

***DOMESTIC COMPETITIVENESS: SENSORY BRANDING
IN DOMESTIC TOURISM***

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Abstract

When a foreign traveler goes to any tourist attraction in Japan there is always the sensorial experience that the traveler encounters which they share on various travel forums and message boards. Japanese culture itself embodies sensory attributes, with its intricacies and the sensory-focused elements displayed through various aspects such as the different ceremonies and celebrations, arts and even popular culture. While foreign travelers find Japanese places of attraction filled with sensorial cues, there is the question of whether the locals themselves see it as such. Domestic tourism in Japan is very popular and successful demonstrated by the number of domestic tourism consistently recording impressive figures and growth. This paper attempts to shed light on whether sensorial elements are the main drivers of domestic tourism. The study begins with various concepts and models explaining the service sector as well as consumer decision-making processes. The background of the study is then discussed followed by the findings organized according to the various factors that influence travel choices by Middleton and Clarke (2007) and Cooper (2008).

Key Words

Sensory Branding, Experiential Marketing, Domestic Tourism, Qualitative Research Methods, Consumer Behavior

Introduction

In 2009, Kyoto welcomed a little over 50 million tourists, out of which a whopping 49 million were domestic tourists. Japan has consistently been successful at generating a high domestic travel rate where swarms of domestic tourists would flock not only major sight seeing spots but also places that are off the beaten tracks and hidden in remote places. While various debates have been taking place with regards to Japan's lack of focus on luring foreign travelers, the success of Japan's domestic tourism reflects highly successful marketing management. In the realm of branding, sensory cues have been found to achieve high brand loyalty due to the ability in evoking emotions and creating relationships. While sensory branding has achieved success in products and services, it has also been used extensively within tourism such as hotels and flight carriers. However, this paper attempts to shed light on the application of sensory branding within places of attraction.

This paper examines the application of sensory branding and culture in creating an effective marketing approach. This study is conducted based on ethnography, a qualitative approach used in sociology and cultural anthropology in gathering and analyzing data regarding sensory cues, cultural elements and consumer perception and emotions. The paper begins with the various concepts and models used in the study such as sensory branding and characteristics of service. The study methodology and design are then discussed. Observations were conducted at various local areas that are frequented by domestic tourists in Kyushu, Hokkaido and the Tohoku region respectively. The factors that drive domestic tourism are then discussed, demonstrating the strength of sensory branding within cultural aspects that shape the consumer's decisions to selecting domestic tourism.

Concepts and Models

This section discusses the various key models and concepts used in this study.

a. Sensory Branding

Sensory studies in understanding consumer choices and preferences has long been undertaken by both researchers and corporations on a wide range of products; ranging from food to household items and cars (Lindstrom, 2005; Peneau, Brockhoff, Hoehn, Escher & Nuessli, 2007; Prinz, De Wijk, 2007). Sensory appeal has been attributed to creating brand success, enhancing consumer relationship and loyalty (Gobe, 2001; Lindstrom, 2005; Roberts, 2004; Schmitt, 1999). According to Lindstrom (2005), brands that appeal to multiple senses will be more successful than brands that take a two-dimensional approach. Underhill (1999) conducted an extensive study and found that almost all unplanned purchases are results of the shopper experiencing the product – through touch, smell, sight, taste or sound. Schmitt (1999) wrote about ‘experiential branding’ and how the consumer encounters different experiences when consuming various ‘products or services’. The ability of each brand to create a positive and memorable experience would be a winning formula for the brand in gaining market share and consumer loyalty. Experiential branding’s foundation is formed by various building blocks where senses and emotions both play very pertinent roles. Figure I.I illustrates the relationship between senses and the creation of experiential branding that dictates and translates to consumption experience.

