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Research paper

Analysing tourism slogans in top tourism destinations

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ABSTRACT

A tourism destination's slogan is an important tool in the development of its national brand. However, few studies have focused on this issue. Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is to examine the characteristics of 150 tourism destinations, considering three geographical levels: countries, regions and cities, and to evaluate them by means of content analysis. The study tests eight different items for each slogan adopted from previous studies. Findings reveal that slogans tend to be very simple and have an exclusive appeal, which comes from emphasizing the affective component in the message.

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1. Introduction

Rome is often referred to as the Eternal City, and Paris the City of Light. These two destinations have been able to link their brand to notions recognised practically everywhere. This is not the result of an advertising campaign but of a largely spontaneous process that reinforces the brand image (brand equity) of a city or country. Within the context of global competition and a growing number of destinations, managers are more focused than ever on consolidating their brand image.

A brand comprises three elements: brand name, logo and slogan. All these elements have prime importance and serve different functions in the shaping the brand image. Names and logos are somewhat limited in their ability to articulate a message, but a slogan can partially bridge this gap. 'Slogans can serve as "hooks" or "handles" in capturing the meaning of a brand and in relaying what makes the brand special' (Kohli, Leuthesser, & Suri, 2007, p. 416). At the same time, while a name or a logo cannot easily be changed, slogans can, and thus have a very relevant function in the most dynamic part of the brand, and can act as a "bridge between brand's legacy and its evolving image" (Kohli et al., 2007, p. 416).

A slogan is a short phrase used to convey descriptive and persuasive information about a particular brand (Keller, 2003; Ortega, Mora, & Rauld, 2006; Supphellen, & Nygaardsvick, 2002). Applied to a tourist destination brand, the purpose of a slogan is to

communicate the key features of that destination in the most eloquent way possible (Supphellen & Nygaardsvick, 2002). Slogans have three complementary functions: firstly to enhance a brand's image; secondly to aid in its recognition; and thirdly to help create brand differentiation in the consumer's mind (Kohli et al., 2007).

Some destinations have managed to create dynamic, evocative and easily recognizable slogans, strategically positioning them on the national and international market. These include the renowned 'I Love New York', which since the late 70s has remained the most renowned tourism slogan in history (Godfrey, 1984; Klenosky & Gitelson, 1997). Also, in the words of Letho, Lee, and Ismail (2014), is 'the well-know slogan "What happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas" [which is] designed to elicit a specific emotive response'. One of the most daring is the 2009 Colombia campaign, 'Colombia, the only risk is wanting to stay', which coincided with a 140% increase in international tourist arrivals (World Tourism Organisation, 2012). While it cannot be said that cause and effect exists, the number of international tourists visiting the country vastly increased in the year following the campaign.

Other destinations have, however, created slogans that have not managed to generate the same impact (Lehto et al., 2014). One such case would be the Bangladesh slogan 'Visit Bangladesh before the tourists come!', which, despite the impact of the message, did not have the desired effect; or the controversial 2006 tourism campaign slogan for Australia, which read, 'So where the bloody hell are you?', and was banned in many countries.

Despite the importance of slogans in constructing brands, the academic world has paid little attention to the study and analysis of slogans used by tourist destinations as an element of brand

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positioning (Keller, 2003; Pike, 2004). This research begins to address this limitation by using content analysis to empirically examine the tourism slogans of 150 of the main tourism destinations around the world, taking the national, regional and local scope into account.

The paper is divided into the following sections: Firstly, a literature review focuses on the main issues related to branding and slogans. Secondly, the methodology employed is briefly explained, in line with the structure of similar studies (Donaire & Galí, 2012; Garrido & Ramos, 2006; Klenosky & Gitelson, 1997; Lee, Cai, & O'leary, 2006; Ortega et al., 2006). Then follows the results of the study, emphasising quantitative aspects such as the length of slogans as well as other more qualitative aspects such as their semantic field. Finally, the main conclusions of the study are presented.

2. Literature review

2.1. The concept of branding

A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of these, employed to differentiate a product from its competitors (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2003; Munar, 2009). A brand makes it easier to identify and differentiate a product (Rooney, 1995; Balakrishnan, 2009; Gartner, 2009), in order to have an advantage when selling it. Brands transmit 'emotions that consumers recall or experience when they think of a specific symbol, product, service, organisation or location' (Simeon, 2006, p. 464). Kotler and Gertner (2002) conclude that strong brands not only attract consumers but also investment and business. Branding has emerged as a top priority in the last decade, due to the growing realisation the brands are one of the most valuable intangible assets that businesses have (Keller & Lehmann, 2006).

