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The Communication Strategies for the Brazil Brand in the United States of America*

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As estratégias de comunicação para a Marca Brasil nos Estados Unidos da América
Las estrategias de comunicación para la Marca Brasil en los Estados Unidos de América

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This article intends to analyze the management of the Brazil brand for tourism promotion, based on the convergence of the communication strategies defined by the Brazilian National Tourism Office (Embratur) with those actually used by the travel agencies and tour operators in the United States of America to attract and keep tourists. We concluded that there are divergences between the strategies defined by Embratur and those executed by the agencies, as well as limited funding for promoting the Brazil brand in the USA.

En este artículo se pretende analizar la gestión de la marca Brasil para la promoción del turismo, basado en la convergencia de las estrategias de comunicación definidas por la Oficina Nacional de Turismo de Brasil (Embratur) con las efectivamente utilizadas por las agencias de viajes y operadores en los Estados Unidos de América para atraer y mantener a los turistas. Llegamos a la conclusión de que existen divergencias entre las estrategias definidas por Embratur y las ejecutadas por las agencias, así como hay financiación limitada para la promoción de la marca Brasil en los EE.UU.

Este artigo buscou analisar o gerenciamento da Marca Brasil para a promoção do turismo, com base na convergência das estratégias de comunicação definidas pelo Instituto Brasileiro do Turismo do Governo Federal (Embratur) com aquelas efetivamente usadas por agências de viagem e operadoras de turismo nos Estados Unidos da América, para atrair e manter turistas. Concluímos que há divergências entre as estratégias definidas pela Embratur e aquelas executadas pelas agências, assim como recursos financeiros limitados para a promoção da Marca Brasil nos EUA.

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1. Introduction

The presence of Brazil in the international tourism market is in full expansion due to globalization, where communication, technology and transportation are readily available nowadays. The communication of a country brand, the perception of the image and associations of a country's brand – as seen by foreigners – is usually present in economic, political, social and academic areas, as well as fashion, sports, movies and, ultimately, tourism. A brand is an intangible resource, and its reputation may generate value for the organization, since it tends to resist the effects of time when compared to other tangible and human resources of the organization or country.

Kotler et al. (1993) emphasize the difference between “marketing a place” and “promoting a place”, which are often considered synonyms. “Promoting” is a marketing activity, whereas “marketing a place” means the creation of a place to attend to the needs of the target market, where citizens and entrepreneurs are satisfied with their communities and discover what the visitors and investors expect. Considering that marketing and promotion are responsible for most of the expenses of a tourism organism (Gee & Fayos-Solá, 2003) when considering the level of worldwide exposure that Brazil has as a tourist destination, it is important to propose studies focused on these areas of the market. Such studies may also contribute for the academic area and bring investment in tourism-related business.

Brazil needs studies on efficient communication strategies abroad, especially in well-defined target markets to strengthen the promotion of the Brazil brand, in order to show Brazil as a competitive tourism destination. Campaigns to promote the Brazil brand, projects focused on incentives and public policies focused on sustainability in the tourism area can contribute for the positioning of the Brazil brand, since a government should assure the integrity and longevity of a country brand by preventing changes to a brand's essence (Florek & Insch, 2008). Florek and Insch (2008) suggest that government systems should be formed and cooperate among themselves, as well as the national tourism offices (bureau, agencies, departments and companies) to promote official and non-official versions/programs that can turn the meaning of a country brand into a prominent and protected identity in a global scenario. Likewise, Pike (2008) understands that a campaign that attracts more visitors who spend more money in the tourist destination is the evidence expected by tax-paying tourism businesses, and, as such, it is expected that this commitment with the government will revert in actions that boost national or local tourism.

