The Relationship between Visionary and Emotional Responses to Print Advertising

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Abstract

This paper empirically tests the nature of the relationship between a consumer's ad evoked imagery, referred to as Consumption Vision, and their subsequent emotional response. Three types of imagery eliciting stimuli – concrete words, instructions to imagine and pictorial images are tested in terms of their effectiveness in enhancing this relationship. A series of Pearson product correlations reveal a strong positive relationship between the extent to which the respondents elaborated on their consumption vision and their emotional response to the tourism product featured in the advertisement. The most effective stimulus combination in terms of the enhancement of this relationship featured concrete words and instructions to imagine with no image present. The least effective combination contained a less concrete style image and a combination of concrete words and instructions to imagine.

Introduction

Recent work in consumer research has focused increasingly on the more symbolic and emotive components of consumer behaviour (see; Branthwaite, 2002; Gnoth, Zins, Lengmueller, & Boshoff, 2000; Goossens, 2003; Miller and Stocia, 2003). Such research represents an emerging shift of attention toward some important but previously neglected aspects of the consumption experience. It has been suggested that a consumer’s consumption vision plays a major role in the information search process, providing the consumer with an intrinsic information source that is often consulted throughout the decision-making process (Crotts, 1999). According to Neelamegham and Jain, (1999), the decision maker may refer to the affective or emotional responses to their visions of future consumption experiences as they provide the psychological cues that are said to direct them to their final decision. The aim of this paper is twofold: First, the paper will report the results of an investigation into the relationship between a consumer's ad evoked consumption vision and their subsequent emotional response. Second, the paper will present results that demonstrate the effectiveness of various combinations of imagery eliciting stimuli, commonly used in print advertising, in terms of their ability to enhance the relationship.

Background

Consumption Vision

The concept of consumption vision is derived from that of mental imagery (Phillips Olson & Baumgartner, 1995). Macinnis and Price (1987) define mental imagery as a non-verbal memory process that entails ‘sensory representations’ of ideas, feelings and objects or experiences with objects. It is said to involve a cognitive process in which perceptual information is represented in working memory via the creation of daydreams, fantasies and imaginative construction. Phillips et al. (1995) identify this phenomena as being a “consumption vision” which is defined by Walker and Olsen (1994) as “a visual image of certain product related-behaviours and their consequence - they consist of concrete and vivid mental images that enable consumers to vicariously experience the self-relevant consequences of product use” (p. 27).
Common to many of the previous studies in this area is the linkage between consumption vision and emotion. For example, Phillips et al. (1995), Escalas (2004) and Macinnis and Price (1987) all agree that the consumer’s mental image of their future purchases can impact upon the current mood of the person as a result of the affective reactions to the outcomes one imagines. In addition, affective or emotional reactions to the imagined consumption experience can influence the consumer’s decision process through the formation of beliefs about their anticipated satisfaction with the actual experience (Phillips et al., 1995). Emotion, with specific regard to its proclaimed linkage to mental imagery is discussed in the following section.

The Linkage between Mental Imagery and Emotion

Singer, an emotions theorist, (1978) assumes that emotions constitute the primary motivational system for human beings. The author’s key proposition is that fantasy processes, dreams and mental imagery provide a major link between cognition and emotion, thus providing representations of human motives (Izard, 1977). Although most of Singer’s work was implemented within a clinical psychology context, it does present parallels to Holbrook’s (1984) thesis which has been successfully applied to a consumer behaviour / decision-making context. Holbrook’s consciousness – emotion – value (C-E-V) model encompassed the full range of emotional phenomena in the consumption experience. The first phase – consciousness - involves imagery, fantasies, daydreams, subconscious thoughts and unconscious mental processes. The second phase – emotion - entails physiological responses, cognition, behavioural expression and feelings. The final phase – value - includes the consumer preferences based on their affective responses and the overall consumption experience based on the use of the product. Of particular relevance to this study were the first and second phases of the C-E-V model. Within the current context, consumption vision is viewed as representing the first phase and the consumer’s emotional response represents the second.

