

Construction of Cuba's country image: analysis of the creation of national identity from the advertising spot

Construcción de la imagen país Cuba: análisis de la conformación de la identidad nacional desde el spot publicitario

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to characterize Cuba's country image through the spots broadcasted by Cubavisión Internacional. For the development of the analysis categories, we used the content analysis method. The results of the investigation show that, in the advertising spots analyzed, Cuba's country image is poorly represented, based on stereotyped advertising themes and signs, as well as unrepresentative topics of the nation. Advertising signs are used to refer features of the Cuban population and promote tourism, hospitality and consumption of national products.

Keywords: Cuba's country image; television advertisement; advertising signs; rhetorical figures; semiotic.

RESUMEN

Este artículo tiene como objetivo caracterizar la imagen país Cuba mediante los spots transmitidos por Cubavisión Internacional. Para el desarrollo de las categorías de análisis se aplica el método análisis de contenido. Entre los resultados de la investigación, se determina que los spots publicitarios analizados representan de modo deficiente la imagen país Cuba, a partir de temas y signos publicitarios estereotipados y tópicos poco representativos de la nación. Los signos publicitarios se emplean para referir rasgos de la población cubana y promover el turismo, la hostelería y el consumo de productos nacionales.

Palabras clave: imagen país Cuba; publicidad en televisión; signos publicitarios; figuras retóricas; semiótica.

RESUMO

O objetivo deste artigo é caracterizar a imagem País Cuba através dos spots transmitidos pelo canal Cubavisión Internacional. Para o desenvolvimento das categorias de análise, são aplicados os método de análise de conteúdo. Entre os resultados da pesquisa, constata-se que nos spots publicitarios analisados, a imagem do país de Cuba está sub-representada, baseada em temas e sinais estereotipados pouco representativas da nação. Sinais publicitários são usados para se referir às características da população cubana e promover o turismo, a hospitalidade e o consumo de productos nacionais.

Palavras-chave: imagem País Cuba; propaganda em televisiono; sinais de propaganda; figuras retóricas; semiótica.

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, advertising is not only limited to providing the public with certain information but seeks to create references and perceptions to somehow influence human behavior. Such a communicative phenomenon is inserted as one more actor in the contemporary social context. Authors such as Kleppner, Rusell and Lane (1994), Bassat (2001), Madrid Cánovas (in Pessi, 2008) or Díaz-Guzmán (2015) define advertising as an impersonal and controlled communication process, which “through mass media, aims to publicize a product, service, idea or institution to inform or influence in its purchase or acceptance” (Ortega, 2004, p. 22). Advertising discourse has a strong persuasive purpose (Hernández & Rajas, 2013).

Among the channels used for advertising, television has a privileged place, due to the position it occupies in the public's media consumption. Consequently, it constitutes an appropriate support for conducting commercial message studies, specifically the advertising spot, as it is considered the most important and frequent genre of advertising (Pérez, 2009).

Television is media that generates impact and reach in audiences, derived from the evident visual nature of the contemporary world, in which the image governs communication (Laguna Platero, 2003). It is used by countries to, along with other communication strategies, build their own representation before the world, including everything that ranges between their international relations and their cultural manifestations.

Through this subjective and conscious elaboration, conceptualized as a country image (Cardús, 2010), nations are presented in a context of competitiveness, in which identity “turns out to be the most important element of recognition, differentiation and commercialization in the communicative process of positioning of cities, regions and countries” (De San Eugenio, 2013, p. 1).

An adequate construction of country's image determines its respect at international level, its areas of specialization and the prestige of its products in the market (Jenes & Malota, 2009). At the same time, it constitutes the main and most differentiating projection of a nation among its counterparts.

Cuba has a very own Caribbean identity, with key sectors in its economy, such as tourism and services export, as well as the commercialization of tobacco, that makes it unique within the region. Its social features, nature, history and ideology give it significance on a global scale and make the island a place of interest,

which is why the development of the country image category is essential.

In this sense, *Cubavisión Internacional* constitutes one of the main platforms from which the Cuban country image can be promoted, based on advertising messages, since it is the only television channel on the island, with commercial programming, intended for a foreign audience.

Considering these particularities, this article aims to characterize the representation of Cuba's country image in the advertising spots of *De Cuba, su gente* broadcasted by *Cubavisión Internacional* as part of its usual programming. We used a mixed perspective with methods such as content analysis, which favored data obtention and its subsequent interpretation, based on qualitative generalizations of the fundamental trends of the identity signs used to transmit the image Cuba. The study delves into a phenomenon currently debated on countries' characteristics to project their idiosyncrasy and products-brand at international level, with a particular reflection from the singularities of a country with a single international channel.

