

GIRL POWER IN TOURISM HOW TO MARKETING A COUNTRY TO WOMEN

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We can read a new scientific study every day that confirms the physiological differences between the sexes: how women's brains are different, how they see, hear, acquire and use language differently. What we rarely hear is how these differences manifest themselves in the marketplace.

Researches show that the buying power of women has increased a lot in the last decades. America's most powerful consumers are already the women. They influence 95% and make 85% of all consumer buying decisions. Moreover, the majority of corporate purchasing agents and managers are women. Female entrepreneurs account for 70% of new business start-ups. Even if the numbers are not, the trends are already the same in Europe and all over the world. Since my PhD research is about country marketing, in this article I will show the "girl power" in tourism, including a short case study: how countries should communicate to attract women travelers.

1. GIRL POWER

Women are traditionally a major target group of fashion, beauty, health and other similar industries. But nowadays their buying authority goes behind these things. They are buying cars, computers, and carpeting, and shelling out the cash for insurance policies, investments, and improvements to the home as well.

As we all know, women themselves are "good consumers". To tell the truth, much better than man, just think of shopping [1]. And women are multiple markets in one: they buy for themselves, they buy for their families, and in increasing numbers, they buy for their businesses.

No wonder, that America's most powerful consumers are already the women. Although they comprise just over half of the U.S. population, women buy or influence the purchase of eighty-five percent of all products and services sold nationwide. Consider these facts:

- Between 1970 and 1990, the number of women living alone doubled and this pattern has been continuing,
- at least 55% of those online each day are women,
- by the year 2010, women will control 60% of wealth in the U.S,
- college students were responsible for \$210 billion in sales in 2002 and 58% of them were female,
- women purchase more than 50% of the cars and own more than 46% of the homes in the U.S,
- more than half of business travelers are women.

The numbers do not lie. In today's extraordinarily competitive environment, marketing to women is unequivocally the fastest track to sales growth, share dominance, and profit improvement [2].

Yet, far too often, products marketed specifically to women fail to address their needs or connect with them on an emotional and motivational level. Marketers do not understand that men's marketing does not work for women. In comparison to men, women have a very different set of priorities, preferences and attitudes; their purchase decisions are radically different; and they respond differently to marketing and media messages.

2. FORGET "THINK PINK"! IT IS TIME TO "THINK LINK"!

Women are also fed up with the "traditional women marketing", the old fashion notions of femininity: powder pink, sweet hearts, and bouquets of roses. Froufrou products will appear ... and vanish. It is time to forget think pink [3].

It's 2005. It's time to think link. Deborah Tannen, author of "You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation" points out that women naturally reinforce their bonds by freely and clearly dispensing information, directions, or heartfelt help [4]. John Gray, author of "Men are from Mars" claims that the behavior is encoded in our very chromosomes: "men retreat to their caves" to solve their problems why women "get together and talk openly" [5].

Just like in love, whereas male buyers are seeking "a good solution", female shoppers are looking for "the Perfect Answer". That's why it is far not enough to marketing the products TO women. You have to marketing WITH women – treating them as business partners and listening to them throughout every step of the marketing process. So, if you really want to succeed with the most powerful consumer group in the world, all you have to do is ask [6]. To use Popcorn's words, men and women are not only biologically but also "shop-ologically" different [7]. While men only buy brands, women join them. The former is good for the moment, the latter is good for life. Women do not bond with brands that market to them in an overly aggressive way. A full frontal attack is not the way to turn a woman on. Women rarely want a one-night stand.

The connection truth means that you must rethink what women want from brands. Your brand must be differentiated, not in the way you bring the components together, but in the way you bring women together! And this will bring the results. According to marketing expert Lori Moskowitz Lepler, founder of the Intuition Group, women are three times as likely as men to recommend brands when they know friends are looking for a particular product or service. And Yankelovich, an international marketing research firm, did a survey showing that 70% of women believe they learn the most about a new product from someone who already owns one. That is brand passing at its best.

Within a decade, the companies that do the best job of marketing to women will dominate every significant product and service category. Popcorn calls this "EVEolution" – a trend that will redefine the way companies crate profitable and lasting relationships with their key consumers – women [7].

The good news is that if you manage to sell one generation of women, you will get the next as well [8]. (Just check how children now dress like adults at a very young age, because Mom and daughter want to look like each other.)

3. CASE STUDY: SELLING BRITAIN TO THE JAPANESE OFFICE LADIES¹

As we all know from the marketing books, it is not reality that matters but rather the consumers' perception of reality. We can even say that the image is the product. Marketers must learn what those perceptions are and not be misled by their own ideas of true image [9].

In comparison with other industries, in tourism perception is even more important. The so-called "destination image" (image of a place, city, country) is the total of all beliefs, ideas, expectations, feelings and impressions that an individual has of a destination. It is the travelers' visual or mental picture of that destination. And in the case of women, image is more an emotional relationship [10].

On the next pages, I will show a short example how Great Britain did change its image to attract more women travelers from Japan and all over the world [11-13].

In the latter half of the 1980's there was a great boom in outbound travel from Japan. This was simulated by a strong Yen and a government campaign which encouraged outbound travel. The aim was to reduce the huge balance of payments surplus about which other countries were complaining.

The main overseas destinations were other Asian countries and Hawaii, while Europe was top of the holiday wish-list. But there was one problem with Europe. It was too far away. Long-haul travel to Europe was not hindered by cost but by the Japanese work ethic which inhibited working Japanese from using their full annual holiday entitlement and from taking off more than a few days from work at a stretch. Only for one's honeymoon – on which was built a huge travel market, notably to Hawaii – was a longer break acceptable.

