

Exploration of Travel Experience:

The psychology of anticipation, experience and transformation

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*“Travel is more than the seeing of sights; it is a change that goes on,
deep and permanent, in the ideas of living.” – Miriam Beard¹*

How many times a day have you thought of how you want to be someplace else? Do you notice how stiff your body gets after staying still for a long time? The human body and mind did not evolve to sit still. Bodies are meant to move, minds to expand. The early human explorer saw traveling as a mean of acquiring food and survival. During the age of discovery from the early 15th century to early 17th century, Europeans were engaged in intensive exploration of the whole globe. They were establishing contact with all the continents that they could find. Compared with people’s current desire to travel, it shares the similar urge to familiarize oneself with some part of the world that has not been explored. It was not until the Industrial Revolution that traveling became more available to common people. Currently, affordable air travel has provided more accessibility to traveling than ever before. With increased safety and flow of information, tourism has become one of the world’s largest moneymaking industries.

Aside from experiencing excitement, being a traveler also means being a part of consumer culture. Travelers in their journey will have to spend a fortune for transportation, lodging, meals, and more. As consumers, travelers will ultimately decide what is going to be offered in the tourism industry. Travel advertising plays a huge role in helping people decide what kind of travel experience suits them best and in the process, educates them about what type of traveler they are. Advertisers must understand different types of consumers to better position their ad strategy to a specific market. Travel design and marketing is an influential factor in choosing a travel destination and defining the nature of the travel experience.

This paper will discuss the underlying psychology behind travel anticipation, travel experience and the psychology of returning home in order to deconstruct the strategies of travel advertisements.

The United States strongly supports consumer culture and this directly affects the travel industry. People have accepted business and trade as a reality such that businesses appeal to a customer's sense of immediacy and/or instant gratification to catch both the consumer's attention and money. It is important to be aware of the different needs that each type of travelers demands to maximize travel experience. Different consumer cultures lead to different types of tourists. Each type of tourist holds different interests, purpose of travels, and lifestyles. Various travelers that belong to different consumer cultures will have different demands that ultimately dictate what will be offered in the industry. To this end, a researcher named Erik Cohen in his article *Toward A Sociology of International Tourism* proposes a model in which he classifies tourists into four types: the drifter, the explorer, the individual mass tourist, and the organized mass tourist.ⁱⁱ Below is a deeper explanation of general behavior of each type of tourist and how specific advertisements cater to these types of tourists.

Type	Familiarity	Novelty	Others
The Drifter	Lowest	Highest	Highly adventurous; lives within the local community
The Explorer	Lower	Higher	Travels alone; seeks comfortable accommodations and reliable transportation
The Individual Mass Tourist	Higher	Lower	Not bound to a group; somewhat controlled time and itinerary
The Organized Mass Tourist	Highest	Lowest	Follows a tour guide; follows an itinerary fixed in advance

ⁱⁱⁱ Figure taken from *The Relationship between Types of Tourist and Destination Authenticity*

Erik Cohen suggested that the satisfaction of travel is a balanced mix between a degree of novelty and a degree of familiarity. The preferred amount of those two elements that would be experienced would vary from each traveler. Even though the new adventure of travel can be exciting, excessive amounts of strangeness would make travelers feel alienated and terrified. Naturally, humans are molded by their native culture to follow their familiar habits. For some people, abandoning every familiar aspect of their daily life could be unpleasant and threatening. Some travelers are highly interested in being involved in different cultures and languages because they enjoy experiencing the difference. Others may feel they have stepped out of their comfort zone too much and may prefer to refer back to activities that may remind them of home and their identity. For example, eating out at a national chain, such as McDonalds or Wendy's may provide a little taste of home. Understanding these preferences is essential in creating appropriate ads to a specific market.

The organized mass tourist is the least adventurous of the four types. He/she would organize a trip with a similar process of buying a product. He/she would stay within an itinerary, make almost no surprise decisions and maintain his/her personal comfort zone. This type of tourist can be found in mass tours where individuals are closely held to the tour packages. Organized mass tourists experience maximum familiarity and minimum novelty.

