

# The Effectiveness of Print Advertising Stimuli in Evoking Elaborate Consumption Visions for Potential Travelers

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## Abstract

Two imagery-evoking strategies are examined to determine their effectiveness for producing an elaborate consumption vision. Specifically, a 3 x 3 factorial experimental design is employed to examine the effects of pictures and text as advertising stimuli to evoke elaborate consumption visions among the participants, within the context of holiday decision-making. A MANOVA revealed a main effect for each of the two stimuli. The presence of more concrete pictures contributed to the extent of elaboration and quality of consumers' consumption visions. Furthermore, the addition of concrete words together with instructions to imagine increased the elaboration and quality of the consumption vision. A significant interaction effect between the picture and text variables demonstrated that combining instructions to imagine with concrete pictures is the most efficacious strategy. The paper discusses the implications of the findings for theory as well as offering an application of the results for tourism destination marketers.

Sue, a young college graduate, is planning her vacation. She is considering a trip to a tropical island and has information on three destination options. She scans the text and pictures of her three options. Sue daydreams, imagining herself in the possible destinations. One set of images especially catches her eye and she is 'off', vicariously experiencing the destination and enjoying the emotional feelings created by her vision.

As the opening vignette suggests, one aspect of planning or deciding on where to vacation may rely on non-rational thought and be influenced by imaginative processes and the associated emotions. Previous research investigating tourists' decision processes suggests that tourists' visions of their future consumption experience may have a substantial influence on both their level of product interest and their information search activities (Etzioni, 1988; Goossens, 2003; MacInnis & Price, 1987; Miller, Hardjimarou & Miciak, 2000). For this reason, an understanding of the effects of various types of imagery-evoking stimuli on tourism consumers' visionary responses to advertising material is of considerable importance to tourism destination marketers. The effectiveness of various imagery-evoking strategies in influencing consumer responses has attracted the attention of numerous marketing researchers. However, to date there has been limited research investigating the usage of various elements of advertising stimuli and resulting effectiveness in evoking elaborate consumption visions for holiday travel decision-making. Our research builds upon the literature to demonstrate how images and text can evoke a consumption vision in tourism consumers.

The concept of consumption vision is derived from that of mental imagery (Phillips, Olson and Baumgartner, 1995) and entails 'sensory representations' of ideas, feelings and objects or experiences with objects. It is said to involve a cognitive process in which perceptual

information is represented in working memory via the creation of daydreams, fantasies and imaginative construction. From a consumer behavior perspective, specifically in relation to intangible or experiential purchases, a consumer's mental image of a product is at times a primary source of information available to assist them in forming a judgment (Schwarz, 1986). For instance, in the opening vignette, Sue has limited information about three options, but it may be that much of the detail about the holiday is actually formed as she imagines herself at the destination. That is, one key source of information actually comes from her ability to construct, and possibly contrast, an imaginary vacation experience. Furthermore, Horowitz (1972) claims that visual image formation is especially useful in the representation of self and object relationships as found in the external world through perception, or as fantasized in the trial perception or trial action of thought. In other words, if the target is not present in the direct physical environment, people may still perform their evaluations by examining their mental representation of the target, or the image that comes to mind when they imagine their consumption experience. Phillips et al. (1995) identify this experience as being a 'consumption vision' which is defined by Walker and Olsen (1994) as "...a visual image of certain product related-behaviors and their consequences...they consist of concrete and vivid mental images that enable consumers to vicariously experience the self-relevant consequences of product use" (p27).

Although several authors have visited the notion of imagery and tourism, these attempts have been predominantly focused on destination image. The main difference between destination image and consumption vision is that the former refers to the publicly held common mental picture of the destination and the latter refers to the somewhat unique mental picture that is held by the tourism consumer themselves (Lubbe, 1998). It is however, the individual consumer's

consumption vision that will determine the level of interest and attraction to the destination (Lubbe, 1998). Further, due to the intangible nature of the tourism product, if the tourism consumer had never visited or had any previous experience involving the destination, their consumption vision may be their only initial source of information and serve as their only influence at the early stages of the decision process (Schwarz, 1986).

The effective usage of external stimuli featured in tourism advertising and promotional material plays a vital role in the evocation of elaborate consumption visions (Mittal, 1988; Reilly, 1990).

It is these external inputs that represent not only the tourism product (destination) but also communicate the product's attributes, characteristics, concepts and ideas (Mackay & Fesenmaier, 1997). For this reason, an understanding of the most effective usage of these various types of external stimuli is of great importance to tourism destination marketers.

