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## **Comparing the Influence on Trip Planning Behaviour of Using Selective “Place Appeal” Versus an “All Inclusive” Style in Destination Marketing**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In the production of marketing materials, Destination Marketing Organization’s must make decisions about the prominence given to certain products and places, often to the exclusion of others. These decisions reflect political or market directions, or a mix of both. Yet, little is known about the influence on traveler behaviour of these decisions. This experimental design study compares trip planning behaviour of potential travelers using a vacation guide featuring regions with greatest appeal most prominently, versus a guide featuring all regions equally. Interestingly, a first position in a guide, or more pages of information, can have as much influence on trip planning as place appeal.*

**Keywords:** *destination marketing, brochure effectiveness, place appeal.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

As long as tourism destination organizations have been in existence, the complexity of their task to fairly represent their membership has been an issue. For public sector organizations, whether national, state, provincial or municipal, the funding provided for purposes of tourism marketing and/or development is often influenced by political factors (Ryan and Zahra, 2002), notably the mandates of equal representation and regional development, than by basic market factors such as supply and demand. Even privately funded tourism organizations, or the quasi-private-public tourism organizational model that is increasingly common, must grapple with the issue of how best to represent a mix of members. At some point in the operation of a destination marketing organization (DMO), when the marketing hits the press, a decision has been made as to the prominence given certain products and places, perhaps to the exclusion of others.

Surprisingly, given that just about every recognized DMO in the world produces marketing material that reflects either a political or market direction, or a mix of both, little is known about the influence on traveller behaviour of these decisions. The question proposed in this study is whether market-driven materials that give greater prominence to places with greater appeal are more effective than politically driven materials that are mandated to present all geographic places equally, regardless of market appeal.

A review of 2008 vacation guides produced by Canada’s three territorial and nine provincial tourism organizations (Ontario was the sole province excluded, as they no longer produce a provincial-level vacation guide) seems to support the influence of equal geographic representation of destinations. Most guides feature a map of their complete territory – some with expensive foldouts to ensure the hinterlands are included – and all inclusive coverage of the

geography in some fashion. The all inclusive coverage is presented in a number of ways. Sub-regions are a popular style, whereby a DMO's territory is divided into a number of smaller destinations. For example, Nova Scotia is divided into seven regions: Halifax, South Shore, Acadian Shores, Annapolis Valley, Northumberland, Cape Breton, and Eastern Shore; with each region described in a similar format, in a similar length. Trails are another popular style, where a territory is divided into a number of travel routes that cover the complete destination from north to south, east to west, and points between.

For the developers of such vacation guides, the all inclusive presentation style holds a number of advantages. They are logical, fair, manageable, and perhaps most easy to layout and order. Some destinations still present vacation guides alphabetically by town name, though most seem to have moved away from this rudimentary approach.

For potential travellers, however, with less familiarity of a destination of interest, the presentation of seven regions or six trails may be more confusing than helpful to the trip planning process. If, for example, after watching the 2008 Summer Olympic Games, a potential traveller has a keen interest in visiting Beijing, what would be the impact of receiving a 40-page vacation guide with only four pages dedicated to Beijing, and four pages each dedicated to nine other regions of China? (Please note, this is a fictitious example – though not an extreme one).

An alternative to the all inclusive guide with equal representation of a DMO's territory is a guide that provides greater prominence to places with greater appeal. For example, the DMO for the province of Quebec includes an early section in its guide called "cities with heart", featuring only three of its best known cities: Montreal, Quebec City, and Gatineau. Montreal is strongly associated with the destination and is Quebec's most well known city.

