



Semiotic Analysis of Touristic Promotion. The Case of International Campaigns from Ecuador, Peru and Colombia

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Abstract. This research presents a semiotic analysis of videographic advertising contents in the touristic promotion of Ecuador, Peru, and Colombia. The study aims to describe and evaluate semiotics present in these campaigns. The research employs a qualitative approach with a deductive methodology, focusing on observation as the compilation tool. The semiotic resources used in the videos were categorized into iconographic and symbolic codes, including images, written codes, spoken words, and music. The frequency of these resources in each country's promotional videos was examined and compared. The findings reveal common patterns among the studied countries. The frequency of representations of explicit tourism is a common pattern in the three studied countries, all of them use this resource in at least 39% of their videos. Peru stands out for its emphasis on nature, Ecuador exhibits a rich animal biodiversity and Colombia's videos stand out for their use of cultural representative elements. The research contributes to the fields of communication, tourism, and audiovisual production by providing insights into the current practices of touristic promotional videos.

Keywords: Semiotic Analysis · Touristic Promotion · Video Advertising

1 Background

According to the World Tourism Organization (2019) the touristic activity represented 7% of the global commerce. As stated by the Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador, in the same year, the direct contribution from the tourism industry to Ecuador's gross domestic product was 2.2% approximately. According to the CEPAL (Economic Commission for Latin America) [1] tourism is the key generator of income and employment. In 2019 the tourism industry represented 10% of the total gross domestic product in the region.

During the health crisis of COVID-19, Ecuador along with all Latin American countries went through an alarming decay in the economic income coming from touristic activities. The border's closure meant a decline in the demand of foreign tourists for and from any country. Only in the first year of the pandemic, the number of international tourists coming to Ecuador went down by 16.86%.

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Because of that, for 2020 in Ecuador the tourism industry went down to the sixth place in the non-oil related sources of income ranking, at which in 2019 had the third place. [2].

Over the Latin American region, COVID-19 meant a devastating decline in Peruvian income from tourism. The visits of international tourists went down by 76.8% only in the first year of the pandemic. [3] Although Peru is a country that has grown and developed in its tourism industry and saw the good results of this investment, there are other factors around the growth stagnation in the Peruvian tourism industry in the last few years, such as the competitiveness among other South American countries with similar touristic characteristics. However, in 2021, the first year of “post pandemic interactions” Peru won several international awards regarding tourism, which makes it an interesting object of study.

COVID-19 virus protection and prevention measures around the world such as: confinement, closure of airports and land terminals, prohibition of mass events, and general closure of the country’s tourist attractions in all countries had a direct impact on the tourism industry worldwide. Tourism was one of the fields that reported the biggest growth and impact to Colombia’s economy in the last few years. In 2019, the tourism market showed a 4.7% growth in comparison to 2018 and became 3.8% of the gross domestic product in the country. The Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Tourism of Colombia felt confident for the years to come, but then the pandemic hit. By 2020, it was estimated that foreign tourist arrivals would decrease by 20–30%. [4].

To analyze through semiotic aspects the touristic videographic advertising created after the impact of the pandemic will help to understand which the specific objectives were stated of these campaigns and by describing the accuracy between to construction of the advertisement and the theory of semiotics we can critically conclude if they correctly achieve to transmit what they want to express.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Semiotics

Semiotics or semiology is the science that derives from philosophy and studies the signs of human communication. It is not a single theory, there are many authors that over the years have contributed to these studies, among them, Saussure, Peirce, Barthes, Greimas and Eco.

Charles Sanders Pierce defined three fundamental elements of semiotics: the signifier, the signified and the interpreter. The first one refers to the sign (word or icon), the second one the idea a community has about the signifier, “the meaning” and the interpreter is the person who receives and interprets the sign and relationates it with the signifier.

Roland Barthes suggests that the components of semiology are derived from structural linguistics, and identifies them as language and speech, signifier and signified, syntagm and paradigm, and denotation and connotation. (1989). This is what he sustains in his book *Elements of Semiology*, where he analyzes the main contributions of various authors on the semiotics field up to that time.

Umberto Eco considers that semiotics focuses on the study of the whole culture as a process of communication. Umberto Eco's book on the semiotic analysis the absent structure, emphasizes on elements like: the construction of the message, the significant structure, chromatic, graphic, sound and metalinguistic codes, denotation and connotation. (1972).

2.2 Semiotics in Advertising

Semiotics within advertising is a major representation of connection between perception and association. If the advertising is correctly constructed, this reaction is expected by the creator. Advertising discourse uses connotative and denotative language, which is complemented by the use of verbal and non-verbal language, especially present in video advertising.

