



Delivering Brand Equity and Consumer Oriented insights through Marketing Communication elements in the Tourism Sector

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Abstract

Over the years, the move to integrated marketing communication (IMC) have gained popularity and increased sales for organisational marketers and brand champions. This is because in order for any business to succeed it must consider communicating with its customers or marketplace. Failure to communicate, or communicating inaccurately may result in customers or market not being aware of the products and services offered by the company. As a consequence, it becomes imperative for customers to understand the communication point of view of the company – this process of communicating with the market, customers and consumers is known as marketing communication. This article examines how the tourism sector in the North West Province in South Africa can deliver brand equity through consumer-orientated insights. In doing so, the article evaluates three marketing communication elements, namely, advertising, direct response marketing, and public relations and the word-of-mouth. The North West Province tourism sector is one the provincial economic hubs that contributes significantly to the provincial GDP and as well as at the national level. Therefore, is important to understand how various marketing communication activities and tactics can be adopted to reposition the Bokone Bophirima brand as a destination of choice.

Key words: Brand equity, Consumer-orientated insights, Marketing Communication elements, IMC, Tourism sector.

Introduction

The marketing communications environment has transformed enormously from what it used to be forty or perhaps even as little as five years ago. Over the years, the move to integrated marketing communication (IMC) has gained popularity and increased sales for organisational marketers and brand champions. This is because for any business to succeed it must consider communicating effectively with its customers or marketplace. Failure to communicate, or communicating incorrectly, may result in customers or the market in general not being aware of the products and services offered by the company. Hence, it becomes imperative for customers to understand the communication point of view of the company – this process of communicating with the market, customers and consumers is therefore known as marketing communication. Through communicating with the market or customers, marketers employ multiple communications to achieve their goals. In doing so, they need to understand how each communication option works and how to assemble and integrate the best set of choices (Eberechukwu & Chukwuma, 2016). In this article, the author evaluates how brand equity is delivered through consumer-orientated insights in the tourism sector. Therefore, the major marketing communication elements adopted in this article for delivering brand equity include; advertising, direct response marketing, and public relations and also word-of-mouth (WOM). Accordingly, it is very important for marketers, the tourism sector, and consumers to understand the importance of integrated marketing communications. For that reason, Belch and Belch (2012: 9) contend that the American Association of Advertising Agencies define

IMC as a concept of marketing communications planning that recognises the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communications impact.

From this perspective, it is evident that the concept of IMC is value offering through a comprehensive plan that marketers need to adopt in order to promote their product offerings to consumers. Moreover, marketers need to integrate various marketing communication elements to provide added value and increase positive relationships with customers. In doing so, the integrated marketing communication plan and strategies should enable marketers to strategically position their products and services to better serve the needs, interests, and expectations of customers based on the identified insights to leverage product resonance. Additionally, marketers need to consolidate consumer-orientated insights in order to deliver brand equity through their products offerings – brand equity is the value perception or belief held by customers of a particular product or service offered by the service provider to fulfil an identified need-state.

Consumer-orientated insights for maximum brand equity

Insights are said to be inspirational truth enacted in the process of discovering consumer perceptions, feelings, emotions, needs, interests and inner desires of what motivation a product or brand can leverage. It is through insights research that marketer learn of consumers' opinions and understanding of the brand's performance in the marketplace. However, some marketers omit the fact that consumer-orientated insights can drive organisational brand equity and increase sales drastically. Aaker (1991) defined brand equity as a set of five categories of brand assets (liabilities) linked to a brand's name or symbol that add to (subtract from) the value provided by a product or service. Other marketers and organisations concede that the nature and complexity of the market and consumer behaviour warrants a move from traditional consumer researches, as a result, those marketers and organisations are faced with numerous challenges of adequately addressing consumer needs, interests, satisfaction and ultimately meeting their expectations through their product offerings.

For marketers to effectively understand the most powerful motivation or trigger that a brand or product can leverage, they need in-depth research to reach a particular goal. To realised brand equity, marketers need to start from the assumption that the power of a brand lies in the minds of consumers and what they have experienced and learned about the brand over time (Eberechukwu & Chukwuma, 2016). The advantage of conceptualising brand equity from the consumer's perspective is that it enables managers to consider specifically how their marketing programmes improve the value of their brands.

