



A marketing research tool for destination marketing organizations' logo design[☆]



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ABSTRACT

The literature widely acknowledges visual communication in the form of a logo as a potential marketing tool for attracting visitors. Focusing exclusively on logos, this study uses the Haitian Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) logo as a case study to explain how the choice of colors of a logo can benefit from market research methods. In essence, the study develops an analytical framework and contributes to the body of meta-literature in tourism marketing research. The results of the research affect current marketing practices in tourism, because firms seemingly overlook some important elements when developing a new logo. This situation is the case of the Haitian DMO and possibly other DMOs in the world.

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1. Introduction

In the tourism industry, exogenous factors like political instability, economic crisis, natural disasters, and the outbreak of diseases (Hai & Chick, 2011; Ritchie, Dorrell, Miller, & Miller, 2004) can cause destinations to decline and sometimes even totally disappear from the tourism map (Seddighi, Nuttall, & Theocharus, 2001). In this respect, tourism is a problematic industry (Getz, 2008). Destinations have an interest in developing strategies to mitigate the effects of these exogenous factors on inbound tourism. Communication with the tourism market using an effective recovery message (Walters & Mair, 2012) is the approach that this study covers. Brands are important intangible assets that can have significant positive effects (Park, Eisingerich, Pol, & Park, 2013) on the performance of a destination.

Because of its image of an unsafe destination (Higate & Henry, 2009; Séraphin, 2011), Haiti has had great difficulties in building and developing a sustainable tourism industry. As a first step, the Haitian Destination

Marketing Organization (DMO) took an initiative toward rebranding the country with an international logo and slogan competition via internet in 2012. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (2007), a DMO is the organization responsible for the management and marketing of destinations. This definition implies that the role of the DMO varies and among its various tasks, a DMO manages the branding of the destination to help ensure that visitors go through visitation experiences that are at a minimum, highly satisfactory, and where possible, highly memorable (Gartrell, 1988).

From March 10th to March 31st 2012, the Ministry of Tourism of Haiti (MTH), via an open call on their website, invited Haitians from its diaspora to participate in a contest to change the image of Haiti as a tourist destination by submitting a logo and a slogan that would become the new DMO emblem. The guideline that the Haitian DMO provides is very brief: "Imagine, create, compose and draw the Haiti of your dreams" (Delatour, 2012). As for the slogan, the choice of language is open (either in French, English, or Creole). The contestant has to provide a 3 page document: the first page with their details; a second page with the logo and a 10 line paragraph justifying their design, and the last page with a slogan and a 10 line accompanying explanation.

The MTH receives 400 proposals and chooses among the top 50 logos and slogans, according to the number of Twitter and Facebook votes on which logo best reflects the new image which the destination

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is looking for (Delatour, 2012). The winner of the logo, a Haitian designer from the diaspora, explains his design as follows (Fig. 1):

The word “Haiti” decorated with a hibiscus flower and a sun evokes the charm of nature and the profound beauty of the country and landscape. The logo symbolises a new positive image that will strengthen the perception the Ministry of Tourism of Haiti [MTH].

The slogan winner, an North American lady married to a Haitian, explains that “Experience It” “sums up the powerful and intense feeling often experienced by visitors while discovering Haiti for the first time” (Pierre-Louis, 2012). The first logo, adopted in 1939 (Fig. 2) upon the creation of the first Haitian Tourism Bureau features a typical Haitian woman carrying a basket on her head coming back from the market. Thomson also widely depicts this image in his travel writing “*Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti*” (Thomson, 2014). On this logo, the name “Haiti” is sitting upright in a basket, replacing fruits and vegetables. The three colors, yellow, red, and green, are reminiscent of the Jamaican culture. The Haitian Revolution (18th century) inspired slaves of Jamaica to seek their own freedom. This logo therefore clearly no longer reflects the vision of Haiti that the MTH wants to put on display.

Even though the internet-based contest conveniently opens the call to artists world-wide, an additional empirical approach based on visual research would have given the decision-makers a better understanding of the message that the new logo conveys.

Scholars have widely acknowledged visual communication in the form of a logo as a potential marketing tool in attracting visitors (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2013). As such, certain broad questions certainly arise: What communication strategy would help improve the image of Haiti as a country? Does the visual communication correctly portray the image of Haiti? This study focuses exclusively on logos and adopts the position that the design of a logo may benefit from a systematic investigation, before its update or modification.

Little academic and market research addresses the topic of Haiti as a destination despite the key role of color in consumers' daily lives (Labrecque, Patrick, & Milne, 2013). Therefore, this conceptual research aims to contribute to the body of meta-literature in these areas. As a result, the originality and objective of the current approach consists in developing a method which uses a multi-disciplinary approach, combining literature on marketing research on Small Island Branding and Destination Image; the role and performance of color in DMO logos and, more importantly, current literature on logos. This method may potentially help in deciding whether a logo (design, color, and slogan) of the DMO is the most suitable to represent and promote the destination. Fig. 4 indicates the process to follow in order to determine the palette of colors for the logo.

The study is a prolongation of a study by Muller, Kocher, and Crettaz (2013, p.86), in the sense that their study advocates the change of logo as being positive for a brand as “the introduction of a new logo leads consumers to perceive a brand as modern.” However, their study does not consider specific elements constituting logos (e.g. shape and color). Color is an important focus of this study because, alongside corporate name and type-face, design is also one of the main factors that



Fig. 1. New logo Haitian DMO.



Fig. 2. Old logo Haitian DMO.

can favorably influence a corporate logo (Foroudi, Melewar, & Gupta, 2014).

The study has four main sections. The contextual framework sets the backdrop for the research. In the present case the context is the Caribbean and more specifically Haiti, a post-colonial, post-conflict, and post-disaster destination. The contextual framework project informs and shapes the conceptual framework. The main function of the latter is to develop a personal reflection of reading the literature published in the area of the research (Quinlan, 2011). The discussion section presents the results, such as what a DMO should take into account when designing their logo. Finally, the conclusion focuses upon the method the Haitian DMO uses, providing suggestions for future research.

2. Context

2.1. Island tourism

According to King (1993, p.14), islands are “enticing forms of land surrounded by water, detached and self-contained entities whose boundaries are obvious.” Research often defines small islands as vulnerable and geographically insular (e.g. Andriotis, 2004; Brigulio, 2008; Dodds & Joppe, 2009). Island attraction as a tourism component is not a recent phenomenon (Conlin & Baum, 1995), but what is recent is the interest that worldwide tourism promoters are increasingly showing in the development of island tourism (Gowreesunkar & Ramnauth, 2013). Islands are usually rich in nature and culture and thus provide unique tourism experiences as compared to mainland destinations (Botti, Peypoch, & Bernardin, 2008; Pestanaa et al., 2011). On the other side of the coin, many authors depict islands as having disadvantages compared to mainland. For instance, islands face scarcity of tourism resources, they heavily rely on climate and weather, they have high percentage of imports and limited access to entrepreneurial networks, and they lack opportunities for self-sustaining strategies arising from sustainability problems (social, economic, cultural, and environmental) and constraints in terms of economic growth, carrying capacity, and market opportunities. From a different perspective, Das and Sharma (2009) argue that to qualify a tourism industry as prosperous and profitable, tourism must enhance the social and economic well-being of the residents who live in the area. The tourism industry should create business opportunities for residents and must satisfy all the stakeholders and protect the environment in which the tourism activity takes place. In the same vein, Cooper and Hall (2008) and Gowreesunkar and Ramnauth (2013) argue that a truly sustainable island destination must satisfy all of its stakeholders in the long run and ensure a balance between economy, society, and the environment.

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