TOURISM DESTINATION SLOGANS- PERSUASIVE OR MANIPULATIVE?

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Abstract: Advertising and tourism are two words frequently used nowadays. They are closely related and in a continuous expansion. Both of them are expensive but at the same time money generating. More than often the choice of a holiday depends on how well it was advertised or on how persuasive or even manipulative the message was. The purpose of this article is to analyze the impact of the tourism destination slogans on the potential tourists and whether the linguistic techniques employed fulfil their specific purposes. Another important objective is to show that the aim of the linguistic choices is not only persuasive and informative but also manipulative in order to achieve their primary goals: attract readers' attention and eventually turn them into tourists.

Keywords: metaphors, slogans, linguistics, the language of tourism

1. Introduction

Language is a complex process yet tourism is nothing inferior. We travel to certain places to "spice up" our life, to feel like we are in heaven, we "game on" for a magical holiday and hope to win or we "take the ride" of our lives. By the use of certain linguistic techniques, the language of tourism informs, describes, promotes, advertises, persuades and even manipulates the reader. Therefore tourism slogans are advertising tools needed in creating the destination image thus having a major role in attracting and persuading potential tourists or customers. The language of tourism when addressing its potential customers is trying to predict their need and motivations by using a certain type of discourse, consequently 'tourism is grounded in discourse.'[1]

Advertising and tourism are two words frequently used nowadays. They are closely related and in a continuous expansion. Both of them are expensive but at the same time money generating. More than often the choice of a holiday depends on how well it was advertised or on how persuasive or even manipulative the message was. Therefore destination branding has received a lot of attention recently as the field of tourism is one of the fastest growing industries. As a result there is this urge to create unique destinations, magical settings, a secluded and pristine environment, or to put it in order words heavenly destinations images. The importance of image nowadays plays a major role in advertisements. More than often we are what we see or we are what we buy, however there are many times when we are disenchanted with what we have bought and realize that we have let ourselves deluded by something utopist, something ideal that can exist only in the world of advertising and not in the real one. This disillusionment occurs as well in case of tourists who let themselves lured

[1] According to Graham Dann in his work *The Language of Tourism – A Sociolinguistic Perspective* , tourism is perceived as specialized discourse, consequently this work the first one that has comprehensively analyzed the language of tourism as a language of its own.

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and fascinated with some tourist destinations that do not live up to their expectations once they are there. It is all about how well the destination was advertised, how persuasive the message was and to what extent the tourist has allowed to be manipulated.

Although the interest in the language of tourism has grown in recent years, most of the studies have focused on the visual aspects of promotion rather than on the written text which is present too, as it is clearly expressed by Dann‟s statement: "where photographs are featured, almost without exception they appear in tandem with a verbal message" (Dann, 1996: 188). And it is particularly the analysis of this "verbal message" that we are interested in, namely the impact of tourist slogans in promoting tourism destinations. Nevertheless we will restrict our study to a number of 38 slogans, which have been taken from Thomas Cook' s *Signature* brochure for wedding destinations. Consequently we are trying to highlight and demonstrate how well written tourism destination slogans work effectively in tourism promotion advertising for the purpose of persuading the audience into becoming tourists, especially in the case of a future bride and groom who want everything to be perfect in their special day.

2. Corpus and Methodology

The corpus that we will be working with consists of 38 slogans (482 words) used in Thomas Cook's *Signature*[2] brochure of **wedding destinations** for 2013-2014. The focus will be on the linguistic techniques employed in the destination slogans in order to persuade and also manipulate to a certain extent the future bride and groom to choose a specific wedding destination. This analysis will be carried out mainly from a lexical and morphological point of view, thus some research limitations may arise.

Although we have limited our analysis only to these slogans, we consider that the fewer they are the more thoroughly will they be analyzed, thus supporting our choice by Van Dijk' s statement that "there is no such thing as a complete discourse analysis: a full analysis of a short passage might take months and fill hundreds of pages. Complete discourse analysis of a large corpus is therefore totally out of question" (Van Dijk in Wodak R. & M. Meyer 2001: 99). The discourse, the target audience, the aim of the discourse and nevertheless the finalities are elements that lead to an efficient and effective communication process in a constantly developing and changing field: tourism.

Aspects of tourism destination slogans: informative, persuasive and manipulative

The advertisements of any kind are accompanied by words or by a text, which provide information about the product, and more importantly, provide a base or an 'anchor' for the image. Under the general category of 'text', there may be descriptive information about the product, other text that serves the purpose of catching the reader's attention, as well as short phrases that act as a kind of slogan, and finally the name of the company and/or the name of the product.

