

CONSISTENCY IN DESTINATION BRANDING: THE IMPACT OF EVENTS

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ABSTRACT

Events are part of the attraction of a destination and as such should be included in the integrated marketing for the destination and incorporated into a destination's branding strategy. This implies the need to evaluate the contribution of an event not just in terms of the direct financial contribution that it generates but also in terms of its consistency with the destination brand values. Consistency as an evaluation criteria concerns how (and if) the interrelationships among the elements of the marketing mix enhance destination brand equity. This paper uses content analysis to demonstrate the importance of incorporating consistency as an evaluation criterion of an event. In particular, the results of a content analysis performed using Australian newspaper articles from 1998-2005 show that the set of negative association related to Schoolies week appears to be inconsistent with the brand values of the Gold Coast as expressed in the brand "VeryGC".

INTRODUCTION

Branding a destination is defined as 'the process used to develop a unique identity and personality that is different from all competitive destinations' (Morrison & Anderson, 2002; p.17). Destination branding is perceived as useful and important by industry and government. For example, Tourism Australia pursues an intense branding campaign and launched a new brand image in May 2004 that was recognized the world's number one nation brand according to the Anholt-GMI Nation Brands Index (Anholt, 2005). At a regional level, the Northern Territory Tourism Commission, in March 2005, introduced a new brand campaign directed to the Australian and New Zealand market that cost around A\$ 2.7 million over six months. At a local level, the Gold Coast developed the brand VeryGC and launched a communication campaign worth A\$2.3 million in November 2004.

There is a general agreement that the concept of branding as discussed in marketing theory can be applied to a destination (Park & Petrick, 2006; Pritchard & Morgan, 1998). In particular, an emerging body of research (Konecnik, 2006) discusses the importance of using the construct of customer based brand equity (Keller, 1993) to understand the combined role that brand image and brand association plays in enhancing the effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand. According to Pike (2002), new studies are extending the concept of destination image (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Gartner, 1989; Gartner, 1993; Hunt, 1975) by incorporating an understanding how the brand image of the destination and the brand associations that relate to it, play a critical role in keeping or positioning a destination within the decision choice set of existing or potential tourists (Crompton, 1992). These issues are even more critical considering that the marketing effort of Destination Marketing Organization (DMOs) are always enhanced or constrained by the consideration that in tourism the destination is the brand (Buhalis, 2000).

This paper focuses on the use content analysis to understand and evaluate the consistency between the destination product policies, the brand messages delivered by newspapers about these products and the values carried by the destination brand and communicated through marketing campaigns. In particular, this paper uses Leximancer; content analysis software, to show that messages generated by newspaper reports about 'Schoolies' at

the Gold Coast are inconsistent with the brand values (Clow & Baack, 2002). 'Schoolies' week is a major annual tourism event in Australia involving students who have completed Year 12, the final year at high school. In Australia, a number of event studies have examined 'Schoolies' week primarily from a risk management perspective aimed at identifying dangerous behaviour of young people at 'Schoolies' week (Ballard, Curd & Roche, 1998; Gillespie, Davey, Sheehan & Steadson, 1991; Jansen, 2000; Winchester, McGuirk & Everett, 1999). 'Schoolies' week has also been examined from an economic perspective and as a tourism product (Faulkner, 1999; Raybould & Scott, 2001). However, no known study has illustrated the impact (in terms of the publicity generated through newspaper articles) of an event such as 'Schoolies' and its consistency with a destination brand. Moreover, the event 'Schoolies' is especially useful as a case study because a significant amount of publicity related to it is generated through newspaper coverage not only during the time when the event happens but throughout the whole year.