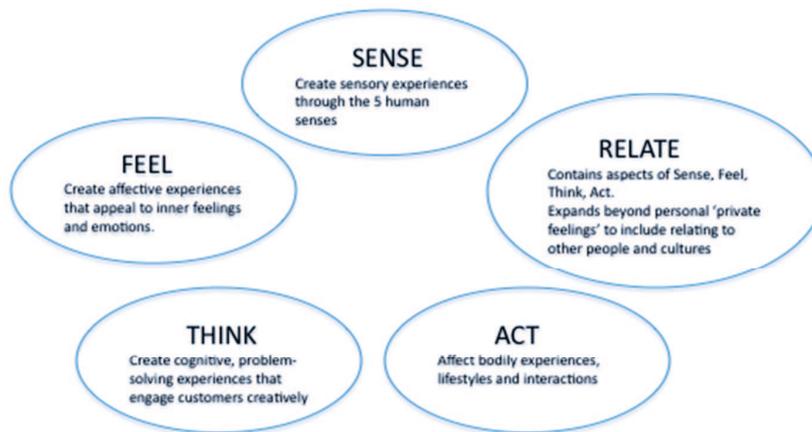


Figure 1.1 Strategic Experiential Modules
(Source: Schmitt, 1999)

Various researches are extensively undertaken to delve further into the aspects of sensory and consumer choice in a myriad of products and services. Music played in stores witnessed the increase in sales, attracts and higher consumer retention rate (Bainbridge 1998, Gorn 1982). Study found that shoppers exposed to pleasant odors such as perfume, cookies, coffee are not only in better moods but also likely to engage in amiable and even altruistic behavior (Baron 1998, Knasko 1985). Meanwhile texture was found to influence the perception of food freshness (Peneau, Brockhoff, Hoehn, Escher, & Nuessli 2007) and a research carried out using custard showed bite-size was proven to influence perception of products thus food packaging and spoons should be manufactured to the 'right' bite size (Prinz, J.E., De Wijk, R.A, 2007). A study also discovered that color names were found to influence the propensity of purchase; where consumers reacted favorably to unusual color and flavor names as they expect marketing messages to convey useful information (Miller and Kahn 2005).

The modern lifestyle has witnessed the 'aestheticisation' of everyday life – smells and sensory appeal in our everyday lives; both products and services (Paterson 2005, Dennis, Newman, & Marsland, 2005). Sensory branding strategies have been deployed successfully across a myriad of products and services, for instance Singapore Airlines and its renowned Stefan Floridian Waters, a distinct scent which is sprayed in the cabins as well as the towels (Lindstrom 2005). P&G's 'gender-specific' toothpaste - Crest Rejuvenating Effects. The box was shimmery and had a hint of vanilla and cinnamon specifically targeted at the female consumers (Aaker,, Kumar, & Day 2004). Herz and Schooler (2002) found that odor-evoked memories are more emotion laden as it brings the sense of a more "brought back" to the original event. Schwartz (1973) highlighted the apparent relationship between sensory and emotions where in the resonance model he states that aesthetic appreciation has emotional undertones. While senses have the ability to evoke emotions (Cervonka 1996, Herz 1996, Pooler 2003), emotions and feelings have been proven to influence thoughts (Frijda, Manstead and Bern 2000). This in turn translates to the act of purchasing and consumption. Lerner, Small and Loewenstein (2004) and O'Neill and Lambert found that emotions can influence people's reaction to the prices of products. Price would have less of an influence when consumers are experiencing positive emotions. It is evident than that to appeal to the emotions.

Sensory experiences and emotions are interdependent; one cannot exist without the other (Gobe, 2001; Hume, 1757; Murphy, 1998; O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2003; Pooler, 2003). The interdependency between both senses and emotions play a crucial role in influencing our decisions and actions, and in a narrower sense, our purchase decisions and consumption behavior. Pooler (2003) illustrates the

prevalence of both sensory and emotions experienced by consumption. He defines the simple, daily act of buying a cup of coffee has since been replaced by a complete therapeutic experience; where the customer gets an emotional lift resulting from a sensory experience.

b. The Service Model

In order to differentiate service from product, there are four key characteristics that those in the tourism sector have to pay attention to in order to develop an effective and efficient strategy (Dickman, 1999; Kotler et al, 2006; Middleton, 2007). Kotler (2006) outlined the four basic pillars of services as illustrated in Figure 1.2.