LITERATURE REVIEW

REPRESENTATION OF THE COUNTRY'S IMAGE IN TELEVISION SPOTS

The image, as a concept, reflects the displacement experienced by humanity from a culture based on language towards the world of the iconic (Doucet, 2008), where visuality takes precedence in the transmission of messages.

Thus, images of territories, understood as defined spaces, emerge with precise limits, both physical and symbolic, created by the subject, society or government structures (Tuan, 1997).

Based on this criterion, Phillip Kotler, Donald Haider and Irving Reign (1994) analyze the perception of a geographical space towards its interior and exterior. From this stand they define the territorial image as the sum of beliefs, ideas, impressions and representations that a person has of a territory. This social construction is established based on the identity-image reciprocal relationship. An identity that allows the formation of a living and changeable idiosyncrasy.

However, the identity perspective, historically associated with countries, changes in a globalized world, where previous social constructs disappear to give way to a new elaboration of territorial or national identity. The reworking of the term presents identity

more as content than as a container, a receptacle of variable conceptions, but at the same time premeditated and the result of the symbolic struggle to achieve recognition and power.

This symbolic struggle must escape the promotion of predetermined stereotypes that, according to Walter Lippmann (1964), become collective images that mediate between people and reality, resist change and have a series of established features: they are simplified, invariable ideas, conventional, repetitive, homogenizing and related to prejudices (Buena Doral, 2012).

Nowadays, there is a dichotomy between country brand and country image. Authors such as Anholt (2002) explain that country brand involves products, people, culture, tourism and additional features that countries can offer, in a promise of particularity and exclusivity. However, the substantial differences lie in the assumption of the country image as directed more towards affective relationships, mechanisms linked to perception and the mental associations with a specific country.

Ingrid Martin and Sevgin Eroglu (2011) have conceptualized one of the most recurring perspectives of country image: the complete set of descriptive, inferential and informational beliefs about any country; the "communication and visibility of the national image [expressed from] politics, economy, culture and social work (...) the imprint of its history and identity" (Ricardo, 2014, p. 50).

Paul Capriotti (2013) defines the image of a country as a supra-organizational level of corporate image, since it is perceived as the global idea that the public establishes about an entity (social subject) and the notions about its products, activities and behaviors.

Based on the above, country image can be analyzed from the corporate perspective, which is why it responds to the dimensions outlined by Villafaña-Gallego (1993): self-image, intentional image and public image. Since the self-image corresponds to the perception of the entity about itself and the public image is the idea that the surrounding environment has about it, this article focuses on the intentional image. This dimension constitutes the manifestation of the personality of the organization (the country), designed to influence the opinions of the audience about it.

Jenes and Malota (2009) do not restrict the country's image number of features, a possibility that adapts such a notion to the story that any country structures on itself, in line with the living and changeable identity mentioned by Nogué and De San Eugenio (2009).

Nevertheless, this conception involves a debate with

two fundamental criteria: the one that analyzes it as an umbrella function, which covers the entire range of national products, brands and various organizations, and the one that considers the country itself as a complex product, made up of a broad set of elements (Jenes & Malota, 2009; Ortigueira, 1999; Szeles, 1998). This opinion is shared by the authors when addressing the country's image category as a symbolic and marketable development, but not exclusively material or commercial.

These stands allow us to conclude that the country image is an intentional and multidimensional image, made up of elements that summarize the national identity and that allow us to show the country from its physical and geographical, cultural and historical, social, political, economic and human aspects. This image constitutes a complex product, with commercial value, and is related to the product image of national productions.

CASE STUDY

Cubavisión Internacional presents itself as the only Cuban channel with programming broadcasted to the world. Its programming consists of national programs that range from informative to dramatized, with emphasis on Cuban soap operas and news on the island's current affairs. In addition, it exhibits various advertising works that range from advertising spots to infomercials.

Created in 1986, its mission consists, as explained by the channel's director of Communication and Marketing in an interview, in fighting against the hegemony of large media consortiums and transmitting a comprehensive image of Cuba through spaces that address culture, science, sports and other issues (Loatmi Porro, personal communication, February 16, 2016). The promotional spot of the channel states that *Cubavisión Internacional* reaches 56 nations of America, Europe, Asia, Oceania and Africa.

