

## Academic Papers

# Hidden messages: A polysemic reading of tourist brochures

Johan R. Edelheim

*Received (in revised form) June 2006*

*Anonymously refereed paper*

Southern Cross University, School of Tourism & Hospitality Management, Hogbin Drive, Coffs Harbour NSW 2450, Australia

Tel: + 61 (02) 6659 3615; E-mail: jedelhei@scu.edu.au

**Johan R. Edelheim** worked before academia in the hotel industry in Finland, Sweden, Germany, Spain and USA. While finishing his MBA studies in 2002, Johan grew discontent with management theory. He is therefore now a PhD candidate in Cultural Studies at Macquarie University; his thesis is evaluating phenomenological experiences of tourist attractions.

### ABSTRACT

**KEYWORDS:** *content analysis, polysemy, semiotics, tourist brochures*

It is self-evident that tourist brochures are selling a positive and attractive destination to travellers; what is not as clear are the hidden messages conveyed by the selection of certain pictures in the brochures produced. By coding each picture appearing in a series of tourist brochures according to their content this research aims at showing how the brochures are overtly aimed at different groups of travellers, while they simultaneously are reinforcing certain hegemonic views of society. The suggestion that hegemonic messages appear is not an accusation against the producers of the brochures of covert propaganda, but rather that taken-for-granted views of society as unproblematic truths portrayed in the brochures is not correct –

the brochures should rather be viewed as highly sensitive polysemic constructs.

### INTRODUCTION

Tourist brochures are produced to induce travellers to choose one destination over another, or to choose one particular travel. In order to create a selling proposition, each brochure producer is thus aiming at highlighting positive images that their selected target market can connect with and that their target market might expect to find in a brochure focused on a specific destination. Whilst an overt reading of tourist brochures from a singular marketing frame of mind proves exactly this point, a polysemic reading of the same brochure might expose something completely different.

Polysemy is the intentional opening up of meaning in a text; it aims at highlighting the multitude of different interpretations that any text can contain, depending on the reader's point of view. In order to show what sorts of ideas, values and meaning systems the national airline carrier Qantas might be reinforcing through their travel brochures, a content analysis has been carried out of each of the company's domestic brochures produced for the 2004–5 travel season.



Journal of Vacation Marketing  
Vol. 13 No. 1, 2007, pp. 5–17  
© SAGE Publications  
London, Thousand Oaks, CA,  
and New Delhi.  
www.sagepublications.com  
DOI: 10.1177/1356766706071202

The initial part of the article will focus on textual analysis and show why polysemy is an important concept to take into consideration when producing tourist marketing material. This will be followed by a presentation of research that aims to highlight how brochures have been viewed in earlier studies, and how this article simultaneously builds on and extends the findings from those studies.

The latter section of the article is concerned with the methodology and the sample utilized in the research, as well as the results from the examination of the brochures. The aim of this section is firstly to point out what measures have been taken to reach an unbiased conclusion. Secondly, it aims to show how travel destination managers – in a simple way – can analyse their own promotional vehicles to find out unintended biases, stereotypes and hegemonic messages. A quantitative coding of each picture included in Qantas 2004–5 domestic brochures will highlight both the overt messages that the travel promoter presumably wants the readers to experience, but also the covert messages that a presumably unconscious selection of pictures have led to.

### TOURIST BROCHURES FORGING DOMINANT MESSAGES

Tourism practice – as well as tourism theory – are generally connected to business interests and are therefore usually linked to business studies rather than to other academic fields of study. This has potentially dangerous outcomes, as tourism – assumed to be Australia's second largest industry in economic terms after mining<sup>1</sup> – has a substantial impact on how tourists view the nation, but also on how the people inhabiting the nation view themselves.<sup>2</sup> The danger lies in the sense that business enterprises, in general, are less interested in promoting an objective picture of society, and more interested in commercial viability. Morgan and Pritchard correctly point out that promotional messages are created by individuals from specific social settings, in which specific overt and covert beliefs and attitudes towards other

social entities are held. The messages these individuals create function as mirrors of their views of society, which often 'reinforce ideas, values and meaning systems at the expense of alternative ways of seeing the world' (p. 5).<sup>3</sup>

Marketing professionals might quite correctly point at the philosophies put forward by John Stuart Mill<sup>4</sup> in regards to all consumers' *free will* to determine for themselves positions in regards to marketing messages. They may say, and often do say, that they are not constructing a new reality in their marketing messages, they are only serving society an image that already exists, and consumers can accept or reject those messages depending on their own preferences.<sup>5</sup> It is, however, claimed that

[t]he images projected on brochures, billboards and television reveal the relationships between countries, between the genders and between races and cultures. They are powerful images which reinforce particular ways of seeing the world and can restrict and channel people, countries, genders and sexes into certain mind-sets.<sup>6</sup> (p. 6)

Place marketing can even have as its aim the silencing of diversity in order to present a 'safe' destination to visitors.<sup>7</sup>

If only a specific view of a nation is presented to travellers purchasing holidays to domestic destinations, and alternative views – while existing, but not visible – are closed out, then it can be reasonably argued that those brochures are tools constructing an overriding understanding of society. Or, as Giddens<sup>8</sup> reminds us, that

class division and other fundamental lines of inequality, such as connected with gender or ethnicity, can be partly *defined* in terms of differential access to forms of self-actualization and empowerment. . . Modernity, one should not forget, produces *difference, exclusion and marginalisation*'. (p. 6, italics in original)

So, if tourism can be seen as the major nominator for modernity as for example MacCannell<sup>9</sup> claims, then possibly the exclu-

sion and marginalization of other than the dominant groups should be seen as self-evident?

