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Unique selling propositions and destination branding: A longitudinal perspective on the Caribbean tourism in transition

Abstract

A recurring theme in the tourism literature is how travelers and tourism businesses perceive the concept of diversity and uniqueness of attractions pinned to places called tourism destinations and respond to their perceptions. In this backdrop, the primary focus of this research is a reexamination of the unique selling proposition (USP) based tourism marketing practice that various Caribbean island nations unleashed since the early 2000's. The extent of USP adoption in the web-based marketing campaigns of these destinations over a timeline from 2004 to 2014 is studied. Analysis shows that higher level USP use initially rose, reached a peak, and then declined. Also, over the years, destinations high in attraction diversity tended to delimit themselves from using highly targeted USPs while their counterparts with less attraction diversity routinely employed hierarchically superior USP slogans. The exact number of attractions in a destination country did not significantly imply the choice of slogans as much as the attraction type diversity. In order to achieve these objectives, an 'attraction diversity index' is proposed, which is a measure of the diversity of attraction types in a destination area. The research opens up further questions about the moderating role of product diversity in uniqueness centered marketing programs. It is recommended that marketers leverage the mass customization potential underlying in the contemporary progress in the information and communication technologies and tailor make USPs that reflect individual and small group aspirations about destination offerings.

Key words: unique selling proposition; trends, attraction diversity; segmentation; competitiveness; Caribbean tourism

Introduction

Since the advent of mass tourism, for destinations with beaches as one of their key tourism resources, the Sun-Sea-Sand-Sex (4S) model of tourism remained to be the default model of tourism development (Dilley, 1986; Wickens, 2002). It was as if these four components were inextricably intertwined: either all or none (Stupart & Shipley, 2012). This was understandable, given how a combination of sun, sea, sand, and sex would help tourists invert their conventionally held selves in their routine lives (Wickens, 2002). The Caribbean islands found this model an instant hit, especially among the cruise tourists (Henthorne, George & Smith, 2013).

The 4S model in the Caribbean is facing significant challenges (Henthorne, George & Smith, 2013; Weiler & Dehoorne, 2014). Many destination countries in the Caribbean had anticipated this and began searching for competitive advantage elsewhere. These searches, however, did not result in the

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identification of any radically innovative products and the alternative for most of these destinations was to highlight 'uniqueness in the commonness.' Driven by the need to highlight the uniqueness, various promotional campaigns were launched, all based on the marketing idea of the "unique selling proposition" (USP).

Do tourism destinations use unique selling propositions in their marketing campaigns? That is, do destinations try to distinguish themselves from their competitors in terms of distinctive attractions, strategies, price levels, culture, history, landscape, music, cuisine, or other attributes? Or, do most destinations employ similar generic – albeit enticing – images to attract visitors? These were some of the questions addressed in an earlier published study by Miller and Henthorne (2006). That study expanded the USP concept to an international tourism context, while also updating the analysis to the 21st century Web-based marketing technology. In that paper, it was argued for the appropriateness of the USP concept in international tourism in general, and the Caribbean as a study region in particular:

The intense competitiveness of the global tourism industry increasingly demands of destinations the most effective possible marketing, including product development, image creation, and promotional strategy. This necessity is nowhere more evident than for the Caribbean region: itself a highly fractured and intra-competitive collection of small destinations, which also must compete with a world of increasingly aggressive and expanding tourism alternatives (Miller & Henthorne, 2006, p. 49).

That analysis concluded that the marketing campaigns of international tourism destinations, such as Caribbean countries, could be classified in a meaningful and useful manner according to Richardson and Cohen's (1993) USP hierarchy. On the other hand, it was also concluded that tourism marketing based on the USP was rarely implemented, even more than four decades past the concept's introduction.

Web-based marketing, in its infancy at the time, opened up a more level playing field among the big-budget and small-budget destinations, and might reward the more creative campaigns that made use of uniquely compelling images and slogans. Thus, this study returns to the Caribbean, for an updated and expanded examination of USP-based tourism campaigns by the same destinations. Primarily, it attempts to answer the following question: as the Caribbean country destinations continue to evolve, is there still a continuing trend toward the increasing use of the USP? In that process, it unravels some of the key nuances of USP based marketing for tourism destinations in general.

