

ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AN EGYPTIAN INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN ON SELECTED TOURIST MARKETS

Amany N. Beshay
Alexandria University/ Faculty of Tourism & Hotels
Alexandria, Egypt
e-mail: amany_nabil@hotmail.com

Hala N. Hilaly
Alexandria University/ Faculty of Tourism & Hotels
Alexandria, Egypt
e-mail: halahilaly@hotmail.com

and

Dalal M. AbdElhady
Alexandria University/ Faculty of Tourism & Hotels
Alexandria, Egypt
e-mail: drdalalabdelhadi@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Subjective indications from tourism officials seem to universally support a positive effect from tourism promotion. However, existing research offers only limited insight into the impact of government-sponsored tourism promotion (Deskins and SeEVERS, 2011). This also applies to Egypt, where there is no or little-known research on impacts of government-sponsored tourism promotion. For this reason the researchers have conducted a field research in order to assess the actual impacts of a government-sponsored marketing communications campaign of Egypt as a tourist destination. The researchers have used the conversion methodology in order to arrive to actual conversion rates that can be attributed to this campaign.

Key Words: promotion campaign, integrated marketing communications, tourism promotion, advertising effects.

INTRODUCTION

The issues of accountability and evaluation in travel research are of particular concern due to the growing misuse of research in order to deliver sufficient justification to funding bodies for tourism marketing programs, using misleading or inflated statistics (Siegel & Ziff-Levine, 1990). Closely linked to accountability is the performance of the promotional program: how efficiently were the resources used and how effectively were the goals accomplished (Burke and Lindblom, 1989). In other words, evaluation is essential in providing NTO marketers with information that will help them improve the impact of future campaigns. In the private sector, marketing communication activities can be more readily tracked within an organization in terms of increases in inquiries, sales, brand equity or other responses to specific activities. However, in the public-private sector partnership organizations of Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), it is more difficult to evaluate the impact of campaign activity that promotes a region in totality (Pratt et al., 2010). This is why measuring the effectiveness of destination marketing communication campaigns is a more challenging and complex task.

To the knowledge of the researchers, in evaluating promotion campaign effects in Egypt, officials usually use simple causality in order to calculate the return on investment from promotion (ElKhadem, 2004 & 2006). This represents the most basic ROI model which is expressed as a multiple of the promotional budget. In reality, these simple causality techniques are useful in establishing performance indicators, as they can shed light on the possible effectiveness of the destination promotion. However, they involve one major conceptual flaw which is a simple causal assumption that the tourist behavior measured is primarily due to the promotional inputs of the NTO, thus, neglecting the effects of a multitude of other variables known to affect inbound tourism other than promotion.

For the aforementioned reasons, specific causality models should be adopted in assessing the effectiveness of marketing communication campaigns. A variety of specific causality approaches have been proposed to assess the effectiveness of tourism marketing communication campaigns, including conversion methodology (Woodside and

Reid, 1974; Burke and Gitelson, 1990), advertising tracking methodology (Siegel and Ziff-Levine, 1990), quasi-experiments (Mok, 1990) and cross-sectional analysis (Silberman and Klock, 1986). These models discriminate more precisely the effects of tourism promotion from other variables, thus, enabling a value to be put on tourism returns that are causally generated by specified NTO promotional inputs (WTO, 2003).

The importance of this study is that it applies specific causality to assess promotion effects by using the conversion model to assess the effectiveness of the campaign under-study. To the knowledge of the researchers, this has not been adopted before in tourism promotion evaluation in Egypt. The main objectives of this study are; determining the levels of advertising exposure and recall generated by the ETA promotion campaign among selected markets; measuring the effectiveness of advertising appeal ; evaluating the campaign's influence on consumers' attitudes and the generation of additional travel to Egypt through measuring adjusted conversion rates; comparing results and conversion rates among selected markets in order to determine whether there were significant differences between target markets in conversion levels and assessing general views on competitors' promotion campaigns among selected target markets. The hypotheses of this study were articulated as follows:

H1: Campaign recall levels will vary significantly between markets and will be greater when using a wider media combination for promotion campaigns.