CONSISTENCY AS A DETERMINANT OF BRAND EQUITY

In Keller's (1993) conceptualization of brand equity, brand associations are defined as 'informational nodes linked to the brand node in the memory and containing the meaning of the brand for the consumers' (p.3). Therefore, since 'a brand association is anything "linked" in memory to a brand' (Aaker, 1991; p.109) it becomes critical for tourism destinations to be able to enhance the favourability, the strength and the uniqueness of the brand association that the tourists-consumer held in their mind about the destination itself. Consistent favourable brand associations held in the mind of a consumer are the essential elements for the creation of strong and long lasting brands (Aaker, 1991; Berry, 2000). Consistency is defined in terms of the degree to which each component of the marketing mix (i.e. product, price, communication and distribution) is able to influence the clarity of a brand signal (Erdem & Swait, 1998) in conformity to the marketing objectives to be achieved (Shapiro, 1985). Consistency is not the mere repetition of a message (Kapferer, 2004) but it is an evaluation criterion that allows to understand how and if the interrelationships among the elements of the marketing mix enhance the brand equity (Erdem & Swait, 1998).

Products, as a tangible component of the marketing mix, are often the strongest manifestation of brand identity Karjalainen (2004) and therefore are able to generate the consistent or inconsistent brand associations that are indicators of the performance of the brand throughout the time (Neumeier, 2003). Communication strategy has also been discussed in terms of its critical role in the branding process (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). A communication strategy must be evaluated in terms of the consistency of the messages being sent with the overall marketing strategy in order to assess whether brand equity is being strengthened or weakened through the communication process (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998). The relationship between communication strategy and brand equity becomes more complex when we consider the objectives of a brand communication strategy for both the consumers and stakeholders of the brand (Davidson, 1999). The role of a brand manager and marketing organization in managing the communication related to the brand is to create brand consistency across all stakeholders and the brand continuity throughout the organisation (Bickerton 2000), Marketing communication can therefore be defined as the voice of the brand or the set of tactics by which the brand relates to its target audience with a single message using various communication channels (Groucutt, 2005). Such, communication is effective when it helps consumers to move from their current knowledge of brand to a desired brand knowledge (Keller, 2003b).

Consideration of the concept of brand equity (Mahajan, Rao & Srivastava, 1994; Martin & Stewart, 2001; Supphellen, 2000) suggests that brands are also vulnerable. As observed by Keller (2003a) since the brand is a multidimensional entity whose knowledge can be created and affected in a variety of different ways 'any potential encounter with a brand –marketing initiated or not- has the opportunity to change the mental representation of the brand and the kinds of information that can appear in consumer memory' (p.597).

To avoid this vulnerability, managers focus on presenting a consistent image for their brand. Consistency has been widely described as one of the critical components to evaluate the contribution of the marketing mix to the creation of brand equity. From a practical perspective Michigan State University and Publicom Inc. ("Measure, then manage", 2006) identifies that consistency is an important dimension of a consumer experience that can be used as an effective measurement tool for business. A series of quantitative studies have evaluated the consistency brands from a consumer perspective. Some qualitative measures have been used to examine brand consistency; Erdem and Swait (1998) for instance used the long term consistency of brand's ads, prices, specials, and products to understand 'how consumers "decode" firms' signals' (p.155) in the context of the creation of customer based brand equity. Park, Milberg and Lawson (1991) adopted the concept of consistency in order to assess firms decisions in terms of products mix and their impact on the value of the brand. Consistency has been also used as a parameter to judge how products extrinsic cues are used to assess its quality (Miyazaki, Grewal, Goodstein, Iacobucci & Monroe, 2005). However, no previous quantitative study has been found examining content analysis to examine the publicity of the brand that is not planned.

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION AND EVENTS

The nature of a tourism destination (Framke, 2002) and the co-opetitive interactions among the stakeholders within it (von Friedrichs Grangsjö, 2001), predispose destination marketing organizations towards less coordinated and comprehensive marketing strategies than private sector firms. Their role involves management and coordination of the different and sometime conflicting interests of their various stakeholders (Buhalis, 2000). As a consequence of the complexity of these relationships, the tourism destination has been considered one of the most difficult entities to manage and to market (Sautter & Leisen, 1999). Within this framework, one the roles of Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO) is to manage the marketing communication of the destination whereas the real marketing remains in most cases in the hands of individual firms (Keller, 2000). DMOs are considered mainly able to exert control on the marketing communication of the destination and in this role DMOs 'should enhance [destination] brand association and market position, with communication objective being to inform, persuade or remind consumers about the destination' (Pike, 2004; p.141).