In this study, the authors propose that travel guides which give greater prominence to places with greater appeal are more effective marketing tools, meaning they have greater influence on potential traveller's trip planning behaviour, than guides that are all inclusive. The study approach is to compare the influence on potential travellers' trip planning of a vacation guide that equally features all regions of a DMO in an inclusive style, to a vacation guide that features places with greater appeal more prominently, and is less inclusive.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Even in the Internet age, the travel brochure remains a staple of many hospitality organizations. Particularly for DMOs, a printed travel guide or vacation planner represents a common publication typically produced annually, often requiring significant investment in development, production and distribution (Andereck, 2005; Hodgson, 1993). For the potential traveller, studies have found brochures to be a commonly used source of information (Andereck, 2005; Yamamoto and Gill, 1999; Fodness and Murray, 1999). As the Internet has moved to the forefront as the preferred travel information source (Singh and Lee, 2009), the brochure is still present as a fulfillment piece sent to web inquirers, or available as a downloadable file on travel websites.

Tourism is a marketing driven field, whereby images of destinations play a key role in branding and image building. Early studies of image and its influence in marketing evolved from the field of social psychology, where image was first presented as an organizational resource of value (Boulding, 1956). Image can be defined narrowly as a visual cue, or broadly as the total impression an entity makes on the minds of people (Dichter, 1985). Images in advertisements are seen as a useful way to shape consumers' impressions (Burns, Biswas and Babin, 1993). Interest in imagery has grown for a number of reasons. Images are thought to be

experiential, multi-sensory, more closely linked to long-term memory, of greater personal relevance, more robust and richer, resulting in a greater effect on consumer attitudes and intentions than discursive stimuli (Burns et al 1993). Experimental study of the use of pictures in print has found that visual imagery processing influences attitudinal judgements (Babin and Burns, 1997).

The influence on consumers' behaviour of images in advertising has been modeled to identify ways that pictures can influence persuasion under systematic processing conditions, whereby consumers are more likely to critically evaluate advertising messages. Pictures can substantiate an advertising claim by providing visual testimony. They can influence the type of elaboration evoked by portraying either a product detail (item-specific elaboration), or a usage occasion (relational elaboration). Lastly, pictures can influence the cognitive demands an advertisement requires. The more elements and colour in an advertisement, for example, the more cognitively demanding it is. Meyers-Levy and Malaviya (1999) infer that the more familiar a consumer is with a product, and the easier it is to comprehend an advertisement, the greater the persuasive impact of the advertisement.

Marketing has become one of the most potent sources of symbolic meaning in the consumers' world, creating, modifying and transforming cultural meanings, and dialectically, representing cultural meanings taken from the consumer's view (Elliot and Wattansasuwana, 1998). A study of symbolic interactionism and its effects on consumer behaviour (Leigh and Gabel, 1992) suggests that a company can enhance symbolic purchasing behaviour of its product through careful attention to providing a favourable symbolic image using all elements of the marketing mix in a consistent, congruent fashion; and, promotions designed to effect symbolic meaning transferral should project the actual symbols that are to be associated with the product, the relevant referents upholding the symbolism, the target segments to which the message is directed, and the benefits of accepting the proposed symbolism.

A company's visual communication is often considered the principal component of image creation (Meenaghan, 1995). A marketer's job is to create promotional material that will change consumer's attitudes in such a way as to positively affect their behaviour. The implication for tourism marketers is to present symbolic meanings that potential travelers most strongly and positively associate with their product or place in order to have the greatest influence on behaviour.

## **METHODOLOGY**

To assess the influence of a guide equally weighted by region to a guide weighted by place appeal, an experimental design survey was undertaken, whereby a vacation guide was manipulated to produce two alternative versions. The Alberta Official Vacation Guide was selected for the experiment for three reasons:

- i. An in-class assessment of all 12 Canadian provincial and territorial guides by third-year marketing students at the University of Guelph's School of Hospitality and Tourism Management ranked the Alberta guide as the most visually appealing. The researchers felt it was important to use a guide that had strong appeal in order to gauge the influence of the manipulation.
- ii. The Alberta guide includes sections for six regions, each four to six pages in length, and all presented in a similar format. It should be noted that the actual Alberta guide begins with sections featuring dining, shopping and other attractions before the regional

sections of the guide. These pages were not included in the experiment, so that the test would focus solely on the manipulated presentation of regions. Thus, the experiment does not reflect an assessment of the actual Alberta Vacation Guide. It is a comparative evaluation of two manipulated versions.