Previous research in marketing communications and mental imagery has investigated a number of individual forms of external stimuli with regard to their effectiveness in evoking mental imagery. For example, Miller and Stocia (2003) found that photographic images of beach scenes were more effective in evoking mental imagery than artistic renditions. Babin and Burns (1997) revealed that concrete imagery eliciting words evoke high instances of product recall and a study by Miller and Marks (1998) found a strong relationship between instructions to imagine and the quantity of imagery. However, to date, research in this area has failed to investigate the combined usage of these various forms of external stimuli and their combination's effectiveness in evoking elaborate consumption visions.

The purpose of this article is to identify the most effective combination of external stimuli in evoking elaborate consumption visions among tourism consumers – primarily focusing on print

advertisements. We provide a brief discussion of consumption vision's role in the tourism consumer's information search. This is followed by a brief introduction of the three different types of external stimuli used in this study, in terms of their previous usage in the evocation of mental imagery.

### **Consumption Vision and the Tourist's Information Search**

The consumption vision approach to mental imagery acknowledges the creative sense making process that consumers may use to anticipate the future by providing clear, specific images of the self interacting with a product and experiencing the consequences of its use (Phillips et al., 1995). From a narrative perspective consumption visions are stories derived from mental simulations that are created by the decision maker and involve a character (themselves), a plot, (the series of events the consumer imagines taking part in) and a setting (the environment or context in which the events take place) (Phillips et al., 1995). Although the terminology of this concept remains unique in its creation and application to consumer behavior, other researchers from a variety of disciplines offer different terminologies that share the same theoretical background with that of consumption vision. For example, Green and Brock (2000) refer to this form of mental imagery as "narrative transportation", which involves the creation of stories via the mental simulation of future events, focusing on goals, behaviors and desired outcomes. Escalas (2004) refers to this process as "mental simulation" which entails the cognitive construction of hypothetical scenarios, including rehearsals of likely future events and fantasies about less likely desired future events. Authors such as Jenkins (1999), Etchner and Ritchie (1991), Lubbe (1998) and Gartner (1993) simply refer to the concept as "mental imagery". However, the definition of consumption vision suggests that it is more than just a mental image.

Unlike a consumption vision, a mental image does not necessarily entail conscious representations of the self experiencing future consumptive situations.

One method via which a consumer may refer to their consumption vision as a valued information source is narrative self-referencing. Debevec and Romeo (1992) refer to this phenomenon as a cognitive process that individuals use to comprehend incoming information by comparing it to self-relevant information stored in their memory. According to Green and Brock (2000) this method of imagery processing has been shown to affect the persuasion power of the advertisement's message and is often accompanied by strong affective responses. Escalas (2005) confirmed this assertion in a study revealing that narrative self-referencing leads to a favorable evaluation of an advertised product regardless of the advertisement's argument strength. The author suggests that the success of an advertisement in persuading the consumer is due to the positive affect that occurs as a result of the mental simulation that distracts consumers from weak arguments.

With regards to the tourism purchase, Um (1993) suggests that mental images of future consumptions not only contribute to the consumer's perceptions of the tourism product's attributes, they also become potential facilitators in terms of satisfying the consumer's original travel motives. When the consumer is asked to specify their reason for travel to a particular destination, they then explain it in terms of their projected image (Crotts, 1999). Fridgen (1984) suggests the tourist's consumption visions of vacation sites and travel situations are powerful factors within the information search stage of the decision process as these images influence the consumer's spending patterns, planned length of stay and planned activity patterns. According to Konecnik (2004), tourism destinations often compete via the images that are held in the

minds of prospective tourists and spend a great deal of time, money and effort in creating a positive image aimed at making their destination more favorable than that of their competitors. In addition, Dann (1981) suggests that prior to a tourism purchase, tourists often plan a series of projected activities that strike them as meaningful. The actual behavioral achievement of these acts then becomes the goals the consumer wishes to achieve as a result of their vacation purchase. For example, a consumer may ask himself or herself: 'What do I want from this vacation?' 'Do I want to relax and escape?' 'Do I want to experience something unique and new?' Driven by the answers to these questions, the consumer then creates images and fantasies in their mind and uses these images to direct their information search and vacation purchase. Therefore, a further understanding of how tourism destination marketers can successfully capture the tourists' imagination will assist tourism marketers to acquire a competitive advantage in the minds of their targeted audience.

### **External Stimulus and Mental Imagery Evocation**

A study by Olsen, McAlexander and Roberts (1986) reported that the external stimulus featured in destination advertisements affects consumers' perception of the vacation experience through association of various types of pictures with certain types of experiences. For example, a photo of a sun setting over an isolated beach may be interpreted by a consumer as conducive to a romantic vacation. According to Miller and Stocia (2003), for a pictorial representation of a destination to be effective in evoking this association it must contain vivid information. Vivid information has been defined as that which draws and holds attention and excites the imagination because it evokes concrete mental imagery, is emotionally interesting and stimulates the senses (Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Miller and Stocia (2003) contend that the key process in producing these vivid effects is the mental imagery evoking quality of the

information, which has been shown to moderate both attitudinal and memory responses to advertising (Burns, Biswas & Babin, 1993). This is supported by Bone and Ellen (1992), who claim that mental imagery is a primary mediator of the ad-evoked feelings and attitudes generated by advertising.

