

THE INVESTIGATION ON PROCESS MANAGEMENT IN WEBSITES AND E-TOURISM MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, a tourism industry is a blood of economic of many countries therefore, many countries have a plan to increase tourism to increase their economic power. In the current study the focus is on the E-tourism marketing. Particular significance is the credibility issue to acceptance and message strength that it shows to lead to higher beliefs, attitude in the direction of the destination and afterwards to purchase intent. The current paper objective is to investigate the persuasive impacts of websites on the marketing effectiveness a destination of the tourist. Moreover, dependent variables involve message strength, purchase intent, and perceived credibility. Results in this paper support the significance of message credibility to message strength, but not to a change in purchase intent.

Keywords: E-tourism marketing, websites, process management.

Introduction

Nowadays, a tourism industry is a blood of economic of many countries therefore, many countries have a plan to increase tourism to increase their economic power. Thus, the world's largest industry is progressively more dependent on the Internet to disseminate and market travel destinations. In addition, [1] suggest that the credibility of information is significantly related to purchase. Prior knowledge asserted by Cho and Petrick (2014) is suspected to affect the ability to process information, and to discriminate relevant from irrelevant information during a Web information search. Malaysian research into Website credibility suggests that trust in a site is enhanced by observable signals, such as the production elements included in the design (Schlosser and White, 2006). E-tourism marketers need to understand how to maximize the persuasiveness of their Websites.

Literature Review

Tourism management

There is no one single and simple definition to explain the term of e-tourism management in this stage. Many people have tried to describe the e-tourism management in different ways. Some tried to summarize the scope of the industry and its characteristics of involving both tangible and intangible features in the online service delivery process. Others attempted to describe the e-tourism management by exploring the online stakeholders involved, mutual benefits generated and the industry's impacts to the society and economy.

E-tourism management is the online act of kindness in welcoming and looking after the basic needs of customers or strangers, mainly in relation to food, drink and accommodation. A contemporary explanation of the e-tourism management refers to the relationship process between a customer and a host. When we talk about the "e-tourism management", we are referring to the

companies or organizations which provide food or drink or accommodation to people who are “away from home”. However, this definition of the “e-tourism management” only satisfies most situations.

The Internet as a Management Tool

While the Internet entered the public domain in the early 1970s, it was not until the mid 1990s that advertisers and researchers started focusing on the new medium. This was due in large part to the introduction of the Web browser which made the Internet much more user friendly. In fact, the first Internet-related research paper appeared in 1996, in the *Journal of Advertising Research*. Subsequent scholarly work settled into six primary themes: (1) interactivity, (2) effectiveness of Internet advertising, (3) electronic commerce, (4) attitude toward the ad (site) or brand, (5) advertising processes and (6) comparisons to traditional media. In the decade of research that followed, articles comparing the Internet to traditional advertising cluster early in the period. The two most frequently cited works are by Bezjian-Avery et al. (1998) and Gallagher et al. (2001). Bezjian-Avery et al. (1998) compare the effectiveness of advertising on the Internet with what they called traditional linear advertising.

To get a clean comparison of advertising on the internet and traditional print advertising, they broke the print ad into components and presented them as static visuals on a computer. After exposure to the two presentations, semantic differential scales measured participants’ purchase intent. Time spent with each presentation was also captured. Results show that those who viewed the Internet presentation spent less time viewing the advertisements and were less likely to purchase the advertised products than those who viewed the “ad in slides.” The researchers theorized that, apparently when a customer uses an interactive system, the link between retrieval and yielding to the persuasion may be broken, they urged marketers to proceed with caution when using this new medium for advertising. In contrast to the seminal work by Bezjian-Avery et al. (1998), other Malaysian researchers argued that principles traditionally associated with mass media advertising did not apply to the Web.

Hoffman and Novak (1996) called for new communication models to better depict active rather than passive participants in the management process. Ghose and Dou (1998) suggest that marketers take better advantage of interactivity to increase the internet’s effectiveness. Leong et al. (1998) concluded that advertisers should not use traditional type advertising on the Internet.