An individual mass tourist experiences his/her trip from a tourist agency's suggestion. Though he/she is similar to the previous type, he/she is not as attached to his/her tour

guide and able to experience more novelty. Most of his/her major arrangements would still be made by the tourist agency, but he/she may stray a bit from the itinerary. He/she is still staying heavily in his/her personal comfort zone, though novelty is increased. Figure iii would be a great match for both organized and individual mass tourists. The ad for Westin Hotel below specifically invested their focus on showing luxury and comfort. Color choices are sophisticated, with a few dominant colors; blue, yellow and red. This piece implies a large degree of artificiality and a catered service similar to a culinary experience.



iii Westin Hotel and Resort advertising 'element of well-being'

iv Wyoming Office of Tourism

v One of the poster series of 'Tourism Australia'

An Explorer loves to travel alone. Although he/she would get acculturated and try to immerse him/herself within the local population, he/she would retain the habits and routines from home and seek proper accommodation and comfort. Example iv shows a suitable example for an explorer traveler. The ad is catered toward backpacker travelers who enjoy exploring nature. The tagline suggests "being free" as a natural quality that travelers have, and encourages the traveler to not be "tamed" by the travel experience. The photo shows an individual in beautiful scenery with no tourist agency.

A Drifter is the one who ventures out the most. A drifter has pride in shunning everything that is connected with the tourist establishment. He/she would not mind sacrificing comfort and living cheaply, as long as that could prolong his/her stays. He/she tends to love surprises; therefore planning would be minimum, only for what is needed in a short period of time. He/she would be interested in following how the local people live in their shelter, local culinary and lifestyle experiences. Novelty would be experienced to the fullest, while eliminating the familiar.^{vi} One of the poster series for "Tourism Australia" is a great example of an advertisement that would appeal to the drifter type. The tagline implies learning, while the image shows how the traveler can interact and learn from the local culture. This particular piece is promising how traveling can earn the audience a newer outlook in life.

Tourists have varying degrees of comfort with newness and exploration, from the travelers who wants every moment planned and dictated to those that welcome surprise and even a little danger in the hunt for genuine experience.

"What tourists are buying, primarily, are experiences - ones that they believe will educate them in terms of the ways other people live, elevate them spiritually, enhance enjoyment of life, and, in the broadest sense possible, educate and entertain them."^{vii} Arthur Asa Berger

Anticipation is defined as an act of looking forward, especially pleasurable or positive experience. The experience of anticipation is almost as interesting as the travel experience itself. Anticipation can start by simply looking at pictures of travel destinations, listening to travel stories, and imagination of feeling rejuvenated. People may develop hope as well as anxiety about their upcoming travel. Just from looking at a few travel ads and brochures, many travelers may develop strong preconceived notions

of how they would experience the travel. Though preparing for travel can be tedious, excitement to “be there” may grow as the travel date is drawing closer. As anticipation and excitement keeps building up, so does expectation.

Alain de Botton wrote his experience about anticipation and the reality that he found while traveling to Barbados:

Nothing was as I had imagined – surprising only if one considers what I had imagined. In the preceding weeks, the thought of the island had circled exclusively around three immobile mental images, assembled during the reading of a brochure and an airline timetable... And if there is a problem with this profusion of images, it was that they made it strangely harder to see the Barbados I had come to find.^{ix}

What the author experienced is very common among travelers who have high expectations. When a traveler projects high personal expectations to their travel experience, sometimes it is unlikely that it can be fulfilled to the fullest. The higher the expectation, the higher chance reality may disappoint them. These imaginations about places that have not been visited are supported by travel ads and marketing. Botton further suggests that art (in this case travel design and marketing) has a similar process of selection and simplification as much as imagination.

