

THE TOP FIFTEEN TOURIST DESTINATIONS IN THE WORLD IN 2014: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: This article is aimed to analyse, from a critical discourse analysis point of view (CDA), the top fifteen tourist destination in the world in 2014. The classification was done by Trip Advisor as a result of the travellers' choice, therefore it might be considered subjective. However this article intends to analyse the advertising discourse of these top destinations rather than the destinations themselves, as we are interested in the discourse of these tourist ads. For this purpose we have collected the descriptions which have been used in order to promote the above mentioned tourist destinations, in order to prove whether they have had an impact or not on the tourists' final choice. As the discourse of tourism is a discourse of promotion, information and manipulation, tourist destinations are advertised just like any other products whose ultimate goal is to sell and generate profit. Thus tourism advertising is meant to create newer and more appealing descriptions of some destinations which seem intangible and abstract. Nevertheless it has to meet and live up to more and more demanding and sophisticated expectations.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), tourism, ads, tourist destinations.

1. Introduction

Nowadays every corner of this planet can represent a possible destination for tourists who are always looking for something new and different as the furthest and newest the destination is the most appealing and exotic it becomes. According to the statistics offered by the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), the number of tourists has increased from 25 million international tourists in 1950 to 1087 million in 2013 and the tendency is an increasing one. Due to the technological development people gained easier access to all the information about the places they are interested in visiting and all the travelling procedures are effortless and uncomplicated. The internet is one of the most important means of presenting, creating and advertising tourism destinations. Thus, at the click of a button one can get closer to the dream holiday, being provided not only with the visual imagery of the destination but also with all the useful information. Online brochures, leaflets, blogs or websites are nowadays accessible to everyone. "The tourism online business is growing fast and competition is fierce. Online advertising is essential in this particular industry for companies to gain customers and therefore to make profit."¹ There is a constant dialogue created between the images in the mind and the reality of the destination, the gap between them being bridged by good advertising and marketing.

Tourism advertising materials contain images, textual descriptions, maps, and all the necessary information meant to create the image of the tourist destination, to enchant, to attract and finally to persuade. Therefore the discourse of tourism is a discourse of promotion, information and manipulation, whose ultimate goal, just like in the case of any other ads, is to

¹ Saß, J. (2011). "Online Advertising in the Tourism Industry and its Impact on Consumers." in *Tourism & Management Studies*, no.7, pp.101-107.

sell and generate profit. Although there is a wide range of tourism promotional tools and sources, this article will focus on a travel website whose rocketing development has changed it into one of the most reliable and frequently used when it comes to travel guides, flights, bookings, destinations hotels and customers' reviews: TripAdvisor.

2. The Top Fifteen Tourist Destinations in the World in 2014 According to TripAdvisor Website

Founded in 2000, TripAdvisor has rapidly become a travel website where people from all around the world share their experiences as tourists and write useful reviews and feed-back about the places they visited, the services they were offered, and other travel-related businesses. With more than 60 million members and reviews of 96% of the countries worldwide, the website compiles millions of holidaymakers' opinions and ratings. As a result of the travellers' choice, a top of the best tourist destinations in 2014 has been made, and the first fifteen preferences on the list are the ones shown in Table 1.

As one can clearly see from the table, the best tourist destinations are those which can offer a mix of culture, history, customs and traditions not only entertainment and fun. Most of them abound in breathtaking architecture, overwhelming history and fairytale features. Generally these destinations appeal to those interested in culture, history and bohemian escapes from the daily routine.

3. Tourism Advertising and Critical Discourse Analysis

Tourism advertising has no different goal than the other types of advertising: to sell and generate profit. Holloway (2004: 265) summarizes the underlying objectives of advertising in three words: "informing, persuading and reminding"². According to Cook, advertising is not just text, but text and context together which should interact in a meaningful way³. Therefore good advertising should not only arouse interest but stimulate desire and finally the urge to buy. Nevertheless they should create an image of perfection and uniqueness: "Most destinations have superb five-star resorts and attractions, every country claims a unique culture, landscape and heritage, each place describes itself as having the friendliest people, and high standards of customer service and facilities are now expected. As a result, the need for destinations to create a unique identity."⁴

² Holloway, J. C. (2004). *Marketing for Tourism*. Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Ltd., p.265.

