

Temporal Orientation and Tourism: It's about Time

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Abstract

Because of the importance of tourism revenue to economies, and the marketing dollars expended by governments through Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), this paper summarizes the recent findings related to temporal orientation and marketing. Present and future orientations are seen as representing stable, clear individual differences that impact information processing, attitudes and behavior. This paper suggests how this construct may be useful to the tourism industry and perhaps to other business categories as well. In summary, the purpose of this study is to understand temporal orientation, its impact on consumer behavior to broadly conceptualize whether it has relevance as a marketing concept for business. Ideas for future research are also included.

Keyword: marketing, temporal orientation, tourism

1. Marketing and the Economy

Because of the economic importance of tourism, marketers around the world seek ways to influence the competitive destination selection process. Potential market segments and consumer behavior have been examined from many perspectives including tourists' motivations, their information search behavior, and how they form attitudes, as well as dissecting the travelling public both demographically and psychographically.

One determinant that may not have been fully examined in tourism or services marketing context is the potential impact of consumers' temporal orientation on their travel and other preferences and their response to messages. A growing body of research suggests that people may respond differently to promotional messages depending on whether those messages are framed with an orientation toward the present or the future (Bergadaa, 1990; Joireman, Sprott & Spangenberg, 2005; Kees, Burton, & Tangari, 2010; Tangari, Folse, Burton, & Kees, 2010; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Only a few business categories have considered this construct. However, whether a consumer is oriented toward the present or the future has been found to influence attitudes and behavior toward recycling (Joireman, Strathman, & Balliet, 2006), health and perceptions of risk (Chandran & Menon, 2004); health and response to health-related advertising (Kees, et al., 2010), and fiscal responsibility (Joireman, et al., 2005).

Because of the importance of tourism revenue to economies, and the marketing dollars expended by governments through Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), this paper summarizes the recent findings related to temporal orientation and marketing. It then suggests how this construct may be useful to the tourism industry, and perhaps to other business categories as well. In summary, the purpose of this secondary research is to understand temporal orientation, its impact on consumer behavior to broadly conceptualize whether it has relevance as a marketing consideration for tourism and perhaps other businesses, and to suggest areas for future research.

2. Background: Temporal Orientation

2.1 The Concept of Temporal Orientation

Research of interest to marketers on temporal orientation began largely with the work of Graham (1981) who put forth that different perceptions of time have an impact on consumer behavior including the choices people make in assigning time to varying activities including work and leisure. He posited that time style is culturally based and can differ widely among cultures. For the Anglo or Western time style studied in this paper, he asserts that European-Americans' perception of time is largely that of present and future.

A past orientation is not embodied widely by Americans (Gonzalez & Zimbardo, 1985) but is more akin to cultures where events are repeated according to a cyclical pattern such as the cycles of the moon or seasons. Graham's (1981) linear-separable model embodies a future orientation that fits a "rational-actor" consumer purchase model where decision making involves the five steps of problem recognition, search, evaluating alternatives, purchase and post-purchase evaluation (Engel, Kollab, & Blackwell, 1968). Graham says this process describes a purposeful, knowledgeable future oriented shopper. Bergadaa (1990) then describes this future orientation as an "attitude of action," seeking progress and self improvement (p. 296). Furthermore, he asserts, future oriented individuals do not believe in fate and see themselves as responsible for their own futures.

When the future holds no particular promise, as in the broad circular-traditional model (Graham, 1981, p. 336), this attitude is often characterized as a present orientation. As opposed to the rational actor, those present oriented see less connection between time and money, and embody the concept that they cannot affect their futures. Their time is not planned or budgeted. Present oriented consumers are more likely to buy first, often out of impulse, and then discover or rationalize the need. When present oriented shoppers do act on need, they tend to search "until they find any solution that works and is 'good enough,' rather than search for the 'best' solution," (p.340). Bergadaa (1990, p.295) labels this consumer behavior as an "attitude of reaction" to external events. In addition to the consumer behavior previously described, Graham also reported that, due to their problem recognition, the future oriented exhibit a sense of urgency to reduce the problem sooner rather than later. The present oriented, however, feel that a chance for purchase will come again (with the exception of items on sale); "there is no real sense of urgency," (p. 341)

It is important to note that present and future orientations are seen as representing stable, clear individual differences (Strathman, Gleicher, Boninger, & Edwards, 1994) based on a scale measuring the consideration of future consequences (CFC). The CFC scale measures whether or not people are likely to consider future outcomes in decision making. Consumer behavior is seen as a continuum from those who routinely consider future outcomes to those who are just not interested in considering possible future consequences. Where people fall on this continuum has an impact on attitudes, information processing and behaviors. According to these researchers, those high on the CFC scale (future oriented) believe behaviors are worthwhile because of future benefits, even if it means sacrificing near term benefits. Conversely, those low on the CFC scale (present oriented) place a high priority on immediate benefits and goals, perhaps because they are "more strongly influenced by the relatively more concrete and certain immediate consequences than by uncertain, probabilistic future outcomes," (p. 743).

