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Research Paper

Effectiveness of intra-destination television advertising of tourist attractions and facilities

Daniel M. Spencer*

School of Travel Industry Management, University of Hawaii at Manoa, 2560 Campus Road, George Hall 216, Honolulu, HI 96822, USA

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ABSTRACT

Many destinations contain television channels that primarily exist to advertise tourist attractions and facilities to the destinations' visitors. However, no empirical research has been published on the effectiveness of such advertising. To help fill this information void, this article reports results from visitor intercept surveys designed to evaluate a tourist-oriented cable TV channel in the Black Hills of South Dakota, USA. The results were consistent with theoretical expectations. Respondents who watched the channel, compared to those who did not, decided to take a trip that involved visiting the Black Hills significantly fewer days prior to their departures, were more likely to have stated that the Hills or a place therein was the main destination of these trips, and spent more money in the Hills on their trips. During the 30-day study period, about 10.4% of visitor parties had heard of the channel, 5.3% had watched it, and 2.0% were influenced "a great deal" to visit one or more featured attractions or facilities. Estimated audience size was 15,000 visitors and estimated advertising returns on investment for two prominent commercial attractions were \$9.20 and \$14.00. Suggestions for further research are advanced.

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1. Introduction

Many of the decisions related to lodging, dining, shopping, entertainment, and outdoor recreation that tourists make in destinations are not planned prior to tourists' departures (Crotts & Reid, 1993; Hyde & Lawson, 2003; March & Woodside, 2005). Consequently, tourist attractions and facilities often advertise to tourists in and near the destinations in which they are located. Such advertising typically takes the form of billboards; tourist-oriented directional signs (Dornbusch & Kawczynska, 1992); information kiosks (Kingsley & Fesenmaier, 1995); posters, brochures, rack cards, and visitor guides, often displayed in or disseminated through visitor information and booking centers (Gunn & Var, 2002); and intra-destination television programs (Colton, 1970; Ortega & Rodriguez, 2007).

The collective success of tourist attractions and facilities in such advertising contributes to the success of the destinations in which they are located because the ensuing patronage of such entities increases tourist length of stay and expenditures in the destination. Recognizing this, many destination marketing organizations construct and staff the visitor information and booking centers at which tourist attractions and facilities often advertise through the means listed above (Pitegoff & Smith, 2003). Thus, maximizing

tourist length of stay and expenditures is a basic function of the visitor industries in destinations (Swarbrooke, 1999) and a logical means by which such industries can fully benefit from the massive investments they make in attracting tourists to their areas in the first place. Such efforts can be termed "internal advertising," in contradistinction to the "external advertising" designed to compel people to visit the destination. Some promotional vehicles, such as brochures, visitor guides, and websites, can function as both external and internal advertising.

Of the various forms of internal advertising, intra-destination TV advertising is the most sensory rich. Its persuasive potential derives from the unique ability of TV advertising to engage the senses, attract attention, provide entertainment, generate excitement, demonstrate products and services in use, reach consumers one on one, and employ humor (Shimp, 2010). Since the attractions and facilities in destinations often cannot be inspected prior to tourists patronizing them, the ability of intra-destination TV advertising to demonstrate products and services in use, with vividness and realness (Wilmschurst & Mackay, 1999), is especially important. The persuasive potential of intra-destination TV advertising is further supported by its apparent popularity among tourists. In a study of tourists in Spain, Ortega and Rodriguez (2007, p. 148) found that "information in a 10/15-minute film on the hotel room TV" was positively evaluated by 74.0% of international visitors and 81.7% of domestic visitors.

Unlike external TV advertising, intra-destination TV advertising is directed to travelers rather than people in their homes.

* Tel.: +1 808 956 8124; fax: +1 808 956 5378.

E-mail address: dan.spencer@hawaii.edu

In addition, its primary function as advertising, rather than entertainment, as well as its orientation to in-destination rather than at-home audiences, distinguishes it from TV travel shows. Its primary function as advertising also distinguishes it from interactive systems that enable hotel guests to use the TVs in their rooms to make housekeeping requests, book local tours, browse the Internet, place room service orders, make dining reservations, etc.

As evidenced by the various examples cited in the next section, intra-destination TV advertising is widely employed in many regions of the world. Yet the effectiveness of such advertising has not been the focus of a single refereed journal article. This is unfortunate because attraction, facility, and destination marketers clearly need information on the effectiveness of all available types of advertising in order to intelligently allocate advertising budgets across such types, especially in these times of fiscal constraints, increasing competition, and heightened challenges related to crisis management and sustainability. The oft-repeated adage originally attributed to British industrialist Viscount Leverhulme, "Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted, and the trouble is I don't know which half" (Ogilvy, 1963, p. 59) highlights the continuing need to place such decisions on an objective basis.

