



## Typography in destination advertising: An exploratory study and research perspectives



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### HIGHLIGHTS

- Theoretical presentation of typography in an advertising context.
- An experiment that identifies the influence of typography in a tourism advertising context.
- Studying the influence of typography helps to better understand the tourist persuasion process.

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### ABSTRACT

In a tourism context, visual copy is an important element of print advertisements. More specifically, pictures have a significant influence on the destination attraction value and visit intentions. Curiously, typography has never been investigated academically as an execution element, despite suggestions from researchers that typography could influence the evaluation of advertisements. This experiment examines the impact of typography on advertisement evaluation in a tourism context and the impact of attitude toward the advertisement on attitude toward the destination. The impact of advertisement evaluation on destination evaluation is also tested, and results show that typography does influence advertising responses. This study highlights the important role of typography in print media destination advertising and enriches this field with a new variable: attitude toward the typography.

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Competition between destinations has dramatically increased over recent years, and assessing advertising effectiveness has become a major concern for tourism authorities and destination marketing organizations (DMOs). The academic literature in this field has a long-standing and rich history of studies dealing with issues such as destination image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Dann, 1996; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002; Hsu, Wolfe, & Kang, 2004; Jeong & Holland, 2012; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Pike, 2002), destination advertisement efficiency (Butterfield, Deal, & Kubursi, 1998; Johnson & Messmer, 1991; Kim, Hwang, & Fesenmaier, 2005;

MacKay & Smith, 2006; McWilliams & Crompton, 1997; Woodside, 1990), and destination and brand (Cai, 2002; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Li & Kaplanidou, 2013; Stepchenkova & Li, 2014; Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil, 2007).

Destination image is defined as a tourist's total impression of a destination (Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993) and is formed by the consumer's reasoned and emotional interpretation of a destination as the consequence of two closely interrelated components: cognitive and affective evaluations (Beerli & Martin, 2004). Advertisement and marketing campaign effectiveness is a key issue both for academics and destination managers, and a more in-depth understanding of message format may significantly contribute to improving destination advertisements. Decrop (2007) states that: "Although much attention has focused on advertising effectiveness in general, it is surprising that little research has centered on the

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issue of message format [...]. This shortcoming is particularly relevant to the tourism industry” (Decrop, 2007, p. 508). This is especially true as visual elements of the message (e.g. image, color) can have a significant influence on the advertising persuasion process. However, to date, the influence of some visual elements such as typography on persuasion is not well known. Therefore, this article aims to investigate the persuasive power of typography in an advertising context for tourism destinations.

Destination branding must be considered as a broader field than just destination-brand advertisements. Destination branding means that tourism authorities decide on a strategy for their destination in terms of identity for further communication, attractiveness, etc. Then, from strategy to operational marketing, tourism authorities have to consider the communication campaign for their destination, including its content, format, and other operational choices. The present study focuses on this latter stage of the destination-brand advertisements, as the choice of typography is part of the operational choices concerning the visual elements of an advertisement campaign.

## 1. Literature review

### 1.1. Typography

One of the most well-known definitions of typography is that of Francis Thibaudeau, a French typographer. “Typography is the art of reproducing texts using movable type pieces, grouping them, and accompanying them with ornamentation that is appropriate to them and to their use. By extension, the word Typography includes all the arts that contribute to Printing” (Thibaudeau, 1924, p. 1). Typography refers to the art of drawing letters, but it also extends to layout. McCarthy and Mothersbaugh (2002) explain that “typography deals with the form, spacing, and layout of words and sentences in the text of written or displayed communication messages” (p. 664). It is obvious that we are confronted with typography every day through every kind of textual communication. The writing element in all communication is significant, and typography is a concept that deserves attention.

It is accepted that readable type encourages people to continue reading and even improves the reading activity (Arditi & Cho, 2005; Slattery & Rayner, 2010). Moreover, from a psychological perspective, it has been shown that the physical characteristics of the typeface (font style, size, color) have an influence on the readability of texts.