³ Cook, G. (1992). *The Discourse of Advertising*. London, New York: Routledge.

⁴ Morgan, N., Pritchard, A. (2005). "Discourse, Communication and Tourism Dialogues." in Morgan, N., Pritchard, A. (eds.) *Discourse, Communication and Tourism*, Channel View Publications. Clevedon, England, p. 60.

Table 1 The top 15 tourist destinations in the world in 2014

	Tourist destination (city and country)
1.	Istanbul, Turkey
2.	Rome, Italy
3.	London, United Kingdom
4.	Beijing, China
5.	Prague, Czech Republic
6.	Marrakech, Morocco
7.	Paris, France
8.	Hanoi, Vietnam
9.	Siem Reap, Cambodia
10.	Shanghai, China
11.	Berlin, Germany
12.	New York City, New York
13.	Florence, Italy
14.	Buenos Aires, Argentina
15.	Barcelona, Spain

Source : TripAdvisor (<http://www.tripadvisor.com/TravelersChoice-Destinations-cTop-g1>)

The descriptions offered by TripAdvisor to the above mentioned top tourist destinations (see Table 1) have been firstly analyzed from a quantitative point of view in order to lead to a qualitative study. The quantitative analysis was carried out with the help of TROPES Programme⁵ with whose help we could establish word frequencies, morphological and syntactic aspects, and word clusters that are specific to the analyzed corpus. Despite the fact that we worked with a very small corpus (15 descriptions- 1210 words) the results have been sufficient to carry out a textual analysis and establish some characteristics of the analysed ads which would contribute further on to a qualitative analysis.

3.1. Nouns

Nouns are given a special role in advertising as they are often used alone in a noun phrase acting independently. Their role is to inform and persuade but at the same time to lure and enchant. Furthermore there are certain key-nouns used, and the entire message revolves around them. In the analysed ads, the most frequently used noun was “city”, closely followed by “market”, “history”, “bar”, “restaurant”, “museum”.

Taking into consideration the fact that the top 15 destinations are all well known cities, with a rich history and culture, it is not surprising that the most frequently used nouns are related to the city, its architecture, museums, places to visit and things to do. All this mixture of culture, history, shopping, good food and quality time is the key to a holiday to remember. Probably that is why they have been ranked so high by the travellers.