Empirical research has shown that DMOs facilitate the creation of destination awareness by achieving consistency between the image delivered by the destination and the actual visitors' experience (Blain, Levy & Ritchie, 2005). Marketing communication and destination branding within it (Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2004) creates 'induced' images of a tourism destination (Gunn, 1988). On the other hand, despite the fact that branding, imagery, positioning, market segmentation, target marketing and marketing mix, are mutually dependent management decisions, in typical destinations these decisions are taken independently by the managers of different organisations based on their own operating criteria (Laws, Scott & Parfitt, 2002). Moreover, while DMOs focus their activity in creating and supporting the destination brand (Blain, 2001; Im, 2003), the influence of DMOs in the message delivered by mean of publicity is marginal (Pike, 2004) and much publicity concerning the destination is unplanned and incidental, and occurs in the general course of 'news' (Dore & Crouch, 2003).

Hankinson (2004) describes events as a component of the core brand experience. The importance of events in destination branding is also emphasized by Jago et al. (2003) who consider that 'if events are to be effectively and appropriately incorporated into a destination's branding strategy, then there needs to be a clear vision for the ways that the event fits into an integrated marketing campaign for the destination' (p.11). This implies the need to evaluate the successful or unsuccessful contribution of an event not just in term of the direct financial contribution that it generates (Dwyer, Mellor, Mistilis & Mules, 2000) but also in terms to its contribution to the consistency of destination brand values. Moreover, there is a no natural or automatic harmony or synergy between events and the other products offered in a destination (Fyall & Garrod, 2005). Therefore conflict generated by the different interests and the diverging objectives of tourism stakeholders might be enhanced by a negative evaluation of the media

coverage or publicity of the event (Carlsen, Getz & Soutar, 2000) that carries a negative impact on the tourism common good of the destination brand equity.

Considering the centrality of the concept of brand equity for the success of a destination brand (Konecnik 2006), this paper aims to contribute to the event literature by proposing to incorporate in the evaluation of events a measure of the consistency between the publicity generated by the event and the values expressed by the tourism destination brand. Since the tourism destination is composed by a set of multifaceted experiences and attraction marketed under one brand, the challenge for events planners and managers is to consistently fit the events into the interrelationships among the elements of the marketing mix and therefore enhancing the destination brand equity.

METHODS

Content analysis has been used since at least the 1950s as a method of analysing texts (Scott & Smith, 2005). Content analysis is defined by Berelson (1952) as 'a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication' (p.18). It has the advantages of being an objective method of analysis (Bryman, 2004), that, given appropriate data, allows relatively easy longitudinal analysis (Warde, 1997), performed in an unobtrusive manner (Lee, 2000). Within this paper content analysis is defined as 'a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use' (Krippendorff, 2004; p.18).

Software programs have previously been discussed as helping to address the issue of reliability in content analysis (Alexa & Zuell, 2000). Computers provide perfect coder reliability in the application of rules for content-coding (Weber, 1984). Moreover, the use of computers reduce ambiguities and uncertainties and as Krippendorff (2004) observes 'computers' operations are always deterministic and hence perfectly reliable' (p.258). The use of automated systems in content analysis has the advantage of reducing the amount of work required for handling and analysing enormous amount of data (Popping, 2000). The use of software programs addresses the issue of validity by automating the coding of the text into categories using a dictionary (Scott & Smith, 2005). The combined use of both a dictionary and a thesaurus allows discovery within the text of ideas that are expressed at different level of abstraction (Krippendorff, 2004) and overcomes the problems related to the use of synonyms or insignificant variations of core meanings throughout the text (Weber, 1985).