In the more recent and second most cited research comparing the Internet to traditional advertising, the authors conclude that “given equal opportunity for exposure to the target audience, the same advertisements were equally effective in print and on the Web,” Gallagher et al. (2001). The Malaysian researchers came to this conclusion after examining the impact on message effectiveness when marketers did not take full advantage of the interactive and enhanced capabilities of the Internet. Their premise was that consumers expect messages on the Web to be enhanced with the media’s capabilities; when they are not so enhanced, the messages are less effective. As to why this hypothesis was not supported, the authors explained that people are expert ad processors, regardless of the medium. In other words, the authors surmised, people respond to advertisements in a skeptical manner, regardless of the medium that carries the message.

In more recent years, Malaysian research in advertising and management journals comparing the Internet with traditional media focuses on the comparison with television, or print and television. Eveland and Dunwoody (2002) compared the Web and print ads, demonstrating that the Internet elicits more elaboration than does print. They surmise that because the Internet makes connections among related bits of information, the structure of the Internet is similar to the human thought process. Chang and Thorson (2004) found that using the Web in combination with television leads to significantly higher attention and message credibility than did repeated exposure to television alone. In comparing multimedia campaigns (television, print and Internet) with single media efforts, Dijkstra et al. (2005) assert that television campaigns are superior to multimedia campaigns in evoking cognitive responses, and that print-only campaigns are as effective as multimedia efforts. However, they found a complementary effect for multimedia campaigns compared to Internet-only management approaches.

Reasoned Action and Elaboration

Considerable study exists concerning how consumers process information. Researchers examining information processing often use the expectancy-value (EV) theory of Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). Petty and Cacioppo (1986) indicate a model that is a model of reasoned behavior or central route processing wherein consumers carefully consider or elaborate on message content. In these cases, Loda et al. (2009) assert that the success of persuasive communications depends on the degree to which consumers accept message claims. Loda (2011) highlights that factors that influence message acceptance include perceived credibility and message strength.

Hypotheses

Importance issues to the E-tourism and management areas are investigated in this research. Hence, the purpose of this research is to examine the persuasive effects of Websites on the effectiveness of management a tourist destination. Specifically this research attempts to test whether there is a difference between the persuasiveness of various E-tourism sites and whether that difference stems from more believability. Dependent variables include perceived credibility, message strength, and purchase intent (change of propensity to visit). Four hypotheses are examined:

- H1: E-tourism Websites will vary in their levels of message credibility.
- H2: Websites will deliver different levels of message strength.
- H3: Websites will differ in the influence they have on purchase intent.
- H4: Website credibility will correlate in a greater change in propensity to visit.

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted as an experiment across continents. It involved a convenience sample of 219 Malaysian college students and 175 travel interested people from Asia who viewed one of ten randomly assigned Websites of city tourism organizations/destination management organizations (CTO/DMOs). In website of Travel and Leisure websites representing major city tourism destinations in the Malaysia and Asia were selected out of the 60 CTO/DMOs screened. Primarily well-known destinations were selected to add a veracity degree to the experimental setting.

Scale Development and Study Variables

Ten CTO/ Websites comprise the stimulus and independent variable of this study. The three major dependent variables are message strength, perceived credibility, and purchase intent. The variables are summarized in Table 1. Perceived credibility was measured with three Likert-type scales asking how truthful, accurate and credible the stimulus was to the respondent. These measures, developed by Darley and Smith (1993) and Smith and Hunt (1978) use a seven-point scale, and the responses were combined and averaged to generate the perceived credibility statistic. Message strength was measured with a three-item scale developed by Petty et al. (1983). This Likert-type scale asked respondents to rate message claims from weak (-3) to strong (+3). Purchase intent was measured with a seven-point Likert-type scale. The question asked if the information and presentation encountered changed the likelihood to visit the destination. Responses range from “no change” (1) to “changed a lot” (7).

