

# Take Me There, I'll Like the Product More

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## ***Abstract:***

*Purpose:* This paper examines the theory behind telepresence and its application to origin of products. Rather than focusing on wine as a product, we examine the idea of place as influencing product perceptions. For example, does seeing images of Champagne increase a consumer's attitudes toward the sparkling wine from the region? We examine the literature of telepresence, tourism experiences, consumer involvement, and hedonic and utilitarian attitudes toward products and then propose a conceptual model and propositions linking these constructs together.

*Design/methodology/approach:* This is a conceptual, theoretical paper. The approach consisted of examining past research from a variety of different domains, including: marketing, wine, cognitive psychology, interactive environments, and tourism.

*Findings:* Our model suggests that the two dimensions of telepresence (vividness and interactivity) each influence hedonic and utilitarian attitudes toward origin products. We also suggest that consumer involvement with travel as well as the richness of data (if telepresence is perceived via a dynamic or static online environment) influence attitudes.

**Keywords:** Telepresence, origin effects, oenotourism, attitudes

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The theory of situated cognition shows that one cannot know something until they experience it. Situated cognition theory makes a distinction between having learned about something (knowledge) and having experienced something (knowing). Thus, learning comes from doing, emphasizing action and plays a role in an experience taking place in time and space. Place is a critical feature of all tourism offers and origin products. Before consumers decide whether or not to travel to a novel place, they rely on external knowledge sources (e.g., travel brochures, word-of-mouth, internet, etc.) as well as their personal internal search resources (e.g., memories of actual experience with products related to place). Thus the following questions arise:

- 1) To understand a tourism offer or origin (including terroir-based) products, must a consumer be able to see the place from where it originates?
- 2) Does having a visual experience with a place moderate the hedonic and utilitarian value perceptions of products originating from the place pictured?
- 3) What sort of visual imagery (static versus dynamic) is most effective in communicating the experiences to be had in a place?

These are important marketing questions as globalization allows cultural goods to flow between borders and numerous consumers experience products from and associated with a specific place without even knowing where that place is on a map or what touristic offerings it might possess. Although many consumers around the world have tasted champagne, relatively few would be able to point to Reims on a map of France and many would not associate the city as eponymous with Champagne. Furthermore, in today's modern age, consumers are more than ever likely to surf online for information regarding touristic offerings and products, but regions and product companies cannot successfully promote their offerings without considering an interactive strategy. In web environments where static and dynamic visuals can be used, telepresence is an important consideration, likely to influence how consumers experience products online.

## **2. TOURISM EXPERIENCES AND TRAVEL INVOLVEMENT**

Tourism destinations are viewed as a means to stage authenticity that cannot be found in tourists' every daily life (MacCannell, 1989). The goal of all tourism destinations is to be positioned in the mind of tourists as "experiences" (Richards, 2001; Oh, Fiore and Jeoung 2007). Several authors argue that the central challenge facing tourism destination managers and planners is the design of effective tourism experiences (Ritchie and Hudson, 2009; Kim, Ritchie, and McCormick, 2012). Tourists appreciate more the extraordinary and unique experiences than the ordinary ones {Kim, 2010 #24}. Tourists primarily seek and consume engaging experiences at destinations accompanied by goods and services unique to those destinations. The components of the travel experience that strongly affect individuals, and lead to memorability are the following: hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, and novelty (Kim, Ritchie, and McCormick, 2012). Therefore, these engaging experiences generated by the physical and non-physical offerings of the places involve tourists even more with travel. In particular, enduring travel involvement is defined as the ongoing, ever- changing, unobservable state of motivation, arousal, or interest

toward pleasure travel, evoked by particular stimuli (Rothschild, 1984). A number of tourism studies examine tourists' involvement with travel experience (e.g. Dimanche, Havitz, and Howard, 1993; Gross and Brown, 2006; Ferns and Walls, 2012). Consumers' involvement levels are based on the strength of the relationship of pleasure associated with travel, to individual needs, self-concept or values (Ferns and Walls, 2012). Therefore, travel involvement can be described as the intensity with which travel 'is embedded in and driven by the consumers' value system' (O'Cass and Muller, 1999, p. 402). Moreover, tourists involved with travel enjoy tasting and purchasing traditional and local products because these goods appeal to their desire for authenticity (Sims, 2009) and add value to the overall tourism experience by connecting them to the region and its perceived culture and heritage (Rand, Heath, and Alberts, 2003; Skuras, Dimara, and Petrou, 2006).

