

МІНІСТЕРСТВО ОСВІТИ І НАУКИ УКРАЇНИ  
ВІННИЦЬКИЙ НАЦІОНАЛЬНИЙ АГРАРНИЙ УНІВЕРСИТЕТ  
КАФЕДРА УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ТА ІНОЗЕМНИХ МОВ



ТЕЗИ ДОПОВІДЕЙ ТА ПОВІДОМЛЕНЬ  
НАУКОВО-ПРАКТИЧНОЇ КОНФЕРЕНЦІЇ  
ВИКЛАДАЧІВ І СТУДЕНТІВ

# МОВА, КУЛЬТУРА та ОСВІТА

16 квітня 2015 року

ВІННИЦЯ – 2015

УДК 81(082)

**ББК 81я5**

**М 74**

**Мова, культура та освіта:** Тези доповідей та повідомлень науково-практичної конференції викладачів і студентів / Гол. ред. Калетнік Г.М. – Вінниця: ВНАУ, 2015. – 16 квітня. – 204 с.

*Рекомендовано до видання рішенням  
Вченої ради Вінницького національного аграрного університету  
від 27 березня 2015 р. (протокол № 4)*

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## **ADVERTISING IN TOURISM AND LEISURE**

Advertising bombards us every day – from commercials on television and radio, to advertising on buses and billboards, in magazines and on the Internet – and there is an increasing amount of advertising masquerading as something else – on television travel shows, in the latest blockbuster movie and on children's toys and clothes. We live in a marketing and media-driven world and much of this advertising markets leisure, travel and tourism products and services. In fact, any organization involved in the leisure and tourism business – from local arts centres, museums, sports clubs and small hotels to the largest theme parks, airlines and cruise companies – will be interested in advertising in one form or another. Advertising has been exhaustively defined and is usually taken to mean either mass communication via newspapers, magazines, radio, television, billboards, the Internet and other media or direct-to-consumer communication via direct mail.

Advertising at its simplest is first and foremost a process of communication. Yet it has many different forms and consumers react to advertisements in any number of ways. Today ads are viewed by an increasingly advertising literate consumer base and not surprisingly (given the sheer volume of advertising clutter) most advertisements are of little interest to most people at any one point in time. People engage with advertisements for a relatively few number of reasons: if the product is different; if the ad is unusual; if the ad is relevant to them; and if the ad is seen often enough. Above all, the key challenge for agencies today is to create advertising executions that can penetrate the clutter of everyday life [1]

In the tourism and leisure sectors, where the product is a service, promotion is even more vital than in other industries. Despite arguments over the essential differences between the marketing of goods and services, it is well established that where it is a service, the tourism and

leisure product is a complex bundle of value – since it is intangible, inseparable, variable and perishable. Put simply, there is nothing tangible for the customer to examine beforehand or to take away afterwards; the service is inseparable from its production; the experience is variable and often subject to factors beyond the marketers' control; and finally, the product is perishable and cannot be stored for future sale. Clearly, you cannot test-drive a holiday beforehand, and thus promotion becomes critical, having a greater role in establishing the nature of the product than in most other markets. Promotion is the product as far as the potential tourist or leisure consumer is concerned. The customer buys a holiday, a theatre ticket or attends a concert purely on the basis of symbolic expectations established promotionally through words, pictures, sounds and so forth. In this way, leisure and tourism experiences are literally constructed in our imagination through advertising and the media. Indeed, it has often been said that tourism marketing is about the selling of dreams and that tourism itself is about illusion, or about the creation of 'atmosphere'. In addition to these characteristics, the tourism and leisure product is also a discretionary product, which will be competing for both the customer's time and money against essential items of expenditure and other discretionary purchases. These five attributes (intangibility, inseparability, variability, perishability and discretionary purchase) mean that the skill in tourism and leisure marketing lies in creating the perceived value of the product, in packaging it and in promoting the experience in a way which gives an organization a competitive edge [2].

Advertising emerges as a key marketing tool in the tourism and leisure industries where potential consumers must base buying decisions upon mental images of product offerings, rather than being able to physically sample alternatives. As a result, advertising is a critical variable in the tourism and leisure marketing mix, and covers a wide range of activities and agencies. Its role reflects that of promotion in general, which is aimed at influencing the attitudes and behaviour of audiences in three main ways: to confirm and reinforce; to create new patterns of behaviour and attitude; or to change attitudes and behaviour. Thus, tourism and leisure operators use images to portray their products in brochures, posters and media advertising; airlines, hotels, theme parks and resorts do the same, as do destinations, attempting to construct an image of a destination that will force it into the potential tourist's evoked set, or destination short list, leading to a purchase decision. Whatever the

tourism or leisure product, its identity is the public face of how it is marketed and the importance of advertising in tourism and leisure marketing should not be underestimated. Certainly advertising in general is big business – and it is getting bigger. In 1997 total global advertising spend amounted to some \$300 billion, with the USA accounting for \$110.1 billion, Europe \$83.5 billion and Asia Pacific \$84 billion. Significantly, much of the expenditure comes from an increasingly small number of megabrands and in 1996 the top 200 brands accounted for over 40 per cent of the USA's media expenditure. In the UK, around 32 500 branded goods and services are advertised each year and over 7000 of these brands spend £150 000-plus annually on their advertising. In terms of total ad spend, tourism and leisure organizations are small players – in fact, if all public sector tourism ad spend worldwide was combined it would still be less than a quarter of the ad spend of one company – Sony (Table 1.2). However, individual private sector companies in the leisure industries have huge advertising budgets, the largest being Walt Disney Co., which spent \$773 million in 1997, 72 per cent of this concentrated on audio-visual advertising.