### TEXT, POLYSEMY AND HEGEMONY

'Text' is used in this article with a broad definition: text can be seen as 'anything that generates meaning through signifying practices' (p. 393).<sup>10</sup> It is common in Cultural Studies to talk about text as an analytical entity that contains different media; 'text', 'reading' and 'writing' are therefore used as combining concepts in this article when analysing the production and interpretation of pictures in the studied tourist brochures. Although a text – in its broader definition – can be read and understood in a specific way, it must always be remembered that the signs of it 'perform double duty in social interaction – both denoting and connoting – their interpretation is filled with ambiguity' (p. 9).<sup>11</sup> While each reader of a text, and each interpreter of a sign, have a specific understanding of the text depending on their own social experiences, Gottdiener<sup>12</sup> reminds us that the discourse interpreted by the reader might have been 'unintended by its producer, who may have come from another social context. For these reasons, the meanings attached to signs are always polysemic, that is, there are always several equally valid ways of interpreting any sign' (p. 10). This follows the 'post-modern cultural framework' outlined in an analysis of images in tourist brochures forming the perceptions held by backpacker tourists in Australia.<sup>13</sup> All interpretive work should thus be read as suggestions of meaning rather than verified 'truths'.

O'Barr<sup>14</sup> clarifies that all interpretation involves three parties: the author, the audience, and the critical interpreter. This 'interpretive triangle... is the base on which meaning is generated. Understanding how advertisements mean what they do requires attention to all three' (p. 7). The author has one meaning in mind when authoring the text; the audience might have the same understanding when they read the text – or an alternative one, and the critical interpreter is finally only suggesting an own view of the

meaning. The free will that all consumers have to interpret marketing messages as they themselves wish is often pointed out by marketing professionals. This view is backed up by Berger,<sup>15</sup> who quotes Todorov, saying: 'Every work is rewritten by its reader who imposes upon it a new grid of interpretation for which he is not generally responsible but which comes to him from his culture, from his time' (p. 14). Barker<sup>16</sup> similarly reminds us that the meanings of all texts are produced by active audiences in an 'interplay between text and reader so that the moment of consumption is also a moment of meaningful production' (p. 11).

The notion of hegemony comes from political sciences where it was introduced by Gramsci to describe the way certain understandings in society come to be regarded as natural and self-evident. Gramsci suggested that individuals and groups in power – such as politicians, owners of industrial enterprises, the media, and so forth – had an influence over the way individuals in society at large came to perceive their daily reality. Rather than being a forceful subjugation of minority opinions, it could be understood as an embedded consensus of views. Hegemony is never stable as it should be 'understood as a fluid and temporary series of alliances, [which] needs to be constantly rewon and renegotiated. The creation and dissolution of cultural hegemony is an ongoing process and culture a terrain of continuous struggle over meaning' (p. 351).<sup>17</sup> Thus, when this article suggests that certain hegemonic views are reinforced through brochure messages, it refers to the suggestion that hidden messages – that are taken for granted in a certain environment – may in reality be propagating for a majority consensus view that is suppressing alternative viewpoints.

The brochures chosen to be analysed in this article are mainly aimed at an Australian audience: they present destinations in Australia, are produced in Australia, written in English, and all prices are quoted in Australian dollars. Qantas specifies in the contractual 'fine print' at the end of each brochure that all descriptions of products are provided by hotels and suppliers. Additionally '[m]any

images are supplied courtesy of tourist bureaux, hotels and tour operators' (p. 43).<sup>18</sup> What this means is that there is a range of authors of all the messages in the brochures, each with potentially different intentions for their texts. This article, however, analyses the texts in the brochures as whole entities, because the conscious juxtaposition of different texts has created a 'text' that has its own logic. This resembles the way museum collections are viewed from the 'new museology' perspective, in which the display and explanation of a range of separate objects tells the audience more of how the exhibition curators think about the world than about the objects displayed.<sup>19</sup>

### ANALYSIS OF TOURIST BROCHURES IN THE LITERATURE

Several researchers have analysed texts consumed by tourists before journeys and the impact those have had on the tourists' experiences.<sup>20-4</sup> For example, Urbain<sup>25</sup> examines travel advertising from a structural perspective. He claims that a basic bipolar structure including 'escapade and discovery, escape and quest' (p. 114) exists in tourism advertising, and that this structure functions as a blueprint that tourists are trying to live up to in their travels. Urry<sup>26</sup> comments that,

[p]laces are chosen to be gazed upon because there is anticipation... of intense pleasures... Such anticipation is constructed and sustained through a variety of non-tourist practices, such as film, TV, literature, magazines, records and videos, which construct and reinforce that gaze. (p. 3)

Kaur and Hutnyk<sup>27</sup> take on travel writing from a non-western perspective and 'signal the need' for travel records to be rewritten as they present the current status as being framed within a hegemonic Eurocentric emphasis, be it then academic or in the popular media. Crick<sup>28</sup> is equally critical in his analysis of tourist discourse, pointing out that it is in most cases a one-eyed process made by the powerful tourist generator, in which

destinations have little, if any, say in how they are portrayed.