The purpose of this article is to contribute to the development of a knowledge base on the effectiveness of intra-destination TV advertising, drawing upon data collected in tourist intercept surveys designed to evaluate an intra-destination, tourist-oriented general cable TV channel in the Black Hills of South Dakota, USA. At the time of the study in 2005, 15 attractions and one in-hotel, upscale restaurant were featured on the channel in continuously looping half-hour segments. The study was funded by the operator of the channel, who only wanted results on the effectiveness of the channel in stimulating visitation to the entities featured thereon to help him market the channel to existing and potential advertisers. Consequently, the results are necessarily focused on advertising effectiveness at the entity level; exploring destination-level issues, such as the extent to which the advertising extended visitors' lengths of stay, increased their expenditures, encouraged repeat visitation, and/or stimulated recommendations to friends and relatives, was beyond the scope of the inquiry.

Study results were reported to the client in late 2005. The underlying data have obviously aged in the interim and readers should interpret the results presented below within the context of the time period in which the data were collected. Notwithstanding this limitation, the data are still useful because so little research on intra-destination TV advertising has been conducted that all available data on it have a role to play in developing a better understanding of this subject. The results reported below can serve to generate insights and stimulate questions to guide further research in this area of inquiry and provide baseline information in establishing trends and constants with respect to the use and effectiveness of this mode of advertising. In particular, these results can provide a baseline for determining the extent to which the currently more widespread use of mobile information and communication technologies by tourists in destinations may have increased or decreased the effectiveness of intra-destination TV advertising.

Intra-destination TV channels vary widely in their content and mode of delivery. To more fully describe the nature of intra-destination TV advertising and to ensure that the results of this study are unambiguously ascribed to a particular type of intra-destination TV channel rather than to such channels in general, a typology of intra-destination TV channels is provided in the next section. This is followed by a review of relevant literature to place the study in the context of both theoretical and applied research in this area. Given the highly applied nature of

the study, the information needs of the client, rather than the theoretical literature reviewed below, guided its design. Such literature is nevertheless reviewed because it provides useful perspectives for interpreting results and making suggestions for further research. Following the literature review, the study region and research methods are described. Next, results are reported on the estimated size of the channel's audience, the characteristics of visitors who watched the channel, the extent to which the channel compelled visits to the entities advertised thereon, and the estimated advertising return on investment (AROI) for two major commercial attractions featured thereon. In the final section conclusions are drawn and suggestions for further research are advanced.

2. A typology of intra-destination TV channels

Intra-destination TV channels can be most basically categorized as those that disseminate content in a continuous loop and those that do not. The latter intersperse paid advertising spots with programming spots, some of which might be local news. For example, The Tourism TV Channel (www.tourismtvchannel.com) targets visitors to Phuket Island, Thailand with 24-h English-language programming on Thai lifestyle, culture, and places of interest, as well as local news, interspersed with tourist-oriented advertising, broadcast through the Island's main cable TV companies. The Destination Network (www.destinationnetwork.com/index.htm) is a collection of similar TV channels operating in southeastern USA.

The channels that disseminate continuously looping content are disseminated through hotel TV systems and/or general cable TV networks or webcasting. Those that disseminate content through hotels involve fixed, prerecorded, continuously cycling 1- to 4-min advertisements that are much longer than external TV advertising spots. The operators of such channels usually generate revenues entirely from advertisers and the hotels incur no costs for serving as a host. Cooperation from hoteliers is usually secured by convincing them that the channel will reduce guest inquiries about nearby attractions and that their properties' amenities can be showcased in the continuous content. The technology typically consists of a server that is plugged directly into the hotels' existing television systems. Advertising is updated through a central facility via the Internet.

Tourist TV (www.inside-shanghai.com), which broadcasts in hotels in Hong Kong, Macau, and Shanghai English- and Mandarin-language programming featuring the attractions, dining, shopping, nightlife, events, and transportation in these cities on a closed loop basis, 48 times a day, is an example of this type of channel. Additional examples include the Singapore Tourism Channel (www.singaporetourismchannel.com), Visitors TV Network (www.tourvideo.com/), Destination Connection TV (dctv.ws/index.php), Hawaii Visitor Television (hawaiivisitortelevision.com), and The Indy Visitors Channel (indyvisitorschannel.com/home).

The Bahamas Tourism Channel (www.BahamasTourismChannel.com), webcast to over 9000 hotel rooms in Nassau and Paradise Island, cruise ships at Festival Place, and Nassau Airport, is an example of intra-destination TV channels that disseminate continuously looping advertising through general cable TV networks or webcasting. Additional examples of this type of channel exist in St. Kitts and Nevis (www.stkittsvisitorchannel.com); the Dominican Republic (www.drtravelstv.com/index.php); Maui, Hawaii (www.paradisetelevision.com/); and the Big Island of Hawaii (bigislandtv.com).

The Tourist Channel (www.touristchannel.tv) is an example of an intra-destination TV channel with dual modes of dissemination. It delivers non-stop, full-motion TV commercials about recreation

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