Beni (2006) also believes that tourism is regarded as an integrated complex of business, and its basic principle should be the continuous innovation of products and services, focused on the perception and fascination of tourists. Maintaining a competitive organization means keeping it adjusted to its environment, especially to the needs and desires of the target-public. Likewise, a place brand needs to be continually developed by being present in several markets in an attempt to reach the desired placement as a product or service in the chosen field, according to the priorities stipulated by market segmentation. A country brand is used to distinguish a country in the global market of products or services, and its main goal is to convey messages that make it essential for the identification, recognition and approval of an added-value product in the consumers' minds (Pérez-Nebra & Rosa, 2008).

KEY WORDS

**Brazil brand;
communication
strategies;
travel agencies;
tour operators;
international
tourism**

PALABRAS CLAVE

**Marca Brasil,
estrategias de
comunicación,
agencias de
viajes, operadores
turísticos,
el turismo
internacional**

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

**Marca Brasil;
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agências de viagem;
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M100, M300

There are few papers about the management of the Brazil brand, especially those focused on the communication strategies for the tourist destinations in Brazil. Thus, the main goal of this article is to analyze the management of the Brazil brand according to the convergence of the communication strategies defined by the Brazilian National Tourism Office (Embratur) for the Brazil brand in the tourism area with those effectively used by some travel agencies and tourism operators in the United States of America. The USA was chosen because it holds the second place in tourist spending worldwide and it has been the second-biggest sender of tourists to Brazil in the last seven years, with a yearly gradual decrease. Therefore, this article may contribute to expand the literature in the field, by reflecting upon the management of the Brazil brand internationally to attract more tourists.

2. Country Branding

Building brands for places and countries is more complex than doing it for products. There are similarities: both allude to identification, development and communication of the parts that make the product or service known favourably for a target market. A convenient consideration may be established regarding the relation between a business brand and a country brand, as observed by Olins (2011). Since the company can recreate its own brand, a country could do the same, in a similar (but not the same) way. Olins (2011) states that, in order to compete effectively in the international scenario, a country or a company needs all the contemporary branding management resources. The responsibility may come from the public or private sector, or even from both, often with partnerships between all the actors involved.

The country branding activity is an urgent and unavoidable challenge for peripheral countries, which need to prosper and consequently narrow the gap between themselves and developed countries. Overall, talent, reliability and courage are necessary for a brand to become global, as well as financial resources in order to develop brand communication that is adequate to the target audience and to accept this conceptual tripod for a country brand (Anholt, 2000).

Since the presence of foreign tourists in Brazil is slowly increasing, it is necessary to rethink the communication of the Brazil brand in order to place it in the tourism market of target-countries. Since brands usually become the dominant channel of communication for the country identity, it is vital to encourage the touristic experience, carefully managing the international perceptions about the political decisions of a foreign nation and the representation of the national culture (Anholt, 2007). For Morgan, Pritchard and Pride (2010, p. 59) the development of a country brand can be performed by several means (medias or channels), with the most obvious being advertisement, direct marketing, personal sales, websites and catalogues, but also with public relations, media companies and national tourism agencies (in Brazil, such tasks are the responsibility of Embratur) with journalists, event planners and movie directors. One important observation is that marketing and strategies vary according to the target market and the product life cycle stage of a brand (Morgan et al., 2010).

Some successful examples may be considered to have competently managed the perception of a country's attributes abroad, using country brand management to improve and accelerate their image, such as Japan, Ireland, Spain, Germany and Scotland, regarding both its economy and self-respect. Other countries have been trying to improve this country brand management issue, such as Australia, India, Wales, Taiwan, Croatia, Slovenia, South Korea and the United Kingdom (Anholt, 2007).

3. Methods

The research method was qualitative and exploratory. Secondary data used in this study were: information from the Ministry of Tourism in Brazil available online and in promotional brochures made by Embratur; international articles found in academic databases; research performed by entities or associations in the studied field. Primary data was collected by in-depth interviews for the exploration of the content found in the real environment of the sample (Hair, Babin, Money & Samouel, 2003).

