

THE PLACE OF HERITAGE AND IDENTITY IN THE MARKETING STRATEGY OF DESTINATIONS: A WORLDWIDE APPROACH BASED ON DMO SLOGANS

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Abstract

In the tourist industry destinations are competing against each other to attract visitors. In this race to seduce visitors, cultural tourism (based on heritage and identity) appears as a very popular form of tourism used by destinations. Because branding plays a major role in attracting visitors, this paper therefore examines the slogan of 139 destinations around the world. Findings reveal that slogans tend not to use heritage but instead adopt a neutral position, this is to be explained by the fact that destinations want to appeal to maximum of visitors and also because they appeal to the emotions (as opposed to a cognitive strategy).

Keywords:

Branding, DMO, world, heritage, identify.

JEL Classification: M3, Z3.

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Introduction

Globally, tourism is a dynamic, fast growing and important key driver of socio-economic growth and it is not confined to any one region (Ashley et al. 2007; Gopalan, 2013; Malik et al. 2010; Thano, 2015). Currently Europe is still the world's largest source region, generating half of the world's international arrivals, followed by Asia and the Pacific (24%), the Americas (17%), the Middle East (3%) and Africa (3%) (UNWTO, 2016). Moreover, estimates from the UNWTO Tourism Towards 2030 suggest that the number of international tourist arrivals worldwide is expected to increase by an average of 3.3% a year over the period 2010 to 2030. Thus, international tourist arrivals worldwide are expected to reach 1.4 billion by 2020 and 1.8 billion by the year 2030. Where in 2030, 57% of international arrivals will be in emerging economy destinations (versus 30% in 1980) and 43% in advanced economy destinations (versus 70% in 1980) (UNWTO, 2016).

In that respect, branding is an important aspect of destination management that contributes to the competitiveness of the destination (Galí et al., 2016). This paper is going to provide a global overview of the branding strategy adopted by destinations. More specifically, we are going to focus on the place of heritage and identity in their branding strategy. Our research question is therefore as follow: How are national identities and heritage reflected in DMOs' slogan? Because 'heritage plays a fundamental role in enhancing the identity of a nation or region, and is a major vehicle for expressing national and regional cohesion and unity' (Park, 2014: 108), from a theoretical and managerial point of view, it is important to understand whether or not the branding strategy adopted conveys the narrative of the destination. From a methodological point of view, this paper is going to be purely qualitative. The progressive structure and the inductive approach adopted by the paper are going to enable us to provide a straight answer to the research question. Also, at this stage, it is important to explain that a brand identity is made of three parts (Saint-Hilaire, 2005): a name; a logo and a slogan. In this paper we are going to focus exclusively on slogans. So doing, the slogan of 139 destinations will be analysed. The use of logos in this paper is merely for illustrative purpose.

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1. Literature review

1.1 Branding

For Kerr (2006, p. 277) a destination brand can be defined as: “[...] name, symbol, logo, word or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination; furthermore it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of destination experience”. Hankinson (2004, 2005) identified three main streams of destination brand conceptualization: the destination brands as communicators, which take this perspective focus own research mainly on formulation and implementation of branding strategy (example: Gilmore 2002); the destination brands as perceptive entity, which includes studies of specific destinations and studies identifying common attributes across a sample of destinations (example: Echtner and Ritchie, 1991); finally, destination brands as relationships, a prospective illustrated by Sirgy and Su (2000) whose sustain that destination ambient (the material and immaterial characteristic of a place) influenced the formation of stereotypic images that influence the choice process. One of the most significant roles of destination branding is its impact on tourism decision-making. Many researchers have clearly shown that destination perceptions and purchasing decision are positively correlated (Mayo and Jarvis, 1981), showing that a place image is a critical selection factor (Woodside and Lysonski, 1989) which produce significant positive effects (Park et al., 2013) on the performance of a target. The need to use destination branding is linked to the characteristics of the tourist market. Today's travelers can choose different destinations, and in crowded tourist markets, places are becoming increasingly substitutable and difficult to differentiate (Pike 2005). Keller (2003) has identified many brand benefits that are also applicable to destination branding. One of the most important is that a brand differentiates one product from another; it also reduces risk and increases confidence in product quality (Gartner, 2009; Knox, 2004). Finally, a trademark helps consumers remember a product when it meets your needs and is convincing. Equally important, Clarke (2000) has identified six benefits of branding related to tourism destination products (TDPs): 1. tourism is typically high involvement, branding helps to reduce the choice; 2. branding helps in reducing the impact of intangibility; 3. branding conveys consistency across multiple outlets and through time; 4. branding can reduce the risk factor attached to decision making about holidays; 5. branding facilitates precise segmentation; 6. branding helps to provide a focus for the integration of producer effort, helping people to work towards the same outcome. According to Blain et al. (2005), the concept of the visitor experience needs to be incorporated into the process of branding.