Previous research in marketing communications has investigated a number of different forms of external stimuli with regard to their effectiveness in evoking mental imagery. Unnava and Burnkrant (1991) claim that there are three basic forms of external stimuli that have been proven to elicit mental imagery, namely, pictures, concrete words and instructions to imagine. Although the effectiveness of various different types of pictorial presentations in evoking mental imagery is a well-established area of research, the research findings surrounding the successful usage of pictorial stimuli remain relatively ambiguous. For example, although MacInnis and Price (1987) argue that pictorial images featured in advertisements are an established means of inducing mental images, Goossens (1994) argues that the use of pictorial images may in fact stifle the individual's imagination as they become over-reliant on the featured image as an information source as opposed to elaborating on their own mentally enhanced images.

The use of concrete wording or words with high visual content are also said to be effective in eliciting mental imagery. Babin and Burns (1997) proposed that concrete words may in fact be more effective than concrete pictures alone in eliciting mental imagery as with no picture present, the individual has no choice but to imagine the objects / scenario described by the text. Instructions to imagine, or directions contained in ad copy that tell consumers to imagine themselves with the product, is the only technique specifically designed to evoke self-generating imagery. This method is said to be more persuasive than the latter two as the images generated

have the potential to be more personally relevant and meaningful (Escalas, 2005; Mani & Macinnis, 2000). However, a study by Burns et al. (1993) that investigated the impact of these particular stimuli on mental imagery, found no significant differences among the participants who were instructed to imagine and those who were not. These findings represent further ambiguity regarding the impact of these three forms of stimuli. Research in this area is also yet to investigate the combined usage of these stimuli and their combinations' effectiveness in evoking elaborate and quality consumption visions within a tourism context.

Given this research gap and the contradictory findings surrounding the effectiveness of these three types of proclaimed imagery evoking stimuli, this study will specifically investigate the effectiveness of these stimuli in evoking the tourism consumer's consumption vision by looking at their combined usage within a tourism context. More specifically, the study aims to identify the most effective and least effective combinations of textual and pictorial stimulus in evoking an elaborate and quality consumption vision by addressing the following hypotheses:

*H1 The extent to which an individual will elaborate on their consumption vision of a destination will vary according to the type of textual stimuli used in the destination's advertisement.*

*H2 The quality of an individuals' consumption vision will vary according to the type of textual stimuli used in the destination advertisement.*

*H3 The extent to which an individual will elaborate on their consumption vision of a destination will vary according to the presence or absence and type of pictorial stimulus used in the destination advertisement.*

*H4 The quality of an individuals' consumption vision will vary according to the presence or absence and type of pictorial stimulus used in the destination advertisement.*

*H5 The effectiveness of pictorial images, whether they be concrete, less concrete or absent in evoking an elaborate consumption vision, is dependent on the presence, absence or combination of concrete words and instructions to imagine.*

## **Methodology**

A 3 (picture) X 3 (text) factorial between-subjects experimental design was used to address the hypotheses. The pictorial stimulus condition consisted of a concrete style color image, a less concrete style color image and no image. The text condition featured either the presence of instructions to imagine, the presence of concrete words or the presence of both. The marketing communications medium via which the stimuli was presented were color print advertisements, a commonly used media source within the tourism industry.

## *Sample*

This study used a convenience sample of 180 undergraduate students. Students were considered an appropriate sample for this study as they were asked to play a role that was familiar to them – that is, a potential purchaser of a holiday. Furthermore, since this study was a test of psychological processes using an experimental design (to test theoretically derived relationships) the use of students should not compromise the results in any way. Sixty-five percent were female and the majority of participants (88 percent) were aged between 17 and 25 years, with the remaining 12 percent being aged between 26 and 50. Seventy percent of the

population were single, while eight percent were married and the remaining 12 percent were in a relationship.

## Stimulus Materials

### *Advertisements*

Nine mock advertisements for a holiday product were constructed following pilot studies and feedback from expert judges. Each advertisement was identical apart from the manipulation of the two independent variables. Table 1 illustrates the ways in which these stimuli were combined with each cell representing one of the nine print advertisement designs.