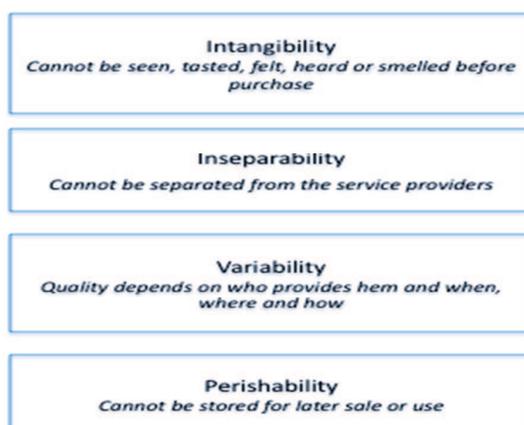


Figure 1.2 The Four Characteristics of Services
(Source: Kotler, 2006)

The four pillars of service outlined by Kotler (2006) are inseparability, perishability, variability and intangibility respectively. Inseparability looks at the tourist being part of the product. Some businesses rely very much on their customers to contribute to

the image or ambience of their establishment, for instance an exclusive sports club strives to attract upper society and creates an exclusive environment. In terms of tourism, exclusive boutique hotels and chains such as the One & Only, Aman Resorts and the Luxury Collection provide personalized and promise exclusivity and luxury to their customers. Inseparability also regards tourism products being the combination of services, intangibles and products with tourism managers having to learn how to manage each of the components (building, cleanliness, friendliness, skills of staff) to create unique products.

Unlike products, services cannot be stored. This translates to the perishable characteristic and if the service is not consumed it is lost forever. To prevent or minimize the losses suffered due to the perishability factor, airlines and hotels charge guests even when they fail to show up or consume the product.

In terms of variability, owing to the large number of service providers it is impossible for offers to be of similar quality or possess similar characteristics. A passenger taking a Delta Airlines flight today may have a positive experience but may feel differently if she encounters a flight delay or cancellation the next time she flies with Delta. Further, fluctuating demand in peak and off-peak seasons contributes to the variability in services as well as the skill and consistency of the staff providing it at the time of purchase. *Variability* is one of the major causes of customer's disappointment in the hospitality industry and poses a challenge to tourism managers

Finally, the intangibility of service products defines the inability of consumers to see, taste, feel, hear or smell the product at the point of purchase. For example, before

arriving at a travel destination a tourist cannot be certain if it will suit his needs - but there is no chance to evaluate such before arrival. Hence, in order to decrease the uncertainty tourists seek tangible information such as the exterior of a restaurant, travel brochures, or the opinion of relatives and friends.

Middleton (2007) further builds on the four characteristics of service model indicated in Figure 1.2. He additionally lists three features that are prevalent only in the tourism market:

1. *Seasonality*: A large portion of tourism demand is centered on the summer months (June to September) and the winter months (December to March), resulting in 90-100% capacity utilization during the peak season and as low as 30% in the off-peak period. The same applies for demand fluctuations during a week. While theatre seats might be in high demand during weekends, performances on weekdays will experience less popularity. Tourism managers will be challenged to generate as much demand as possible in off-peak periods through campaigns or product modifications especially considering the fact that a service not consumed is forever lost (Perishability).

2. *High fixed costs of service operations*: Companies operating in the tourism industry tend to have high fixed costs, which are necessary to provide services, and lower variable costs, which occur when travelers consume services. Costs for premises, rents, equipment, energy costs, insurances, wages, management salaries and marketing amount to the high fixed costs and the strong competition within the tourism industry makes it vital to operate efficiently to assure their coverage.

3. *Interdependence of tourism products:* A travel product is expected to contain a bundle of products, such as the transport to the location, accommodation, entertainment or meals. Over a year there is always a relationship underlying the various tourism products available at the destination. Tourism suppliers have to assure that their marketing decisions are compatible or preferably, decide to join their marketing efforts.

C. Hawkins, Best & Coney Consumer Behavior Model

Basically, as indicated earlier both long-term rational interests and short-term emotional concerns influence consumers' purchase decisions (Hirschman, 1985; Hoch & Loewenstein, 1991). The influence and role of both cognitive and affective processes in the consumer decision-making process has to be factored in obtaining a better understanding of consumption and choice drivers. Hawkins, Best and Coney (1998) viewed consumer needs as a result from numerous internal and external factors that are grouped under consumer self-concept and lifestyle. As shown in Figure 1.3, both internal forces such as perception, emotions and learning and aspects such as culture, family and demographics that serve as external influences generate experiences and acquisitions that form consumer self-concept and lifestyle. This in turn translates to needs the desires that drive the decision making-process.

