members with different tiers of membership. They also propose that hotels make better use of social media, along with emails and text messaging, to facilitate direct interactions and better engage customers with the brand.

Customer relationship management activities, particularly those related to employee loyalty programme members, are also important for hotels seeking to build BRQ, argue the researchers. Given the critical role of hotel employees in building trust with customers, hotels need to ensure that staff members are willing to prioritise customers and “tailor their different needs and wants during face to face encounters”. As customer orientation is important in Asian countries, which emphasise the “long-term development of relational bonding and trust”, the researchers were not surprised to find that the Asian members of the loyalty programme preferred to build relationships with employees who put customers first before engaging in a business transaction.

Trust can also be gained when employees deliver the service as promised by the brand. The researchers note that hotels could make use of internal programmes to ensure employees understand the brand’s promise to customers, and they need to hire staff with the “right attitude” and train them well. Well orchestrated internal communications could also be used to effectively disseminate the brand’s message to employees around the world.

Word of Mouth Promotion

Loyalty programme members with stronger BRQ indicated that they would be willing to recommend the hotel brand to others and would stay in the group’s hotels more often. However, BRQ may not always have positive effects.

Against their expectations, the researchers found that those with stronger BRQ were somewhat less willing to serve as marketing resources for the brand as they were reluctant to allow their personal information to be used. Word of mouth recommendations, however, were another matter because they were spontaneous. The researchers suggest that hotels could make use of this by encouraging their customers to advocate for their brands via social media.

Right Audience Critical for Destination Marketing: Mini-moves

Destination marketers interested in how to produce effective mini-movies to market travel destinations need to ensure that they target the right audience, show the STHM’s Tianyi Gong and Dr Vincent Tung in a recently published research paper. Mini-movies are increasingly popular and effective form of advertising, the researchers observe, but many current efforts are missing the mark. Indeed, in some circumstances mini-movies may actually have the opposite of the intended effect on the destination’s image.

Mini-Movies as Advertising

Mini-movies have recently become a popular way for marketers to promote destination brands. The researchers explain that a mini-movie is a trailer-length video that “blurs the line between advertising and entertainment” by integrating the product message into the plot to better engage the audience. They differ from promotional videos in that they generally emphasise “cinematic esthetics and film attributes” and present storylines focusing on the “place, protagonist, and plot” rather than on the landscape and scenery of a destination.

The idea is that as viewers become absorbed in the story, they are “transported into a fantasy world” that enhances their emotional response but reduces their critical thought. Similar to film tourism, moviegoers are motivated to travel to a destination by viewing the characters, actors, plot and setting portrayed in the movie. Unlike a full-length movie, however, mini-movies are usually only around 3-10 minutes long and have much lower production costs. This, the researchers note, make them very appealing to “emerging and growing destinations” that do not have the resources to produce big-budget films.

Motivation and Reactance

The researchers also speculated that the influence of mini-movies on evaluations of destinations might depend on viewers’ travel motivation, or the extent to which they feel free to act on, their needs. In addition, the effectiveness of any form of advertising can be reduced by “reactance” – that is, individuals may resist persuasion if they feel that advertising is attempting to control their behaviour or eliminate their freedom of choice.

However, the researchers also hypothesised that mini-movies could “reduce consumers’ resistance to embedded brand promotions” because they tend to be viewed voluntarily, usually through social video-sharing or by YouTube. The “narrative storytelling” format means mini-movies are less likely to be regarded as attempts to persuade.

Viewing Peru

To determine whether motivation on the one hand and recognition of persuasion on the other have considerable influences on the impact of destination marketing mini-movies, the researchers asked a group of 156 students to watch a mini-movie entitled ‘Whatever you need, Peru has got you covered’ by the Peru Tourism Board, the mini-movie features a hard-working businessman watching a video he made 20 years ago when he was a young adult travelling through Peru. This seemed a particularly apt movie because it features landscapes, historical and archaeological sites, activities and facilities that are useful for tourists’ evaluation of destination images. Furthermore, the destination and marketing nature of the movie are not revealed until the end.

Of the 156 viewers, most were aged between 21 and 25, as young people of this age group were considered an appropriate target audience. They were randomly assigned to one of four groups. The researchers asked half of them to write about their “most enjoyable and memorable tourism experience” to prime their motivation to travel, while the other half were asked to write about their “most enjoyable and memorable travel destination” to prime their motivation to travel, while the other half were asked to write about their “most enjoyable and memorable tourism experience” to prime their motivation to travel, while the other half were asked to write about their “most enjoyable and memorable travel destination” to prime their motivation to travel, while the other half were asked to write about their “most enjoyable and memorable travel destination” to prime their motivation to travel, while the other half were asked to watch the video.