As Rodriguez says quoting Ferrer (2016) [5] "advertising language has signifiers that organize sounds and meanings that organize ideas", with the premise that this message is decoded correctly, in other words, that it is understood by the viewer and this is accomplished when the codes have been developed based on a planning with a solid knowledge of the semiotic subject matter.

2.3 Advertising in Social Media

The constant development of social interactions has significantly changed how we view communication and advertising. Social media is nowadays largely used around the world, experts even say that businesses refusing to evolve to digital marketing are destined to die. Social media has become a powerful tool for businesses and organizations to reach and engage with their audiences. According to HMD Global studies, on average, we check our cell phones 142 times a day, meaning once every ten minutes approximately; in this context, digital interactions are a big part of our environment interplay. According to the ICT Observatory, a project developed by the Ministry of Telecommunications and the Information Society of Ecuador, in 2015, 91% of people who use cell phones do so to access social media. [6]. Social media platforms allow people to connect with others in ways that were previously not possible, that, among other reasons are why social media have become an essential part of modern communication in today's society.

Social media keeps the audience up to date on news and trends. This fact has shaped the way we coexist with social media nowadays. Advertising in social media is the practice of promoting products, services, or brands by creating and distributing content, such as spots and image ads through digital platforms. Among the most popular social platforms there are Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok, Twitter and Youtube.

Advertising in social media is an absolute necessity because of the advantages it can offer: to rapidly grow in visibility due to the accurate algorithm, giving segmentation possibilities like categorizing contents to age, sex or geography because of the enormous quantity of information social media has on every user. "It is of great significance to combine AI technology to identify advertisements and optimize intelligent advertising strategies based on the needs of the rapid development of the current social media." [7].

Advertising through social media also allows many format options as video, pictures, or text; besides the direct feedback and all statistics about interactions it can give.

The education field was the first one entering social media investigation for benefits in the academic environment and soon communication and advertising fields generated discussion spaces to better understand the social media impact and its role in communication and advertising strategies. [8]. Currently social media is a powerful tool for businesses to closely interact with their audience and target bigger strategic objectives.

2.4 Touristic Advertising

The image of a country in consumers' minds must be perceived as a brand. "A name (or sign) that pursues differentiation from others and tries to identify its management (service or product) from its competitors." [9]. Advertising is not only an element of marketing, but also a form of dialogue with the public and that's why it should be considered as an inversion in any kind of business because in the short or long term it'll repay.

Touristic advertising must catalog a place as the ideal destiny of its public; exalt its characteristics, associate it to the values tourists are looking for depending on their interests.

It is also important to note that creative advertising for tourist destinations is often very simple and straightforward. In this type of communication, the fundamental thing is that the message is understood at the first time and is remembered at least for a certain time so that at the moment of making the decision it can be associated. [10].

Tourism and social media are closely related in many ways. Diverse investigations on the tourism industry have identified a significant influence of social media on people's willingness to visit an attraction, therefore social media platforms have become powerful tools for tourists to plan and research their trips, share their experiences with others, and find inspiration for future travel. Social media has become an essential tool for both tourists and the tourism industry, allowing them to plan, research, share, and inspire travel.

Tourism represents a great source of income in many countries and it's not as general as it used to be. According to the book "Las claves de la Publicidad" de Mariola García Uceda, a few main types of tourism are: short term tourism, referring to weekend travels; urban tourism, offering city views; cultural tourism, strongly related to heritage attractions; ecological tourism, related to landscapes, sights -the concept of adventure tourism and beach tourism could fit in this category - and rural tourism addressed to visiting communities and indigenous places. [10]. There are more than a dozen types of tourism numbered by other authors, however, the ones mentioned are the most recognized and popular around touristic destinations. Therefore, the importance of planning adequate strategies to each niche, recognizing ideal formats to advertise each kind of tourism and the use of segmentation facilities offered by modern social media.

2.5 Country Branding

Advertising is one the most important factors in the tourism industry. It promotes the natural, cultural or patrimonial characteristics of destinations. Therefore, it is not only necessary but fundamental to have a company or entity dedicated only to this purpose.

In Ecuador, “Ecuador Travel” is the Ministry of Tourism’s official touristic portal in charge of international promotion of the country as a tourist destination since 2004. The Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador is a government entity created in 1992. According to its web site: their main strategic objectives are: To increase the offer and services of sustainable and competitive tourism destinations in Ecuador and to increase the participation of tourism in the sustainability of Ecuador’s economic system.

