

# TOURISTIC DESTINATION AMBASSADORS, CASE ANALYSIS AND CONCEPTUALIZATION. HOW TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AND USE BRAND AMBASSADORS IN COGNITIVE, AFFECTIVE AND EXPERIENTIAL APPROACHES

*UDC 338.486*  
*Review*

**Pablo Brice de Diesbach**

Received 30 June 2011  
Revised 17 July 2011  
11 August 2011

## **Abstract**

The purpose – We propose to capitalize on recent research on tourism marketing, destination choice, but also and mainly on conceptual reflexions and research on emotional and symbolical brand relationship . We try to understand how destinations could communicate, using destination ambassadors; in order to better attract travellers.

Methodology – this is a theoretical article presenting key concepts and their relevance to tourism marketing. We present the key concepts and analyse cases or real-life examples of destination ambassadors uses, trying to show the relevance of the described concepts.

We use research key concepts and results in Affective marketing, Environmental psychology, and Experiential marketing, exploring issues of persuasion by three persuasion routes through which ambassadors can impact consumer choices.

Approach – This article is a case-based theoretical reflection, aimed at deepening our level of understanding of how and why ambassadors could matter in tourism destination and branding in general. We start with real-life examples, and show in several cases what does not work and why, suggesting better professional practices based on theory.

Findings – We illustrate the concept of destination ambassadors with some real examples. We show that the concept of brand ambassador and destination ambassador are often understood in a very limited approach with confusion, and not much effects because they only rely on “strike power”, famousness. We propose improvements, suggesting three persuasion routes: cognitive, affective and symbolical. We define “symbols” in branding.

We find out that Affective and Symbolical marketing research could dramatically improve our understanding and good use of ambassadors in touristical destination and marketing in general. We also propose three key definitions in tourism marketing.

We propose a reflection on how the Deep metaphors conceptualized by Zaltman, actually relate to Experiential marketing and do make sense in destination branding; we show that ambassadors could largely contribute to it, using such theoretical framework. In a last section, we take a number of examples and formulate recommendations to practitioners, specific to different sorts of destinations such as spas, ski resorts, hotels, etc. We also suggest to enlarge our vision of “marketing” to creating value in a more sustainable, ecological manner. It encapsulates the idea of creating value for all stakeholders, relying all the old concept of Service Profit Chain in services marketing, and on recent research in Tourism marketing. We suggest to think the option of co-branding for both destinations and ambassadors, especially via Online Social Media.

The originality of the research – It consists of two main points. First, although it seems rules/breaking, we simply stick to the modern definition of marketing – marketing seen as a relationship construction process – and to research contributions, in proposing to better

understand how ambassadors could be better used for creating value for targeted consumers, in a consistent manner with the destination positioning. We seem to be very provocative in questioning the practices of practitioners using mainly celebrities; but we rather want to enhance more profound practices and more efficiency in business. We also remind that Marketing is not to be seen as a Communication or Manipulation process, but as a value delivery process, and propose how ambassadors could contribute to it.

Second, we draw attention on some key concepts largely ignored in Experiential marketing, and on the importance of more thought. The principle of parcimony also asks us to communicate in a less superficial manner, and in a more efficient way. In the context of Ambassadors in tourism destination, that means we might need to think and understand more, use less Celebrity effects, and more, ambassadors consistent with brand emotional and symbolical positioning. Those can be celebrities, or non famous humans, virtual agents, animals or other non human objects.

**Keywords** Experiential marketing, Destination, Ambassador, Affect, Symbol

## THE KEY CONCEPTS OF OUR RESEARCH

This article consists of a conceptual improvement proposition in order to improve tourism marketing efficiency. We therefore start clarifying some of the key concepts we use here.

### The concept of brand

The literature gives many definitions of a “brand” (see the seminal works by Aaker 1991, 1995, 2000). We could also refer to e.g. Kapferer (1992; 1999; 2001; 2004) and Keller (1993; 1998; 2001; 2003). One example of definition that we keep here follows, from Aaker (1991, 7): “*a distinguishable name or symbol (such as logo, trademark or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those competitors*”. The definition of the AMA insists on the multidimensionality and the non tangible aspects of its components. We will find them extensively evoked in that paper, in the affective and symbolical meaning of a brand.

### Destination as a brand

A touristic destination proposes a bunch of products and services to be consumed or experienced in a given set. A destination can be considered as extremely similar to a brand and can be marketed as a brand per se: Kerr (2006, 277) proposes to define a destination brand as follows: “[. . .] *name, symbol, logo, word or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination; furthermore it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of destination experience.*” Authors traditionally limit such definition to a place which defines a given geographical area and is a city, region, country, such as St Tropez, Paris, Mykonos, etc. We extend this definition to components of available services in such place. We include in this concept of Destination brand, places of experience or service delivery such as a hotel or a restaurant per se, a casino, and even a shopping mall, when the nature and intensity of the delivered experience can become sufficiently

memorable per se in order to be remembered (and positively commented in word of mouth) as a consumption experience per se.

The interest of destination branding lies in communicating on the destination and its consumption facets or components, differentiating itself from competing destination. We can list 6 advantages of destination branding: helping reducing the choice, reducing the uncertainty and other problematic impacts of intangibility, conveying consistence across outlets and over time, reducing perceived risks in decision making, facilitating segmentation, and motivating and communicating the place image also towards stakeholders such as employees. As Moinat and Diesbach (2009) puts it: "*The image of a specific place represents the simplification of large amounts of information and perceptions of that place. Place image is the process of taking a large quantity of data about a city or country and turning it into a small set of ideas and beliefs*". In our intent of understanding how the image of a place is constructed, we study here the role of a destination ambassador.

### **The concept of ambassador**

In a classical approach and if we refer to several dictionaries, the concept of ambassador comes mainly from the middle age. Ambassadors and spies are intrinsically linked from the beginning of the history of diplomacy and in Europe. The first who had regular ambassadors in all important European, oriental and sometimes Asian courts, were the Venetians. We find since the Renaissance documents mentioning the word "ambassade", but not as a place where the ambassadors live and work but rather as a group of people, sent for a specific mission of negotiation or to deliver a specific request. In all historical mentions an ambassador corresponds to the modern meaning, that is a *person who is here to represent, and defend, the interests of a specific sovereign or state, in a different place or state*. We believe that it quite well corresponds to the meaning it takes in marketing, where the Brand ambassador classically refers to a person who is included in prints, or in videos, and the presence of whom is expected to support the promotion of a product-service-destination, etc. we now analyse examples of destination ambassadors.

### **CONCEPT AND EXAMPLES, OF DESTINATION AMBASSADORS**

Traditionally we associate the word "brand/destination ambassador" to a famous person who, through her official function (a diplomat) or because she is paid for that, promotes a brand. We all know George Clooney for NESPRESSO and Johnny Halliday for OPTIC 2000. Follow some examples of destination ambassadors taken from the professional literature.

A film called BORAT was broadcasted in Nov. 2006 in the USA and UK, about Kazakhstan, and perceived as extremely insulting and humiliating by this state. In reaction, Kazakh Pdt Nazarbayev turned out to act as a firm ambassador of business investments and tourism to his country: his behavior and declarations during his official trip to Washington which took place a few months later, was actually largely impacted by his role as a destination ambassador (Wallis 2007).

We observe all along the 19th century a remarkable boom in water therapy. Urquía (1992), quoted in Lorrinaga (2005), explains this boom thanks to 3 main drivers:

- A breakthrough in chemical and medical investigation,
- The lack of effective curative practices for a number of chronic diseases,
- A fashion imposed by aristocracy.

We believe he forgets two main points: that such fashion is more and more imposed by a growing non aristocratic, industrial elite (first) but effectively poorly represented in Spain; and a growing interest for diseases which took more and more importance, due to the Industrial revolution, in which important physical loads and threatening atmospheric working or life conditions, made arthritis and respiratory system illness become much more serious issues than ever. The author has personally been working in the CHAINE THERMALE DU SOLEIL in France, and could know quite well the surprising effects of medical spas on such illness. San Sebastian in Spain, Biarritz in France, and Bath (even though it had been running spas for 2000 years) in the UK, then became extremely praised medical and wellness spa destinations.

To come back to our topics, in such context there was no real “ambassador-related” touristic promotion. Or rather, there were destination ambassadors - as seen below - but they were not recruited by the spa operators, nor by the tourism offices which did not exist at the time. Nevertheless, the places to which Imperatrice Victoria, Emperor Napoleon III and his wife Countess of Montijo, the Duke of Angouleme, the Prince of Savoy, would go to “*prendre les bains*”, became much praised destinations for the new as well as for the old elites. Destination ambassadors therefore actually existed; but they were not paid and would have then not needed being paid for that - their descendants would certainly be most happy to play such role for money nowadays...but they are not asked to do so nowadays!

Is it because they are not famous any more? We don’t believe this is the reason. We rather think a reason why is because they do not serve as much as social models than two centuries ago: their symbolic importance has declined and they are therefore not often recruited as ambassadors.

In the example of the declarations and offers to become destination ambassadors for Kashmir by minister Omar Abdullah (Tribune Business News 2009), we see there is a very poor conception and understanding of a destination ambassador role and persuasion modalities. He offers anyone to be ambassadors, people are offered to be so openly, they are not instructed to say something in particular, in a particular way, are not motivated or rewarded: it then might work, but by chance only.

In another press article (Marketing 2003) the author reminds us the poor forecasts for Toronto touristical summer season that year of 2003. He analyzes the different measures taken, and concludes recommending that all Torontonians should become “brand ambassadors” for Toronto, inviting friends and relatives to visit the city this Summer. We understand that this is, again, a limited view of the concept of a “ambassador”: “*please just talk around*”.

