

Tone of voice in DMOs' social media marketing

Kaede Sano (Wakayama University, Japan)
Yuji Yamashi (Wakayama University, Japan)
Zhen Li (Kansai University, Japan)

INTRODUCTION

As a result of Web 2.0, social media usage in tourism has become one of the megatrends that brought about the era of travel 2.0 (Parra-López et al., 2011). Tourist-generated content (TGC) has been adopted by tourists as an essential information resource for travel planning (Aych et al., 2013). As early as 2000, Gretzel et al. (2000) indicated that destination marketing organizations' (DMOs) success requires the integration of information technology (IT) into their organizational fabric. With the rapid development of social media technology and the rising popularity of smartphones, DMOs have the opportunity to stimulate and encourage interaction with tourists on social media platforms (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012). Accordingly, DMO-generated content (DGC) has become an increasingly important part of destination marketing (Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020).

Using official cartoon characters to promote tourist destinations is a popular strategy in Japan. Cartoon characters play an essential role in DMOs' social media marketing campaigns and are always treated as ambassadors during the promotion of various destinations. Official cartoon characters increase peoples' awareness of local destinations and promote different attractions located in these destinations. For example, the Japanese city of Kumamoto became a well-known destination because of its official cartoon character, Kumamon. After using this character in its advertising, the city's economy increased by 1.4 billion dollars in 2018 and 6.2 billion dollars cumulatively since 2011 (Nihon Keizai Shinbun, 2019). In the academic field, most previous studies have concentrated on brand relationships and have examined how consumers' perceptions towards brands' use of anthropomorphism affects their purchase behavior from the perspective of two-side theory (McGuire, 1961; Pechmann, 1992), parasocial relationship theory (Perse & Rubin, 1989), interpersonal relationship theory (Aggarwal, 2004), and love relationship theory (Fetscherin, 2014). More recently, Kim and Kramer (2015) suggested that the relationship between a consumer and a brand is strongly affected by how the consumer treats the brand—as a servant or as a partner. Hudson et al. (2016) found that individual and cultural differences influence brand anthropomorphism perceptions in social media environments. Barcelos et al. (2018) tested how a brand's tone of voice on social media affects consumer responses and found that, compared with a corporate voice, a human voice can positively influence a consumer's purchase intention when the consumer's goal is hedonic. Nevertheless, these past studies have focused primarily on brand anthropomorphism rather than on how an anthropomorphized third party, such as a cartoon character, can be used to attract consumers.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to investigate whether a DMO or a local cartoon character presents a better tone of voice for applications in DMO social media marketing to enhance tourists' attitude toward a destination and increase their trust in DGC.

METHOD

Wakayama Prefecture, located in western Japan, was selected as the tourist destination to be used for this study because it is not as famous as some well-known Japanese destinations, like Kyoto, but it has many tourism attractions, such as world heritage sites, sites of natural beauty, gourmet restaurants, outdoor activities, and so on. The Wakayama Tourism Federation—a DMO in Wakayama Prefecture—and Wakapan—an official cartoon character used in Wakayama tourism promotion—were selected as the research objectives. An online experiment was designed to examine how consumers respond to different tones of voice (a DMO's vs. a cartoon character's) used in two types of messages (cognitive vs. affective) about various tourism categories (world heritage sites: Koyasan and Kumano; sites of natural beauty: Hashikuiwa and Sandanbeki; outdoor activities: traditional log rafting and sea kayaking; gourmet foods: Wakayama ramen and Meharizushi). To ensure that the current experiment was realistic, we created two Facebook pages that appeared to be operated by Wakayama Prefecture's DMO. A 2 x

2 online experience has conducted, and 400 participants were randomly involved in one of the groups – G1 (DMO's tone of voice vs. affective post), G2 (DMO's tone of voice vs. cognitive post), G3 (a cartoon character's tone of voice vs. affective post), G4 (a cartoon character's tone of voice vs. cognitive post). To make sure the similarities among the four groups, each group includes 100 samples with the same percentage in gender and age.

FINDINGS

This study applies Lee and Gretzel's (2012) dimensions to measure participants' attitude strength toward Wakayama Prefecture as a tourist destination which includes "How good would the destination be for a pleasure trip (Q1)", "How positive would you say is your impression of the destination (Q2)", "How much do you think you would like this destination (Q3)", "How favorable is your impression of the destination (Q4)". The attitude strength was assessed before and after the participants read the affective/cognitive Facebook posts with DMO's/a cartoon character's tone of voice. According to the data analysis results, the attitude strength of participants was significantly enhanced by Facebook posts regardless of the different types of posts and tone of voices (Table 1).

Table 1. The changes of attitude strength before and after post presenting

	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig
Q1_before – Q1_after	-.470	1.259	-3.733	99	<.001
Q2_before – Q2_after	-.380	1.135	-3.348	99	.001
Q3_before – Q3_after	-.310	1.293	-2.398	99	.018
Q4_before – Q4_after	-.370	1.160	-3.189	99	.002

To future explore which tone of voice – DMO or a cartoon character more effectively affects on participants' attitude strength on Wakayama Prefecture as a tourist destination, Two-Way ANOVA tests were performed with time (before vs. after) and group (DMO vs character) with both affective and cognitive posts. As a result, the interaction effect was not significant in affective posts ($F(1, 396) = .308$, $p = .579$) and cognitive posts ($F(1, 396) = .001$, $p = .976$), suggesting that there is no significant between different tones of voice influencing participants' attitude strength (Figure 1, 2).