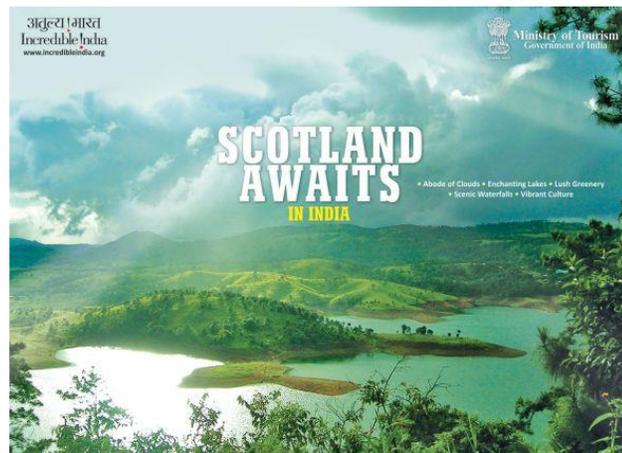
In the 21st century, media for travel advertising can range from television, online marketing, newspapers, and travel magazines where it can be targeted toward a specific target audience. Arthur Asa Berger quoted Baudrillard, who raised an interesting point, that “most people believed they are not affected by advertising, which makes them all the more susceptible to being influenced by it.”^x To promote the product or service that is

being advertised, advertisement uses both words and images to appear seductive. Specifically in travel advertisements, copywriters struggle to find words and tag-lines that would seduce audience to “visit.” They may try to connect the benefits of the travel with mental images for the traveler to image the experience.

Image is one of the strongest elements in advertisements as it allows the audience to “picture” their travel. Images that we encounter in marketing and design media are already selected to highlight a certain object, aspect, or idea by the photographer and art director. Another expert on the topic, Kelly Mackay refers to this concept as picture superiority effect. “Picture forms of advertisements not only feature the tourism destination, but also communicate characteristics, concepts, values, and ideas about the destination to the prospective traveler”.^{xi} Ideas that are being presented through picture are easier to remember, making picture ads stronger in comparison to other visual media.



^{xii} Print advertisement for Tourism Victoria, appeared in Seattle Times (2007)



^{xiii} An advertisement from Ministry of Tourism, Government of India: Scotland Awaits.

The audience is attracted to the Tourism Victoria ad because it uses sexual phrasing that sounds evocative. Here they are linking the desire or frustration of looking for the

perfect orgasm with finding the perfect getaway. The primary focus of this ad is the choice of words, while images only play as secondary element. In the other hand, figure xiii is using imagery as its main strength. The type of image that they are portraying is lush green scenery with calm water and the sunlight emerging from the clouds. Because the imagery is already strong, adding the title "Scotland Awaits" can make the piece stronger because the image and the text both support each other and link the India with Scotland - an already highly favorable tourist experience. The text is implying that the experience is always waiting for a traveler's decision to visit.

"We are inundated with advice on where to travel to;
we hear little of why and how we should go." – Alain de Botton^{xiv}

The experience of travel can begin as soon as travelers leave home to catch their flight, cab, or friend's carpool. The act of carrying one's suitcase and loading it into check in can bring the warmest joy and excitement: hope for a change. Any signs that the traveler may encounter on his/her way, such as landmark signs, the view from airplane window, the change of view from the train's window can provoke so much pleasure. There is also a sense of camaraderie with anyone else traveling regardless of destination. Those signs – no matter how simple they are – give out the first evidence that one has arrived somewhere else. The sign represents a promise of change and happiness. Just by looking at a different typeface, color palette, and material choice, the visual difference can signify a life-changing experience. This demonstrates that there are other ways of living that may offer solutions to personal conflict or boredom at home.

The better travelers understand their reasons for travel, the closer they are to satisfying their desire. People are always in search of improvement and happiness. If a traveler knows what he/she is looking for in their travel, satisfaction would be much more attainable. There are four main types of experience motivation: Getting Away, Investigation, Personal Transformation, and Social Interaction and History.



^{xv} "Stress: Successfully Left Behind in Latvia State Forests."

A print advertisement for Latvia State Forest, Latvia (2011).

GETTING AWAY. The most common thing that most travelers share is the urge to get away from their normal life to experience the difference. Many times the main underlining reason of traveling is to *get away*, rather than *going to*. This may develop from a desire to create a distance between an individual and his/her home. The reason is that closeness of daily activity can constrict thoughts and prevent people from thinking creatively. In extended periods of time it also prevents fresh creativity and lack of appreciation. This can happen when an individual always restricts his/her mind to daily activities. The act of getting away can break this routine and expand the way of thinking. Travel is a way to liberate thoughts and opportunities to find deeper meaning of life. Also by getting away, people are giving themselves time to investigate new possibilities.

