploited.

Transactional, only sales-driven marketing activities may have a number of limitations. They tend to be designed for generation of first-time buyers, and thus they may not be effective for another significant segment (e.g., repeat customers). They require large resources but many destination authorities may lack such resources. It is naïve to expect that once the destination has been announced to public at large there is no need to advertise it further. The marketing efforts are likely to be inefficient when they do not reach as many potential and interested visitors as wished (Woodside, 1996). They may not be seen 100% of potential buyers (Woodside, 1996). Even seen, a significant proportion may not pay attention or be interested in. Evidence suggests that while a large number of potential customers may request information from an advertising campaign, they may never read the brochure at all (Woodside, 1996). It is possible that in a situation where numerous messages reach the consumer, s/he may neglect the message due to a selective perception and/or superiority of competitors' offers. Timing and length of the promotion/advertisement are vital. If the time is short to examine the message, consumers are not repeatedly exposed to the message, and if there are many distractions (e.g., other messages), processing of the message by the individual will be unlikely (Reiser & Simmons, 2005). This may explain why, in some cases, promotional expenditure compared to other determinants of demand, has minimal effect on tourist flows to a country (Faulkner, 2003).

Advertising can be used more effectively when further materials are provided to those customers who notice and respond to advertisers' offers of these materials (Woodside et al., 1997). "Too often awareness advertising leaves the prospect dangling, with no idea of what to do next, where to buy, or how to obtain more information. At the very least, the ideal advertising and marketing process should bridge this gap between the advertising and the sale by offering-and providing-additional information. We call this 'linkage'" (Rapp & Collins, 1987, p. 17). Linkage advertising "links the up-front advertising to the sale with additional arguments and benefits which the up-front advertising [i.e., the print or broadcast advertisement that includes the linkage offer] didn't have space or time to include" (cf. Woodside, 1997). According to Woodside et al. (1997) linkage advertising may be particularly effective in increasing brand-affect, and intentions to return to the destination among visitors with prior visits to the destination because it stimulates deeper mental processing of current and former experiences by the visitor. Destination linkage advertising may serve as an album that helps to build, maintain, renew, and strengthen mental connections of places/events and outcomes experienced (Woodside et al., 1997, p. 217). Multiple and carefully planned post-purchase destination exposures may give consumer more opportunity to internalize destination attributes and to develop more positive attitudes (Shiffman & Kanuk, 2004).

While post-purchase promotions/advertisements can increase preference of the product in the future through purchase reinforcement (DelVecchio et al., 2006) and relationship building (Woodside et al., 1997), there is a paucity of research on whether such exposures of a destination alter visitor perceptions and behaviors. This research therefore aims to explore whether post-purchase exposures to a promotional film affects how actual visitors evaluate and respond to a destination. To this end, the following section first presents a review of literature on marketing and how onsite exposures could reinforce purchase of a holiday product. The methodology followed in the study is outlined next. Findings have been discussed in the light of previous studies, and recommendations were made for future research.

Literature Review

The role of marketing in communication with customers is comprehensive (Dore & Crouch, 2003) and it is conducted in a variety of ways (Brooksbank, 1991). Marketing requires large amounts of funds (Dore &