The uniqueness of the USP

The concept of the unique selling proposition and its application to advertising is generally credited to Reeves (1961). The purchasers of unique products will obtain specific unique benefits from consuming those particular products (Bao & Shao 2002). Richardson and Cohen (1993) operationalized and tested the USP concept in their 1993 comparative study of tourism marketing campaigns for U.S. states. Richardson and Cohen developed a hierarchical scale for analyzing states' marketing slogans, which ranged from "Level 0: No proposition" through "Level 4b: Unique selling proposition" (p. 95). They identified four primary criteria in the use of the USP approach to advertising. First, the advertisement must make specific claims substantial enough to be either considered true or false by consumers. Second, the advertisement should forward only one distinct proposition. Third, the advertisement describes what specific benefits are to be realized through the consumption of the product. Fourth, the consumer benefits have to be unique to the advertised product. In essence, a product's USP communicates what is unique about the brand and what sets it apart from the competition.

A uniquely competitive USP must also display to consumers: 1) an eagerness to sell the product; 2) the desirability of the product to the potential customer; and 3) an assertion the product is not just special but truly unique. In essence, the marketer is seeking to create a uniquely positive brand image – ideally, a brand image that can be captured in a single memorable slogan (e.g., "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas"). An effective slogan should deliver a strong message about the USP to the market (Reeves 1961). While originally proposed as pertaining to product marketing, the USP concept has been extended to encompass services (Linning 2004; Chiagouris 2005) and destinations (Richardson & Cohen 1993, Plog 2004; Miller & Henthorne 2006).

Turning to the Caribbean, in the early 2000s, most Caribbean destinations competed head-on against one another in their web-based marketing campaigns, using similar and highly generic slogans and imagery. Standard beach images predominated, along with "one-size-fits-all" slogans such as Anguilla's "Tranquility Wrapped in Blue." Destinations with non-unique selling propositions included several of the region's major tourism players: Bermuda, Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Bahamas, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic (Miller & Henthorne, 2006). At the same time, however, a few highly creative campaigns did demonstrate the potential for inventing truly noteworthy USPs for tourism destinations – and implementing these USP-based campaigns on the web. These creative websites included some of the smallest players in the region, such as Dominica ("The nature island of the Caribbean") and Suriname ("The Beating Heart of the Amazon").

USP oriented branding

To be effective, an advertisement should capture attention, awaken interest, and arouse a desire to purchase the promoted product (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). The USP has been considered a critical component in this effectiveness (Warner, 2004) and is an integral component in modern-day branding efforts (Lee, Cai & O'Leary, 2005). In destination marketing, successful branding efforts are designed to differentiate a destination from other competitive destinations and to develop for that destination a unique personality in the marketplace (Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2004; Prebensen, 2007). Branding is viewed as being particularly important for high value, infrequently purchased and highly differentiated items (e.g. destinations) (Rowley, 2004). One component central to the destination branding process is a strong destination image (Aaker, 1991; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Baloglu, Henthorne & Sahin, 2014).

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) go on to state that a well-differentiated and consistent image is a necessity in successful branding strategies today. Destination branding has been shown to be a tool that can be used to gain a competitive advantage over other similar destinations (Murphy, Benckendorff & Moscardo, 2007). Conversely, Daye (2010) has shown the muddled results that may result from undifferentiated destination brand images. In any case, USPs and the slogans designed to capture them are central to many destinations' branding efforts.

As remarkable destination image impacts destination selection (Gartner 1996; Baloglu 1999), if a destination is to remain competitive in the ever-crowded marketplace, a "unique identity" is more important than ever (Morgan, Pritchard & Piggott, 2003). The more clearly a destination's slogan reflects the uniqueness of its attractions, the more efficient a message it projects (Lee, Cai & O'Leary, 2005). Also, the slogans that create a concrete image rather than the more generalized abstract images deliver a cleaner and more effective brand image. While branding as the process of highlighting a unique identifier has been practiced less dynamically in destination marketing than in the general marketing arena (Cai, 2002; Murphy, Benckendorff & Moscardo, 2007), its application and importance to destinations is becoming more widely recognized (Peirce & Ritchie, 2007).

