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Tailor-made tourist marketing communication: the advantages of adapting to the culture of the target group

Tourist marketing communication usually focuses on specific features of a tourist area such as history, culture, scenery, food, but it is hardly tailored to the target group. If it is, the content of the communication is tailored to specific target groups, such as youngsters, silvers, and/or language choice is adapted to the target group, for example Italian is used for an Italian speaking target group. Tailoring to the culture of the target group in terms of content of the message, communication style and communication media used occurs seldom (Manrai and Manrai 2011). This is surprising because it appears from a number of theories such as Byrne's similarity attraction theory and studies such as those by Litvin and Kar (2003) that congruity between the self-image of a person and the image of a tourist destination plays an important part in the selection of tourist destinations. This paper will show how taking account of the cultural background of potential tourists may help to design an image of a tourist destination that is congruent with the self-image of the potential tourist. Three aspects of tourist marketing communication will be dealt with: Content of the information about the tourist area, communication style used, and communication media used to convey information about the tourist area.

Regarding tailor-made *content* we will show how taking account of the cultural values of the potential tourist in the description of a tourist area may create an image of the tourist area that is congruent with the self image of the potential tourist. A number of values of different cultural specialists (Hall 1976, Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov 2010, Trompenaars 1995) that could play a part in developing an image of a tourist area will be dealt with: individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, universalism versus particularism, indulgence versus restraint, monochrony versus polychrony, masculinity versus femininity, power distance. For example, in order to attract a potential tourist from an indulgent culture the tourist marketer should emphasize that one can have fun, enjoy life and pamper oneself in a tourist area, but in order to attract a potential tourist from a restraint culture he or she should emphasize aspects of the tourist area that are related to serious matters, for example that one can learn a lot in the area about history, geography, art etc. Potential tourists from low uncertainty avoidance cultures should be attracted by telling that they will have lots of unexpected adventures,

whereas potential tourists from high uncertainty avoidance culture should be attracted by telling that the area is safe with no risks for health and crime, that one will always know beforehand what to expect, and that one will stay in hotels of a well known hotel chain. In view of the idea that congruity between a tourist area and a future tourist of that area could play a part in the decision to visit an area, the content of the communication to attract tourist should be as congruent as possible with the target group, but one should of course never promise things that cannot be accomplished.

Regarding *communication style* one should try to use a style that is congruent with the style that the target group appreciates most. Research into the effect of different communication styles in advertisements has shown that people are more attracted to products that are advertised in their own communication style than to products that are advertised in a communication style that is different from their own style. It is plausible that this also holds for the marketing of tourist areas. In this perspective it might be important to reckon with cultural differences in style, for example the differences between low and high context cultures. People from high context cultures will probably be more persuaded to visit a tourist area that is advertised in a high context style (implicit, indirect, flowery, narrative, poetry-like), whereas people from low context cultures will probably be more persuaded to visit an area that is advertised in a low context style (explicit, direct, to the point, no waste of words).

Regarding *communication media* one should also try to use those communication media that are preferred by the target group. Again it is plausible that there is a difference between high and low context cultures in preference for media to find information about a tourist area or to book a holiday. People from low context cultures generally prefer media with a low information richness (e-mail, letter), whereas people from high context cultures prefer media with a high information richness (face-to-face communication). For that reason it is plausible that potential tourists from low context cultures should be informed that they can find information about the area and book holidays via low information rich media such as the internet, whereas potential tourists from high context cultures should be informed that they can go to travel agencies to get information or to book a holiday.

Albeit that communication tailor-made to the target group in content, style and communication medium used might help to increase tourism, there is also a disadvantage: costs. In the first place there are the costs of the design of content and style of the messages. Regarding this aspect no reduction of costs are possible, unless one asks students to make these adaptations as part of their study. In the second place there is the culture specific dissemination of the materials which is more complicated and

more costly for tailor-made communication. Some reductions of those costs might be made by using new media such as the internet. Just as tourist areas have web sites in different language they could have sites for different cultures. One should keep in mind, though, that cultures also differ in communication media they use and that especially high context cultures prefer information high media such as face to face communication.

Keywords: Tourism planning, persuasion, cultural values, communication style, communication media, tailor-made tourist communication

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