



Case Study

How to transform research results into the advertising message: The example of experiential artisanal tours in Morocco

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This study demonstrates to advertising and marketing planners how they can transform consumer research results into the advertising message. There are three main points in the advertising strategy: “the target group (to or with whom are we going to communicate?), the advertising objectives (why are we going to communicate or what are we trying to reach?) and the message strategy (what are we going to communicate?)” (De Pelsmacker, et al., 2010: 215). Generating the advertising message strategy is one of the most challenging stages of the advertising planning. This study adopts a practical perspective to advertising strategies using a study analysis of a small tourism business that manages in attracting niche visitor segments to Artisanal Tours within the tourism market in Morocco.

Key Words: Experiential tourism, internet advertising, SME, consumer research, Morocco, Fes.

Word Count: 4, 520

INTRODUCTION

The scarcity of resources in many small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) often prevents them conducting extensive consumer research and creating wide-scale advertising campaigns. However, over the course of the last decade, new approaches, such as guerrilla marketing, viral marketing, buzz marketing, stealth, and on-line advertising have been developed with the intention to gain successful results using the minimum of financial and human resources available to small businesses. The tourism and hospitality sectors do not remain unaffected to innovative approaches taking place in the marketing field. Indeed, tourism and hospitality firms go beyond service excellence and adopt innovative strategies and tactics in the sector. This study demonstrates how SMEs can employ innovative marketing strategies to their advantage considering the scarcity of their resources by using the case of Culture Vultures, a Moroccan

organization founded by a visual artist Jess Stephens in 2009, which provides artisanal tours in the city of Fes, Morocco. As the constraints of this paper do not allow us to fully elaborate on all the steps of marketing planning and the whole range of the promotional arsenal developed for the examined organization, Culture Vultures, I concentrate on the research and advertising development stages, particularly how the transition between the two happens.

This article opens with the background information on Moroccan tourism industry followed by the description of an organization providing experiential artisanal tours in and around the city of Fes. Next, the study leads the reader through the process of consumer research conducted for creating the advertising message tailored specifically to the organization’s primary target group.

The study continues by illustrating the process of developing on-line advertising based on the results of the consumer research. In conclusion, the study summarizes those tools that a small company or organization may use to achieve its goals in view of the financial constraints.

BACKGROUND

Tourism plays an important role in Moroccan economy. It generated 834,500 jobs in 2011 (7.8% of total employment) (Travel and Tourism Economic Impact: Morocco, 2012: 4). In 2011, tourism contributed 8.9% of GDP to the Moroccan economy (ibid.). The number of arrivals in Morocco reached 9.34 million tourists during 2011 (Morocco, International Tourism, 2011). The objective of the Ministry of Tourism is to increase beds from 602,000 in 2015 to 1,880,000 beds by 2015 (Ministry of tourism of Morocco, 2009).

One of the most important tourist destinations of Morocco alongside Marrakesh, Tangier, and Casablanca is the city of Fes. The Ministry of Tourism of Morocco (2009) positions Fes as “a lively old-age museum”, and “an authentic destination of cultural and spiritual meetings. Fes is currently the third largest city in Morocco in terms of residents. The city was founded at the beginning of the ninth century, under the reign of the Idrisid dynasty (Medina of Fez, 2014). Since 1981, Fes’ medina is under the protection of UNESCO and has been unchanged since the twelfth century (Porter, 2000: 77). Its international past makes it one of the capitals of Muslim civilization along-side with Damascus, Baghdad, Cordoba, Istanbul, Granada and Alexandria. Fes nowadays is considered to be the cultural and spiritual destination for tourists from all around the globe. The Medina in Fes is the oldest yet, continuously working medina in the Islamic world. Consequently there are many tours available for tourists showing the main sites around the city of Fes and the medina. In addition, there are many tours which include workshops where tourists can acquire such skills as making traditional drums, learning oriental belly dancing, and using natural products for cosmetics and body care.