Disadvantages of the USP approach

Despite all the beneficial effects of the USP indicated above, it is important to highlight a few caveats. Marketing literature has long identified the advantages of product diversity (Tallman & Jiatao, 1996; Varadarajan, 1986). By definition, a USP-based marketing approach may have the undesirable effect of narrowing the scope of attraction inventorying. Attractions that are part of a destination area not conforming to the USP definition might possibly be left out of the marketing campaigns. In centrally controlled tourism economies, the will of the prominent decision-making class will determine the extent of the USP adoption. In other situations, when the attraction clusters are competitive (low concentration of power for any single given attraction cluster), the political lobbying process among cluster stakeholders may well result in some USP based slogans not gaining prominence.

Attraction diversity of a country has strategic, tactical, and operational benefits and the USP based marketing campaigns could well be neglecting the value of such diversity. A diverse range of products can help a firm to spread the risk of market contraction and is particularly useful when a single star product offers no further opportunities for growth. Hence, while the USP based marketing approach is organic to small destinations with limited inherent attraction diversity, larger destination countries with a variety of attractions might find it less appealing. Attraction diversity and inter-attraction competitiveness within a destination country will likely determine the extent of USP adoption in its tourism campaigns.

Towards the concept of attraction diversity

Product diversity related studies are abundant in the economics and general marketing literature, but not so much in tourism literature. It was theoretical economists interested in competition related issues who first investigated the topic of diversity (Hotelling, 1929; Lerner & Singer, 1937). Tallman and Li (1996) examined how product diversity impacts the performance of a firm and found a quadratic relationship. Wan and Hoskisson (2003) concluded that the home country environments moderate any such relationship. Fiegenbaum and Karnani (1991) observed the unique advantages of small-scale enterprises from diversifying their product offerings. These authors stress that a diversified product portfolio is synonymous with output flexibility, a great asset in turbulent market conditions.

Using economic theory, Rumelt (1982) predicted that the advantages of product diversity would still remain even after the effects of varying industry profitability were removed. However, the literature is not unified in its support for diversification. For example, Montgomery's (1985) advocacy for less diversified firms is built upon the premise that highly diversified firms have lower 'general market power' in their respective markets than do less diversified firms, even when they wield some 'specific market power.' Economists have often highlighted the inherent disharmony between efficiency and diversity (Chamberlin, 1933; Meade, 1974). Hence, if diversity is to be a virtue, support for the same should be sought outside of traditional economics. Tourism is one unique way of looking at the costs and benefits of diversity.

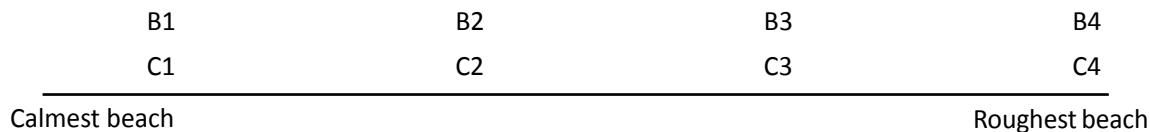
The question of a tourism destination's attraction diversity is, both, that of the extent of variance in its attraction offerings and that of the rationale for such variance. The extent of variance itself is multifaceted. In its simplest form, it can be seen linearly as variance within the same attraction type (or same core product). For example, a destination country may have different kinds of beaches that could be placed on a linear continuum from calm to rough beaches. In this example (Figure 1), different customer types (C1, C2, C3, C4) are attracted to different beach types and the associated businesses (B1, B2, B3, B4) capitalize upon the differences in customer tastes. Another example, even more linear

than the one given above, is that of two restaurants serving the same menu distinguishing their businesses based on differences in location and price.