INVESTIGATION. As intelligent creatures, people naturally want to grow and expand intelligently, socially and financially. One way to achieve growth is by investigating new, unexplored travel places. In being a stranger, one must find creative ways to bridge the difference and make connections to their surroundings. Another dominant element that travelers look for is the search for authenticity and exotic qualities. Authenticity and exotic qualities can be defined as something foreign and different to everyday lives. While exploring new environments, individuals are given the chance to reconnect with their inner-self, that sometimes stays hidden in the midst of hectic lifestyle.



^{xvi} “The Holiday You Feel Inside”.
An advertisement by LS&Partners in Italy.
(2008)

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION. Traveling allows people to gain or lose their identity. Travelers are interested to see what the world has to offer and gain insights from the experience. Traveling can be seen as a search of new home as well. Many times people can fit in well with a travel destination because it projects similar identity/ values that their homeland may not support. Since who we are today is a product of our past, relationships, and social classes, by traveling we are able to let go of “labels” that we must carry everyday. Personal transformation can be liberating as it allows travelers to pick up on values and integrate them. By comparing and contrasting different values, travel experience can strengthen personal identity. Travelers can reconsider how they

look at life and they can integrate new values they've picked up and/or throw away the ones they don't prefer anymore.

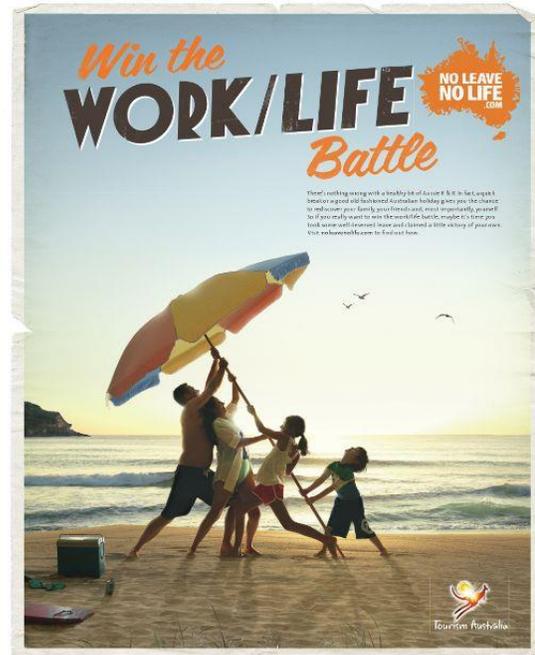
SOCIAL INTERACTION AND HISTORY. Travel provides opportunities for travelers to interact more socially, with their families, travel companions, and/or locals. This significantly helps establish social bonds with friends, families, and community. Aside from the relaxing qualities of traveling, it can be full of challenges. Traveling has been seen as a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. Things like foreign exchange students and a semester abroad for students will provide new status when they are integrated in community. Travelers have a great urge to participate in history, which explains why they want to visit historical places. This phenomenon as explained by J. William Fulbright, is an effort to deal with everyday anxiety by realizing the universe is a vast place with many ongoing things. ^{xvii} Considering that most of people fill their life with hectic duties everyday, people are more susceptible to feeling overwhelmed by the responsibilities they have to do. By visiting historical places, people are given the chance to see that their existence can be a small measure in a vast world. What Fullbright suggested is by being aware of the scope of the world and other possibilities, mental burdens can become less dramatic.

Referring to figure XIX below is print advertisement that uses nostalgia/history to entice urges of traveling. There are 3 children dressed in old-fashioned style outfits to refer to how this image may have been taken in the past. This ad connects nostalgic qualities (familiar things) with memories of childhood. The tagline suggests the audience can revisit places they have visited before for its nostalgic/historical qualities.

“The object of travel is not to set foot on foreign land;
it is at last to set foot on one’s own country.” – G.K. Charleston ^{xviii}



^{xix} Eurostar: When Was the Last Time you visited London?
A print ad from an agency in France for Eurostar
^{xx} Tourism Australia: No Leave, No Life campaign.