iii. Alberta is a destination that features a mix of well known, iconic places, such as the Canadian Rockies and Banff National Park, along with numerous lesser known places, such as the Railway Station Museum in Camrose. This mix of known and unknown places reflects the reality of many destinations, and also allowed the researchers to create two very distinct versions of the same guide.

The methodology used to create two versions of the Alberta guide is presented in Table 1. The desired outcome of the manipulation was to create one version that featured each region equally, beginning with the Edmonton Region; and, one version that featured places with greater appeal more prominently, thus beginning with the Canadian Rockies Region.

Several decision steps were taken to derive a method of weighting that reflected place appeal. First, the weighting is dependent upon the statistics selected for the calculation. Rather than using the regional number of visitors, or person-trips, as the base figure, the percentage of provincial tourism revenues by region is used as the base figure (column a). By using revenues instead of person-trips, greater importance is given to tourists and overnight visitors whose per trip expenditures are typically higher than the visiting friends and relatives (VFR) traveller. For example, the Central Region received 22% of Alberta tourists, but only 11% of provincial tourism revenues, reflecting the fact that almost one-third (32%) of visitors to the Central Region are VFR. By contrast, the Rockies received 17% of Alberta tourists, but 23% of provincial tourism revenues, reflecting not only a high percentage of pleasure visitors (74%), but also the fact that 67% of overseas travellers to Alberta visit the Rockies (Alberta Tourism, Parks & Recreation, 2008).

**Table 1**  
**Method of Weighting Destination Region Appeal**

<b>Alberta Vacation Guide Regions</b>	Equal number of pages in Brochure Version #1	(a) % of provincial tourism revenues <sup>1</sup>	(b) % of tourism revenues from trip purpose "pleasure" <sup>1</sup>	(a) x (b) = appeal index by region	Weighted number of pages in Brochure Version #2
Rockies	4	23	74	17.02	10
Calgary	4	22	34	7.48	5
Edmonton	4	23	28	6.44	4
Central	4	11	32	3.52	2
South	4	7	45	3.15	2
North	4	7	24	1.68	1
	24			39.29	24

1. Alberta Tourism, Parks & Recreation (2008) statistics based on Statistics Canada 2004 Canadian Travel Survey and International Travel Survey

Behind the decision to focus the calculations of Table 1 on revenues, and further, on revenues from travellers whose trip purpose is for pleasure (column b), and not whose trip

purpose is business or VFR, is a marketing decision that the vacation guide is most effective as a medium for influencing pleasure travel. Focused marketing requires focused decision-making. This is not to say that business travel, typically a high expenditure segment, and VFR travel, a contributor to restaurants, festivals, and many other local attractions, are not important. However, business and VFR are more effectively influenced by factors beyond a vacation guide. To mix market targets could potentially dilute the effectiveness of the guide to influence pleasure travel.

Two colour versions of the Alberta guide were distributed randomly to students at two institutions; the University of Guelph's School of Hospitality and Tourism Management (Canada), and the College of Charleston's Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management (U.S.). Testing at two institutions, one Canadian and one American, was chosen so that the influence of familiarity with the selected destination could be considered. Students were given one version of the guide along with a survey that asked them to envision planning a trip after graduation, at the beginning of their working careers, according to the following scenario:

*You and your friend both work for the same company and the two of you have been sent by the company to a one-day meeting in Calgary, Alberta. You flew into Calgary Friday morning and went straight to a hotel where the meeting was held. The meeting included dinner and lasted well into the evening. As the day wrapped up, you headed to your hotel room for the night. You receive a message from the company informing you that you can either fly back home Saturday morning, or, they will book you a flight for a later date if you prefer to stay in the area for some vacation time.*