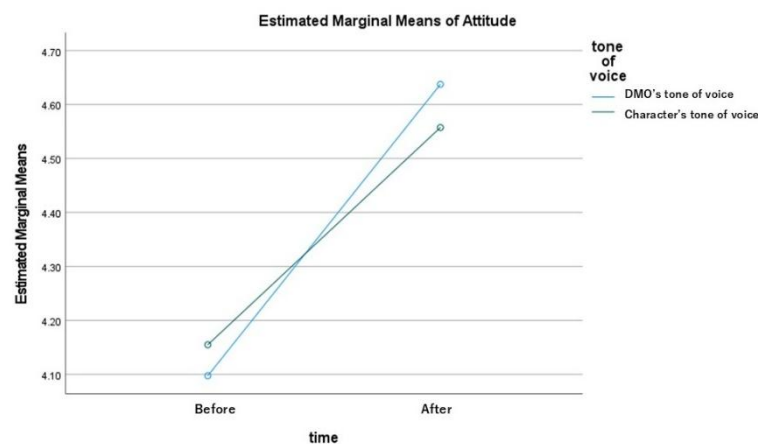


Figure 1. The effect of tone of voice vs. affective posts on attitude strength change

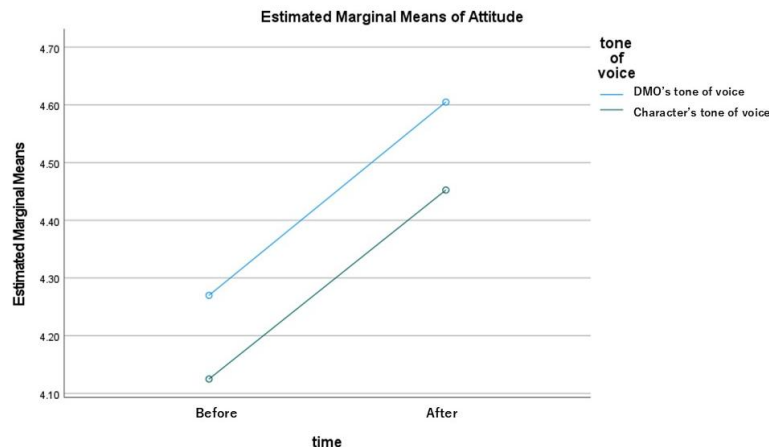


Figure 2. The effect of tone of voice vs. cognitive posts on attitude strength change

CONCLUSION

This study analyzes how the use of a DMO's voice or a cartoon character's voice and a cognitive or affective message in destination promotion can influence tourists' responses to DGC. The concept of human voices is still underexplored in marketing literature (Barcelos et al., 2018), especially within a tourism context. This study extends the theory of brand relationships to the context of tourism by exploring the role of anthropomorphized third parties. Based on the results of data analysis, this study reveals the over-estimation of cartoon characters' practice in promoting destinations, even though it is a useful method to enhance tourists' attitude toward destinations. This study also has implications for marketing strategies. As mentioned above, cartoon characters are widely employed in destination promotion; however, few studies have empirically examined whether and how these cartoon characters contribute to the attraction of tourists. DMOs can use the results of this study to understand how to effectively use cartoon characters in social media marketing.

REFERENCES

- Aggarwal, P. (2004). The effects of brand relationship norms on consumer attitudes and behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31, 87–101.
- Ayeh, J. K., Au, N., & Law, R. (2013). Predicting the intention to use consumer-generated media for travel planning. *Tourism Management*, 35, 132–143. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2012.06.010>
- Barcelos, R. H., Dantas, D. C., & Sénécal, S. (2018). Watch your tone: How a brand's tone of voice on social media influences consumer responses. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 41, 60–80. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2017.10.001>
- Fetscherin, M. (2014). What type of relationship do we have with loved brands? *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 31(6/7), 430–440. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jcm-05-2014-0969>
- Gretzel, U., Yuan, Y.-L., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2000). Preparing for the new economy: Advertising strategies and change in destination marketing organizations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 39(November), 146–156. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004728750003900204>
- Hudson, S., Huang, L., Roth, M. S., & Madden, T. J. (2016). The influence of social media interactions on consumer–brand relationships: A three-country study of brand perceptions and marketing behaviors. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 33(1), 27–41. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2015.06.004>
- Kim, H. C., & Kramer, T. (2015). Do materialists prefer the “brand-as-servant”? The interactive effect of anthropomorphized brand roles and materialism on consumer responses. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 42(2), 284–299. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucv015>
- Lange-Faria, W., & Elliot, S. (2012). Understanding the role of social media in destination marketing. *Tourism*, 7(1), 193–211. <https://doi.org/10.26215/tourismos.v7i1.264>
- McGuire, W. J. (1961). The effectiveness of supportive and refutational defenses in immunizing and restoring beliefs against persuasion. *Sociometry*, 24(2), 184–197.

- Nihon Keizai Shinbun. (2019, March 4). *Kumamon hanbai 1505 okuen, 18nen saikou koushin* [The sales of Kumamon has achieved 15.5 billion yen which is the highest sales until now] [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXMZO42002480U9A300C1LX0000/>
- Parra-López, E., Bulchand-Gidumal, J., Gutiérrez-Taño, D., & Díaz-Armas, R. (2011). Intentions to use social media in organizing and taking vacation trips. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27(2), 640–654. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2010.05.022>
- Pechmann, C. (1992). Predicting when two-sided ads will be more effective than one-sided ads: The role of correlational and correspondent inferences. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 29(4), 441–453.
- Perse, E. M., & Rubin, R. B. (1989). Attribution in social and parasocial relationships. *Communication Research* 16(1), 59–77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365089016001003>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 25K00006.