Aaker (1991) maintains that conceptualising brand equity from the consumer's perspective is useful because it suggests both specific guidelines for marketing strategies and tactics and areas where research can be useful in assisting managerial decision making. Two important points emerge from this conceptualisation. First, marketers should take a broad view of the marketing activity for a brand and recognise the various effects it has on brand knowledge, as well as how changes in brand knowledge affect more traditional outcome measures such as sales. Second, markets must realise that the long-term success of all future marketing programmes for a brand is greatly affected by the knowledge about the brand in memory that has been established by the organisation's short-term marketing efforts.

Brand equity achieved through consumer-orientated insights helps to differentiate the product from competitor's offerings, serves as a proxy for quality and creates positive images in consumers' minds, presents market share erosion during price and promotional wars, and prevents market share erosion by giving an organisation time to respond to competitive threats. According to Keller (2008), brand knowledge is a key antecedent of consumer based

brand equity and is in turn conceptualised as a brand node in memory to which a variety of associations have been linked. Brand knowledge is then decomposed into two separate constructs, brand awareness and brand image (associations). The majority of conceptual studies agree that awareness and associations are important components of consumer-based brand equity. Moreover, marketers should differentiate between what is and what is not a good insight, table 1 below briefly articulate some of the important reflections on consumer-orientated insights:

A GOOD INSIGHT:	AN INSIGHT IS NOT:
- Reflects a core truth, value, belief - Provides a deeper understanding of the motivations behind behaviour - Is true for a consumer group with significant potential - Is concise and distilled - Anticipates consumers' needs - Taps into values - Is an emotional lever that makes intuitive sense - Resonates with the target audience - Explains behaviour in an empathetic way - Is leverageable, gives momentum to a brand - Focuses on the most powerful trigger to unlock a business opportunity - Has the power to translate into sales, word of mouth, and consumer loyalty - Builds value for the brand - Drives great creative marketing	- A rational explanation of behaviour - Facts put together in a sentence - Judgement of consumers - Descriptive illustration of current status quo - Exclusive - Too broadly defined or vague - Temporary - Overly intellectual - Written in business language or jargon

Table 1. *Consumer-orientated insights* (adapted from Koekemoer, 2014: 29).

From the table above, successful marketers and their respective organisations acknowledge that consumer-orientated insights are one of the many factors influencing integrated marketing communication decisions, particularly in the tourism and hospitality sectors. The primary focus therefore of any tourism sector should be brand positioning and communication. As a consequence, consumer-orientated insights links a business objective to measurable behaviours, such as purchasing and consumption patterns, or brand equity. Furthermore, it opens up new opportunities for a brand by strengthening the brand's competitive advantage in the marketplace (Koekemoer, 2014).

Bringing insights to life for the tourism sector

Consumer-orientated or motivated in-depth research can energise the tourism sector landscape to better understand the importance of market insights, brand insights, and consumer and shopper insights in a compelling way. It is crucial for the tourism sector to continuously evolve and adopt new ways of attracting investors, travellers, and locals who supports the vision of the sector. Tourism is a goal-driven business where individuals, institutions, and tourism boards are faced with the challenge of finding practical strategies for gaining, mileage, clientele, and customer database. The aim here is to serve a variety of stakeholders with the intention to position tourism as an economic hub and a leading contributor to aspects such as leisure, high employment rate, and brand presentation equity.

In the tourism sector, it is imperative to concede that inspiring, motivating, and convincing key stakeholders to make decisions, to change strategic direction or try something new is often a difficult task. Moreover, stakeholders are the movers and shakers of the how the tourism sector should operate and comprehensively find innovative strategies to grow and develop the sector, thus it is imperative for brand equity to be realised. According to Aaker, Batra and Meyers (2006) brand offerings have equity because they have high awareness, many loyal customers, a high reputation for perceived quality, and proprietary brand assets. Additionally, consumers prefer high-equity brands because they find it easier to interpret what benefits the brand offers, feel more confident about it, and get more satisfaction from using it. As a consequence, consumer-orientated insights can leverage the tourism sector to command higher asset value by systematically integrating marketing communication elements such as direct response marketing, advertising, and public relations and the word of mouth for planned and tailored messages to the key stakeholders. In order to bring insights to life, integrated marketing communication (IMC) should be viewed as the strategic drive and the key to deliver consumer-orientated insights for the attainment of brand equity in the tourism sector. As such, IMC is the strategic process of elaborating on various marketing domains utilising elements that complement each other for the better good of the overall strategy and plan. To sum up, bringing insights to life, the Figure 1 below illustrates the integration of key insight areas for maximum productivity as a recollection of what the IMC plan should consider for brand equity to be realised in the tourism sector. Moreover, integrated marketing communication is about story-telling and brand recognition through platforms such as advertising and direct response marketing to effect a degree of change in consumer behaviour.