2.2 Traits Associated with the Present or Future Oriented

Research suggests other behavioral and demographic traits are associated with temporal orientation. Present oriented individuals are usually younger (<35 years) while those future oriented are older. In general, future orientation is also related to many positive individual consequences such as higher socioeconomic status, higher educational achievement, less sensation seeking and fewer health risk behaviors. For those with a present orientation, essentially the opposite is true. They are at risk for many negative life consequences including mental health problems, juvenile delinquency, and addictions when they function in a largely future oriented society (Bergadaa, 1990; DeVolder & Lens, 1982; Levine, 1997; Nuttin, 1985; Strathman, et al., 1994; Zaleski, 1994.)

Zimbardo's (1999) research added that a present orientation (which he categorized into two subgroups, hedonic or fatalistic) correlates with a low preference for consistency, low ego and impulse control and an emphasis on novelty. Those with a present-fatalistic orientation are associated with aggression, anxiety, and depression. In contrast, he found these traits for the future oriented group: conscientiousness, preference for consistency, and reward dependence. In sum, concerning the temporal orientation or CFC concept, he concludes, "Our decades-long research and personal involvement with aspects of temporal perspective have convinced us that there are few other psychological variables capable of exerting such a powerful and pervasive impact on the behavior of individuals and the activities of societies," (p. 1282).

2.3 Research on Message Response

In addition to the trait differences found between present and future oriented individuals, researchers report differences in how they respond to marketing messages. Graham (1981) reports that those future oriented, would be more receptive to information that fits into categories of need, as and when defined, while those present oriented seem receptive to more and various types of information more of the time.

Information, rather than an identified need, stimulated purchase behavior for people with a traditional present perspective.

Two recent studies have introduced the CFC construct into marketing literature. Kees, et al., (2010) report on message strategies that impact obesity. Their findings are consistent with studies published in psychology literature: that individual differences in CFC can influence consumer attitudes. Specifically, they report that consumers with a chronic promotion focus, aligned with a present orientation, evaluated near term benefit messages more positively; consumers with a chronic prevention focus, related to a future orientation, preferred messages focusing on long-term benefits. In addition to target market and message strategy, their findings also shed light on behavioral intent. Results suggest that when there is a fit between consumers' orientation and the strategy of the advertisement (offering near or long term benefits), the ad is evaluated more positively and respondents report higher behavioral intent to comply with the advertising message. In essence, they report that low CFC/present oriented consumers seem low elaborators of message content, responding more favorably to messages emphasizing near term benefits. Conversely, high CFC/future oriented consumers tend to engage in high message elaboration and prefer message strategies that include long term benefits. The researchers conclude that "CFC can be an important construct in the marketing and advertising literature," (p. 31).

Another recent study (Tangari et al., 2010) focused on the importance of time preference to cause-related marketing campaigns (CRM). The hypotheses were confirmed in that present oriented consumers had significantly higher purchase intentions and brand attitudes when an advertisement was framed with near term benefit. In contrast, for future oriented consumers, there were no significant differences concerning either attitude or purchase intent with near versus long term benefits. This was expected, because while a faster corporate response (i.e., near term benefits) would not be perceived negatively by those with a future focus; they were less likely to discount a benefit because it happens in the future. In a second part of their study, a distant need coupled with distant benefits led to more significantly favorable scores for those with a future focus compared to a present orientation on three variables: attitude toward the campaign, brand attitude, and purchase intent. A need framed in distant terms, coupled with near term benefits, was significant on the same three variables only for those with a present orientation. The researchers conclude, while consumers with a future orientation do not discount existing needs or near term benefits, they are motivated by long term benefits. Those present oriented are not.

(Table 1 here)

2.4 Applications to Specific Markets

Many of the applications of temporal orientation have been market or issue-specific. For example, consumers with a long term perspective reported less favorable attitudes toward oil drilling due to future environmental considerations (Strathman et al., 1994). Attitudes toward recycling behavior differ depending on consumers' orientations (Lindsay & Strathman, 1997). Several studies of health behaviors have looked at time orientation and found individual differences for attitudes toward colorectal cancer screening (Orbell, Perugini, & Rakow, 2004), likelihood to get tested for HIV (Dorr, et al., 1999). Joireman, et al., (2005) studied the impact of temporal orientation on fiscal responsibility and found that those who were low in CFC were more likely to spend a monetary windfall on immediate benefits.