1.2 Slogans

Almost every destination uses a slogan. A slogan is a short phrase that serves to convey descriptive and convincing information about a particular brand (Keller, 2003; Galì et al., 2016). The slogan is applied to a tourist destination label to communicate the basic features of that destination in the simplest possible way (Supphellen and Nygaardsvick, 2002). There have been many criticisms of destination slogans over the years, better summed up in Gold and Ward's (1994) statement that these slogans can only reach ephemeral indifference. In other words, slogans are unlikely to differentiate destinations over time. These difficulties are also expressed by Pike (2005), which states that the positioning of the brands by destination marketing organizations (DMO) is a complex and challenging for a few reasons. First, destinations are much more multidimensional than consumer goods and other types of services. To be effective, positioning theory suggests that reaching a consumer mind requires a brief message that focuses on one or some brand associations. Conversely, in the branding destination often there are slogans that seem to be trying to cover everything.

There seems to be broad consensus that slogans that personalize the message and focus on a differentiated feature will allow better positioning of the destination. On the contrary, slogans trying to sell everything show nothing representative of the destination and end up being too generic and not original. Lee et al. (2006) argued that many destinations are trying to sell both nature and heritage at the same time, which means that these elements cease to be unique attributes. In addition, the message often transmitted by such slogans is applicable in many other places.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1 Heritage and identity

Park (2014: 95) explained that heritage is as an essential element of material culture and ‘serves as a symbolic medium through which identity is created, recreated and maintained’. Park (2014) also explained that heritage contributes to the development of a sense national belonging, unity, cohesion and identity as the past is an essential element contributing to the understanding of a nation. ‘Heritage acts as a *milieu de memoire*’ (Park, 2014: 98). Equally important, Park (2014) explains that the term ‘heritage’ covers a wide range of areas (including culture;

history; politics; religions, communications, etc.) that can be classified into three main groups: built heritage (forts, relics, etc); scientific heritage (plants, birds, natural habitats, etc); and cultural heritage (fine art, customs, languages, etc).

It is also important to highlight the fact that some people are travelling especially to understand the culture and heritage of a destination. This form of tourism is called 'cultural tourism' (Cros & McKercher, 2015).

2.2 Heritage, identity and tourism

Heritage tourism uses images and symbols to reveal a past that belong to a specific society (Park, 2014). Sometimes this heritage is manipulated and invented in order to be turned into consumption products (Park, 2014). Heritage in that respect is also used as a brand to attract visitors and boost sales. Using heritage for that purpose is called 'heritage marketing'. So doing, certain cultural symbols and icons are sometimes used. The ultimate the purpose is to enhance an emotional connection with the tourist (Park, 2014). As for Heritage tourism, it is 'predominantly concerned with exploring both material (tangible) and immaterial (intangible) remnants of the past' (Park, 2014: 1). The tourism industry is often accused of commodifying heritage (Park, 2014: 1). The aspect of heritage that is commodified can be natural, built, fixed or mobile, ongoing or temporary (Cros & McKercher, 2015).