Students were then instructed to use the Alberta guide to record an itinerary for as short or long as they would like to visit Alberta, up to the maximum of their two weeks vacation. Additionally, the survey captured respondents' impressions of Alberta and travel, and demographic data for descriptive purposes. While the generalizability of student sample data can be questioned, it was selected for the purposes of this study because of the length of time required to complete the survey (approximately 20 minutes) and because the experiment was meant to capture respondents' reaction to a guide, not to measure actual travel volume.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In all, 146 students completed the survey; 65 from the University of Guelph and 81 from the College of Charleston; 76 completions based on the "place appeal" unequal brochure version, and 70 based on the "equal region" all inclusive version, divided fairly evenly between the two institutions. Three quarters of respondents were female, almost all aged 18 to 23 (94%), reflecting the composition of the classes surveyed. The two samples were quite homogeneous, with the exception of previous travel to Alberta, which not surprisingly was much more common amongst the Guelph students (38%) than Charleston students (4%). However, previous visitation to Alberta did not significantly influence the number of days planned for their hypothetical trip.

Table 2 compares the mean number of days planned in each of the six regions of Alberta by brochure version. The hypothesized result was that the "place appeal" version, featuring the Canadian Rockies most prominently and allocating few pages for the lesser known Central, South and North Regions, would be more effective as measured by number of trip days planned. However, an analysis of variance between trip days and brochure version indicates that the

differences are only significant for Calgary and the Central Region ( $p < .100$ ) and very close to significant for the Rockies ( $p = .105$ ).

**Table 2**  
**Comparison of Mean Number of Days Planned in each Region**

Brochure Version		Days by Region						TTLDays
		Edmonton	Calgary	Rockies	South	Central	North	
1. Presentation of all regions - equally	Mean	<b>1.0786</b>	1.0000	1.8214	<b>.3143</b>	<b>.3143</b>	<b>.3714</b>	4.9714
	N	70	70	70	70	70	70	70
	Std. Dev.	1.03432	.95173	1.45222	.62654	.69246	.70549	2.21799
2. Presentation by place appeal – unequally	Mean	.9934	<b>1.3224</b>	<b>2.2697</b>	.2895	.0461	.2763	5.2500
	N	76	76	76	76	76	76	76
	Std. Dev.	1.05670	1.29539	1.82472	.68927	.20294	.90331	2.69011
ANOVA	F	.241	2.895	2.668	0.52	10.436	.497	.462
	N	146	146	146	146	146	146	146
	Sig.	.624	.091*	.105	.821	.002*	.482	.498

\*ANOVA is significant at  $p < .100$ .

Interestingly, for all regions, the average number of days planned in each is congruent with the manipulated number and order of brochure pages. For Calgary and the Rockies, the number of days planned in each of these regions is higher in Version 2 – the “place appeal” brochure that features more pages for Calgary and the Rockies than the “equal region” version. For the South, Central and North Regions, the number of days is higher in Version 1 – the “equal region” brochure that features more pages for these three regions than in the “place appeal” version. For Edmonton, the number of days is slightly higher in Version 1 – the “equal region” brochure. Even though the number of pages for Edmonton was the same in both brochures, Edmonton was featured first in the “equal region” brochure, and third in the “place appeal” brochure, after the Rockies and Calgary. Though most differences are not statistically significant, the fact that in all cases the number of days planned in a region correlates with the prominence given to the region in the brochures suggests some degree of influence. As additional support for the marketing strength of place appeal, the Version 2 brochure stimulated a 5.25 day trip in Alberta, 5.6% longer than the Version 1 brochure.

