

# Albania (Go Your Own Way!) to Zimbabwe (A World of Wonders): A rhetorical analysis of the world's country tourism slogans

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## Abstract

Despite a large focus on polysemy and rhetorical figures in brands and logos, there is much less research on slogans in marketing literature in general and virtually no studies that relate slogans to tourism destinations using a similar methodology. The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the tourism slogans of the countries in the world using a combination of semantic evaluation methods, including rhetorical analysis, semiotics, and thematic reviews. Results suggest dominant themes of comparing and contrasting with other regions and countries, heavy use of metaphors and dramatic portrayals, anthropomorphized country traits, and individuality along with overarching concepts of the self. Implications for destination marketing practitioners and future research are also discussed.

## Keywords

Country slogans, destination branding, rhetorical analysis, semiotics, thematic review, tourism

## Introduction

For many successful brands, there is often a successful slogan accompanying it (Aaker, 2009). Slogans (also referred to as taglines) may be described as the few words or phrases that accompany a brand name to create appeal with those exposed to it (Dowling and Kabanoff, 1996; Sherif, 1937). Slogans have been strategically used in marketing to fulfill a number of goals including highlighting brand functionality (M&M's 'Melt in your mouth, not in your hand'), increasing memorability ('L'eggo my Eggo'), and reinforcing brand positioning (Mazda—'It just feels right') (Aaker, 2009, 2012). Often used as tools of branding, slogans allow flexibility and help overcome legal limitations encountered by brand names and symbols (Aaker, 2009, 2012). The importance of slogans in establishing and maintaining brand identity has resulted in their use as a dominant advertising technique (Reece et al., 1994).

Among the fields of advertising which see a prolific use of brand slogans is the area of destination branding. From small towns (Mount Forest: 'High, Healthy, Happy'), to big cities (Toronto: 'See Toronto Now'), to provinces (Ontario: 'Yours to Discover') and eventually, to countries (Canada: 'Keep Exploring'), slogans play a central role in being the first impression a tourist may have with a destination. In fact, this research has revealed that nearly 85% of the world's countries has some form of slogan that they use to encourage tourism. Understanding how these slogans are structured as compared to product brand slogans and what some of the potential interpretations may be in regard to their word choices and sentence structure would thus provide for a meaningful exploration.

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## Purpose of the study

Despite a large focus on polysemy and rhetorical figures in brands and logos, there is much less research on slogans in marketing literature in general (Dimofte and Yalch, 2007) and virtually no studies that relate slogans to tourism destinations using a similar methodology. For instance, Supphellen and Nygaardsvik (2002) examine the interpretations of a single country's (Norway) slogan by Australian participants in a controlled setting. The authors suggest that future studies should examine country slogans prior to being subjected to empirical testing, such as through a semantic evaluation of the slogans in terms of rhyme, rhythm, and alliteration (Supphellen and Nygaardsvik, 2002: 394). As a slogan's effectiveness is not only based on its possible meanings but on the recipient themselves as well as the context they receive it in (Dimofte and Yalch, 2007), the present work pays important consideration to these various perspectives.

Specifically, continuing from the suggestions by Supphellen and Nygaardsvik (2002), the purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how each country's slogan is structured using proven branding research techniques. By categorizing these slogans in a meaningful way into several themes, the authors aim to contribute to the domain of research on brand slogans within destination marketing. This conceptual study is composed of three main sections: the first reviews the literature on slogans used in marketing branding studies, aiming to show parallels between product and place branding. The second involves a detailed description of the methodologies and the resultant outcomes after a rigorous coding process involving each country in the world which contains a tourism slogan. Finally, the third section presents a holistic summary of the major country slogan themes as compared to those found in the product branding literature and describes the implications for both future research and destination marketing organizations.

Using a semantic text analysis (i.e. slogans as text), this article will outline and identify broad themes and techniques incorporated within tourism destination slogans using a combination of semantic evaluation methods including rhetorical analysis, semiotics, and thematic reviews.

## Literature review

### *Destination and place branding*

Destination branding's most robust definition comes from Blain et al. (2005), who combine

several major aspects of the most popular definitions from a wide range of sources, with the resulting definition of destination branding being:

... the marketing activities (1) that support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both *identifies and differentiates a destination*; (2) that convey the promise of a *memorable* travel experience that is *uniquely associated with the destination*; and (3) that serve to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of *pleasurable memories* of the destination experience, all with the intent purpose of *creating an image that influences consumers' decisions to visit the destination in question, as opposed to an alternative one*. (Blain et al., 2005: 331, italics added for emphasis)

Within this definition, several goals of destination marketing organizations become clear and will help to shape this study's methodology. The key elements of the definition include the differentiation that a destination hopes to demonstrate. Next, uniqueness is identified as a core component of destination branding. Third, image creation helps the tourist to associate a pleasurable perception of how the travel destination will actually look and feel. This is done by what Ritchie and Ritchie (1998) describe as *consolidating* and *reinforcing* these recollections. The former involves grouping memories into distinctive categories, while the latter has the destination marketing organization confirm these memories through their various advertising channels. Finally, there needs to exist a desire from the tourist to choose this specific destination over an alternative option.