Three types of respondents characterized the sample of interviewees: (i) a representative of Embratur; (ii) professionals working for one of twenty travel agencies in the United States of America; (iii) three experts in the field of international tourism – two of these being American, and the other Brazilian. The travel agencies in the United States of America were located in the cities of New York, Miami, Orlando and Atlanta. Regarding the sample size, interviews with at least 20 listed agencies were believed to be enough (the number suggested by Hair et al. [2003, p. 102] varies between 1 and 50).

Regarding the cities herein chosen, they are mentioned in the International Trade Administrative website as the top States of tourist senders to Brazil (ITA, 2011). The three experts have been chosen because each one represents different points of views: (i) a business man from the tourism market, (ii) a journalist specialized in Brazil destinations and culture and (iii) a director of USA and Brazil trade office.

The instrument used during the interview was a script in English or Portuguese, depending on the respondent's nationality. The interviews were conducted in person during the months of July and August 2011 in the agencies or agency operators' offices. The highest concentration of tourism agencies was in Florida (a total of twelve), and the highest concentration of agency tour operators was in New York City (seven in total). The USA travel agencies promoting Brazil have been in operation for up to 40 years.

Considering the general goal of this article, and based on the literature review, two propositions were defined as guidelines for data collection and analysis of the results to further reflection about the topic, as follows:

Proposition #1 (P1): Communication of the Brazil brand is in constant evaluation and maintenance, in order to promote and publicize it abroad to attract more tourists [according to Florek and Insch

(2008), Morgan et al. (2010), Pérez-Nebra and Rosa (2008) and Pike (2008), which indicate that governments should follow this guideline when launching their country brands].

Proposition #2 (P2): The communication strategies used by travel agencies in the USA are aligned with those developed by Embratur [according to Morgan et al. (2010) and Pike (2008), who point that such alignment should conceptually exist].

Qualitative models for data analyses by Bardin (2010), Hair et al. (2007) and Flick (2009) were considered to treat the data collected. After the interviews were transcribed and the notes were observed (memoing), the answers were sorted according to the theoretical standards of the investigation, so that they could be analyzed, compared and explored.

4. Results Presentation and Discussion

The investigation of P1 was based on the responsibilities of Embratur for the management of the Brazil brand. Firstly, regarding the main communication strategies of the Brazil brand, specifically for the USA, it should be mentioned the “Plano Aquarela” (“Watercolour Plan”, available in both English and Portuguese for promotion), developed specifically for the international promotion of Brazil, and launched in 2005. It focuses on the segmentation of the target markets and the placement of the image of the Brazil brand abroad.

According to the interview with Embratur, at its launch, the Brazil brand was created for the promotion of tourism and products in general; however, since then, its main focus has been the promotion of tourism, being strongly adopted by tourism-related activities. Nowadays, over five thousand companies in twenty-five countries use the Brazil brand for exported products.

One of the interviewees in one of the travel agencies speaks favourably of the topic, mentioning the current situation of Brazil and the world, regarding its economic development. He says:

Our companies are expanding into the world, such as Vale and Banco Itaú, and also because Brazil is “trendy”. The world has embraced Brazil with our Havaianas sandals, our fashion models, our music. Nowadays, Brazil has become international. Brazil is once more becoming a trendy country, such as it was in the 1950s, where movies were produced in Brazil, Brazil was known for its prosperity, a country where people knew how to live. Brazil was a place where everybody wanted to be, such as Brigitte Bardot and her friends. Therefore, there is an intrinsic Brazil brand, although it’s not a logo, not something that conveys this concept that lies in the air, something that can be summed up in a brand.

On the one hand, Embratur promotes tourism, making sure that Brazil is to be considered a desirable tourism destination and creating the necessity of coming to Brazil. Embratur considers that infrastructure and hotel services also depend from private funding, and the brand promotes the country and the Brazilian tourist products. The brand is a response from a series of actors, the trade of the travel agencies, the foreign tourists, the Brazilian servers and the Embratur team.