⁵ <http://www.semantic-knowledge.com/tropes.htm>

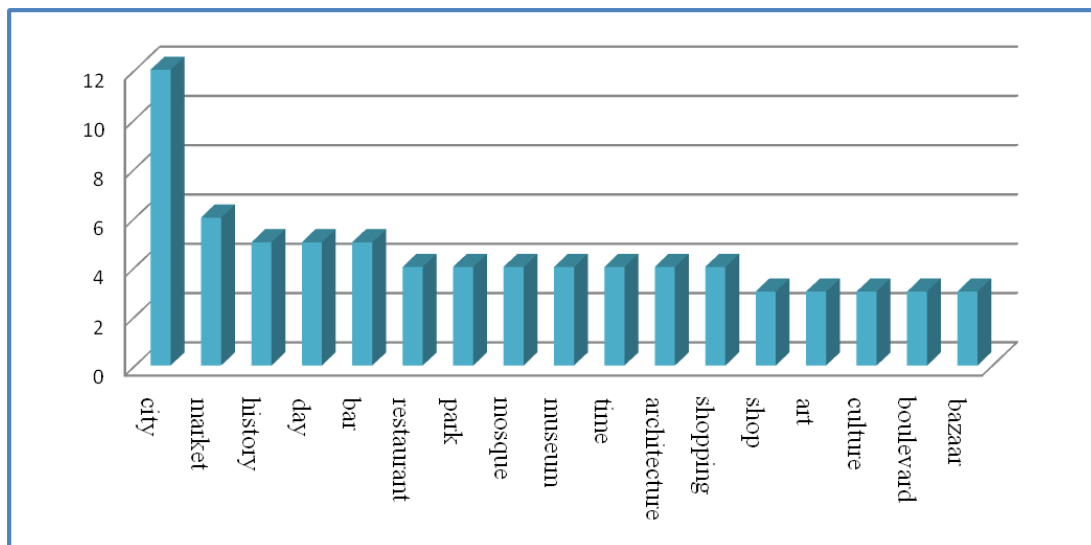


Fig.1 The most frequent noun occurrences in the analyzed ads

3.2. Verbs and Adverbs

According to Leech “verbal groups are mostly of maximum simplicity consisting of only one word”.⁶ Therefore the most frequently used verbs in the analyzed advertisements are: be (14), can (9), will (6), find (4), explore (3), visit (3). The majority of them are either used at present or at imperative, thus creating a feeling of eternity and universality. Moreover the fact that 51% of the verbs present in our analysis are factive verbs (Fig.2), highlights the idea of truthfulness, consequently what is advertised is correct, real and can be trusted. The use of factive verbs does not leave room for interpretations and presuppositions so the potential tourist may be convinced to receive what it has been advertised. On the other hand, the presence of state and reflexive verbs in the ads places the accent on the travellers’ feeling and inner states. This feeling of joy, fulfilment and positivity can be durable and persistent. As far as the adverbs are concerned, the predominant ones are

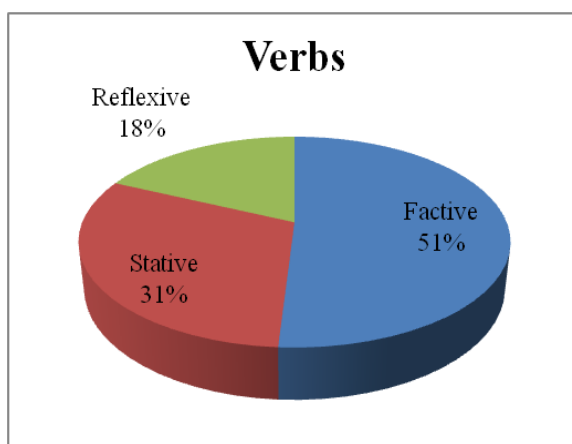


Fig. 2 The verbs used in the analysed ads

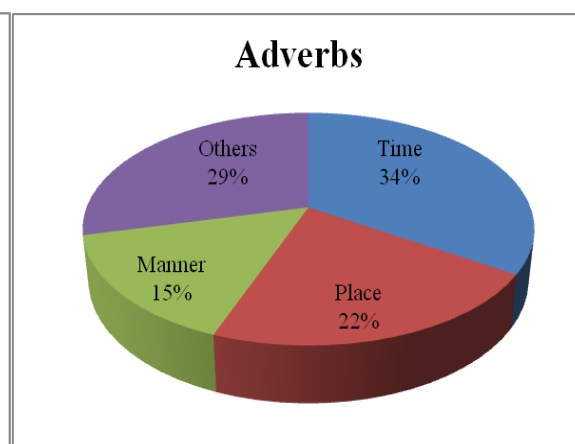


Fig. 3 The adverbs used in the analyzed ads

⁶ Leech, Geoffrey, N. (1972). *English in Advertising: A Linguistic Study of Advertising in Great Britain* (English Language Series). London: Longman, p.121.

the adverbs of time and place. Time and place are keywords in promoting a tourism destination. Advertisers always invoke the idea of perfection: one can spend the holiday in a perfect place and there is always a perfect time to do it.