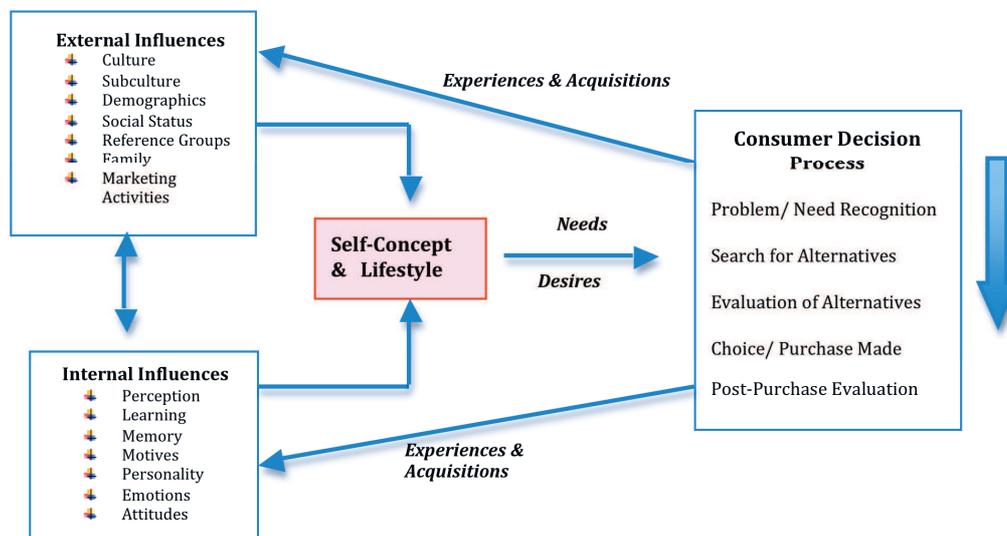


Figure 1.3 The Hawkins, Best and Coney Consumer Behavior Model (1998)
 (Source: Hawkins, Best & Coney, 1998)

The HBC model builds on the Engels, Kollat & Blackwell (EKB) model (1982) and broadens it to the external and internal influences that shape the individual. However, even though factors such as emotions are recognized as an influence in decision-making, this model still takes the assumption that consumers approach consumption and purchasing decisions in a rational manner weighing options and alternatives before making a decision. Similar to the EKB model, the HBC model looks at the decision process as a flow that is rational, well-thought and deliberated; weighing cost-benefit and functional benefits. Both models provide the axiological in planned purchase as well as in understanding the reasons and factors that drive consumer behavior. However, both fall short in explaining impulse buying, the process and the factors that drive impulsive purchases and consumption.

Generally, consumers make two kinds of purchases, planned and impulsive. Impulsive purchases occur often where nine out of ten shoppers occasionally buy on impulse (Welles, 1986). The affective processes are responsible for creating

impulsivity while cognitive processes are the rational side that maintains self-control. Affective process refers to the emotions, moods, feeling states while cognitive refers to mental structures and processes involving thinking, comprehension and interpreting; though affective and cognitive processes are different, they are not independent of one another (Youn, 2000). It is the balance between these two that dictate the degree of impulsiveness. Impulsive purchasing happens when consumers experience strong desires that outweigh restraints, the consumer loses the power of self-control and makes the purchase (Hoch & Loewenstein, 1991; Weinberg & Gottwald, 1982; Youn, 2000). The interaction between these factors can be illustrated in Figure 1.3.1 where there are two situations and outcomes; one leading to impulsive buying and the other does not.