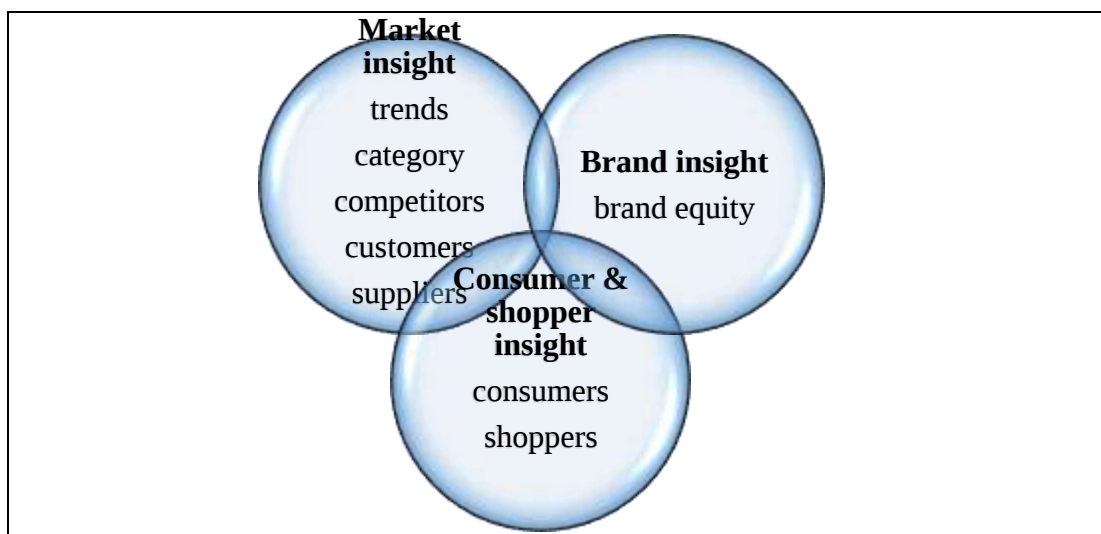


Figure 1. *Key insight areas* (adapted from Koekemoer, 2014).

It is therefore also important to realise that insight can be brought to life in a number of different ways and the chosen method often depends on the intended audience, areas such as the hospitality industry, leisure, and tourism depends largely on the target markets' knowledge and brand awareness to stimulate a particular desire and act favourably inclined towards product and service offerings. The strength of the market insight relies on identifying and analysing various market trends, segmenting and categorisation of the market as well as the ability to gain the necessary competitive edge over competitors – and the capacity to spot potential customers and suppliers.

For brand insight, it is crucial to meaningfully communicate the intention, performance, and benefits a brand has to offer so as to create brand recognition, awareness, and knowledge – ultimately, happier consumers attach value (brand equity) to a brand based on its competitiveness and fulfilment. Lastly, consumer insight and shopper insight provide deeper knowledge brand preferences and association. As a result, a powerful brand has the potential and ability to persuade the target market and communicate the goals of an organisational profile, therefore insights are about consumer education, their needs, interests, and expectations.

Koekemoer (2014) correctly points out that business decisions require solid understanding of consumer's behaviour and the process should be fact based, not merely assumptions or unrelated data points. In the main, bringing insights to life can offer the following narrative to brand and/or product success:

- ✚ A **consumer story** that tells the story of a typical consumer and the role the brand plays in his or her life;
- ✚ A **'day in the life' portrait** of the consumer's life, including their general lifestyle patterns, how they consume media, and the point at which the brand becomes relevant;
- ✚ A **mood board or video** that visually portrays the insight and/or the consumer;
- ✚ A **debrief** presentation that summarises the key findings and insights to relevant stakeholders, typically presented by the research agency; and
- ✚ An **immersion**, such as sending stakeholders out to experience the life of the consumer for themselves.