In Peru, the Commission of Peru’s Promotion for Exportation and Tourism called PromPeru of the Ministry of Exterior Commerce and Tourism is the one in charge of international promotion of Peru as a destination with their official platform named “Peru Travel”. In Colombia, PROCOLOMBIA, the entity in charge of promoting tourism, foreign investment in Colombia, non-mining energy exports and the country’s image and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism have “Colombia CO”, the official portal for promoting international tourism and the country brand of Colombia.

Peru and Colombia present an advantage among other Latin American countries because of their established country brand. Ecuador tried to position “Ecuador ama la vida” as its country brand, however despite the efforts and investments this campaign failed to accomplish the established objectives of the current government. [11] Therefore Ecuador still doesn’t have a defined country brand.

2.6 Previous Studies in Semiotic Analysis of Advertising in Tourism

The study “A new methodological approach to locating USP in promotional videos of islands: The case of the Croatian Islands” the authors Igal Baum and Eli Avraham point the very little analytic investigation made on visual representation of tourism and so analyze from a semiotic and marketing point of view promotional videos of similar touristic destinations to conclude what strategies can make a place different from its touristic competitors. [12].

In 2017, Shirley Cervantes published “Análisis de la imagen turística proyectada y percibida del destino Ecuador”, [13] which explains the role of marketing in a brand’s image or a touristic destiny.

There are studies made on the effects every country had to go through after the pandemic, especially in the economic field. However, there are very few studies made on video analysis of touristic advertising in Latin America.

3 Objectives

3.1 General Objective

To analyze through semiotic aspects the videographic advertising contents published by Ecuador, Peru and Colombia within the purpose of evaluating on theoretical groundings the videographic country branding.

3.2 Specific Objectives

1. To recognize the most used semiotic resources in the videographic advertising pieces published by Ecuador, Peru and Colombia’s Ministry of Tourism on their official tourism promoting platforms.

2. To evaluate in a semiotic level the contents, signs and symbols, present in the videographic advertising pieces published by Ecuador, Peru and Colombia's Ministry of Tourism on their official tourism promoting platforms.
3. To establish a reference on how touristic videographic advertisements are made nowadays and their accuracy to theoretical groundings.

4 Methodology

This research seeks to analyze the semiotic aspects of videographic advertising contents published by Ecuador, Peru and Colombia by describing the technical structure of these pieces, recognizing and interpreting the message it pretended to send.

This methodology has a qualitative approach. "Qualitative research draws epistemologically upon hermeneutics, phenomenology and symbolic interactionism." [14] This method relies on verbal and written subjective expressions. This kind of research trusts impartial systematization of the information from the investigator. The present study has a qualitative criterion as its approach since it analyzes non numerical aspects presented in video contents by using observation techniques. According to Sampieri "Qualitative research is based on an interpretative perspective" [15]. So technical and semiotic dimensions will be described prioritizing a deep and reflexive analysis.

This is deductive research; which is established on theory groundings and previous knowledge on the subject giving proximity to the studied case or subject. [14] This research studies in general aspects the concepts of advertisement, tourism and semiotic to later explain these notions for the proposed analysis. It also studies each one of the videos from the sample to break them down into their technical and semiotic aspects for the proposed analysis.

This research has a semiotic analysis design, as Ordoñez and Torres [16] quote, semiotic analysis design consists in distinguishing how meanings are constructed helping to understand what they want to express. Semiotic focuses on understanding how people create and interpret the meaning of signs and symbols, including communication through metaphor, analogy, allegory, metonymy, symbolism and other means of expression that can also be manifested in graphic matters, video and text. This research will break down videographic advertising contents and systematize them in a semiotic level to conclude in interpretations of said contents and their structure.

Semiotics is an observation science. In the study "A new methodological approach to locating USP in promotional videos of islands: The case of the Croatian Islands", visual semiotic analysis tools were the compilation tool developed and used in order to study official YouTube videos of the Croatian islands and to examine the various narratives used to create their USPs (Unique selling proposition), a marketing strategy designed to highlight the values of a product which make it better in comparison to the competitors. [12].

Visual semiotic analysis can be understood as a profound observation to conclude in analyzing the semiotic of a content, therefore, in order to conclude which technical aspects were mostly used in the construction of videographic advertising published by the Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador, Peru and Colombia on each digital platform, a profound observation of the contents will be done, being this the compilation tool. Scientific observation is conducted in a rational and structured way according to previously

formulated objectives. [14] Observation as a data compilation tool consists in observing attentively a case, with no participation, to register information that later on will be analyzed.