Different authors, in this journal and elsewhere, have studied travel marketing by analysing tourist brochures from different perspectives, each highlighting how segmentation of the market constructs a narrow frame, which neglects certain groups of society, regardless if they would be profitable customers or not. Examples of this include the prevailing age-discrimination found in tourist brochures, which repeatedly focus on young to middle-aged travellers whilst neglecting senior travellers in the pictures employed.<sup>29-30</sup> Other examples highlight the often male-dominated heterosexual-framework that brochures confine themselves to;<sup>31-6</sup> the promotion linked to nation building;<sup>37-42</sup> and the dominant Caucasian perspective that is found in tourist brochures.<sup>43-7</sup>

Not only written text has been analysed in terms of the messages communicated. Pictures and films are equally filled with narratives that shape tourists' perceptions. Albers and James did a thorough investigation of pictures on postcards depicting ethnic minorities in America. They outlined a methodology for how photographs can be used to investigate tourist practice as well as stereotypes born through recurring themes in travel photography. 'Tourism adopts, shapes, and distorts popular ethnic imagery to its own ends. It does so, however, in a way that is consistent with some broader historical understanding, even if this is ultimately false' (p. 143).<sup>49</sup> The methodologies Albers and James used were content analysis and semiotics, building in the latter case on the pictures' contextualizations in narratives, which is closely connected to the manner in which this article has analysed tourist brochures. Additional guidelines have been taken from Leiss et al.'s<sup>50</sup> seminal text which utilizes a combination of content analysis and semiotics to study advertisements.

### METHODOLOGY

This research follows mainly the methodology outlined by Jenkins<sup>51</sup> in her analysis of

tourist brochures aimed at backpacker travellers from Canada to Australia. Jenkins clarifies that '[c]ontent analysis, as a methodological technique for analysing photographs, is concerned primarily with describing quantitatively the content or appearances of a group of photographs' (p. 312). This is done through coding the pictures based on their content in different categories, as explained at a later stage in the statistical part of this article. In order to counteract the potential bias that a simplistic codification of pictures into a content analysis framework could have, it is acknowledged that each picture can be viewed as a polysemic construct with multiple meanings.<sup>52</sup> Each of these alternative meanings can then be used to question, or to confirm, the dominant message presented.<sup>53</sup> The second methodology used is thus analysing how the pictures represent what they are aimed to symbolize through a semiotic description. Jenkins<sup>54</sup> states that '[s]emiotic analyses investigate the content and composition of photographs and how these combine to communicate through signs and symbols various messages about the places they depict' (p. 314). The semiotic analysis traces its roots back to Barthes<sup>55</sup> who introduced the concept of everyday 'myths' – pictures as social constructs that denoted an everyday situation, but through their connotation became powerful symbols for the dominating discourse. Hackley<sup>56</sup> claims that meaning should be understood as cultural constructions and continues:

Signs are 'read' and their meaning interpreted in terms of cultural codes which we have to learn in order to make sense of the signs around us... Consequently, imposing authorial meaning on the interpretation of a text is a delicate balance and a complex achievement. Advertising agencies that understand this know that they must take great care to isolate the right groups of consumers and to understand them as an "interpretive community." (p. 166; p. 170)

For a more thorough description of the

methodology used refer to Jenkins<sup>57</sup> and Dann<sup>58</sup>.

Travel advertising is always playing up extraordinary features of destinations; this is justified by the claim that it is what travellers seek. However, what O'Barr<sup>59</sup> asks is if the features that travellers seek exist before or after the commercial, and continues by claiming that advertising functions as 'social tableaux' – in other words, templates for how to behave and what to expect in the social environment. Cohen<sup>60</sup> divides the analysis of touristic pictures into two categories: '[a]n extrinsic direction, which focuses upon the relationship between an image and "reality"... and '[a]n intrinsic direction, which focuses upon such imminent characteristics of the image itself as style, motifs, content, structure and, especially, messages encoded in the image' (p. 38). This article claims that brochure producers are presumably only focusing their attention on the first – extrinsic – dimension in order to present a positive, and reasonably correct, image of a destination. While they are doing that they are forgetting the second – intrinsic – dimension, and thereby admit into the brochures unconscious hidden messages that inform readers of how the authors identify with society. Cohen warns, however, that a less rigorously conducted content analysis coding might lead to highly biased results if only certain data are coded and reported on. The categories for coding the pictures were based on earlier researchers analysing travel promotional material: messages in brochures aimed at British package tourists,<sup>61</sup> brochures analysing Tamworth's country image,<sup>62</sup> the male gaze,<sup>63</sup> the ethnicity of family mothers portrayed in Australian media advertising,<sup>64</sup> and the previously mentioned research<sup>65</sup> focusing on Canadian backpacking tourists' reading of Australian travel brochures.