Based on the information provided so far in this paper (section 1 & 2), the rest of the paper is going to show how heritage and identity is reflected in slogans in order to develop an emotional connection with potential visitors. If heritage and identity is not used, we are going to try to establish what is used instead and why.

3. Methodology

The object of the research is to identify how heritage and identity are used in destination branding (slogan).

Step 1: Identifying the DMO slogans

The starting point was to identify the DMO slogans. The website *FamilyBreakFinder*, the UK's favorite site for family friendly holidays, short breaks and days out provides a list of 139 DMO slogans.

Step 2: Classification

The slogans will be categorized in one of the following group: natural features / geographical features (scientific heritage); quality of life / authenticity of experience / history (cultural heritage) and neutral (none of the others). However, there will be certain limitations to the results, as the classification of the slogans could be argued to be subjective or biased. Hammond and Wellington (2013: 15) claim that: "The term bias is not helpful one as it implies that there is a state of being unbiased. There is not".

Step 3: Cluster

The WTO segments destinations into four different groups: Europe, the Americas, Africa, Asia / Oceania. Once we will have the results of the classification, the destinations will be reshuffled into new groups.

4. Results and discussions

4.1 The Americas (Caribbean destinations)

The Americas include North America, South America, and Central America (including the Caribbean). The Americas have the second most improved Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI⁴) performance at the aggregate level, just behind Asia-Pacific. International tourist arrivals have boomed, growing from 170 million in 2013 to over 201 million in 2015. The majority of the countries in the region rely on rich natural resources and good service infrastructure to appeal to tourists. While North and Central American nations outperform South American ones on infrastructure, the opposite is true for cultural resources. Numerous South American nations are taking advantage of their rich heritage to create a strong tourism value proposition consisting of natural resorts, entertainment and culture. On the other hand, Central American and Caribbean countries continue to rely too excessively on their natural resources and have not made much progress in developing other tourism segments (WEF, 2017 [Online]).

⁴ The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) measures 'the set of factors and policies that enable the sustainable development of the Travel and Tourism sector, which in turn, contributes to the development and competitiveness of a country. It comprises 4 sub-indexes, 14 pillars, and 90 individual indicators, distributed among the different pillars (WEF, 2017 [Online])

Because of the Caribbean destinations are very different from the other destinations of the Americas mainly in terms of size, carrying capacity in terms of tourists, facilities, culture, etc we have decided to overlook the other components of the Americas. This approach is going to provide more accurate results. Moreover, the destinations in the Caribbean are quite similar at many levels:

1. They belong to the Creole society or black culture (Reyes-Santos, 2013; Cashmore, 2006; Green, 1972)
2. They also have a common ground of political instability due to the fact that ‘the Caribbean was ruled by some of the most infamous dictators of the Western Hemisphere’ (Bucheli, 2008)
3. The islands face similar issues like drug fight, preservation of heritage, natural disaster management, immigration management, etc. (Dubesset, 2013)

In their branding strategy, the Caribbean destinations are mainly focusing (1) on the authenticity and the quality of the experience that the visitors can get. A large proportion of destinations are also adopting (2) a neutral tone in their slogans. Our findings contrast with the fact that Caribbean countries continue to rely too excessively on their natural resources (WEF, 2017 [Online]). There is here a discrepancy between the actual strategy implemented by the DMO and the branding strategy of the destination. That said, this trend toward neutrality is also reflected in the DMOs logo. If we consider for instance the Haitian DMO, their original logo designed in 1939 (figure 1) was quite representative of the history and culture of the destination. In the process of changing the negative image of the destination, the DMO adopted in 2012 a more commercial / neutral logo (figure 2).

4.2 Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa remains on aggregate, the region where Travel and Tourism competitiveness is the least developed. Although regional performance has increased, it has improved less compared to other parts of the world. Southern Africa remains the strongest sub-region, followed by Eastern Africa and then Western Africa. Tourism in the region is mainly driven by natural tourism. In several African countries, there are numerous cultural sites and intangible expressions that could be better leveraged and combined with the rich natural capital available (WEF, 2017 [Online]). The branding strategy trend in Africa seems to go toward neutrality (figure 4). This could be explained by the fact that the African continent wants to move away its painful past related to slavery. The continent is trying to reinvent itself.