Because of motivational benefits perceived a brand to have, the tourism sector should often realise that marketing campaign objectives need to be presented in the form of a communication effects pyramid with lower-level objectives, such as awareness and knowledge or comprehension, at the bottom. This approach will assist the tourism sector in planning and executing programmes that build a primary demand, influence attitudes and feelings, and create preferences while positioning their brands as more preferred to those of competitors. The communication effects pyramid should therefore include advertising and promotion objectives to effectively engage constituents for brand association.

To summarise the pyramid, the marketing communication plan and campaign should promote the communication of the brand as a unique selling proposition or the big idea. In doing so, the marketing communication programme will create a broad level of consciousness among the target audience with the objective of reaching spontaneous awareness as a way to stimulate or induce the target audience. Additionally, the next step in the pyramid process is to communicate information so that a certain percentage of the target audience will not only be aware of the brand, but will also understand its features, performance, and benefits.

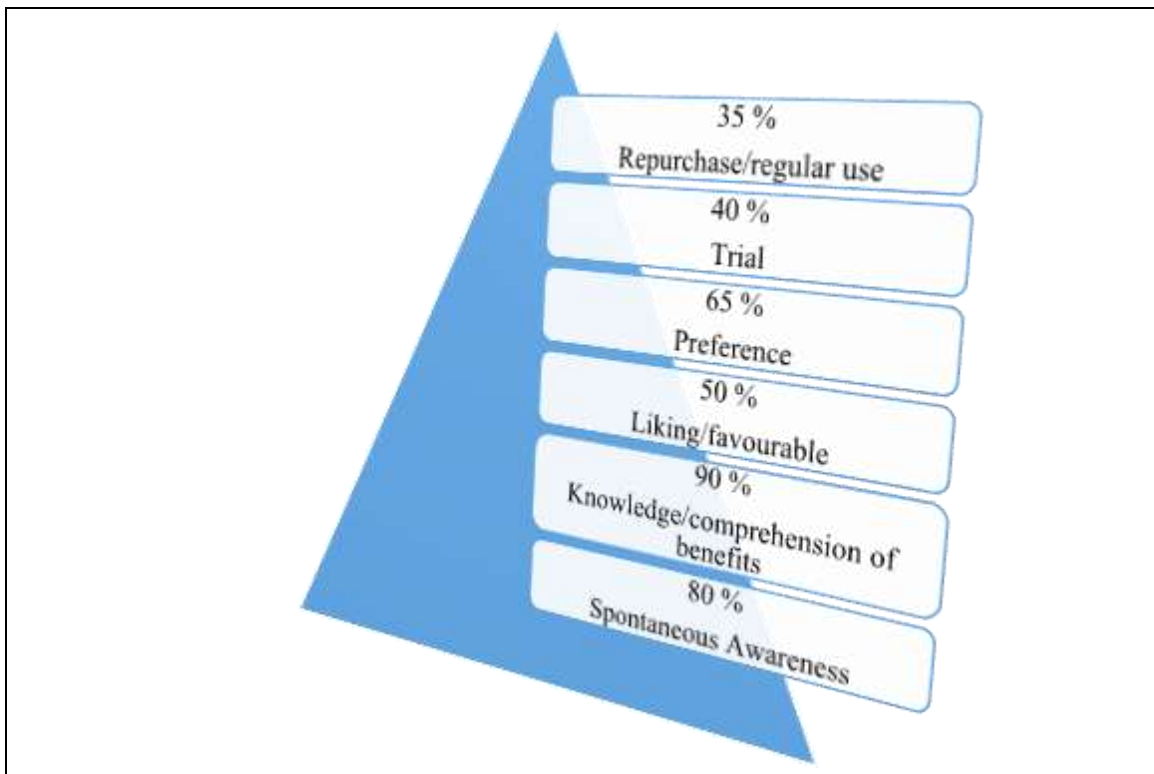


Figure 2. *Communication pyramid* (adapted from Belch & Belch 2012: 222).

It is therefore important to factor all the percentages of the communication effects pyramid as part of the identified objectives throughout the integrated marketing communication plan and strategy. The ultimate goal of the marketing communication programme is to create brand preference and trust so as to reinforce brand loyalty through customer retention and gaining new set of customers. In the market (like the tourism sector) where many active competitors provide the same or similar products or services, brand education should be the strategic key indicator that facilitates a business in achieving its financial target, reputation and customer's loyalty.

