

Female tour leaders as advertising endorsers

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In the Pan-Asia domain, especially Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, and the most effectively emerging power house, China, group package tours (GPTs) have been considered as an indispensable gadget for overseas vacationing tourists. A well-trained senior tour guide is capable of bringing up the GPT by offering an intriguing and entertaining interactive service, and vice versa; the presented research reveals the gender differences in terms of positioning tour leaders as advertising endorsers. Technically, the features and cover letters posed on GPT brochures simply justify the credibility of being a capable and well-organized tour leader; nevertheless, female tour leaders seem to be far more satisfying when it comes to satisfying the needs of consumers. In the meantime, there are 440 samples closely examined through the methodology of 'post-test-only control group experimental design', which discloses the ground-breaking mystery of why female tour leaders are more favorable than males. Significantly, the updated developing research is able to provide a cost-effective and target-oriented marketing information for any multi-national Tourism Bureaus and travel agencies.

Keywords: front-line employee; gender; group package tour; endorser advertising

Introduction

Previous studies have cited the importance of tour leaders and travel brochures to the tourism industry. In many Asian countries, such as Taiwan, Japan, Hong Kong, Korea, China, etc., the group package tour (GPT) is one of the main modes of outbound travel (Tourism Bureau, 2005; Wang, Hsieh, & Huan, 2000; Yamamoto & Gill, 1999). The most distinctive feature of the GPT is the tour leader. He or she is a front-line employee for the travel agency implementing an outbound GPT, and has the opportunity for long-term contact with tourists (Wang, Hsieh, & Chen, 2002). Quiroga (1990) also noted that the role of a tour guide within a group is considered to be indispensable by the tourists, and the quality of the tour guide is a crucial factor because his or her presentation can make or break a tour. Moreover, Schuchat (1983) indicated that various roles and responsibilities of tour leaders include providing security and protection, providing information, promoting group interaction, and acting as a surrogate parent, pathfinder, mentor, leader, mediator, and entertainer.

With regard to the importance of the travel brochure, Yamamoto and Gill (1999) noted that the most important source of information for tourists planning overseas package tours is the tour

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brochure. In addition, Holloway and Plant (1988) demonstrated that of all the promotional methods available, travel brochure is one of the most important and widely utilized. Furthermore, Wicks and Schuett (1991) found that the brochure is an attractive information source for many vacation decision-makers.

In summary, previous studies have clearly indicated that the tour leader and the travel brochure are the two critical and influential variables for the tourism industry. Wang et al. (2002) also showed that travel brochures that contain photos of male tour leaders or the companies' CEO have a better advertising effect than conventional travel brochures. However, no studies have explored the advertising effect of gender differences in travel brochures. This study explores whether or not tourists show a marked difference in behavior when photos of male and female tour leaders are used in travel brochures.

Research problem

Previous studies have shown that endorser effectiveness varies according to the nature of the product (Friedman & Friedman, 1979). Recent studies highlight the advertising effectiveness of celebrities as endorsers (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1995); multiple product endorsements (Tripp, Jensen, & Carlson, 1994); corporate and endorser credibility (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999); and the distinction between the endorser's physical attractiveness and expertise (Till & Busler, 1998).

Do the studies cited above answer the present study regarding the advertising effect of the tour leader's gender in travel brochures? Even though there are studies and theories on the effect of endorsers in advertising, previous researches are unable to fully explain the problem that this paper tries to explore and answer.

Middleton (1995) indicated that the brochure performs a 'product substitute' role and establishes the expectations of quality, value for money, product image and status. If related information regarding tour leaders is included in the travel brochure, the tourists will be able to formulate more complete, clearer, and more effective expectations (Middleton, 1995). This study analyzes tour leaders as a part of GPTs (Wang et al., 2000, 2002). Previous literature discussed the role of endorsers such as CEOs, chairmen, celebrities, experts, and common consumers, but the roles they play do not belong to front-line employees and are not part of the GPTs. Therefore, it is obvious that these endorsers are unable, as Middleton (1995) pointed out, to fulfill the desired effectiveness and expectations.