H2: Adjusted conversion rates will be significantly lower than gross conversion rates of the ETA promotion campaign.

H3: When using a standardized promotion strategy there will be a significant difference in conversion rates between markets.

This study will be divided into four sections. Section one will describe conversion methodology, while section two will present the Egyptian marketing communications campaign under study. The empirical study will be discussed in section three. Finally, section four will provide the conclusions and recommendations of this research.

CONVERSION METHODOLOGY

The conversion methodology was chosen to evaluate the marketing communications campaign for Egypt as a destination. The main goal of the conversion study is to measure the extent to which tourists visit a destination as a result of exposure to promotion (Kim et al., 2005). A conversion rate is a "percentage of inquirers who visit the destination after being exposed to the direct response marketing campaign" (Burke and Lindblom, 1989: 35). It is also defined as "the rate at which inquiries by prospective visitors lead to actual visits" (Deskins and SeEVERS, 2011: 156). Conversion rates are usually calculated as a ratio between those who viewed the campaign and those who contacted the campaign website or other sources for more information and whether this has led to actual visitation. Among the advantages of the conversion methodology, is that it provides a relatively simple measure of return on investment from promotion (Burke and Gitelson, 1990). Moreover, it is more feasible than other approaches in that the cost of the study is relatively inexpensive (Cai, 1998). In addition, conversion can be useful for comparing the performance of alternative promotion campaigns in generating visitors, revenues and net returns as well as comparing media vehicles and ad message performances (Woodside, 1990).

On the other hand, a number of flaws associated with conversion methodology have been detected by researchers including poor sampling (Silberman and Klock, 1986), focusing on the return on investment in revenue terms and ignoring other promotional effects such as increased awareness, motivation or enhanced destination image (Siegel & Ziff-Levine, 1990) and failing to discriminate between real converts and those who had already chosen the destination before requesting information (Burke and Gitelson, 1990). Moreover, conversion studies do not include scientifically designed equivalent comparison groups to control for sources of invalidity (Woodside, 2010). In order to overcome such possible flaws, the researchers have applied a number of improvements to the conversion method that have been suggested by a number of researchers (Ellerbrock, 1981; Ronkainen and Woodside 1987; Woodside and Soni 1988; Woodside and Dubelaar, 2003).

EGYPTIAN MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN

"Egypt, Where it all Begins" is the name of the campaign conducted by the Egyptian Tourist Authority (ETA), which is the Destination Marketing Organization in Egypt. In May 2009, the ETA commissioned JWT, a multinational agency, to create a new international promotion campaign, covering both on and offline media across major international markets. JWT won the bid for this campaign competing with six other multinational agencies

(ETA, 2009). JWT has more than 200 offices worldwide in more than 90 countries with a strong presence in the Middle East and North Africa. Following a period of extensive creative development, the ETA has launched the new campaign “Egypt, where it all begins” at the World Travel Market (WTM) in London on November 9th 2009. However, the TV component of the campaign joined later in January 2010.

The ETA has adopted an integrated marketing communications approach in this campaign (IMC). The ETA has attempted to deliver the same consistent message throughout all promotion and media tools, using the same logo, slogan and visuals, thus creating a unified image of the destination throughout all channels. This was apparent in the analysis of the campaign. The integrated campaign includes a print & outdoor campaign, a television campaign and an online campaign. Prior to carrying out the field study, the researchers have extensively studied the campaign promotion strategy. The ETA has chosen a clear pull strategy, directing its promotion towards end consumers through various channels of communication. A standardized promotion strategy was also adopted in all integrated campaigns. However, some minor adaptation has occurred in some markets like changing the models in the Japanese and Chinese markets to feature national models from these markets. The logo and the slogan were also translated in various languages of the chosen markets. Apart from that, the visuals and the creative material were all standardized. It should be noted here that some researchers believe that the direct translation is still considered to be a standardization strategy (Okazaki & Alonso, 2003).

THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

As previously indicated, this study will assess the most recent marketing communications campaign for Egypt as a destination using the conversion methodology. Twenty six international markets were chosen by the ETA to be targeted by the campaign. Those markets are; the UK, Germany, Russia, Italy, France, USA, Poland, Netherland, Czech Republic, Ukraine, Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Sweden, Japan, Denmark, Canada, Spain, China, Ireland, Norway, Australia, India, South Korea, Slovakia and Finland (ETA, 2011).

The conversion methodology in this research uses the questionnaire to measure consumers’ attitudes, behavior and views towards the campaign among a representative sample from selected target markets from those targeted by the ETA promotion campaign. This allows a measure of the total influence on the target audience and focuses on the level of additional travel which can be attributed to the campaign. The researchers have chosen four target markets from those which were targeted by the campaign namely the UK, Germany, Russia and Spain. The choice of the markets depended on two factors summarized below:

- 1- Campaign budget allocation for the selected market: UK, Germany & Russia were selected as the three highest markets in the campaign. In contrast, Spain was chosen among the relatively low budgets in the campaign.
- 2- Campaign media variances for the selected markets: the four chosen markets had a variant distribution in the media used for the campaign.

In order to represent the four target markets and to guarantee proportionate representation, the researchers have used the stratified random sampling technique. The survey was conducted through distributing questionnaires to tourists visiting Egypt from the four selected markets. This helped in overcoming one of the flaws of conversion methodology; in that we are certain that the travel decision was already taken at the time of completing the questionnaires. The questionnaire was accurately designed in order to factor out inquirers who had decided to visit the destination before the campaign exposure.

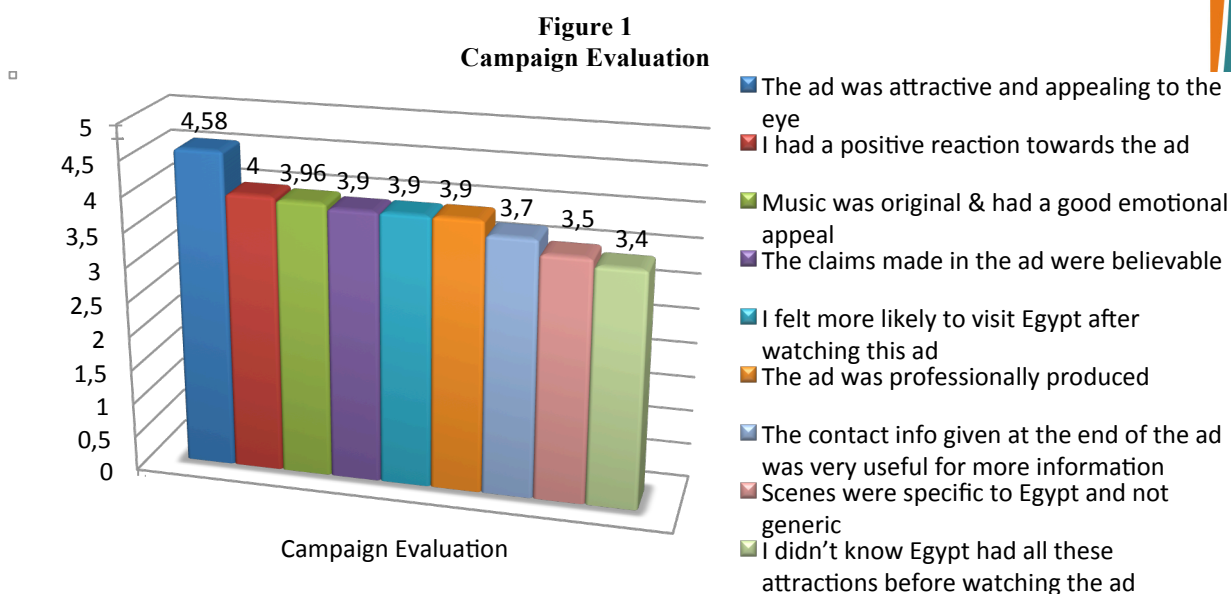
Questionnaires were distributed in Cairo, Sharm ElSheikh and Hurghada over a five-month period which started in November 2010. In total, 900 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 373 were completed. Accordingly, the rate of response is approximately 41%. After eliminating wrong questionnaires, the final number of respondents was 362 including (32%) Russian tourists, (29%) British tourists, (21%) German tourists and (18%) Spanish tourists.