Unlike product brands, which can be directly affected by marketers, the image of a destination is often out of the destination marketer's control and relies on the various images that the region's specific locations collectively create (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002). As a result, it is even more crucial that a destination's tourism slogan effectively compels both long-distance and regional-based tourists to consider visiting their country, as they are not able to control many other variables in that tourist's decision set.

A presentation by Ritchie and Ritchie (1998) at the Annual Congress of the International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism concisely explored the impact of performance on destination branding using predetermined 'roles' of selection (choosing one destination over others) and the tourists' recollection (recalling the

destination experience in terms of ease, frequency, and strength). What is particularly salient about these roles is the level of insight they provide into how these measures can be dissected and studied. That is, 'the effectiveness of a brand is dependent on how well it performs each of these roles' (Ritchie and Ritchie, 1998: 19). For example, with regard to selection (or the pre-experience of a tourist), one may observe that anticipation (the extent to which brand generates a desire to visit the destination) can be directly compared to a country's slogan to see whether that country is effectively evoking an interest by tourists to visit. Clearly, this notion of interest on behalf of the tourist is an important consideration for destination marketers (see, for instance, Pike, 2005). Arguably then, these roles, when compared with the country slogan data, can help to identify which measures countries have traditionally focused on as well as the ones that have been previously ignored.

### *Destination slogans*

Despite the lack of broad studies that investigate destination slogans overall, there is a small body of literature on specific destinations and their individual roles in their efforts to design effective tourism slogans, such as the countries of the United States, Australia, and New Zealand (Pike, 2004); Norway (Kohli et al., 2007; Supphellen and Nygaardsvik, 2002); and Sweden (Papadopoulos and Papadopoulos, 1993). Outside of a marketing perspective, the discussion of country slogans opens up more broadly to include additional countries such as Iran (Gheytnchi and Kamalipour, 2010) and Uganda (Cohen, 2004), yet even with this broader lens, the literature on country slogans remains sparse. Because tourism slogans are so important to the destinations that create them (Dinnie et al., 2010; Pike, 2004; Supphellen and Nygaardsvik, 2002), it is imperative that research be conducted to better understand their contribution to the destination marketers' tool kit.

The use of slogans for both destination and product brands has been utilized to achieve varying objectives including reinforcement of positioning, gaining brand recall and unaided awareness, increasing brand equity, and capturing brand essence (Aaker, 2009, 2012; Reece et al., 1994). Despite common goals, the inherent and obvious differences between the nature of destinations and products may result in contrasting outcomes of slogan used in both categories.

For example, product brand slogans may be designed to assist in capturing the essence of a product through a simple and memorable statement (Dowling and Kabanoff, 1996). However, it may be difficult for a simple statement to capture the essence of a destination that consists of several dimensions, offerings, and varying socio-cultural practices. This varied complexity in the nature of destinations might contrast with the use of oversimplified slogans and may become potential deterrents as a result.

Another consideration when crossing from the realm of product brands to destination brands is in the term of effectiveness. For instance, slogans work best for inexpensive, impulse products (Keller, 1999)—yet tourism services often do not fit this description so neatly, as even a deeply discounted travel experience is still relatively expensive compared to the cost of most consumer goods (Gold, 1994). This schism needs to be considered when comparing across these two categories.

Lastly, notions of loyalty have been discussed in the literature in terms of the use of metaphors, where the connection to human characteristics with brands leads to a strong brand community and interpersonal relationship between consumers and products who employ them (Maxian et al., 2013). As a frequently used approach in advertising, metaphors allow the comparison of two objects and state that one object is figuratively like another, even though both may in fact be quite different from one another (McQuarrie and Mick, 1996). Often a literal meaning with other implied meanings underlying the words is provided. For example, slogans such as Czech Republic's 'Land of stories' may creatively imply adventures or experiences for the traveler, or Cyprus' 'Cyprus in your heart' would indeed not be taken to literally mean that the country fits within a traveler's vital organ. Hence, both brand and destination slogans often use metaphors to be able to generate curiosity, gain attention, and increase advertising creativity (McQuarrie and Mick, 1999; Phillips, 1997; Phillips and McQuarrie, 2004).

Personification, or the ascription of human qualities to brands, is another advertising technique that often allows the development of consumer-brand relationships (Aggarwal, 2004; Delbaere et al., 2011; Fournier, 1998). Often, advertising copy may use human-like characteristics or personality features to describe brands allowing for figurative connections to be formed between a brand and those exposed to it (Aaker,

1997; Govers and Schoormans, 2005; Keller, 2003). Beyond product brands, this use of personification appears to exist in a destination context as well. For instance, Denmark's 'Happiest place on Earth' attributes the notion of happiness to make a relatable analogy with readers based on human emotion. In literal terms, the physical, inanimate stretch of land that marks the country lacks the ability to be 'happy', of course. However, there lies an inherent contrast between product and destination brands in the context of personification techniques. While products are often inanimate and brought to life through analogies, destinations literally comprise life-form, and this intrinsic difference may result in contrasting outcomes in the use of personification in advertising slogans. Unfortunately, although country slogans have been seen to be effective, they are very difficult to define as compared to consumer brands that typically have a more clear identity (Supphellen and Nygaardsvik, 2002: 386). Nevertheless, as Supphellen and Nygaardsvik (2002: 386) observe, '...the controllable sources should be optimally exploited in order to obtain strong awareness and a clear-cut, favourable and differentiating brand image for the country brand'.