The state of Orissa in India seems to have some difficulty to find a touristical destination “positioning”: their website mirrors this, with a homepage (<http://orissa-tourism.com/>) that looks like a messy catalog of too many things - at first sight at least. They tried to use Nandita Das as a destination ambassador in 2005, an award-winning Indian film actress and director, because she was a very famous actress in India. Here a major issue is to be raised: she is, and was famous; but do the values she expresses as a character, or the lifestyle and values she represents by the kind of films she played in, match with some clear positioning statement for the state of Orissa? We surfed on Orissa state and on Nandita Das’ websites. Nothing is very clear about either “personnalities” (actress and destination) and we believe that this is an example of a rather “poor” but common, approach of the concept of an ambassador, that is: the assumption that “famous” should = “success in affiliating people”. She is used in the limited traditional manner: “being famous is enough”. We believe it does not work so easily, and by the way, after 2005 we find no evidence at all about some continuation in such collaboration.

The example depicted in the Article in the *New Haven Business Times* (2001) is much more interesting. Senator of Connecticut Mrs Rowland, and her husband, Governor Rowland, are depicted as the ambassadors of Connecticut as a touristic destination for New Yorkers. Such campaign was launched in 2001 upon request of the Connecticut Tourism Council and the Department of Economic & Community Development, Office of Tourism. The ads consisted of radio commercials, 4 television spots, an extensive prints and radio campaign. In their participation, the Rowland present and promote various landscapes and activities that boomer couples and families can enjoy in Connecticut. In such example, we believe the Brand ambassadors for Connecticut use cognitive and affective routes mainly: the cognitive route because they actually are from this state, they know it and can describe it detailfully, delivering data; the affective route via two facets that we detail hereafter.

As to the cognitive persuasion route, the Rowland being important personalities from Connecticut, they are perceived as relevant speakers. They are also seen as expert as they can describe the destination, its facilities, benefits, etc. Perceived expertise and relevance or congruence with the destination that they promote, are important moderators of the credibility of the delivered message, as the facts and arguments deployed will be perceived as more plausible. Of course a bias exists: they are also perceived as biased speakers as they have an interest in convincing us. There will then be a trade-off between how subjects believe the ambassadors are biased and how much – if one believes in their ethics and honesty - congruence and relevance will reinforce their persuasion power.

As to the affective persuasion route, as Senator and Governor, they represent power and authority. When I receive a recommendation from such destination ambassadors, if such VIPs talk to me in an ad, it is likely that the importance of the speaker, gives to me (the message receiver) a feeling of (self) importance, feeling like: “wow, the ambassador is talking to me! I am a quite important guy too!”). That is, in a language of psychology, a feeling of *dominance*. According to findings in environmental psychology – see hereafter, such feeling reinforces the credibility of the message.

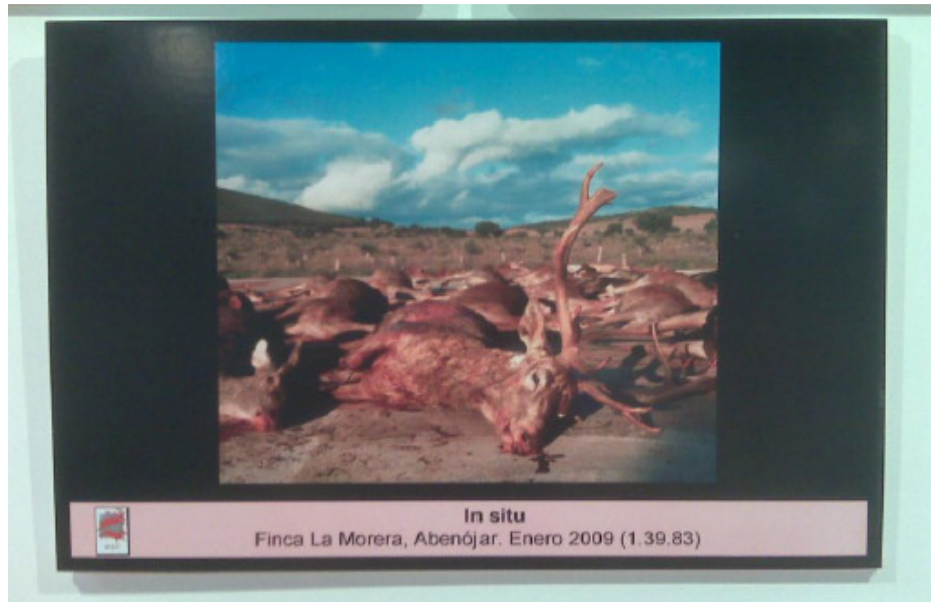
If, additionally, the Rowland are either handsome, agreeable, and/or have a convincing body language (in particular if they are good-looking and-or smile), another facet of affective persuasion will be likely to operate and again reinforce the speakers' credibility – this, whatever be the righteousness of what they say. Such affective cue effects are well described in e.g. Burgoon (1978), Burgoon & al. (1990). Such ambassadors are therefore relevant, for several important components of cognitive and affective persuasion routes.

An article in the *Tribune Business News* (2008) comments the 40 years of 'Virginia is for Lovers'. The State of Virginia seems to always have been a touristic destination expressing authenticity, relationship to nature and to a down-on-earth way of life. A slogan was launched in 1969, raising some eyebrows till a real, strong acceptability showed-up. It was officially adopted and even broadcasted by the very Governor Linwood Holton. It is being renewed and reexpressed and enriched. : "We are bringing 'Virginia is for Lovers' back to life," said Alisa Bailey, president of the Virginia Tourism Corp. (...) "It's one of the most recognized tourism slogans in the world, or slogans of any kind in the world, It's got enormous brand equity and marketing power". Is there behind this an axis for a positioning statement? We feel, with what Kaine comments in the article that, beyond love of the beloved person, the positioning is related to an expression of a quest for real and authentic experience and feelings: towards a beloved person as well as towards family and nature. In other words, an affective and symbolical positioning. Does this hold for a set of value that a "Brand" can adopt? Certainly. Can that be expressed by an "ambassador"? Certainly yes: we would well imagine photos of landscape scenarios, of family gatherings (just retake a number of the photos used by RALPH LAUREN in their catalog for years: not the fashion-like but the ones showing Americans in a cabane in the far west, around a fireplace) etc. Beyond the fact such photos should be pretty, they would have to precisely express the strength and authenticity of love of others and nature, and could (without being a specific, famous, person such as looney or Tigerwoods) be a very efficient ambassador for such touristic destination. Such ambassador would hold a symbolic function – see further on in the article.

In their analysis of the most valued and accepted images of promotion of, and expression of the value delivered by a sky resort, Frochot & Kreziak (2008) find out interesting results via focus groups with real consumers.

The image of an old church in the mountain is the most preferred image. It probably is an aesthetically and emotionally loaded image which may seduce for the beauty of it. But the comments rather show that it is praised because it expresses authenticity, calm, nature. That is, if such images of a church were used as a destination ambassador we would clearly understand that it is not the fact the "ambassador" is famous (vs using George Clooney for instance), nor the fact it is particularly pretty, that might matter. It is rather the fact that such image indirectly expresses "something" that makes senses, and creates value for consumers. We will see that this can be called a symbolical communication. We will call that the symbolical communication dimension and we believe that an ambassador should include that in how and what it communicates to an audience. Hereafter follows, as another example, a photo of a enormous ad, taken in the *Fair of Nature, Hunting and Fishing*, in Ciudad Real (figure 1).

Figure 1: **Hunting in Mexico, dead animals or “service” evidence, as ambassador, Fair of Nature, Hunting and Fishing, Ciudad Real, Spain**



Source: photo by the author, September 2009

It promotes hunting in Mexico! From a cognitive point of view it fairly describes the expected “delivered value”, that is: a big hunting harvest, as is rarely imaginable nowadays in Europe. From the affective point of view, people like me will find it disgusting and the effect will be a strong rejection, avoidance: I find the image disgusting (emotional reaction). On another hand it expresses a way of life and a set of values (non respect of animal life and especially species that become rarer and rarer) to which a consumer like me does not adhere at all (symbolic communication). But for people belonging to the target it generates excitement, a set of shared values and a will to know more and if possible, to come (cf interviews conducted in the fair). Those are therefore good examples of both affective and symbolical ambassador-based positioning statement. The next photo is taken in Geneva airport, where it is displayed since 2009.

Figure 2: **The Spa by Valmont, service evidence and landscape as ambassadors, Geneva airport, International transit area**



Source: photo by the author, displayed since 2009 till 2011

From a cognitive point of view it says four things: hands (probably expert hands) will take care of you, while you relax (photos 1 (left up) & 3 (left down)). We, and You, will take care of you (photo 2 (right up)), and you will find, close to you, the pure Swiss nature and mountains,

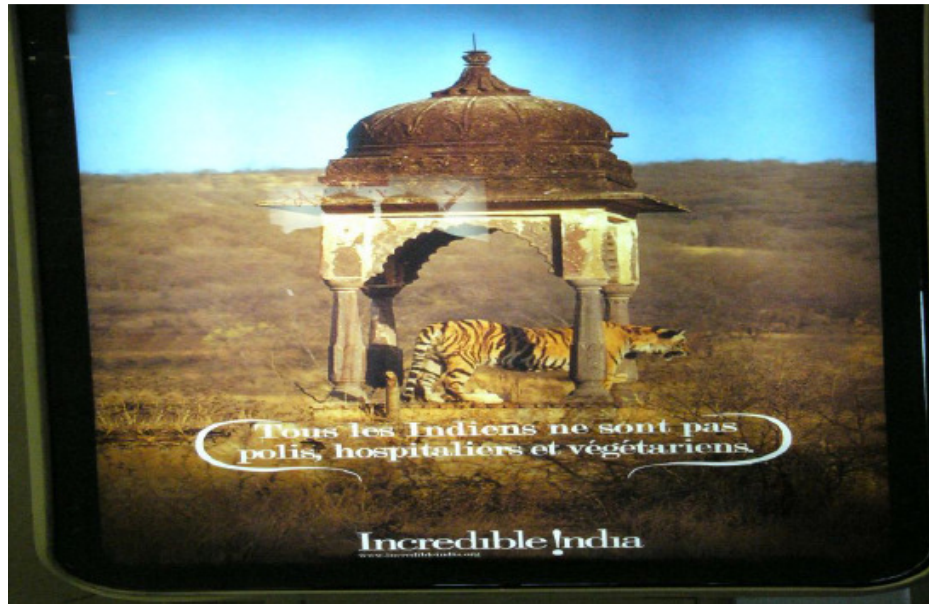
From an affective point of view, photos 1, 2, 3 are pretty: this aesthetic value creates a contagion effect that will transfer from the beauty of the woman to the ad and the destination, impacting beliefs about the destination. Photos 1 & 3 also express relaxation, intimacy, which positively impact brand communication in e.g. cosmetics, health care, etc. photo 2 expresses some eroticism – is this woman relaxing, or caressing herself? A combination of relaxation and excitement tainted by eroticism might be elicited here, and some focus groups should reveal if this holds true, AND if this enhances persuasion or not – again it probably will depend of the targeted men and women.