Of particular interest, Bergataa's (1990) qualitative in-depth interviews included specific questions about holidays. Vacations were content analyzed to fall into three categories: relaxing, enriching, or varied. Relaxing holidays included peace and quiet, relaxation, being with friends and family, or forgetting about jobs. Enriching holidays offered something "new and enhancing from a personal point of view," (p.296). Varied holidays could be either relaxing or enriching, "according to the time of year or the individual's particular situation." Of the 15 people interviewed, eight preferred holidays that were enriching, four preferred relaxing holidays, and three preferred varied holidays. Those preferring enriching holidays were corporate executives or professionals (or masters degree and married to a top executive); executives preferred varied holidays. Office and blue collar workers showed a preference for relaxing vacations. The majority of corporate executives were assessed as action or future oriented; office and blue collar workers were primarily reaction or present oriented. The future oriented also noted coming from families whose parental breadwinner was in an executive or professional field. Bergataa's study was the only one located to include tourism and temporal orientation.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

3.1 Does Temporal Orientation Apply to Marketers?

While marketers of tourism and other goods and services use many means to identify and persuade customers, few have likely considered the temporal orientation of current and potential customers. Following are several different ways that tourism marketers might apply the orientation concept. While these suggestions are specific to tourism, they may have application to other industries, as well. The literature to date finds that present oriented individuals are more likely than those future oriented to be in lower socioeconomic status, less educated, more impulsive, and more concerned with immediate benefits, and less likely to engage in extensive search behavior when a need is realized. For the future oriented, essentially the opposite is true. They are more educated, better off financially, consider future consequences in their decision making, and are less impulsive, thereby undergoing a more comprehensive planning and search process in order to make the best decision or purchase to fit their needs.

Table 1: Orientation Characteristics Summary from Literature

	Future	Present
Destination preference	Enriching	Relaxing
Benefits motivation	Future, current	Immediate
Behavioral tendency	Acts	Reacts
Buying behavior	Planner	Impulsive
Message type	Covert, facts	Overt, deals
Message elaboration	High	Low

With these traits and behaviors in mind, it seems that tourist destinations may be able to categorize their offering as potentially appealing more to present or future oriented customers. Firstly, do visitors to your destination seem to primarily be seeking rest and relaxation, or are they looking for more of a stimulating experience? Do their possessions give clues to socioeconomic status? Do they ask where to find free or high value experiences, or do most visitors seem to already know what they want to experience at the destination? Answers via surveys or observation may provide insight into visitors' orientations.

If findings to the above questions lean more heavily to one orientation than another, you may categorize your destination as appealing to present rather than future oriented visitors (or vice versa). The literature presented in this paper may suggest methods to more effectively market to your temporal customer segment. For example, if your temporal segmentation is future oriented, research to date suggests:

1. Provide a higher level experience over a budget minded one. Envision ways to truly provide new and enriching experiences. As an example, if you are a hotelier, decorate with authentic native appointments. While your visitors have a good idea of what they want to see and do, you might enrich their experience with suggestions for tours or dinners that are out of the ordinary, and serviced by accommodating natives. Offer an afternoon gourmet picnic carried by llamas to a breathtaking little known vista!
2. They have researched and know the area's offerings. They have selected your destination for the new and enriching experiences there. Offer assistance in accessing these experiences, realizing the guests are ready and eager. You may also give advice about lesser known experiences privy largely to locals.
3. Your destination cannot be chosen if it is unknown. To plan the trip, visitors must be able to find information. Focus your marketing efforts on placing organic (less commercialized) messages where they can be "discovered" by a high socioeconomic group. Advertise and seek editorial placements in travel magazines. Invest in good photography, copywriting and design for marketing materials. Reference long range benefits such as "memories for a lifetime." Hire a talented graphics team who can visually and verbally create a new and enriching fantasy for potential customers!

However, if your destination seems to appeal more to present oriented visitors, secondary research offers clues for you, as well. Be overt with your advertising. Offer deals. As present oriented individuals are more impulsive buyers with limited search strategies, this suggests the need to advertise in popular media with deals and promotions.

Also, you would likely need to command a high share of voice compared to competitors and work closely with travel agents who can finalize and simplify the planning process. Also invest in search engine marketing, with the goal of being on the top half of the first page of search results. Marketing should offer immediate benefits with short term pricing such as “offer ends” at a near-term date. Visually incorporate relaxing visuals among your offerings. Be prepared for visitors’ information needs and questions when they arrive. In summary, secondary research suggests that temporal orientation may have application to the tourism industry. Using the examples and suggestions above, other industries may be able to extrapolate strategies, as well. However, before being applied widely by any industry, further research is needed to test and verify concepts.

4. Future Research

Different models should be developed and tested to see if destinations can define their temporal market segment with confidence. Differing advertising messages should be developed and tested to see if assumptions about messages presented previously are valid for tourism. Media strategies should be tested to see if the medium carrying the message (i.e., publicity versus advertising) matters significantly depending on temporal orientation. Information search strategies should be tested; for example, is there a difference in how far in advance different orientations plan a trip, and are different information sources used? Research to date seems to indicate that temporal orientation may have a role to play in marketing efforts. Clearly, however, more research should be conducted to add to the value and validity of this concept to tourism and other marketers.

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