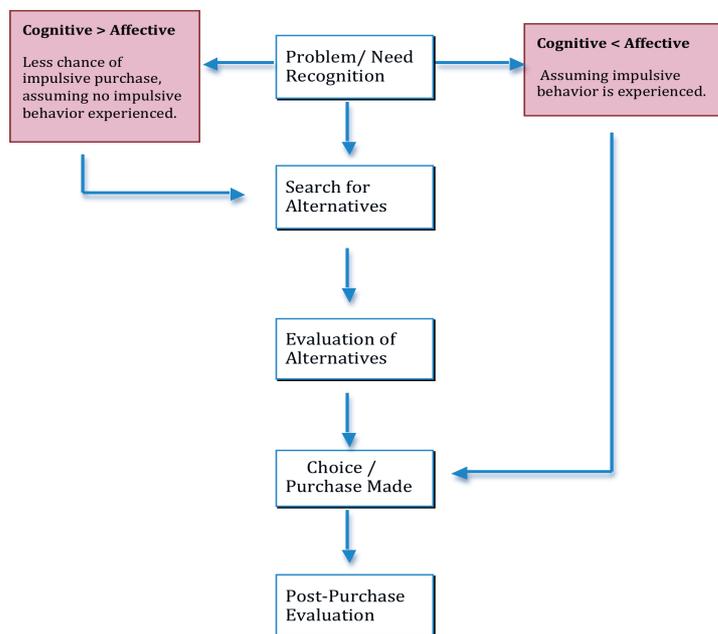


Figure 1.3.1 The Modified Decision Process Stages of the Engel, Kollat and Blackwell Model Incorporating Impulsive Purchasing Decisions.
(Source: Engel & Blackwell, 1982)

The affective and cognitive factors are the influences in triggering needs. Here, they also influence the possibility of impulsive purchase behavior. At different points in the decision making process, these factors play different roles and trigger different outcomes. This further substantiates the importance of these factors in consumer behavior and provides a holistic view of the drivers in consumption and choice. The models discussed provide the necessary foundation in understanding the factors of cosmetics consumption. In the following section, the focus shifts to comprehending affective factors is essential to understand the reasons that lead to such importance being placed on affective factors and the how and why brands should focus on tapping into consumer emotions.

Methodology

This study adopts the qualitative research methodology, focusing on conducting an exploratory research. Exploratory research is used in seeking insights into the general nature of a problem, the possible decision alternatives and the relevant variables that need to be considered with hypotheses being either vague and ill defined, or do not exist at all (Aaker, Kumar & Day, 2004). The problem is explored using an open, flexible approach as each step of the exploration process uncovers a multitude of data. The research methods are highly flexible, unstructured, and qualitative, for the researcher begins without firm preconceptions as to what will be found, typically

exploratory research is often qualitative in nature (Aaker, Kumar & Day, 2004; Hague & Jackson, 1996).

Qualitative research prioritizes the study of perceptions, meanings, and emotions in defining how social experiences are formed and interpreted in the socially constructed nature of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Silverman, 2005). It is concerned with empathizing with the consumer and establishing the meanings that he/she attaches to products, brands and other marketing objects (Hague & Jackson, 1996). Therefore, the methods adopted by a qualitative researcher are used to gauge and look for attitudes, feelings and perceptions (Seidler, 2003).

Qualitative research methods are used in the understanding, making sense of and interpreting events and situations from the perspectives of the meanings people assign to them. Qualitative market research is a form of market research that seeks to explore and understand people's attitudes, motivation and behaviors – basically, the how and why behind the what (Imms, & Ereaut, 2002). The methods utilized are focused on comprehending attitudes, feelings, behaviors that can be obtained through dialogues and elicitation. The purpose of qualitative research is to find out what's in the consumer's mind, to better formulate the understanding of consumer decision-making processes. Qualitative research is utilized for things that cannot be directly observed and measured for example, feelings, thoughts, and intentions (Aaker, Kumar, & Day, 2004). Most times, qualitative research embraces an inductive process. Inductive reasoning is a theory building process, starting with observations of specific instances, and seeking to establish generalizations about the phenomenon under investigation (Hyde, 2000).