From a symbolical point of view, those ads depict silence, majesty, authenticity. We don't see here a provocative Russian millionaire on the most magnificent yacht: we see intimacy, authenticity. For people adhering to this way of life and whose self-concept corresponds to such values (Belk 1988, 1989; Belk & al. 1989), this will exert a positive leverage effect in communication.

A last example is a photo taken at Charles de Gaulle airport-Exit after customs control, Terminal 4, in Dec. 2006. It promotes Tourism to India as a part of a large international campaign (Read here: *"All Indians are not polite, caring and vegetarians"*).



Figure 3: **Incredible India, an iconic animal as an ambassador,  
CDG International airport**



Source: photo by the author

About affective route: the landscape is dry, not particularly pretty, nothing aesthetically special. The character is not a famous human such as Nicole Kidman or an Indian minister. But is extremely consistent with the destination as tigers are still many in India. It delivers information on what can be seen or found there (cognitive route of persuasion). The animal may also express a sort of wilderness and sense of primitiveness, and then authenticity: authenticity is actually a strong driver of tourism towards the Far East (symbolical route). Wilderness may frighten some tourists; but it can motivate and attract: we cannot understand certain sport activities such as climbing, trekking, and leisure (watching action films and thrillers) without integrating that negative emotions can also create value: consumers do not look only for pleasure; they can sometimes look for pain, ugliness, danger and challenges. This can also create arousal, pleasure and attract, retain and affiliate (Bitner 1992): negative emotions can actually create approach behaviors and again, this will be the source of a refined segmentation strategy for the brand manager. Finally, the tiger is here a relevant and efficient cognitive and symbolical destination ambassador.

#### **COMMUNICATION ISSUES: THE EFFECTS OF A BRAND AMBASSADOR**

We have already touched in the given examples the fact that images and in particular ambassadors, can communicate following different ways, called routes of persuasion. We start now analysing how they effectively do communicate in a more theoretical and conceptual way. This will allow us in the last part of the article to review the role of the brand ambassador, applying it to the case of the destination ambassador.

## 1. The cognitive route of persuasion

A first possibility can be using an ambassador, being a real character, perceived as knowledgeable because she has an expertise, either as a “producer” or as a customer, in the mentioned area of services. For instance, Dayanara Torres is used by Philippinian authorities to promote medical tourism towards Philippines. She is not a doctor but was a 1993 Miss Universe, a fabulous model, and has gone through different cosmetic surgery operations: she is an expert “consumer” and reinforces a trust-based persuasion route.

See: [http://www.healism.com/blogs/the\\_stanley\\_rubenti\\_medical\\_tourism\\_blog/philippines%E2%80%99\\_newest\\_medical\\_tourism\\_promoter:\\_dayanara\\_torres/](http://www.healism.com/blogs/the_stanley_rubenti_medical_tourism_blog/philippines%E2%80%99_newest_medical_tourism_promoter:_dayanara_torres/)).

Conversely the DEIRA clinic at Dubai uses a service “producer” as ambassador: her role is to reassure the prospect via a feeling of more technical expertise. She is a woman – complicity with female consumers, i.e. reassurance + demand from muslim husbands or brothers than no man should medically attend their wife or sister - and her Vitae is visible on the very homepage, just below a nice photo of a female patient being reassured by a doctor (figure 4).

Figure 4: DEIRA Clinic, a service provider as ambassador

The screenshot shows the website for the DEIRA Clinic, specifically the Gynecology Department page. The page has a blue header with the 'PRIME MEDICAL CENTER' logo and a search bar. Below the header is a navigation menu with links for Home, About Us, Branches, Pharmacy, Health Packages, Corporate Services, News, Contact Us, and Appointments. The main content area is titled 'Deira Branch' and features a large photo of a doctor and a patient. Below this, there is a list of departments: Cardiology, Dental, Dermatology, Endocrinologist, ENT, Gastroenterology, General Medicine, General Surgery, Gynecology & Obstetrics, Neurology, Ophthalmology, Orthopedics, Pathology, Pediatrics, Urology, and Yoga therapy. The Gynecology & Obstetrics department is highlighted. Below this, there is a section for 'Gynecology Department - Deira Branch' which lists services: Antenatal clinic, Infertility management, Gynec endocrinology, Post menopausal clinic, and Gential cancer screening. A photo of Dr. Manju Lodha is shown, along with her biography: 'Dr. Manju Lodha has over 18 years experience in OB - Gynecology having worked and trained in India, USA, UK and UAE. After finishing her basic training from prestigious grant Medical College, Mumbai.' Below this, there is a section for 'EXPERTISE' which lists: Gynecology Endocrinology, Cervical cancer screening including colposcopy with Biopsies, and Postmenopausal clinic.

Source: [http://www.pmcubai.com/deira\\_gynecology\\_obstetrics.htm](http://www.pmcubai.com/deira_gynecology_obstetrics.htm) (June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011)

On the other hand, ambassadors, apart from the delivered message *per se*, can exert a leverage effect on what is said in the rest of the ad, commercial or website.

A first kind of leverage effect could be considered as rather cognitive in the sense that an ambassador could reinforce the weight, the strength of the arguments used in the ad or commercial. We call this first route a Cognitive persuasion route. We must point out here that the definition of “cognitive” (vs affective) would deserve a whole PhD dissertation *per se*, and cannot be summarized or justified in 5 lines. We will just stick

here to the idea that this route is called cognitive because it is related to a rather conscious process, where pure unconscious and emotional cues would not dominate, and in which we rather focus on the cognitive part of the data processing (Ledoux & Damasio 1997, Ledoux 1998; Bagozzi & al. 1994, 1998, 1999).

It is called “cognitive” in part because it is rather rational and conscious. We stick to this simplistic definition and don’t enter into the enormous debate of *What* is Cognition and about its primacy on Affect, as this could also deserve several research careers per se (Zajonc 1978, 1986 Zajonc & Markus 1982, 1985; Tsal 1985).

Our experience of analysing a number of examples of brand and destination ambassadors and interviews with professionals seem to show that the main effect looked after when using an ambassador - and actually contracting them because they often are real person - is related to the *notoriety* of the ambassador. The mere notoriety is a crucial cue in term of (expected) persuasion power and the idea is that a famous person endorsing a product-service-destination should reinforce the persuasiveness of the ad. And if the person is perceived as congruent with the brand or destination, as an expert producer or consumer, such effect is reinforced. It would be similar to the *mere/first exposure effect* described by Zajonc, except that here the important point would not be “*being the first*” but rather “*being the most famous and congruent*” with the brand universe, here with the destination, universe.

#### ***Congruency effect related to the ambassador-consumer similarity and complicity***

Another congruency effect can be expected, not from the congruency of the ambassador with the brand but rather from her congruency with the consumer, e.g. in Kastenholz (2004). For instance, the presence of a man of my age and who seems to have, or at least might have in my mind, the same health-related requirements (ease of access for partly disabled people), the same health problems (at his age he could easily suffer from arthrosis, like me), could create a sort of complicity because of the perceived similarity between him and myself. This in turn could reinforce the credibility of the message and the persuasion power of the whole commercial, even for the elements of content which are *not* related to that ambassador-consumer similarity.

#### ***Memorization effects***

Another “cognitive route” related effect is likely to occur via the memorization process. This will hold in the case of both short term memory and long term memory.

For the case of short term memory, the first situation would be the one of the pure impulsive purchase. For example we are walking in Dijon, coming back from a visit to the cathedral and the treasures of the crypt, and we suddenly see a nice printed ad promoting the famous *Andouillette with gratin dauphinois*, with a traditional mustard. What a nice local specialty: I had rather thought of a bio salad with soya and spinach, but this looks greater. And it is promoted by a Troisgros brother, one of the very famous French food ambassadors. Shall I choose that for lunch?

In case of a pure impulsive purchase the subject will be more prone to choose the product-service for which an ambassador is endorsing it, because of the familiarity effect related to the acquaintance with the ambassador. This could occur either because she is famous (by a route of persuasion impacted by the *mere exposure effect* and the familiarity effect: “*I know this guy and he promotes such product-service, waow!*” (Zajonc & Markus *ibid*); or, because of the sort of warranty and reassurance effect generated by the ambassador, if he is an expert, that is, if he is perceived as relevant, consistent with the product-service category, regardless of how famous or liked he-she is.

In the case of a reminded impulsive purchase (Fady & al. 2007), the process is different: the ad or commercial presents an alternative (a touristic destination, a museum visit, a nice meal, etc.). I had not thought for now about such alternative, but it is not totally new to my mind: seeing the ad with the ambassador making her recommendation, just reminds me that I really wanted to buy that and had thought about it several times before.