Crouch, 2003), and thus it is imperative to understand not only how potential customers respond to such activities but how relations with customers in existing markets can be maintained and sales can be increased (Kaplanidou, & Vogt, 2003; MacKay & Smith, 2006). In this respect, advertising significantly matters. Ehrenberg (1972) suggests that “the key role of advertising is in reinforcing previous purchase decisions, rather than in persuading people to make a first-time or brand-switching decision”. Ehrenberg’s model Awareness-Trial-Reinforcement (ATR) emphasizes that potential visitor’s first gain awareness and interest in a destination, then try it. Satisfaction with the experience would reinforce desire to return in the future. This model recognizes that previous visitors would use their experience with a destination in order to make a selection decision, and attitudes developed from previous visits are likely to be resistant to persuasive advertising whose messages may be counter to that experience, but receptive to advertising that reinforces it (McWilliams & Crompton, 1997). Individuals on holiday would continue to be receivers of advertising messages (Krugman, 1969). Thus, repeated exposure to destination promotion materials/messages at the consumption stage may result in learning and ultimately further visitation and extra buying behaviors on holiday (McWilliams & Crompton, 1997). Donnelly and Ivancevich (1970) argue that after a purchase a buyer would be highly receptive to advertising and sales promotion put out on the product s/he bought. Literature on post sales promotion and advertising further shows that buyers would feel reassured that a wise purchase decision has been made when they are presented with such post purchase promotions. For existing customers, promotion reinforcement takes place by reminding customers to buy the brand thereby supporting their preference for it. For non-users, promotions may induce trial thereby buttressing attitudes and likelihood of purchase (DelVecchio et al., 2006). Effects of post purchase advertising on customers evaluation and preferences have been tentatively supported by two studies in the automobile industry. One study found that automobile buyers exhibited high readership of advertisements for the make of the car they had recently bought. Another study revealed that back-out rates were significantly lower when the buyers were positively reinforced by the salesman (Donnelly & Ivancevich, 1970). Exposures of a destination to actual holiday makers could stimulate further interest and alter image and perceptions about the destination (Givon & Horsky, 1990; Kim et al., 2005). Based on the above review of literature we propose that:

P1: Exposure to a destination advertisement during holiday would affect visitors’ quality perceptions of a place.

P2: Exposure to a destination advertisement during holiday would alter visitors’ approach/avoidance behaviors.

The Study

The objectives of the study are twofold. Firstly, the study aims to examine whether post-purchase exposure to a promotional film would affect visitors’ quality perceptions of a destination and their approach/avoidance behaviors. Secondly, the study explores whether effects of exposure would differ between first-time and repeat visitors¹. Previously tested scales were used to gauge visitors’ perception of destination and their approach behaviors. Items from Fisher’s (1974) Environmental Quality scale were utilized to obtain onsite evaluations of visitors. Two items (poor-good value, and poor-high quality) from Bellizzi, Crowley and Hasty’s (1983) were added to the scale to assess quality and value of having a holiday in the studied destination. These scales have been frequently used by other researchers (Sherman, Mathur & Smith, 1997; Spangenberg, Crowley & Henderson, 1996; Yuksel, 2006; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2007). The environmental quality scale consisted of thirteen items, accompanied by a 7-point bipolar scales. Similarly, approach/avoidance behaviors were measured by the scale developed by Donovan and Rossiter (1982). The approach/avoidance scale contained eight items. *Approach behaviors* include all positive behaviors that might be directed at the environment; for example a desire to remain in a store, place, attraction etc. and explore its offerings could be stated as approach behavior. *Avoidance behaviors* reflect contrasting responses; that is, a desire to leave a place or not to browse represents avoidance behaviors (Spangenberg, Crowley & Henderson, 1996). Individuals are expected to have greater approach behaviors in pleasant environments creating positive affects and greater avoidance behaviors in unpleasant environments creating negative affects (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Yuksel, 2006).

Didim, a resort town on the southwest of Turkey, was chosen for the fieldwork. Didim Municipality, together with other stakeholders (Association of Hoteliers, City Council, Chamber of Commerce) has funded making of a short film by a professional team to promote Didim and its main attractions at international fairs, conventions and festivals. This six-minute long promotional films was used in a quasi experiment-based

tracking model in which pre and post tests were conducted. Due to potential limitations of recruiting different participants, the same participants took part in the pre and post exposure stages of the research. Over two hundred fifty participants were conveniently sampled from five big scale hotels registered with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Tour guides and hotel reps were briefed about the study and they assisted the researchers in the collection of the data. Participants in a group of eight to 12 were taken to the conference rooms of participating hotels and after the instructions, they had filled the first part of the survey form. They then watched the material (in English) of six minutes long. Finally, they had filled in the second part of the survey form. During the experiment, participants were requested not to share views with one another to prevent any within-group effect. The overall time of completion was 22 minutes. Before proceeding with the analysis, limitations of the study should be noted. The process did not factor out those respondents who had already been exposed to the same or similar promotion material about Didim. Familiarity with Didim has not been controlled. That those who visit a destination could be more inclined to respond to a survey than those who have not may constitute a “favorability” limitation. Depending on the nature of the ads and where they are displayed, consumers’ concentration may not last for six minutes. Their openness to the watching promotional films in real life may be significantly different from the experiment. The ratings were taken immediately after watching the material. We are therefore not able to report how long the exposure effects would last.