### Polysemy in slogans

An audience is made up of various individuals, each having their own unique images, perceptions, and beliefs about the world around them. Polysemy is described as multiplicity of text where a varied but finite number of meanings exist through reader interpretation (Ceccarelli, 1998). As exemplified through a television audience as described by Fiske (1986: 3), 'a television program must be polysemic so that different subcultures can find in it different meanings that correspond to their differing social relations'. As Nerlich and Clarke (2001) suggest, this ambiguity in multiple meanings is not isolated to a specific research paradigm—in fact, polysemy occurs in almost all facets of human life. Certainly, as destinations design their advertising slogans—typically between just one and four words in length—polysemy would ensure that as much meaning as possible can be taken from such conciseness. Evidence of this can be found in slogan research in general. Take, for example, Nike's 'Just Do It' campaign—though only a few words long, Nike's slogan has as strong a presence as the brand itself, confirming that effective slogans can enhance a brand's image, aid in its

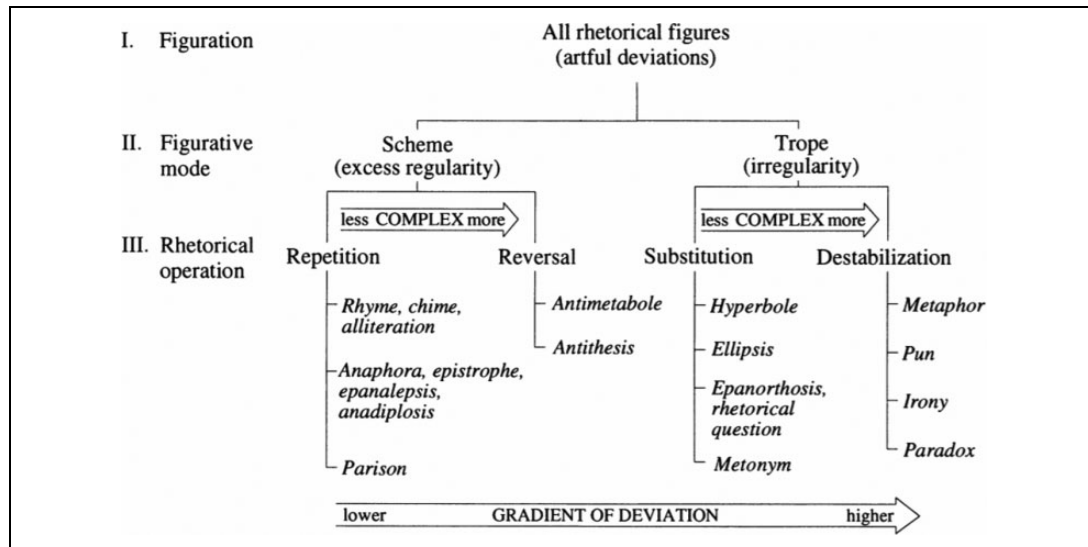
recognition and recall, and help to create brand differentiation in consumers' minds (Kohli et al., 2007: 415).

Due to the ambiguity in interpretation it creates and the subsequent ease of communication it provides, polysemy has been prevalent over time (Ceccarelli, 1998). Research suggests that the deliberate use of ambiguity and figurative devices in advertising has resulted in increased appreciation of brand slogans (Kohli et al., 2007; Lagerwerf, 2002; McQuarrie and Mick, 1996). Hence polysemy, specifically in slogans, can be a useful tool to reach the wide-ranging target audience of destination brands and enhance the creativity of its intended advertising message. Because ambiguity that has been too abstracted may also result in confusion in interpretation or a lack of reconciliation with the objective of the advertiser, use of such tools has often been prescribed with a certain degree of cautiousness (Kohli et al., 2007).

One of the most structured methodologies to examine the efficacy of slogans in a branding context comes from the framework established by McQuarrie and Mick (1996), which is presented in Figure 1. Here, the various forms of allegorical representation (figuration, figurative mode, and rhetorical operation) are presented and linked along a gradient of deviation from their prevalence in branding operations. By ranking the operations on a scale from less complex (e.g. schemes that simply repeat words in a phrase) to more complex (e.g. tropes linked to self-contradictory or impossible statements), the words used in destination brands can be categorized and analyzed using such structured qualitative techniques. One of these structured approaches is referred to as semiotics or the study of signs. Typically divided between two main components of the signifier (literal meanings) and the signified (implied meanings) (Penn, 2000), semiotics can be a useful tool to analyze the content of an ambiguous message such as a slogan and thus will be effected here.