For instance I have been thinking of going to a spa for my back and knee-ache, and that ad with this young tennis woman who followed a rehabilitation in Roscoff (Bretagne) precisely reminds me about this partly forgotten option. The idea of the purchase was lying, asleep, somewhere in my memory. The ad awakes my interest, but several alternatives are possible. Obviously among all the possible alternatives (say, 200 spas in Europe), subject will have to select 4-5 analyzable options. Among them, certainly some, such as the one she just saw, and others presented in ads, will pop up more easily – those that are encapsulated in the *Consideration set*. The subject will retrieve more easily the ones which are present in her memory with some reinforcement cues. Again, destination ambassadors, either when those are extremely famous (and if possible, liked), and-or when they are perceived as relevant-competent for the considered product-service category, will be more likely to pop up and occupy a place, and possibly more space than the others, in the consumer consideration set (Armstrong & Kotler 2007; Desai & Hoyer 2000). Being located in the consideration set, thanks to the reinforcement effect of the ambassador on memorization, they will then be more likely to be selected as a possible option, for a purchase, that would be done with little rational and analytical consideration. This holds true in particular for examples such as Lastminute.com promotions, restaurant and hotels package offers, cruise and touristic offers which would not be too highly priced, so that the impulsive part would still be reasonably important in the purchase process.

We now come to another persuasion route, in which data processing occurs but is much less conscious and of a very different nature.

## **2. The affective route of persuasion**

We will consider the affective route as a route of persuasion in which unconscious, or little conscious effects, dominate in the decision process, and in which the impacting cues are rather related to Design or accompanying or environmental elements, rather than to a rational evaluation of the “performance” of a product or service offer.

The issue of the level of consumer consciousness is important but not decisive: when seeing an ad for Roscoff spas, ornamented by a beautiful woman's back, I am perfectly conscious of the agreeableness of the woman and of the aesthetic, or maybe erotic, nature of the stimuli. But I am probably not aware of the fact that such elicited emotions will impact my decision process. OR, if I am aware about such effect, I am probably not totally aware of how much it does matter, not aware at all of how it "works" in the persuasion process. Last, I might deny the potential persuasion effect: if I might confess such attractiveness of the woman's back and body in the photo or website it to myself, I will probably not confess it to my girlfriend! That means, the affective route is considered as often unconscious, or at least is "less" conscious (or less confessable), by nature.

It is important to remember that we separate both routes for pedagogical reason. They of course will overlap in extremely complex, often unexplained, manner, in how persuasion is exerted. Developments can be seen in, among many, Diesbach (2008), Edell and Burke (1986, 1987), Bagozzi & al. (1999) or Otnes & Scott (1996) to quote very few of the wide research on that issue.

Among the wide available research on the role of affect and its consequences in term of behaviour or persuasion in marketing, we remind the seminal work of Mehrabian & Russel (1974) in Environmental psychology. Without discussing the relevance of their affective space measurement scale, often criticized, we believe that their conceptualization of the *Approach-Avoidance behaviours* and their application are seminal to marketing. They show that an affective stimulus could generate affective reactions (called here *Arousal, Pleasure and Dominance*). Then, the stimuli would, either directly, or through the mediation of such affective reactions, elicit approach behaviors such as "*Staying, Exploring, Coming back, Affiliating*".

Even though such approach is (with reason) criticized for being too black-box-like, Donovan & Rossiter (1982) propose to apply such approach to marketing research. A wide literature has proved such approach relevant since then: in consumer goods, in luxury goods, banking, restauration, and in tourism and leisure (Dubé & Lebel 2001, Dubé & al. 2003; Diesbach and Lebel 2010).

An improved version of such approach is proposed in consumer-in-store behaviour by (Baker, Grewal & Parasuraman 1992). They propose to add, to the Ambient factors and Design factors - which fundamentally corresponds to the Ambiance factors posited in the Environmental approach by Mehrabian & Russel and then in marketing by Donovan & Rossiter - the role of the *Social factors*. That is, the fact that the presence, appearance, behavior of service personnel or salesreps, might also contribute, jointly or independently, to impact approach behaviors. This is interesting for us if service clerks do effectively matter in the delivered value. Such is the case in tourism and destination-related service delivery: then the clerks could well play a role as destination ambassadors in advertising.

We propose that, in a similar manner, the inclusion of a human brand ambassador in an ad or commercial, because it is associated to the promoted store, hotel, restaurant or touristic destinations, could generate positive emotion which could in turn generate the will to:

- Affiliate: the will to ask questions (by phone, online, in an agency) and learn more about the destination,
- Come to the destination,
- Will to stay more,
- Will to return,
- Will to recommend.

What we are highlighting here sticks to an affective route, that is, a route of persuasion in which the subject is not or is little aware of the effects of the added element of design (the brand ambassador) in the ad, commercial or website.

A beautiful lady in an elegant destination magazine ad is a good example of such ambassador with expected effects via an emotional route. A handsome, young, smiling doctor too (see the ad commented before for the Dubai-based hospital). If the expertise effect comes from the cognitive route, we highlight here another parallel effect via the affective route.

Then, other ambassadors impact via an emotional route and in particular the route of Dominance: if we use an expert of a character who looks like such expert, for instance a man dressed with a white blouse, who looks like a doctor, explaining the benefits of a spa on my arthrosis pains, two persuasion routes can operate.

His speech will touch me via a cognitive route as he will describe for me the attributes of the air and water, and give the medical and comfort-related arguments in the print or commercial. But he will also generate, by his mere presence as an expert, a feeling of dominance, of a better control of the situation by myself. This will happen via an (partly at least) unconscious route. The credibility of his argumentation might be reinforced by such affective route. Because he speaks to me, whatever be the content of his speech – that I most often do not understand – I will feel arousal, dominance, and more self-confidence, and the choice will be facilitated (see e.g. Groeppel-Klein 1998).

In a same manner, the positive emotions generated by a beautiful surrounding, flowers, decoration, and ambassadors such as by beautiful people (a star as well as service personnel), in an ad for a FOUR SEASONS hotel and spa, will most probably reinforce the persuasive power of the message delivered in the ad or commercial, if we follow Edell and Burke (1986, 1987) and Bagozzi (1999), and in an online context, Diesbach & Midgley (2007, 2008).

That is, an ambassador in a tourism marketing context is likely to impact persuasion through an affective route, either via a perceived-expertise and consistency leverage effect, as well as via a more aesthetic or eroticism-related effect. In all cases, such effect would be mediated by affective reactions. We not only underline the mediating role of *Pleasure* but also of *Dominance*.

We now come to the last persuasion route, which touches both cognitive and affective route but is different from them.

### **3. The symbolical route of persuasion. Concepts and conceptual definitions.**

We now would like to comment a third possible route of persuasion, the symbolical route. We first define the concept of “symbol”, and then comment such persuasion route.

Symbols and symbolical consumption are most used but, in our opinion, with often a lack of conceptual definition, in an emerging literature since the 1980's. Originally, the concept comes from the Greek words *sumballon*. The most detailed record comes from the French Language Historical Dictionary (DHLF 1992): the original Greek verb “sumballon” means first “to through away, to join, to put in contact” and is then used in “sumballein”, for an object cut-off into 2 pieces which served as an identification sign when people joining them could then re-assemble the 2 pieces in one (*Petit Robert de la Langue Française*). Both etymologies converge in that a symbol is always something that projects us towards something that is absent. With the Renaissance, Symbol means “*a natural fact or an object which evokes, through its shape or its nature, a conceptual association/relationship with something that is abstract or absent* (Rabelais 1552, in DHLF). There is therefore the idea of a metaphorical representation of something that is said, but that is absent.

The *Spanish Dictionary of the Royal Academy* posits that a symbol is an: “*image, figure or devise by which a moral or intellectual concept is represented in an oral or material manner, thanks to a similarity or correspondence that our understanding perceives, between such concept and such image*”.

In marketing we will follow Levy (1999a, 2006) who posits that “*in casual usage symbol is a general term for all instances where (consumption) is mediated rather than direct; where an object, action, word, picture, or complex behavior is understood to mean not only itself but also some other idea or feelings*”. That is, the symbol per se is visible, and it reflects, expresses an invisible or absent, signified concept. The literature on symbolism in anthropology or sociology as we can find it in works by Piaget, Baudrillard, Lipovetsky, perfectly matches such definitions even though they rarely refer to in-depth analysis of the origin of the concept.

The literature in marketing such as in Levy or Belk rich pieces of research, is perfectly consistent with our approach. We nevertheless believe that they often do not “define” symbolism and symbolic consumption, and sometimes holds that readers do understand the exact meaning – which might sometimes be expecting too much from us.

We therefore propose to define, in a marketing context, « Symbol » as « *something, an object – i.e. a product, a service, an ambience cue, this object may also be a word in a brand-slogan, a brand or destination logo, an element of design in an ad or commercial or website or into an object of consumption.*

*That “something” refers to, appeals to, a concept, a value, an event, a way of life or an idea, that is “absent” and that is therefore indirectly expressed. This concept-value-event-idea-way of life, etc., makes sense and is supposed to create some sort of value for the subject (here, the consumer). The nature of its value deserves still lots of conceptual research in experiential marketing.*

*This meaning, that is, the link between the evoking object and the evoked concept-value-event-idea-way of life, is understood thanks to a common cultural background and to shared values with the message sender; second: it creates value for the consumer (if she has been properly targeted of course) by the associations related to such meaning;*

*This “meaning process” or evocation, this projection to some indirect, absent meaning is the core of a value creation process for the consumer.*

*Such associations may be of a rather cognitive nature (e.g. a music evokes an event because I learnt that at school); but in general, their value comes precisely from the fact that there is an emotional attachment to what is evoked. This meaning can generate some emotional reactions such as nostalgia, positive surprise, complicity, sexual excitement, social pleasure, self confidence related to self-concept reinforcement, etc. That is (and this is absolutely crucial in symbolic marketing), a symbol conveys a meaning, talking about an “absent”, which is related to more or less conscious, emotional reactions”.*

It is the double dimension of a symbol, its cognitive and emotional content, which makes it so delicate to use and understand.