After the movie, the viewers answered questions designed to evaluate what Peru has to offer as a destination in terms of safety and comfort, interest and
study should provide food for
From a practical viewpoint, the attempt to persuade.
freedom" from the advertisement’s travel, they perceived “less loss of were not primed to think about travel but were
difference to the evaluations of those who were not primed. However, this positive effect only applied to those who were unaware that the mini-movie was an advertisement before watching it. Priming participants to think about travel and then telling them that they were going to watch an advertisement made them evaluate the destination negatively.

In contrast, the disclosure of the advertising content made little difference to the evaluations of those who were not primed to think about travel, and if anything it seemed to result in slightly more positive views. Therefore, the most positive evaluations were made by those who had been primed to think about travel but were unaware that they were watching an advertisement. The researchers suggest that a possible explanation for this is that when viewers were not primed to think about travel, they perceived “less loss of freedom” from the advertisement’s attempt to persuade.

For instance, rather than sharing the advertising nature of a mini-movie at the outset, leaving the disclosure until the end may be a more effective when targeting viewers who are already motivated to travel. The researchers explain that motivation may drive individuals to search for signs in communication materials that “contain the promise of fulfilling their needs”. However, advertising is generally perceived as less credible than “real” movies, so disclosing the nature of a mini-movie at the outset reduces its credibility and could cause reactance, ensuring that the movie has the opposite of the intended effect.

The researchers also suggest that marketers should consider using social media platforms to attract potential tourists based on their “recent browsing history”. Someone who has spent a lot of time searching for travel-related information is likely to be a “motivated potential traveller” who will react positively to a travel-related mini-movie if they do not realise it is an advertisement.

Alternatively, marketers hoping to “capture the attention of non-motivated viewers” may be better off disclosing the advertising nature of the mini-movie at the outset to generate awareness of the destination.

Mini-movies are a novel and interesting form of marketing ideally suited to today’s social-media-led world. Yet their relative novelty means that marketers may not have all of the information they need to use them in developing positive destination images. Still, the results of this study will go a long way towards rectifying that situation, paving the way for a better understanding of how mini-movies can influence potential travelers.

POINTS TO NOTE

• Mini-movies are a novel and effective online marketing strategy.
• Marketers can promote positive images of their destinations through travel mini-movies.
• Travel motivation influences viewers’ evaluations of the destination.
• Disclosing the movie as an advertisement can have either a positive or a negative effect.


Travel Motivation Matters
The results confirmed the researchers’ expectation that motivation influences how people are persuaded. When the viewers were primed to think about travel by writing about a travel experience of their own, they evaluated the destination image of Peru more positively than those who had not been primed. However, this positive effect only applied to those who were unaware that the mini-movie was an advertisement before watching it. Priming participants to think about travel and then telling them that they were going to watch an advertisement made them evaluate the destination negatively.

In contrast, the disclosure of the advertising content made little difference to the evaluations of those who were not primed to think about travel, and if anything it seemed to result in slightly more positive views. Therefore, the most positive evaluations were made by those who had been primed to think about travel but were unaware that they were watching an advertisement. The researchers suggest that a possible explanation for this is that when viewers were not primed to think about travel, they perceived “less loss of freedom” from the advertisement’s attempt to persuade.

Practical Implications
From a practical viewpoint, the study should provide food for thought to destination marketers.

In Brief . . .

School Business Excellence Recognised
Dean Chon, Professor Brian King, Dr Barry Mak, Dr Karin Weber and Dr Tony Tse received the Grand Award in the Business Excellence category of PolyU’s Distinguished Knowledge Transfer Awards on 5 June for the development of new academic programmes in travel and tourism management for King Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia. Held once every five years, the awards pay tribute to PolyU staff for their knowledge transfer achievements, particularly those that exemplify the diversity, quality and innovativeness of works and technologies transferred to businesses and other organisations.

Long Service Recognised
Six SHTM faculty and staff members, including Professor Cathy Hsu, Dr Wilco Chan, Dr Nelson Tsang, Dr Karin Weber, Ms Almen Yau and Ms Noriko Leung received Long Service Awards on 24 March in appreciation of their loyal and dedicated service to PolyU over the years. Professor Hsu and Dr Weber have been with the SHTM for 15 years, and Dr Tsang, Ms Yau and Ms Leung joined 20 years ago.