*Insert Table 1 about here*

These nine different print advertisements featured one of three different pictorial options; one that was concrete, one that was less concrete or no image at all. To ensure that the participants would not recognize the destination portrayed in the advertisements a graphic artist manipulated the pictorial images so that the destination remained fictitious. The other variable, text, varied in the advertisement and contained concrete words only, words and instruction to imagine or both of these combined. The design was fully crossed resulting in nine cells. The size, length and theme of the advertisements were kept constant across the nine different designs to minimize any confounding effects. The print advertisements were professionally designed in full color. See Appendix 1 for an example of the stimuli material, which features a copy of both the concrete and less concrete (abstract) pictorial images and the textual stimuli (combined condition)<sup>1</sup>.

### *Independent variables*

The 'picture' variable was operationalised with three levels as either: (1) a photographed scene of a tropical island destination that exhibited concrete imagery eliciting material; (2) a tropical island destination that exhibited less concrete imagery eliciting material; or (3) no pictorial content. In the present study, the concrete picture consisted of an entire island type scene complete with sand, water, palm trees, deck chairs and blue sky. The less concrete picture contained just parts of this scene and included a picture of blue sky and the tip of a palm tree and a picture of two deckchairs against a plain blue backdrop. The aim of the manipulation was to make the less concrete picture less identifiable in terms of its recognition as an island destination. This approach was adopted from Babin and Burns (1997) and was found useful by the researchers in terms of the investigation of the evocation of mental imagery.

The 'text' variable was operationalised with three levels as follows: (1) concrete imagery eliciting words; (2) instructions to imagine; or (3) a combination of concrete eliciting words and instructions to imagine. For the concrete eliciting words condition, two phrases 'palm fringed beaches' and 'relaxing sun lounges' were used. These phrases were specifically designed to evoke a mental representation of the objects in participants' minds. For the instruction to imagine condition, there was a set of written instructions asking the participant to imagine themselves at the destination. The instructions contained rich elaborate text that described the destination and suggested some possible scenarios that the participant may be likely to experience. Prior to the commencement of the experiment, the advertisements were subjected to both an expert panel consisting of advertising and marketing communications specialists and a

pilot study to assess the effectiveness of the independent variable manipulations as well as the realism and appropriateness of the manipulated variables and look of the copy.

### *Dependent Variable Measures*

Participants' visionary responses to the advertisements were measured via a two-dimensional scale designed specifically by the researchers to measure consumption vision. The two dimensions were elaboration and quality of the consumption vision. The elaboration items were developed through an extensive review of the relevant literature surrounding the consumption vision construct. As a result, the elaboration of vision scale included statements such as "I could easily construct a story about myself and the featured destination based on the mental images that came to mind" and "The mental images that came to mind made me feel as though I was actually experiencing the destination featured in this advertisement". Responses to these items were measured via a 7-point Likert type scale where participants could indicate their level of agreement with the statements (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). The statements included in this scale provided the researcher with data representative of the extent to which the participants elaborated upon their visionary response to the advertisement.

For the quality of vision scale, five items were adapted from the Miller et al. (2000) Ad-Evoked Mental Imagery Scale and the participants responses were measured via the use of a semantic differential. Participants were asked to rate the quality of the images on five dimensions – vividness, clarity, intensity, sharpness and appeal.

The consumption vision scale was both pilot tested and subjected to a factor analysis to assess the structure and internal consistency of the scale. The two resultant dimensions, elaboration and

quality, explained 39.7 percent and 24.4 percent of the variance respectively, accounting for a total of 64.1 percent of the variance. A reliability analysis revealed Cronbach alphas of .93 for the elaboration dimension and .84 for the quality dimension. The factor loadings of the scale items can be found in Table 2.

*Insert Table 2 about here*

## Procedure

Ethical approval was sought and received to conduct the research. Participants were randomly allocated to one of the nine conditions. Each respondent was given a booklet containing one version of the advertisement and a series of questions to evaluate consumption vision. In order to limit the likelihood of demand effects, the participants were not told that the experiment had been specifically designed to measure advertising evoked consumption vision. Rather they were told that the researchers were testing the viability of a new tourism advertisement. Participants were debriefed following the experiment.

## Results

### *Manipulation Checks*

As previously mentioned, the research design comprised nine conditions. In order to ensure the manipulations were reliable and effective, a number of manipulation checks were included in the questionnaire. A brief description of these checks and their effectiveness are reported below.

*Picture Manipulation.* Three levels of the picture condition were included in the analysis – specifically, a concrete picture, a less concrete picture or no picture. A pre-test was used to

check the effectiveness of the manipulation. The researcher presented the less concrete picture to 20 students and asked them to describe what they saw. Most of the students simply noted the words 'blue sky' and 'deckchairs' signifying that when presented alone without leading questions the picture can be described as less concrete than the picture featuring the entire scene. The significant differences among the mean level of elaboration between the concrete and the less concrete advertisement also provides support for the effectiveness of the manipulation.