Advertising at its simplest is first and foremost a process of communication. Yet it has many different forms and consumers react to advertisements in any number of ways. Today ads are viewed by an increasingly advertising literate consumer base and not surprisingly (given the sheer volume of advertising clutter) most advertisements are of little interest to most people at any one point in time. People engage with advertisements for a relatively few number of reasons: if the product is different; if the ad is unusual; if the ad is relevant to them; and if the ad is seen often enough. Above all, the key challenge for agencies today is to create advertising executions that can penetrate the clutter of everyday life. The good news for advertisers of tourism and leisure products is that for many people tourism- and leisure-related purchases are items of expenditure which deserve significant consumer attention and effort – unlike other inexpensive consumer goods such as toiletries or convenience foods. Ads are there to persuade and suggest things that the consumer may not previously have considered and the persuasion process is lubricated by ads that are witty, charming and beautifully constructed. This process may have an immediate effect but more likely, it may influence behaviour some time later. Indeed, advertising should have both short- and long-term results, although one thing to bear in mind is that advertising which does not work in the present will hardly

work in the future. This is completely different, however, to saying that advertising must produce immediate and measurable effects. The rate and nature of effect will also depend on the objectives underpinning the advertising campaign itself (e.g., sales promotion, brand positioning, brand awareness etc.).

When it is effective, communications (and advertising in particular) moves customers along a continuum from awareness of a product to reinforcing post purchase satisfaction:

Stage 1 – Awareness. The target market needs to be aware of the product – particularly when it is a new product or a new market. Stage 2 – Comprehension. Once they are aware of the product, potential customers need to understand its features and benefits. This can be challenging where product parity exists (for instance, between destinations) and substitutability threatens. Stage 3 – Acceptance. Potential customers must decide that the product can meet their needs – advertising plays a vital role here. Stage 4 – Preference. Advertising messages must offer a compelling reason for potential customers to think that the product meets their needs (ideally in a unique way that reduces brand substitutability). Stage 5 – Purchase. Advertising motivates customers to action or to buy the product (often this objective is linked to sales promotions). Stage 6 – Reinforcement. One of advertising's key roles is to confirm customers' choices and create a sense of satisfaction about their actions or purchase.

These six stages are known as the hierarchy of effects model since it reflects the audience's stages of reaction to advertising, however, our understanding of how advertising works has had to move on from this model, not least because advertising objectives have evolved, as have the nature of brands and the competition. Perhaps a more useful way of understanding how advertising works, is to look at the four key models employed in planning advertising today: sales, response, persuasion, involvement, saliency [3]

Advertising need not be complex to be effective – it is simply about creating enough awareness and positive brand associations for it to register as a top-of-the-mind brand when the consumer is faced with a purchase choice. However, with every adult person in the West exposed to between 2000 and 3000 advertising messages every day, the ad appeal has to cut through a lot of marketing clutter – whether by using humour (although the comedy has to be finely balanced to avoid overwhelming the message) or originality.

At the beginning of the 2000s, over two-thirds of European customers are reported to be irritated by ads and some commentators are predicting that the future will be an age of advertising ineffectiveness, with the rise of one-to-one media (through smart websites and CD-ROM technology) facilitating interactive and individually tailored ads. Others see in the new technology an opportunity to converge many traditional techniques into web media to produce a more stimulating interactive environment using on-line television, channel websites and enhanced animation and video links. Whatever your perspective, it is certain that the new Digital Age will revolutionize advertising, and ultimately the Internet and digital television will combine into web television – creating an interactive promotional platform particularly suited to the travel, tourism and leisure industries.

Some of the newer media vehicles already being used by leisure, travel and tourism advertisers include audio tapes, video tapes, faxes and interactive kiosks, and further technological change is opening up other new advertising vistas. For instance, virtual reality already allows tourists to see and ‘experience’ certain destinations, resorts and hotels before ever visiting them. Visitors planning a Hawaiian vacation can, for \$8.95, buy the Visit Hawaii CD, the Hawaii Visitors Bureau’s official travel planner on CD-ROM. The disk contains ‘valuable visitor information, hundreds of images of the most beautiful islands in the world, traditional and modern Hawaiian music, a wealth of Hawaii’s history and cultures, maps, a photo guide to beaches, parks, and sights of interest, a calendar of events, a talking Hawaiian dictionary, and much more!’ [4]. In the UK, the English Tourist Board and the regional boards are developing integrated management systems for tourist information centres – installing touch-screens linked to a bookable Internet site. Eventually interactive kiosks will be installed in hotels and leisure centres, giving information about a range of services – including accommodation, events, attractions and transport – acting as one-stop travel agents. To sum up, advertising is expensive, its impact is difficult to judge and it usually takes awhile before it has any influence on your customers. So advertising has been exhaustively defined and is usually taken to mean either mass communication via newspapers, magazines, radio, television, billboards, the Internet and other media or direct-to-consumer communication via direct mail. Whilst word of mouth may be the most credible form of promotion, both of these definitions of advertising are characterized by its two key definers: they are paid for



and non-personal. They are paid for in the sense that the sponsor or advertiser is clearly identifiable (as opposed to public relations activities) yet non-personal in the sense that the sponsor is simultaneously communicating with many receivers (perhaps millions) instead of talking to small groups or individuals as a salesperson would [5].

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