In the past, travel agencies would include photos of young female tourists in their travel brochures as part of their marketing strategy, hoping that this would entice tourists to visit. This strategy has been proven effective (Heatwole, 1989). Studies have also shown that attractive advertising models have a marked influence on consumers' purchase decisions. When the gender of the consumer is different from that of the model, mutual attraction between the opposite sexes is stimulated, and the consumer is more likely to appreciate the advertisement. This is especially true for advertisements that use female models, where there is a more marked influence on male consumers (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Joseph, 1982). Kamins (1990) reported that attractive models or endorsers will have an effect on the attitude of the consumers toward the advertisement. However, Ohanian (1991) and Till and Busler (1998) proved that the expertise or specialization of the product endorsers has a more marked influence on consumer willingness to make a purchase.

This study used male and female tour leaders as endorsers of tourism products to analyze the following question: When the endorser has expertise in the advertised product, will tourists also

exhibit a different advertising effect based on gender differences? In addition, is this difference influenced by the principle of opposite sex attraction, or do consumers believe that expertise is more important than attractiveness? This study will seek to answer the questions raised above.

Research concepts and hypotheses

Baker and Churchill (1977) and Joseph (1982) suggested that differences in the gender of the consumer and the advertising model would result in a scenario of opposite sex attraction, which further enhanced consumer appreciation of the advertisement. This is especially true for advertisements that made use of female endorsers, and the effect is much more pronounced. DeShields, Kara, and Kaynak (1996) pointed out that consumer purchasing desire is influenced by information transmitted by sellers that have a strong appeal. Heatwole (1989) also proved that adding photos of attractive young ladies in travel brochures has an influence on consumers of either sex. Therefore, when the consumer is confronted by a tour leader who is also a part of the GPT, will the consumer believe that female tour leaders have a stronger appeal than male tour leaders? Will this influence their assessment of the advertising effect? Thus, it is hypothesized:

H1a: Subjects will have a more positive attitude toward the brand of a GPT brochure that features a female tour leader's photo than to a brochure with a male tour leader's photo.

H1b: Subjects will have a more positive attitude toward the advertisement of a GPT brochure that features a female tour leader's photo than to a brochure with a male tour leader's photo.

H1c: Subjects will have greater purchase intentions for a GPT brochure that features a female tour leader's photo than to a brochure with a male tour leader's photo.

Furthermore, Abernethy and Butler (1993) suggested that service firms with standard employee training programs could incorporate training information in their advertising as tangible evidence of service quality. Duke and Persia (1993) also noted that travelers expect the tour to be the best method of seeing as much as possible in a congenial atmosphere, with comfort, scenery, and experienced tour guides.

According to the preceding discussion and the studies cited earlier regarding the importance of the tour leader, this study infers that adding the personal information of the tour leader to the travel brochure and allowing consumers to understand the tour leader's background, his or her training, experience in handling tour groups, etc., will help create a stronger influence on advertising effectiveness when compared with travel brochures that only carry the tour leader's photo, hence:

H2a: Subjects will have a more positive attitude toward the brand of a GPT brochure that features the tour leader's photo and brief personal resume than toward a brochure with only a tour leader's photo.

H2b: Subjects will have a more positive attitude toward the advertisement of a GPT brochure that features the tour leader's photo and brief personal resume than toward a brochure with only a tour leader's photo.

H2c: Subjects will have greater purchase intentions for a GPT brochure that features the tour leader's photo and brief personal resume than to a brochure with only a tour leader's photo.

Finally, Fischer, Gainer, and Bristol (1997) discovered that consumers in certain service situations will have a fixed gender preference or impression. For example, male service crews should be in-charge of vehicle repair services while females are much more suited to being salespersons in handicrafts stores. Ohanian (1991) and Till and Busler (1998) also reported that the expertise of the product endorser has a stronger effect on consumer's buying behavior than mere

attraction. However, in Quiroga's (1990) European package tour study it was noted that the sex of the guide does not appear to matter to the tourist, but when a preference is expressed, they opt for a woman. Based on the preceding discussion, it seems that no conclusive results were found regarding the gender of the professional tour leaders. This study aims to analyze whether or not consumers, because of their fixed gender impressions, believe that male tour leaders are more professional than female tour leaders, and therefore create a better advertising effect. The resulting hypotheses are outlined below:

H3a: Subjects will have a more positive attitude toward the brand of a GPT brochure that features a male tour leader's photo and brief personal resume than toward a brochure with a female tour leader's photo and brief personal resume.