Each picture from the brochures was numbered and databases were created recording the content of them. The statistics software program SPSS (11.0) was utilized for this purpose, each brochure being an own entity so that extrinsic messages for different destinations could be recorded, but

also a total database for all brochures combined was created. The items recorded in the database were:

- number of people in the picture – none, one, two or three and more;
- whether the people portrayed were tourists, locals or a mixture of both;
- sex of the people in the picture – male, female, or if the picture includes both;
- ethnicity of the people in the picture – blond-haired Caucasian, dark-haired Caucasian, Indigenous Australian, Asian, other, or any mixture thereof;
- whether the people in the pictures were active, passive, or a combination of both;
- if the people in the pictures were facing towards the camera or away from it;
- the age of the people pictured – below 20, between 20 and 40, over 40, or any combination of the aforementioned;
- if the pictures were taken indoors or outdoors; and, the landscape the pictures portrayed – accommodation, attraction, nature, urban setting, transport or wild-life.

The coding of the pictures was done by a research assistant who was briefed on the type of categories the researcher was aiming for, but the research hypothesis was not presented to the assistant at the recording stage. The researcher of this article is a Caucasian male, originally from Northern Europe, though not from an English speaking background. He had been living in Australia for six years when this article was written. The research assistant is a female of Asian ethnicity who was also living in Australia when the article was written, but who came originally from a South-East Asian country. While both parties of the research team built on different social assumptions in the coding process, and possibly neither built on the same assumptions as did the authors of the brochures, a neutral view was at all stages attempted. It was acknowledged that a certain subjectivity was always possible in the coding process, and the research assistant was therefore guided to point out pictures with a possibly ambiguous message. A discussion about those pictures followed in which a

consensus, based on criteria set beforehand, was reached before entry of the data into the database took place. This is in line with suggestions, given in earlier studies, of how to reduce biases in coding exercises.<sup>66</sup> It is, however, acknowledged that research is always written from a point of view, and that a totally unbiased research is more a theoretical claim than a practical reality.<sup>67</sup>

## SAMPLE

Twelve brochures produced by Qantas for the 2004–5 season of domestic destinations were collected from local travel agents, together with competing travel wholesalers' brochures from the same areas. This research will focus only on Qantas' brochures, while forthcoming articles – which will help to confirm findings from this article – will compare the messages from Qantas' brochures with the messages from competitors. It should, however, be noted already here that Qantas is generally presenting a more diverse and less stereotyped picture of Australia than do some of the other travel wholesalers. The destinations Qantas produced brochures for in the 2004–5 season were, in alphabetical order: Adelaide; Broome; Gold Coast; Melbourne; Norfolk Island; Northern Territory; Perth; Queensland Islands and The Whitsundays; Sunshine Coast and Brisbane; Sydney; Tasmania; and Tropical North Queensland. A two-page leaflet called *Top End Touring*, also produced by Qantas for the 2004–5 season, was not included, as the different format from the other brochures would have skewed the percentages in the results. However, the pictures included in the leaflet that were not included did not differ in any way from the pictures of the included brochures. There were a total of 1801 pictures in the 12 brochures; 510 of these pictures (28.3 per cent) portrayed people, while the rest were images of landscapes, buildings, or modes of transport. The most common setting for the pictures was pictures of accommodation alternatives making up approximately two-thirds of the total count of pictures, followed by nature and attraction pictures making up

a combined fourth of all pictures. Of the pictures containing people, 79 per cent portrayed only tourists, 11 per cent tourists and locals, and 10 per cent only locals. These initial statistics are hardly exciting, but it is the finer categorization that makes the underlying messages interesting.

## RESULTS

This section will be divided into two parts based on the division of tourist pictures' extrinsic or intrinsic direction.<sup>68</sup> The first analysis will focus on the extrinsic dimension, namely the messages that the brochures are overtly trying to create. These messages are beneficial to highlight, in order to show the validity of the coding exercise overall. The second analysis is a polysemic reading of the same brochures by studying the intrinsic messages that the brochures contain. Owen<sup>69</sup> cites McKerrow in reminding that 'a polysemic reading "uncovers a subordinate or secondary reading which contains the seeds of subversion or rejection of authority, at the same time that the primary reading appears to confirm the power of the dominant cultural norms"' (p. 213). Marginal groups are either assumed not to consume the same messages, or, an even more scary thought, that the marginal groups might be assumed to consume the same messages, but are presumed to view them as social tableaux, as norms to assimilate into.<sup>70</sup>

### Extrinsic messages

In order to determine the extrinsic messages portrayed, each of the categories recorded was calculated and a comparison between the individual brochures was undertaken. This section will shortly describe what the average percentages for the different categories were in all brochures, and then point out high and low scores from different brochures and briefly draw conclusions from those results.

Of all the pictures, 28.3 per cent portrayed people in different settings; the brochures with most people pictured were Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast – both popular 'mass-

tourism' destinations where people and crowds are expected and so the lack of people in the pictures would seem unnatural as travellers choose those destinations to enjoy a collective gaze.<sup>71</sup> Least people in the pictures were found in the Norfolk Island brochure. A division of the pictures portraying people into singles, couples, or three and more, shows that the brochures for Tasmania and Broome have the most single people; Queensland Islands and again Tasmania have the most couples; and Norfolk Island and Adelaide have the most pictures of three or more people. The significance of this is that travel brochures naturally are aimed at different segments and that single travellers can be assumed to seek solitude in natural environments, couples to be pampered in luxurious settings, and groups of people to congregate in urban settings.

