

Brand Salience and Destination Marketing

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Abstract

With the globalisation of the market economy and the growth in air travel over the last 30 years governments all over the world have come to regard tourism as a generator of 'export' income with a consequent shift in focus from the delivery of visitor services to destination development and marketing. As an outcome of this trend destination managers have become increasingly interested in creating destination brands as a focus for marketing activity. The branding strategies adopted by destination managers generally reflect an approach where destination choice is determined primarily by a favourable image and differentiation from competitors. This approach is generally consistent with an attitude based model of consumer behaviour.

This thesis examines an alternative approach to thinking about consumer behaviour, known as brand salience, and examines assumptions associated with brand salience for a category of domestic tourism. Brand salience is the propensity of a brand to be noticed or thought of in buying situations. The salience model is consistent with low involvement processing of marketing communications and the weak theory of advertising effects.

The research methodology consisted of qualitative and quantitative data collection procedures. In depth interviews were conducted with 20 Australian travellers on a face to face basis in Sydney and Melbourne. The quantitative stage consisted of a longitudinal design using a web hosted survey questionnaire and a sample of Australian travellers selected from a fulfilment database provided by the South Australian Tourism Commission. A sample of 229 interviews was achieved as a benchmark survey and 128 at a follow up survey.

The results demonstrate the stochastic nature of destination recall in response to situational and motivational cues present at retrieval and also show how a measure of destination brand salience is related to travel intention and travel behaviour for a set of Australian capital cities as travel destinations.

The findings are significant as they extend the results of brand salience research to a category of tourism and travel. The implications of the results are discussed with respect to destination marketing.