H3b: Subjects will have a more positive attitude toward the advertisement of a GPT brochure that features a male tour leader's photo and brief personal resume than toward a brochure with a female tour leader's photo and brief personal resume.

H3c: Subjects will have greater purchase intentions for a GPT brochure that features a male tour leader's photo and brief personal resume than toward a brochure with a female tour leader's photo and brief personal resume.

Research design

Baker and Churchill (1977), Woodside (1990), and Till and Shimp (1998) all pointed out that a better result is achieved when using the experimental method in measuring advertising effectiveness. This study analyzed the use of tour leaders of different genders as group tour endorsers. Addressing the characteristics of this research problem, this study used the experimental method as the foundation for the actual experiment. This paper employed the post-test-only control group design of the experimental method as the primary research method (Zikmund, 1997). This study is categorized under two-factor design, wherein the control variables are the gender of the endorser and the availability of information regarding the endorser. For the first part, the gender of the endorser is divided into two treatment standards: the photo of the male tour leader and the photo of the female tour leader. The second part concerns over the information on the endorser and is divided into two treatment standards: the availability of personal information regarding the endorser and the unavailability of personal information regarding the endorser (Figure 1). Experimental groups are presented in Table 1.

This research design made use of the random method to select the experiment groups (excluding the tourism students of the business school of a university in Taiwan). This was done to increase internal and external effectiveness and the function between the experiment and the treatment. The research design included two steps.

The first step: defining tour leader models

Based on the study of Walster, Aronson, and Abrahams (1966), an attractive external appearance plays a very important role in human interaction; often an individual will form a preconceived idea or impression toward the other based on of the person's appearance. Baker and Churchill (1977) and Joseph (1982) have proven that physically attractive models or communicators might produce higher advertisement ratings than unattractive models. Hence, in order to prevent any disparities in selecting the tour leader and to avoid any bias toward the results, this study conveniently selected nine photos of different types of male and female tour

