



Tourism brochures: Linking message strategies, tactics and brand destination attributes



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H I G H L I G H T S

- An extensive inventory of executional tactics can be applied in brochure concept.
- Relationship among tactics, strategies & destination attributes is analyzed.
- A single brand destination attribute may work with many message strategies.
- Connection between destination attributes & executional tactics is rather loose.
- On average, each message strategy is associated with 17 executional tactics.

A R T I C L E I N F O

Article history:

Received 2 June 2014

Accepted 20 October 2014

Available online

Keywords:

Brochures
Message strategies
Executional tactics
Destination attributes
CHAID

A B S T R A C T

Brochures are a versatile and ubiquitous tourism advertising medium. Although almost all types of advertisement message strategies are considered in brochure development and production, the relationship of those strategies with brand destination attributes has not been studied. Likewise an extensive inventory of executional tactics can be applied to put forward a brochure concept. This research shows the relationship among executional tactics, message strategies and destination attributes in 400 tourism brochures from around the world. On average, each message strategy is associated with seventeen executional tactics. A single brand destination attribute may work with many message strategies. However, the connection between destination attributes and executional tactics is rather loose. This media-centered approach study will provide a benchmarking profile to advertising agency and tourism destination managers in their endeavor to develop brochures.

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1. Introduction

Creativity and effectiveness are two key objectives sought after by brand managers or communication agencies, although not exclusively. As long as communication is an investment the return on investment is a rational aim in the minds of business people. The need to scrutinize creativity and to measure advertising performance has led researchers to further debate and be aware of the process of ad development, which drives the two main objectives mentioned above. In that respect the question arises –which task is more essential: the message strategy or the creative execution?

This classic controversy has historically opposed David Ogilvy's (1963) philosophical method and the pragmatic approach staged by Burnett (Mayer, 1958). Within a marketing communication plan both components are more complementary than conflicting (Lane, King, & Russell, 2010). Traditionally, the definition of “how to say” (creative execution) tends to be the agency's job, subject to brand advertiser approval, whereas guidelines on “what to say” (message strategy) are the result of shared contributions by the agency and the advertiser (Lane et al., 2010; C.R. Taylor, 2005). A set of message strategy typologies together with a long list of executional tactics make up a menu from which an advertising solution can be drawn up. An ad is a (creative) combination of executional possibilities (layout, design, color, music, celebrities, etc.) which meets the delineated message strategy (Smith & Yang, 2004). Finally, a specific brand-related identity (logo, brand signature and information) is incorporated into the ad, conveying an appropriate sales argument (or distinctive brand attribute).

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In the literature these three research domains – message strategies, executional tactics and brand destination attributes – emerge in a disconnected manner. Nevertheless, at both the theoretical and operational level the three dimensions are considered together whenever a creative decision-making process is undertaken. Tourism destination managers or brand owners are concerned about communicating their destination brand attributes effectively, whereas an advertising agency aims at persuading their client that the choices of executional tactics are effectively translated into an acceptable creative proposition. So why is the link between these three topics so under-researched? Some of the underlying typologies are not recent, having begun in the seventies and were re-conceptualized at the beginning of the new millennium. Our research follows a rather phenomenological approach since we focus exclusively on the advertising objects *per se* – the communicational characteristics of brochures – not the creative agency's intentions, clients' briefing or on the nature and extent of ad impact on audience psychology.

In the tourism industry, brochures are a distinctive advertising medium. They have multifunctional purposes, oriented to persuading or conveying a more general interest focus on a specific market segment profile. But they all share a common trait: to be a practical tool in helping tourists answer place-specific questions such as what to see and why, and how to get there. The conception and production of brochures has to address design and communication criteria in order to make them more appealing to the eyes of a potential reader, that is, increasing the likelihood of someone taking it from a rack and being effectively influenced by the offers it conveys (Pennisi, Gunawan, Major, & Winder, 2011). Technically, this depends on the tourism marketers' choice of brochure design in regard to size, format (folding options, e.g.), paper and print quality, density of copy, typography, graphics, layout style and content (Pennisi et al., 2011; Pritchard & Morgan, 1995). The last component comprises both the text and visual elements. The visual factors are particularly powerful in conveying imagery to represent the attractions (Moriarty, 1985).