Traveling is not a luxury, it is a *necessity*. “Win the Work/Life Battle” ^{xx} ad campaign is using this concept to initiate motivation to do a leisure travel based on necessity. A person who has traveled tends to have a greater personal improvement, versus someone who never takes time to travel. Leisure travel plays a huge role in reducing stress and pressure to travelers, especially those who are in a lower income scale. “Quality of life is drastically improved, along with personal growth, fulfillment, and a higher self-esteem.” ^{xxi} As a foreigner, travelers tend to pick up on simple things that may be taken for granted by the locals. In the process of appreciating these qualities, upon their journey home they are given a second chance to look at their surrounding and its value. This alone has allowed for creativity and open-mindedness. Ultimately, the biggest benefit that we may

experience from traveling is going home to realize everything has changed because something in our mind has changed.

Aside from a new, positive outlook after coming back from traveling, there also can be setbacks. It can be difficult to come home when the community that surrounds the traveler doesn't really want to hear about his/ her experience. In cases where a traveler's experience is strongly influencing personal transformation, he/she may find coming home to be a lonely experience since values that are being integrated may not be understood or accepted by society.



^{xxii} Travel Corporation India Honeymoon Packages: Venice.
Advertising Agency: Grey Worldwide, Mumbai, India.

NEW PERSPECTIVE AND OPEN MINDEDNESS. Tony Hiss, in his book *In Motion: The Experience of Travel* suggested “people who had spent time living outside their own countries were ‘less fixed’ in their thinking and ‘more able to accept and recombine novel ideas’.” ^{xxiii} When people stay in one place for a long time, mundane activity can only influence them to think about things nearby and have more constricted thoughts bound by limitations. Traveling gives a chance to put a distance between travelers and their

lives, which allows them to experience attitudes and mood differences that allow them to be more receptive to new ideas.

If a traveler has spent a lot of time traveling, and is constantly faced with situations that challenge one's identity, a traveler may experience identity confusion. Being a stranger for an extended period of time can cause repeated feeling of identity confusion. Scott Cohen, an expert in tourism studies conducted a research on personal identity (de)formation among lifestyle travelers. Jackie (English, 26), one of the respondents noted, "I suppose you have to develop a peace with yourself because you've turned your whole world upside down by starting traveling and then you have to put yourself back together in some ways. You've left what you're from and everything that defines you so you have to get the bits and put them all back together and make yourself again." ^{xxiv}

SELF-ESTEEM AND SOCIAL INTERACTIONS. When one thinks about traveling, one can connect a personal feeling of accomplishment and self-motivation. By experiencing the excitement of travel, it highlights a certain feeling of self-worth and rejuvenation. The wealthy tend to maintain leisure travel to keep them motivated. By traveling, people are also given a chance to improve their social skills. By letting themselves to be outside their comfort zone, they would be more relaxed and secure in unfamiliar settings, making them more socially versatile individuals.

PERSONAL IMPROVEMENT. By increasing one's personal time away, traveling has become crucial to improve an individual's wellness. Since traveling helps to maintain a feeling of self worth, in the long run it will continue to encourage people to keep working hard. By having learned something during their vacation, it increases one's possibility of seeking life or career opportunities in the long run. Upon this realization, one will become

aware of the wide opportunities that are available, therefore reducing unnecessary pressure and enabling one to reach one's potential.

There is no doubt with the level of safety, price and availability, traveling will continue to be an activity to be pursued by many. Traveling is already implanted in our system as individual, social and intellectual beings. Travel advertisements and marketing are responsible for generating interest and many people rely on the information found in them. Just a few pictures and a few words can give people such a strong desire to make that getaway. Advertisers are using different strategies to relate to specific target markets. Some ads presented as examples were image driven, some are word driven, and others are concept driven. Nonetheless, understanding the psychology of traveling is essential to designing and marketing the ad campaign. Aside from looking attractive, travel advertisement have a great opportunity to educate or introduce interesting knowledge about the destination omit, or even about the audience themselves. After all, what people see and understand is a reflection of themselves. What makes travel exciting and enriching is what makes it potentially intimidating for those unwilling to confront themselves or their pre-conceived notions. Traveling can make our world bigger and smaller at the same time. Travel advertisement plays an important role in improving and enticing people's interest to travel. As long as people have the hunger to seek opportunities and find themselves again, there will always be opportunities for advertisement to encourage those curiosities.

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