That “absent”, the meaning, may be clearly understood by the message receiver only thanks to a common cultural background and set of references. If there is no such common background, the symbol is most likely to be non-understandable. That is, and this is key: a symbolical communication differs in the extent to which it will be understood to varying extents, with varying levels of depths by receivers, precisely thanks to the depth of the common references and cultural backgrounds between the sender and the receiver. This can be clearly seen in e.g. the analysis of the meaning of a Medieval miniature, a Renaissance political or religious painting, the way the fascist regimes were promoting “authentic destinations” in Italy, Germany or Austria (see examples in Walton 2005), as well as in the way luxury hotels or modern carmakers communicate in an experiential manner on their products or services in their ads or commercials TV.

We now come to the last part of our article, proposing a definition of a Destination ambassador that takes into account our description of persuasion routes and our definition of the symbolical communication, and will comment examples of application.





Consumers therefore use external cues in order to reduce such uncertainty. Anything that communicates on the service delivery dimensions, and levels, may therefore be used by consumers in that purpose. If a destination or brand ambassador communicates on certain destination attributes (the dolphins or the rieß for Red-Sea-based diving, used as ambassadors on MANTA DIVING TOURS touristic offers “tell” me I will see dolphins there), or on certain destination thriug values, preoccupation, symbolic properties (ex. I see the face of a famous altermondialist for a sustainable tourism destination and this tells me “they think like me, that is OK”), it will then express or confirm destination value promises, reduce uncertainty, and limit the risk of service gaps afterwards. The ambassador will then be absolutely not useful in persuasion because they are a “famous character”, but because they are *meaningful* (symbolic route) in term of value delivery communication. They could also generate unconscious positive emotions of course, for instance because of eroticism or pure aesthetic.

Their symbolical value – the fit with certain natures or facets of value delivery such as authentic nature, ethnologic experience or casinos with beautiful girls and millionaire around – plus the possible emotional power of such ambassadors, is in such case what matters whether they are a plant, an animal a human or an object. We clearly see that this goes far beyond the case of brand ambassadors being reduced to a famous singer, model or politician.

After analysing those possible emotional and symbolical effects in persuasion, we must then enlarge our conception of a brand or more specifically destination ambassador. Normally we considered in most cases that a brand ambassador should be a real character; but we now propose a richer and more accurate definition of a brand or destination ambassador.

## **2. A new definition of the concept of brand and destination ambassador**

We capitalize here on the literature and examples commented in the previous pages. Retaking the etymological approach from the *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, we find out that the concept of “ambassador” comes from the concept of “Ambiance”, the origin of which is described hereafter.

### ***Definition of a brand ambassador:***

The word ambassador comes “From lat. *“ambiens”*: gives *ambiens*, 1515, p.p. of *“ambire”*, “to go around” (gives in Fr.: *“ambassade, ambages, ambition”*); in Science, 17th & 18th c., “a liquid that circulates around” ; since end 19th c., “physical or moral atmosphere” (DHLF 1992). The important radical concept here is “ambire”, to turn or flow around. IF we take the etymology AND if we enlarge the concept of ambassador in marketing integrating the affective and symbolical persuasion routes in communication, we propose to define a new concept of brand ambassador as follows: “a brand ambassador is a communication *object* which is not specifically the promoted brand, destination, product or service, but which is used in a peripheral manner to enrich and reinforce other elements of communication encapsulated in an ad, commercial or website. That object “says” something, directly or symbolically, to a targeted audience.

It may be a famous character as most often used, or a non famous person which is therefore used in general for two reasons related to her expertise.

When considering a non famous, real character as a possible ambassador, it may be used for its congruency with the product-service-destination promoted, either because she is seen as an expert producer (e.g. a diplomat, a tourism worker, a doctor), or an expert stakeholder (e.g. a journalist specialized in the mentioned area), or an expert consumer - or we can also consider a virtual agent who looks like an expert producer, stakeholder or consumer.

If not an expert, it may be *at least*, a real person (or a virtual agent) who seems to know a lot about the topic, the brand, the product-service category and who seem to have exactly the same preoccupations as the targeted consumer (e.g. the senior consumers promoting a cruise or funeral services or life insurance contracts, to other senior consumers). Such human ambassadors generally communicate mainly through the cognitive persuasion route, and to a lesser extent via affective and symbolical routes.

An ambassador can also be an animal, or even an element of design included in the ad or commercial or website, e.g. a specific flower, monument, ambience music (in the future, an odour online), the presence of which is partly due to either its *affective* effects (creating positive emotional emotions): we call those Affective ambassadors.

Ambassadors can also have an impact in the persuasion process, due to the fact they are deeply connected to *symbolical meanings* which are here to create, justify, reinforce or make credible some axis of value creation for the targeted audience. For instance the pretty female's body in VALMONT SPA has an aesthetic, affective effect, but it also symbolically expresses those idea of relaxation and self-care; or imagine a destination which wants to position itself on the idea of Nature and relaxation: they might use the symbolical image of a budhhist monk practising meditation. To clarify the difference, an ad using a beautiful woman practising mediattion would mix-up affective (via eroticism and attracticeness) and symbolical (via the fact it expresses the idea of meditatiing) persuasion routes whereas using only a budhhist monk, with no particular aesthetic appeal, would only appeal to the symbolical route.

We call those last ones, the Symbolical ambassadors (even the non human cues) because of their capacity to "signify and say something", around what is said in a more symbolical or cognitive manner in the rest of the ad, commercial, website. Finally a Brand or Destination ambassadors can be a person, an animal, a virtual being or avatar, and even a mere, representative object (e.g. a flower, a piece of food, a specific tree such as the Banyan tree for BANYAN TREEE hotel chain, etc.)"

This definition applies to brand ambassadors in general and to destination ambassadors in particular. We insist on the fact that such definition is seminal because it explains why the spectra of the concept covered by a brand ambassador should go far beyond the simplistic idea and use that we have when we see the immense majority of branding practices using anbassadors in the real-world: practitioners all converge in using a pretty or rich and famous star, and this is all. This is actually often a primitive conception and we often seeno emotion, no symbolical meaning, just a tendency to

copy what competitors do, with little imagination. We now come to the implications for the use of destination ambassadors.

### **3. Implications of our analysis and conceptual definition, for the use of destination ambassadors**

*“Illuminating the (consumer’s) mind”* is the big challenge on which Gerald Zaltman has been working for years at Harvard Business School, and in his advertising and communication company, OLSON & ZALTMAN. His main working tool is the “collage”, a qualitative tool in which consumers search for, and then express, rather indirectly reveal, the in-depth emotions, fears, needs, which in turn are analysed as the main purchase or consumption drivers which rarely correspond to what could be gathered via questionnaires (Zaltman 2003). Of course it focuses on emotions and symbols.

After 20 years of consulting they have found out a list of around 20 “deep metaphors”, often unconscious, that are most commonly found to be the real main consumption drivers (Zaltman 2008), for instance the search for a protective, reassuring, “container”; or the fact that “life is a journey” with challenges, threats, good and bad surprises. Some metaphors may stick to one of the generic scales of e.g. the Maslow pyramid: for example the concept of “search for a container” partly mirrors in many cases, the need for basic, physical protection. Others may well correspond to drivers as elicited in research articles working on the symbolic, self-concept-related, social-value creation oriented, particularly related to the self expression and construction for example (Belk 1988; 1989) or symbolic in nature (Belk & al. 1989).

In such perspective, a brand ambassador in general, and in the case of destination marketing a destination ambassador in particular, has an important role in embodying the strong values and-or emotional cues, that incarnate such symbolic axis of value creation. We then see that such extended role of a brand ambassador is deeply related to recent – and complex – research in consumer psychology.

#### ***Coming to the experiential marketing literature***

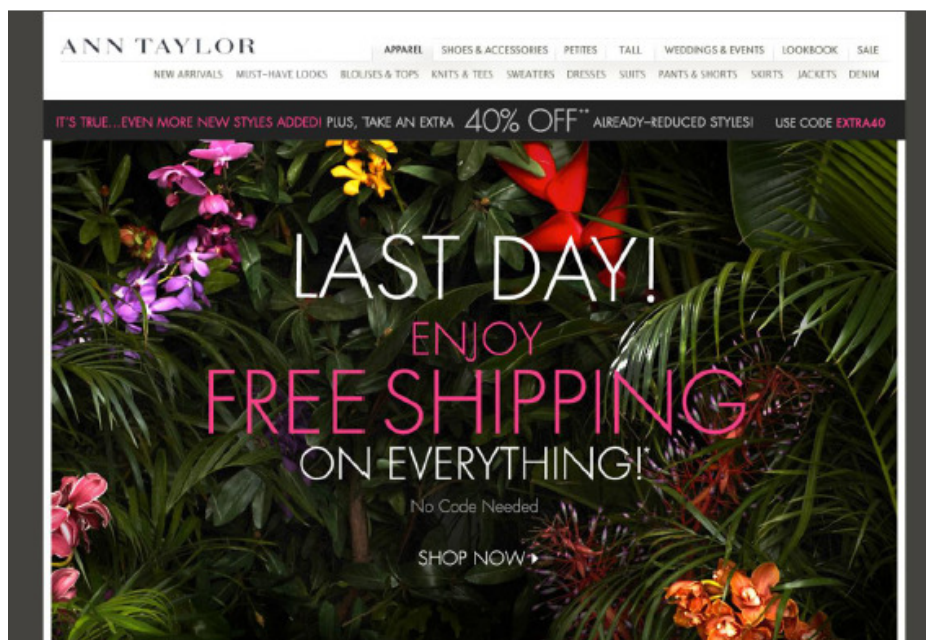
Following the experiential paradigm as put by Schmitt & Simonson (1997), the focus on value creation through Customer experience has been evolving from the focus on the attributes & benefits phases, to the branding names and associations phases, to end-up in the sensory experiences phases, that they fundamentally relate to the Aesthetic value creation.