Table 1: Independent and Treatment Variables

IV: DMO Websites	Dependent Variables
<i>Ten Levels</i>	Message Acceptance
Tehran	Perceived credibility
Beijing	Message strength
Seoul	
Hong Kong	<i>Message Response</i>
Tokyo	Purchase intent
New Delhi	
Bangkok	
Singapore	

Three hundred ninety four subjects were randomly assigned to the ten treatment groups. In keeping with the procedures of [1] subjects were asked to read instructions carefully, view the stimulus Website, and then proceed through the questionnaire. To create reasonably high processing involvement, subjects were asked to “consider you a person who has saved their funds, and now has the time and money to take a vacation this summer.” They were instructed to visit the site, told to form an evaluation of the destination, and informed they would be asked some questions about the destination later. Each participant signed onto a Website containing these instructions, a direct link to the stimulus site, and survey questions to be completed following exposure to the stimulus. Subjects were asked if they have ever visited the travel destination used for this experiment. Those with prior experience were eliminated from the analysis. Subjects were instructed to spend as much time as they needed at the CTO/DMO site. Next, the dependent measures were collected (subjects were not allowed to go back to the stimulus materials).

Data Analysis and Results

Content analysis was used to determine the 20 most commonly used Website elements. One independent and three dependent variables were analyzed. Data were collected from 394 respondents, and entered in SPSS 15. A MANOVA was first performed to assess variables simultaneously; a series of one-way ANOVAs then looked at areas of significance. Discriminant analysis was used to assess Website elements. Significance was measured at .05.

Profile of Respondents

Respondents were between 16 and 65 years with an average age of 26. 75% were younger than 27 years. 52% were female. 81% indicated a Caucasian ethnic origin, 9% an Indian, 1% a Chains and 2% another Asian. On average, these respondents reported 3.7 trips a year. 10% reported no travel. Respondents with prior visits to a destination were excluded. Due to the random assignment of destinations each of the 10 places had an equal frequency of about 40.

Table 2: Analysis of Variance for Perceived Credibility

	df	F	p
Between Groups	9	2.46	.010
Within Groups	300		

Post hoc tests produced the following results. Three of the between group comparisons revealed significant differences, as depicted in Table 3.

Table 3: Result of Treatment Groups with Significance on Perceived Credibility

Treatment	Treatment Group	Mean Difference	Std. Error	p
Bangkok	Hong Kong	-.930	.215	.003
	Singapore	-.779	.213	.022
	Tehran	.795	.195	.007

Based on this evidence, Hypothesis 1 was supported. There is sufficient evidence to conclude that Websites differ in their levels of message credibility.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance for Message Strength

	df	F	p
Between Groups	9	4.77	<.01
Within Groups	300		

In post hoc tests, five of the between group comparisons revealed significant differences, as depicted in Table 5. These differences were between Tokyo and three other DMOs

Table 5: Result of Treatment Groups with Significance on Message Strength

Treatment Group	Mean Difference	Std. Error	p
Tehran	-.998	.292	.048
Hong Kong	-.995	.290	.048
Singapore	-.925	.264	.001
Seoul	1.27	.306	.005
Bangkok	1.13	.277	.008

Based on this evidence, Hypothesis 2 was supported. There is sufficient evidence to conclude that Websites differ in the levels of message strength they generate.

Table 6: Analysis of Variance for Propensity to Visit

	df	F	p
Between Groups	9	1.28	.247
Within Groups	300		

The analysis of variance was not significant. Based on these findings, Hypothesis 3 was not supported. There is insufficient evidence to conclude that Websites differ in generating a change in the propensity to visit a destination following exposure to that destination's Website. Hypothesis 4 was not supported based on the evidence presented above. Websites with high levels of message credibility did not result in a greater change in propensity to visit a destination. No Website generated a significant change in purchase intent.