In this highly competitive environment, Culture Vultures decided to position itself as a provider of experiential artisanal tours in and around the city of Fes. For millennia, crafts and hand-made art pieces have been produced by the local craftsmen of Fes. The know-how of making artisanal goods has been traditionally passed on through generations. There are a lot of shopping tours encouraging purchasing and guided-tours showing the main sites around the city, but none offering workshops that enable customers to be directly involved in the craft experience, meet the artisans, and closely learn their skills. Culture Vultures fills this gap by

providing the unique artisanal experience within the domain of experiential tourism.

Experiential Tourism

A literature review resulted in no clear definition of the concept ‘experiential tourism.’ Instead the literature suggests dimensions, standards, and examples of activities assembled under the term ‘experiential tourism.’ Judy Karwacki, a tourism consultant, describes experiential travel as a form of travel that “engages visitors in a series of experiences that make connections on a physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual or social level” (Jacks, 2012). Photography, yoga, wine-tasting, dancing and music, with an emphasis on meeting local people, and learning cultures and traditions are some of the activities in which tourists might be involved in experiential tours. Minister’s Roundtable on Parks Canada (2005) reports some insights into ‘experiential tourism’ summarized as following:

1. Experiential tourism is an outgrowth of a global movement toward experiential learning, whereby people create meaning through direct experience.
2. Experiential tourism is also tied to the evolution of mass customization and the experience economy. Companies are moving beyond services, to experiences. For the tourist, the experience includes, among other aspects, the people one meets, the places one visits, the accommodations where one stays, activities participated in, and the memories created.
3. Experiential tourism encourages visitors to participate and promotes activities that draw people into cultures, communities and the outdoors.
4. Experiential tourism is the opposite of mass tourism that traditionally focused on package tours and vacations with low levels of personal involvement. Experiential tourism shows rather than describes [...]. In this sense, it is very personal and individual. Nature tourism, resource-based tourism, adventure tourism, eco-tourism, transformational travel, heritage tourism and other niche areas fit under the umbrella of experiential tourism.

Following the above descriptions, it can be stated that Culture Vultures involves participants into ‘experiential tourism,’ by engaging them in learning the craft and culture of Moroccan artisans. Artisanal Tour Culture Vultures of Fes offers the following services:

1. Both the guide and facilitator escort the clients to meet the craft people from Fes in their workshops where they step into the work environment. Customers are encouraged to interview the crafts-people, pick up the tools, and gain an understanding of the work process of the artisans and their day to day lives.
2. The customers can visit dyers, ironmongers, wood painters, copper workers and engravers, teapot makers, bone carvers, tanners, carpet makers, and weavers.

Table 1. SWOT analysis results for Culture Vultures

Strengths	Small business (more customer oriented) Small groups (more interactive) Backstage access Local guides	Organizational structure problems Work-process needs review Low level of brand awareness Lack of promotional activities	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Growth of Moroccan handicrafts industry (+15%) Fes reform and development program Growing tourism in Morocco Creation of National Moroccan Handicraft Label	Political instability due to the uproar of the Arab World High level of direct competition (other types of tours) High level of indirect competition (existence of other destination for tourists in Morocco as well as other leisure activities)	Threats

3. The tour guides translate interviews and conversations between clients and artisans, briefly inform the clients of the history of the ancient medina of Fes, and some perspectives of the Moroccan culture.

4. Through the ethos of the project one may gain personable insight into the daily lives of Fes crafts people. It is a non-shopping tour, introduction to the artisans as people and experience of their surroundings. All artisans are paid for their time and for sharing information.

To promote the Artisanal Tour, Culture Vultures decided to create an advertising campaign using minimum financial and human resources due to limited budget available to the organization. In order to generate a strong positioning strategy and well-targeted advertising tactics, a situation analysis was conducted.