We undertook a media-centered or agency-centered analysis since the aim was toward a phenomenological understanding of the logic behind the combination of a specific message strategy and the tools (executional tactics) used to convey the communication (brochure). Brochure design should reflect unique destination characteristics – the attributes. Whereas the image is for a tourist's mental elaboration, attributes are the chosen differentiated features that the destination managers want to emphasize in the communication process. Therefore, this research undertakes an analysis of how the three dimensions of message strategies, executional tactics and brand destination attributes have been linked and connected in the development of brochures.

2. Typologies and background theories

In the literature several typologies or categorizations of message strategies, executional tactics and informative content (brand persuasive copy) have been considered according to discrete research agendas:

- The message structure is a framework created by Shimp (1976, p. 31) "to describe the techniques employed by TV ads for presenting commercial messages". Eleven structural subcategories are organized into four types, which when cross-tabulated with ad product categories allow identifying their incidence. To systematize a final set of ninety "individual aspect" descriptions of commercials in a more objective way, McEwen and Leavitt (1976) used factor analysis, obtaining twelve consistent dimensions designated as a 'key elements inventory.' Since TV

commercials stimulate several senses (not only verbal and/or visual), Haley, Richardson, and Baldwin (1984) enriched the executional element repertoire with seventeen nonverbal communication types identified in movie ads.

- Those typologies of executional tactics or styles were instrumental for the analysis of the effectiveness of ads. By isolating the executional tactics (copy variables) into message content, mechanical and product-class variables, Holbrook and Lehmann (1980) assessed the relative effect of magazine ads on Starch Readership Scores. Laskey, Fox, and Crask (1994) tested Shimp's executional styles and product categories for TV commercial recall, message comprehension and persuasion. They measured the impact of executional factors on ad performance and discovered that the selected explanatory variable had changed compared with previous studies, and they also tested a varied number and different types of executional formats. Taking into consideration all those conditions they found that "no single executional factor accounted for more than 6% of the variance of any measure" (Stewart & Furse, 2000, p. 87; Stewart & Koslow, 1989).
- Frazer (1983) proposed seven alternative message strategies. He acknowledged the difficulty of making a clear separation of execution from message strategy. A partial overlap between two categories showed a certain inconsistency in producing exclusive categories (Laskey, Day, & Crask, 1989). More recently Taylor's (1999) conceptualization, rooted in several theoretical models of consumer psychology, proposed six major message strategies. The value of a typology lies in its ability to classify elements in order to maximize intra-category homogeneity and inter-category heterogeneity (Kluge, 2000). Subsequently it provides sound criteria to structurally give rise to mutually exclusive and exhaustive types of message strategies. The operationalization of Taylor's analytical tool seems to confirm its robustness (Golan & Zaidner, 2008; Hwang, McMillan, & Lee, 2003; Lee, Taylor, & Chung, 2011; R.E. Taylor, 2005).
- The discussion about whether ads should be more informative or merely persuasive as a pre-condition for effectiveness prompted a research agenda centered on the categorization of advertising information content, especially based on print ads. Originally Resnick and Stern (1977) applied fourteen criteria on ad information for a systematic classification of TV commercials, and later extended them to magazine ads (Stern, Krugman, & Resnik, 1981). Those information signals and content were shown to be influential both in persuading and informing, since there was no persuasion without relevant information (Laband, 1989). The following list of categorization studies were undertaken to analyze informational content: the evolution of the interplay between executional tactics versus information (Pollay, 1985); the cross-cultural perspective of informational content and emotional appeals in print ads (Biswas, Olsen, & Carlet, 1992; Graham, Kamins, & Oetomo, 1993); the varying nature and intensity of attributes/claims informativeness according to the industry (Healey & Kassarjian, 1983); an analysis of the trend toward(s) less verbal and more visual/open ads (Ketelaar, Van Gisbergen, & Bosman, 2004); the cross-cultural aspects of the visual forms used in print advertising (Bu, Kim, & Lee, 2009). The inclusion of some symbolic territory identity claims has also deserved content analysis. The state flag, state colors, maps, scenes with flowers, animals and landscapes or cowboy-related imaginary were among the brochure executional tactics under dispute for several Texas tourism spots (Avraham & Daugherty, 2012).
- A growing number of studies have been done on online advertising presence and influence. At the most basic level only the delivery or distribution mode changes, since the content format

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