Research has shown that typography affects people's ability to process and information. McCarthy and Mothersbaugh (2002) examine the legibility of typography, which is operationalized by considering the size, height, and typeface style (serif vs. sans-serif). They take the ability of the reader (slow vs. fast) into account and show that fast readers read more words when the text is presented with a serif typeface and a high x-height (the height of the lowercase x in a specific typography) as compared to a text presented in a sans-serif typeface. Moreover, Novemsky, Dhar, Schwarz, and Simonson (2007) show that typography has an influence on information processing and purchasing behavior. The authors state that consumers' choices of products can be explained by the legibility of the print font, and choices can be postponed when a text promoting a product is presented in a difficult-to-read font.

Typography is able to generate its own evocations without even taking into account the meaning of the text. Tantillo, Di-Lorenzo Aiss, and Mathisen (1995) show the influence of type style on readers' affective response to print by using 28 affective adjectives (e.g. beautiful/ugly) to describe print types. The conventional classification of *serif* vs. *sans-serif* type is not relevant in their study because two fonts “Univers” and “Helvetica” belonging to the same

class, the *sans-serif* family, are significantly different on 20 of the 28 affective descriptors. Hence, a family of type style (based on the physical characteristics of fonts) does not produce the same evocations. However, the authors conclude that *sans-serif* types convey a less elegant and more masculine image than *serif* types, and ornate types have a more feminine image. Henderson, Giese, and Cote (2004) find that impressions created by typeface are structured around four dimensions: pleasing, engaging, reassuring, and prominent. For example, the more ornamental the typeface is, the more it will be perceived as pleasing, engaging, and reassuring. To our knowledge, however, whereas the effect of typeface design has been extensively tested, the influence of type style on cognitive and affective beliefs and on people's attitude toward the type style has not been investigated. Nevertheless, these concepts could be essential in the field of advertising persuasion (for more details, see Amar, 2010; Amar & Droulers, 2014).

### 1.2. Tourism visuals

There is a rich body of research on tourism visuals. They can be seen from different angles, such as museum visitor books that offer a written dialogue between the museum and visitors (Noy, 2015) or personal diaries in Towner's (1985) analysis of the Grand Tour. “An analytical approach to the Grand Tour is possible because of the wealth of primary research material. These are principally the diaries, journals, and letters written by the tourists during their journey s around Europe” (p.301). Other studies considered: photos, signs/notices, crafts ... Through observations of tourists' photo-taking routines, Noy (2014) offered an ethnographic study of tourism's visuals culture. In his paper, the author remind us of the constantly developing agenda investigating image and visual in tourism, from John Urry's work (1990), to more cultural/artistic oriented analysis (including Barthes, 1984), to various recent studies, including the author's observation on a cruise ship of tourist portrayed by the industry (production and consumption of tourist image) (Noy, 2014). Li, Huang, and Christianson (2016) who have investigated the visual attention toward tourism photographs, showed that the perceived effectiveness of an advertisement is increased with tourism photographs including text in a known language. Many researchers used tourism photographs from traditional advertising material (Garrod, 2008, 2009; Pan, Lee, & Tsai, 2014); other recent studies tend to focus on digital media and online user-generated platforms (Lee & Gretzel, 2012; Lo, McKercher, Lo, Cheung & Law, 2011; Stepchenkova & Zhang, 2013).

Dann (2003) highlighted the importance of signs and notices. “Once arrived at destination, it is virtually impossible for tourists to escape the plethora of notices as signs of signs instructing them what to do (Dann, 2003, p. 479). Touristic signs are informational and promotional. These visuals lead people in the right direction, reassure them at destination, transmit a variety of information (restaurants, hotels ...) using logos, brand image, text. A lack of sign can produce anxiety, and even destroy the tourist experience (Law, 1998). In a context of increasingly signs presence, Dann indicates that “signs presence extends far beyond the visual to other senses and situations ... and operates a massive system of social control” (Dann, 2003, p. 479).

In the context of Thai crafts, it has been shown that ribbons can be part of tourist attractions and help to promote crafts (Cohen, 1995). A qualitative research study has also shown that when reading a touristic map, people also interpret a text as they would any other text (Collins-Kreiner, 2005). Finally, destination image formation is an important process that arises through people's experience and beliefs. A relationship between people's psychological motivations and the image has been demonstrated; in other words, image perception is unique (Baloglu, 1997; Dann, 1996). In

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