Situation Analysis

Situation analysis implies an assessment of the internal and external factors. The external environment analysis covers two major areas: the macro-environment and the micro-environment. The macro-environment consists of such factors as political, economic, socio-cultural, technological, environmental, and legal. The micro-environment contains such factors as the structure of the market, suppliers, customers, competitors, public, and trends of the market. The internal environment incorporates the inspection of “the company’s marketing mix (product, price, place, promotion), service mix (people, process management, physical evidence), [as well as] sales, profitability, market share, and customer loyalty” (Vrontis and Thrassou, 2006: 135). While external forces are mainly uncontrollable by the company or an organization, internal forces are mostly controllable by the company and therefore, it should try to avoid any problems arriving from internal forces.

The result of situation analysis conducted for Culture Vultures is summarized in the table above.

Consumer Research

The consumer is a part of the external micro-environment. Analysis of the Culture Vultures’ customer database reveals the clients’ age range, marital status, and geographic distribution (graphically represented in the charts below):

As seen, the artisanal tour attracted a greater interest of married individuals of different gender (52 % of women and 48% of men) who arrived mostly from the United States of America. One of the categories that is of special interest to Culture Vultures are couples aged 55 – 64. This category is often called the ‘empty nest’ and represented by couples whose children have grown up, whose mortgage is paid and who continue to receive a full pay. This clientele is characterized by significant discretionary income. The target audience of the ‘empty nest’ is much less sensitive to price than buyers of other age groups.

The target audience can also fit the category of ‘senior citizens’ or ‘older population’. Although, the definition of older person is arbitrary and there is no standard numerical criterion, “United Nations agreed cutoff is 60+ years to refer to the older population” (Definition of an older or elderly person, 2014). Despite the fact that “senior citizens represent a group that accounts for 80% of personal wealth and about 40% of consumer spending,” (De Pelsmacker, et al., 2010: 217), advertising is inclined to ignore ‘senior citizens.’ Culture Vultures directs its promotional message to this category of population.

The table above demonstrates that the majority of the Culture Vultures’ consumers found out about the Artisanal Tours via recommendations from family members and friends as well as via the internet. Therefore, the tactics developed later will focus on online promotional activities.

Identification of the target group of the marketing communications plan (the ‘empty nest’) is crucial to the