A majority of pictures, almost 80 per cent with people in, portrayed only tourists and no locals, with most pictures of tourists being found in the Queensland Islands brochure where they made up almost 90 per cent of all pictures. This is similar to findings from other researches of brochures where it is explained that tourists want to view tourists in order to identify with the people in the brochures; pictures of locals and staff are only added to give the pictures on the one hand an aura of ethnic authenticity and, on the other, a feeling of safety.<sup>72</sup> Two-thirds of all pictures portrayed tourists as passive, with the assumption that people want to get away from too much activity and relax on their holidays. The only two brochures where people were approximately as active as passive in the pictures were the brochures from Northern Territory and Tasmania, two destinations known for their 'nature' and for attracting travellers to explore the surroundings. All city brochures were predominantly filled with passive people, for example sitting and enjoying food and beverages at street restaurants or pictured in their hotel rooms. Similar to this, two-thirds of all the pictures in Qantas brochures were taken outdoors, with the exception of Sydney and Melbourne where more than half the pictures were taken indoors. This can be explained

by the fact that larger cities are not necessarily attracting tourists by their sights, but rather by their assumed urban experiences, and indoor environments – such as accommodation alternatives – are therefore more important to portray than cityscapes. As a contrast, three-quarters of the pictures in the brochures from Tasmania, Broome and Northern Territory were taken outdoors.

### Intrinsic messages

The hidden – intrinsic – messages that also exist in the same brochures might, at times, be conscious on behalf of the brochure authors, as they might believe that they are communicating with a market segment that thinks in a similar manner to themselves. However, some of the messages might not be as conscious and are thus interesting as they highlight what a portion of the Australian society considers normal and not ‘conspiratorial’.<sup>73</sup>

### Ethnicity

Firstly, by looking at ethnicity of the people portrayed one would assume that the national carrier Qantas would like to target a broad spectrum of the country’s middle- to upper-class population. Statistics show for example that ‘23.6%... [a]lmost one in four of Australia’s 2000 population was an immigrant’<sup>74</sup> (pp. 10–11), but in reality only 34 pictures – which is about two per cent of all pictures, or about seven per cent of all pictures with people in – pictured a person or persons that would not fit the description of being ‘Anglo-Australian’. This can naturally be explained by pointing out that many newly arrived immigrants fit the description of ‘Anglo-Australians’ – as does the author of this article – while in reality not being that. However, those seven per cent of the pictures also include pictures of indigenous Australians, thus the proportion of pictures chosen is even more skewed than the reality would suggest. Similar results have been found in studies of Australian television advertisements, and questions regarding ‘the relationship between “social reality” and the

iconic practices of advertising’<sup>75</sup> (p. 74) have been raised. The blunt reply that a researcher received from an advertiser when asking about the skewed message was that ‘it is not that Australian women and families are “like that”... but that “everyone wants to be like that”’<sup>76</sup> (p. 74). By adding to this analysis an interpretation of the role the non-‘Anglo-Australian’ people were playing in the pictures, it can be established that only ten pictures, less than two per cent, showed non-‘Anglo-Australian’ tourists. Seventy per cent of all people of Asian ethnicity were, for example, portrayed as Qantas air hostesses, and people of Middle-Eastern ethnicity were pictured as hotel room maids and chauffeurs. The indigenous Australians pictured are even further stereotyped as there are no identifiable pictures of indigenous holiday makers; in all the pictures portraying indigenous people those people in different roles of serving the tourists as some kinds of performers – with body paint – in a majority of the pictures. The category named ‘Other ethnicities’ had 12 representatives, which is 2.4% of all pictures of people; all of these were people of Middle-Eastern origin. No pictures in the brochures portrayed people that could be distinguished as being of Pacific Islander, South-East Asian, South Asian, African origin or any other ethnic group, even though sizeable minorities exist from most of the aforementioned groups in current Australian society. Earlier studies have in a similar fashion found that ‘Non-Anglo Australian are often portrayed as marginal to the fundamental unit of the family. They are usually subservient (e.g. cooks, waiters, grocers);... or a representation of our desire for something dangerous or unknown’<sup>77</sup> (pp. 75–6). An explanation put forward claims that producers of advertising messages are ‘pitching to the mass’ and thus ‘pitch to the norm’; this is an adaptation strategy aimed at appealing to a ‘value consensus’<sup>78</sup> (p. 277). Based on that, it is interesting to note that two-thirds of all people portrayed in the brochures were blond Caucasians, followed by 14 per cent dark-haired Caucasians, and 13 per cent blond and dark-haired Caucasians. It must be stated that regardless how

much a travel promoter claims to portray what travellers want to consume, it can be questioned if the selection of ethnic belonging can be explained as representative of the market place – is it actually ‘pitching to the norm’? It rather sends a message that truly Australian holidays are arranged for blond Caucasian Australians, and people of other ethnic belonging only serve these needs.