“The Brazil brand is still young, but we already have numbers: it is known by 20% of the foreign tourists and needed little investment. This is the result of a 2009 study with 2400 tourists from 27 countries.

The strategies executed for the management of the Brazil brand are planned separately by each department of Embratur. For example, the Marketing Department focuses on “how to promote”; the New Markets Department focuses on “where to promote”, and the Products Department decides “what to promote”. However, there are four management divisions in the Marketing Department to coordinate the planning and management of the Brazil brand: Control Management (focusing especially on contracts), Digital Communication Management (mobile tools, social networks, website); Advertising Management (both internal and third-party) and Public Relations Management (press relations).

According to Embratur, communication strategies for the Brazil brand are defined and executed in accordance with Plano Aquarela, which is constantly updated. Nowadays, Plano Aquarela 2020 (a long-term plan) acts as a plan of actions and activities with a specific schedule and with a specific investment for each country. Likewise, there are several tools for the communication and promotion of the Brazil brand, which are used for different audiences (press, trade and consumer). Also, the interviewee confirmed that different percentages of the funds are used for each tool, for each specific audience in the priority countries. For example: the press and the trade seem to have saturated Brazil in Portugal; thus, the current focus is on the consumer, and the communication strategies are adjusted accordingly. However, interviews with the American travel agencies showed that there are no constant activities, and no calendar of events was published by Embratur.

About the branding guide, Embratur states that the Brazil branding guide is available in English, Dutch, French, Spanish and Italian, in addition to Portuguese, but the guide is not available online. Access to the guide is controlled by Embratur: “the Marketing department sends out the manual to the travel agencies”. According to the interviewee, a travel agency’s request for digital files with the Brazil brand in high resolution, to be used in advertisements, comes to Embratur’s marketing department through a Brazilian Tourism Office (BTO). However, the agency must register online previously. After the registry is evaluated and approved by Embratur, the digital material is sent. According to Embratur, as seen above, “there is a filter before the Brazil brand is sent”; however, it works only partially, according to the responses of the interviews regarding the procedures for requesting and receiving the digital files with the Brazil brand. This filter tool should actually be the moment to check the quality level of each agency, regarding communications strategies and promotion commitment. Five of the agencies did not receive or request the files with the Brazil brand; two of them were sent the files by Brazilian Tour Operator Association (BTOA); four requested the files and received them after registering with Embratur being approved, and two of these received the files via the BTO in New York.

Another topic mentioned in the interviews was the training provided to the professionals working for agencies that promote or trade the Brazil brand and its respective destinations. In the interviews, Embratur states that it invests in training for the agencies (an e-learning program), but only three other interviewees mentioned knowing about it. Likewise, Embratur assured that it invests in advertising, public relations, digital communication, presence in tourism fairs and events and the offer of gifts with an investment forecast for each country; “Embratur’s legal configuration does not allow for sponsorships. It takes part in events, works with trade marketing and exhibitions, with

road shows frequently organized by the BTO". Therefore, regarding training and qualification of tourism agents in the area of customer service and/or sales, most interviewees responded that Embratur does not offer such services; three mentioned that they knew about the online course, but only two took part in the classes; and one interviewee did not respond.

Comments about the lack of information regarding government actions focused on tourism were observed, such as future improvements in infrastructure, innovation in services, attempts at improvement and possible adjustments or efforts regarding the flaws of the tourism industry. Such factors could be transformed into positive arguments for the sales efforts of travel packages. Therefore, the communication between Embratur and the travel agencies in the United States needs improvement. One of the American experts said that "more communication and a better promotion of Brazil, both institutionally and in advertising" is fundamental to attract more American tourists for Brazilian destinations.

Training, either promotional or institutional – when well-coordinated and frequent – is known to be a useful tool to keep information updated and cohesive, as well as to maintain the quality of human resources in tourism services. Such a tool could contribute for better argumentation in customer service regarding controversial issues that are publicized by the media.