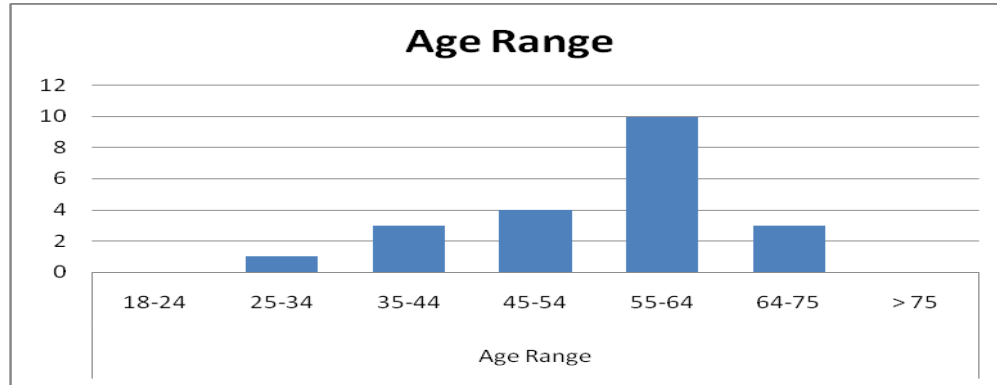


Figure 1. Customers' Age Range

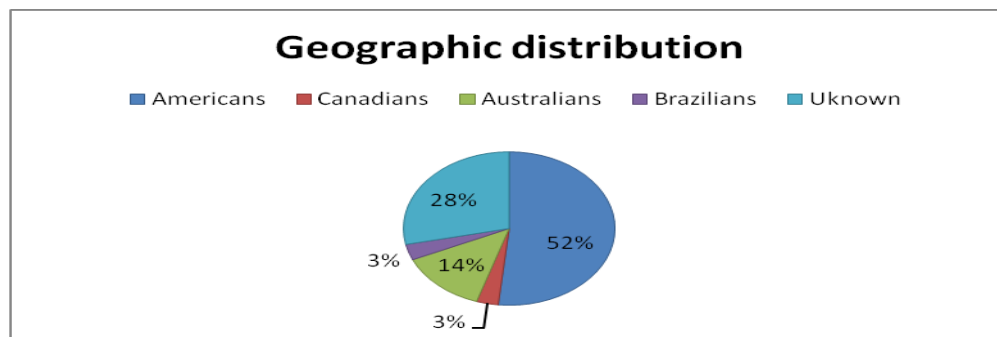


Figure 2. Geographic distribution

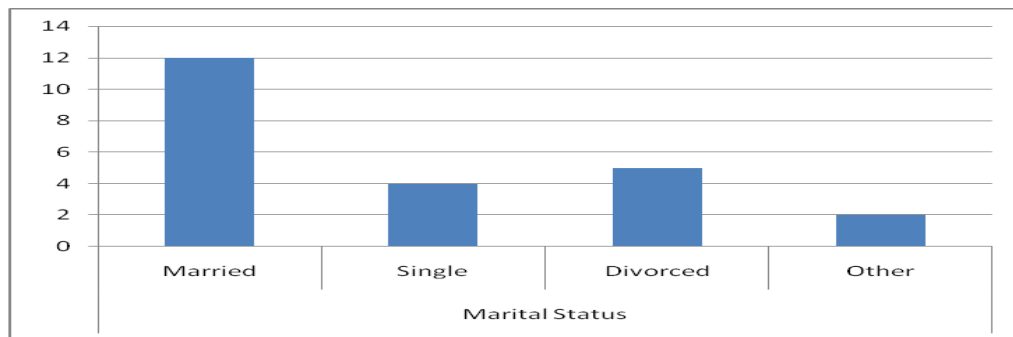


Figure 3. Customer's marital status

planning process to set the main communications objectives. These goals will determine the choice of the right tactics.

Advertising Objectives

Culture Vultures established three main advertising objectives for the year 2014 – 2015:

1. To promote the Artisanal Tourism Fes emphasizing online advertising (increasing brand awareness by 65 %).
2. To clarify the organization's positioning for the customers (improving the brand knowledge by 60%).

3. To reach a positive customers' feedback on TripAdvisor.com (increasing positive attitude by 30%).

Once the objectives are defined, the advertising strategy should be developed. The starting point is the marketing strategy, on the ground of which an advertising strategy needs to be developed.

Marketing Strategy

A situation analysis dictates generating a sustainable competitive advantage in order to increase the organization's profitability. Culture Vultures chooses to follow a differentiation strategy. In a differentiation strategy, "a firm seeks to be unique in its industry along

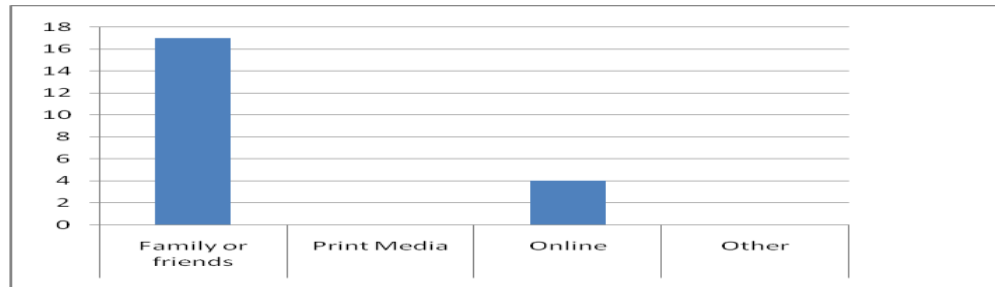


Figure 4. The medium used by the customers to learn about the Culture Vultures' services

some dimensions that are valued by buyers. [...] It picks one or more attributes of the product or service that its buyers perceive as important, and then positions itself to meet those needs" (Dessler, 2001: 166). One can see that the application of a differentiation strategy is closely related to positioning. Positioning can be defined as "a marketing strategy that aims to make a brand occupy a distinct position, relative to competing brands, in the mind of the customer" (Business Dictionary, 2011). Positioning became a key element in marketing's strategic foundation in the 1970s. It provides a direction or a center point for the promotional campaign around which the creative plan revolves.

