An emerging body of research indicates that males and females often respond differently to advertising stimuli. Therefore, this research used a between-subjects experimental design in study 1 to illustrate that a written touch reference in a destination ad (e.g., Visit the Newstead Cove Resort and feel the soothing Caribbean sand and water as you walk on our pristine award-winning beach) positively influences females’ affective responses to the advertisement and image of the destination, without having a significant impact on male sentiment. Next, study 2 used two photo-elicitation sessions, one conducted with females and the other with males, to probe deeper into these findings. The managerial and research implications of both studies are discussed.

From a managerial perspective, because magazine content is more than 50% advertising (Magazine Publishers Association, 1995), and Internet search engines have put hotels at risk of becoming price-based commodities (Cai & Hobson, 2004), resort destinations must have a clear understanding of how to design their ads to appeal to their target audiences. The use of a written touch reference in a print ad appears to have the unique ability to increase appeal to females without sacrificing male appeal. This finding is also managerial relevant because emerging research appears to indicate that males and females weight the importance of destination attributes differently (Meng & Uysal, 2008). Thus, written touch references can be used to appeal to these differences.

In terms of limitations, as in virtually any experimental design performed in the social sciences, the results and interpretations are limited by the nature of the stimuli, respondents, and instruments. For example, although the use of under-graduate subjects has an established precedent in marketing-related experimental designs (Hennig-Thurau, Groth, Paul, & Gremler, 2006; Hess,
Ganesan, & Klein, 2002; Maxham, 2001), future studies should test the influence of written touch references on other samples. It would also be prudent for future research to test the influence of a variety of touch references across myriad destination settings. Such replications would enhance the external validity of our findings. Such extensions may also uncover moderating and mediating variables not evident in the current study. For instance, a person’s past experiences in an advertised environment may be found to moderate the influence of a written touch reference. Moreover, much of the theoretical support for our hypothesized predictions was founded upon existing hedonics studies but research has yet to address whether hedonic effects could be product or service specific for both genders, or might be more relevant for females than for males.