Another measure of the influence of the brochure version on traveler behavior was the expected trip highlight that respondents identified when asked to state what they felt the overall highlight of their trip would be. The named highlights were then coded by region. Table 3 compares the top regions for trip highlights by brochure version. The relatively high number of unknowns reflects responses that could not be coded to a specific region (e.g. skiing, hiking, the views, etc.). Here, the Rockies are considerably more popular in the “place appeal” brochure

version, identified most often as the top region, and consistent with the greater prominence given to this region in brochure version 2. Edmonton, on the other hand, was mentioned less often in the “place appeal” version, consistent with the less prominent position it was given in brochure version 2. The other differences are not significant.

**Table 3**  
**Comparison of Top Region for Trip Highlight**

Brochure Version	No. of Trip Highlights Mentioned by Region							Total
	Edmonton	Calgary	Rockies	South	Central	North	unknown	
1. All regions - equal	11	13	24	2	1	1	15	67
2. Place appeal - unequal	6	10	36	3	0	1	17	73
<b>Total</b>	17	23	60	5	1	2	32	140

Additional evidence suggests that the order in which places are featured in a brochure influences traveler plans, found by examining the sequencing of the trip itineraries identified by respondents. For both the “place appeal” and “equal region” versions, respondents’ itineraries follow the order of the regions as presented in the brochure version they received. So for the “equal region” version that presented Edmonton first, then Calgary, then the Rockies, it was most common for respondents to begin their trip itineraries in Edmonton (31 times), then Calgary (20 times), then the Rockies (12 times). Whereas for the “place appeal” version that presented the Rockies first, then Calgary, then Edmonton, it was most common for respondents to begin their trip itineraries in the Rockies (33 times), then Calgary (30 times), then Edmonton (6 times). The results quite logically illustrate the influence of regional order on itinerary planning. Potential travelers appear to follow the order that is presented to them in brochure format, seemingly taking the brochure sequence as a recommended trip pattern.

### CONCLUSION

This paper presents the findings of an experimental study comparing two manipulated versions of a tourist brochure to assess the influence on traveler behaviour. The initial proposition, that travel guides which give greater prominence to places with greater appeal are more effective marketing tools than guides that equally present all regions of a DMO, is partially supported by the findings. The hypothesized result, that the “place appeal” brochure version, prominently featuring the Canadian Rockies and allocating few pages to lesser known regions, would stimulate more planned trip days than the “equal region” version, was only supported statistically for Calgary and the Central Region ( $p < .100$ ) and was very close to significant for the Rockies ( $p = .105$ ). The total trip days planned by respondents using version 1 and version 2 equalled 4.97 days and 5.25 days respectively – not a statistically significant difference, but in the hypothesized direction.

Notably, the average number of days planned in each region is congruent with the manipulated number and order of brochure pages. Respondents using the “place appeal” brochure that features the Rockies and Calgary most prominently do plan more days in these



regions, and fewer days in the lesser known regions that receive only one or two pages. Likewise, respondents using the “equal region” brochure do plan more days in the lesser known regions that are given equal space. The “place appeal” brochure also seems to influence the selection of the Rockies as the top region, and the first region of respondents’ planned itineraries.

DMO marketers, it seems, can influence travelers’ trip planning by their selection and presentation of place and product. A first position in a travel guide, or more pages of information, and a region can attract the interest of more travelers. While intuitive, empirical findings to support these conclusions are rare in the tourism literature, and difficult to conclude given so many factors that can influence travel decisions. A significant consideration is the objectives of the DMO. If regional development is a primary goal, then marketing material should be developed with consideration given to the desired equities of distribution. If maximization of visitation is a primary goal, then marketing material should highlight product and places with the greatest appeal.

The findings of this study suggest that marketers have within their control the ability to influence traveler behaviour. This is a responsibility that requires additional research to fully understand. The limitations of a student sample, and only partial statistical support for the hypothesized proposal, limit the generalizability of the results. Yet it is an important subject, given the vast expenditures on tourism marketing on both old and new media, which continue to grow, and to be influenced by both market and political directions.

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