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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the overlap and gap between the communication efforts of destination marketing organisations (DMO)'s and consumer perspectives of tourism destination within Australia. This paper applies qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Three stages of analysis are discussed. The web site content of state tourism authorities are analysed using Leximancer. The results show that states are using differing perceptual dimensions to portray characteristics of state tourism destinations. It is also found that consumers can recall the slogans and positioning of some states to a much greater extent than others. Finally it was shown that there was little correspondence and consistency between state positioning slogans and the destination promise and actual content on the web site.

Keywords

Regional, Branding, Perspectives, tourists, Australia

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Regional Branding: Perspectives of tourists in Australia

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the overlap and gap between the communication efforts of destination marketing organisations (DMO)'s and consumer perspectives of tourism destination within Australia. This paper applies qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Three stages of analysis are discussed. The web site content of state tourism authorities are analysed using Leximancer. The results show that states are using differing perceptual dimensions to portray characteristics of state tourism destinations. It is also found that consumers can recall the slogans and positioning of some states to a much greater extent than others. Finally it was shown that there was little correspondence and consistency between state positioning slogans and the destination promise and actual content on the web site.

Keywords: branding, regional branding, Australia, tourist perspectives

NOTE: Presenter is asterisked.

Regional Branding: Perspectives of Tourists in Australia

Introduction

Branding, brand images and brand personality have been popular topics in the marketing and tourism literature. Local versus global branding has been a popular area of discussion. (e.g. Schuiling and Kapferer, 2004; Hsieh, 2004; Green and Smith, 2004; Gillespie et al., 2002). Another area addressed is country branding (Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Papadopolous and Heslop, 2002; Riege and Perry, 2000; Otabil, 2004; Pitt et al., 2007) versus regional branding, for example the branding of cities, regions, towns and places (Olins, 2004; Hankinson, 2004; Ward, 1998; Manrai and Manrai, 1993; Whitelock et al., 1995; Pitt et al., 2007; Murphy et al. 2007).

There have been attempts to apply and to clarify these overlapping theories of tourism by Tasci and Kozak (2006), and Hosany et al. (2006). An integrated definition of branding for destination marketing organisations (DMOs) is proposed by Blain et al. (2005, pg. 331):

“The marketing activities (1) that *support* the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates a destination; (2) that *convey* the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; and (3) that *serve* to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience, all with the intent purpose of creating an image that influences consumers’ decisions to visit the destination in question, as opposed to an alternative one.”

Destination brand image and personality delivered through destination brand communications, need to be measured to determine the overlap and gap between what is in the consumer’s mind (perspective) and what the DMO is trying to communicate to prospective customers. This exercise assists in building strong tourism destination brands and in facilitating consumer decision-making processes (Williams and Palmer, 1999, pg. 273). For example, Murphy et al. (2007) examine destination brand personality value to differentiate two regional destinations in Queensland, Australia.

Communication of brand messages via official web sites is a main source of consumer information nowadays. Mullin (2000) states web sites are an important and competitive tool for the acquisition of new customers. Recent research was conducted by McCartney et al. (2008) on the destination brand image of Macao held by inbound travellers. The results show that Internet or e-mail is one of the top three information sources for Macao. The research of Xiang et al. (2008, pg.138) is consistent with the integrated definition provided by Blain et al. (2005). This research focuses on the importance of online tourism domain which comprises those technological elements and information entities related to travel. Tourism Australia has an interesting web page, which includes links to all states and territory destinations. Each of the entities attempts to communicate their destinations based on what they have to offer or what they perceive that they have to offer.

How successful are these attempts of online communication of brand image? This paper aims to explore the overlap and gap between DMO’s communication efforts and the consumer’s perspective of tourism destination within Australia.

Method

This paper utilises both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Qualitative methodologies are useful in tourism and international marketing research (Tucker, 2005; Sinkovics et al., 2005). Moreover, content analysis has been found to be valuable in analysing text and content (Neuman, 2003; Kassirjian, 1977; Kolbe and Burnett, 1991; Murgolo-Poore et al., 2002). This paper analyses the official web sites of Australian states using content analysis of the destination text and then utilises the Leximancer program to capture and analyse this text. Maps are developed to better understand the overall picture provided by these web sites as well as the images that the regional tourism organisations endeavour to communicate to consumers. The Leximancer program can be used to compare the web site content of destinations (see www.leximancer.com for more detail). It has been widely used by researchers in marketing and tourism, for example, Martin and Rice (2007), Smith and Humphreys (2006), and Scott and Smith (2005).

During the second stage of this research, SPSS analysis is applied. Secondary data from Roy Morgan Research Centre (RMRC), Australia is utilised to assess the image of each Australian state that is held by respondents. RMRC collected these data in 2006 and 2007 from a face-to-face survey and a self-completion questionnaire survey. A large sample of 46,000 Australian respondents was interviewed. The data has been weighted to indicate exact representation of the Australian population. The sample is representative of the Australian population and therefore includes travellers and non-travellers. In the third stage, the findings of the preceding stages are compared and related to the tourism theme of each state.

Results

Leximancer analysis was applied to the text content of the official web sites of the tourism authorities of all six Australian states. Figure 1 shows Leximancer output for NSW and Victoria. The words occurring in the Victorian web site relate to history, heritage, wine, night activity and fishing. NSW content relates to beaches, Sydney, world heritage and parks.

Table 1 shows a comparison of key words for all six states. The personality and the positions of the states become evident in this comparison. Queensland content relates to beaches, world heritage, rain forest and snorkelling. Some states appear to rely on content that jumps on the band wagon using traditional Australian images.