### Methodology

Using the above framework as a guide, the current research will use an interpretivist perspective, guided by a semiological and rhetorical approach that applies these rhetorical operations in a tourism-specific context. To accomplish this, text is first examined with attention to the country's intention and inferred meaning situated within a historical and sociocultural context.



**Figure 1.** Rhetorical figures framework (McQuarrie and Mick, 1996).

Brand slogans not only communicate meaning to the audience through words used but also provide obscure meanings (or ‘signs’) that may be understood in different ways by individuals depending on individual context (McCracken, 1986). Often verbal elements in advertising and communication are used to present different messages to consumers, making a semiotic and rhetorical analysis a means to interpret the crucial connotations behind these elements (McQuarrie and Mick, 1999). Rhetoric is seen as an approach of framing a message in a manner to influence the reader and may be seen as an advertisers’ creative attempt at persuading the audience (Scott, 1994). An interpretive approach involves critical analysis of text to determine its single or multiple meaning, emerging through varying influences such as the authors intention, historical influence, popular culture, and social traditions (Holbrook and O’shaughnessy, 1988). Within this approach, one underlying assumption is that culture may be a ‘lens’ through which the world is interpreted and be given meaning to (McCracken, 1986: 72).

### *Rhetorical analysis coding procedure*

The initial decision to seek out every country in the world’s tourism slogan was made based on the availability of such information through moderate search efforts on the Internet. Going alphabetically, the majority of the slogans were presented prominently on the country’s website. For others, the online search led to either deeper digging online or a phone call placed to that

country’s tourism office. After completing this task, a fairly recent map of the country slogans was found, which included a complete list with the countries and slogans presented. This drastically reduced the challenge of confirming the slogans in our own list, and acknowledgement of our appreciation toward this effort is owed to Family Break Finder (2016) for making such a useful illustration. In total, the final Excel file included slogans for 157 countries across the world confirmed by comparing the Family Break Finder list to our own Google searches and then comparing the final lists across both authors.

From the Excel document, existing columns were added to begin the analysis. First, a reference was made to the four rhetorical operations in advertisements as used by McQuarrie and Mick (1996)—repetition, reversal, substitution, and destabilization—for each slogan. Next, examples of ways in which the slogan can be interpreted were given for each slogan (for instance, Cyprus: ‘Cyprus is in your heart’ contributes to being a rhetorical figure. Possible interpretations include Cyprus is a place that resides in the human heart; this place has a strong connection to my emotional state; tourists are in love with Cyprus). Following this, and using the slogans as a guide, along with the rhetorical operations and interpretations previously created, a column of key words was created for each country’s slogan, which eventually became sorted into the final five themes of country slogan typologies. This file was then downloaded into NVivo 11 Plus for Windows software to map these themes and nodes for the aggregate analysis

portion of this research. Finally, the themes were related back to polysemy/ambiguity, cognitive/affective appeal, brand slogan literature, and so on, to find areas of strengths/weaknesses in overall country slogan's effectiveness, particularly as compared to slogans in the product branding literature. Results were triangulated through multiple coders. Throughout the process, the coding was constantly recreated and reinterpreted in order to ensure that the process was iterative and not stuck on themes that did not end up in the final project. In total, each author spent 75 h on average on these steps from beginning coding to final draft.

## Outcomes

### General findings

As previously mentioned, tourism slogans of 157 countries were analyzed for themes using rhetorical tools and methods. It is noteworthy to describe some of the most commonly used words in the tourism slogans to situate them in the context of the qualitative analysis. Referring to Figure 1A for the complete word cloud, the words 'beautiful' (7 times), 'experience' (6 times), 'land' (6 times), 'life' (6 times), 'discover' (5 times), 'feel' (5 times), and 'heart' (5 times) were the most used in the tourism slogans. When a similar word cloud is created, this time based on the identified key words following the coding process, there is a noticeable shift in some words, while others remain topline. Again referring to Figure 1B, these shuffled words to the top include 'discovery' (13 times), 'comparison' (12 times), 'beauty' (10 times), 'exploration' (9 times), 'co-creation' (8 times), and 'exaggeration' (7 times). Interestingly, the notion of beauty remained near the top, showing that image was a main contributing factor to the tourism slogans. Further, after the key word analysis, discovery and exploration became much more prevalent.

Overall, there was a great sense in the slogans around the use of exaggerative expressions (United Kingdom: 'Home of amazing moments'; Suriname: 'A colorful experience—exotic beyond words') that was much more prevalent in this context than in a product brand context. Even when branding in a product sense crosses over into the exaggerative and hedonic, it maintains a link to the product (O'Shaughnessy and Jackson O'Shaughnessy, 2002), a link that was much less obvious from the country slogan

perspective. One possible explanation of this is the missing link between the words and the place itself. Indeed, a great volume of slogans emphasized various abstractions that did not speak to any specific element of their respective countries. One exception to this is Peru's 'Land of the Incas', which was one of the only country slogans to name a popular tourism element that visitors can hope to see when they visit.