Data Analysis

Following data cleaning procedures suggested for multivariate data analysis, the evaluation scale and the approach/avoidance behavior scale were subjected to a Reliability Analysis. A series of pairwise t-tests were then conducted to examine differences in the ratings of respondents between the pre and post exposure stages of the research.

Exposure Effects on Perceptions

A total of 261 respondents participated in the research. Approximately half of the respondents were female (49.6%) and the majority of respondents were within the 31-40 age group (Table 1). The majority of visitors (59%) were first time visitors, however a considerable percentage of the visitors had been to Didim on more than three times (Table 1). Only three percent of the respondents stated that their choice of Didim had been shaped by advertisements. This may evidence the extent to which how conventional marketing at tourist-originating countries is effective for Didim. Reliability tests revealed that scales used to measure participants’ perception of the destination and their approach/avoidance behaviors had acceptable levels of Alpha scores (.92 and .78 respectively). A pairwise t test was conducted to see any difference between participants’ perceptions of destination at the pre and post exposure stages. As can be seen in Table 2, compared to the pre-exposure stage, participants’ scores in the post-exposure stage are significantly higher. It appears that participants’ evaluations of the destination under investigation increased as a result of exposure to the promotion material. Pre-exposure scores reveal that participants hold favorable impressions for the destination. After watching the material, participants’ evaluation in relation to cognitive and affective image (attractiveness, goodness, interesting etc.) had increased. Perceptions as to affective qualities of the destination (i.e., being jittery, exciting, pleasing, stimulating) appear to have also been affected by the exposure to the promotion material. The results further show that customers perceptions as to the quality of a holiday and its value can be influenced significantly by onsite exposures. Despite significant increases in all items, the reader is cautioned that these results may be influenced by limitations discussed in earlier sections.

Table 1. Distribution of Demographics

Age	%	Education Level	%
Under 20	1,2	Less than high school	4,7
21-31	20,3	High school	62,1
31-40	33,1	University	27,7
41-50	23,9	Other	5,5
Above 50	21,5		
		Income(\$)	
Gender		under 25.000	13,3
Female	49,6	25.000-34.999	47,2
Men	50,4	35.000-49.000	21,7
		50.000-74.999	11,7
Marital Status	%	75.000-99.999	5,6
Single	26,2	over 100.000	0,6
Married	61,5		
Other	12,3	Source of Information	
		Travel Agents	53,1
Previous Visit		Friends	14,7
1 st time	59	Family members	11,8
2 times	25,7	Tour Operator	8,6
3 times	8,8	Books	0,8
4 times	4	Brochures	3,7
5 times	0,8	Advertisements	3,3
More than 5 times	1,6	Airlines	2,4
		Travel Guides	0,4
		Movies	0,4
		News	0,4
		Other	,4

Nevertheless, immediate effect of exposure on affective image has marketing implications. Understanding and managing destination image sources affecting travelers' thinking and feeling is vital (Yuksel, 2006). Travelers are not only motivated by the appearance of destinations and attractions prior to visit, but also by the location's emotional qualities which help fulfill their psychological needs (Pearce, 1988). It is possible that onsite exposures play a role in determining the induced image (destination-dependent activities) and also the complex image, which is affected and modified by actually visiting (seeing) the destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). It would be appropriate to speculate that such exposures can stimulate favorable consumption emotions, and liking of the destination.

Table 2. Environmental perceptions at the pre and post exposure stages

Item	Pre-exposure	Post-exposure	Mean difference	t value	Significance
Bad – good	5,64	6,11	-,46	-10,04	,000
Unpleasant-pleasant	5,58	6,12	-,54	-10,3	,000
Unfavorable - favorable	5,58	6,02	-,44	-8,89	,000
Unattractive-attractive	5,46	6,02	-,55	-11,04	,000
Uninteresting - interesting	5,69	6,08	-,46	-6,89	,000
Unmotivating - motivating	5,73	6,18	-,45	-7,83	,000
Dull – jittery	5,61	6,00	-,39	-7,07	,000
Calm-exciting	5,43	5,98	-,54	-10,41	,000
Annoying - pleasing	5,61	6,01	-,40	-7,35	,000
Boring - stimulating	5,45	5,87	-,41	-6,64	,000
Depressing - cheerful	5,66	5,93	-,27	-4,85	,000
Poor quality- high quality	5,36	5,82	-,46	-8,05	,000
Poor value - good value	5,62	5,94	-,31	-5,78	,000