In order to measure unaided recall levels of the campaign, two questions were designed where respondents were asked to indicate whether they remembered any of the theme, message or images in the campaign they have seen and state what they could actually recall. The results indicated that 36% of those exposed to the campaign could recall very well some aspects of the campaign, including the slogan, the main theme and some visuals. The questionnaire later provided a few slogans and logos for respondents to state which ones they recall seeing, in order to measure the aided recall percentage of the campaign which is usually estimated to be higher than unaided recall.

The percentage of aided recall was calculated to be 63% of those exposed to the campaign in comparison to unaided recall which was calculated to be 36%. However, if we calculate the aided recall percentage from the whole sample, it would only amount to 23.5%.

In order to test the first research hypothesis, a contingency test was conducted to test whether there is a significant difference between markets in terms of recall levels. The Chi-square is calculated to be ($\chi^2 = 31.43$), which indicates that there is a significant difference between markets regarding recall and non-recall levels ($p < 0.01$). This significant difference between markets in recall levels can be further explained if we compare the media combinations used in each market. From this comparison we can deduce that the highest recall level is that of Russia (34%) which has the widest media combination than the rest of the markets. On the other hand, the lowest recall level is that of Spain (3%) which depended only on two media which are OOH and online. Thus, the first hypothesis of this research was supported.

In order to evaluate certain features of the campaign, the portion of the sample that was exposed to the campaign was asked to evaluate various aspects of the campaign through nine criteria. Nine sentences were given to the respondents and they had to agree or disagree with those sentences on a given scale. Later the weighted average for each criterion was calculated. Figure 1 shows these results.



It is clear from the above chart that the evaluation of the campaign is very good in general. The two factors with the highest given weighted average were that the ad was attractive and appealing to the eye and that the respondents had a positive reaction towards it. It is obvious that the campaign creative theme and professional production had a positive influence on respondents evaluating the ads. However, what is more important is whether this was positively translated into actual behavior or not.

In order to calculate initial conversion rates, those who viewed the campaign were asked whether after they saw the ads, they sought additional information about Egypt or not with the purpose of evaluating how the acquired information has led to actual conversion or not. And since the survey sample is chosen from tourists visiting Egypt, then the actual visitation has already occurred. Therefore, it is easier to calculate conversion rates in this case. Initial conversion rate was calculated to be approximately 72%. Some researchers also call it gross conversion rate (Urness et al., 2006; Pratt et al., 2010).

The above conversion rate (72%) is considered to be a very high rate. Studies have shown that observing only the gross conversion rate can provide a misleading picture as to the success of a promotion campaign (Pratt et al., 2010). This is because one of the main disadvantages of conversion methodology as discussed previously is its failing to discriminate between real converts and those who had already chosen the destination before requesting

information (WTO, 2003). This has been treated through including questions in the conversion study that identify previous commitment to visit destination and exclude those previously committed from conversion sample and ensure that even those who have visited the destination previously are actually influenced to visit again through their contact with the promotion campaign and their related inquiries. The adjusted conversion rate of the campaign in the four markets was calculated to be 29%. This is a reasonable rate for campaign conversion unlike the gross conversion rate which was inflated to a great extent. It is observed that the adjusted conversion rate is significantly lower than gross conversion rate, which supports the second research hypothesis. Adjusted conversion rates were calculated for each market separately to compare between conversion levels in different markets and to test the third research hypothesis. Conversion levels for each market are summarized in table 1.

