Analysing the Emotional Appeal of a Website through Verbal and Pictorial Stimuli

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Abstract

When looking for information about a tourism product in the majority of cases websites are the first contact most tourists have with a tourism product. Moreover, the first impression of a destination or tourist facility is crucial for the evaluation of these. As pictures and text are a main part of a tourism website, a tourist’s opinion will be influenced by them. So, through the visual and textual stimuli an experience and especially emotions are evoked. Therefore, it is of major importance to know what a picture and a text initiates and why. Hence, this research study analyzes pictures and text on tourism websites related to their emotions in order to catch the visual appeal and in succession the induced image. Results show that verbal stimuli are used skilfully while a third of the pictorial stimuli are perceived negative. Therefore improvements are necessary to create a positive overall perception.

Keywords: Emotion, Picture, Text, Image

1 Introduction

Tourism as a part of the service industry is characterized by intangibility and heterogeneity (Sheldon, 1997). Therefore, it is very important for tourists to look for detailed information, at first internally and in a second step externally (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard, 1995), here especially on the internet (Zhang, Pan, Smith & Li, 2009; Xiang & Pan, 2009; Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006). So mostly, websites are the first contact tourists have with the tourism product. Additionally, the first impression of a destination or tourist facility is crucial for the evaluation of these (Haathi & Komppula, 2006). This means if users find a website visually appealing, other factors (like usability, missing information) play a secondary role (Lindgaard, Fernandes, Dudek & Brown, 2006).

When thinking of the form of a website, the major components are the structure, the pictures and the text. To improve the visual appeal, these three segments have to harmonize with each other. A lot of research was done in usablity studies concerning the structure (Moss, Gunn, & Heller, 2006; Ruso & Mayer, 2006), but the minor elements of the website, namely pictures and text, which build the structure, are not really analysed. As pictures and text are a main part of a tourism website a tourist’s opinion will be influenced by them.

Gunn (1988) called these views in the mind of the tourists formed through websites, brochures, etc. induced image. Thus, an experience and especially emotions are evoked. Therefore, it is of major importance to know what a picture and a text initiates. Although research studies in measuring emotions evoked through text
(Strapparava & Mihalcea, 2008) and pictures exist (Lang, Bradley, & Cuthbert, 2008; Schweiger & Wiklicky, 1986), most marketing campaigns only think about the ideal theme and not really about the evoked emotion. Hence, this research study analyzes pictures and text on tourism websites related to their emotions in order to catch the visual appeal and in succession the induced image. The following research is devoted to which emotions are evoked through pictures and text on selected websites and what could be the reason that these emotions arise.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Induced Visual and Textual Image

The experiences and impressions which a potential tourist has when visiting a website, reading a book or looking at a brochure, form the so called induced image (Gunn, 1988). Through the use of pictures on a website, a certain image is created called the visual image. This visual image is defined as “the interest that a picture will create if potential tourists observe it and it inspires for a first and repeated visits” (Ye & Tussyadiah, 2011). Based on this literature background, the use of text creates also a special image which is from now on called the textual image.

So far there are various Image-Analyses (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Pike, 2002; Mazanec, 2010), however, none of these are analysing the emotional component. Most of them, focus on the cognitive dimension of an image only (Bigné Alcaniz, Sánchez García, & Sanz Blas, 2009). Moreover, there are few studies which compare the projected image meaning the image transported by the tourism facility and the perceived image meaning the image of the visitor (Grosspietsch, 2006).

Due to the inspection of pictures and text from websites, in this paper the visual and textual image and in succession the induced image caused through selected websites regarding their emotional component is detected.

2.2 Evoked Emotions

It could be said that a tourism website has to fulfill two big challenges. On the one hand it is important to build trust in order to create a relationship between the offered product and the prospective tourist as the user of the website. On the other hand the website has to arise first experiences and inspirations.

Experiences and also trust are mostly created through emotions (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005). This means that through emotional stimuli a person will be activated and will be strongly connected to the tourism product. Emotions are the key to attract potential tourists.

The imparted information will be easier memorized and stays longer in the memory (Foscht & Swoboda, 2007) if the appropriate emotional stimuli are used. Bagozzi, Gopinath and Nyer (1999) call these kinds of advertisement “feeling ads”. Especially, they can be faster addressed as rational information (Lindgaard, Fernandes, Dudek, & Brown, 2006).

An exact definition of emotion is hard to generate as scientists from different disciplines have different accesses to the term (Scherer, 2005; Kleinginna &