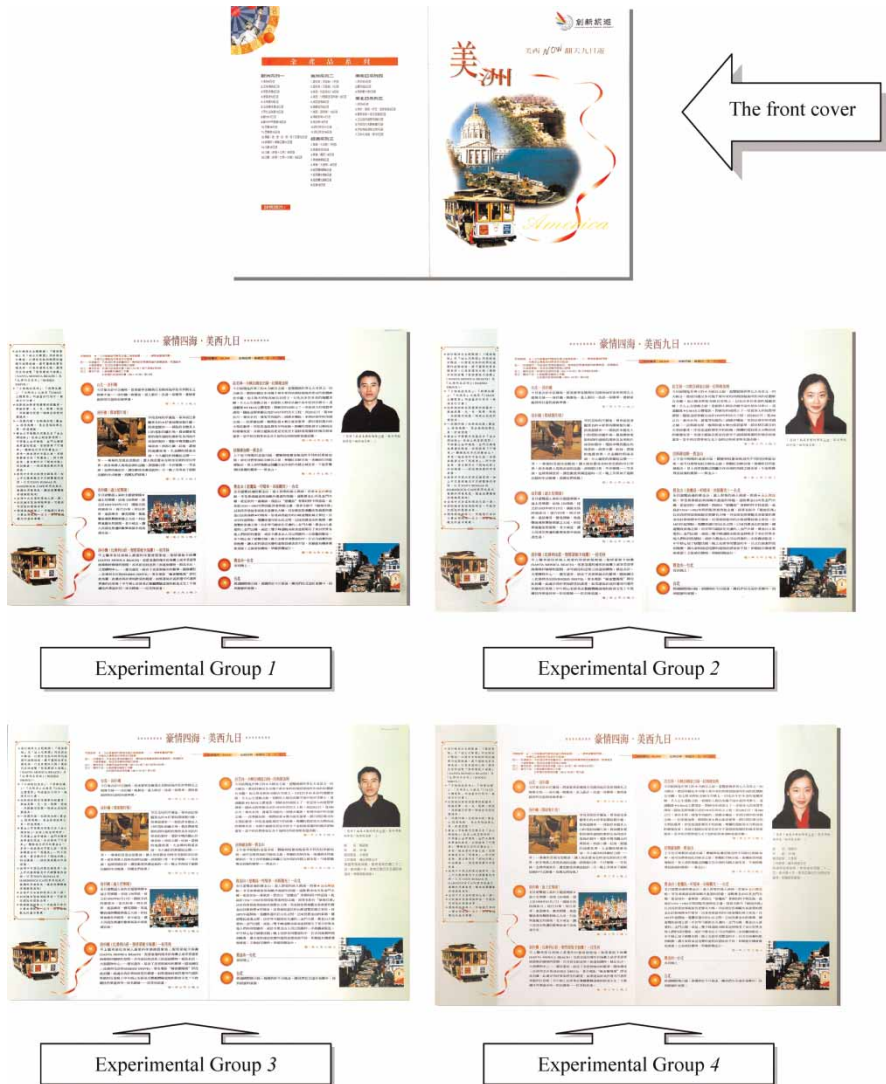


Figure 1. Travel brochures.

leaders. Using the random sampling method, 100 current university students (not including business school students) were asked to make their evaluation and selection from the photos of the selected tour leaders. This study asked the students to give scores (1–9 points) based on the attractiveness of the male and female tour leaders in the photos. Researchers then averaged the scores received by each photo and selected the median-score (fifth place) photos of male and female tour leaders for use in the next step of the experiment design. In order to

Table 1. The experimental groups.

Experimental group	Dimension	
	Gender	Personal resume
Group 1	Male	No
Group 2	Female	No
Group 3	Male	Yes
Group 4	Female	Yes

test interjudge reliability, a Kendall coefficient of concordance (W) was computed. The W of male was 0.462, $p < 0.001$; the W of female was 0.467, $p < 0.001$.

The second step: experiment design

This process is divided into two parts. In the first part, student subjects were selected for the experiment. Students were considered appropriate for the experimental research because of their homogeneity (Mowen & Brown, 1981). In Singh, Lessig, Kim, Gupta, and Hocutt's (2000) study of the advertising effectiveness of pictures, it was shown that with respect to effectiveness, students and community volunteers are the same. Laskey, Seaton, and Nicholls (1994) also noted that students evince significant interest in the travel experience, making their use appropriate for experimental control and external validity.

According to the report of Tourism Bureau (2005), 23% of tourists whose goal was sightseeing using GPTs had not yet reached 30 years of age. Furthermore, common occupation categories of sightseers included management personnel (17%), service and sales personnel (16%), technical people (11%), and students (10%). Based on this information, university students were used as respondents because they possess the characteristics of a 'typical consumer' of GPTs. Using the random sampling method, the experiment groups were selected from all classes in the business school. In order to limit respondents forming their own biases or preconceived notions, the study excluded tourism students from the experiment. In order to minimize students' awareness that they were being experimented on and thereby further increasing the external effectiveness of this study (Till & Shimp, 1998), the researchers told the respondents that travel agencies wanted to make use of this enquiry to understand the viewpoint and opinion of the students toward a new travel brochure. In addition, the sample for this study was divided into four experiment groups and eight classes (two classes per group). Each group had more than 100 students; as much as possible, the ratio of male to female students was controlled at 1:1.

In the second part of the experiment design, the researchers collected five different wholesale travel agencies' 'American West Coast 9-day tour' brochures. This destination was chosen because the USA is among the top five destination countries for Taiwanese outbound travelers (Tourism Bureau, 2005). After extensive discussion, one travel agency's brochure was selected as the model brochure. Subsequently, the researchers contacted this travel agency and requested authorization to redesign and duplicate its 'American West Coast 9-day tour' brochure.

Finally, a fictitious brand name was developed for the purpose of avoiding potential effects from the pre-existing brand attitudes (Stafford, 1998; Till & Shimp, 1998; Woodside, 1990), and a professional graphic designer was also requested to help redesign the company's logo and

layout of the brochure. Four different color print brochures were created. The copies were virtually the same, the only differences being the photo (male/female tour leaders) and a brief personal resume (yes/no).

Questionnaire design

Advertising effectiveness can be measured by the attitude toward advertising, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intentions (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999; Shimp, 1981; Wang et al., 2002). Therefore, the questionnaire design of this research was created in five parts. In the first part, subjects were asked to give ratings on three 7-point bipolar adjective scales to assess the attitude toward the brand. The scales were labeled as 'good/bad', 'favorable/unfavorable', and 'satisfactory/unsatisfactory' (Bruner & Hensel, 1992; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999).

