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# A marketing research tool for destination marketing organizations' logo design<sup>☆</sup>

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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.

## 2.2. The Caribbean: an overview

People commonly associate the Caribbean with sun, sandy white beaches, swaying palms, and romantic images of tranquil azure seas (Nelson & Torres, 2010). This “sun-and-sand” image attracts mass tourists who do not go off the beaten path (Nelson & Torres, 2010). Because of its diversity, not all of the islands are “vested in the branding and marketing of paradise” (Sheller, 2004, p.23). For instance, a common depiction of Haiti is that of a destination where the worst is likely to happen.

Many Caribbean nations depend on tourism (Murphy & Murphy). However, some island-state destinations appear to be more successful than others in offering tourism services and activities, and in attracting travelers (Murphy & Murphy, 2004). Five destinations lead the way in 2013. The Dominican Republic (4,689,770 visitors) is by far the most visited destination of the Caribbean (Caribbean Tourist Organisation (CTO), 2013). Followed by Cuba (2,850,135 visitors), Jamaica (2,008,409 visitors), Puerto-Rico (1,588,795 visitors), and the Bahamas (1,363,487 visitors). The CTO refers to this group of five destinations as “The Big 5” (CTO, 2013).

## 2.3. Tourism in Haiti: an overview

Between the 1940s and the 1960s, Haiti is the most popular tourist destination in the Caribbean and, as such, attracts the international jet set. In 1957, the dictatorship and the atmosphere of terror that Francois Duvalier and his “Tontons Macoutes” cripple the country’s tourism industry. The country then goes through a severe economic crisis which develops into a socio-political crisis (Séraphin, 2011; Thomson, 2014). The key issue of Haiti’s development is the fact that Haiti’s government comprises politicians who do not have a genuine interest in development (Maguire, 2014; Thomson, 2014). Leadership is a key issue of the country (Séraphin, 2013) and Wagner (2015, p.258) argues that:

Over the next two hundred years, Haiti would endure long periods of political instability, increasing socio-economic inequality, a nearly twenty-year occupation by US Marines, a nearly thirty-year dictatorship, several coups and military juntas, and an unremitting series of foreign military, political, economic, religious, and humanitarian interventions (...) Haiti and its people have struggled for stability, sovereignty and democracy.

On January 12, 2010, an earthquake shakes Haiti to its foundations, further damaging the tourism industry because of the destruction of most of the infrastructures and facilities of the sector. Thanks to the Haitian diaspora, investments and foreign direct investments, the hospitality sector quickly recovers from the earthquake (Séraphin, 2014), to the point that the Haitian government has identified the tourism sector as the key vehicle for economic development of the country (Séraphin & Nolan, 2014). However, in the updated version of “*Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti*,” Thomson (2014) highlights an important question regarding the impact of the tourism industry for the country:

New Hilton and Marriott hotels are due to open in Port-au-Prince; change is coming fast. The question is whether the poor – that is, the majority of Haitians – will benefit from the foreign loans and investment, whether money will trickle down from the Hilton to the slums at the harbour’s mouth. No doubt something will be lost as the global market brings more all-inclusive resort hotels and standardized Palm Beach sport cabin villages. As in Jamaica in the 1950s, it will be a trade-off between dignity and the mighty dollar (...) but jobs are needed.

Therefore, the question of whether tourism is positive or negative for Haiti is legitimate.

## 2.4. The Haitian identity or “Haitianity”

When talking about the Haitian identity or “Haitianity,” considering the Haitian leaders who played a major role in creating a national identity (Destin, 2014) is important. Such is the case of Toussaint L’Ouverture (1743–1803), who freed Haiti from the French domination and contributed to make Haiti the first black republic in the world. The black face of the first DMO logo (Fig. 2) is a reminder of the African origin of Haitians, which leads naturally to the topic of religion and voodoo. An intimate link exists between voodoo and the culture and history of Haiti, because the Haitians are 100% Voodooist and religion is the mainstay of Haitian society. Voodoo plays a key role in the Haitian survival of the slave trade and continues to provide the locals with a common identity and connection to their past. Voodoo is for Haiti a shared understanding and acceptance of a common identity (Séraphin & Nolan, 2014). The first DMO logo reflects this idea (Fig. 2) by the black mambo (female high priest in the Voodoo religion in Haiti). Fig. 2 provides evidence that a branding symbol such as a logo can portray a place’s identity.