Beyond the word “aesthetic” which could stick too much to an emotional facet if misunderstood, we also recommend to the marketers to Focus on the symbolism-related issues. We believe that some images are to be seen from a larger point of view that goes beyond aesthetics. They can represent icons or prototypes, that is, extremely powerful, generally well decrypted (inside a specific community which could then become, for that ability to decrypt, a market segment), conveying a powerful emotional and symbolical content.

According to Schmitt & Simonson (1997) a prototype is defined as an “*hypothetical, most typical instance of a category*” (ibid, 124). It may be a non-real character, created from collages of real traits: Betty Crocker, used for decades by GENERAL MILLS on food packaging to evoke a caring, friendly, mother-like, and highly professional, cook, is one good example. We don’t understand the success of Betty Crocker as a brand ambassador if we only believe in a famous or handsome ambassador design: she is not famous (she did not exist, she is not a real person) and she is just “reasonably” attractive. She nevertheless has been a fantastic brand ambassador for decades. Her success comes probably from aesthetics for a little part, and from its symbolical meaning. She has nevertheless embodied care, love, technical skills, a strong mother personality, for millions of kids and mothers. The objective of incarnation of such character was the driver followed by the designers in their brand ambassador design.

The example of the comprehensive identity management of ANN TAYLOR is another good example (Schmitt & Simonson 1997, 293). During years the real used “icon” was a woman: beautiful, elegant, and of course – as for so many cosmetics or apparel brands, changing over time. We now interestingly find that their ambassador is...a bunch of flowers (figure 5).

Figure 5: **Ann Taylor, Evolution of a concept of ambassador: from an elegant woman, to a bunch of flowers**



Source: [http://www.annaylor.com/ann/home/index.jsp?cid=m\\_ps\\_brd](http://www.annaylor.com/ann/home/index.jsp?cid=m_ps_brd) (June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011)

This fashion shop has become a destination per se, expressing freshness, youth, rejuvenation. And every page of the website tries to express such emotions or values with flowers: flowers have become a quasi band ambassador, of this brand who has become a strongly experiential brand.

### ***Branding with ambassadors***

Sometimes, scholars has touched our new conceptualization of the destination ambassador, without naming it. For instance the first most preferred image of the ski resorts as analysed by Frochot & Kreziak (2008) was a small church in the mountain, among a collection of photos showed to the tested subjects in focus groups. It was neither particularly beautiful, nor rich or impressive. It rather expressed a strong value: authenticity and probably, harmony with nature. This image would then work, in our opinion, as a perfect ambassador for the appropriate targets valuing parcimony, authenticity, and no show-off places. Of course this persuasion route is totally symbolical.

The second most preferred image of the ski resorts, especially in small and middle-sized resorts, is the one of a ski monitor. Why? Because in those resorts the possibility of taking care of kids is one of the most valuable service characteristics. An excellent destination ambassador would then be a smiling (young or old? Male or female? we don't know yet), caring, reassuring face of a ski monitor. And again, such face does not need be famous at all. To be "efficient", it rather needs to express the actually expected service (caring for and teaching to kids) which can be expressed with professional signs or attributes and labels (official diplomas, quality certifications etc.). Such message of an attribute or performance-related, cognitive, communication; would reassure fathers and mothers and this is what a ski monitor should express symbolically.

If the face is handsome (either a young or old face, both may work) it can of course also impact via an emotional route by emotional contagion, and positively moderate the ad evaluations. But the essential role of such ambassador would be symbolical.

In such ad, some other cues which would be the topic of other developments could be thought of. They should generate trust and express professionalism, and would be included in order to reinforce the communication of the destination by a symbolical route. Here, non-verbal language communication (research by Ekman, Burgoon, Babin, Sujan & Bettman) should have to be carefully studied and the destination ambassador, could then exert persuasion through a cognitive, affective and symbolical route.

Another interesting paper by Frochot & al. (2009) analyses the reasons for not visiting a touristic destination. It is a valuable and rare approach because they study the reluctants, not the "good students" but the laggards. They find out that Auvergne has been contaminated by decades of previous print, radio, TV and now online communications by mineral water brands, targeting rather non dynamic or fashionable market segments sometimes, capitalizing on the natural environment and the volcanoes.

Now, continuing their reflexion, if the destination image is quite old-fashioned in the eyes of non-comers, our interviews or actual visitors to Auvergne and our own experience nevertheless show that the volcanoes, per se, because of their beauty, uniqueness and majesty, could very well be used as a destination ambassador, at least for tourists looking for outdoor sports and activities (parapente, climbing, delta wings,

rafting, trekking, etc.). We could consider volcanoes as a valuable destination ambassador for Auvergne (even though it should and will be tested with consumers) because they seem to give a quite clear message in term of attributes on which activities can be found in this area of France (the cognitive persuasion) and to symbolically evoke tradition and authenticity.

Another example of (non human) destination ambassador we find worth quoting, is proposed by Peniston-Bird (2005). Her historical analysis states that Austria suffered of a strong absence of commitment and expression tools of their national identity in the inter-world-war period, after the dissolution of the Austrian Empire. What is extremely interesting from a historical and symbolical point of view, is that this is when a sort of myth was created. For revolutionaries, Klimt and the representants of the *Art Nouveau* were the icon of the new emerging world, in rebellion against the old elite, regime and paradigms, which made possible the disastrous WWI. It also became an icon for artistic and intellectual tourism. The other icons of tourism were created during that period: *Coffee* and *Climbing* (Peniston-Bird 2005). The role of coffee as a sign of art-de-vivre comes back to the time of the Habsbourg empire in the 16th-17th century, while climbing is a sane leisure which arose in c. 19. Both became noticeable destination icons that we qualify of destination ambassadors too, in the interwar period just when Austria went through an identity crisis.

Those are interesting examples of ambassadors who do not correspond to a person at all. We now come to other recommendations concerning the use of destination ambassadors. If an ambassador can have a symbolical meaning and @say@ something, it can contradict, or reinforce, an existing commonly shared vision of the world, or paradigm.

### ***Ambassadors and dominant paradigms***

In some cases a “book”, a touristic guide, becomes a destination ambassador because it spreads around a specific paradigm and the destination is a pretext to it. Of course we can understand such “ambassador” role in a first basic meaning: the guide is an ambassador of one bunch of destination because it recommends, promote them, just as an ambassadors defends the interest of a given community as a diplomat. But we go further. According to Mackenzie (2005) travellers’ handbooks and touristic guides in the 19th century are the mirror of an imperial taxonomy and vision of the world, in an era when England promotes civilization, charting of progress, imperial modernization. In his analysis, the *Orient Guide* is not only a guide promoting Australia as a destination: it is promoting a “new (vision of) England”, a new type of modern, superior, English man, who will bring civilization ) to an “empty”, seen-as-new country. The European one is seen as superior; and among Europe what they see as the epitome are the British civilization and way of life. That is, going on holidays for exploration as well as for settling to Australia, is not related to exotism or getting more sun and mew lands only; it is a heavily symbolic act related to self construction and social construction (Belk 1988, 1989), embedded in a vision of the world. This touristic guide is in a way an ambassador of...the British order of the world!

If a marketer nowadays would like to promote such destination, he could certainly think of using as ambassador, images, icons, humans, that symbolically incarnate that vision of a renewed man bringing civilization. Of course the only difference is that we probably are nowadays much more doubtful about the veracity of the underlying paradigm that made such eurocentric vision possible two centuries ago – the assumptions that those lands were empty; and that our civilization is-was so “superior”. An interesting question for academics and professionals in tourism would be deepening on what is the state of the man/nature relationship and which ambassador could incarnate such vision, according to the nature or destination to promote. This can apply to coral reefs diving areas, to high mountain summits, to rain/forests, to deserts, to natural environments particularly impacted, cared and loved by a given civilization in the past, etc. for each we could investigate how to incarnate the desired positioning via a destination ambassador.

### ***Tourism and volunteering***

An interesting study was conducted at Cornell on volunteer activities and tourism (Mellor & al. 2008). The data analysis seems to show that perceived control and optimism mediated the effect of the activity of volunteering on personal well-being. Of course if we want to promote a specific destination proposing volunteering activities, an ideal ambassador, being an object, animal, or human, should certainly match those emotions of optimism and control – control of one’s own life and of the environment or context in which one lives. Last, volunteers consistently report higher well-being than nonvolunteers as an extensive literature on the topic can be found on the topic – which goes beyond the scope of our article. We would then test which face, which virtual agent design and body language (Diesbach & Midgley 2008), better expresses such self-confidence and-or optimism.

The ambassador should also be a support that would express certain human values such as solidarity, interest towards others – humans, communities, animals and nature for instance. As a conclusion, it would probably be more useful not to use an ambassador making reproaches against for instance, the fact that we ignore so much misery around us or against rich people materialism and selfishness. We’d rather use one expressing with words or symbolically, the emotions commented here above, in which volunteers do recognize themselves through their volunteering experience (Moinat & Diesbach 2009).

Those should be important recommendation to follow in the design or choice of the ambassador, for the emotional route and the symbolical route.

### ***Issue of segmentation in an experiential approach of the role of the ambassador***

If we do not simply stick the role of a brand (in general) and a destination (in particular) ambassador merely via the leverage effect of how much she is famous, and if we include emotions and symbolical meaning among its expected effects, then of course we have to integrate the fact that different groups of consumers will react in different ways to used images.