From 2013, and as a way of self-financing, they decide to include advertising under the Advertising Regulation Policy, and develop a commercial portfolio offered to Cuban, mixed and foreign companies based in the national territory: their target market. The options include overprints, infomercials, product placements and advertising spots. In addition, it restricts the time spent on advertising to a maximum of 144 minutes per day, equivalent to 10% of a normal 24-hour broadcast.

Among the advertising projects, the most relevant is *De Cuba, su gente*, divided into three subdivisions.

The first, *Estatuas Vivientes*, features street artists who embody different exponents of Cuban and universal culture, as well as characters from literary and cinematographic fiction.

Arte y Danza explores the island's musical diversity through its rhythms and dance groups, which allows the country to show some of most internationally recognized artistic manifestations. The third subsection, *Cápsulas*, is the one with the greatest thematic variety, since it encompasses personalities of culture, popular figures, geographical spaces, as well as other aspects considered in the construction of a diverse and authentic image of the nation.

METHODOLOGY

In this research, the main objective was to characterize the representation of Cuba's country image in the advertising spots *DeCuba, su gente* broadcasted by *Cubavisión Internacional* as part of its usual programming. The specific objectives to reach this goal are:

- Identify the topics covered to represent Cuba's country image in the advertising spots of *De Cuba, su gente*, broadcasted by *Cubavisión Internacional*.
- Describe the use of advertising signs and rhetorical figures through which Cuba's image is represented in the advertising spots of *Cuba, su gente*, broadcasted by *Cubavisión Internacional*.

Due to its objectives, this research draws on the proposal made by Hernández-Sampieri, Fernández and Baptista Lucio (2006), assuming a mixed approach in the two-stage design modality consisting of the "transformation of one type of data into another (quantitative in qualitative or vice versa) and/or generation of one type of data with another approach analysis (quantitative analyzed with qualitative methods and vice versa)" (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2006, p. 759).

To reach a greater dimension and knowledge of the analysis category, Cuba's country image, we first quantified the national identity elements and the recurrence of issues present in each of the analyzed spots.

With these results as a basis, we delved into the characterization of the elements and the message generated by the use of certain rhetorical signs and

figures in the advertising spots. To select the sample of analyzed spots, we took as references the thematic categories in which the channel itself classifies its universe of spots: *Arte y Danza*, *Cápsulas* and *Estatuas Vivientes*. We quantified how many spots there were in each category and how many TV appearances each one had in total. When dividing the total of transmissions by category by their total of spots, we determined the average appearances per month of each spots' category: 17 for *Arte y Danza*, 9 for *Cápsulas* and 7 for *Estatuas Vivientes*. The spots that were finally selected are all those that exceed the average number of broadcasts in their category (table 1).

This subsequent analysis exceeds the numerical dimensions to delve deeper into the phenomenon that involves the use of preconceived national identity images, an explanation that combines several compositional elements of the image (shots and colors) and cultural folkloric components (music, costumes or dance).

Based on this, we combined methods such as content analysis to "describe trends in communication content" (Berelson, in Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2006, p. 356) and the Constellation of Attributes technique set forth by Schmidt and Moles (cited in Martín, 2008), which seeks to isolate meanings related to a central meaning. These authors propose the existence of some key meanings and others "with more content, that do not necessarily coincide with the key meanings" (Martín, 2008, p. 220).

RESULTS. CUBAVISIÓN INTERNACIONAL: CUBA'S INCOMPLETE IMAGE TOWARDS THE WORLD

A first approach to the media and its editorial policy allowed us to verify that, in the communication of the national image, there is no uniform pattern, nor a policy that guides how to project the image abroad. Therefore, the channel resorts to general notions shared between public and broadcaster, which respond to codes recognized by the foreign population on the island.