Majid Khosravini and Mohammedwesam Amer [17] in their study about “Social media and terrorism discourse: the Islamic State’s (IS) social media discursive content and practices” use systematic observation followed by a content analysis of “ typical multimodal meaning-making content on YouTube” to examine the practices and digital speeches of the Islamic State by analyzing how communication in social media environments is used to spread its ideology. This study uses observation approaches and a semiotic and contents analysis of the images.

Semi-structured systematic observation is the type of observation tool that will be used in this study, it involves prior planning and it is based only on observation without intervening in the object or phenomenon of study. Research on the backgrounds of this investigation’s concepts will be done ahead of time and also a systematization of the criteria to be analyzed will be previously established. The investigator may merge their observations with previous knowledge to make conclusions.

The investigator will describe the semiotic elements of the videos analyzed creating a criteria’s table of own authorship based on some of the criterias used on the table of methodological tools created by Silvia Rodriguez on her master’s thesis *Análisis de los elementos estratégicos utilizados en la campaña “All You Need is Ecuador” y su impacto a nivel nacional e internacional. Caso de investigación: “Estudio semiótico de los spots, determinar las características del discurso publicitario”*.

Umberto Eco’s theory will be fundamental in the analysis. The construction of the message, the significant structure, chromatic codes, graphic codes, the sound code, which includes the musical subcode and the sound effects; in the semantic structure, denotations and connotations at a level of iconographic statements and symbolic structure will be studied.

The visual record, the prevalence of colors and the metalinguistic function will be observed in order to demonstrate how advertisements are used as social speeches to promote the customs, beliefs, values, cultures and habitats of a country, based on Umberto Eco’s concepts. [11].

Denotation:

Denotation is defined as the elementary form of a signification implied by the referent [18], an invariable description without subjective qualifiers, however, is not limited to a simple reference to the object, but also includes the correspondence between the sign and its object.

Also, denotation is a matter of how that correspondence is established through social and cultural conventions, which will later be better interpreted in connotation.

Denotation is an accurate description of reality, that’s why it englobes iconographic and symbolic codes in the table.

Iconographic codes:

Part of the visual register. Pierce refers to iconic signs as those that have a certain resemblance to the object or subject to which they refer. The icon is one of Umberto Eco’s visual codes, a representation of objects of reality that are not photographic [18].

On the other hand, in the case of films, the image becomes the icon, therefore it is that which the public can recognize and relate to their reality. The visual signifier in a video product consists of the images and written signs. A chromatic analysis can be included in the visual record.

Symbolic codes:

The symbol is a conventional sign based on an established and codified correspondence [19]. Written language, alphabet and numbers are arbitrary signs that have been given a meaning and correspond to a codification and decodification understood within a society. Therefore, in terms of the objects of study, the present written symbols will also be studied through the classification of symbolic codes. The authors of “Cómo analizar un film” also state that “In film, images are equivalent to icons as music and words correspond to symbols.” [19].

Connotation:

Many authors find a cognitive or emotive insight in the understanding of connotation. Connotation is the ensemble of all the cultural elements that the signifier can include and recall in the mind of the interpreter. It is the definition understood for a signifier in relation to its signified. For the purpose of the study of advertising contents, a global, emotive and rhetorical-stylistic connotation will be described. From the previously explained codes, the following Table 1 was constructed to collect data.

Table 1. Table of study.

Name of the video		
Length of the video		
Semiotic analysis		
Criteria		Description
Denotation	Iconographic codes	
	Symbolic codes	
Connotation		
Conclusion		

Source: Own elaboration

The significant structure of Eco, the fundamental elements of semiotics of Pierce and the components of semiology of Barthes, such as signifier is presented in the table as the iconographic, symbolic, chromatic and sound codes and in the denotation element and the signified is represented and will be described in the connotation and conclusions. In this case of study, the interpreter is the investigator. The sample will be touristic advertising videos within the limits of thirty seconds minimum and ninety seconds long maximum. Ten videos from each country will be studied. These will be taken from the youtube pages of the touristic promoting platforms of Ecuador, Peru and Colombia, which are posted for the public. A total of 30 videos, 10 from Ecuador, 10 from Colombia and 10 from Perú, with these characteristics published between 2021 and 2022 will be studied.

5 Results

Semiotic resources were categorized into two big groups: iconographic, corresponding to images and written codes, and symbolic codes including spoken words and music. The following Table 2 shows the frequency of these resources used in the videos for touristic promotion in each country.

Table 2. Table of semiotic resources used in the videos.