According to the results found in the interviews, there is no ongoing plan of effective strategies in the USA, where the agencies are not informed or exposed to media actions frequently, disagreeing with the authors' suggestions used to elaborate P1. Although random actions do happen, as mentioned in the results, these usually have no specific purpose and/or content focused on the target market, with flaws on the updating of information, lack of investment in a serious plan of integrated marketing communication, focused on continuity, modernity and complementarity.

Finally, no efforts were observed to expose the Brazil brand in the USA, either by means of communication and marketing tools (advertising, publicity, public relations, product placement, personal sales support, direct marketing, merchandising and promotion) or means of communication (television, radio, internet, mail, newspapers, magazines, telephone, movies, posters), as stated in theory.

Therefore, Proposition #1 was partially confirmed. The responses led to the conclusion that the management of the Brazil brand is probably not completely being constantly evaluated or maintained by Embratur (or the Ministry of the Tourism). On the one hand, Embratur was considered to be an organization focused on promoting tourism, prepared to handle administrative processes and professionally qualified. However, the field research performed in the United States yielded complaints about Embratur's lack of interest. Still, Embratur reports that it invests in the market, supported by the BTOs and the BTOA, and states in both Plano Aquarela and the interview that the USA is a high-priority market for Brazil.

With relation to Proposition #2, regarding the strategies of the travel agencies consulted, according to Embratur, the companies use websites to support communication and customer service as tools and actions for communication and marketing in the USA. The interviews show that most agencies make their own investments and believe that any action undertaken will result in sales. Nowadays they rarely advertise, or, when they do it, it is a partnership with other agencies/operators. Of the total sample of twenty agencies/operators, nineteen prefer contacting their clients via the internet, mostly because of the cost and the ease to use. The internet is used as a platform for

online sales, sending out newsletters, advertisements in partner websites or social media. Next is personal endorsement by clients and the traditional use of printed catalogues to support other actions by two agencies-operators, and two with customer service in their own offices. According to the secondary data analyzed and the responses of the interviewed agencies, the reasons why Americans visit Brazil are mostly related to friendships, an information that agrees with ITA (2011)'s statistical data and is corroborated by a Brazilian expert: "Regarding the profile of Americans who visit Brazil, a friend or a relative in Brazil; it's very common for them to have a friend or to make a friend, so they return later".

Regarding the use of technology in customer service, more specifically about the website with an e-commerce option, an American expert says that

"American customers prefer online purchases; it's much more common in the United States. Americans prefer to do it on their own. For destinations that are less common, such as the Amazon, many Americans buy travel packages. Another problem is that nobody speaks English outside the big cities in Brazil, and many Americans feel insecure if they're not part of a package or a group".

Next, for the agencies interviewed in the United States, only five had e-commerce: three in Florida and two in New York. Regarding the sales of the travel agencies, nineteen use the telephone as their primary communication tool for customer service; e-mail or contact via website is the second most common tool, with sixteen affirmative responses. Only four offer person-to-person service in their own stores, with two of these being located in Florida (one offers full customer service, while the other only does it in matters of confidentiality) and two others in New York, representing one third of the services offered.

The corporate relationship between agencies/operators with Embratur was not considered positive. About the provision of adequate and updated information about the Brazilian destinations and the campaigns and events for the member agencies, i.e., the existence of a corporate relationship between the agencies and Embratur, eight travel agencies declared not receiving any type of support from Embratur. One of them added "maybe if we call Embratur". Two others agreed that they receive support, and ten agencies admit that communication exists; but the frequency of contacts and quality of actions could be improved. One of the companies states that "Absolutely not. There is no relationship".

One aspect mentioned by Embratur is that "When there is a change in the national government, the brand management may change", which can contribute negatively for the brand strength, as mentioned by the authors, such as Kotler and Pfoertsch (2010), who say that a solid brand is the most important and long-lasting asset, and its strategy should guide all the marketing actions and decisions.