Despite the relative ease in which each country's slogan fit into a specific theme, there were some countries that did not easily fit into any single category in a meaningful way. This may suggest an opportunity for these destinations to consider the message that their slogan is intending to convey. Take, for example, Morocco's 'Much Mor [sic]', Slovakia's 'Travel in Slovakia—Good idea', or Jordan's 'Yes, it's Jordan'. In all of these cases, the message may actually be *too* ambiguous, losing a clear interpretation in any meaningful sense. This lack of a clear message in the slogan could potentially lead to an erroneous dismissal by potential tourists who would have enjoyed these destinations' many worthwhile features.

With regard to the rhetorical operations as detailed by McQuarrie and Mick (1996), there were some common reoccurrences throughout the country slogans. These are illustrated here in Table 1. Most salient was the notion of repetition in the form of chimes—countries would group together words with the same first letter in hopes of having the slogan stick in the tourists' minds: Iceland's 'Inspired by Iceland', India's 'Incredible India [sic]', Lebanon's 'Live Love Lebanon', and Palau's 'Pristine Paradise Palau', all employ this operation effectively. Interestingly, there were also a large number of destabilization operations, in the forms of oppositions and paradoxes (Fiji: 'Where happiness finds you'), similarities and puns—specifically, homonyms (Croatia: 'Full of Life'; Namibia: 'Endless horizons') as well as the use of metaphors, discussed in greater detail later in this study. Finally, the operation of substitution played out in a large number of the slogans, particularly in the case of claim extremity and hyperbole as exemplified by Denmark's 'Happiest place on earth!', Dominican Republic's 'Dominican Republic has it all', and Honduras' assertion that 'Everything is here'. Within the same operation, hints of metonyms also occurred, with slogans offering sights for the tourist to seek (e.g. Romania: 'Explore the Carpathian garden'). Only two countries used an epistrophe (Mexico: 'Live it to

**Table 1.** Rhetorical operations with country slogan examples (from McQuarrie and Mick, 1996).

Operation and formal element			Brief description	Country slogan example
Repetition	Sounds	Rhyme	Repetition of syllables at the end of words	Austria 'Arrive and revive'
		Chime	Key words in a phrase begin with identical sounds or letters	Antigua and Barbuda 'The beach is just the beginning'
	Words	Assonance and alliteration	Three or more repetitions of a vowel or constant	Iceland 'Inspired by Iceland'
		Anaphora	Repetition of words at the beginning of phrases	Estonia 'Epic Estonia'
		Epistrophe	Repetition of words at the end of phrases	Lithuania 'See it! Feel it! Love it!'
Reversal	Phrase structure	Epanalepsis	Repetition of a word toward the beginning and end of a phrase	n/a
		Anadiplosis	Repetition of a word toward the end of one phrase and the beginning of the next	n/a
		Parison	Marked parallelism between successive phrases; often involves the use of one or more embedded repeated words	Nigeria 'Good people, great nation'
	Syntax	Antimetabole	Repetition of a pair of words in a phrase in reverse order	n/a
	Semantic	Antithesis	Incorporation of a binary opposites in a phrase	n/a
Substitution	Claim extremity	Hyperbole	Exaggerated or extreme claim	Brunei Darussalam 'A kingdom of unexpected treasures'
				n/a
	Assertive force	Rhetorical question	Asking a question so as to make an assertion	n/a
	Presence or Absence	Epanorthosis	Making an assertion so as to call it into question	n/a
		Ellipsis	A gap or omission that has to be completed	Morocco 'Much Mor [sic]'
Destabilization	Center or periphery	Metonym	Use of a portion, or any associated element, to represent the whole	Kyrgyzstan 'Oasis on the Great Silk Road'
	Similarity	Metaphor	Substitution based on underlying resemblance	Cyprus 'Cyprus in your heart'
		Pun (General)	Substitution based on accidental similarity	Micronesia 'Experience the warmth'
Opposition		Homonym	One word can be taken in two senses	Croatia 'Full of life'
		Antanaclassis	Repeating a word in two different senses	n/a
		Syllepsis	A verb takes on a different sense as clauses it modifies unfolds	n/a
	Opposition	Resonance	A phrase is given a different meaning by its juxtaposition with a picture	Colombia 'Colombia is magical realism'
		Paradox	A self-contradictory, false, or impossible statement	Fiji 'Where happiness finds you'
		Irony	A statement that means the opposite of what is said	n/a

believe it' and Lithuania: 'See it! Feel it! Love it!').

Based on McQuarrie and Mick's (1996) taxonomy, rhetorical figures create higher recall for advertisements that incorporate them and, in turn, this recall increases as complexity and deviation is enhanced. Slogans depicted here use repetition as a scheme that involves low decoding complexity while simultaneously increasing memorability and potential recall. Substitution and destabilizations (puns and metaphors) incorporated in some slogans generate higher complexity and deviation from expectation, gaining reader attention and creating engagement.

### *Countries as human traits*

A common element pertains to the anthropomorphized human-like qualities associated with the country in order to make them more relatable or to create deeper relationships between them and the individual (Plummer, 1985). These traits range from a heightened sense of confidence (Belgium: 'The place to be'; Cameroon: 'All of Africa in one country'; and Georgia: 'For the best moments of your life'), friendliness (Iran: 'You are invited'; Micronesia: 'Experience the warmth'; and Nigeria: 'Good people, great nation'), and self-actualization (Iceland: 'Inspired by Iceland' and the Netherlands: 'The original cool'). In each of these cases, one can imagine a young and fun-loving Netherlands, a polite and courteous Iran, and an older, more mature and confident Belgium.

