

Small Grant Proposal

Tools of Persuasion in Visual Advertisements at Maltese Sites of Cultural Tourism: A Social Science Analysis

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Abstract

Measurement of cultural tourists' attitudes toward advertising in the city of Msida, Malta. Textual analysis of visual advertisements located in popular tourist sites.

Keywords

small grant proposal; marketing research; advertising research; survey study; textual analysis

Research topic

Measurement of cultural tourists' attitudes toward advertising in the city of Msida, Malta, as well as textual analysis of visual advertisements located in popular tourist sites and mediating their messages on visual channels.

Aim of the research

To apply learned methods (Based on the course materials of BKO 0211 Research Methods I, BKO 0212 Research Methods II, BKO 4319 Marketing Research, and BKO 4320 Marketing Communication) of advertisement analysis in a research effort demonstrating new, original scientific results. During the research study tour organized by the Institute of Social and Communication Sciences of Karoli Gaspar University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, we will aim to achieve two *immediate goals*: **I)** to assess the general attitudes of tourists present in these areas towards advertising, and more specifically their attitudes towards visual advertising in public places **II)** exploration, typologization, and analysis of text-level persuasion tools used in visual advertisements at the examined sites.

Additional goals of the study tour consist of **a.)** supporting the participating students by ensuring the possibility of acquiring practical research experience in order to be able to prove that they can apply the knowledge they possess in a market-relevant form, **b.)** development of bilateral relations with our host institution, the University of Malta (L-Università ta 'Malta), in order to promote student and staff mobility, as well as **c.)** to further develop the current research collaboration.

Research questions

1. What is the social background of cultural tourists visiting Malta?
2. How do cultural tourists visiting Malta relate to advertising in general and to public visual advertising in particular?
3. How does advertising and marketing communication work in the context of Maltese cultural attractions?
4. Which are the most frequent and popular advertising strategies of visual advertising found at Maltese sites of cultural tourism, and how do these characteristics change in cases when knowledge or experience connected to specific cultural products are marketized.

Background and Significance

Measuring and analyzing attitudes towards advertisements and advertising in general, have a central importance in market research due to the fact that by these results, as well as the design and messages of specific advertisements can be constructed strategically. This is a general statement that applies equally to both traditional advertising as well as to new forms of advertising appearing in the new public sphere, primarily as a result of new technological advances.

In the 80's, many surveys pointed out the phenomenon of negative trends in the public's view toward advertising (Zanot 1984, Ogilvy and Mather 1985, Andrews 1989). However, these surveys measured attitudes towards advertising and promotion in general, rather

than opinions towards messages sent through a specific media or promoting specific content. Accordingly, during the examination of opinions toward advertisement, we find it more reasonable to study attitudes towards advertisements through specific media channels and product-specific advertisements (which naturally remain comparable, or can be supplemented by various impressions created by abstract concepts). The need for such general-specific comparisons is already indicated by Ducoffe's assertion that the media context greatly affects the value perceptions of advertisements (Ducoffe 1996, 24). Since the pioneering Schlosser study (Schlosser et al. 1999), this approach gained many more followers (Tan and Chia 2007; Petrovici and Marinov 2007; Munusamy and Wong 2007). Thus, during the first phase of our research, we will carry out this comparison by studying visitors to popular tourist attractions in Msida. The choice of the research site was carried out with consideration to the fact that samples of the non-American population are underrepresented in surveys on attitudes toward advertising (O'Donohoe 1995), and that the research is to be conducted in an international environment where commercials need to appeal and convince the audience with different national and cultural backgrounds.

In the second phase of the research, we will measure the tools and techniques of persuasive communication in public advertising. The significance of this topic lies mainly in tourist attractions being the center of cultural tourism, as such, advertisements installed there are particularly suitable to appeal to an audience which arrived with a relatively well-defined goal, but which is highly diverse regarding their socio-cultural characteristics. In addition, it can be said that tourist attractions can function as an advertisement in themselves; both with regard to providing *knowledge* to the audience of a culture that is alien and exotic, and, in some cases, by ensuring an authentic *experience*. In the context of all advertising present at the examined locations, tourist attractions can be conceptualized as a basal advertisement, meaning that as main targets of cultural tourists, these sites can influence or even determine the displayed image of conventional commercial advertisements in their extended areas. This approach is relevant to our research topic because cultural tourists are looking for experiences of different depth and quality; accordingly, different advertising strategies are needed to win different types of cultural tourists (Kantanen and Tikkanen 2006). During the research, we will first use McKercher's five-segment typology of cultural tourists to examine what types of tourists are addressed by the unique advertising materials of tourist attractions (McKercher 2002, McKercher and Du Cros 2002), then we will map the effects and working mechanisms of advertisements presented in the vicinity of specific tourist attractions.