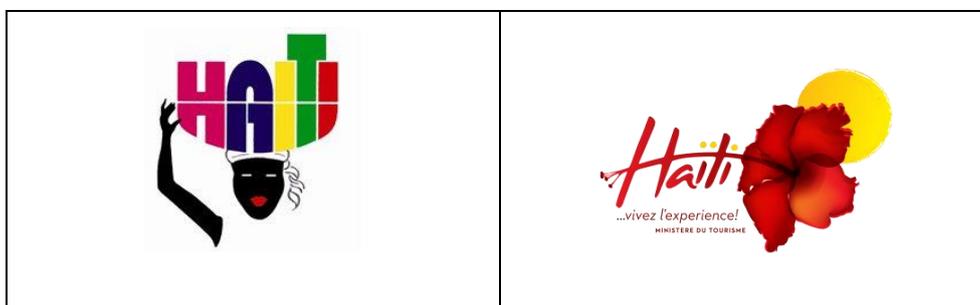


Figure No. 1: Haitian DMO logo (1939) Figure No. 2: Haitian DMO logo (2012)

Source: Séraphin et al., 2016

Among the various logos of this area, Egypt is particularly interesting (figure 3). In an attempt to expand its touristic activity beyond its history (made up of pyramids and ancient ruins), Egypt has introduced a new identity through a new logo that suggests another side of Egypt, that of the beach (the Red Sea, the Sinai Peninsula and the Gulf of Aqaba) (Avraham, 2016).



Figure 3: Egypt DMO logo (2009)

Source: <http://www.egypt.travel>

4.3 Asia/Oceania

Asia and the Pacific area continue to be among the fastest growing tourism regions in the world. In 2015, international tourist arrivals in the region grew by 6%, reaching 279 million more than the only 110 million in 2000. By 2030, according to UNWTO Tourism Towards 2030, growth will be more and more pronounced. Asia and the Pacific, and especially China, is rapidly becoming the main source of many destinations, ie within the region. About 80% of international tourism in Asia is indeed intra-regional (UNWTO/GTERC, 2016).

Despite this growth, this region is not yet mature from the point of view of the destination branding strategy. In fact, most slogans are considered neutral. There is also no reference to historical aspects. The logo of Singapore (figure 4) reflects the overall trend toward neutrality, the purpose being probably to be more visitor-centric and connecting directly with consumers.



Figure 4: Singapore DMO logo (2010)

Source: <http://www.yoursingapore.com/>

4.4 Europe

Europe is the region with the strongest overall travel and tourism competitiveness performance. It boasts six of the 10 most competitive countries in the travel and tourism sector, and attracted 620 million of the 1.2 billion international visitors in 2016. To date, strong health and hygiene conditions, cultural richness and safety are common travel and tourism competitiveness advantages across the majority of European countries (WEF, 2017 [Online]). The category more present is the “neutral”, followed by “quality of life”. Europe is the geographical area in which we found the most DMO strategy based on history. For this area, history is a key pull factor. In France for instance, the Eifel Tower is the most visited attraction. Taking Spain as another example, it is among the best examples of modern national branding, with its easy recognizable Mirò’s sun (figure 5), designed in 1983, which symbolizes the modernization of the country (Gilmore, 2002).



Figure 5: Spain DMO logo (1983)

Source: <https://www.spain.info>

5. Toward an ambidextrous approach of the branding strategy of destinations

5.1 Global trend

As table 1 and figure 7 below show, the vast majority of tourist destinations in the world have opted for a neutral approach in their branding strategy (slogans). In other words, heritage (scientific, cultural and built) or heritage marketing is not the most popular form of marketing used by DMOs to advertise destinations. Most destinations used a neutral slogan probably in order to reach a bigger target. This strategy is adopted by mass market destinations like Europe and emerging destinations like Asia. France the leading destination in the world

(UNWTO, 2016), has quite a neutral / generic slogan but a very identity based logo with the color of the French flag and Marianne, the symbol of the republic (figure 6).