This previous literature is somewhat suggestive that should a marketer responsible for the promotion of intangible products be successful in evoking mental imagery among their audience, they may also expect some form of emotive response to their product offering. However, empirical research to date is yet to reveal the effectiveness of print advertising in terms of its impact on the strength of the relationship between a consumer’s consumption vision and their emotional responses to print advertising materials. This paper responds to this gap in the research and addresses following research questions:

R1: What is the nature of the relationship between a consumer’s consumption vision and their emotional response to print advertising material?  
R2: Which combination of print advertising stimulus is most effective in evoking consumption visions that are likely to lead to strong emotional responses to the advertised product?  
R3: Which combination of print advertising stimulus is least effective in evoking consumption visions that are likely to lead to strong emotional responses to the advertised product?
Method

This study used a convenience sample of 180 undergraduate students. Students were considered an appropriate sample for this study as they were asked to play a role that was familiar to them – that is, a potential purchaser of a holiday. Furthermore, since this study was a test of psychological processes using an experimental design (to test theoretically derived relationships) the use of students should not compromise the results in any way. Sixty-five percent were female and the majority of participants (88 percent) were aged between 17 and 25 years, with the remaining 12 percent being aged between 26 and 50.

The data used in this research are based on an experimental design whereby the respondents received one of nine conditions, each of which comprised a colour print advertisement designed to portray a tourism destination. These nine different conditions featured one of three different pictorial options; one that was concrete, one that was less concrete or no image at all. The other variable, text, varied in the advertisement and contained words only, words and instruction to imagine or both of these combined. The size, length and theme of the advertisements were kept constant across the nine different designs to minimize any confounding effects. The print advertisements were professionally designed in full color. To ensure the chosen stimuli was effective in evoking visionary responses among the sample, a series of manipulation checks were performed. Ninety two percent of respondents claimed they were able to generate images in their mind as a result of the instructions to imagine variable and 92.7% of respondents agreed they were able to generate images in response to the concrete words. The less concrete images, designed to make the entire island scene less identifiable, also proved successful with 88% of respondents not able to identify the entire scenario depicted in the advertisement featuring this stimuli.

Each respondent was given a booklet containing one version of the advertisement and a series of questions to evaluate their consumption vision and their emotional response. The scales used to measure these constructs are discussed below.

Consumption Vision Scale

The respondents’ visionary responses to the advertisements were measured via a two-dimensional scale designed specifically by the researchers to measure consumption vision. The two dimensions were elaboration and quality of the consumption vision. The elaboration items were developed through an extensive review of the relevant literature surrounding the consumption vision construct. As a result, the elaboration of vision scale included statements such as “I could easily construct a story about myself and the featured destination based on the mental images that came to mind” and “The mental images that came to mind made me feel as though I was actually experiencing the destination featured in this advertisement”. Responses to these items were measured via a 7-point Likert type scale where participants could indicate their level of agreement with the statements. For the quality of vision dimension, five items were adapted from the Miller et al. (2000) Ad-Evoked Mental Imagery Scale and the participants responses were measured via the use of a semantic differential. Respondents were asked to rate the quality of the images on five dimensions – vividness, clarity, intensity, sharpness and appeal.

The consumption vision scale was pilot tested and subjected to a factor analysis to assess the structure and internal consistency of the scale. The two dimensions, elaboration and quality, explained 39.7 percent and 24.4 percent of the variance respectively, accounting for a total of
64.1 percent of the variance. A reliability analysis revealed Cronbach alphas of .93 for the elaboration dimension and .84 for the quality dimension.

**Emotional Response Scale**

This scale, specifically designed to measure the participant’s emotional response, consisted of nine items, five of which were adapted from the Well’s (1964) Emotional Quotient Questionnaire and four that were developed as a result of intensive review of the relevant literature. The scale was also piloted and subjected to a factor analysis which revealed a one dimensional solution accounting for 75% of the variance A reliability analysis supported the internal consistency of the scale with a Cronbach alpha of .96.