### **3. TELEPRESENCE**

Telepresence is defined as the degree to which an environment or communication medium allows one the benefits of experiencing an environment without physically being in that environment (Mollen and Wilson, 2010). This sentiment is made possible by a gathering of technologies and techniques that reproduce a real environment such as photographs and videos (Suh and Lee, 2005). The more a web site contains telepresence-inducing elements, the more a consumer has the impression of subjective knowledge, and thus telepresence is positively correlated with attitudes and intention to purchase (Hopkins et al., 2004). Likewise a high level of experienced telepresence reduces sentiments of purchase risk (Suh and Lee, 2005). Keng and Lin (2006) show that online ads with high telepresence increase recall and recognition of the ad.

The telepresence effect occurs due to heightened involvement, which manifests itself in a hedonically rewarding state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Mollen and Wilson, 2010). Related to involvement, it remains a distinct concept, often modeled as an antecedent to web site engagement (Mollen and Wilson, 2010). Research suggests that flow amplifies sentiments of telepresence, acting as "an intermediate variable between website properties and consumer attitudes and behaviors" (Mollen and Wilson, 2010, p. 921). Thus telepresence acts as an intermediary concept between web site functionalities/stimulus and consumer outcome behaviors. The more a web site engages a consumer, the more sensory and cognitive arousal they are likely to experience, augmenting the sentiment of "being there" (Mollen and Wilson, 2010; Slater, 1999; Witmer and Singer, 1998). However, interactive content on websites are likely to influence attitudes only if telepresence is felt by the website user (Fiore and Jin, 2003). This is especially the case because telepresence, like flow, is a hedonic state and leads to instrumental as well as experiential value (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). As demonstrated by Björk (2010), tour operator websites that include emotional content, such as images, result in affective states such as satisfaction, excitement, curiosity and pleasure, and this even when consumers have yet to visit the destination. Thus, it is emotional content on a brand's website that most influences loyalty and purchase intent in the brand's physical store (Mummalaneni, 2005).

#### **4. HEDONIC AND UTILITARIAN EXPERIENTIAL VALUES**

Due to the potential affective effects and experiential value resulting from telepresence, an examination of the hedonic and utilitarian benefits of products related to the place where the consumer is being transported is relevant to examine. When consumers make purchases, they are not only looking to satisfy only functional needs, but may also seek to indulge themselves (Babin et al., 1994). Not all products are alike, often differing based on the hedonic and utilitarian benefits they represent (Voss et al., 2003). As per Chitturi et al. (2008), the following definitions are used: “utilitarian benefits refer to the functional, instrumental, and practical benefits of consumption offerings, and hedonic benefits refer to their aesthetic, experiential, and enjoyment-related benefits” (p.49). Thus, perceptions of products, in terms of the benefits they provide, can be classified as fun or functional. Research specifies that joining function with aesthetics can be important in understanding the full scope of consumer attitudes (Voss et al., 2003).

Ultimately, consumption choices made by consumers align with personal goals specific to individual differences: functional features often relate to prevention goals (i.e. “selecting a safe alternative”) and hedonic features often relate to promotion goals (i.e. “being cool”) (Chernev, 2004). Recent research shows that hedonic benefits encourage promotion emotions leading to increased delight, word of mouth, and repurchase intention. In contrast, utilitarian benefits lead to prevention emotions resulting in increased satisfaction, word of mouth, and repurchase intentions. When products meet both the hedonic and functional requirements, consumers are shown to prefer products with more hedonic features (Chitturi et al., 2008).

Past research in the domain of wine has suggested that the origin of a wine interacts with telepresence perceptions, influencing both hedonic and utilitarian value expectations (Babin et al., 2011). However this research examined the explicit or implicit statement of telepresence. The explicit statement included a wine label with the following statement: “No other wine transports the drinker to (the place) like this one.” As such, telepresence was stated rather than experienced. Nonetheless, this research suggests that origin and products emanating from an origin can interact with telepresence.