A controversial topic is the issue of Brazilian corruption, present in the Ministry of Tourism (published in the news and cited next) and observed in administrative actions and public policies. Some news stories about possible cases of embezzlement by the Ministry of Tourism and Embratur were published: "Corruption has a long history in tourism" (Newton, 2011), "Border tourism and the borders of mediocrity" (Cioffi, 2011), and "Corruption in the Ministry of Tourism moves onto the 2014 World Cup" (Rizzo & Pariz, 2012). The topic was also openly quoted by three of the interviewees before the scandals were revealed by the media. One of them

believes that there is no political effort, and asks, enraged: "Where is the 17 million worth of investment?" Most interviewees were unhappy with the funds promised by the government and the amount that was really applied to promote the Brazil brand, with suspicious gestures and looks during the interviews. Therefore, there should be a tighter watch on government spending and better planning, as stated by authors Morgan et al. (2010), Florek and Insch (2008), Beni (2006) and Pike (2008).

With such results by the American travel agencies consulted, the general observation on P2 was not confirmed, for two reasons observed in the responses: first, there are no standardized or integrated communication strategies – developed by Embratur – for the tourism agencies in the USA; second, the sporadic strategies performed by Embratur are not aligned with the actions of the agencies, as they are scarce and inconstant due to the lack of a corporate relationship, events, training and communication between Embratur and the American travel agencies.

5. Conclusions

In this article, it was seen that the Brazil brand has incomplete relationships and conceptual divergences with the theory. For example, the brand identity should be the strategic vision of the brand, which is theoretically distorted by Embratur and not experienced in the interviewees' responses. Therefore, the strategic positioning of the Brazil brand in specific target markets should be sought by using strategic marketing communication, directing communication tools and forms that are appropriate, standardized and coordinated for each target audience. With that, each strategy would be expected to generate competitive advantages to improve the reputation and maintain the promotion of the Brazil brand abroad.

From the interviews with Embratur and the materials published it is seen that the creation of the country brand for Brazil was made after studies abroad and it was formatted according to the attributes of Brazil, as a touristic destination. Moreover, in terms of human resources, there seems to be well-trained professionals and specific departments in the communication and marketing division of Embratur.

Regarding investments abroad, the specific amounts invested in each country or for each audience were not disclosed due to Embratur's claims to confidentiality. This information could have been used in the general analysis, reviewing the feasibility of the announced actions, verifying whether they were executed or not, according to the coherence of the responses. However, from an operational panorama of strategic planning, no schedule of actions or events per country were found or informed, or even the plan itself. At the same time, a number of actions were announced in Plano Aquarela 2020, but most were not executed, according to the analyses in the present study.

Therefore, there are few communication actions focused on the predetermined target audiences, little mapping of each country according to their marketing characteristics, no active or frequent corporate relationship with the operators and agencies by means of communication (such as

newsletters); no promotion or execution of partnership for advertising, direct sales, merchandising and product placement. Also, no presence in the media or in business fairs, since no schedule is sent in advance to the agencies; no periodic offers of “fam” trips or meetings with sales teams; no public relations or permanent contact with the media or control strategies when there is a national crisis. Finally, no maintenance of the publicized actions established in advance in the strategic plans.

As such, there are divergences between the communication strategies defined by Embratur with those effectively used by the travel agencies in the United States of America for the prospection of American tourists, with the absence of an effective integrated marketing communication plan, no diversification of tools, no constant and updated schedule of marketing actions and efforts, and also, limited funding for promoting the Brazil brand in the USA.

Regarding the limitations of this study, the foremost is the relative lack of literature about communication strategies focused on country brands and particularly the management of the Brazil brand, a reality that restricts reflection on the topic and the comparison of results obtained with other studies of its kind.

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