## 2.5. Examples of Caribbean destinations: identity and logo

Grenada is a rural agrarian society, where the decline of agriculture over the past two decades has pushed the government toward tourism for the economic development of the island (Nelson & Torres, 2010). Grenada is an example of a destination where the dominant image and largest tourist market is “sun-and-sand” but also where varied dimensions of tourism products have emerged, co-existed, and complemented each other (Nelson & Torres, 2010). Neither the current nor the former logo of the DMO reflect this hybrid nature. The principal imagery used in the logo for Grenada is the nutmeg (Fig. 3). The nutmeg is a key component in Grenada’s destination promotion, because the concept of spice has long been a focal point for creating a sense of unique identity and distinction from other islands in the region. The nutmeg not only denotes the traditional importance of spice in the island’s agricultural industry but also connotes ideas of a “natural exotic environment.” The brand “*Pure Grenada*” does not aim to replace the national identity but rather to “more clearly position the unique product in the minds of consumers.” The first logo appears in 1998 and draws on the fact that Grenada has a strong Unique Selling Point (USP) not connected with “sun and sand.” The colors and the position are in accordance with the fact that Grenada is one of the world’s largest producers of Nutmeg, and the spice permeates the whole of the island’s way of life (United Nation’s Development Program).

As for the Haitian’s DMO logo, the old logo seems complete from an identity point of view: the representation of women in the Haitian culture that simultaneously praise and prescribe women to the social roles of breeders, mothers, nannies, and laborers (Charles, 2014), and the role and importance of color in this society. Mackay and Couldwell (2004) and Feldman, Jacobson, and Bender (1991) particularly illustrate this idea. The authors observe that colors are not only vital in communicating images but also have immediate perceptual and cognitive

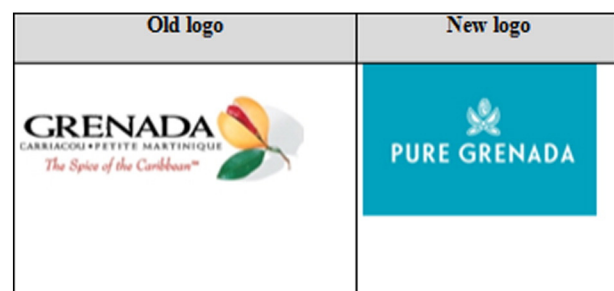


Fig. 3. Grenada DMO logos.



significance in human experience of visual consciousness and responsiveness. As a matter of fact, color infuses all aspects of social life in Haiti and is “a political and ideological instrument for the acquisition, maintenance, and/or reproduction of class position and privileges by distinct social groups. Color has become a surrogate for race” (Charles, 2014, p.72). The whiteness (associated with freedom, superiority, and life) and blackness (associated with bondage, inferiority, and social death) are antipodal. The new logo symbolizes a new image that the destination wants to project. The slogan “*Experience It*” conveys an encouragement to visitors to come to Haiti. Park et al. (2013: 181) also echo this idea. The authors conduct a study on the impact of brand logo on customer brand commitment: “...logos often create value to customers by making brand identification easier and enabling faster decision-making”. By and large, Caribbean destinations seemingly adopt three kinds of strategies regarding the design of their logo: a) Moving from an idiosyncratic identity-based logo to a universal “sea-and-sun” stereotyped one; b) taking the opposite strategy; or c) adopting a neutral and stylized logo that does not refer to identity or “sea-and sun” stereotype.

Drawing on the findings, this study supports the view of Mueller and Schade (2012) regarding the difficulty of projecting a brand which has to encompass many different audiences, the complexity of the place, and the necessity of stimulating economic growth simultaneously. Alongside Mueller and Schade (2012), this study posits that further research is still necessary on how place branding authorities can portray or stimulate a place’s identity. As the section below highlights, customers are the main variable in the process of communication of the brand. Their constant change of expectation, taste, and behavior (Doyle, 2002; Quek, 2012) complicates logo selection.