*Instructions to Imagine Manipulation.* This particular manipulation was successful with 91 percent of participants who received this condition claiming that the instructions to imagine did in fact tell them to imagine or picture something in their mind.

*Concrete Words Manipulation.* Participants who had confirmed that they received this condition were asked if they were able to form a mental picture in their mind of the objects or images that these words were representing. This manipulation check confirmed the effectiveness of this manipulation with 76 percent of participants claiming they were able to mentally picture the objects described by the text. The remaining 24 percent were either unsure as to whether or not they could picture the objects, some suggesting they may have had problems understanding the question (15 percent) while others were not able to picture the objects at all (9 percent).

However, given that the majority of participants were able to form a mental representation of the objects, this manipulation was considered to be successful.

The aim of this research was to reveal the impact of the two different types of stimuli - pictures or text - independently or in combination, on eliciting participants' consumption vision. A 3 x 3 MANOVA was performed to test the main and interaction effects of the pictures and the textual

content on the dependent variables comprising the elaboration and quality components of participants' consumption vision.

*Text content.* In respect of hypotheses one and two, observation of the Pillai's Trace revealed a significant multivariate effect for text,  $F(4,342) = 5.89$ ,  $p < .05$ , with an effect size accounting for 6.5 percent of the variance. Furthermore, the text variable demonstrated significant univariate effects for both elaboration and quality (see Table 3). Examination of the Tukey HSD post-hoc test and further inspection of the means (see Table 4) revealed that two conditions - instructions to imagine or a combination of both instructions to imagine and concrete words - were significantly more effective than concrete words alone in evoking an elaborate consumption vision. There was no significant difference between the instructions to imagine level and the combination of both, signifying that the concrete words are more or less redundant when used in unison with instructions to imagine.

*Insert Table 3 about here*

*Insert Table 4 about here*

The significant differences with regard to the quality of the consumption vision were again found between the concrete words and both the instructions to imagine and the combination of concrete words and instructions to imagine. Again, there was no significant difference in terms of the quality of the consumption vision between the instructions to imagine condition and the combination condition (instructions and concrete words). In summary, there was support for hypotheses one and two.

*Pictorial content.* In respect of hypotheses three and four, observation of the Pillai's Trace revealed that the picture variable produced significant group differences in terms of the elaboration and quality components of the participants consumption vision,  $F(4,342) = 5.41$ ,  $p < .05$ . The effect size for this independent variable accounted for six percent of the variance in the combined dependant variables, suggesting a reasonably small impact on the participant's elaboration on their consumption vision and the vision's quality.

As can be seen in Table 3, the univariate tests revealed that the main effect of the picture stimuli was significant on both the elaboration and quality components of the participants' consumption vision. Inspection of the cell means (see Table 5) showed that the concrete picture was most successful in evoking an elaborate and quality consumption vision as the means were significantly higher than the less concrete picture. There was no significant difference between the less concrete picture condition and the no picture condition, signifying that a less concrete picture had no more impact on participants' consumption vision than no picture at all.

*Insert Table 5 about here*

In respect of hypothesis five, the text x picture interaction multivariate effect was significant,  $F(8, 342) = 2.53$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .06$ . However, the univariate results revealed a significant effect only for the elaboration variable (see Table 3). This result suggests that the effectiveness of the picture in the advertisement, in terms of its ability to evoke an elaborate consumption vision, is dependant on the presence, absence or combination of the concrete words and instructions to imagine.

Further examination of the post- hoc tests and the associated profile plot illustrating this interaction (see Figure 1), demonstrated that the concrete picture was most effective in evoking an elaborate consumption vision when combined with instructions to imagine. Simple effects tests revealed a significant difference among the three levels of text within the concrete picture condition,  $F(2,57) = 5.57, p < .05$ . The Tukey's HSD revealed that the significant difference lies between the concrete words condition ( $M = 4.88$ ) and the instructions to imagine condition ( $M = 5.74$ ). No significant difference appeared apparent between the concrete picture when combined with instructions to imagine and the concrete picture and the text condition consisting of both instructions and concrete words.

*Insert Figure 1 about here*

The less concrete (abstract) picture appeared most successful in evoking an elaborate consumption vision when combined with the combination of both the concrete words and instructions. An ANOVA was performed selecting those cases that received the less concrete picture condition. The analysis demonstrated a significant difference between the means of the three text conditions on the less concrete picture level,  $F(2,57) = 7.01, p < .05$ . Observation of the Tukey's post-hoc test demonstrated that the difference on this picture level lies between the concrete words condition ( $M = 3.96$ ) and the condition that includes both concrete words and instructions to imagine ( $M = 5.29$ ). As illustrated by the profile plot, the latter text condition was the most effective in evoking an elaborate consumption vision at the less concrete picture level.