Using personality traits in a product brand context, Aaker (1997) confirms the existence of five specific traits: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness to describe various aspects of brands. These traits influence consumer reaction and interpretation of marketing communication used by advertisers (Guèvremont and Grohmann, 2013). Although there were elements of some of these personality traits among the country slogans, the traits of excitement and competence were the most clearly represented. Aside from these traits, there was a much stronger connection to the feelings associated with love and affection—both from the tourist operators' and the tourist themselves' viewpoints. These strong affectionate traits include love (Slovenia: 'I feel sLOVEnia' and Lebanon: 'Live love Lebanon') and happiness (Maldives: 'The happy side of life' and Bhutan: 'Happiness is a place'). Product brand research supports this tendency to build relationships with

your consumers based on warmth and affection, suggesting that 'high levels of warmth... drive purchase intent and loyalty' (Fournier and Alvarez, 2012: 180). Consumers have often referred to terms such as 'love' or 'desire' in describing brands (Fournier, 1998). Love, however, has variations depending on who or what the emotion is being directed toward (Ahuvia et al., 2009). While love as a concept may be applied to objects and brands based on norms of interpersonal relationships, it would vary in nature from the love felt for individuals (Ahuvia et al., 2009; Fournier, 1998). Hence, brand slogans that incorporate references to interpersonal relationships may attempt to develop deeper connections with their audience, and the use of personification may allow positive associations to develop between destination brands and consumers. This discussion of love is extended into the next major aspect of the tourism slogans—the use of metaphors and dramatic portrayals of often vivid imagery.

### *Metaphors and dramatic portrayals*

The effective use of metaphors can allow brands to create riddles and puzzles to generate curiosity with consumers as well as to reveal connections with the brand and their personal lives that they did not otherwise think existed (Zaltman et al., 2003). In the context of the tourism slogans, there was a strong usage of the metaphor of a human heart (Bosnia and Herzegovina: 'The heart of SE Europe'; Cyprus: 'Cyprus in your heart'; Guatemala: 'Heart of the Mayan world'; Malawi: 'The warm heart of Africa'; and Saint Kitts and Nevis: 'Follow your heart'). There is a substantial amount of literature related to the interpretation of such metaphors (Coulter and Zaltman, 1995; Forceville, 2002; Phillips and McQuarrie, 2004), yet one article in particular, by Morgan and Reichert (1999), makes a strong argument for the use of what they refer to as 'concrete metaphors' (as opposed to 'abstract metaphors') which emphasize the metaphorical object that can be experienced through the five senses of touch, taste, sight, sound, and smell. The authors find that these concrete representations have a greater impact on consumer decisions than do the abstract ones. Put into the context of the concrete 'heart' metaphor, there is support to suggest that it is a potentially powerful metaphor to use in the context of tourism experiences, as it may suggest elements of love, affection, health, longevity, and life. In fact,



because ‘life’, ‘feel’, and ‘heart’ all top the most used words among the tourism slogans, there is evidence that this is indeed the case here. Although metaphors in brands have the benefit of being imaginative, they suffer from lack of sincerity that can affect the public’s opinion of the brand’s overall competence (Ang and Lim, 2006). This may be the case with another popularly used metaphor in the slogans, which attaches notions of royalty (Cambodia: ‘Kingdom of wonder’; Lesotho: ‘The kingdom in the sky’; Liechtenstein: ‘Experience princely moments’; and Swaziland: ‘A royal experience’). Ambiguous messages as related to royalty may hint to potential symbolic linkages for tourists as related to being rich, powerful, or influential. Although some of these countries are literally kingdoms with regard to their geographical locations (i.e. Lesotho and Swaziland are each considered either constitutional or absolute monarchies and have direct sovereignties), they may also be kingdoms in their ability to create a royal experience for their visitors—a potentially powerful use of polysemic messaging to engage with their tourists.

### *Individuality and concepts of self*

Again extending from the previous section of metaphors and imagery are slogans dealing with the concept of one’s self. Within the tourism slogans, a correlation between the destination brand and the traits of the tourists’ identities was explicitly depicted. Take, for instance, Argentina’s ‘Beats to your rhythm’, South Korea’s ‘Imagine your Korea’, or Albania’s ‘Go your own way!’. According to Belk (1988), this sense of personalization and building on the concept of the ‘self’ allows consumers to see brands as part of their own unique identity. The use of elements to draw parallels in advertising has been found to influence perceptions of a brand’s self-concept and personality (Aaker, 1997; Ang and Lim, 2006). The idea that brand personality is instrumental in enabling self-expression for consumers also in turn determines outcomes for the brand such as attachment and choice (Swaminathan et al., 2009). In the context of destination slogans, these extensions can relate to imagery used by destination marketers to create a sense of self that is dependent on the cocreation of a tourist experience. As people view brands as an extension of themselves (Belk, 1988), destination choice may be seen as one that allows identity to be defined through experiences.