In the second part, three items were ranked on a 7-point bipolar scale labeled as 'good/bad', 'favorable/unfavorable', and 'pleasant/unpleasant' to measure the attitude toward the advertisement (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999; Mackenzie & Lutz, 1989). In the third part, purchase intentions were measured by a three-item 7-point bipolar scale labeled as 'very likely/very unlikely', 'probable/improbable', and 'possible/impossible' (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999; Yi, 1990).

In the fourth part, five items from the Marlowe–Crowne social desirability scale (Paulhus, 1984), five items from the self-deception scale (Paulhus, 1984), and five items from the YN-2 scale (Goldsmith, 1987) were included in the questionnaire to assess the likely social desirability and yea-saying biases (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999). This was done because one of the previous studies had indicated that social desirability and acquiescence biases can occur when subjects respond to a questionnaire, threatening the reliability and validity of the other measures (Bagozzi, 1994).

The final part consisted of seven questions to capture the subjects' demographic profiles, an open-ended question to assess hypothesis guessing, and a question regarding subjects' overseas traveling experiences and the modes of travel used. The purpose of these last two questions was to determine if the dependent and independent variables would be moderated by the subjects' traveling experiences and modes (Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977). Finally, the subjects were asked if they had seen the brochure and endorser before. This question was asked in order to minimize the pre-existing knowledge and any effect owing to prior exposure and familiarity (Till & Shimp, 1998). If they did, it could bias their responses and invalidate the results. Therefore, those subjects were not considered.

Results

Characteristics of subjects

Before the large-scale experiment took place, this study used a small-scale pretest (40 samples) in order to uncover any potential problems. Based on the respondents' results and comments, some revisions were made to improve the clarity of questionnaire items. Finally, researchers distributed a total of 440 questionnaires, removing 38 questionnaires that had incomplete answers or wrong answers, as well as 26 questionnaires from those who had already seen the travel brochure, and three questionnaires from those who knew the tour leaders. The total number of effective questionnaires was 373 copies, with an effective return rate of 84.77%. Based on the analysis of the effectively returned questionnaires, the Cronbach's α value of attitude toward

advertising, attitude toward brand, purchase intentions, and credibility of the endorser variables were all at 0.85 and above.

The characteristics of 373 participants were as follows: 205 were female (55%) and 168 were male (45%). Students came from several departments: the international business department (35.4%), the business management department (29.2%), the accounting department (24.1%), and the information management department (11.3%). Ages ranged from 18 to 28 years old, with most being between 19 and 22 years of age. Those with overseas travel experience comprised 46.4%.

Credibility of the endorser and advertising effectiveness

Using one-way multivariate analysis of variance to test the endorser credibility, it was found out that Wilk's Lambda was 4.927. Proportionately its p -value was 0, which was significantly different from the Scheffe post-test analysis to examine the differences in each group, as shown in Table 2. The results showed that the photos of female tour leaders were more attractive than the photos of male tour leaders (experiment group 2 ranked higher than experiment group 1).

The second part discusses the different genders in the travel brochure photos and the availability of tour-leader information and its advertising effect. After the Scheffe post-test analysis, comparing the three levels of advertising effectiveness, each group showed no marked difference in terms of brand attitude. However, average scores were highest in experiment groups 2 and 4, which had female tour leaders as endorsers, with scores of 4.61 and 4.46, respectively. In terms of advertising attitude, the average scores of experiment groups 2 and 4 were also the highest, with 4.75 and 4.69, respectively. Finally, in terms of willingness to purchase, there was a marked difference. It was discovered that experiment group 2 was better than experiment group 1, and after comparing the average scores of each group, the scores of experiment groups 2, 3, and 4 were higher and were closer to each other. The score of experiment group 2 was the highest at 4.10, followed closely by experiment groups 3 and 4 with scores of 3.81 and 3.82, respectively.

As a result, $H1c$ of this experiment was supported by the findings. However, $H1a$ and $H1b$ were not established. Apart from this, the experiment results revealed that there were no marked differences when information about the male or female tour leaders was added in the experiment groups. Thus, $H2a$, $H2b$, and $H2c$ were not proven. Finally, based on Table 3 experiment result analysis, there were no marked differences in the advertising effectiveness of experiment groups 3 and 4 after adding photos and information about the male and female tour leaders. As a result, $H3a$, $H3b$, $H3c$, were also not supported.