**Results & Discussion**

A series of Pearson product correlations were performed to address the above research questions. The research design of the study satisfied the related pairs and scale of measurement assumption and examination of the affiliated scatter plots confirmed a linear relationship and homoscedasticity as the scores were clustered uniformly around the regression line.

**R1:** The results revealed a large positive relationship exists between both the elaboration component of consumption vision \( r = .84, p < .01 \) the quality component of consumption vision \( r = .69, p < .01 \) and the respondent’s emotional response. This suggests that the more a consumer elaborates upon their evoked consumption vision and the greater the quality of the resulting images, the stronger their emotional response towards the advertised product is likely to be. This result is consistent with Oliver, Robertson and Mitchell (1993), who reported a strong positive relationship between imagery and affect, and proposed a carry-on effect of this relationship on the consumers’ potential purchase behaviour.

**R2 & R3:** Table 1 presents the results of the nine correlation analyses performed to address these research questions. These correlation coefficients revealed the most effective combination of stimulus to be the condition featuring the two forms of text stimuli – concrete words and instructions to imagine, while the least effective combination comprised the less concrete picture and concrete words alone. Support for the fact that the most effective combination comprised no pictorial images is provided by Goosens (1994) who argues that the use of pictorial images may in fact stifle the individuals imagination as they become over reliant on the featured image as an information source as opposed to elaborating on their own mentally enhanced images. The finding regarding the least effective combination was also consistent with previous notions that non-concrete or abstract style images are generally a non-effective source of imagery eliciting stimuli (see for example: Babin & Burns, 1997; Rossiter & Percy, 1983).

On a practical level, this research provides tourism marketers, particularly those attempting to reach their audiences via print advertising, with valuable information regarding the internal stimulus often referred to by consumers as an information source when considering the purchase of tourism related products. For example, we can now affirm that the successful evocation of an elaborate and quality consumption vision will result in the consumer experiencing some form of emotional response to the advertised product. In addition, tourism marketers are now informed of the combination of imagery evoking stimuli that is most likely to enhance this relationship among their targeted consumer base. Such information will also
assist tourism marketers to overcome the intangibility issues associated with the tourism product.

**Table 1. The Relationship between Consumption Vision and Emotional Response**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stimulus Combination</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation Coefficient</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CV Elaboration &amp; Emotional Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete Picture &amp; both Concrete Words and Instructions to Imagine</td>
<td>.807(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete Picture &amp; Concrete Words</td>
<td>.822(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete Picture &amp; Instructions to Imagine</td>
<td>.794(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Concrete Picture &amp; both Concrete words and Instructions to Imagine</td>
<td>.822(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Concrete Picture &amp; Concrete Words</td>
<td>.505(*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Picture &amp; both Concrete Words and Instructions to Imagine</td>
<td>.885(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Picture &amp; Concrete Words</td>
<td>.822(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Picture &amp; Instructions to Imagine</td>
<td>.824(**)</td>
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</tbody>
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**P <.01, *P<.05**

From a theoretical perspective, this research offers two contributions to the body of knowledge surrounding marketing communications. First, this research has been successful in the creation of a statistically valid and reliable scale for the quantitative measurement of imaginative responses to advertising. Second, the research responds to calls within the tourism marketing literature for further investigation into the non rational emotive components associated with the tourist’s decision process (see: Botterill & Crompton, 1996; Gnoth, 1997; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; McGuiggen, 2001; Phillips et al., 1995).

A limitation surrounding this study was the use of university students. However, given that the research goal of this stage of current study is one of theoretical explanation as opposed to generalization, a homogenous sample such as university students is considered to be suitable for this study (Sternthal, Tybout & Calder, 1994).

Further research should examine the impact of the relationship revealed in this research on the consumers’ product choice behaviour, looking more closely at the ability of the ad-evoked consumption vision and subsequent emotion to expedite the consumer’s purchase decision. Additional insight into the types of emotions certain advertising stimuli are likely to evoke is also represents an area worthy of further investigation.
References