Before taking a position in the minds of consumers, different groups of customers that exist should be identified and the segment of customers a company or an organization wants to serve should be selected. The process of identifying different groups of existing customers is called segmentation. The process of selecting the segment of customers is called targeting. Positioning refers to communicating the advertising message and the company's image to the chosen segment or target group. Thus, segmentation, targeting, and positioning are stages of one process.

The results of consumer research revealed a few segments, among which 'senior citizens' and the 'empty nest' customers were considered to have a potential advantage for Culture Vultures. The target group is described in terms of demographical parameters as follows:

Gender: both male and female
 Age: 50+ years old
 Marital status: married or single
 Education level: highly educated
 Income: minimum \$70,000 per year

Culture Vultures brings forward the main attribute of its Artisanal Tours – in-depth interaction with artisans. It provides a high quality service for those tourists who are interested in engaging with the culture and traditions of the Moroccan crafts. Culture Vultures presents an opportunity to apply the skills and knowledge acquired during the tour by creating an object manufactured by

their own hands. These attributes of Artisanal Tours and the organization's positioning will be reflected in advertising messages directed to the target group through various communication channels. A company or an organization should be able to summarize its positioning in a one sentence statement. For Culture Vultures, the positioning statement, "Experience with artisans and as an artisan" has been creatively expressed in a slogan, "Craft your experience" and accompanies various advertisements. Together with its logo, it creates a visual identity of the organization and strengthens its brand image.

Culture Vultures' logo has to express its positioning. A few logo proposals have been offered by a graphic designer: all were inspired by the shapes found in Moroccan artisanal craft and represented a mixture of contemporary arts and the Moroccan traditional craft. As a result, after conducting a small-scale test among the organizations' customers, the logo presented below was finalized.

The choice of the logo was dictated by the positioning of the organization – experience of Fes. In Morocco, the symbol of the Hand of Fatima is given a great deal of importance. Many craftsmen of Fes use this symbol in their work. The positioning is reinforced by the name of the city, Fes, written with the Arabic script.

Three main points in the advertising strategy are: "the target group (to or with whom are we going to communicate?), the advertising objectives (why are we going to communicate or what are we trying to reach?) and the message strategy (what are we going to communicate?)" (De Pelsmacker, et al., 2010: 215). So far, we have identified the main target audience – 'empty nest' – and advertising objectives (brand awareness, brand knowledge, and brand attitude). Next, the message strategy is described.

Message Strategy

"Since 80% of consumers over the age of 50 perceive contemporary advertising as irrelevant to them" (De Pelsmacker, et al., 2010: 217), Culture Vultures tries to



Figure 5. The examples of logo propositions for Culture Vultures



Figure 6. Final version of the logo for Culture Vultures

Both kids and teens and senior citizens require a specific advertising approach. The table below outlines some dos and don'ts.

ADVERTISING DO'S AND DON'TS

Kids and teens		Senior citizens	
Dos	Don'ts	Dos	Don'ts
1 Tell a basic story	1 Long dialogues	1 Positive message	1 Remind of getting older
2 Entertain kids	2 Complex messages	2 Inter-generational approach	2 Use senior positioning
3 Surprise kids	3 Imitate kids' talk	3 Focus on cognitive age	3 Age labels
4 Use older models	4 Patronise	4 Promote benefits to overcome guilt	4 Make long story short
5 Remember mum and dad	5 Execution mistakes	5 Use symbols of their youth	5 Take physical consequences of getting older into account

Figure 7. Advertising to specific target groups: Kids and teens and senior citizens

Source: De Pelsmacker, P, Geuens, M, and Van den Bergh, J (2010). Marketing Communications: A European Perspective. 4th edn. England, Essex: Pearson Education Limited, p. 217

generate the advertising message relevant to 'senior citizens.' In order to produce an on-line video that will be positively perceived by the target group, Culture Vultures extracts useful data about 'senior citizens' preferences and values from the secondary sources.