Initially, the adoption of qualitative research methods was limited to non-commercial fields such as psychology and sociology. It began to gain recognition in the 1970s in the disciplines of anthropology and sociology where methods such as ethnography, fieldwork, and participant observation were extensively used (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). These methods were found to give a true picture of feelings and attitudes as opposed to quantitative methods that have been criticized for not being able to obtain such information. Hence, the popularity of qualitative research grew as a result of the limitations faced by quantitative methods in 1950s and 1960s (Desai, 2002). During the late 1970s and 1980s commercial qualitative market research was experiencing a huge boom in the UK (Imms & Ereaut, 2002). The incorporation of qualitative market research methods in the commercial sector gained momentum and proliferated across the globe as corporations seek to better understand consumer behavior (Ereaut, 2004; Walle, 2001). Marketers adopt qualitative methods as a means to understand what drives consumption, what makes people buy and how they feel about brands and products. Qualitative research also helps marketers to understand consumer perception and feelings about advertising (Desai, 2002). Basically commercial market researchers drew upon the various theories and practices from the fields of psychology and psychotherapy (Imms, 2000; Schlackman, 1989). These disciplines delve into aiding people arrive at the understanding of their true motivations generally using a discourse method.

Potter (1996) has identified a basic list of seven predominate qualitative methodologies namely, ethnography, ethnomethodology, reception studies, symbolic interactionism, ecological psychology, cultural studies and textual analysis. Though

each methodology possesses a different emphasis on various axioms the methods utilized are taken from a common pool. The methods can be adopted by various methodologies, giving the researcher a variety of methods to choose from. However, essentially there are some preferred methods for each methodology though they map overlap, as illustrated in Figure 2.1.

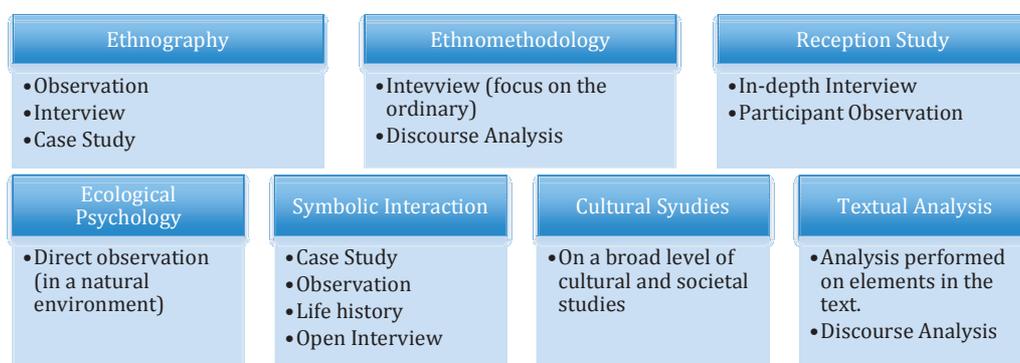


Figure 2.1: The Seven Qualitative Methodologies and the corresponding Preferred Methods (Source: Potter, 1996)

The adoption of qualitative market research has expanded and proliferated rapidly over the past few decades to not just commercial businesses but even non-profit organizations and public sector bodies (Marks, 2000). Qualitative research has been effective in mining the underlying factors that propel decisions and actions where quantitative methods are not able to effectively measure. This is as each method has a different objective, basically targeting different aspects of a research subject. Qualitative research provides insights and understanding of the problem setting while quantitative research focuses on quantifying and generalizing the results obtained from a sample that would represent the population (Malhotra, 2004).

Qualitative approach is prevalent in studies that focus on aspects of people's daily lives (Radway, 1984; Rogge, 1989; Traudt & Lont, 1987), which makes this approach suitable for this study where the factors that drive consumer purchase decisions are derived based on observing consumers in their natural state (within the various sales channel environment).

Walle (2001) defines ethnography as a method that seeks to understand people by observing their behavior and by intuitively interpreting it as it unfolds in a real-life setting. Harris and Johnson (2000) stated that ethnography literally means 'a portrait of a people'. This method has long been adopted beginning with the nineteenth century where colonists would gather and record information about local cultures, customs, beliefs and religions, and languages so as to set up administrative systems in the acquired colonies (Vidich & Stanford, 2000). A majority of the findings based on ethnography was used by the fathers of British Social Anthropology in acquiring information on different cultures and societies which involved long-term immersion (Evans-Pritchard, 1940; Malinowski, 1922). Observations have been encouraged as a means of gathering objective data. While interviews and group discussions have been suggested to rely on the consumer's feedback, which could be subjected to the consumer manipulating the answers (Desai, 2002), observation has been likened to the truth serum of society (Mariampolski, 1999).