Figure 6: France DMO logo

Source: <https://www.france.fr/en>

5.2 Trend per area of the world

Regarding the distribution of the category (table 1 & figure 6) it's interesting to note that "natural features" (scientific heritage) category is most represented in Africa, while the "quality of life" (cultural heritage) is in Europe. In the same way, "history" (built and cultural heritage) is especially in Europe and Africa while "authenticity of experience" (cultural heritage) is in the Caribbean. The overall results of our research show that areas of the world base their marketing strategy on their endowments (either natural or built heritage).

Table no. 1: Branding strategy of the DMO

	Europe	Asia	Caribbean	Africa	TOTAL
natural features	4	2	3	4	13
neutral	22	36	5	13	76
quality of life	8	5	1	3	17
geographical features	4	2	0	0	6
authenticity of experience	4	4	5	1	14
History	4	0	0	3	7

Source: our elaboration

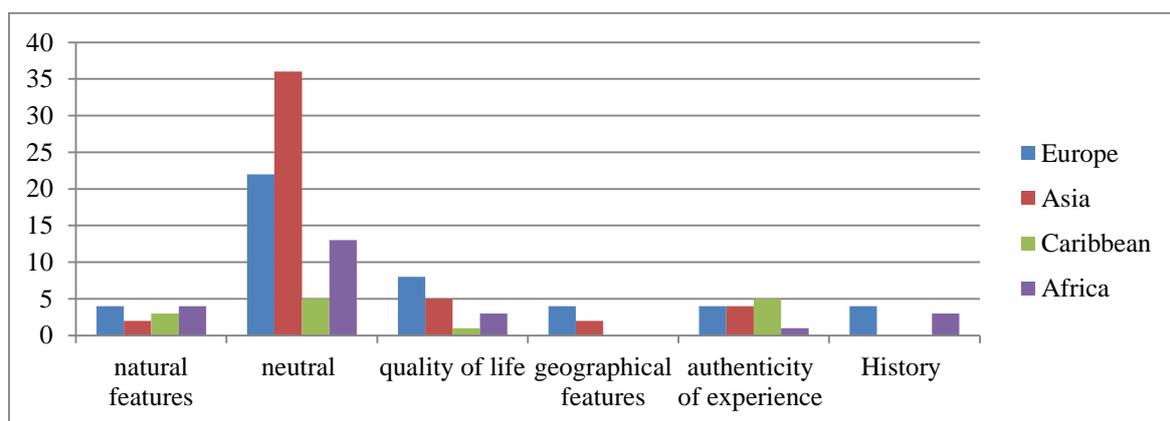


Figure no. 7: Branding strategy (slogans) of the world destinations

Source: our elaboration

5.3 Two way strategy

Basically, there are two main streams for a logo and slogan design. Either a neutral position is adopted or a narrative position (scientific, cultural and built heritage). Based on Séraphin et al. (2016), a good logo design should adopt

an ambidextrous approach in other terms, be able to tell the narrative of the destination (scientific, cultural and built heritage) and be a good marketing and communication tool and be aesthetically pleasant. This ambidexterity approach is quite important. Ambidexterity is all about embracing two opposites (Smith, 2017). This approach contributes to the sustainable development of an organisation (Mihalache and Mihalache, 2016).

Conclusions and limitations of classification

This paper examines the tourism slogans of 139 destinations around the world. Findings have revealed that neutrality (no use of scientific, cultural and built heritage) is by far the mainstream strategy adopted by destinations. Our findings are line with Gali et al. (2016) who explained that slogans are moving from descriptive strategies (using words related to the features of the destination) to one that appeals to the emotions (very few words). Future research could consider the impact of a DMO new branding strategy on the performance of a destination.

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