The Cuban population constitutes one of the most recurring themes (table 2) in the representation of Cuba's country image, as it is found in 20 of the 29 advertising spots analyzed. This shows the role given to the people to show the country, in line with the main purpose of the project *De Cuba, su gente*. Within this classification, features related to the Cuban are addressed: a multiracial nature, population aging, the

Spots	Total broadcasts (1 month)	Total days	Average frequency
<i>Infantil Habana Compás Dance</i>	33	11	1.4
<i>Danza de Yemayá</i>	36	13	1.6
<i>Habana Compás Dance</i>	28	10	1.2
<i>Callejeros</i>	24	10	1.1
<i>Cautivos</i>	27	10	1.2
<i>Baile de la chancleta</i>	34	15	1.6
<i>Compañía Flamenca Ecos</i>	26	10	1.2
<i>Conjunto Folclórico Nacional</i>	27	10	1.2
<i>Danzón Folclórico</i>	35	10	1.5
<i>Flamenco</i>	18	6	0.8
<i>Frasis</i>	8	5	0.4
<i>Gigante</i>	17	5	0.7
<i>Mundito González</i>	18	6	0.8
<i>Calle Obispo</i>	18	4	0.7
<i>Dali</i>	13	4	0.5
<i>Carros</i>	13	4	0.5
<i>Celestino Esquerré</i>	14	5	0.6
<i>Viajeros</i>	14	4	0.5
<i>Marta Campos</i>	15	5	0.6
<i>Migdalia Echevarría</i>	9	4	0.4
<i>Cristian Alejandro</i>	16	6	0.7
<i>Omara Portuondo</i>	18	8	0.8
<i>Mojitos</i>	13	6	0.6
<i>Nelson Díaz</i>	10	3	0.4
<i>Tradicionales del 50. Chan Chan</i>	16	6	0.7
<i>Steelband Habana</i>	15	5	0.6
<i>Caballero de París</i>	11	4	0.5
<i>Caballero Don Andrez</i>	9	5	0.5
<i>Homenaje a Pablo Casals</i>	21	6	0.9

Table 1. Broadcast frequency of the selected spots

Source: Own elaboration.

affable character and the tranquility and happiness of children.

In each of the spots in which they appear, children are used as a sign of vitality, joy, energy and creativity, a frequent reference to the Cuban nation. The children provide a message of placidity and social tranquility

when they are presented playing, smiling in the park, dressed in school uniforms or integrated into a dance group.

Showing children as an indicator of a state of peace and security constitutes a repeated cliché in the representation of Cuba's country image. This idea is

Nº	Topics	Spots in which it appears	Total	%
1	Typical elements	1, 7, 8, 17, 25, 26	6	20.69
2	Urban spaces	1, 7, 8, 9, 13, 17	6	20.69
3	Cuban population	1, 4-8, 11, 14-18, 20-26, 29	20	68.97
4	Traditional cuisine	2	1	3.45
5	National products	2, 6, 7	3	10.34
6	Culture personalities	3-6, 9, 10, 12, 13	8	27.59
7	Music	3-6, 8-10, 12-14, 17-26	20	68.97
8	Traditional clothing	4-6, 18, 20-22, 25	8	27.59
9	Particularities of the political system	7	1	3.45
10	National symbols	7, 8	2	6.90
11	Hostelry	7	1	3.45
12	Tourism sector	7	1	3.45
13	Universal culture	7, 29	2	6.90
14	Geographic characteristics	7, 8, 11, 14, 15	5	17.24
15	Historical and heritage sites	8, 11, 16, 17, 27-29	7	24.14
16	Geographical spaces	8, 14, 15	3	10.34
17	Street art	11, 16, 27-29	5	17.24
18	Historical figures	27, 28	2	6.90
19	Dance	17-26	10	34.48
20	History	18-19	2	6.90
21	Religious syncretism	11, 20, 21	3	10.34
22	Circus art	15	1	3.45

Table 2. Topics used to represent Cuba's country image

Source: Own elaboration.

used to show a stable nation, a place where children are respected, which generates confidence in the audience that approaches the country, through the messages transmitted by *Cubavisión Internacional*.

In the same way, there is a working population, jovial, affable, that likes to party and is linked to art in its various manifestations. Presenting a nice population constitutes an advertising resource which seeks to establish empathy between the public and the promoted site. By showing a standardized image of this issue, other identity aspects of the Cuban are ignored, such as the peasantry, professionals from various fields and youth not linked to art.

Cuba is not only reduced to festive moments, it can be a reference in science, sports, health, education, international politics and many other achievements that break the usual scheme and also characterize the Cuban population.

Population and music are continuously linked in the sample. As in the previous topic, music has the same number of appearances (20), and also presents a partial melodic panorama of the nation.