Figure 1

Attraction diversity as linear variance

(B_i =beach type 'i'; C_i =customer type visiting the beach type 'i')

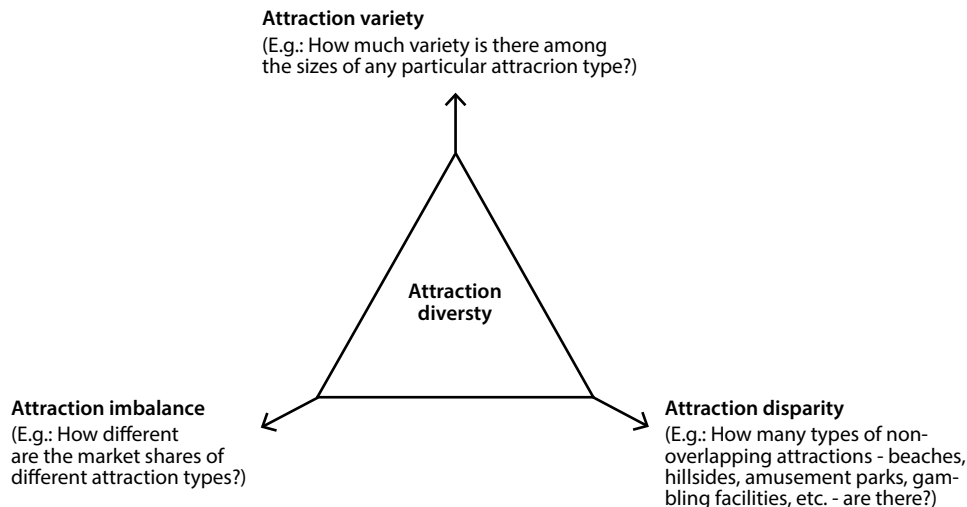


Attraction diversity may also be modeled based on the 'convexity' of consumer preferences (Dixit & Stiglitz, 1977). This takes into account that a consumer's preference for a compound product is not necessarily the sum total of consumer preference for each of the elements comprising the compound product. For example, a preference for coffee with cream and sugar may not be the sum of the individual preferences for coffee, cream and sugar. It is not unusual to find a tourist fascinated by shopping and nature walks but not a nature walk dotted with shopping establishments. Similarly, tourists may prefer particular compound products even though they do not prefer some of the individual components of that mixture. Such emergence of synergy means that USP based promotions can work well even for destination countries having a diverse set of attractions. In these situations, USP slogans could be framed around the mixture, as long as the mixture is perceived as an emergent single attraction in the minds of tourists.

Even though diversity has remained on top of the literature for the last half-century, its definition was typically assumed to be commonsense. According to Ranaivoson (2005), Sterling (1998) was one of the first to take serious initiatives to operationalize the concept of 'diversity.' While Sterling (1998) did not define product diversity as such, his treatment of the term broadly included technological diversity and even biodiversity. He conceived diversity as being composed of three dimensions: variety, balance and parity. In the case of tourism destination countries, this could be visualized as given in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Attraction diversity as a multidimensional construct



In order to study the relationship between the use of USPs and attraction diversity in a destination area, the present research proposes an attraction diversity index (ADI). While the developmental stages of ADI is beyond the scope of this paper, it suffices to tell that the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) could become the basis of such an index. This index measures the size of firms in relation to the industry and is an indicator of the amount of competition among them (Calkins, 1983; Hirschman, 1964). That is,

$$H = \sum_i S_i^2$$

where S is the market share of firm 'i' in the industry. Typically, an H below 0.01 indicates a highly competitive, no concentration index. An H below 0.15 indicates a largely un-concentrated index. An H between 0.15 and 0.25 indicates moderate concentration. Finally, an H above 0.25 indicates high concentration.

If all firms have an equal share of the market, the reciprocal of the index shows the number of firms in the industry. When firms have unequal shares, the reciprocal of the index indicates the "equivalent" number of firms in the industry. For the purpose of this study, HHI is used as a measure of the size of particular tourism attraction types in a country in relation to its overall tourism industry. An increase in HHI could be interpreted as a decrease in the attraction type diversity and vice versa. The tourism attraction diversity of a destination country may be operationalized as the inverse of HHI. Mathematically, Attraction Diversity Index (ADI) is represented as:

$$ADI = 1/\sum (MS_i)^2$$

For example, MS_1 represents the market share of attraction cluster 1. Also, market share for a cluster = Revenue generated by the cluster / total tourism industry revenue for the country.