Ethnographic research is useful for identifying the different needs of the consumers. Observing the actual activity is utilized to identify need states and analyze the influence of context on people's actions (Leith & Riley, 1998). Qualitative methods are enjoying a renaissance in business fields, such as marketing as this provides

subjective and intuitive analysis that centers upon what individual people actually think and feel during the consumption process (Mariampolski 2006, Walle 2001), where observational and ethnographic research methods are increasingly used in commercial market research (Desai, 2002). Kotler and Keller (2006) suggest that observational research provides a fresh set of data from observing the relevant actors and settings. Consumers can be unobtrusively observed as they shop or consume products. In the 1970s, large manufacturing companies such as Unilever were observing people cooking and taking baths in the research laboratories (Pegram & Lee, 2000). Anthropologists like Daniel Miller (1998) and Mary Douglas and Isherwood (1996) have used ethnographic data to answer academic questions about consumers and consumption, consumer perception and feelings as well. It is the closest that a marketer can get to the consumer (Mariampolski, 1997). Johansson and Nonaka (1987) found that Japanese companies relied heavily on personal observation. They presented the case of Canon when they were losing market share in the US, sent three managers to US to observe customers, shop layout and sales channels. The result of the data gathered from the observations helped Canon turn the business around.

In essence, observation is not far removed from the sort of approach that we use in everyday life to make sense of our surroundings; taking research activities from the lab to where the people are, the streets, homes, parks, malls. The main thrust of this study is to uncover fundamental truths about society, human nature, the conduct of daily life and relationships and social structures. Hence, ethnography would capture the issues best as it relies heavily on up-close, personal experience.

Study Design

The study design was based on observations conducted in a natural environment and analyzed using thematic analysis. Basically, there are two possible environments where observations can be conducted, in a natural setting or a contrived environment (Rust, 1993). Hence, the study was carried out at the following places:

- a. Kyushu (Beppu, Mt. Aso, Kurokawa Onsen)
- b. Hokkaido (Furano, Hakodate, Otaru, Akan National Park)
- c. Kanto region (Yunishigawa onsen, Kinugawa onsen, Numata)

The range of different locations was selected as different landscapes and attractions were necessary to derive if there was a common thread that ran through various locations and different consumer groups.

Maholtra (2004) suggests that unstructured observation is suitable for exploratory studies. This is where all aspects of the phenomenon are monitored without the specifying of details in advance. In this study, the researcher adopted an unstructured observation approach as not to limit the breadth of information and data mined.

Respondents were also unaware that they were being observed.

The researcher assumed the approach of a complete observer where there was not interaction with the subjects (Desai, 2002). Shadowing (Kotler & Keller, 2006) was focused on the ways the consumers shopped, and used or tested the products. Personal observation was adopted at certain points in the study according to the environment and situation. This strategy requires the recording of the observation as it occurs (Maholtra, 2004).

Subjects

Observations were carried out in various locations within Japan. Hot springs, farms and towns were included in the list of locations. Travelers and tourists were the subjects of this study with the focus on consumer behavior in consuming these locations.

Procedure

Basically, the core procedure was the observing and recording of consumer behavior. The researcher/ observer shadows consumers selected at random. The entire process of product selection and purchase decision-making was observed. Close attention was paid to any display of sensory cues and sensorial experiences and importance sought by the consumer.

The observation approach was broadened to cover tourists and the environment and conducted over a course of 20 months, from July 2008 to February 2010. The observations were conducted in order to understand the factors that tourists seek for and view as major elements that make a location a perfect holiday spot. This method was deemed necessary, as observation is a way to up close and personal with the consumer (Johansson & Nonaka, 1987; Leith & Riley, 1998; Mariampolski, 1997).

Findings

Based on observations conducted, the findings demonstrated that a range of factors

influence traveler choice when selecting holiday destinations. These factors can be mapped against the factors that influence tourism demand summarized by Middleton and Clarke (2007) and Cooper et al (2008) accordingly.