Among the identifying elements of the treatment given to music is the recurrence of fusion rhythms such as the Flemish rumba, derived from the Spanish and African cultural heritage. However, both rumba and



Figure 1. Frame of the *Steelband Habana* spot (2016)

Source: *Cubavisión Internacional*.

flamenco are developed independently in several of the analyzed advertising spots, which is why not only the hybridization of melodies is explored, but also the direct presence of these traditions in national art. The external musical influence is also exposed through the Steelband group (figure 1) with its typical rhythm of Trinidad and Tobago.

The inclusion of such melodies, performed by Cubans, shows an inclusive nation that exchanges culturally with the countries of the region. Similarly, the *guaguancó*, *bolero*, *son*, *danzón*, mambo and the traditional *trova* have a place as representatives of the country's history and musical development. Popular titles are featured, such as *Dos gardenias*, *Chan Chan* and *Lágrimas negras*, mostly performed by recognized national artists, such as Omara Portuondo, the group Tradicionales del 50, Migdalia Herrera, Mundito González and Marta Campos.

In the same way, young exponents of Cuban music are included in the sample under analysis, although to a lesser extent. Among them are X Alfonso (rap), Cristian Alejandro (pop-rock), the Frasis group (contemporary melodies with string instruments), and William Vivanco (new *trova*).

In a general analysis, music is the most complete and diverse element used to represent inside cultural manifestations and those external influences in search of acceptance, reinforcing the idea of a musical island so entrenched in the world. But it is not a random choice; the established is strengthened and what is shown are the most representative examples, without taking a risk with novelties, following established formulas and without delving into traditional exponents such as the *punto guajiro*, *conga*, *timba* and *changüí*, and

some current ones such as reggaeton. Musical rhythms that characterize the Cuban sound repertoire and, more specifically, its national identity, much more popular, although perhaps less commercial and –therefore– neglected.

Culture personalities are another recognizable topic in the representation of Cuba's country image, which constitutes 27.59% of the sample, with a total of eight spots. However, this topic is limited exclusively to musicians and bypasses representatives of arts such as ballet, plastic arts and acting.

The selection is extremely biased and not very distinctive, based on conventional canons, from a Cuba already discovered by the world and without giving importance to other manifestations, young or controversial personalities. Without an intention to rediscover or show new faces, this sample is not characterized by a break with the personalities structurally established as important, even though there are other personalities that emerge and are also part of Cuban culture, as well as the other manifestations of art, even linked to the popular.

Along with the music and those who play it, dance has a space in the list of topics used by the channel. Rhythms such as *danzón*, rumba, flamenco and break dance are included, which emphasize the joy of Cuban people and their passion for dancing (figure 2).

Similarly, musical instruments and allegorical clothing are signs of idiosyncrasy, only this time as a result of Spanish and African heritage. The spot concerning the Ecos Flamenco Company is an example of it, where cajones, drums and claves show the imprint of Spain in the creation of rhythms, today Cubans, like the flamenco rumba.

The same goes for the National Folklore Ensemble, which alludes to the black presence in the national culture through the *batá* drums and dancers dressed like slaves. The historical-cultural influence that formed Cuba is also evidenced by religious syncretism. Sunflowers (figure 3) and the Cathedral of Havana show the Catholic pattern of the analyzed advertising spots, while Danza de Yemayá and National Folkloric Ensemble resort to the Yoruba presence, with dancers dressed as African deities who dance before paintings of Orishas. Both cases show a diverse nation, proud of its tradition, authentic, but at the same time shaped by the imprint of other regions.

The analysis shows that the dances representative of the Afro-Cuban tradition are performed by mulatto and black interpreters, while those of European origin



Figure 2. Frame of the *Habana Compás Dance* spot (2016)

Source: *Cubavisión Internacional*.



Figure 3. Frame of the *Gigante* spot (2016)

Source: *Cubavisión Internacional*.

are performed by white men and women. Racial differentiation corresponds to another of the usual patterns in the sale of Cuba's image, that *Arte y Danza* uses as a population and cultural trait.

The spots related to dance and its clear intention to demonstrate the preponderance of the black race try to be a sign of the multiracial composition of the Cuban nation, its inclusion in art and culture and its right to equality. However, this vision does not show the contributions of the black race in the civil and social life of contemporary Cuba; their contributions in other areas other than culture and sports are excluded and hinder what could be an unprejudiced view on the racial issue in Cuba.

Dance is shown in 10 of the analyzed audiovisuals, a figure higher than the culture personalities. However, compared to this topic, the spots that deal with dance are less diverse, since the same groups are featured several times.