3.3. Adjectives and Pronouns

Probably the most present and abundant parts of speech in advertisements are the adjectives. They are those lexical units which enrich the text, thus assigning it a metaphorical and hyperbolic character. The superlatives and comparatives emphasize why a product is better in comparison with another, why a tourist destination should be chosen instead of another. David Crystal⁷ states in his study *Making Sense of English Usage*, that the most frequently used 20 adjectives in advertising are the following : *new, crisp, good/better/best, fine, free, big, fresh, great, delicious, real, full, sure, easy, bright, clean, extra, safe, special*. They all envisage positive thinking therefore their persuasive power is higher. Needless to say how subjective and hyperbolic they are sometimes, but there are these ideas of grandeur, exaggeration and greatness that make the destinations appeal to the tourists. Regarding the pronouns, they are employed to continue the same idea of perfection, but the perfection tailored for *you*, the ad's reader and the potential tourist. In our corpus, 75% of the pronouns used were represented by the personal pronoun *you* (Fig. 5). However this is no surprise as the majority of ads abound in the presence of this personal pronoun which enables a connection, a bond, a more personal relation between the advertiser and the customer. The pronoun *you* is a

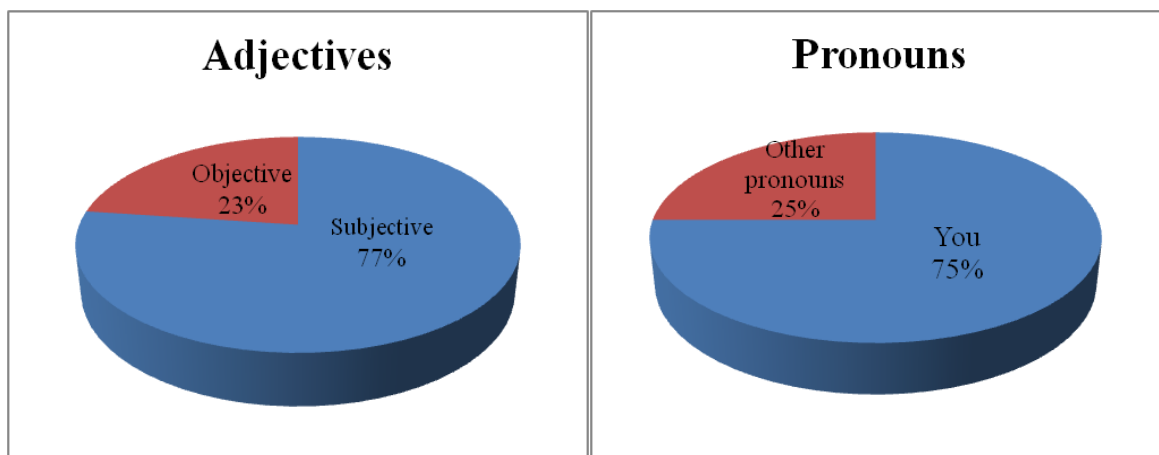


Fig. 4 The share of objective and subjective adjectives

Fig. 5 The pronouns used in the analyzed ads

marker of familiarity between the addresser and the addressee; thus the first claims to know the needs and desires of the latter and eventually promises to fulfil them. “The objective strategy consists in the occultation of both the enunciator and the enunciatee. [...] The result is an impression of objectivity”⁸, but with a high persuasive power.

⁷ Crystal, D. (1997). *Making Sense of English Usage*. Edinburgh: Chamber.

⁸ Mocini R. (2005). “The verbal discourse of tourist brochure.” in *Annals* 2005; 5:153-162. At http://www.uniss.it/lingue/annali_file/vol_5/0016%20-%20Mocini%20Renzo.pdf (29th Oct. 2014), p.158.

4. Conclusions

Tourism advertising is definitely moulded on the travellers' needs and wishes, being also influenced by the social context. Tourism itself is a social phenomenon with a range of socio-cultural implications. It is constantly evolving, developing and reinventing itself therefore tourism advertising and marketing must keep up. The fact that in 2014 the top 15 tourist destinations in the world are all well known cities, with outstanding architecture, places to visit and things to do, show people's need for spiritual and enlightening experiences not only for sightseeing. Nowadays travelling is more than going to a secluded island and lying on the beach. On the contrary, it is rather about the spiritual quest and enrichment, the search for the roots of old civilisations, of love beauty and timelessness.

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