For the benefit of the tourism sector in the main, marketing communications have to be used to build brand image, reinforce memories and understanding about brand's product, inform and attract public attention to raise awareness of brand presence and finally persuade customers to buy or consume the products. To position the tourism sector, it is imperative to consider the three marketing communication elements as part of the IMC plan and strategy, but firstly, what follows next is the discussion of the tourism sector in the North West Province and later the three elements as articulated in figure 3.



Figure 3. Three marketing communication elements (adapted from Koekemoer, 2014).

Tourism sector in the North West Province

Throughout South Africa, tourism has influenced the economic growth and in particular, the increase in Gross Domestic Products (GDP), this is because of the ever increasing movement of tourist and tourism flairs created to stimulate the necessary growth in the sector. As a consequence, all the nine provinces of South Africa has seen rapid growth in terms of their planning and strategic management in the tourism sector. The North West Province as one of the tourist destination of choice has also gained much movement over the years, with the current slogan '*I do Tourism sustainably – we do tourism*' been the centre piece of innovation and attraction. The mission of the North West Department of Tourism therefore is to lead and grow a dynamic, sustainable, diversified and vibrant tourism sector for the North West Province through:

- ✚ Promoting partnerships and collaboration with all key stakeholders, in particular the private sector;
- ✚ Promoting cultural and heritage tourism in the North West;
- ✚ Strengthening institutional capacity; promoting good corporate and cooperative governance; and
- ✚ Branding and marketing of North West province as a tourist destination; and creativity and innovation (NW Department of Tourism, Undated).

To reposition the North West Tourism sector in the global space, the department's strategic goals are:

- ✚ tourism product development in 19 townships and 56 villages;
- ✚ providing intervention in the village, township and small dorpiés economies;
- ✚ increasing the economic profile of tourism; provincial bed capacity audit;
- ✚ the promotion of Bokone Bophirima Tourism Growth and Development Agency;

- ✚ the Bloemhof Dam tourism development;
- ✚ the Wentzel Dam tourism infrastructure upgrade;
- ✚ the Lotlamoreng Dam tourism infrastructure upgrade;
- ✚ the Taung Hotel School and Conference Centre;
- ✚ the Bojanala Eco-Tourism City; and
- ✚ A re yeng Bokone Bophirima (NW Department of Tourism, Undated).

The North West's tourism offering is varied and comprehensive. The emphasis is on the bushveld experience, with major assets being the Pilanesberg National Park (a provincial facility) and the Madikwe Game Reserve, which contains many luxury private lodges. The North West Parks and Tourism Board runs a further 12 smaller parks and reserves. Two Unesco World Heritage Sites are located at Vredefort Dome (where a meteorite hit the earth about two million years ago) and Taung, where the discovery by an archaeologist of a skull in 1924 is regarded as one of the most significant of all time (NW Department of Tourism, Undated).

The complex of hotels at Sun City in the Pilanesberg offers a range of accommodation, from the last word in luxury to family accommodation. There are two very good golf courses at Sun City. The annual Nedbank Golf Challenge, hosted at the Gary Player Country Club, helps to put North West Province in the international spotlight. There are campuses of the North - West University in Potchefstroom, Mahikeng and the Vaal Triangle.

Current status of the tourism sector in North West

The North West Provincial Government has acknowledged without reservations the significant growth within Tourism fraternity in the Province and that the Tourism department is well on course to realising its set goal of ensuring that the province becomes the 3rd most visited province in the Country. This was confirmed by Premier Supra Mahumapelo when he was delivering his State of the Province Address (SOPA) at the Taung Sports Ground in Taung (SOPA, 2017). Premier Mahumapelo further said that there are commendable signals indicating progress in efforts to position the Bokone Bophirima amongst the top 3 most visited Provinces in the country.

“The focus of our agenda going forward will be anchored on building efficiencies in the sector, improving our tourism marketing efforts, strengthening tourism infrastructure in VTSD areas, building strong regulatory regime, partnering with bodies responsible for capacity development in the sector and aggressively attracting investment into the tourism sector”, said Premier Mahumapelo.

Additionally, Premier Mahumapelo told the Provincial Legislature that the success of the Province to attract tourists will be largely dependent on security, stability, cleanliness, friendliness, improving transport and road infrastructure (NWP, 2017). He further urged all relevant stakeholders to rally behind the Department of Tourism in ensuring that they work hand in glove in developing a comprehensive Provincial VTSD Tourism Action Plan. It is also hoped that in the next financial year, this department will be able to finalise the establishment of Bojanala and Dr Kenneth Kaunda Hotel Schools, and also expand the Tourism Youth Hospitality Learnership Programme.