In general, the selection of topics sometimes responds more to an aesthetic purpose than to a conscious elaboration of the criteria that Cuba's country image should represent. This is manifested in the inclusion of street and circus art, topics more present in Havana than in other regions of the country.

STREET ART AND OTHER TOPICS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF CUBA'S COUNTRY IMAGE

Street art is found in five of the audiovisuals analyzed, constituting 17.24% of the total. The latter refers to the commodification of Cuban culture, manifested in living statues that charge for their performance and that, in addition, represent the external influence in the artistic trends.

As part of their performance, living statues include personalities related to Cuban history and universal culture, closely linked to the Havana context. Among them are the Caballero de París¹ and Don Andrés², figures of the Republic and the Colony in Cuba, respectively (figure 4). Belonging to universal art, we find the famous Spanish cellist Pablo Casals.

As in the previous topics, history is approached as a cultural imprint of the nation, since the different periods and their characteristic elements become the seal that is exported to the world as a commercial image of Cuba.

To this end, it shows the African slaves of the colonial era and the society of the republican period, topics present only in two of the *Arte y Danza* spots, which show the scarce relevance given to history despite its importance in the representation of the country's image.

This thematic imbalance fosters a very urban image, typical of the capital, that excludes much more local artistic manifestations that respond to the syncretism of cultures present in the formation of Cuban nationality, manifested in other regions of the island. Different cultural manifestations, festivals, expanded dance meetings throughout the archipelago, characterize Cuba in the region and, nevertheless, do not find a place in the representation of the spots of *Cubavisión Internacional*.

Other recurring aspects are Cuba's typical elements and traditional clothing. The channel's emphasis on advertising signs that denote custombrist features is also seen in the use of the guayabera, the *yarey* hat, the fan, the stool, the wooden flip flops, the maracas, the guitar, the bongos, the *longa cum* drums, the American classic cars and *bicitaxis* (three-wheeled tricycle used to transport one or two people) (figure 5).



Figure 4. Frame of the *Caballero de París* spot (2016)

Source: *Cubavisión Internacional*.



Figure 5. Frame of the *Danzón Folclórico* spot (2016)

Source: *Cubavisión Internacional*.

The use of signs such as rum, tobacco and coffee, considered for years as the essence of Cubanness among the foreign public, have generated around them a culture of consumption of the purely Cuban. Based on these symbolic-commercial implications, the audiovisual texts under study have a strong emotional and enjoyment connotation. The ads show a cafeteria where, at Benny Moré's tempo, two cups of coffee are prepared. Similarly, there is a nightclub where Cuban music is played and the client completes his experience of placidity smoking tobacco, and a cozy bar where, with the music of Bola de Nieve, purely Cuban, a bartender prepares drinks with national rum.

To the above are added historical and heritage sites, a topic aimed at showing a nation of remembrance and closely linked to its history. In the seven audiovisuals where the topic appears there is a recurrence of the synecdoque as a rhetorical figure, particularly emphasizing various sites and monuments as an allusion to Cuba. Among these are the Faro del Morro, the lions of the Paseo del Prado, the Cathedral of Havana (figure 6), the Plaza San Francisco de Asís, the Obispo street and the Havana seawall.

Both historical and heritage sites, as well as urban spaces and allusions to geographical features, focus only on Havana, even though Cuba has other privileged locations due to its topography and deep historical, cultural and heritage legacies.

These images strengthen the idea of an urban Cuba that combines historical elements and that is presented from different signs such as costumes, architecture, music, dance or urban spaces. Partially, it shows an urbanized Cuba, attached to the idea of Havana as a wonder city, but it undermines the cultural wealth and

heritage of other provinces, of local environments, of cities that remind of the colonial era, natural spaces, also of marked beauty that can attract, in the same way, tourism.

Instead, the geographical characteristics essentially show the Cuban coast and the intensity of the tropical climate as an accentuation of the country's Caribbean nature. Other geographical places of interest such as mountainous massifs, natural niches, vegetation, ponds or rivers are ignored in the country's representation, responding to the same established canons and significantly limiting the island's representation.

This Caribbean character is also reinforced in other signs, although perhaps unconsciously for the audience. The use of the costumes, the weather, the allusion to refreshing drinks, the musical and culinary traditions, the skin color and even the sensuality of the people combine to leave show an insular character and its potential for enjoyment.