### 3. Conceptual framework

#### 3.1. A logo as a symbol

A logo is a key component of brand identity and provides instant recognition for a brand (Park et al., 2013). Because logos visually represent the essence of a brand and what the brand stands for, they have the potential to serve as a focal point of connection for customers, communicating and reinforcing a brand’s core values (Park et al., 2013). Logos are therefore a form of visual communication to customers transcending international boundaries and language barriers (Pittard, Ewing, & Jevons, 2007). Yet, despite the importance of logo design in marketing and communication, little empirical research exists around this issue (Pittard et al., 2007). A Logo should be able to communicate an organization’s objective to its target market, be memorable, and easily lead to an association with the corporate or brand name (Marti, 2008; Morgan et al., 2013). Logos, as visual symbols, offer an untapped opportunity (Park et al., 2013). The logo should also embody the firm’s uniqueness and value and yield customer brand commitment and improve the organization’s performance, while contributing to favorable interaction between the firm and its customers (Park et al., 2013; Wang, Hernandez, Minor, & Wei, 2012). In a tourism context, Hem and Iversen (2004) argue that destination logos should match the destinations they represent, “their identity, uniqueness and value, as well as essence and objective” (Marti, 2008; Morgan et al., 2013). These traits are all the more important in tourism because logos can influence tourists’ destination choice (Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002).

#### 3.2. The role of color in a DMO logo

The effectiveness of a visual logo likely depends on multiple design properties of the logo, such as color, shapes, and sizes (Park et al., 2013). Communication, marketing, and retail sectors acknowledge the role of color in attracting attention, inducing a mood, or conveying complex information and use color to achieve specific goals. The Color Marketing Group (CMG) suggests that color increases brand recognition

and accelerates learning. The role of color in logos essentially relates to its symbolic function, which has remarkable power. An accumulation of archeological evidences over the last 10 years indicates the use of colored pigments (e.g. ochre) in pre-historical times to convey meaning (Labrecque et al., 2013).

A tourism destination usually comprises a variety of natural and cultural resources upon which a myriad of stakeholders work to co-create the final tourism offer. As a result, because of the involvement of multiple hands in creating the tourism product, determining the appropriate colors that best represent the destination is often an area of high debate among stakeholders. The choice of the color palette that best captures the essence and narrative of the destination is also an important prerequisite (Morgan et al., 2013). Marketers have long used color to catch consumers’ attention and to communicate a brand meaning, and they continually review color meanings and associations to adapt to the market in order to gain a competitive edge. Tourism marketing is a sector that has not yet optimized the use of color in its communication’s strategy; DMO logos are suitable examples to illustrate this viewpoint. The implication for DMOs is that they face the challenging task of selecting the appropriate color that not only best represents the destination, but also generates a strong image in the mind of visitors. As a result, DMOs should be aware of the perceived importance of colors and their interpretation when designing a logo.

Firms should conduct research regarding choice of colors before launching a product or service. Following this perspective, the performance of color in a logo, if well calculated can affect the destination image, perceived value of destination, loyalty, attractiveness and hence competitiveness of a destination. Tourism marketing, like other marketing areas, could take advantage of the research and development in color psychology to enhance communication and effect. The framework (Fig. 4) below builds on propositions that claim that capturing the essence of the destination is very important for any visual element (Morgan et al., 2013). Thus, a translation system of parameters into colors can determine the palette of colors of the logo.

The outer circles of “Destination” and “Marketing” show all the key criteria that firms should take into account when deciding the colors of an effective logo. Fig. 4 also shows the difficulties of choosing the right colors because organizations must change the image of the destination while maintaining the essence of the destination. The framework also highlights the complexity of designing a good logo because the logo needs to simultaneously reflect the essence of the destination and break with the previous image of the destination. Applying the above model to Haiti’s DMO logo, the colors in the first logo (Fig. 1) are more effective in

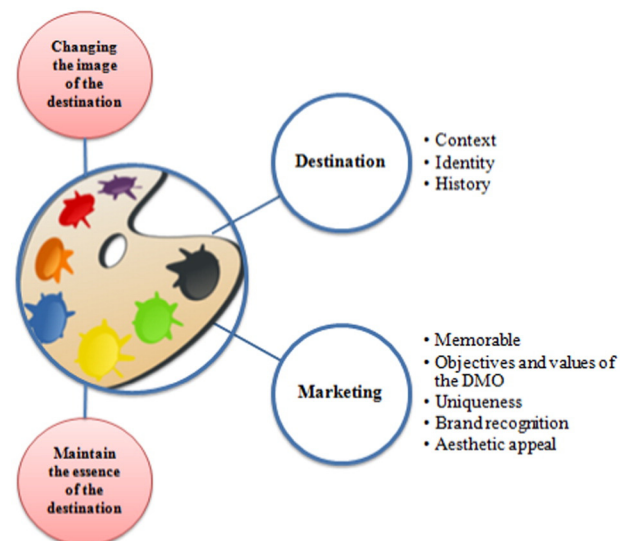


Fig. 4. Determining a palette of colors for logos.