### Sex

A second categorization of all the pictures of people, which was based on sex, shows that 68 per cent of all single-people images are of women. Most images of single women are found in the Tropical North Queensland and Broome brochures, while most single men are found in the brochures for Tasmania and Northern Territory. The majority of these single women are pictured indoors (63 per cent), usually laying on a hotel bed, while only 19 per cent of single men are pictured indoors. Of all single men in the pictures 65 per cent are active, compared with only 17 per cent of all single women being active. A majority of the pictures portraying single men are placed in active leisure pursuits, such as surfing, bushwalking or fishing. Women are more commonly pictured in the hotel room, by the pool or in domestic tasks. These results are similar to an analysis of brochures from countryside Australia.<sup>79</sup> Other researchers<sup>80</sup> point out that ‘[c]ommercials present condensed typifications of gender relations, with men typically shown as active and dominant, and women shown as passive and dependent’ (p. 187). The conclusion that can be drawn from this is a typical sex-stereotype: men are depicted as conquerors taming the wild nature like the ‘pioneer myth’ asserts,<sup>81</sup> while women are domestic objects for a male gaze.<sup>82</sup>

There is a semiotic relevance in the way people in pictures are facing – either towards or away from the camera. When facing the camera the textual intention is to absorb the people into the context so that they become a part of the environment, objects amongst other objects. However, when people face away from the camera, they seem to replace

the reader in the context with the message, ‘If you were here, you would see that view or enjoy this activity’<sup>83</sup> (p. 49). It is thus interesting to note that the majority of all people portrayed are facing away from the camera; men to an even larger degree so – only one in ten facing the camera – than women, who in almost a quarter of the pictures are facing the camera.

Following on this categorization it was found that in 83 per cent of the pictures portraying two people those were of different sex; only ten per cent of the pictures were of two women and only seven per cent were of two men. Further to that it can be noted that the majority of couples of the same sex pictured were from different generations, in other words, pictures of mothers and daughters or fathers and sons. It can therefore be claimed that Qantas, in their general marketing brochures, is only selling holidays to heterosexual people. Or, if that suggestion is too controversial, it is at least evident that it is a heterosexual Australia that Qantas wants to portray in general terms, as the company does have special brochures made for the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras carnival.

### Age

Finally, by analysing the age construct of people pictured in Qantas holiday brochures, one can reach an understanding of the type of demographic segments the brochure is aimed at. In the total of all pictures with people portrayed, 70 per cent were in the age bracket 20–40 years. The second largest category – making up eleven per cent – were pictures of people who were under 20 and between 20–40. In third place, with ten per cent of the total, were people aged 40 and over. These results are interesting at several levels. Firstly the brochures are clearly aimed at middle-aged consumers, or possibly produced by middle-aged people who want to portray people in their own age category. Secondly, families with children are not the producers’ main target market; it is perhaps assumed that families are more price-conscious and thus not choosing to holiday

by air travel. Finally the mature market is seen as even smaller than the family market, even though social trends in Australia are clearly pointing at a constantly ageing population with a higher degree of spending power. While the country already now has over 13 per cent of the population over 65 years of age, certain councils, such as Port Macquarie and Tweed shire, have over a quarter of their populations over 65 years of age. The only individual brochure that had a third of the pictures portraying mature travellers was Tasmania, while Queensland Islands and The Sunshine Coast had around three per cent, followed by the Gold Coast and Broome with about five per cent of the pictures of a mature market. Added to the discussion of this potential age discrimination in terms of pictures chosen, it should also be noted that not one picture in any of the 12 brochures portrayed people with any type of visual signs of disabilities. Although the accommodation providers in the brochures have indicated if there are facilities suited for people with disabilities, the invisibility of disabilities tends to further highlight the hegemonic norm these brochures are focusing on.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article highlights that no reading of a text is final; each analysis is only a suggested reading, with a multitude of alternatives still existing. It briefly presents research conducted earlier in which travel brochures and advertising have been the issues of discussion. The latter section of the paper presents two sets of analyses of Qantas Holidays brochures. Firstly, an extrinsic analysis of what the overt messages of the brochures are, and thus are overtly selling. Secondly, a polysemic or intrinsic analysis points out the alternative hidden messages that the brochures also contain.

An earlier research<sup>84</sup> has concluded that '[n]onstereotypical media depictions... have the potential for providing cognitive maps, visual models, and linguistic resources for resisting or creating new patterns of gender relations' (p. 188). If the travel trade and

marketing managers want to follow on from these findings, the following suggestions are made:

- Instead of simply 'reading' the extrinsic messages that the different promotional texts produced are highlighting, a larger emphasis should be placed on potential intrinsic messages.
- If advertising indeed acts as social tableaux as O'Barr<sup>85</sup> claims, then a multicultural society such as Australia could be 'taught' to enjoy all parts of the country by including multi-ethnic pictures in the brochures.
- Instead of always keeping to set stereotypes of, for example, indigenous Australians, more pictures could be supplied in which the same group is portrayed as tourists, which undoubtedly already happens to some extent in the reality.
- By introducing more mature-aged people and people with disabilities into the pictures chosen, both of these currently marginalized groups would become more visible and thus more part of society's 'norm'.
- Finally, to overcome the still prevailing male-chauvinistic attitudes in society, a larger emphasis should be placed on pictures in which male and female travellers are performing similar activities, not simply conforming to and confirming the Australian 'pioneer myth'.<sup>86</sup>
- More pictures of couples of the same sex would also promote a more inclusive view of society compared with the current heteronormativity portrayed.<sup>87</sup>

As a conclusion it can be said that tourism needs to be regarded from more dimensions – in both education of future tourism professionals and in current-day tourism management circles – than simply economic or managerial. The socio-political and cultural messages that are otherwise created do nothing to improve the life of marginalized groups in society. It should also be pointed out that whilst this article aims at presenting one reading of a set of brochures, replications of this study should be made in order to

confirm the trends and suggestions made here.