Table 2 presents the current destination slogan for the tourism authorities of all six Australian states. It was expected that the web site content, would reflect either factually or emotionally on the state brand position and slogan messages.

RMRC data are analysed using SPSS. Table 3 indicates the accuracy of aided recall of these state slogans. The findings show that the Queensland and Victoria slogans are more accurately recalled than those of other states.

There is a significant gap between the slogan attributes and images developed and communicated by the state tourism authorities and the content of the official websites. In many cases these slogans are non-specific and ambiguous. An exception is South Australia which is positioned as a brilliant blend. Key words in the web site content of South Australia did indicate a blend of Past, Sea, Colourful, Aboriginal and Swim. It would seem logical that the desired positioning of the state should be reinforced from within the web site. In fact the application of integrated marketing communications would dictate that main messages are

reinforced wherever possible. It would seem that there is a danger of separate identities developing between the web site and the main positioning slogan. If Western Australia promotes “Welcome to Western Australia” then the web site should also discuss the people of Western Australia, the welcome that visitors might expect or the friendliness that they might receive.

Figure 1 Map Comparison of Victoria and New South Wales Tourism States Web Sites

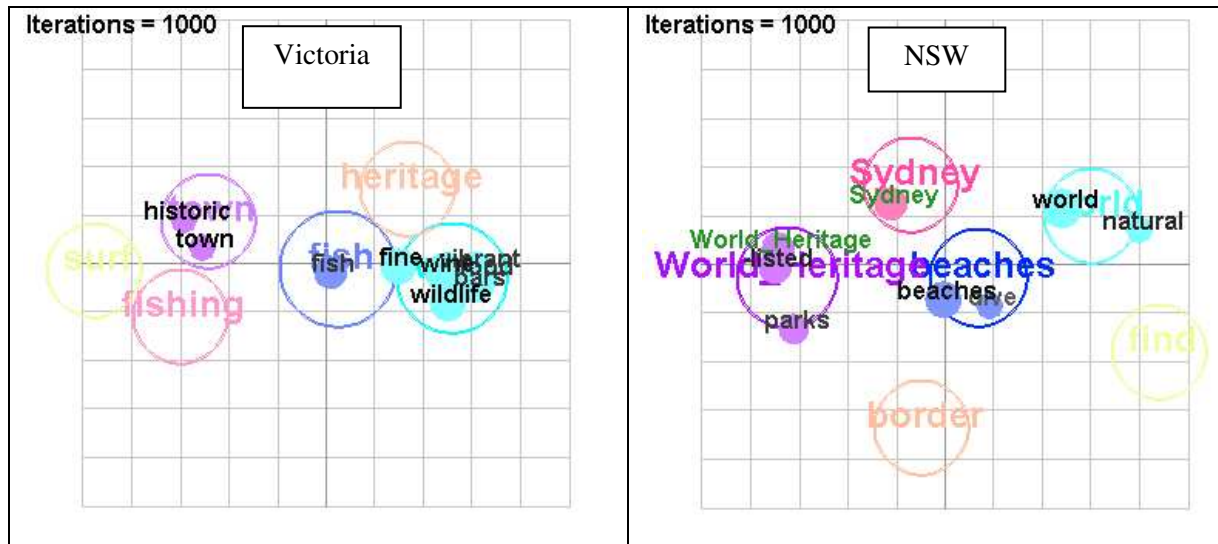


Table 1 Top-Five Wording Comparison of Six Tourism States Web Sites

Words	VIC	NSW	QLD	SA	TAS	WA
Historic	7				8	
Fine	7					
Town	7					
Wildlife	7					
Explore	6					
World		7				
Beaches		6	12			7
Natural		5				
World Heritage		5	6		6	
Sydney		5				
Rainforest			18			
Snorkel			7			

Fish			6			
Past				8		
Sea				7	5	
Colourful				6		
Aboriginal				5		
Swim				5		
Walk					8	
Wilderness					6	
Drive						7
Landscape						7
Surf						5
Outback						5

Table 2 Tourism Slogan Campaign of Six Australian States

States	Slogan Campaign
Victoria	You'll Love every piece of Victoria
New South Wales	New South Wales There's no place like it
Queensland	Where else but Queensland
South Australia	South Australia A brilliant blend
Tasmania	Tasmania Island of Inspiration
Western Australia	Welcome to Western Australia

Table 3 Accuracy of aided recall of state slogans

State	Correct Percentage
Queensland	72.6
SA	17.2
Victoria	56.2
Tasmania	33.7
WA	24.4 **
NSW	10.4

Source: Roy Morgan Research Centre data 2005 -2006

**** Slogan for WA was changed since the period of data collection.**

Conclusion

This paper aims to explore the overlap and gap between DMO's communication efforts and consumer perspectives of tourism destinations within Australia. The web site content of state tourism authorities are analysed using Leximancer. The results show that states are using differing perceptual dimensions to portray characteristics of state tourism destinations. These characteristics have not been successfully communicated from within the web sites. It is also found that consumers can recall the slogans and positioning of some states to a much greater extent than others. There are huge differences in the level of recall. This may be due to the ambiguous nature of the slogan and the non reinforcement of this positioning using the web sites. Finally, it is shown that there was little correspondence and consistency between state positioning slogans, destination promise and the actual content on the web site. Future research will be conducted at the country level (e.g. Australia, New Zealand and beyond). Detailed potential traveller images and expectations gathered through surveys can be compared to expectations and information portrayed in destination websites.

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