Content analysis has been widely used in communication, journalism, sociology, psychology and business (Neuendorf, 2002) and tourism. In an early study, tourists' behaviour was analysed with the help of content analysis (Vukonic, 1986). More recently, content analysis has been used in tourism in order to analyse communication through brochures in the context of health tourism (Goodrich & Goodrich, 1987) and during touristification of a mining area (Chon & Evans, 1989). As discussed above, an important aspect of tourism is the representation of tourism places and destinations in terms of combinations of symbols and images and as brands (Morgan et al., 2004; Pike, 2002; Trauer & Ryan, 2005). Representation of tourism through images and the manipulation of the imagery are critical factors important in the marketing of tourism (Cheong & Miller, 2000). The increasing importance of destination branding in tourism practice and academic research (Pike, 2004) is reflected in the number of studies that use content analysis to discover how destination image is formed (Lee, Cai & O'Leary, 2006; Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2006; Xiao & Smith, 2006). Content analysis has been used to examine how effective and consistent marketing can reshape and give greater complexity to cliché images of a destination (Morgan & Pritchard, 2000). Content analysis is therefore critical to understand how media reports impacts on tourism in terms of moulding destination images (Jenkins, 1999; Stabler, 1988) and through reporting of crises and disasters (Faulkner & Vikulov, 2001).

The software Leximancer Version 2.0 (Smith, 2003) is used in this research to perform content analysis. Following a scheme proposed by Krippendorff (2004; p.83) the method used in

this research involved the steps of unitizing, sampling, recording/coding, reducing data to manageable representation, abductively inferring contextual phenomena and narrating the answer to the research question. It has been observed that unitizing might occur at various places in the content analysis design and that it is critical that the researcher justifies the method adopted for unitizing (Krippendorff, 2004). This research draws on texts of newspaper articles that were obtained performed a Boolean keyword search ('Schoolies' and 'Gold Coast') within the Factiva newspaper database. The texts of newspaper articles were obtained by performing a keyword search ('Schoolies') from Australian newspaper holdings on the Factiva text base for each year from 1998 to 2004. This database covers all newspapers in Australia including major dailies such as the Courier Mail, Age, Herald Sun and the regional dailies such as the Gold Coast Bulletin. Schoolies Week is a topic of great interest to the local, regional and national press and thus was expected to be well reported. This proved to be the case with increasing numbers of articles found between 1998 (63 articles found) and 2004 (680 articles found). In order to check that the search collected in scope articles, a second independent study was conducted by an independent organization for 2004. This resulted in 688 newspaper articles being identified indicating the scope of the search was adequate.

In scope articles were downloaded as plain text and stored in electronic form for analysis. The next step was to "filter" the text to remove extraneous text using the software application. Significant contamination of the text was observed from two sources. Firstly a number of 'Schoolies' week related reports from other destinations apart from the Gold Coast were found. Secondly, the text articles downloaded were found to contain movie reviews of a film about Schoolies Week on the Gold Coast that was released in 2002. A number of sundry other topics of limited relevance to Schoolies' Week were also removed.

These contaminants were filtered out using a Leximancer software technique that involved creation of categories of related and unrelated words. For example, a category of other Schoolies destination names was created, and used to suppress any article which matched one of the names. Similarly, a category of terms relating to the movie was used to suppress those articles. Finally, an additional function of Leximancer was used that allows lexical concept development. Here words closely related to a particular word or words are found from an initial analysis of the text and stored in a concept thesaurus. In this study, a concept was seeded for Schoolies and Schoolies Week and following thesaurus adaptation, was required to be present in any text segment or the segment was ignored for further coding.

Six negative descriptors (alcohol, damage, drugs, sex, 'Toolies' and violence) identified a previous study (Scott & Smith, 2005) as commonly associated with 'Schoolies' week are considered the dependent variable of this analysis whereas 'Schoolies' is considered the independent variable. The number of sentences included in each context block in the learning phase was set at 3 and the classification was performed with 2 sentence segments.