Using advertising in the NW tourism sector

The North West tourism sector is a viable economic contributor that accounts for a larger percentage both within the provincial and national GDP. However, for the sector to continue flourishing and creating employment, it is of utmost importance to communicate with all key

stakeholders and arguably position the sector as the peoples-centred brand. To achieve this, the tourism sector has to consider the most modern and proactive ways of advertising and reaching the diverse target market. Advertising therefore, generally remains a purposeful way to induce potential customers, investors, and any other interested/affected stakeholders to respond favourably to the business offerings.

To date, numerous definitions of advertising exist, however, there is no universally agreed upon definition. Koekemoer (2011:101) suggest that advertising is any form of mass presentation of ideas, products and services by an advertiser, addressed to selected target audiences with the objective of creating awareness, informing, reminding, influencing, and persuading them to buy the product or service or to be favourably inclined towards these ideas, products or services. In summarising and supporting Koekemoer's definition of advertising, Semenik, Allen, O'Guinn & Kaufman (2012:11) posit that advertising can be defined as a paid, mass-mediated attempt to persuade. From these two definitions, it becomes unblemished that advertising is a paid process with the intention to persuade the target audience to act favourably to the offerings of the advertiser, the advertiser is therefore identified with the message conveyed.

The tourism sector should note that, what makes advertising unique is the fact that it can reach a diverse target audience and communicate the brand in a compelling way so that action can be taken, such action can be positive or negative depending on the message conveyed through an identified and confirmed media channel of choice. Because of the nature and complexity of the tourism sector where products and services represent the profile of businesses to the target market, it is important to consider advertising as an organisational feature with the strength and potential to increase sales and favourably induce the target market to be inclined towards business offerings.

Advertisers are now more interested in consumers' reactions to the ad because they know that affective reactions are an important determinant of advertising effectiveness, since these reactions may be transferred to the brand itself or directly influence purchase intentions. One study found that people who enjoy a commercial are twice as likely as those who are neutral toward it to be convinced that the brand is the best (Belch & Belch, 2003). It can be argued that consumers' feelings about the ad may be just as important as their attitudes toward the brand (if not more so) in determining an ad's effectiveness. The importance of affective reactions and feelings generated by the ad depend on several factors, among them the nature of the ad and the type of processing engaged in by the receiver. As a consequence, many advertisers now use emotional ads designed to evoke feelings and affective reactions as the basis of their creative strategy.

The success of this strategy depends in part on the consumers' involvement with the brand and their likelihood of attending to and processing the message (Belch & Belch, 2003). Figure 4 briefly illustrate how advertising work, it is imperative to consider advertising as content and message driven because advertising aims to persuade and therefore both the content and message should be systematically organised to effect a degree of change in the target market.