The research problem

Given the various and significant benefits and costs associated with the use of the USP based tourism marketing approach, the primary research question to be addressed is whether, as the Caribbean destinations continue to evolve and mature, does the trend toward the increasing use of the USP approach still exist? An associated question is whether small and less diverse destination countries are more likely to adopt USP based tourism marketing campaigns than their larger and more diverse counterparts. This appears likely given large countries with diverse attractions may have more diverse interest groups, thus making USP choices and their adoption problematic. Additionally, qualitative reviews of Caribbean tourism literature and informal interviews with the stakeholders lead the researchers to the belief that, in destination countries with high attraction diversity, there may be substantially more industry resistance to adopting a USP approach. Stated another way, in large and diverse tourism destination countries, slogans representing the USP will be delimited to the lower levels of a hierarchy of slogans.

Methodology

A USP is not merely what is said, but also how it is said (Laskey, Day & Crask, 1989). Thus, in order to study USPs, it is very important to gather information on both these aspects. Infusing quantitative analysis with qualitative insights is pivotal and hence this research utilizes a mixed methods approach.

The marketing slogans of all members of the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO a, CTO b) for 2004, 2009, and 2014 were examined. Slogans that were in use towards the latter end of each of these years, generally considered as the beginning of the high season for Caribbean tourism, were used for analysis. Analysis included, both, text slogans and visual images used on the destinations' websites.

Additional data for qualitative analysis came in the form of tweets and TripAdvisor user reviews related to the Caribbean tourism, accessed using IBM Watson Analytics software's social media module. Quantitative analysis upon the secondary data sourced from the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) was performed using SPSS / IBM - PASW Software.

Richardson and Cohen's (1993) interpretation of what constitutes "uniqueness" in their definition of USP became the basis of classification of marketing slogans. These authors created the following hierarchical categorization of marketing slogans for their analysis of tourism campaigns by U.S. states (Richardson & Cohen, 1993, p. 95):

- Level 0: No proposition
- Level 1: Proposition equivalent to "Buy our product"
- Level 2: Proposition equivalent to "Our product is good"
- Level 3a: Proposition gives a product attribute, but virtually any [tourism destination] could claim the same attribute
- Level 3b: Proposition gives a product attribute, but many [tourism destinations] claim the same attribute
- Level 4a: Proposition gives a unique product attribute which is not a product benefit (i.e., does not "sell")
- Level 4b: Unique selling proposition.

Analysis of the marketing slogans helped to identify the "keywords" that represented a country's USPs. Visual analysis focused primarily on the extent to which the countries employed stereotypical and generic images of "sun & sand" tourism – sunny weather and sandy beaches being fairly ubiquitous commodities across the Caribbean region. The slogans were shared with at least three marketing scholars who had expertise in the area of tourism marketing: they were asked to classify each slogan into the most suitable level on the USP classification scheme proposed by Richardson and Cohen. When there were disagreements among the experts, the median classification was used for further analysis.

Data analysis

A content analysis of the marketing slogans of various destination countries served as the initial stage of data analysis. Given below in Figures 3a, 3b, and 3c are the prominent words that appeared in the slogans of 2004, 2009 and 2014, respectively. Larger font sizes correspond to more frequently used words. Utilizing such a visual technique makes certain word patterns readily identifiable. However, in order to identify the contextual polarity of text, a formal sentiment analysis was carried out. Analysis revealed that 57% of the words conveyed pleasant or positive, 18% of the words conveyed unpleasant or negative mood, while the remaining words were primarily neutral.