The referential capacity of the sign is also used to place the country's spatially as part of the Caribbean; therefore, they used natural signs, such as palms and the rest of the vegetation, the sun, the sea and the coast. The inclusion of these references, along with the presence of architectural signs, demarcates the features of a tropical island, reinforcing the usual reference to Cuba as an "eternal summer", but at the same time as a place where city and nature are interwoven. The harmony between the natural and urban development constitutes a symbolic element that differentiates the national image, to which the filmmakers appeal.

The Caribbean and tropical atmosphere is generally reaffirmed by the filming in the afternoon. During these hours there are strong lights and the sun works as a



Figure 6. Frame of the *Gigante* spot (2016)

Source: *Cubavisión Internacional*.



Figure 7. Frame of the *Dali* spot (2016)

Source: *Cubavisión Internacional*.

large frontal focus that sharpens the figures' contrasts. This is the case in the *Cápsulas Steelband y Dali*, which transforms the technical resource into an expressive method (figure 7).

RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM AND NATIONAL SYMBOLS WITHIN THE BROADCASTED TOPICS

Within culture and tradition, there are references to religious syncretism as a consequence of the African and Spanish imbrication; hence it is represented mainly from the Yoruba religion, inherited from black slaves, and the Catholic, from European colonial influence. However, this topic is not frequent in the advertising spots studied (only 10.34% of the sample).

On the other hand, national symbols also have representative value in the construction of Cuba's country image; however, only the national flag is used in this regard. The same happens with the specificities of the political system³, a distinguishing feature of the country that, in the analyzed spots, is reflected only through political figures and organizations.

However, the very essence of the Cuban political system and its most frequent peculiarities, such as the election process, economic development, foreign policy, socialist character or the party system could have been treated from a much deeper perspective. These peculiarities of the Cuban reality also make up the nationality, identify the island and generate international interest.

The hospitality industry and the tourism sector complete the 22 topics which represent Cuba's image. Restaurants, bars and hotels are displayed in this area, as well as the presence of foreigners in their role as visitors. Both gastronomy and hospitality, as well as

other topics already mentioned, are poorly addressed.

The scarce treatment of subjects of high importance to Cuba's country image, such as history, national symbols, gastronomy and national food products shows a poor representativeness of the advertising spots. This implies a biased image of the country, where the arbitrary selection and thematic distribution prevents showing a global and inclusive vision of the identity aspects of the nation.

USE OF ADVERTISING SIGNS IN SHAPING THE DENOTED AND CONNOTED MESSAGE OF THE ADVERTISING SPOTS OF DE CUBA, SU GENTE

The use of Cuban women as a sign creates habitual denotations and connotations established in the collective consciousness of the audience. The woman is represented as pretty, young and sensual; there is a reference to miscegenation through the black and mulatto women, and they are also shown as artists, dancers, cheerful and jovial. From this stance of affability and sympathy, women are presented with a smile and with a casual attitude before the cameras that capture the heat of their personal treatment.

On the associations of possible meanings, there are also connotations that present women with an erotic and sexual feature (figure 8). This significance is especially mentioned through the dancers' movements in the spots on *Habana Compás Dance* and the *Ecos Flamenco Company*.

Visually reinforced with close-up details and close-ups, this repetitive sensuality becomes evident by showing the lips, the thighs, highlighted during the dance, the body wetted by sea water revealing the feminine beauty, the constant provocation through



Figure 8. Frame of the *Habana Compás Dance* spot (2016)

Source: *Cubavisión Internacional*.



Figure 9. Frame of the *Mojito* spot (2016)

Source: *Cubavisión Internacional*.

dance movements. All recorded from the visual level and reinforced to persuasively influence the connoted message.

This is seen in the repetition as the most used rhetorical figure in these advertising spots: women are the most frequently used sign. The most basic recurrence lies in exposing the sensuality of their bodies to highlight the feminine beauty of Cuban women and the eroticism linked, generally, to dance and music. *Arte y Danza* is the category that most resorts to such a figure, since it uses young dancers as an advertising attraction. On the other hand, *Cápsulas* applies the same meanings to the rest of Cuban women and, although to a lesser extent, also reinforces the stereotype of females as an object of sexual desire.

The use of clothing colors is intentionally used to convey emotions. They appeal to the vivacity, passion and strength of red and white as a fresh, pure, bright and typical colors of the Caribbean coast. Black is used as a symbol of elegance, mystery and to stylize the female figure, while orange refers to joviality, vitality and energy.