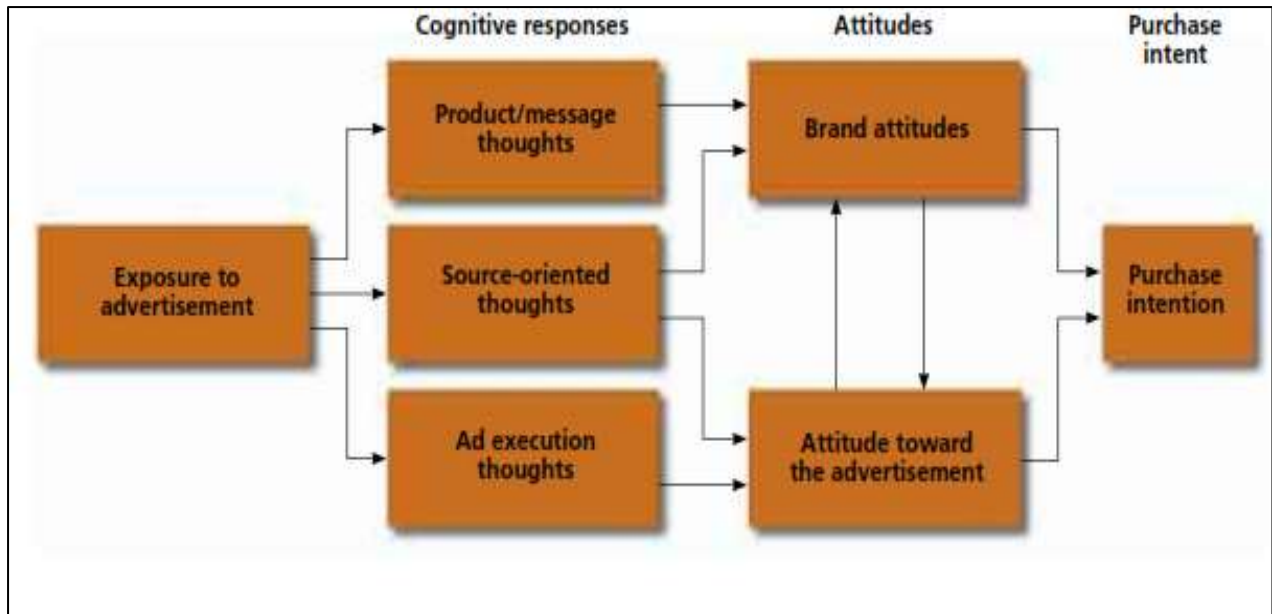


Figure 4. *How advertising works* (Belch & Belch, 2012 cited by Koekemoer, 2014).

One of the most widely used methods for examining consumers' cognitive processing of advertising messages is assessment of their cognitive responses, the thoughts that occur to them while reading, viewing, and/or hearing a communication (Belch & Belch, 2003). These thoughts are generally measured by having consumers write down or verbally report their reactions to a message. The assumption is that these thoughts reflect the recipient's cognitive processes or reactions and help shape ultimate acceptance or rejection of the message. The cognitive response approach has been widely used in research by both academicians and advertising practitioners. Its focus has been to determine the types of responses evoked by an advertising message and how these responses relate to attitudes toward the ad, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions (Belch & Belch, 2003).

It is therefore without a doubt that the tourism sector should engage the advertising process with the view of understanding the cognitive responses of potential consumers in the consumption of their products and services. The tourism sector should factor consumer-oriented insights in planning and organising advertisements that seek to position their brands, areas such as Entertainment resorts, Hotels, Game reserves, and other Tourism attractions in the North West Province can adopt the cognitive response model of how advertising works for corporate image and reputation of the sector. This approach to advertising have the potential to deliver brand equity through identified consumer-orientated insights as a result of the target market research and analysis.

Adopting direct response marketing in the NW tourism sector

As an interactive process of communicating and creating awareness of the products and services, direct response marketing is arguably the fastest growing form of marketing communications activity in South Africa and most other countries. Like its cousins in the marketing communication spectrum, direct response marketing cannot be viewed as a stand-alone as it requires elements such as Public relations and digital media marketing to serve its purpose. Stone (1986: 1) defined direct marketing as an interactive system of marketing which uses one or more advertising media to effect a measurable response and/or transaction at any location. Later on in 2004, Koekemoer suggested a definition that encompasses all the determining characteristics of direct marketing:

Direct marketing is an interactive system of marketing designed to create and keep customers by developing long-term, personal relationships with each of them through increasingly relevant product or service offerings. To achieve this, direct marketing uses one or more advertising media to generate a measurable response in the form of an order (direct order), request for further information (lead generation), and/or a visit to the business site (Koekemoer, 2004: 326-332).

From this perspective, the tourism sector have to concede that direct response marketing is one of the most effective activities of marketing communication and a leading contributor to the overall integrated marketing communication plan and strategy. In this context, direct response marketing is interactive, which means that the marketer and the customer engage in two-way communication. This makes direct marketing different from many other methods of marketing, the distinction is that ordinary marketing send out messages to large numbers of consumers using mass advertising on TV, radio or print, but has no precise method of obtaining feedback. Direct marketing, on the other hand, allows the marketer and the customer to communicate with each other directly and immediately.

It is for these reasons that direct marketing remains the only method that guarantees immediate responses. This method would assist the tourism sector in understanding customers in a quick and responsive manner while persuading them to use their products and services. As a build up to direct marketing, the sector can consider gathering consumer-orientated insights through the formulation of customer database marketing. Database marketing can complement direct response marketing because information about customer would be recorded and kept for future engagements. In the main, direct marketing is a measurable process that stimulate behaviour through the methods of coding and tracking that direct marketers have developed. This will further enlighten the tourism sector on how to monitor and evaluate customer behaviour for maximum productivity to attain high brand equity ultimately.