Methodology

Selection and building of the research strategy, demarcation, sampling plan, and the creation of the measured variables, description of measurement, and data analysis methods for the sample selection are part of the work to be conducted during the proposed research study trip, and they will be jointly developed by the participants at specific workshops during the study tours. Drafting the methodology is closely linked to the students' university studies as they will have the opportunity to apply the knowledge they

acquired in the courses Research Methodology I-II (BKO 0211, BKO 0212), Marketing Research (BKO 4319) and Marketing Communication (BKO 4320) held at the Institute of Social and Communication Sciences of Karoli Gaspar University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. The composition of the group (2 Ph.D. candidates and 8 B.A. students) ensures professional supervision by more experienced participants and provides control over individual student's work processes; promoting the study tour's highlighted purpose that involved younger students should carry out independent work and participate in the entire process of the specific research.

Expected results

Results of the research can be utilized for multiple purposes. First, we can acquire knowledge of advertising attitudes of cultural tourists visiting Malta, and be acquainted with the various advertising techniques used to persuade them. Moreover, these results will be comparable with other results stemming from domestic and European advertising research. Second, we can formulate empirical research-based recommendations to support decision makers of a well-defined market, in the field of advertising and marketing communications. Third, we can expand the literature of advertising communication and tourism research with new data and analysis. The results will be utilized in two student research papers since a commitment to writing these was a prerequisite for the B.A. students interested in attending the research study tour. The members of the group will also give project status updates while visiting the sites, using various Web 2.0 services (Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, and personal blogs), which will make the research more transparent and traceable. In the first academic semester of 2013/14, we will be giving a colorful presentation at the university about the gained experiences and adventures, where we will emphasize for awareness and promotional purposes, the role of Balassi Institute's Campus Hungary Program in making it possible for the students to participate in the research study tour.

Research tour timeline

07.01.2013

Arrival, Check-in.

07.02.2013

Review, extraction, and procession of relevant international literature collected in advance by the Principal Investigator. All participants will process two original research articles and will summarize hypotheses, materials & methods and obtained results in a 15-minute presentation to the group. After each presentation, the group members will have the opportunity to reflect on what was heard, and any elements that are unclear or difficult to understand can be clarified.

07.03.2013

Participation in a lecture given by an invited guest speaker from the Department of Tourism of the Maltese host institution, from which the team members will get acquainted with the cultural particularities of the local advertising market, as well as major advertisers and advertising habits & techniques present on the island. After the lecture and in the light of the previously processed literature, group members will develop the research methodology together.

07.04.2013

Two members of the group will visit the University of Malta in the morning, where they will discuss the possibility of developing future bilateral relations with the Karoli Gaspar University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. Discussion will be conducted based on the authorization received from our Department Head, with an increased emphasis on the question of student and staff mobility, as well as mutually promoting each other's institutions in Malta and Hungary. Meanwhile, other members of the group will form pairs and will assess tourist attractions of Msida and its surrounding areas. Group members will collect or take a photo of advertisements and advertising flyers of tourist attractions found at tourist offices or around the area. During the afternoon, the data of the collected materials will be transferred to a computer and a preliminary analysis will be conducted.

07. 05-09. 2013

I. Measuring attitudes toward advertising among cultural tourists with survey technique – Data Gathering.

II. Listing (with photos), categorization, and analysis of visual commercial advertisements found in the vicinity of tourist attraction sites. BA students will work in groups of two, and in the given time frame, they will be scattered and rotated among sites, in order for everyone to be able to survey each location. Students will both participate in data collection, electronic data processing, and analysis of advertising images and messages.

07.10.2013

Organizing and summarizing results. Discussion of the results and gained experiences. Discussion of the further work needed for students to develop and use the results in their student research papers. Preparing a timeline for completion of student research papers.

07.11.2013

Field trip

07.12.2013

Leaving accommodation and arriving home.

Funding program

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Hosting institution

University of Malta (L-Università ta 'Malta)

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