But these travel-shy characteristics applied much more to men than to women, who expected to stop work once they got married. Confronted with a lower status at work and few career opportunities women felt less pressure than men to prove their commitment to a company by forgoing and curtailing holidays.

These "office ladies" (OLs as they were called) lived with their parents. They had high disposable income as well as time to travel. Eager to escape from their male dominated society and to enjoy some freedom before being tied down by marriage, the OLs fuelled the travel boom of the eighties. Europe, seen as liberal, romantic and shopping mecca, was their preferred destination.

¹ For this short case study, I have used the following materials:

- Török, Péter: Tourism case study of Japan (Turizmus Bulletin, 2002/1.)
- Hwai Kar, Goh and Litvin, Stephen W., professors of Nanyang Business School, Singapore: Destination Marketing (Eclipse Destination Marketing Magazine, periodic publication from Moonshine Travel Marketing)
- The Brand Called UK (FastCompany Internet Magazine)

Most of them traveled to Europe on a multi country group package tour, France, Italy, Switzerland and, revealingly, Germany were particularly popular. Japanese men, in contrast, mostly went to Europe on business. And if they were senior enough they might include a day or two of semi leisure.

Britain was very often included on the European circuit, usually as a gateway and often for only one night. The British Tourism Association noted very soon that Britain was becoming less popular compared to its continental competitors. It was faced with declining market share.

Applying a global approach to branding, in Japan the BTA relied on images that had worked well in other markets: pageantry, history, tradition, royalty, imposing castles, golf, cricket, pubs, whisky, Scottish bagpipers, Welsh choirs, London bobbies, bowler-hat gentlemen, Shakespeare and so on.

Japanese tour operators and travel agents reassured BTA that the images it was using represented a distinctive and attractive Britain, which they always enjoyed visiting. But one thing they forgot to mention: at that time nearly all senior staff in the travel industry were men. When BTA realized this, it decided to invest in some attitude research to test the images it was using and to look closely at its competitors, and in particular at Germany's success.

This research showed the Britain's real picture. It was seen as a heavy, serious, rather cold and above all masculine destination. And this was even reinforced by the visual images that BTA used. Images that actually put off OLs, who traveled to escape from maleness back home...

Germany's success in Japan was founded on very focused positioning and product development, specifically for the OL market. The so-called Romantische Strasse, a 350 km route linking pretty towns and villages; river, lake and Alpine scenery; and fantasy castles was heavily emphasized. Germany was promoted by Japanese tour operators as a romantic destination.

The mystery of why pictures of German castles, particularly Neuschwanstein, invariably won travel poster competitions and frequently appeared on the cover of tour operators' brochures in Japan, while British castles always rated poorly, started to unravel. BTA figured out that in the consumers' mind there were masculine castles and feminine castles. And while "Fairytale" and "Disneyesque" castles were alluring and feminine, the massive, uninhabited defensive castles were uninviting. A subsequent test with photos of different styles of British castle reinforced this observation and identified some feminine British castles.

Romance with suggestions of self-discovery, freedom, self-empowerment and *joie de vivre* – was perhaps the key words for attracting young single Japanese women at this time. France, particularly Paris and Italy had always seemed romantic. Germany had made itself appear so. It was high time for Britain to do the same.

BTA therefore decided to redesign its image specifically for young Japanese females. Their campaign called "Ladies Britain" took full advantage of royal romances of the time, with Princess Diana as the supreme icon. Emphasis was on the soft, the pretty and the feminine. Shopping, entertainment and eating out were repositioned with the OL in mind. Thus street fashion replaced the Saville Row suit; afternoon tea the pub, pop music rather than choirs, Wimbledon tennis and horse racing at Ascot replaced golf and rugby; punks had more appeal than the city gent.

Even the British flag as a logo was replaced by a romantic rose. BTA copied Germany and crated new itineraries for Japan that emphasized soft and warm aspects of Britain. Pretty villages were linked to create a route called "Along an English Country Lane". Another itinerary linked places with "Royal Romance" as its theme. Another focused on gardens and country house hotels. Even British flower arranging and British etiquette courses were organized.

There were knock-on benefits from this female-oriented approach. "Ladies Britain" also appealed to the growing market of Japanese mature women who were free of their children and eager to travel with their female friends. They too had the disposable time their husbands lacked. Female bias also worked with the emerging "silver market" (retirees) where wives often made the travel decisions.

All promotions, press visits, brochures, mailers, display, store promotions, seminars - pushed this new identity. And the travel trade and media responded with enthusiasm to this fresh approach. The Ladies Britain theme expanded beyond travel and was taken up by department stores, and non-travel products. TV programs became interested in due course.

The result was surprisingly quick. Within a year of launching Ladies Britain travel by Japanese to Britain was growing faster than to France, Italy and Germany. It was up 46% in 1987 and over 30% in '88 and '89...

4. CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen in the case study, most tourism destinations are multi-faceted. They can be variably designed and positioned to meet the needs of different segments. And it is definitely worth to marketing a country to the women, since they have the money, they usually have more time than men, and they make the decisions within the family. To sell our country it is always a good starting point to test whether the images currently projected are congruent with target market perceptions ... As BTA found out in this case, there can be castles and castles - just because men and women are not the same.

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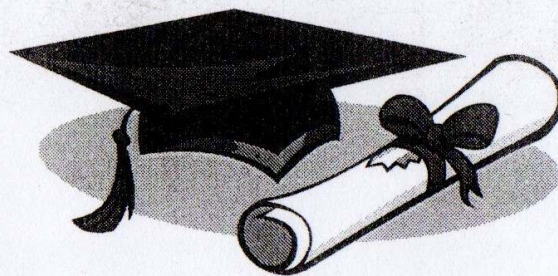
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