terms of conveying the essence of the destination to the tourists, because the colors used are quite meaningful and representative of the history, tradition, identity, and context of Haiti. The new logo of the Haitian DMO, as Muller et al. (2013) argue, contributes by changing the image of the destination into something more modern. From this point of view, the logo achieves the objectives and values of the DMO. However, the logo does not give the full narrative of the destination.

In terms of brand recognition, uniqueness, and memorable traits, colors of the Haitian DMO logo are not that different from other Caribbean DMO logos. Caribbean DMO logos commonly use red and yellow. The colors (and design) of the Haitian DMO logo are not very different from the logo of the Dominican Republic (DR) DMO logo (Fig. 5). Therefore, the Haitian DMO may have used a benchmarking approach when adopting their current logo. This situation echoes Séraphin's research (2011, p.43), which argues that "whatever direction Haiti and the Dominican Republic choose to go to in order to achieve a sustainable tourism industry that is economically, geographically and socially viable, a partnership between both countries seems to be unavoidable as there is a high risk of duplication."

#### 4. Discussion

As an exploratory study, this research argues that proper choice of color is critical in developing destination logos because color is one of the main vehicles that communicate image, cut through clutter to gain attention, and speed up recognition of the destination (Hem & Iversen, 2004). As a result, tourism marketing managers must develop a better understanding of the effects of color in order to make informed decisions in the development of strong destination logos. Tourists often perceive destination image through its logo, which has been an important contributor in determining destinations' representativeness, visual brand awareness, and marketing effectiveness (Morgan et al., 2013).

Fig. 4 provides a method to determine the right palette of colors for a logo. This process is the "nutshell approach," the nut being the core elements of the destination (context, identity and history) and the shell the visual aspects (esthetic, the memorable aspects, etc.). The current research about the Haitian DMO goes far beyond a research study on the marketing of a post-colonial, post-conflict, and post-disaster destination, or about the role of color in marketing. This study also sheds some light on the role of the diaspora in the tourism development of the destination as purveyor of knowledge, innovation, entrepreneurship, and development. Séraphin (2015) also explains that diaspora tourism presents more benefits for Haiti than non-diaspora tourism.

The results highlight above all the importance of innovation in the tourism industry with competition as the main driver (Edgell & Swanson, 2013). In the same line of thought, competitiveness influences the success of a destination (Enright & Newton, 2005). The market conditions and business environment in which tourism operates are constantly changing, requiring businesses to adapt, to develop strategies and to be innovative to retain their position (Page, 2012). With globalization, the tourists have more choices, therefore increasing the competition between destinations (Holden, 2013). Performance becomes a key feature of competitiveness (Holden, 2013).



Fig. 5. Dominican Republic's DMO logo.

The results on the Haitian DMO logos and the methods the Haitian government used to select the new logo lead to think that amateurism is still an issue in Haiti (Théodat, 2004), in detriment of strategic intelligence. Adopting a scientific and academic approach in DMO logo design would have been an effective and efficient method for a destination aiming to play a major role in the tourism industry in the Caribbean.

#### 5. Conclusions

Haiti, as a tourism destination, has since 1960s portrayed an image of uncertainty and insecurity. To win back its popularity, the Haitian DMO has introduced a new logo. This article does not question the decision of adopting a new logo. Instead, this study focuses on the design (including colors used), and particularly, the absence of empirical research to inform the decision. This study proposes a conceptual framework to determine the right colors for the DMO logo. The framework establishes a relationship between color and its effect on the overall competitiveness of the destination.

Further research in the form of a short survey (questionnaire) carried out at the World Travel Market (WTM) 2013, shows that the respondents consider the colors of the first logo (Fig. 2) as the most representative of Haiti (Séraphin, 2014). This study interviews a sample of respondents, representing each of the nine countries of the Caribbean Tourism Organization. A future article will provide the results of this survey and further empirical research.

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