Table 1
Campaign Adjusted Conversion Rates in Different Markets

| | Russia | UK | Germany | Spain | Total |
|-----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|--------|-------|
| Conversion | 15 (28%) | 14 (25%) | 10 (48%) | 0 (0%) | 39 |
| Non-Conversion | 39 | 42 | 11 | 4 | 96 |
| Total Exposed Sample | 54 | 56 | 21 | 4 | 135 |

In order to test the third research hypothesis, a Z- test for proportions was conducted to determine the difference in conversion proportions in each two markets represented in the research sample. However, Spain was excluded from this test as the conversion percentage was 0%. The results of the Z-tests for each two markets are summarized below:

Russia versus UK : $Z= 0.299$, then we cannot reject the null hypothesis with a 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, there is no significant difference in conversion rates between Russia and the UK.

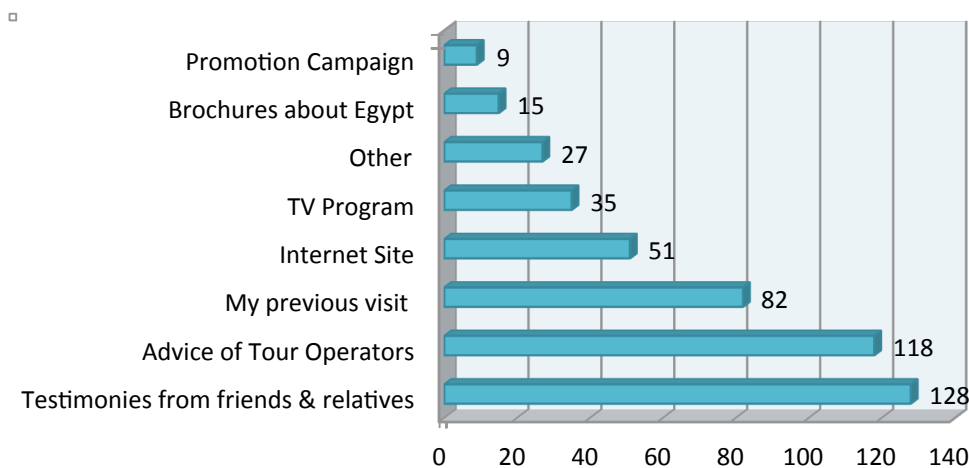
Russia versus Germany: $Z= 1.663$, then we reject the null hypothesis with a 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the difference in conversion rates between Russia and Germany is statistically significant.

UK versus Germany: $Z= 1.94$, then we reject the null hypothesis with a 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the difference in conversion rates between UK and Germany is statistically significant.

Therefore, we can conclude that two of the three tests performed proved that there is a significant difference between conversion rates in various markets which supports the third hypothesis of this research.

In order to develop better promotion strategies based on an understanding of the needs and preferences of each market, the whole sample was asked to choose the most influential factors in their decision to visit Egypt. The sample was allowed to choose multiple answers. The following figure summarizes these results.

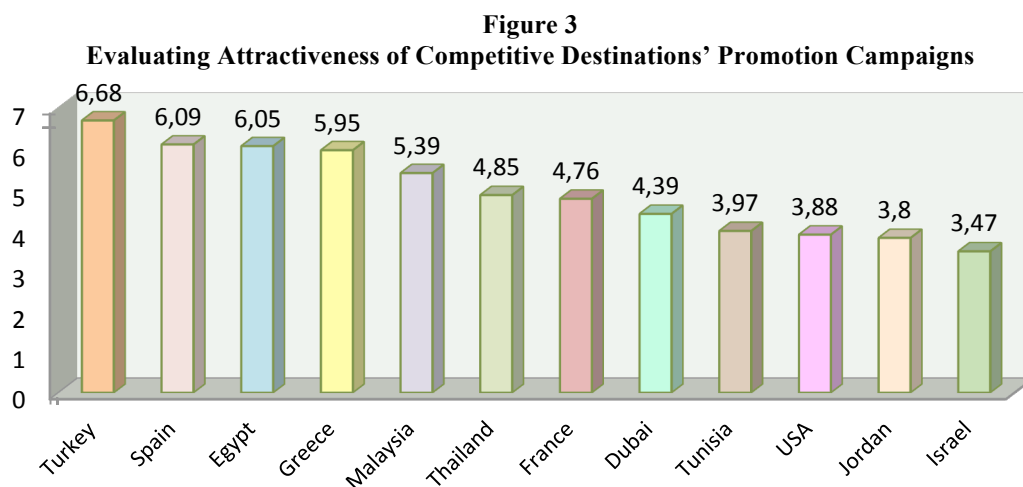
Figure 2
Factors Influencing Persuasion & Travel Decisions