- Senior citizens know they are getting older and that this will bring inconveniences; they do not want advertising to remind them of this or to confront them with these negative life aspects. Rather, focus on what the

product can do for them, what the main benefits are. Another possibility is to stress positive aspects of getting older such as friendships, children and grandchildren, a good financial position, wisdom and experience.

- An inter-generational approach may tap into these perfectly, such as featuring grandparents enjoying a certain product or service with the rest of the family.
- Seniors are not looking for a product 'ideal for seniors' because they still want to belong to society and



Figure 8. On-line advertising for Culture Vultures

do not want to form an isolated group or, as Ahmad put it: 'Older consumers like to be respected as people and not because they are old in terms of chronological age.'

- Moreover, many seniors do not feel old (actually, at an age of 55 they feel about eight years younger than they are) and do not want to be addressed as old or senior citizens, certainly not if they have not reached the age of 65 yet. Unfortunately, in practice the age of 50 or 55 is often chosen as the boundary (De Pelsmacker, 2010: 217).

Culture Vultures has conducted interviews with the 'senior citizens' trying to find a suitable theme for the on-line video. The research results showed that interviewees enjoy those advertisements that, as expressed by one of the participants, "have a story". Story-telling is a powerful creative technique that can be used for generating persuasive advertising. Stories contain indices or "touch points to the lives of [people] or to others that cause implicit and/or explicit awareness and emotional connection/understanding in the minds of [people]" (Woodside, 2010: 2). Indices are very important for creating good stories: the more indices our story contains the more comparisons with our previous experiences we can make. McKee (2003) says that the best way to persuade someone is by telling a persuasive story.

In a story, you do not only weave a lot of information into the telling but you also arouse your listener's emotions and energy. [...] it demands vivid insight and storytelling skill to present an idea that packs enough power to be memorable. If you can harness imagination and the principles of a well-told story, then you get people rising to their feet amid thunderous applause instead of yawning and ignoring you (McKee, 2003: 52).

A story can be told through words and/or visuals. You can create a visual, a photograph or illustration to convey the main concept of your advertising message. A product benefit, a useful product feature, or a problem that your

product/service can solve might be presented through visuals: pictures, illustrations, drawings, and/or photographs.

The most difficult step is translating the advertising strategy into a creative strategy.

Based on the findings of the interviews, a story was used to shape the Culture Vultures positioning strategy: "Experience with artisans and as an artisan." In the video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exg-ZV6qmkw1>), the story is weaved around the adventure of a married couple who takes a trip in and around the city of Fes. They meet artisans and experience their workshops. Grabbing the tools, they practice the traditional methods involved in producing the crafted objects.

The following section summarizes the exact tactics that were employed to convey the main advertising concept.

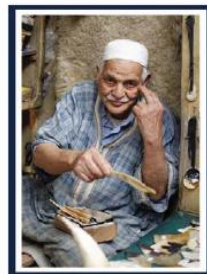
Tactics

"The tactics provide the details of how the strategy will be implemented to achieve set objectives" (Vrontis and Thrassou, 2006: 148). Culture Vultures defined an integrated marketing communications mix that will help to establish the organization's image as a provider of experiential artisanal tours. Customers are encouraged to interview the crafts-people and gain an understanding of the work process of the artisans such as dyers, ironmongers, wood painters, copper workers, teapot makers, bone carvers, tanners, carpet makers, and weavers by using the artisans' tools. To intensify customers' experiences, Culture Vultures adds new services and modifies current ones to correspond with the target audience' needs and wants based on the

¹ Video produced by Sara Ezzouek and Med Naoufel Madih.