When no (absent) picture was presented, the 'both' text level was the most effective in evoking an elaborate consumption vision. This was significantly different to the concrete words level,

which when accompanied by no picture was the least effective of all combinations of the independent variable levels in evoking an elaborate consumption vision. An ANOVA was conducted selecting those cases that received the 'absent' picture condition. This particular analysis also reveals how well the three levels of the text variable perform when presented without any pictorial content. The analysis presented a significant result with  $F(2,57) = 4.91, p < .05$ . The Tukey's post-hoc test demonstrated that the main difference on the level that presented no picture again lay between the concrete words condition ( $M = 3.81$ ) and the 'both' condition ( $M = 4.98$ ). This finding suggests that the combination of both concrete words and instructions to imagine is the most effective textual combination in evoking an elaborate consumption vision should there be no pictorial content presented in the advertisement.

In summary, this analysis has confirmed that the three different levels of the independent variables, text and pictures, do in fact modify each other's impact on the participant's elaboration of a consumption vision. However, no significant interaction effect was found for quality of the consumption vision.

## Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the importance of imagery and text in eliciting consumers' subjective consumption vision. The primary aim of the study was to determine the most and least effective combinations of pictorial and textual content in evoking an elaborate and quality consumption vision among tourism consumers. The statistical analysis has successfully revealed that the most effective combination is a concrete style picture combined with textual content consisting of instructions to imagine, whilst the least effective usage or combination of this stimulus is textual content featuring concrete words and no picture. The study also revealed that

the inclusion of certain types of textual and pictorial copy when designing print advertisements specifically for tourism products can have a significant impact upon the targeted consumer's visionary and imaginary responses to the destination. The authors believe that these findings make a unique and valuable contribution to the existing consumer behavior / tourism literature by addressing the need for more clarification regarding the effectiveness of various external stimuli in evoking consumption visions among potential tourism consumers.

#### *Implications for Tourism Destination Marketers*

This study provides tourism marketers with valuable information regarding the internal stimulus often referred to by consumers as an information source when considering hedonic or experiential purchases. Such research has several implications for the tourism industry's marketing professionals. First, these findings can assist tourism marketers to better understand how certain stimuli are processed mentally by customers and therefore improve their ability in targeting and capturing their desired audiences (Burns, Biswas & Babin, 1993). Second, knowledge of such an area can also assist the industry's marketing professionals to overcome the issue of intangibility associated with the tourism product as they become more informed of the appealing imagery clues that can be used in various forms of print media to evoke imaginary consumption experiences among their potential customers.

Third, previous research suggests that the successful evocation of elaborate mental imagery may reduce the time in which the consumer makes his / her decision (Etzioni, 1988). For example, the consumer may be more inclined to make their purchase decision after considering only one option as opposed to seeking alternatives to evaluate and compare. Fourth, should the consumer imagine themselves in multiple scenarios with the one tourism product as opposed to several,

they are less likely to expect any one of these to unfold as planned. Therefore, deviations of the actual outcome from the imagined outcome are less likely to occur, resulting in less dissatisfaction in the tourist's post purchase evaluation (MacInnis & Price, 1987). In general, should a tourism marketer have an understanding of the usage and effectiveness of these types of stimuli, the more likely they are to sell their destination.

It is important to realize, however, that the interpretation or meaning of these stimuli lies in the mind of the beholder and, therefore, one particular stimulus may represent different meanings to different markets, depending on their original motive (Uzzell, 1984). For example, a pictorial image of an attractive woman lying on a beach may represent relaxation and sun lust to the consumer who has identified that particular need. Alternatively, a single man may interpret this image as representing a destination that possesses many single beautiful women – thus evoking an interest towards the destination should he be seeking companionship and romance. This may present problems for the destination with regards to the post purchase evaluation of the destination experience due to the possible misinterpretation of the stimulus and what it represents. Therefore, the marketing professional should take time to research and familiarize themselves with their desired target markets' precise needs and motivations for travel.

A limitation surrounding this study was the use of university students. Previous research in this area has sometimes criticized the use of university students in academic research (see, for example, Soley & Reid, 1983). However, given that the research goal of this stage of current study is one of theoretical explanation as opposed to generalization, a homogenous sample such as university students is considered to be suitable for this study (Sternthal, Tybout & Calder, 1994). Furthermore, the use of this sample will provide reliable results indicative of the most

effective methods of advertisement design for tourism marketers who may be targeting the student market. Finally, the study was designed to be relevant and involving for the cohort targeted. It is suggested, however, that the research be extended to replicate its findings within the broader community.