FINDINGS

Overall the findings show that media articles reporting on the 1998 'Schoolies' event had the highest co-occurrence with negative descriptors. The incidence of co-occurrence of negative descriptors then declined from the year 2000 to 2002. However, since 2002 there is a constant and steady increase in the co-occurrence between 'Schoolies' and negative descriptors. A breakdown of the negative factor into its components shows that the incidence of sex as a negative descriptor has become less important throughout the years. Nevertheless, content analysis shows that, among the different negative components, sex has always had the strongest association to 'Schoolies' week. Consistent with an increasing concern expressed by public authorities about the use of drugs among teenagers during events like 'Schoolies' (Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee, 2004), the results show that 'drugs' as a negative descriptor has steadily increased since the year 2003 and 'drugs' and 'sex' almost contribute by the same percentage to the negative descriptor. The overall incidence of negative descriptor co-occurrence is significant at around 15%. Thus there remains a consistent negative image of

'Schoolies' week in the Australian press. The following table (Table 1) summarizes the findings about the occurrence of negative factors as a percentage of total news about Schoolies.

Table 1: Occurrence of negative factors as a percentage of total news about Schoolies

Year	Negative factor				
	sex	drugs	alcohol	violence	damage
1998	51%	23%	21%	4%	1%
1999	42%	20%	18%	18%	2%
2000	39%	35%	20%	4%	2%
2001	36%	31%	22%	6%	4%
2002	28%	24%	21%	21%	6%
2003	40%	20%	16%	15%	9%
2004	39%	29%	15%	13%	5%
2005	34%	32%	18%	13%	4%

Source: Developed for this research

Table 2 provides a selection of headlines from Queensland papers relating to Schoolies Week taken from the study period. The headlines contain numerous references to the potential for danger at Schoolies Week relating to drinking, predators, sexual attacks and drink spiking. These headlines refer to dangers that may occur at Schoolies Week and illustrate the primarily unfavourable tone of newspaper articles found from a review of newspaper article text. This provides some confirmation that the unfavourable words were used in a negative manner in the stories used in this research.

Table 2 References to "Schoolies' Week in Newspapers

Courier Mail Tuesday 30/11/ 2004	The 'fun police' will be on patrol at Schoolies Week next month as hotel managers enforce a list of hardline rules.
Sunday Mail Sunday 7/11/ 2004	The Schoolies who drink 'til they drop
Gold Coast Bulletin Monday 8/11/2004	Schoolies planning to sneak into pubs and clubs outside Surfers Paradise using fake IDs risk being caught by a new three member taskforce
Gold Coast Bulletin Thursday 25/11/2004	It's danger time for tired revellers as the predators make their play
Gold Coast Sun Wednesday 13/10/2004	Young Gold Coast women are being urged to take extra precautions against sexual attacks in the lead-up Schoolies Week

CONCLUSIONS

During the period of study, newspapers have consistently portrayed 'Schoolies' on the Gold Coast as an event associated with sex, drugs, alcohol, violence and to a lesser degree damage. In the same period of time, the Gold Coast underwent a visioning project (Faulkner & Tideswell, 2002) that produced the brand VeryGC as one of its tangible outcomes. Through the brand VeryGC and a significant investment in a communication campaign to support it, the Gold Coast aimed to position itself as a sophisticated upscale tourism destination. The marketing initiated efforts aimed to promote the brand VeryGC appeared to be at least partially counterbalanced by the constant negative publicity generated by the news coverage of 'Schoolies'. Clearly there is a need on the Gold Coast to ensure consistency between associations with the Gold Coast derived from these two different sources. This paper also advocates for the use of 'consistency' as a measure for evaluating an event proposing a qualitative method to assess it.

This paper also shows the usefulness of content analysis for DMO managers and events planner and managers in order to monitor the media coverage received by destination products and its consistency with the destination brand values in light of enhancing destination

brand equity. The use of software tools such as Leximancer and the development of electronic databases provide an opportunity to examine issues such as media portrayal of destination image in a new and useful way.

Further research on event evaluation should focus on confirming the usefulness of consistency as a criterion for brand evaluation and should expand the study of consistency not just to publicity but also to the other critical components of the destination brand equity. Examples of its use may be found in an examination of the impact of a crisis or disaster on destination image or the relationship between a country and regional brand.

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