Adopting public relations and word-of-mouth in the NW tourism sector

As a context, the tourism sector need to recognise the important distinction between publicity and public relations. When an organisation systematically plans and distributes information in an attempt to control and manage its image and the nature of the publicity it receives, it is really engaging in a function known as public relations (Belch & Belch, 2003). It is important to consider publicity as one of the activities of public relations. Public relations is defined as the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or organisation with the public interest, and executes a programme of action to earn public understanding and acceptance (Belch & Belch, 2012).

Another view from PRISA (2009) is that, public relations is the management, through communication, of perceptions and strategic relationships between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders. Public relations generally has a broader objective than publicity, as its purpose is to establish and maintain a positive image of the company among its various publics. Public relations uses publicity and a variety of other tools – including special publications, participation in community activities, fund-raising, sponsorship of special events, and various public affairs activities – to enhance an organisation's image.

The tourism sector should use advertising as a public relations tool. Traditionally, publicity and public relations have been considered more supportive than primary to the marketing and promotional process. However, many organisations have begun making PR an integral part of their predetermined marketing and promotional strategies. Belch and Belch (2003) maintain that PR firms are increasingly touting public relations as a communications tool that can take over many of the functions of conventional advertising and marketing. Since well the tourism sector is about rendering services or promoting products or brands, public relations can be adopted as a key role player in developing understanding and support for a particular cause

or event. Essentially it can help the tourism sector to define and explain relationships of mutual benefit between the sector and their key stakeholders.

As a key tool of marketing communications, PR serve as a supportive tool to other marketing communications elements. The relationship between PR and marketing can therefore be summarised by stating that PR and marketing both deal with organisational relationships and employ similar processes, techniques and strategies as articulated by Cant, Van Heerden & Ngambi (2010: 354). This can accelerate productivity for the tourism sector as the two functions have to be separated by mission or goal. PR has the goal of attaining and maintaining accord with social groups on whom the organisation depends in order to achieve its mission. On the other hand, marketing has the goal of attracting and satisfying customers on a sustained basis in order to achieve an organisation's economic objectives. Therefore, it can be argued that public relations activities contribute to fulfilling marketing objectives as an organisation need both of them for survival and success.

Another dimension that can be added to public relations that the tourism sector can consider is the management of word-of-mouth (WOM). Meiners, Schwarting, and Seeberger (2010) define word-of-mouth as a non-paid interpersonal form of communication about brands, products or services that may be either positive or negative. This is considered one of the most powerful communication channels, and comes from friends, relatives, newspaper reviews, work colleagues and other reliable reference groups (Koekemoer, 2014). What is important about word-of-mouth communication is that the information received from these sources creates an impression in the consumer's mind and he or she uses this information to form a desired and predicted service expectation.

As a consequence, the value and importance of word-of-mouth advertising in the tourism sector cannot be over emphasised, people tend to believe what they are told by others- especially consumers who have had first-hand experience of an organisation, product or service. Equally the nature of the tourism sector relies heavily on positive word-of-mouth to thrive, negative communication has the potential to decrease sales and affect the organisational image and reputation negatively. The tourism sector is both service and product orientated, managing negative perceptions is paramount, and thus the sector should consider insight-audit regularly in order to understand consumer perceptions and opinions. Public relations as a management function that deals with managing perceptions must be employed to actively perform environmental scanning and situational analysis so as to recommend suitable solutions to the sector.

Conclusion

Consumer-orientated insights remain the benchmark to attain maximum business productivity and success. More and more sectors are increasingly becoming aware of the importance of developing and measuring high brand equity through consumer identified insights. The unique selling proposition of a brand is created to stimulate continuous purchase or use of product and service offerings in a compelling manner. There is no doubt that marketing communications activities are suitable to deliver brand equity and effectively understand consumer need-state. This article evaluated three of the marketing communication elements as a way to understand the contribution of consumer-orientated insights in delivering brand equity for the tourism sector, advertising, direct response marketing, and public relations and word-of-mouth closely work together and complement each other as part of the integrated marketing communication plan and strategy. The three adopted elements can assist marketers to build and manage their brands in a dramatically changing marketing communications environment. The customer-based brand equity serve as a value proposition that emphasises the importance of understanding consumer brand knowledge and their cognitive response to product or service offerings. Unambiguously, the tourism sector has to consider the communication effects pyramid to offer brand resonance and as a means to track



how the three marketing communications element can create intense, active loyalty relationships and affect brand equity.

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