An experiment such as the one described also had the advantage of virtually ensuring the attention of 100 percent of the subjects, whereas print ads in the real world receive attention of only about 49 percent of the targeted audience (Rossiter, 1982). In addition, the current research demonstrates that print ad strategies can stimulate elaborate consumption visions, but this research is by no means definitive as it is limited to the specific strategies chosen to test the experiment. For example, the combination that proved to be most effective in the particular scenario portrayed in the advertisement might not necessarily be the most effective in other scenarios created for other destination advertisements. Moreover, individual differences in mental imagery ability have not been taken into account in this research and there is the possibility that students with greater mental imagery ability were by chance assigned to one of the conditions. In addition, the tourism management major in which the participants were recruited may also attract students with a high level of mental imagery ability.

Further research should examine the impact of such imagery eliciting strategies on the tourism consumers' destination choice behavior, looking more closely at the interrelationship between the consumer's elicited consumption vision and their affective response toward the destination. Questions remain such as: 'Does the extent to which the consumer elaborates upon their consumption vision effect their emotional response to the advertised destination?' 'Does this relationship expedite the decision process as the consumer becomes more emotionally attached

to the destination and, hence, bypass the evaluation of possible alternative destinations?’ Future research should also investigate the individual differences in mental imagery ability. For example, imagery eliciting strategies such as instructions to imagine might be more successful in generating mental images in some consumers than for others. Demographic differences such as age, gender and nationality should be explored in terms of their possible influence on imagery elaboration. Finally, the current research investigated the impact of an advertisement featuring three widely acknowledged imagery-eliciting strategies, however, these strategies alone should not be assumed as the only means of mental imagery evocation. Future research should examine other print advertisement features such as colors, font size and positioning and picture size with regards to their potential in evocating mental imagery. Although we used a fictitious destination it would be useful to check that the destination was not thought to be recognized in future research.

This research has not only contributed to the academic body of literature surrounding the consumer behavior discipline, it has also addressed a specific knowledge gap that existed within the destination choice literature. This research has provided those with an interest in tourism marketing communications with an explanation of the importance of the tourist’s consumption vision in their decision making activity and how best to evoke such visions via the use of external stimuli commonly used to market tourism destinations.

## Tables

*Table 1. Advertisement Designs*

Advertisement 1	Advertisement 2	Advertisement 3
<u>Concrete</u> picture	<u>Less concrete</u> picture	<u>No</u> picture
Combined words and instructions	Combined words and instructions	Combined words and instructions
Advertisement 4	Advertisement 5	Advertisement 6
<u>Concrete</u> picture	<u>Less concrete</u> picture	<u>No</u> picture
Instructions to imagine	Instructions to imagine	Instructions to imagine
Advertisement 7	Advertisement 8	Advertisement 9
<u>Concrete</u> picture	<u>Less concrete</u> Picture	<u>No</u> picture
Concrete words only	Concrete words only	Concrete words only

*Table 2. Factor Loadings of the Consumption Vision Scale*

Item	Factor loading	Factor loading
	Elaboration	Quality
The mental images that came to mind formed a series of events in my mind in which I was a part of	.797	
The mental images that came to mind made me feel as though I was actually experiencing the destination featured in this advertisement	.777	
This advertisement made me fantasize about having the opportunity to experience the featured destination	.763	
I could easily construct a story about myself and the featured destination based on the mental images that came to mind	.753	
It was easy for me to imagine being at this destination	.750	
Whilst reviewing this advertisement I found myself daydreaming about the featured destination	.746	
Whilst reviewing the advertisement many images came to mind	.741	
The mental images that came to mind were very clear and specific	.699	
The images that came to mind acted as a source of information about the featured destination	.695	
I could actually see myself in this scenario	.691	
Overall the images that came to mind while I examined the advertisement were sharp / dull		.842
Overall the images that came to mind while I examined the advertisement were intense / weak		.841
Overall the images that came to mind while I examined the advertisement were clear / unclear		.825
Overall the images that came to mind while I examined the advertisement were vivid / vague		.727

*Table 3. Main and Interaction Effects of the Stimuli on the Participants Consumption Vision*

Stimuli	Elaboration of vision		Quality of vision	
	F-Value	Partial $\eta^2$	F-Value	Partial $\eta^2$
Picture	9.21*	.10	10.08*	.11
Text	12.59*	.13	5.52*	.06
Picture X Text	2.40*	.06	1.03	.02

\* Effect significant at the 0.05 level of significance

*Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations of the Textual Stimuli Conditions*