From figure two, we can easily conclude that the two most influential factors that influence travel decisions are testimonies from friends and relatives in addition to advice of tour operators. For this reason the researcher

believes that the ETA should have adopted a push strategy to take advantage of the role of tour operators in the decision making process beside the pull strategy that the campaign adopted towards end consumers. In this case, conversion rates might have been much higher.

At the end of the survey, the whole sample was requested to evaluate the attractiveness of twelve given destinations' promotion campaigns from their point of view on a scale from 1 to 10, with "1" meaning least attractive and "10" meaning most attractive. The aim of this question was to assess the general views on competitors' promotion campaigns among the selected target markets. From the results provided by the sample, a weighted average was calculated to indicate the relative position of each destination's promotion efforts in the minds of the surveyed sample. The results are illustrated in the figure 3



From the above table and figure, we can observe that the most attractive promotion campaigns from the respondents' viewpoints are those of Turkey and Spain followed by Egypt and Greece which nearly have the same weighted average. The researchers believe that this is because the creative theme of the new campaign for Egypt is very attractive and has consequently led to a better positioning for Egypt as a destination among other regional competitors with attractive promotion campaigns. It is also noted that Tunisia, USA, Jordan & Israel have got the least weighted averages in the above evaluation. This might be due to the relatively low budgets allocated for tourism promotion in Tunisia, Jordan & Israel (WTO, 2006; Hassman, 2008). The case of the USA is different, however, due to the fact that tourism promotion is currently only conducted on state levels and not on the federal level in the USA. This has greatly affected the attractiveness and budgets of USA promotion campaigns.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers believe that the concept of the campaign "Egypt, Where It All Begins", together with the developed brand logo and slogan, in addition to the professional production of the campaign gave Egypt as a destination a stronger positioning opportunity than all previous promotion campaigns for Egypt. Among the weak aspects that need to be developed in future campaigns is the possible media wastage between global and local media channels in different markets, the exclusion of some potential markets due to budget limitations and not employing a push strategy in addition to the pull strategy to enhance effectiveness.

There was a significant difference in campaign recall levels between the four surveyed markets. Moreover, it was noted that recall levels were greater when using a wider media combination for the campaign. Therefore, it is advisable to use a wider media combination in future campaigns in order to increase the rates of exposure and recall.

It is concluded from the field research that the two most influential factors that influence travel decision are testimonies from friends and relatives in addition to advice of tour operators. This is a very important conclusion as it should be reflected strongly in promotion strategies. For this reason the researchers believe that the ETA should have adopted a push strategy to take advantage of the role of tour operators in the decision making process, in addition to the pull strategy that the campaign adopted towards end consumers. The combined push and pull strategy is strongly recommended by the researcher for future Egyptian tourism promotion campaigns.

In spite of using a standardized promotion strategy by the ETA campaign, there was a significant difference in campaign conversion rates between markets. Some of the reasons behind this may be due to the excessive influence of tour operators in some markets or a variable reaction to promotion between markets. The exact reasons and interpretation behind the significant differences in conversion levels between markets need to be a subject for future research.