#### **5. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

We propose that examining how perceptions of telepresence (i.e., being in a specific place) impact the hedonic and utilitarian perceptions of a place, as well as the experience of products from that place would be extending the current research on tourism, advertising, and consumer behavior as it relates to the wine trade. For example, does seeing images of Champagne (the place) add or take away from the hedonic and/or utilitarian value of champagne (the product). We suggest that perceived telepresence not only influences attitudes toward a place, but transference to products that are place-related.

Previous literature has outlined certain relationships that we would like to extend theoretically, as demonstrated in Figure 1. First we focus on the nature of telepresence and its dimensions, which have not often been tested individually. Telepresence consists of two

dimensions, vividness and interactivity (Laurel, 1991; Steuer, 1992). Vividness includes sensory breadth (number of sensory dimensions presented simultaneously) and sensory depth (the resolution of each sensory dimension) (Steuer, 1992). In a website, rich media tools such as videos, audio, and animation may be considered instruments that increase vividness by enhancing the richness of the experience (Coyle and Thorsen, 2001). On the other hand, interactivity as a functional tool is defined as “the degree to which a communication system can allow one or more end users to communicate alternatively as senders or receivers with one or many other users or communication devices, either in real time or on a store-and-forward basis or to seek and gain access to information on an on-demand basis where the content, timing and sequence of the communication is under control of the end user, as opposed to a broadcast basis” (Fortin and Dholakia, 2005, p. 388). Increased vividness and interactivity increase perceived telepresence (Coyle and Thorsen, 2001; Klein, 2003; Hopkins et al., 2004). Overall perceived telepresence has a direct effect on attitudes to the ad (Hopkins et al., 2004). Yet past research suggests that increased levels of vividness result in higher attitudes toward web sites (Coyle and Thorsen, 2001). Past research on telepresence outlines the direct impact of perceived telepresence on brand attitudes, and ad attitudes (Park and Young, 1986), but does not make the distinction between the types of attitudes, hedonic or utilitarian (Voss et al., 2003). This is surprising as Mollen and Wilson (2010) include instrumental and experiential value as prefacing consumer outcomes. As such, we propose that vividness, because of its sensorially rich content that appeals to multiple senses, creates experiential value and emotions whereas interactivity, as a functional tool, allows the consumer to have a better idea of how the product is made and how that relates to the place. Thus, we expect the following:

P1: Increased vividness has a positive impact on hedonic attitudes toward the place-related product.

P2: Increased interactivity has a positive impact on utilitarian attitudes toward the place-related product.

Media characteristics influence consumer responses such that perceived telepresence in dynamic media environments should result in more positive responses from consumers than perceived telepresence in static media environments (Klein, 2003). Attitudes formed in virtual environments are stronger than in static environments (Klein, 2003) because they are closer to being a direct experience (Fazio and Zanna, 1982; Smith and Swinyard, 1988). As such, we propose:

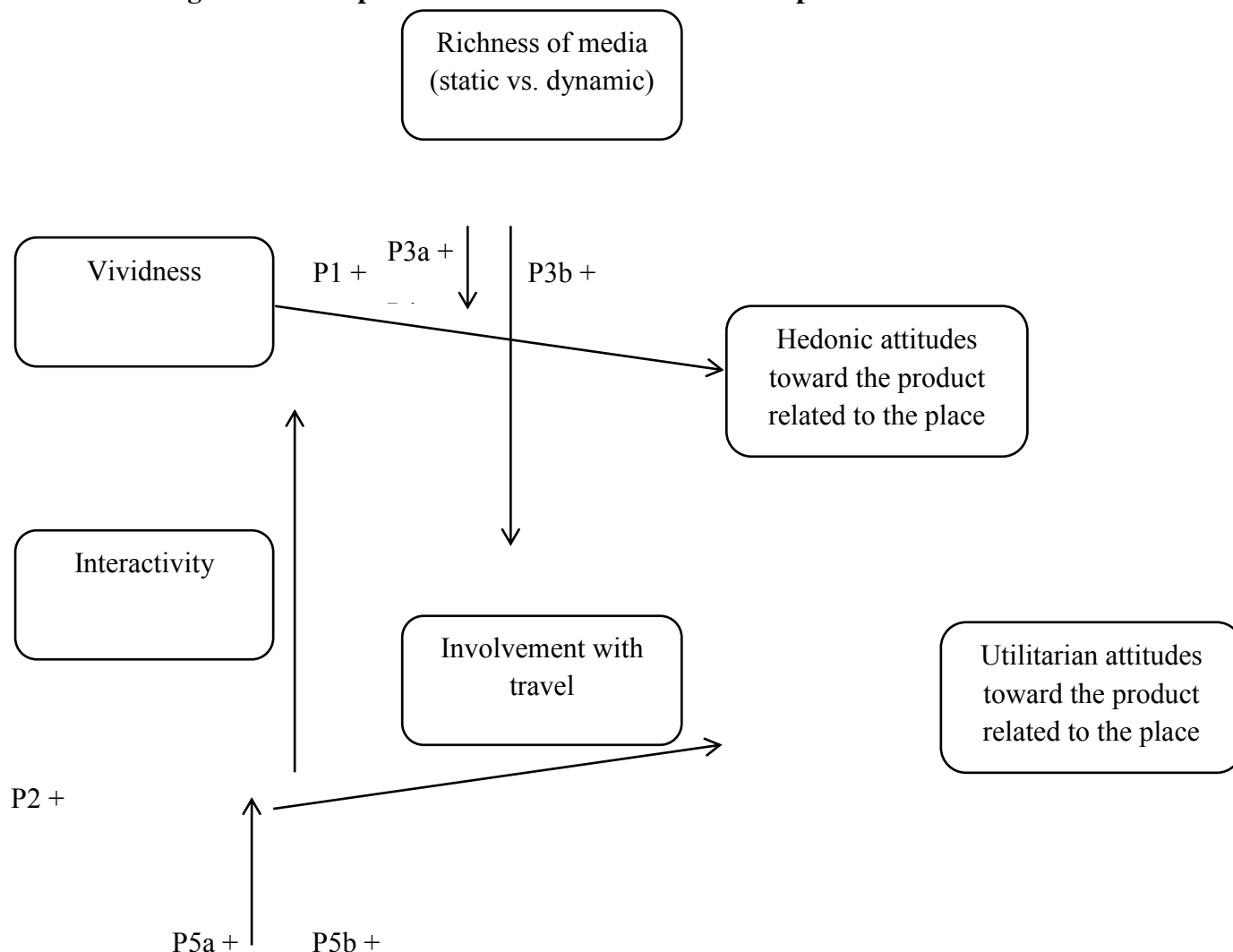
P3: Richness of the media environment moderates effects on the a) hedonic attitudes toward the product and b) the utilitarian attitudes toward the product

P4: Perceived telepresence from a dynamic media environment results in higher hedonic attitudes toward the product than from static environments

Consumer involvement moderates the response between perceived telepresence and attitudes (Li et al., 2001), in particular for online environments (Novak et al., 2000). Media richness, the result of more and more various peripheral cues, impacts the processing of advertising online (Cook and Coupey, 1998). For example, Hopkins et al., (2004) operationalized a very rich media environment as having music, motion, animation, etc. Research has shown that tourists involved with travel use online settings to buy their trips because information quality, system quality, and service quality are present in the online setting. (Wen 2010). Moreover, highly involved tourists appreciate tasting and purchasing regional products because these goods link visitors with the region and its heritage (Rand, Heath, and Alberts, 2003; Skuras, Dimara, and Petrou, 2006). Thus, we suggest that involvement with travel will moderate the influence of perceived telepresence on the attitudes toward the product from the place.

P5: Consumers who are more involved with travel will perceive more a) higher hedonic value expectations (manifesting themselves in hedonic attitudes) and b) higher utilitarian value expectations (manifesting themselves in higher utilitarian attitudes) toward the consumption experiences involving the product from the place than consumers who are less involved with travel.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Influence of Telepresence**



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