Discussion

Previous Malaysian research suggests that for a message to lead to purchase intent, it must have credibility to generate message strength, or be accepted by the consumer. Message acceptance is then purported to lead to a supportive attitude toward the destination, and ultimately to purchase intent (Ajzenand Fishbein, 1980; [1]). The lack of significance in change of propensity to visit is inconsistent with expected findings (note that although the ANOVA for change in propensity to visit was not significant. To further mine the data for a potential explanation, another variable, prior knowledge, was explored. This variable assessed respondents' knowledge about the assigned destination prior to exposure to a destination's Website. The survey used a seven point scale ranging from "don't know anything" to "know quite a lot." The ANOVA for prior knowledge showed significant differences.

Table 7: Analysis of Variance for Prior Knowledge

	df	F	p
Between Groups	9	10.04	<.01
Within Groups	300		

The ANOVA revealed several areas of significance. In summary, the results of this study support the importance of message credibility to message strength, but not to a change in purchase intent. Hence, this study may indicate that a one-time Website exposure will not overcome perhaps years of accumulated prior knowledge, nor induce any significant change in propensity to visit for well-known destinations.

Conclusions and Implications

Based on these findings, there are various management implications in Malaysia. One overriding application – the importance of prior knowledge - may help increase E-tourism marketers’ effectiveness as they attempt to fulfill their primary mission of increasing the number of visitors by affecting intent to visit. Potential visitors’ prior knowledge is formed from years of exposure to various sources, ranging from friends and family to news. Friends can share positive or negative experiences. News can be positive or negative, a one-time story or reoccurring. This prior knowledge may lead to an entrenched impression of a potential destination, especially of well known destination. Because of this accumulation of knowledge, people likely have firm grasp of a well known destination, and whether or not they would like to visit.

Therefore, well-known destinations, image management may not be the best strategy. Efforts to create a desired image may not be effective because images of well known destinations are already entrenched. Instead, marketers of well-known destinations may consider alternatives to image management, including three suggested here. Malaysian marketers could (1) give potential tourists a specific reason to visit and (2) disseminate unexpected information and (3) take maximum advantage of organic messages.

Create reasons for tourists to visit. As this study points out, due to prior knowledge, potential visitors may have entrenched impressions. They likely know whether or not they want to visit a well-known destination. If they do want to visit, perhaps giving them a specific reason to visit now would have a greater impact on change of propensity to visit than will general image management. Marketers can create this reason to visit in several ways, including special events and price promotions. The potential draw of special events is well documented in the E-tourism industry. Events can be held annually. Multiple venue events create an opportunity to share production and promotional expenses. A good example comes from the cultural exhibit, Tutankhamen and the Golden Age of Pharaohs.

Price promotions are most often used by hotels and attractions. Some cities have coordinated ticket programs which offer unlimited admission to many area attractions for one price. Of course, historical visitor spending data should drive feasibility, and procedures must be thoroughly tested. However, such price promotions could be both profitable for the CTO/DMO and give potential visitors a specific reason to visit now.

Share unexpected information. As discussed, prior knowledge comes from many sources and not all of those sources may be positive or accurate. Regular attitude surveys of potential visitors could show whether entrenched images hold any inaccuracies. If so, image management to correct the inaccuracy could be beneficial. Not only would the resulting image management help to correct misinformation, it could also add a new image dimension to a wider populace. The state of Texas advertising program is a good example. “Texas, It’s like a Whole Other Country” gives information about areas of sophistication and high culture not normally associated with Texas and “cowboys.”

Take maximum advantage of organic messages. Source credibility is a recurring theme in studies concerning effective management. Gunn’s (1972) typology of induced and organic agents is applicable here. Induced images are a function of management efforts and destination promoters, and have lower credibility. Organic images are formed from sources not directly associated with a destination area, such as news reports, feature articles, documentaries, and have higher message credibility. Although specific Website elements that were more organic were not ranked higher in this study, it is important to remember that the Internet itself is currently seen as a highly credible medium. There is further evidence for the organic approach. Loda and Coleman (2005) emphasize the role of integrated management communications, with publicity being important to the management mix. A related study showed that publicity is more effective than advertising at influencing destination selection, and that the most effective media strategy for E-tourism promotion is publicity followed by advertising. “Clearly, E-tourism marketers who do not have resources devoted to a publicity effort should consider doing so.”

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