Within the field of service management, this concept of cocreation has witnessed great momentum in recent years (Payne et al., 2008; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo et al., 2008). Essentially, as consumers gain experience and a general preference for building their specific service experiences (think: self check-in at the airport or build-a-bear workshops), country slogans are beginning to also capture this need for individualized experiences, allowing tourists to create their own encounters with the destination. For instance, South Korea’s ‘Imagine your Korea’ slogan is actually just one element of a full-scale campaign that has garnered special attention from tourism researchers. According to the South Korea tourism website (Imagine Your Korea, 2017), ‘the brand slogan “Imagine your Korea” expresses the brand identity, creative motivation, in a way that stimulates tourists to travel to Korea through Korea’s creative culture’. This effort to express their identity through the tourists’ own behaviors is a unique way to position their country’s brand and appears as a strong trend in destination branding.

Another application of the notion of individuality and the sense of self with regard to the cocreation process is that of sharing, particularly through social media. Some country slogans were suggestive of this sharing relationship (Bulgaria: ‘A discovery to share’ and France: ‘Rendezvous en France’), while one in particular, Spain, chose a more direct approach—their slogan is a Twitter hashtag: ‘#spainindetail’. Indeed, sharing one’s destination plans and experiences is a major component of modern travel and communication behavior (Lever, 2017).

Finally, with regard to the country’s own self-image, the use of terms such as beauty and color were by far the most prevalent among all the slogans, with seven countries each using a variation of the word ‘beauty’, with two countries (Laos and Saint Lucia) sharing the exact same slogan: ‘Simply Beautiful’.

### *Comparisons/contrasts with others*

According to Wang and Krakover (2008), even just a *perceived* notion of competition with other destinations can be vital in marketing a place effectively. With diminishing marketing budgets and increasing competitiveness, it is crucial that destination marketers are able to create innovative communications that help to separate them from the many other options that tourists have

available to them (Morgan et al., 2003). This level of comparison among destinations was another prolific theme, as many countries market themselves less on *who* they are and more on *where* they are. Examples include Portugal: 'Europe's west coast'; Tonga: 'The true South Pacific'; Malawi: 'The warm heart of Africa'; and Malta: 'Truly Mediterranean'. These notions of separation even border on isolation and escapism, with countries such as Madagascar boasting 'A genuine island, a world apart', and, more dramatically, Seychelles: 'Another world'. Whether tourists are indeed finding authentic experiences contained within these remote destinations is debated in the literature (Carson and Harwood, 2007), yet this element of separation nonetheless appears in their slogans. Perhaps a more tourist-friendly angle to promote this comparison could be in terms of uniqueness rather than isolation. More successful countries have adopted this alternative strategy, using more positive slogans such as Australia's 'There's NOTHING like Australia', nearby New Zealand's '100% Pure', and Nicaragua's 'Unica. Original!'. Although still technically presented as separated from others, the fact that it is framed as unique rather than alone makes a potential difference in a tourist's impression and is worth considering how the difference between the two may affect tourist behavior. This dimension of uniqueness adds to the literature on destination image by modifying the enduring characteristics of what drives the image of a destination—namely, the functional and psychological characteristics as outlined by Echtner and Ritchie (1991), wherein the inclusion of common and uniqueness variables to explain image formation helps to provide a more natural illustration of the process that tourists go through when imagining a destination.

### *Discovery, magic, and mystery*

Perhaps one of the most unique themes to emerge through the rhetorical analysis is that of discovery, magic, and a general sense of mystery that many of the slogans contained. Consider the following slogans and the imagery they bring to mind as they are read: Brunei Darussalam: 'A kingdom of unexpected treasures'; Cambodia: 'Kingdom of wonder'; Colombia: 'Colombia is magical realism'; and Czech Republic: 'Land of stories'. Here, the destination emphasizes what one may find when they arrive in a very abstracted way and seemed to be used more frequently applied in Central European countries

**Table 2.** Summary of identified slogan themes.

Slogan theme	No. of slogans	Most frequently used words
Countries as human traits	47	Beautiful (5), Feel (3), Life (3), Love (2)
Metaphors/dramatic portrayals	24	Heart (4), Experience (3), Life (3)
Individuality and concepts of self	24	Your (9), You (2), Beautiful (2)
Comparisons/contrasts with others	27	Coast (2), Country (2), Island (2), True (2)
Discovery, magic, and mystery	34	Discover (4), Land (4), Experience (2), Inspiring (2), Magical (2)

(Germany, Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Montenegro, and Macedonia, all used discovery-based slogans) as well as the Northeast Africa region (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and UAE). Personifying a destination's construed image as that of magical or mysterious may have implications that can be construed in one of two ways. On the one hand, the imagery attached to these slogans is vivid and highly imaginative—however, on the other hand, they do not necessarily suggest what one may actually find in these countries, erring toward a sensationalized version of the place in lieu of a practical one.