Table 2. The credibility of the endorser in experimental groups.

Credibility	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	F	Wilks' Lambda
Attraction	3.63 ^a	4.13 ^b	3.87	4.01	3.391*	4.927**
Trustworthy	4.27	4.71	4.64	4.42	2.972*	
Expert	4.12 ^a	4.28	4.78 ^b	4.52	4.807**	

Notes: Means with similar superscripts are not significantly different based on the Scheffe tests p significant at 0.01 level. If no superscripts appear, none of the means was significantly different ($a < b$).

* F statistically significant at 0.05 level.

** F statistically significant at 0.01 level.

Table 3. The advertising effectiveness in experimental groups.

Advertising effectiveness	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	F	Wilks' Lambda
Attitude toward the advertisement	4.40	4.61	4.31	4.46	1.877	
Attitude toward the brand	4.56	4.75	4.49	4.69	1.559	1.784
Purchase intentions	3.46 ^a	4.10 ^b	3.81	3.82	3.639*	

Notes: Means with similar superscripts are not significantly different based on the Scheffe tests p significant at 0.01 level. If no superscripts appear, none of the means was significantly different ($a < b$).

* F statistically significant at 0.05 level.

Conclusion and discussion

Consumers exhibited a higher willingness to purchase from travel brochures that carried photos of female tour leaders compared with travel brochures that had photos of male tour leaders. While there was no marked difference in the advertising effectiveness of travel brochures that carried photos and personal information of the tour leader and travel brochures that only had the photos, there was an obvious influence on the professionalism and credibility of the endorsers. Generally speaking, the advertising effectiveness of female tour leaders as travel brochure endorsers is greater than that of male tour leaders.

The conclusion of this study corresponds highly with Heatwole's (1989) study, which reported that consumers have a higher appreciation for female model advertisements than male model advertisements. However, this study was unable to reveal what Baker and Churchill (1977) and Joseph (1982) discovered: consumers and the commercial model create a scenario of opposite-sex attraction. The cause of this could be that consumers already had preconceptions toward the gender of certain product service providers (Iacobucci & Ostrom, 1993; Mohr & Henson, 1996). The tourism industry has traditionally been the domain of male tour leaders; hence, consumers may have formed a fixed impression that tourism service providers are male. As a result, when the travel brochures showed photos of female tour leaders, it attracted the attention of the consumers and further enhanced consumer appreciation of the advertisement.

In addition, Kendall and Booms (1989) pointed out that most consumers believe that travel agencies are more or less similar. In general, the competition for the overseas tourist market of Asian countries is very intense (Heung & Chu, 2000; Wang et al., 2000), and travel agencies must distinguish themselves from the rest to obtain business (Heung & Chu, 2000). Vakratsas and Ambler (1999) reported that both experience goods and service brands need more innovative and stimulating advertisements. This study shows that adding photos and personal information of female tour leaders to travel brochures will help distinguish a travel agency from other agencies and increase the number of clients. Advertising effectiveness was substantiated by this experiment.

This study also discovered an interesting phenomenon: when the photos and information of the tour leaders were added to the travel brochure, advertising effectiveness was not evident. The results of this experiment showed that the expected best travel experience of tourists is not just having an experienced and highly knowledgeable tour leader accompanying the tour group, as pointed out by Duke and Persia (1993). As a result, it is suggested that future study make further analysis on whether or not the amount of information regarding the tour leaders in the travel

brochure influences advertising effectiveness, or if advertisement content demand influences consumers.

In summary, the travel brochure serves as a source of travel information for consumers and is also the primary method by which travel agencies lure customers. However, this innovative approach may create difficulties or a lack of flexibility in implementation. There is usually a gap in time between printing travel brochures and the date of the group tours. The tour leader may change during this period, for reasons such as job resignation, sickness, death, and other reasons. This may lead to disputes when the consumer discovers that the actual tour leader is not the one originally described in the travel brochure.

Based on the findings and discussion of this paper, innovative travel brochures may lead to concrete management problems. With advancements in web technology, however, traditional travel brochures may slowly be overtaken by web-based travel brochures. This would also present an interesting question. In addition, a web-based travel brochure is often cheaper than a printed travel brochure in terms of time and cost. Hence, the conclusion of this study will be more helpful and feasible when applied to web advertising.

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