

DEMYSTIFYING THE VALUE OF CELEBRITIES' IMAGE OF TOURISM ACCOMMODATION ESTABLISHMENTS WEB SITES

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Producers, investors and consumers have used information and communication technologies (ICT) to make decisions and the Websites are, frequently, the first impression projected by an organization to the market (Robins & Holmes, 2008). Thus, on one hand, it is essential for companies and organizations to have Websites with effective, appealing, and credible designs, able to capture attention, interest and trust of the audience they are targeted because of the increased virtual buyers and consumers (Cyr et al., 2009; Lavié and Tractinsky, 2004). On the other hand, the demand from travelers who move from region to region for various reasons has evolved to the point that tourism is the second world's economic activity (Ritchie and Crouch, 2000; Sancho, 2006). In this sense, it is understandable the boom of the study in tourism marketing as an element of management and adaptability to a fully competitive market (Bigné, 1996).

A market segment of particular interest is the so-called Generation Y, which consists of individuals born among 1977-1994 (Sheahan, 2005). The importance of this consumer segment is the fact they have particular characteristics relating to: their behaviors, attitudes and skills in the use of the internet and mass media (Bakewell and Mitchell, 2003; Leask et al., 2014; Martínez, 2013; Roy et al., 2015), higher income, consumption and time spent in surfing the net (Waters, 2006), since they have grown hand in hand with technological innovation (Djamasbi et al., 2007, 2008). These features also result in higher levels of demand on the visual appeal and credibility of Web pages (Tractinsky, 2004; Williams and Page, 2011).

Thus, the credibility of the information projected through the Websites is critical to the effectiveness of the message and for evaluating the attractiveness perceived by users, because the first impression of a Website is based on the visual elements and answers preconceived judgments that take place even before other cognitive processes occurring

in the consumer's mind (Robins and Holmes, 2008). In this same line of thought, other researches highlight that using images, especially of people and text on a Website, are capable of eliciting a more personalized atmosphere to generate an emotional response, and positively affect confidence and enjoyment of the users who navigate the Website (Cyr et al., 2009; Herrero and San Martin, 2012).

Using eye-tracking systems as a support tool in the design of commercial messages in general and for the development of Web page content in particular, can create certain competitive advantages and increase the value of organizations, given that propitiate a maximum use of the functional elements -understood as those relating to the perceived usefulness of the product or service offered-, and hedonic -those of an aesthetic nature, and focused on affective or emotional aspects- that integrate it, thereby optimizing the design of their Websites (Djamasbi et al., 2007) and generating consumer's confidence (Cyr and Head, 2013).

In the specialized literature, it has been suggested that the presence of celebrities is one of the essential features to increase both visual appeal and the credibility of Web pages. In order to contribute to the knowledge of tourism marketing, and with the aim to compare the findings of Djamasbi et al. (2010) empirically, a causal research was conducted, a 3x2 factorial design experiment, supported by a survey questionnaire and eye tracking technology, applied to 126 university students randomly selected in Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico, whose ages were in the range proposed for the Generation Y. Three different versions of two previously selected Web pages of exotic tourist accommodations were used, in which the presence/absence of celebrities and non celebrities on the screen were manipulated for the groups subject to treatment but not for the control one, in order to determine possible differences in the influence of each one in the dependent variables visual appeal and perceived credibility of Web pages, as well as in the time of fixation gaze on the area that contained each stimulus. This design was conceived and implemented taking into account both the nature of research and the need to ensure comparability of results. The data obtained through both eye-tracking device as the survey were statistically analyzed using SPSS.

The proposed hypotheses of this study were:

- H1: The visual appeal declared by Generation Y users of a Web page to promote tourist accommodation does not differ significantly by the presence of celebrities or not famous people in its design.
- H2: The credibility declared by Generation Y users of a Web page to promote tourist accommodation does not differ significantly by the presence of celebrities or not famous people in its design.
- H3: The adding of graphic elements not related to the company itself increases the time fixating on them and distracts the attention of consumers.

As result of this research, the three hypothesis were accepted, which found that the presence of celebrities does not increase the attractiveness and credibility of Web pages, but surprisingly and on the contrary, subtracts the attention dedicated to the information of the companies, so its value as a source of visual appeal and credibility is, at best cases, null.

Indeed, the results suggest that the value attributed to celebrities as a source of visual appeal and credibility for the subjects of the generation Y is, at least in the context of this study, unfounded and even counterproductive. Hence, it is considered more convenient for those companies which are interested in capturing the attention and confidence of the users of that generation not to include celebrities in their Web designs for two main reasons. The first reason is that the investment production and royalties required to use the image of celebrities tend to be considerably expensive and, as in this case, inefficient, therefore not justified; and the second reason is that their presence in the Web pages reduces the effective time dedicated by the user to observe specific information of the company and its offerings, reducing their opportunities to provide relevant information of the organization itself.

The knowledge generated by this research contributes to the study of tourism marketing in three ways. In the first place, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first time that an empirical study contrasts the aesthetic reactions of the members of the generation Y related to the presence of celebrities in the Web pages as a source of visual appeal and credibility, from a causal perspective and through a true experiment. Secondly, this study is pioneer in the use of eye tracking tools for scientific research of marketing in Latin America and of tourism marketing in particular. Thirdly, refuting previous theoretical approaches helps lay a foundation for future studies of academics and practitioners in this regard. From a management standpoint, the findings of this investigation provide statistical evidence that can be taken as a reference by policy makers, at the time of designing the Web pages of promotion, particularly for the promotion of tourist accommodation targeted to the members of Generation Y.

The limitations identified in the present study correspond to three fields of application, and for which the recommendations for future work are simultaneously exposed. The first one, is that all the participants were college students of Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico, and although those were selected and assigned to study groups randomly and their ages belong to Generation Y, are not necessarily representative of all the members of this market segment; for this reason, it is required and recommended to replicate this research in different contexts. The second limitation stems from the fact that was used only Web pages for the promotion of exotic tourist accommodation services, which are high involvement products. In addition, the third one has to do with the number of Web pages used in the study, i.e., only two, then it is also necessary to conduct further research in economic sectors different from tourism and/or with goods and/or services of high and low involvement, as well as using different promotional pages.