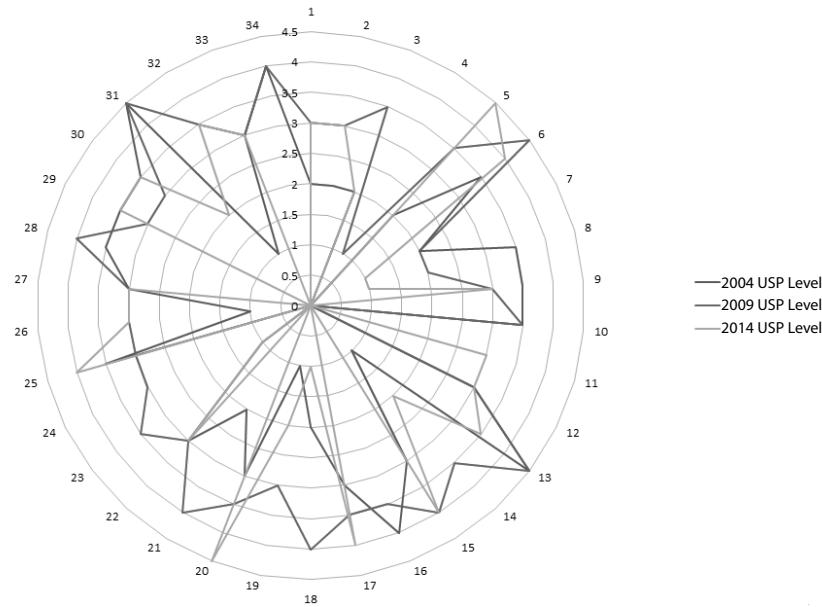
As would be expected, the word 'Caribbean' appeared highly prominent across all slogans, across the study period. Most destinations countries recognize that they are the truest representatives of the spirit of the Caribbean. This way of defining uniqueness, however, loses some of its luster when all destinations define it as such. If Country A's USP slogan included word phases containing the word "Caribbean," as if the true spirit of the Caribbean is unique to Country A; but similar word phrasing was also contained in the USP slogans of County B and Country C. The overall effect of this is the nullification of the potential relative benefits for all.

Figure 3
Slogan word cloud. (A) 2004. (B) 2009. (C) 2014.



A review of the word clouds reveals some interesting overall trends. Caribbean destinations are increasingly portraying themselves as much more than just sun, beaches and beachside resorts. In particular, the word 'nature' has become more popular in the slogans of various countries. As is visible in Figure 4, the heaviest use of USP oriented advertising peaked in 2009. Year 2014 data showed a few countries dropping out of the USP based campaigns (USP level=0), some lowering the levels of USP employed, while a few newcomers, like Cuba, joining the USP bandwagon.

Figure 4
Changes in the levels of USP used over 2004-2014



It must be noted that, as Table 1 implies, despite its relative prominence, the use of the word 'Caribbean' has dropped substantially. By 2014, countries were looking to become more unique and singular, not so ubiquitous as previous. Note that, in 2004, nine words appeared at least in two country slogans; in 2014, this number had dropped to just four countries.

Table 1
Most common words across tourism slogans

Keyword	Frequency		
	2004	2009	2014
Caribbean	12	6	5
Island	6	3	4
Experience	2		
Secret	2		
Little	2		
Explore	2		
Paradise	2		
French	2		
Nature	2	5	3
Treasure		2	
Beautiful		2	2

The lowest, highest, and mean USP values for all countries during 2004, 2009, and 2014 are provided in Table 2. This supports the earlier finding that the year 2009 saw the peak of the USP based marketing campaigns.

Table 2
Range of USP values in 2004, 2009, and 2014

USP Level	2004	2009	2014
Highest	4.50	4.50	4.50
Lowest	0.00	0.00	0.00
Mean	2.50	3.21	2.29
SD	1.28	0.91	1.51