Economic factors and comparative prices

These factors are the most important determinants for leisure vacation as well as business trips. The good performance of an economy almost guarantees high average disposable income, which is essential for tourism consumption. Additionally, tourism research confirms that the price of a destination, compared to its competitors, is still the most dominant factor in the short term.

Demographics

Demographic variables such as age, social class, income, education are the most common used characteristics to analyze a tourism market. Especially the aging population has become one of the most attractive tourism segments for tourism operators in recent years. This is noticeable with JR having constant campaigns and advertising to encourage older travelers, enticing them with the ‘traditional beauty and landscapes of Japan’. It was also noted during observations that many elderly travelers voiced their feelings of safety and comfort traveling domestically versus abroad where they would stress over language and cultural differences.

Attractions and Climate

Visiting a destination is often triggered by its scenic attractions and favorable climate. Examples are the numerous trips of Northern Europeans to the Mediterranean region for a seaside vacation or the flux of city dwellers to countryside locations. In Japan,

the National Parks welcome a surge of travelers during the summer season where families and friends can enjoy hiking, camping and a host of outdoor activities while still being able to soak and relax in the hot springs. This stresses on the sensory elements that accompany travel.

Socio-Culture

Socio-cultural attitudes towards tourism greatly vary between different nations. Whereas in one country vacation is a luxury in another one it has become the norm to go on one or several holidays throughout the year. The length of vacation, the motivation factors for traveling and the expectations of a destination depend on each national cultural background and pose a challenge to tourism planners. In Japan, students in elementary schools, junior high schools and high schools often take school excursions and trip both domestic and international. On the other hand, office workers have limited vacation days and this definitely skews the destination choices to domestic spots.

Population Mobility

The *mobility* of a population greatly influences tourism demand, especially for domestic tourism, as the ownership of a car makes visiting nearby locations possible and convenient. In Japan, car rentals are widely available hence the population is fairly mobile.

Governmental Regulations

Governments around the world impose various *rules* and *regulations* to safeguard their population. Examples are laws for customer protection, fair competition,

regulation of holidays, visa permits, and environmental protection.

Media and Promotions

Promoting travel through *media communications* will bring awareness to the consumers and the possible subsequent purchase of the travel product. Advertising on billboards, train stations and leaflets as well as magazine and through tv programs are commonly done in Japan.

From a psychological perspective, Kolter (2006) outlined a list of determinants that influence travel, prestige, escape and relaxation, education, social interaction, family bonding and self discovery.

Prestige

People being able to afford a vacation, especially a long distance trip, have always been credited with a certain level of prestige by their surrounding.

Escape & Relaxation

A basic human desire is the escape of the every day routine, and tourism marketing managers often incorporate the catchphrase 'escape' into their campaigns. The hot spring experience markets the timeless feel of old Japan, a place where one can go back in time and relax.

Education

Tourism has often the purpose of increasing someone's knowledge and widening the understanding of other cultures. A very prominent historical example is the tour of

Otaru and its history.

Social interaction

Meeting other people aside from the immediate surrounding has been identified as a very strong motivator for traveling resulting in the designing of appealing resorts and cruises.

Family bonding

Whether between marriage partners or between parents or their children travel has become a suitable tool to improve family interaction.

Self-discovery

The desire to 'find oneself' can have different triggers: for example a dramatic event in ones life such as the death of a family member or a divorce. Another example are temporary employment opportunities at resorts or youth hotels are offers to young people who wish to engage in self-discovery. An example is seen is the '*hitori tabi*' (travel alone) packages that are proliferating the market.

Sensory Branding

The observations did prove that travelers did soak up the sensorial experiences at each travel location. However, the actual strength of sensorial pull proved rather difficult to determine due to the intricate relationship with other factors.

Conclusion

While it is safe to say that sensory branding does play a role in influencing domestic travel choices, it is a challenge to determine the actual level of influence as travel decisions are made up of various interlinking and interdependent factors. Moving forward, it may open the door to further research where travel locations are grouped according to similar categories (factoring in the economic aspect as well where locations that cost around the same are grouped together) hence reducing the strength of other factors and exploring the strength of sensory branding in influencing consumer decision-making.

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