Stimuli Condition	Elaboration of vision	Quality of vision
Concrete Words (only)	M = 4.68 <sup>a</sup> (1.52)	M = 4.48 <sup>a</sup> (1.39)
Instructions to Imagine (only)	M = 5.06 <sup>d</sup> (1.11)	M = 4.77 <sup>b</sup> (1.31)
Concrete Words and Instructions to Imagine (combined)	M = 5.15 <sup>d</sup> (.89)	M = 4.84 <sup>c</sup> (1.28)

Within the column: a is different from b at  $p < .05$ ; a is different from c at  $p < .01$ ; a is different from d at  $p < .001$

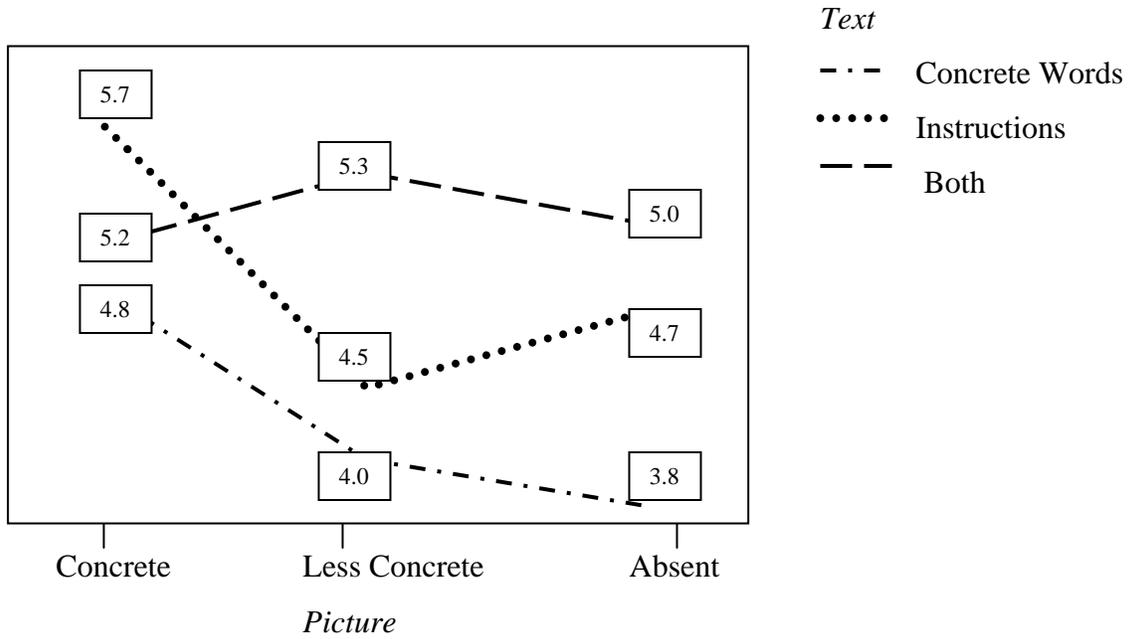
*Table 5. Means and Standard Deviations of the Pictorial Stimuli Conditions*

Stimuli Condition	Elaboration of vision	Quality of vision
Concrete Picture	M = 5.26 <sup>a</sup> (.90)	M = 5.16 <sup>a</sup> (1.10)
Less Concrete Picture	M = 4.58 <sup>c</sup> (1.23)	M = 4.24 <sup>d</sup> (1.40)
No Picture (Absent)	M = 4.50 <sup>d</sup> (1.31)	M = 4.26 <sup>d</sup> (1.41)

Within the column: a is different from c at  $p < .01$ ; a is different from d at  $p < .001$

Figures

Figure 1. Profile plot illustrating the picture x text interaction effect on the participants' consumption vision elaboration.



## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> The full range of stimulus material is available from the first named author on request

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## Appendix One – Stimulus Materials

Sample advertisement: Concrete images and the combined textual stimuli



### ***Palm fringed beaches***

*...Just close your eyes and imagine plunging into the cool crystal waters that sparkle beneath the warmth of the eternal sunshine...feel the warmth of the sand softly caressing your feet as you take a leisurely stroll along the endless beaches...*



### ***Relaxing sun lounges***

*...Hear the sound of the gentle waves lapping up against the shore and the tender island breeze blowing softly through the palms, whilst you unwind at the end of the day in your very own secluded paradise...*

Sample advertisement: Less concrete images the combined textual stimuli



## ***Palm fringed beaches***

*...Just close your eyes and imagine plunging into the cool crystal waters that sparkle beneath the warmth of the eternal sunshine...feel the warmth of the sand softly caressing your feet as you take a leisurely stroll along the endless beaches...*



## ***Relaxing sun lounges***

*...Hear the sound of the gentle waves lapping up against the shore and the tender island breeze blowing softly through the palms, whilst you unwind at the end of the day in your very own secluded paradise...*