### *Summary of the five themes*

The five themes are summarized in Table 2 and provide an illustrative comparison to one another. Although simply having a related word was not necessarily enough to fit each into its respective theme, it was a useful exercise to consider how the words helped to shape the theme itself.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

This article has taken the heavily researched field of slogans and their impact on products from an advertising focus and considered whether the same evaluations can be used to effectively understand national tourism slogans. The findings suggest strong notions of complexity and polysemy that appear frequently in country slogans. Indeed, as seen through the analysis of the 157 slogans for which this study was based on, the major personified themes of human love, discovery, and adventure-seeking seemed to dominate, while the many other wide-ranging human

**Table 3.** Comparison of product brand versus tourism slogan attributes.

	Product brand slogans	Country slogans
Prevalence	Most prevalent in inexpensive, impulse-based products	Prevalent throughout the world for most countries that welcome tourism
Message polysemy	Direct message with tangible benefits to the product	Ambiguous message with abstract connection to the place
Complexity	Simply stated and to-the-point	Larger words incorporated and layered-messages which require thought to unravel entirely
Personification	Attribute a wide-range of human qualities to inanimate products	Attribute narrow focus of loving and adventurous human qualities to living places
Image volition	Image can be more readily controlled by the brand	Image is more controlled by the tourist's own perceptions and beliefs

emotions (including intelligence, strength, courage, compassion, ad infinitum) were not directly present in these slogans as they are in traditional brand personalities such as those outlined by Aaker (1997). Finally, the country slogans were overwhelmingly ambiguous in nature, which give a better opportunity for meaning interpretation than if they were direct and to the point as many product brands tend to be.

Overall, this article has given structure to the various slogans used to brand this world's nations by providing a contrast and comparison to those slogans found throughout the product branding world and paying special consideration to the rhymes, rhythms, and alliterations contained within. Extending this further, this study has also demonstrated five major themes found in today's country slogans, including metaphors and dramatic portrayals, individuality and concepts of self, comparisons to others, and discovery, magic, and mystery. This research is important as it uses a structured conceptual methodology in the area of social science research and applies it to a previously unexamined topic: tourism destination slogans at the country level. By building on past research related to polysemic slogans and brands, this study demonstrates that a destination's slogan can contain rich, ambiguous messages that may or may not be having an impact on the tourists who choose to visit them. The differences described throughout this study between product brand and country slogans is summarized below in Table 3.

The research propositions outlined in this report aimed to highlight the various elements of branding strategies and roles as seen through a number of related fields of literature, including advertising, service management, product branding, destination branding, and tourism destination image. From 157 country slogans, a variety of figurative operations were demonstrated to be present as shown through a stringent

rhetorical analysis. In choosing destination marketers' goals in the creation of their tourism slogans, challenges arose with regard to determining which ones best represent the specific goals that these slogans set out to achieve. For instance, one article stated that a slogan's aim is divided into one of two camps: driving an action to be taken or stress the rewards that the brand can offer (Gold, 1994). Yet with the destination's slogans, it was not so simple to delineate them into just these two groups. For instance, what actions are inspired, or what rewards are offered, by the following countries' slogans: Gambia's 'The smiling coast of Africa'; Georgia's 'For the best moments of your life'; or Bahamas' 'Life is grand'. Although these slogans conjure imagery of happy coasts, exceptional experiences and rich lifestyles, they do not neatly fit into drivers of specific actions or specific rewards offered by these locations. With their slogan often being the first point of contact for potential tourists, it is imperative that destination marketers understand how to use them effectively and thoughtfully.

**Future research.** By uncovering the broad themes that help to shape these tourism slogans, this research has important implications for both destination marketing organizations and academic researchers. This study focuses on varying strategies used in slogan communication and the subsequent advertising techniques employed to strengthen them. Using multiple approaches to understand linguistic devices incorporated within destination slogans, we isolate themes that emerge from all 157 countries. This research also provides some interesting directions for future research to directly contrast product and destination brands by understanding the impact of destination slogans on consumer recall, memorability, and effectiveness. Another goal for future research may be to identify which slogans prove

to be the most effective in consumer choice and decision-making regarding destinations. Additionally, the current analysis may be used to complement understanding of consumer reaction to different destination slogans and facilitating the recognition of denotative and connotative meanings.

Future research should test the increasing level of complexity between product brands and destination slogans to determine whether there is indeed an increasing effectiveness of this complexity in consumer or tourist behavior. Just as McQuarrie and Mick (1996) had observed, this deviation in terms of how much a metaphor truly makes one 'think' before they get the reference can, and often does, shift (such as a car 'hugging' a road likely at one time forcing this process and subsequent satisfaction in coming to the right conclusion that it is because the car has high maneuverability, whereas today this phrasing of 'hugging' the road has become so ubiquitous that there is no longer this sense of satisfaction in deciphering it). Although this study has observed a difference in message polysemy and complexity, it does not take the next step to determine how effective these differences are. An empirical assessment of the differences summarized in Table 3 would therefore be a worthwhile pursuit for future studies based on this conceptual undertaking, particularly in linking the findings of this study to actual destination selection and/or tourist (re)visit intention.

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