For instance OLSON & ZALTMAN served as consultants for an important Chinese American restaurant. The collage they realized revealed different important consumption drivers for current consumers. I analysed it and commented it to my students in class: some of them, and myself, did not like *at all* some parts of the images expressing certain kinds of created values. Prebensen (2007) also highlights such divergences in the perception of the destinations benefits, what those represent and how they create values for different consumers and stakeholders. This is actually no major issue: it just shows that as soon we enter in the emotional and symbolical communication, and the use of ambassadors, we have to better choose how we “talk”. This is because to whom we talk impacts how the evoked emotions or symbols will be valued or conversely, rejected. How much they will actually create value, or not. That means, an improved refinement in the segmentation is more necessary in such affective and symbolical, that is, experiential, approach.

We also suggest to use recent research in consumer behavior to better conduct market segmentation. For instance interesting experience and pleasure typologies are presented but and rarely or never tested by academics nor used by practitioners. We can mention the already mentioned 3 Fs of Holbrook and the 5 SEMS of Schmitt. Diesbach & Lebel (2010) also propose a useful contribution with their proposition and test of a 5-types categorization of Pleasures: incarnating properly those different types of pleasure via the website design and content, the virtual agent design and body language, and the contributions on social media, opens rich perspective for properly targetted positioning statements.

***Co-branding: using destination ambassadors for cobranding, and to promote inside stakeholders***

When different products or brand, even if they have a priori nothing to see with each other in term of product category, connect the consumer to a given universe of values and emotions – precisely via a symbolical route – they may share enough in common in order to be co-branded and promoted, either with the same symbolical images or by mutually promoting each other each one in its own corner, boutique or magazines. HARLEY DAVIDSON & HARLEY DAVIDSON CAFES are one good example of such experiential overlap which allows co-branding with the same icons, or ambassadors (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997). For both brand universes, for instance Elvis Presley could be a good brand ambassador; Johnny Halliday could be one for the European market, too. We conclude now with the case of co-branding between the brand and the ambassador itself. The *Service Profit Chain* model presented in the 1990s by Heskett & al. (1994) insists on the need to properly train, inform, remunerate and motivate the personnel, in order to deliver more value in services in general, and we posit, in touristic destinations in particular. On this topic, if we extend the SPC approach not only to the employees but to other stakeholders such as, e.g., the (real) human ambassadors, we find the concepts and findings proposed by Anderson & Ekman quite interesting and in particular the concept of *network use*. To synthetize, they criticize the fact that most (all) places-regions-areas using brand ambassadors (human, real ones) actually stick to using them for the leverage effect on the strike power: for how famous they are only. As we said it is a very primitive vision of the destination ambassador...

They believe that the ambassadors should be used also for their network and that such use could be endeavoured because there could create some mutual benefits: “*we have also observed that there can a kind of symbiotic co-branding situation between the network and its members*”. Applying that analysis to our broad acceptance of the concept of brand ambassador to a destination, we believe that, if we use an emotional and symbolical cue as a place ambassador, similarly, members of the network sensitive to the values expressed by such ambassador could, the same way, contribute to promote the place. If we additionally apply this to internet and social media marketing (Balagué & Fayon 2010), we could well imagine Tourism office employees, or external experts hired by the Tour Operator, working on Facebook, Twitter and other social media and blogs, interacting with opinion leaders among the consumer community(ies) and nurturing the debate by providing documentation, documentaries, narrations, regular interactions, in order to:

- Promote the destination,
- And to a certain extent promote the opinion leaders, the important actors of the network acting as ambassadors.

A sort of co-branding would take place, non problematic because as far as opinion leaders and promoted destination belong to the same vein, share the same values and networks. It is at least food for thought for research and for practitioners.

## CONCLUSION

We have first illustrated the concept of destination ambassadors with some real examples taken from articles and photos from the real life. It appears that the concept of brand ambassador and destination ambassador in particular, is often not well understood or understood in a very limited approach. This brought us to propose an analysis of how different types of destination ambassadors do actually impact our perception of a destination, and to propose some concepts and elements of modelization of the persuasion effects of ambassadors. We have then proposed a larger definition of the concept of ambassador, and suggested three routes of persuasion: cognitive, affective and symbolical, the latter encapsulating elements of the two previous ones (without being reduced to those). We have then concluded with some practical examples or suggestions of research avenues for the use of brand ambassadors in destination marketing.

In our suggestions to practitioners we have detailed examples and concepts drawn from the experiential marketing literature, as this is key to understand this new vision of the destination ambassador. We elaborate on that aspect.

A rich, conceptual article by Alistair (2006) is too be highlighted, as we do not see so often in-depth immersion into the emotional, experiential, and postmodern marketing literature - those are not synonymous; but their areas and concepts do meet or sometimes overlap. We quite share the view of Alistair: destination marketing does not only deal with pure “touristic” cities, islands, resorts etc. of course Bars, Restaurants, Hotels, enter into its research field. They may become destination per se –for instance one of the author’s student reported in a memoire that the CEO of the Hotel

PRESIDENT WILSON in Geneva gave a conference to all his staff in Nov. 2009. He was explaining that his objective was making PW hotel become a destination *per se*. Then of course we don't discuss here whether they have the vision clarity and means to do so. But there lies an interesting avenue for future new destination marketing approach. Some managers already do so for Casinos, or for important malls, in Dubai, Alberta, Las Vegas or Orlando for instance (Badot & al. 2006). Hubs, luxury wellness clinics, could become examples of other destinations *per se* in the future, that could start working seriously in consumer psychology, understanding that marketing is not only spending money in communication but "creating a strong, durable relationship with customers and stakeholders (Armstrong & Kotler 2007; definition of marketing by the AMA).

In such approach, experiential marketing still has a lot to bring to illuminate consumers behaviour in term of destination choice, purchase, re-purchase and recommendation (Bigné & al. 2001; Bigné & Andreu 2008; Moinat & Diesbach 2009). We can try to modelize the nature of the created value based on the typology by the founding father of experiential marketing, with the triptych of *Feelings, Fun and Fantasy* (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982; Holbrook 1986). They can sometimes be obvious and sometimes paradoxical – when pain mixes-up with pleasure and still, creates value such as in nostalgia (Holbrook 1993; Savery 2008). The other important typology of experiential value in the literature is the SEM (Schmitt 1999), improved ad partly validated (Zarantello & Schmitt 2010). The five axis of value creation for Schmitt are *Act, Feel, Sense, Think, Relate*; even though this typology still needs conceptual deepening and improvement (Diesbach & Lebel 2010) we take it as it is. If we use the 3Fs typology we have seen that ambassadors persuasion effects seem to touch consumers via Feelings and Fantasy in a large part of the examples (affective and symbolical routes. If we use the SEM typology, we have seen that the destination ambassador says a lot under the facets of Feel, Sense, Relate for instance, again via the affective and symbolical routes. Experiential marketing becomes far more crucial as an axis of value creation year after year in tourism and in destination promotion in general, whether we focus on the 3 Fs of Holbrook (Feelings, Fun and Fantasy: see Williams 2006 or Moinat & Diesbach 2009), or on the SEM model by Schmitt (1999). Destination ambassadors uses, in affective and symbolical routes (but not in a too limited and primitive, strike power perspective) fits with such evolution, in particular in Online social media. This had been demonstrated in other industries such as the luxury watch industry (Diesbach 2010), it appears quite clear that it also holds true in Tourism Destination marketing.

We hope that future research, together with the present article, will contribute to help understanding how destination ambassadors can help promoting a brand or destination and how concepts and tools developed in experiential marketing will help understand and use their power of persuasion and affiliation more efficiently, not merely because of the "famousness" effect but through the cognitive, affective, and symbolical persuasion route.