REFERENCES

- Burke, J. F. & Lindblom, L. A. (1989). Strategies for Evaluating Direct Response Tourism Marketing. *Journal of Travel Research*, 28: 33-37.
- Burke, J. F., and R. Gitelson (1990). Conversion Studies: Assumptions, Accuracy and Abuse. *Journal of Travel Research*, 28 (3): 46-51.
- Cai, L. A. (1998). Effects of Destination Advertising on Financial Returns: A Comparative Analysis of Two Inquiring Methods. *Journal of Hospitality Financial Management*, 6 (1): 61-73.
- Deskins, J. & Seevers, M. (2011). Are State Expenditures to Promote Tourism Effective? *Journal of Travel Research*, 50 : 154-170.
- El-Khadem, A. (2004). *New Vision for Egypt Tourism*. Al-Ahram Weekly. September 16, Issue No. 708.
- El-Khadem, A. (2006). *Nothing compares to Egypt*. The Egyptian Gazette, October 16: 6.
- Ellerbrock, M. (1981). Improving Coupon Conversion Studies: A Comment. *Journal of Travel Research*, 19 (4): 37-38.
- ETA. (2009). *Egypt New Tourism Campaign Communication Strategy*. Cairo: Egyptian Tourist Authority.
- ETA. (2011). *Egypt Where it All Begins - Campaign First Year Annual Review*. Cairo: Egyptian Tourist Authority.
- Hassman, R. (2008). *The Israel Brand- Nation Marketing under Constant Conflict*. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press.
- Kim, D. Y., Hwang Y. H. & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2005). Modeling Tourism Advertising Effectiveness. *Journal of Travel Research*, 44: 42-49.
- Mok, H. M. (1990). A Quasi-Experimental Measure of the Effectiveness of Destination Advertising: Some Evidence from Hawaii. *Journal of Travel Research*, 29: 30-34.
- Okazaki, S. & Alonso, J. (2003). Right Messages for the Right Site: On-Line Creative Strategies Japanese Multinational Corporations. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 9 (4): 221-239.
- Pratt, S., McCabe, S., Jimenez, I. C. & Blake, A. (2010). Measuring the Effectiveness of Destination Marketing Campaigns: Comparative Analysis of Conversion Studies. *Journal of Travel Research*, 49: 179-190.
- Ronkainen, I. and Woodside, A. G. (1987). Advertising Conversion Research, in J. R Brent Ritchie and Charles R. Goeldner(eds.), *Travel, Tourism, and Hospitality Research*, New York: Wiley: 481-88.
- Siegel, W. & Ziff-Levine, W. (1990). Evaluating Tourism Advertising Campaigns: Conversion versus Advertising Tracking Studies. *Journal of Travel Research*, 28: 51-55.
- Silberman, J., and M. Klock (1986). Alternative to Conversion Studies for Measuring the Impact of Travel Ads. *Journal of Travel Research*, 24 (4): 12-16.
- Urness, T., Andersen, C., Gabel, B., Johnson A., Northington, M., Trojan, R. & Vanhyning, T. (2006). *Best Practices for Measurement of Destination Marketing ROI*. State/Provincial Travel Researchers ROI Subgroup: 1-8.
- Woodside, A. G. (1990). Measuring Advertising Effectiveness in Destination Marketing Strategies. *Journal of Travel Research*, 29: 3-8.
- Woodside, A. G. (2010). Tourism Advertising and Marketing Performance Metrics. *Advances in Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 4: 1-14.
- Woodside, A. G. and Soni, P. (1988). Assessing the Quality of Advertising Inquiries by Mode of Response. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 28: 31-37.
- Woodside, A. G., and Dubelaar, C. (2003). Increasing Quality in Measuring Advertising Effectiveness: A Meta-Analysis of Question Framing in Conversion Studies.” *Journal of Advertising Research*, 43 (1): 78-85.
- Woodside, A. G., and D. M. Reid (1974). Tourism Profiles versus Audience Profiles: Are Upscale Magazines Really Upscale? *Journal of Travel Research*, 12 (4): 17-23.
- World Tourism Organization. (2003). *Evaluating NTO Marketing Activities*. Madrid: UNWTO.
- World Tourism Organization. (2006). *Structures and Budgets of National Tourism Organizations, 2004 – 2005*. Madrid: UNWTO