Keller (2003) identified a number of benefits of brands. Among the most relevant can be mentioned that a brand differentiates one product from another, as well as the producer assumes ownership and responsibility for it. A brand also reduces risks and increases trust in the product's quality (Gartner, 2009; Knox, 2004). A brand helps the consumer to remember a product when it satisfies their needs and is convincing. The main dimensions of a destination brand said to be are awareness, image, loyalty, quality and value (Gartner, 2009).

Destination branding has caught the attention of both the tourism industry and academics, generating a multitude of documents, research papers and books. However, the majority of these studies focus on image (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005; Cai, Gartner, & Munar, 2009), as image is closely related to the concept of brand (Cai, 2002), and notions of image are usually involved when a destination brand is conceptualised (Tasci, and Gartner, 2009). While image, as an element of a brand, has received ample attention (Cai, 2002; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Gartner, 1994), other aspects of branding, such as slogans, still require detailed review (Cai, 2002; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Gartner, 1994).

2.2. The successful slogan

The literature on slogans, and tourist slogans in particular, has identified a series of characteristics that a good slogan should have in order to be effective and successful. The majority of these studies differentiate between: (1) media exposure and the effect advertising campaigns have on brand recall and brand recognition (Kohli, Thomas, & Suri, 2013), and (2) the intrinsic characteristics of slogan design which help reinforce the brand image. The present article focuses on this second area.

Dahlen and Rosengren (2005) emphasised that the key to a

successful slogan was found in the following elements: the medium- and long-term picture; the positioning tool; the link between slogan and brand; the jingle effect; repetition; and the use of slogans and creativity. In a wider sense, the literature on tourism slogans has defined a number of features that a good slogan should have in order to be effective and successful: it should be short, entertaining, credible, durable, unique, concise, direct and appropriate. This, however, is not always achieved.

Authors largely agree on the importance of reflecting in the message that attribute which best characterizes and distinguishes the destination (Klenosky & Gitelson, 1997; Kohli et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2006; Obiol, 2002; Ortega et al., 2006; Pike, 2004; Richardson & Cohen, 1993), thereby avoiding heterogeneity in promoting the destination. There would therefore appear to be a broad consensus on the fact that those slogans that customize the message and focus on a differentiating feature achieve a better positioning of the destination, more singularization and greater recognition (Donaire & Galí, 2012). Conversely, those slogans that try to sell everything do not show anything representative of the destination, and end up being excessively generic and unoriginal. Lee et al. (2006) argued that many destinations try to sell nature and heritage simultaneously, which means they cease to be unique attributes. In addition, the message often conveyed by such slogans is applicable to many other places. As Pike (2004) stated, seeking out what makes a destination different generates powerful brands.

Authors also agree on the importance of associating the brand with the slogan. Integrating the brand within the slogan itself facilitates recall and association with the brand (Garrido, 2005; Kohli et al., 2007; Obiol, 2002; Ortega et al., 2006). Although the inclusion of the brand in the slogan may limit creativity, the potential benefits are huge (Kohli et al., 2007). Hence, it seems that tourist destinations are more likely to use slogans integrating the destination in the message itself (Ortega et al., 2006). In addition, if the destination is not well known, integrating it within the slogan will help with identification (Ortega et al., 2006).

Some studies highlight the relevance of slogan length. The slogan should convey the key idea in a few words (Garrido & Ramos, 2006). As Donaire and Galí (2012) state, since the main purpose of a slogan is retention, slogans tend to simplify as far as possible. That is, short slogans tend to be more easily remembered than those containing many words (Ortega et al., 2006; Pike, 2004). Donaire and Galí (2012), in their study of Catalan municipalities (Catalonia, Spain), use slogans with an average number of 4.9 words: a very similar result to that obtained by Ortega et al. (2006) in their study of Spanish slogans.

A slogan should also be easy to remember. Ease of recall increases when slogans are easy to repeat or contain rhyme, rhythm or alliteration (Supphellen & Nygaardsvick, 2002). Therefore, they must be original, ingenious and memorable: capable of impacting the consumer and positioning themselves in their mind, which is why they often use rhymes, puns, alliteration, analogies, syllogisms, and so on. A clear example of this would be the Amsterdam slogan, 'I Amsterdam', created in 2004, which makes use of a clever pun. 'I Amsterdam' is a motto and a brand all in one for both the people of Amsterdam and the city itself.

Furthermore, the clarity of the message must be taken into account. The slogan must be a simple statement, concise, unequivocal, direct and appropriate. Thus, if a slogan requires further promotional material to make it understandable, it loses effectiveness (Pike, 2004). Slogans should be expressed in simple terms and clearly focused on their purpose. In addition, the message should provoke positive emotions. Letho et al. (2014), in their study of the affective responses to 10 US destinations and slogans conducted on a group of 272 students, show that a slogan is most clearly effective when it awakens emotions and feelings, and when

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