[2] Thomas Cook *Signature* editions for 2013-2014, including the one used for our study, can be found online at www.ThomasCookSignature.com

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When producing a slogan the advertiser clearly has a communicative intention and it depends on how this is interpreted by the target audience. According to Sperber and Wilson[3] every act of communication is an *ostensive-inferential process*, consequently one can perceive any form of advertising (including slogans, in our case) a similar process. In other words the tour operator (the addresser/advertiser) can make use of various media as ostensive stimuli in order to manifest to the audience (the addressee) the informative intention about the destination/location advertised.

In the case of tourism advertisements language is an important tool. Not only does it send a message or some information but it also attempts to persuade or even manipulate the reader. Therefore the language in tourism ads has to be extremely convincing to achieve its materialistic goal and it is always open to interpretations. Usually the slogans have more than one meaning and the reader is free to understand what he desires. Moreover, it has to be eye-catching in order to attract attention towards the product and create a favourable meaning.

Nevertheless , the slogans should be easy to repeat and remember. That is why they are often formed of very few words, but not any kind of words. The slogans should easily interpretable and often convey double meanings, both communicative and persuasive, thus giving the possibility to the reader to make a decision according to what he/she understood or wanted to understand. Dyer considers that "catching out attention and imagination and aiding memory are perhaps the primary functions of advertising language" (139). Although shorter than any another discourse type, the advertisements will make use of a wide range of techniques to attain their ultimate goal: persuade and eventually sell. More than often good advertising techniques are the fine line between success and failure.

2.1. Lexical and morphological characteristics

Often called 'loaded language'(Leech 1972:25) the language of advertising aims to inform, persuade, sell thus changing people's opinions, choices and points of view. It relies on the connotative aspect of language which is more emotional and appealing. Verb and noun phrases and especially adjectives have a decisive role in changing the reader of a tourism advertisement into a tourist.

2.1.1. Noun phrases and nominalization

In many cases the whole slogan does not contain any verb; therefore nouns are of utmost importance when it comes to advertising, being much more suggestive, meaningful and manipulative than verbs are. For instance, out of the 38 analyzed slogans 10 do not have a verb (e.g. *Africa. Out of Africa and into a dream wedding*; *St Lucia. Arguably one of the prettiest and most sociable islands in the whole of the Caribbean*; *Antigua. A cool Caribbean vibe and a laid-back atmosphere*; *Grenada. A ruggedly beautiful paradise of secluded beaches, waterfalls and rolling contours*). Moreover there are key- nouns which are constantly repeating: the noun ***wedding*** is used twelve times in the 38 slogans, often determined by superlatives and comparatives meant to highlight the importance of such a special occasion. The noun ***paradise*** is used 6 times in the slogans, showing the importance of

[3]As far as the Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson's Relevance Theory is concerned, in general terms it can be perceived as a theory of communication. Given the fact that slogans, as marketing and advertising tools, are a kind of communication acts between the advertiser and the possible consumer/tourist, one can argue that the Relevance Theory can be perfectly applied.

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a weeding to take place in paradise. The noun ***island*** is also six times employed, thus the logical conclusion that the perfect weeding should take place on an island which is actually a human paradise.

Another way of manipulating the representation of certain destinations is by the use of nominalization, the choice to use instead of nouns different parts of speech, thus emphasizing the message. Nevertheless the use of genitives abounds, thus personifying the country and its possessions: *Extraordinary natural beauty and the easy-going charm ensure* ***Phuket's popularity***; *Off* ***Florida's east coast*** *where the Atlantic Ocean meets the Caribbean Sea you'll find the stunning Bahama islands*.

2.1.2. Verbs

If one quickly sets an eye on some randomly chosen advertisements would definitely notice that the majority of the verbs used are either at present tenses or in the imperative form. Therefore simple verbal forms are used in order to deliver a clear message, to satisfy the customers' needs and nevertheless to express timeless and universality of the message embodied: for instance Barbados will always be called 'the jewel of Caribbean', Caribbean 'a paradise' or Maldives is 'the epitome of paradise.' According to Leech (1972: 121), "verbal groups are mostly of maximum simplicity consisting of only one word". The verbs are common, used in everyday life, however the tourist destinations are the ones that make them profuse, special and worth taking into consideration. Verbs as ***enjoy***, ***experience***, ***try***, ***choose***, ***offer*** go beyond their common usage and invite the reader into a magical world where everything receives connotations. In Italy you can 'speak the language of love', in San Francisco the 'weddings are as personal as you like, from the ceremony to the iconic locations', in Caribbean you can 'experience a marriage made in paradise', etc.