## REFERENCES

- (1) Hall, C. M. (2003) *Introduction to Tourism – Dimensions and Issues*. 4th edn. Frenchs Forest: Pearson Education.
- (2) Judd, D. R. and Fainstein, S. S. (1999) *The Tourist City*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- (3) Morgan, N. J. and Pritchard, A. (1998) *Tourism Promotion and Power: Creating Images, Creating Identities*. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- (4) Martin, R. M. (2002) *The Philosopher's Dictionary*. 3rd edn. Peterborough: Broadview.
- (5) O'Barr, W. M. (1994) *Culture and the Ad: Exploring Otherness in the World of Ads*. 1st edn. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
- (6) Morgan and Pritchard, ref. 3 above.
- (7) Gibson, C. and Davidson, D. (2004) 'Tamworth, Australia's 'Country Music Capital': Place Marketing, Rurality, and Resident Reactions', *Journal of Rural Studies* 20: 387–404.
- (8) Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity, Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- (9) MacCannell, D. (1999) *The Tourist – A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. 3rd edn. Berkley, CA and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- (10) Barker, C. (2000) *Cultural Studies – Theory and Practice*. London: Sage Publications.
- (11) Gottdiener, M. (2001) *The Theming of America – American Dreams, Media Fan*. 2nd edn. Colorado: Westview Press.
- (12) Gottdiener, ref. 11 above.
- (13) Jenkins, O. H. (2003) 'Photography and Travel Brochures: The Circle of Representation', *Tourism Geographies* 5(3): 305–28.
- (14) O'Barr, ref. 5 above.
- (15) Berger, A. A. (1997). *Narratives in Popular Culture, Media, and Everyday Life*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- (16) Barker, ref. 10 above.
- (17) Barker, ref. 10 above.
- (18) Qantas (2004) *Northern Territory 2004/5*. Mascot NSW: Qantas Holidays Limited.
- (19) Kirchenblatt-Gimblett, B. (1998) *Destination Culture – Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. Berkley, CA and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- (20) Gruffudd, P., Herbert, D. T. and Piccini, A. (2000) 'In Search of Wales: Travel Writing and Narratives of Difference, 1918–50', *Journal of Historical Geography* 26(4): 589–604.
- (21) Urbain, J.-D. (1989) 'The Tourist Adventure and his Images', *Annals of Tourism Research* 16(1): 106–18.
- (22) Johnson, D. E. (1995) '“Writing in the Dark”: The Political Fictions of American Travel Writing', *American Literary History* 7(1): 1–27.
- (23) Dann, G. (1999) 'Writing out the Tourist in Space and Time', *Annals of Tourism Research* 26(1): 159–87.
- (24) Kaur, R. and Hutnyk, J. (eds) (1999) *Travel Worlds – News in Contemporary Cultural Politics*. London and New York: Zeo Books.
- (25) Urbain, ref. 21 above.
- (26) Urry, J. (1990) *The Tourist Gaze*. London: Sage Publications.
- (27) Kaur and Hutnyk, ref. 24 above.
- (28) Crick, M. (1989) 'Representations of International Tourism in the Social Sciences: Sun, Sex, Sights, Savings and Servility', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18: 307–44.
- (29) Pritchard, A. and Morgan, N. J. (1997) 'Marketing Practice and Opportunities in the Tour Operators' Senior Travel Market: Beyond Bowling and Ballroom Dancing', *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 3(2): 153–63.
- (30) Peterson, R. and McQuitty, S. (2001) 'The Depiction of Seniors in Hotel and Motel Television Commercials', *Journal of Hospitality and Leisure Marketing* 8(3/4): 37–50.
- (31) Pritchard, A. and Morgan, N. J. (2000) 'Privileging the Male Gaze – Gendered Tourism Landscapes', *Annals of Tourism Research* 27(4): 884–905.
- (32) Pritchard, A. and Morgan, N. J. (1996) 'Sex Still Sells to Generation X: Promoting Practice and the Youth Package Holiday Market', *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 3(1): 69–80.
- (33) Edensor, T. and Kothari, U. (1994) 'The Masculinisation of Stirling's Heritage', in V. Kinnaird and D. Hall (eds) *Tourism: A Gender Analysis*, pp. 164–87. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- (34) Kinnaird, V., Kothari, U. and Hall, D. (1994) 'Tourism: Gender Perspectives', in V. Kinnaird and D. Hall (eds) *Tourism: A Gender Analysis*, pp. 1–34. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