Scale: 1 to 7

Exposure Effects on Behavioral Intentions

Similar to environmental perceptions, it appears that participants' stated behaviors are likely to change as a result of the exposure (Table 3). The presentation has intensified participants' interest in exploring other areas at the destination. Decrease in the ratings of customers' avoidance of exploring other areas after the exposure suggests that onsite promotions could induce more sales, particularly within the existing market. Onsite promotions can be used to move those customers from a stage of unawareness to awareness. The exposed material however should be effective in seizing attention, awaking interest, arousing a desire to try or buy the product and urging customer to take action (Yadin, 2002). Based on the results (Table 3), we assert that ad exposure whilst on holiday can increase visitors' spending intentions. Having seen diversity of things to do whilst on holiday may lead to previously unplanned actions, visits, and/or spending.

Table 3. Approach/avoidance behaviors at the pre and post exposure stages

Items	Pre-exposure	Post-exposure	Mean difference	t value	Significance
Environmental quality	5,32	5,50	-,1815	-3,61	,000
Choose Didim as a holiday destination for next vacation	5,12	5,45	-,3372	-5,65	,000
Enjoy having my holiday in Didim	5,07	5,41	-,3423	-5,70	,000
Sort of place where I might spend more money	4,88	5,39	-,5155	-9,02	,000
Recommend Didim to others	5,03	5,44	-,4063	-6,07	,000
I would avoid ever having to spend my holiday in Didim	4,24	3,43	-,8043	-6,60	,000
I would avoid exploring other areas of Didim during my stay	3,60	3,14	-,4625	-4,03	,000
Feel talkative to others	4,98	5,06	-,0736	-1,64	,102
Feel talkative to the hotel staff	4,37	4,48	-,1020	-1,62	,106

Scale: 1 to 7

It appears that participants' intention to revisit has increased as a result of exposure. The visitor may want to come back to do things, visit places that s/he has been unable to do during his/her present stay. Based on the diversity of things/places shown in the material, the participants may feel comfortable that s/he has

made the right choice, thus the money was wise spent. Table 3 shows that viewing promotion materials influences participants' recommendation intentions. This implies that tourists who are exposed to post-purchase advertisement may become "ambassador" of the destination. This is important since personal contact carries more credibility than the media. "As people interact, they are better able through observation of body language and vocal cues to judge the honesty of the person in the discussion. Newspaper and radio do not offer these cues" (Griswold, 2006, p.34). Their enjoyment from the purchase partly from exposures may facilitate flowing of information about the destination to others in their social circuit whilst on holiday and upon returning home.

Conclusion

In a competitive market, destination authorities need to create innovative ways in order to attract attention of visitors, and generate bonds with them. One of the ways to increase return on marketing investments could be the use of post-purchase reinforcement. Exposures to such promotional materials during vacation may reinforce previous promotion (or current experience) by keeping the name and features of the product before the market. The results of the study and preliminary reports from the practice provide some empirical support for this contention. Collaborated authorities have very recently piloted displaying of promotion materials on widescreens/building walls in heavy pedestrian traffic areas of downtown, and reports of their preliminary observations suggest that such efforts catch the eyes of the visitors. Despite the limitations of the study, exposures may have (short or long-term) effects on how the visitor perceives the destination and whether they would engage in additional activities/spending that is previously unplanned. In other words, sales within the existing market (e.g., actual visitors) can be increased through carefully crafted and implemented onsite marketing. The study was limited to the effects of a short promotion film. Individual and/or collective reinforcing effects of other marketing mediums (e.g., advertisement displays on buildings walls, outdoor billboards, signpost, motorways, departure/arrival lounges of airports, etc.) need to be explored. More experiments with control groups are required to understand effects of onsite exposures on visitor evaluations and behavior.

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ⁱ The results of this analysis will be discussed in another paper.