Figure 9. A group of tourists learning calligraphy, the art of producing “artistic, stylized, or elegant handwriting” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2014).



Culture Vultures

presents a new and surface-scratching experience for artists and craft-curious folk to discover the world of artisanship in the ancient medina of Fez, the oldest, continuously working medina in the Islamic world.

“The tour is an extraordinary opportunity to meet artisans, to see their work, and to learn about their lives. It is informative, interesting and even exciting at one point!”
Sculptor David Parker



Figure 10. The example of the use of testimonial in a brochure

research outcomes. The exploration of areas that surround Fez, such as Azrou, Imouzar, Ifrane, and Sefrou; attending festivals and music events; and visiting other artisans and practicing other types of craft, such as calligraphy, are some of the additional services that will be provided by Culture Vultures to enrich customers' experience.

Culture Vultures transforms the positive experience of customers into the tool that attracts other customers. “People, especially strangers, crave social proof. Social proof is the theory that we are more likely to do something when we see others doing it. This applies even more when the others in question are similar to us” (Kabani, 2011: 29). Therefore, Culture Vultures uses the videos and photos depicting the positive customer

experience on the organizations' Facebook page. It transforms past successes into new attention to the Artisanal Tours.

The experience provided by Artisanal Tours is reflected also in the following communication or promotional elements: home website, brochure, flyer, travel websites, on-line video, and other websites.

Having a professional website is crucial since most of the Culture Vultures' customers learned about the tour using the internet. The organization's website will be updated to reflect the needs of its new target segment. The website should be user-friendly meaning that it should be easy to navigate with a clear outline of the content. The web page should be constantly updated in order to keep the clients aware of the upcoming events.

Testimonials of previous customers can be included in the organization's website and brochures. Testimonials should be accompanied by pictures illustrating the interaction of participants with the artisans and their involvement in various activities.

Professional and welcoming brochures should be designed. A detailed tour list should be included, as well as the prices. These brochures could be put in travel agencies, airports, car rentals, post offices, taxis, restaurants, and hotels.

Flyers should include the most valuable information such as price, offers, logo, slogan, and contact details. Flyers should be distributed at the old medina of Fes since it is a major tourist destination. Flyers should be distributed (hand-to-hand) to the people who fit the profile of the target audience as well as other tourists.

Advertising the tour in online travel websites can be very fruitful since a lot of tourists – when planning a vacation – book their excursions and tours via the travel agencies. Therefore, working side by side with travel websites can create brand awareness and catch customers' attention.

In order to promote the Artisanal Tours, Culture Vultures will reinforce on-line presence through the use of Facebook and blogs. An on-line video ad will be placed on YouTube, Facebook, and Culture Vultures' website. On-line video is produced in order to introduce the service to the target group in a simple and appealing way.

All the marketing communication tactics are united with one advertising concept "experience of the Moroccan artisanal craft." This concept runs as a leitmotiv through all the promotional materials.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates how the research results are translated into a creative advertising message. The study explains how consumer values and preferences are central to generating advertisements. Advertising requires "creative and innovative solutions formed within the discipline demanded by carefully set objectives and strategic thinking" (Parente, et al., 1996: 320). The case of Culture Vultures displays how advertising can be created for the target audience, by understanding their needs, and within the budget limits and clearly stated objectives. Conducting situation analysis, identifying the objectives, developing strategy, identifying tactics, and evaluating the campaign are the major steps a company or an organization would take in developing a marketing communication campaign. The communication message expressed through various media should consistently

translate the results of the research: what you know about your target audience, your competitors, your own self, and the environment.

The case of Culture Vultures shows how practitioners, owners of SMEs and advertising planner can implement advertising strategy by identifying the target group, the advertising objectives and the message strategy. Utilization of secondary and primary research results and knowledge about consumer values, perceptions and tastes can enable advertisers to generate a creative advertising message.

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