- (35) Aitchison, C., MacLeod, N. E. and Shaw, S. J. (2000) 'Leisure and Tourism Landscapes Social and Cultural Geographies', in B. Goodall & G. Ashworth (eds) *Routledge Advances in Tourism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- (36) Hughes, H. L. (2002) 'Marketing Gay Tourism in Manchester: New Market for Urban Tourism or Destruction of "Gay Space"?'', *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 9(2): 152–63.
- (37) Pritchard and Morgan, ref. 31 above.
- (38) Henderson, J. C. (2003) 'Tourism Promotion and Identity in Malaysia', *Tourism, Culture & Communication* 4: 71–81.
- (39) Hopkins, J. (1998) 'Signs of the Post-Rural: Marketing Myths of a Symbolic Countryside', *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 80(2): 65–82.
- (40) Pritchard, A. & Morgan, N. J. (1995). 'Evaluating Destination Brochure Images: The Case of Local Authorities in Wales', *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 2(1): 23–38.
- (41) Murphy, P., Pritchard, M. P. and Smith, B. (2000) 'The Destination Product and its Impacts on Travellers Perceptions', *Tourism Management* 21(1): 43–52.
- (42) Santos, J. (1998) 'The Role of Tour Operators' Promotional Material in the Formation of Destination Image and Consumer Expectations: The Case of the People's Republic of China', *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 4(3): pp. 282–97.
- (43) O'Barr, ref. 5 above.
- (44) Gibson and Davidson, ref. 7 above.
- (45) Teye, V. and LeClerc, D. (2003) 'The White Caucasian and Ethnic Minority Cruise Markets: Some Motivational Perspectives', *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 9(3): 227–42.
- (46) Ateljevic, I. and Doorne, S. (2002) 'Representing New Zealand: Tourism Imagery and Ideology', *Annals of Tourism Research* 29(3): 648–67.
- (47) Hanefors, M. and Larsson, L. (1993) 'Video Strategies Used by Tour Operators: What is Really Communicated?', *Tourism Management* 14(1): 27–33.
- (48) Albers, P. C. and James, W. R. (1988) 'Travel Photography – A Methodological Approach', *Annals of Tourism Research* 15(1): 134–58.
- (49) Albers and James, ref. 48 above.
- (50) Leiss, W., Kline, S. and Jhally, S. (1990) *Social Communication in Advertising*. 2nd edn. Ontario: Nelson Canada.
- (51) Jenkins, ref. 13 above.
- (52) Pritchard and Morgan, ref. 40 above.
- (53) Owen, A. S. (1993) 'Oppositional Voices in China Beach: Narrative Configurations of Gender and War', in D. K. Mumby (ed.) *Narrative and Social Control: Critical Perspectives*. Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications.
- (54) Jenkins, ref. 13 above.
- (55) Barthes, R. (1957, 1972) *Mythologies*. London: Vintage.
- (56) Hackley, C. (2003) *Doing Research Projects in Marketing, Management and Consumer Research*. London and New York: Routledge.
- (57) Jenkins, ref. 13 above.
- (58) Dann, G. (1996). 'The People of Tourist Brochures', in T. Selwyn (ed.) *The Tourist Image: Myths and Myth Making in Tourism*, pp. 61–82. John Wiley & Sons: Chichester.
- (59) O'Barr, ref. 5 above.
- (60) Cohen, E. (1993) 'The Study of Touristic Images of Native People: Mitigating the Stereotype of a Stereotype', in D. G. Pearce and R. Butler (eds) *Tourism Research Critiques and Challenges*, pp. 36–69. London and New York: Routledge (in association with the International Academy for the Study of Tourism).
- (61) Cohen, ref. 60 above.
- (62) Gibson and Davidson, ref. 7 above.
- (63) Pritchard and Morgan, ref. 31 above.
- (64) Jakubowicz, A. (1994) 'The Blond Aussie Mum', in A. Jakubowicz, (ed.) *Racism, Ethnicity and the Media*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- (65) Jenkins, ref. 13 above.
- (66) Leiss et al., ref. 50 above.
- (67) Ryan, C. (2000) 'Tourist experiences, Phenomenographic Analysis, Post-Postivism and Neural Net... ', *The International Journal of Tourism Research* 2(2): 119–31.
- (68) Cohen, ref. 60 above.
- (69) Owen, ref. 53 above.
- (70) O'Barr, ref. 5 above.
- (71) Urry, ref. 26 above.
- (72) Cohen, ref. 60 above.
- (73) Horne, D. (1989) *Ideas for a Nation*. Sydney: Pan Books.
- (74) Tiffen, R. (2004). *How Australia Compares* (Ed. R. Gittins). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (75) Jakubowicz, ref. 64 above.
- (76) Jakubowicz, ref. 64 above.
- (77) Jakubowicz, ref. 64 above.

- (78) Wernick, A. (1987). 'From Voyeur to Narcissist: Imagining Men in Contemporary Advertising', in M. Kaufman (ed.) *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power and Change 277-97*. Canada: Oxford University Press.
- (79) Gibson & Davidson, ref. 7 above
- (80) Allan, K. and Coltrane, S. (1996) 'Gender Displaying Television Commercials: A Comparative Study of Television Commercials in the 1950s and 1980s', *Sex Roles* 35(3/4): 185-203.
- (81) Rowe, D. (1993) 'Leisure, Tourism and "Australianness"', *Media, Culture and Society*, 15: 253-69.
- (82) Pritchard and Morgan, ref. 31 above.
- (83) Cohen, ref. 60 above.
- (84) Allan and Coltrane, ref. 80 above.
- (85) O'Barr, ref. 5 above.
- (86) Rowe, ref. 81 above.
- (87) Cresswell, T. (2004) 'Place - A Short Introduction', in *Short Introductions to Geography*. Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.