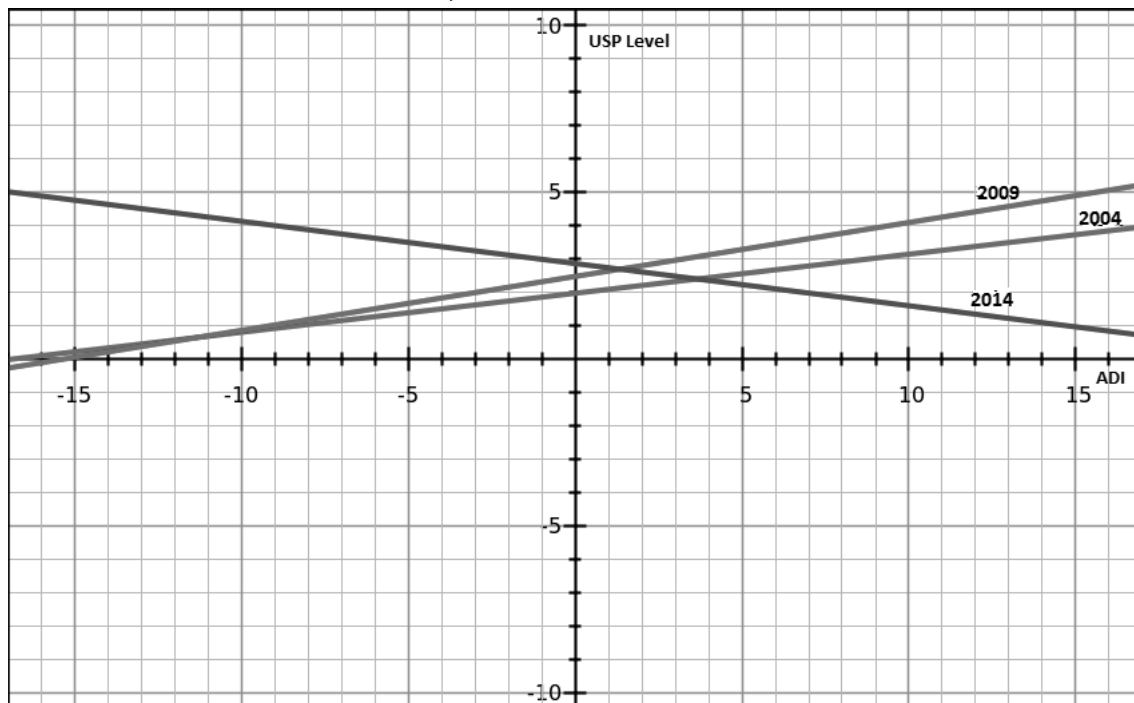
To examine the relationship between attraction diversity and USP use, straight lines ($y=mx+c$) were fitted over the data available. Statistical testing of significance of this relationship was deemed unnecessary since the data available was on the entire population. Three equations were derived based on the data for 2004, 2009 and 2014 (x =attraction diversity index (ADI); y =USP level):

2004: $y = 0.117128x + 1.972817$

2009: $y = 0.161789x + 2.477685$

2014: $y = -0.126659x + 2.864197$

Figure 5
USP Level as a function of attraction diversity



Interestingly, the expected relation was true only for the 2014 data (See Figure 5). What could this mean? Possibly, this implies that tourism marketing over the years has become more of a negotiated and democratic process. Smaller attraction types might not have wielded the same lobbying power over the

marketing policy authorities in the past. An alternative explanation is that tourism authorities understand the harms of highly targeted and narrowly specified USP based campaigns for their destinations.

While the 2014 data shows attraction concentration measured in terms of ADI indicates an overall trend, the trend is the resultant of multidirectional currents at the country levels: some countries with really low attraction concentration have low USPs; also, a few countries with above average diversity still go for relatively higher levels of USP implementation than their peers.

Discussion

The present analysis highlighted the strained relation between diversity of attraction types and the choice of USPs in a destination. It also pointed out the historical changes in this relationship, over a decade. Revisiting the research questions proposed to be addressed, the following findings emerged from this study.

Firstly, there was a question whether, as the Caribbean country destinations continue to evolve and mature, there is still a continuing trend toward the increasing use of the USP approach. The answer to this question is complex. The USP use, operationalized in terms of the grade of marketing slogans / DMO taglines, increased during the early part of the study period; USP use peaked by 2009 but then started its decline. It seems likely that most Caribbean destinations are now heading towards an era of mass-customized selling propositions. Advances in information and communication technologies have tremendously aided tourism marketers in this regard – to the extent that it is now possible to customize marketing slogans at an individual traveler level. Actually, tourism related websites and apps capture user behavior and tailor-make their entire offerings each individual customer in a fully automated manner.

Secondly, there was a question of the relation between the attraction diversity of a destination management area and the level of USP usage in that destination area's promotional campaigns. Generally, an inverse relationship is observed. This is increasingly true towards the latter part of the study period. This is understandable, given that diverse destinations may find it difficult to pick up any single selling proposition. However, there are exceptions. Some island destinations have included in their "unique" selling propositions many items: these USP statements generally adhere to the general proposition that "diversity is our uniqueness". Theoretically, however, such framing may not stand up to the rigorous definition of what might constitute a USP statement.