As far as the imperatives' usage is concerned, this appeals to the customers' emotions and personal desires and aspirations, especially in case of a wedding, thus suggesting a way to make dreams come true: 'Dream a little dream.'; 'Unveil your perfect day.'; 'Get ready for the big day.'; 'Experience a marriage made in paradise.' ; 'Enjoy a beautiful ceremony in beautiful surroundings.'; 'Enjoy a USA wedding, your way.'; 'Let it capture your heart.' Moreover they also show the advertiser's confidence about the claim to have the perfect ingredients for a perfect day.

2.1.3. Adjectives

Adjectives are probably the most frequent part of speech used in slogans. They have to be expressive, persuasive, convincing, out of the ordinary and give a clear image of the heavenly like destination. The focus is on their hyperbolic dimension as well as on their comparative and especially superlative forms. The tourist destination is more than often depicted as *beautiful, breathtaking, spectacular, magnificent, perfect, extraordinary, unspoiled, seclude, unique, stunning* and the list can go on. Therefore the persuasive and manipulative force of the adjectives is high as it is meant to construct and envisage another world, authentic, magical and special, nothing like the one we are used to. Thus adjectives are of utmost importance in tourism slogans, being "the most notable feature of the language in advertising" (Townson 1995:85). It is therefore an inescapable fact that the language of advertising relies on the heavily use of adjectives and on exaggerations.

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2.1.4. Pronouns

The use of personal pronouns is meant to break down any boundary that may exist between the addresser and the addressee. By the constant use of the second person YOU, the advertisers establishes a dialogue with the readers, trying directly to persuade them that what is being advertised is actually worth trying. These are markers of familiarity between the product and the possible consumer, as the former is aimed at meeting the latter's needs and desire. "Interaction is one of the primary techniques of involvement, through which the enunciator tries to persuade the enunciatee of the tourist brochure. There are two main enunciative strategies. The objective strategy consists in the occultation of both the enunciator and the enunciatee. […] The result is an impression of objectivity." (Mocini 2005: 158) therefore under the mask of a false objectivity, the advertiser claims to know the tourist's needs and promises to fulfill them: "Why Signature? Because we promise you the world, and we deliver."; "Enjoy a USA wedding, your way."; "South Africa has everything you need for the perfect African wedding."

2.1.5. Numerals

Although in many advertisements numerals are present to define certain quantities of percentages, the place it holds in certain surveys or amongst the customers' top three preferred, in the case of tourism destination slogans there are no numbers. Out of the 38 slogans analyzed there is only one slogan that contains a number: "Just **26 miles long by six** miles wide, Tobago's often called the last of the unspoilt islands." In case of the tourism slogans numbers are used either to express distances or to rank the locations in order to make them different from the others.

2.1.6. Idioms and collocations

The role of both idioms and collocations are on the one hand to use constructions that the reader is familiar with, but on the other hand to exert a kind of emotional manipulation on the potential tourist. And this manipulation becomes even greater in the case of the slogans we have analyzed as they depict a very special day, a once in a lifetime event: the wedding. Therefore, advertises invite the future couples to have their wedding in 'sceneries that takes their breath away', 'to experience a marriage made in paradise', to have 'the honeymoon of a lifetime', all of them persuading the consumer to make the 'right decision.

3. Research limitations

Research limitations may arise from the fact that we have focused only on a rather small corpus made up of only 38 slogans and 482 words; however it was clearly targeted at wedding destinations. Furthermore, it could be argued by some that the research of text without the image could seem void, and might prevent the researcher form establishing certain relations and interpretations. However this approach has been specifically chosen to highlight and better explore the text itself as the text shapes the image.

4. Conclusions

The fact that tourism is a continuously developing domain has led to many research studies carried out from different perspectives: geographic, historic, economic, social, political, however our study has aimed to analyze tourism destination slogans from a

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morphological and lexical point of view. Since advertising slogans are generally characterized by briefness there could be different and diverse interpretations of a sole slogan. But despite this divergence in understanding and interpreting, slogans are always intended to deliver positive messages. Taking everything into account, it can be said that tourism destination slogans are still a subject that raises many people's interests. Whether they are used to inform, persuade, manipulate or with any other purpose good and effective slogans can always create new and new meanings. They hold the potential to create reality as well as imagined worlds. Understanding what they communicate or imply makes all the difference.

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