Semiotic resources		ECUADOR	PERU	COLOMBIA
Iconographic codes	Images	100%	100%	100%
	Written codes	100%	100%	80%
Symbolic codes	Spoken codes	40%	80%	100%
	Music	100%	100%	100%

Source: Own elaboration

There is a noticeable similarity in the presence of written, spoken and sound codes, being Ecuador the country which uses spoken codes with less frequency in its touristic promotion videos.

Contents, signs and symbols present in the videos were evaluated in a semiotic level and ordered in the following table according to their presence on screen. Table allows us to compare results from the three analyzed countries.

Criteria Tourism includes all sequences that show people explicitly doing some kind of touristic activity such as: taking pictures, looking at landscapes, being part of traditional celebrations, etc. By showing people doing these activities in the promoted places, the intention behind these scenes is to incite others to visit.

Criteria Nature (flora and vegetation) includes all the sequences that show, green leafy vegetation, forests, trees, flowers and diversity of plants, the communicative intention of these elements is to show life on its natural splendor, flora transmits vitality in a touristic destination, a disconnection to the city and digital life. Vegetation shows a range of possibilities of activities outside enjoying the peace and harmony of the natural environment.

Criteria Animal biodiversity includes all representations of animals, mammals, aquatic, amphibians, insects from the different regions. The outstanding representation of animals conveys care for the preservation of the environment. It also calls to the attention of tourists interested in bird sightings and exciting experiences closer to nature.

Criteria Cultural representations (folklore, art, architecture, ruins, crafts) depict patrimonial richness and history. The plural nationalities and cultures communicate authenticity and exciting experiences to foreign.

Criteria referring to water bodies representatives of each region show geographic diversity and a variety of touristic possibilities such as: adventure, relaxation, rural and different weathers for the tourist to choose (Table 3).

The three studied countries have common use of representations on explicit tourism in their videos, however, Colombia has the highest frequency of people being present in

Table 3. Table of tabulation of the iconographic elements present in the videos.

ELEMENTS	ECUADOR	PERÚ	COLOMBIA
Tourism	39.20%	44.80%	48.30%
QueryNature (flora and vegetation)	45.30%	66.60%	46.50%
Animal biodiversity	16.20%	10.80%	9.40%
Cultural representations (folklore, art, architecture, ruins, crafts)	24.70%	23.70%	36.20%
Forms of water representative of region sierra	2.50%	9%	1.70%
Forms of water representative of beach (coast and islands)	23.10%	6.60%	5.90%
Forms of water representative of the amazon	6.70%	9.90%	10.30%

Source: *Own elaboration*

its videos. Peru stands out with a 66.60% frequency of appearance of elements related to nature, indicating that this country wants to stand out for its richness in biodiversity and natural landscapes. In terms of animal biodiversity, Ecuador has the highest frequency of occurrence with 16.20%, which suggests that Ecuador is recognized for its variety of animal species, although all countries in the region have a rich biodiversity in fauna.

In the criteria of cultural representations Ecuador and Peru have similar percentages and Colombia has the highest frequency of presence of these elements. In relation to forms of water representative of each region, Ecuador stands out for its iconographic representations of seas and beaches, Perú for its Andes region and Colombia for its Amazon territory.

As stated in the theoretical framework and methodology, studying the structures of touristic promotion of similar countries in fact lead to similar analysis results. The correct use of color to highlight the natural characteristics of each country and typical elements representatives of each region tourist destinations still achieve to transmit a desire to visit and explore, empathizing with the audience showing different activities to a wide range of travelers.

Semiotics in advertising explores the connection between perception and association, emphasizing the use of connotative and denotative language, verbal and non-verbal elements, and video advertising, which was achieved in these videographic pieces in some more than in others.

6 Conclusion

There are general patterns in the results of semiotic elements used in the videos from the three studied countries. There is a pattern of use of the resource of touristic activities performed by travelers in the three studied countries, which concludes in a constant and common invitation and a resource of empathy by looking at others do things that can interest the audience.

There is a correct use of color to represent a natural diversity in the three countries studied. Ecuador stands out for its constant use of animal biodiversity presenting itself as a unique destination for nature interested travelers and animal lovers. Perú's videos stand out for their use of color green and bright colors to represent diversity in flora and plants, presenting itself as a full of life and colorful country and Colombia stands out in the sample by its use of cultural representative elements in its videos, colorful clothes and traditional rituals and dances are constantly present in its touristic promotion videos. Ecuador is the country from the sample that uses in minor amounts symbolic spoken codes in its touristic promotion videos. The results of this investigation are useful to comprehend why these countries are recognized worldwide and how regions with similar natural characteristics can replicate their strategies.

As a suggestion for future video graphic pieces in Ecuador, it is important to include an equal quantity of representative elements of each region.

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