The use of USP use may have another interesting consequence: in attraction diverse destination countries, the use of USP based marketing is related to a larger gap between tourist expectations and performance. In other words, USPs seem to 'mislead' tourists. Recalling that the difference between performance - expectation is customer satisfaction, this finding may have an important implication for destination marketers and marketing scholars alike.

Further analysis might help improve the extant theory - the possible moderating role of attraction diversity in the effectiveness of USP use. Preliminarily, we know that the diversity of attraction types in a destination area make the application of USP based promotions problematic. This research also gives some indications that tourist satisfaction could be adversely affected if a highly attraction diverse destination promotes itself with a single USP and if tourists who buy into the same get disconfirmations when they actually make their visits.

Destination marketers should be aware of the fact that attraction diversity can reduce the benefits of USP based campaigns. Worse, it can mislead potential tourists about what a destination could offer.

Yes, in some cases, it could pleasantly surprise them leading to delight. However, it is more likely that tourists attracted to a destination because of its uniqueness are unimpressed by the accidental diversity. This could lead to dissatisfaction, complaining behavior, and behavioral disloyalty.

Finally, from a practitioner perspective, it is high time to examine the possibilities of mass-customized USP campaigns: identify each individual tourist, understand his or her expectations in terms of destination experience, and co-create the offerings available at the destination that resonate with their expected experience. There could be a notable gap between what destination marketers consider as USPs and what actual tourists consider as the key values of destinations. Recent advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs) permit custom making USPs in line with the tourist aspirations.

Conclusion

Caribbean tourist destinations are increasingly realizing the need to fight together for the tourist. The Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) has been encouraging member nations to identify elements that make each of them unique so that marketing dollars are not wasted in competing against one another (Hill & Lewis, 2015). Still, for the mass tourist, the Caribbean is still a single, largely indistinguishable, region. The geography and climate in the Caribbean region does vary, but not so much distinguishable to the gaze of the touristic eyes. National destination management organizations and tourism industry bodies of each country in the Caribbean have struggled hard to differentiate their country from all others, but again with not so much success.

Based on data gathered in 2004, 2009, and 2014, it was observed how different Caribbean destinations have experimented with the use of unique selling propositions (USPs). The high octane use of USP based advertisement peaked around 2009 and then declined, based on our 2014 data. The honeymoon with USP oriented advertising peaked in 2009. Given the need to differentiate offerings and to stand out, it is quite intuitive to understand the logic behind the USP based campaigns. But, did these campaigns really benefit? Not actually. Even when the highest level of USP use was noted for a country, it probably could not have helped them much because many other countries had almost similar content in their USP messages.

The Caribbean destinations are increasingly realizing that they are not just beaches and beachside resorts. In particular, the word 'nature' has become more popular in the slogans of various countries. Year 2014 data also shows many countries dropping out of the unique selling proposition based campaigns, many moderating their extreme views on uniqueness, while a few newcomers like Cuba joining the USP bandwagon (their modest slogan is 'Autentica Cuba'). Our findings do not mean that Caribbean destinations are losing steam on differentiation; what we observe is that the basis of differentiation is not as enthusiastically communicated via the USP slogans anymore, as it used to be half a decade back.

The special benefits of a USP based national tourism campaign for businesses that are aligned with the agreed upon definition of the USP needs further exploration. Among other things, such businesses can potentially leverage the benefits of the government funded campaign with relatively low promotional budgets. This has significant implications for further tourism development in a country, too. It is possible that businesses that traditionally marketed attractions not in conformity to the official USP statement realign their products and services. If not, the alternative question is how such businesses would differentiate themselves within the homogeneity implied by the USP statement.

Evidences that come from some of the peripheral regions in the Caribbean indicate that they are moving out of the fast paced beach tourism model to various 'slow tourism' alternatives that include

promoting sustainable living experiences, eco-farming, and cultural tourism (Timms & Conway, 2012). Our suggestion is that these outlier businesses and regions form cooperative community networks of their own and market their regions based on the synergy implied by such cooperation.

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