## REFERENCES

- Aaker, D. (1991), *Managing Brand Equity: Capitalizing on the Value of a Brand Name*, Free Press, New York, NY.
- Aaker, D. (1995), *Building Strong Brands*, Free Press, New York, NY.
- Aaker, D. (2000), *Brand Leadership*, Free Press, New York, NY.
- Alistair, W. (2006), "Tourism and hospitality marketing: fantasy, feeling and fun", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 18, 6, pp. 482-495.
- Andersson, M., Ekman, P. (2009), "Ambassador networks and place branding", *Journal of Place Management and Development*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 41-51.
- Anholt, S. (2003), *Branding places and nations, Brands and Branding*, Profile Books, London, pp. 213-26.
- Armstrong, G., Kotler, P. (2007), *Marketing: An Introduction*, Prentice Hall.
- Badot, O., Lemoine, J.F., Carrier, C. et al. (2006), De l'expérience en «hyperréalité» à l'expérience en «hypermonde», *Décisions Marketing*.
- Bagozzi, R., Moore, D. (1994), "Public service advertisements: emotions and empathy guide prosocial behavior", *Journal of Marketing*, pp. 56-70.
- Bagozzi, R., Baumgartner, H., Pieters, R. (1998), "Goal Directed Emotions – Cognition and emotion", *Journal of Research in Marketing*, Vol. 12, pp. 1-26.
- Bagozzi R., Gopinath M., Nyer P. (1999), "The role of emotions in marketing", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 27, pp. 184-206.
- Balagué, C., Fayon, D. (2010), Facebook, Twitter et les autres... : *Intégrer les réseaux sociaux dans une stratégie d'entreprise*, Ed. Village Mondial.
- Baloglu, S. (1997), "Affective images of tourism destination", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 35, No. 4, pp. 11-15.
- Baloglu, S. and Mc Cleary, K. (1999), "A model of destination image formation", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 26, No. 4, pp. 868-897.
- Baker, J., Parasuraman, P., Dhruv, G.A. (1994), "The influence of store environment on quality inferences and store image", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 22, 4, pp. 328-339.
- Belk, R.W. (1988), "Possession and the Extended Self", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15, pp. 139-168.
- Belk, R.W. (1989), "Extended Self and extending paradigmatic perspective", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16 (1), pp. 129-133.
- Belk, R., Wallendorf, M., Sherry, J. (1989), "The sacred and the profane in Consumer Behavior: Theodicy on the odyssey", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16, pp. 1-38
- Berry, L.L., Zeithaml, V.A., Parasuraman, A. (1990), "Five Imperatives for Improving Service Quality", *Sloan Management Review*, 31, 4.
- Bigné, E.J., Mattila, A.S., Andreu, L. (2008), "The impact of experiential consumption cognitions and emotions on behavioural intentions", *Journal of Services Marketing* 22 (4), pp. 303-315.
- Bigné, E.J., Sanchez, I.M., Sanchez, J. (2001), "Tourism image, evaluation variables and after purchase behaviour: inter-relationship", *Tourism Management* 22 (6), pp. 607-616.
- Bitner, M.J. (1992), "Servicescapes: The impact of physical surroundings on customers and employees", *Journal of Marketing*, 58, pp. 57-71.
- Burgoon, J. (1978), "Attributes of the Newscaster's voice as predictors of his credibility", *Journalism Quarterly*, 55, pp. 276-300.
- Burgoon, J., Birk, T., Pfau, M. (1990), "Nonverbal behaviors, persuasion, and credibility", *Human Communication Research*, 17, 1, pp. 140-169.
- Desai, K., Hoyer, W. (2000), "Descriptive characteristics of memory-based consideration sets: Influence of usage occasion frequency and usage location familiarity", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27, 3, pp. 309-323.
- DHLEF, *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* (1992), Ed. Alain Rey, Le Robert, 2 Vol., 2300 pp.
- de Diesbach, P., Le Bel, J. (2010), *Accounting for pleasure: An attempt to improve experiential consumption modeling*, Research Conference of Burgundy in Marketing (JRMB), Ed. Marc Filser & Bl. Anteblian, 16 pp.
- de Diesbach, P. (2010), "L'image et le renforcement de la relation avec le consommateur: Etude sur la communication de quelques marques horlogères de luxe", *Journées de Recherche en Marketing Horloger (JRMH)*, 22 pp.
- de Diesbach, P., Midgley, D. (2008), *Advances in Consumer Research, Embodied agents on a branding website: Modeling effects through an affective persuasion route*.
- Donovan, R., Rossiter, J. (1982), "Store atmosphere: An Environmental Psychology approach", *Journal of Retailing*, 58, pp.34-57.

- Donovan, R., Rossiter, J., Marcolyn, G., Nesdale, A. (1994), "Store atmosphere and purchasing behavior", *Journal of Retailing*, 70, 3, pp. 283-294.
- Dubé, L., Le Bel, J. (2001), "A differentiated view of pleasure: Review of the literature and research propositions", *Advances in Consumer Research*, 5, pp. 222-226.
- Dubé, L., Le Bel, J., Sears, D. (2003), "From customer value to engineering pleasurable experiences", *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, pp. 124-130.
- Fady, A., Renaudin, V., Vyt, D. (2007), *Le merchandising*, Vuibert.
- Frochot, I., Mazuel, L., Maumelat, A. (2009), "A study of non-visitors", *Advances in Tourism Marketing*, pp. 166-175.
- Frochot, I., Kreziak, D. (2008), "Customers' perceptions of ski resorts' images: Implications", *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 8, pp. 298-308.
- Gold, J.R. and Ward, S.V. (1994), *Place Promotion: The Use of Publicity and Marketing to Sell Towns and Regions*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester.
- Groepel-Klein, A. (1998), "Findings of environmental psychology", *International Marketing: New frontiers and new tendencies*, Ed. Desportes Y, pp. 489-504.
- Holbrook, M., Hirschman, E. (1982), "The experiential aspects of consumption: Consumer fantasies, feelings and fun", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9, pp. 132-140.
- Holbrook, M., Peterson, R., Hoyer, W., Wilson, W. (1986), "Emotion in the consumption experience", *The Role of Affect in Consumer Behavior*, pp. 17-52.
- Holbrook, M. (1993), "Nostalgia and consumption preferences: some emerging patterns of consumer tastes", *Journal of Consumer Research*, pp. 245-255.
- Kastenholz, E. (2004), "Assessment and Role of Destination-Self-Congruity", *Annals of Tourism Research* 31(3), pp. 719-723.
- Kavaratzis, M. (2004), "From city marketing to city branding: towards a theoretical framework for developing city brands", *Place Branding*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 36-49.
- Kotler, P., Asplund, C., Rein, I. and Heider, D. (1999), *Marketing Places in Europe*, Financial Times/Prentice-Hall, Harlow.
- Larrinaga, C. (2005), "A century of tourism in northern Spain: The development of high quality provision between 1815 and 1914", *Walton Ch. 5*, pp. 88-103
- Ledoux, J. (1998), *The Emotional Brain*, Ed. Simon & Schuster.
- Ledoux, J., Damasio, A. (1997), "The emotional brain: the mysterious underpinnings of emotional life", *Scientific American*, 276, 6.
- Mackenzie, J. (2005), "Empires of travel: British guide books and cultural imperialism in the 19th and 20th centuries", Ch. 1, 10-38, in Walton John, *Histories of tourism*, Channel View, 244 pp.
- Mellor, D., Hayashi, Y., Firth, L. et al. (2008), "Volunteering and Well-Being: Do Self-Esteem, Optimism, and Perceived Control Mediate the Relationship", *Journal of Social Service Research*, 34, 4, pp. 61-70.
- Meuter, M., Ostrom, A., Roundtree, R., Bitner M.J. (2000) "Self-service technologies: Understanding customer satisfaction with technology-based service encounters", *Journal of Marketing*, 64, pp. 50-64.
- Mohr, L., Bitner, M.J. (1991), "Mutual understanding between customers and employees in service encounters", *Advances in Consumer Research*, 18, pp. 611-617.
- Moinat, V., de Diesbach, P. (2009), *Rejuvenating touristic consumption: From a cognitive approach to a symbolic intent of modelisation*, *Advances in Tourism Marketing*, Goodfellow Publishing, Oxford, pp. 54-65.
- Otnes, C., Scott, L.M. (1996), "Something old, something new: Exploring the interaction between ritual and advertising", *Journal of Advertising*, 25, 1.
- Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V., Berry, L. (1985), "A Conceptual Model of Service Quality and Its Implications for Future Research", *Journal of Marketing*, 49.
- Peniston-Bird, C. (2005), *Coffee, Klimt and climbing: Constructing an Austrian national identity in tourist literature 1918-1938*, in Walton, pp. 162-178
- Pearce, P. (2005), "Tourist behaviour: Themes and conceptual schemes", Chapter 4, *Perceiving and choosing the destination*, Ed. Channel View, pp. 86-112.
- Prebensen, N.K. (2007), "Exploring tourists' image of a distant destination", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 28, No. 3, pp. 747-54.
- Savery, H. (2008), *The management of marketing of Jamaica's past: Archeology and heritage tourism*, Thesis for Master of Arts in Anthropology, Binghamton University.
- Schmitt, B., Simonson, A. (1997), *Marketing Aesthetics*, Free Press, New York.
- Schmitt, B. (1999), *Experiential Marketing*, Free Press, New York.

- Tsal, Y. (1985), "On the relationship between Cognitive and Affective processes: A critique of Zajonc and Markus", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 12, pp. 358-362.
- Wagner, O., Peters, M. (2009), "Can association methods reveal the effects of internal branding on tourism destination stakeholders? ", *Journal of Place Management and Development*, Vol. 2, No. 1.
- Wallis, C. (2007), *Propaganda analysis; a case study of Kazakhstan's 2006 advertising campaign*, Ohio State University, M.S. thesis, Stillwater.
- Walton, J. (2005), *Histories of tourism: Representation, Identity and conflict*, Channel View.
- Zajonc, R. (1978), "Feeling and thinking: Preferences need no inferences", *American Psychologist*, 35, pp. 151-175.
- Zajonc, R., Markus, H. (1982), "Affective and cognitive factors in preferences", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9, pp. 123-131.
- Zajonc, R., Markus, H. (1985), "Must all affect be mediated by cognition? ", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 12, pp. 363-364.
- Zajonc, R. (1986), *Basic mechanisms of preference formation*, in *The Role of Affect in Consumer Behavior*, Ed. Peterson Robert, Hoyer Wayne, Wilson William, pp.1-17.
- Zaltman, G. (2003), *How customers think: Essential insights into the mind of the market*, HBS Press.
- Zaltman, G., Zaltman, L. (2008), *Marketing Metaphoria: What Deep Metaphors Reveal about the Minds of Consumers*, HBS Press.
- Zarantonello, L., Schmitt, B. (2010), "Using the brand experience scale to profile consumers and predict consumer behaviour", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 17, No. 7, pp. 532-540.
- Zeithaml, V., Bitner, M.J. (2003), *Services Marketing, Integrating customer focus across the firm*, McGraw Hill.

*Articles in non-academic magazines:*

- Marketing*, Turning Torontonians into brand ambassadors, 108, 24, Ed. Rogers Publishing, June 23rd, 2003.
- Business Line*, Orissa to step up tourism promotion: Ropes in actress Nandita Das as brand ambassador, August 20, 2005.
- Tribune Business News*, Want to become Kashmir's 'brand ambassador', visit the Valley, Washington, Aug. 12th 2009.
- New Haven Business Times*, Connecticut Tourism Turns to NY Residents for Revenue, June 1st 2001.
- Tribune Business News*, 40 years of 'Virginia is for Lovers': New 'Live Passionately' slogan will help boost the tourism campaign, Nolan, Jim, 20 Nov 2008.

**Pablo Brice de Diesbach**, PhD, Associate Professor  
Institut Supérieur de Gestion  
147 av. Victor Hugo, 75116 Paris-FR  
Phone: +33 6 6491 2602  
E-mail: pablo.diesbach@isg.fr, diesbach@windowslive.com