Once again, *Cubavisión Internacional* resorts to stereotypes, in this case sexist, since it obviates women as professionals, workers, mothers or farmers, and only presents them as an object of desire and commercial appeal.

On the other hand, the counterpart of this female advertising sign is the Cuban man, who shares some connotations with women, such as joviality and racial miscegenation. In the *Cautivos* spot, of the National Folklore Ensemble, a brown filter is applied to grant virility and strength to the dancer's half-naked bodies, who embody slaves fighting for their freedom.

Other spots include other symbolic representations, such as worker and professional, strong, manly, experienced and modern, where older men embody tradition and young people, usually, contemporaneity.

The costumes also establish generational differences; the *Callejeros* choreography shows young dancers as the image of modernity standardized by the Western world, with clothes linked to the rap and hip-hop culture. While they exhibit a new canon of Cuban masculinity, elderly men are presented as referents of the Creole tradition: wearing guayaberas, hats and formal pants.

Spots such as *Calle Obispo* and *Estatuas Vivientes* build a Cuban country image where the male population, of any age, has an active social role and is linked to different work activities. This idea is reaffirmed in the spot *Mojito*, that focus on the activity of a bartender while preparing a drink thoroughly. Medium shots are used to show the bartender in his immediate context, linked to drinks and the bar, in addition to detailed shots to show the drink's ingredients, the man's eyes and facial expression, reinforcing the idea of professionalism (see figure 9).

Overall, there is a marked interest in promoting mojito as a typical Cuban drink, as well as national products as a symbol of *Cubanness* and enjoyment (see figure 10).

The continuous references to a unique nation also derive from the mention of its culture. Consistent with this discourse, music and dance are recurring topics in the symbolic management of advertising spots. The signs chosen include the culture's representative figures.

To reinforce the above, the spots include accentuation as a rhetorical figure, which particularizes the influence



Figure 10. Frame of the *Mojito* spot (2016)

Source: *Cubavisión Internacional*.



Figure 11. Frame of the *Danzón Folclórico* spot (2016)

Source: *Cubavisión Internacional*.

of external cultures on current Cuban music. To this end, they show a typical drum band from Trinidad and Tobago, and Cuban mulattos and black persons playing music in a coastal environment in Havana. The inclusion of the rhythm of long conga drums and *güiros* in the interpretation accentuates the contrast in terms of content.

In the case of dance spots, visual intentionality constantly reinforces the connoted message. The use of close-ups has a descriptive purpose, to show the performance of musical instruments, faces, facial expressions and gestures that reaffirm the discourse transmitted during the spot. In addition, they are combined with long shots used to capture the concept of choreography and the dancers' interaction.

In addition, sound effects help to stress the message. This is also found in the *Flamenco* spot on *Habana Compás Dance*, in which the heartbeat, at the beginning of the audiovisual, without music yet, and along with various shots of the dance, refer to the sense of passion, vivacity and energy provided by the dance.

This game of connotations, and the representation of a country marked by traditions, aims to offer historical resources from various levels that allow a more thorough understanding of Cuba and certain nostalgic and longing airs. The desaturation of the colors evokes temporarily distant atmospheres and recreates historical moments. The video of a couple dancing *danzón* uses this resource to place the dramatic action during the republican stage (first half of the 20 century in Cuba), while reinforcing intentionality from the very selection of the costumes (see figure 11).

The same happens with the spot dedicated to the classic American cars that circulate around the city;

the use of desaturation reaffirms the historical value of the elements shown. This technique also appeals to memory, using black and white. To this end, the spot on Omara Portuondo uses these colors to contextualize the artist at a time distant from the current one.

References to fun and recreation in Cuba are recurring in the representation of the national image. This idea is reinforced by showing foreign visitors who interact in various fields and bring the target audience closer to the sensations and experiences that people enjoy during their journey in the country.

This implies that several of the analyzed advertising spots show foreigners who smile and take photos, walk the streets and squares of Havana; this intention is even recreated through a living statue that embodies a traveler sitting on his suitcase to contemplate the urban landscape.

Likewise, posters of restaurants and tourist centers expose the diversity of offers of the hospitality industry, which implies that the productions of *Cubavisión Internacional* include the association between consumption, tourism and fun, a usual practice in advertising at international level. The use of these codes in the advertising spots of *Cuba, su gente*, marks a trend in the way in which Cuba's country image is shown to the world.

The set of symbolic meanings used refers to an allegation of authenticity and nationalism. In these, the channel aims to show Cuba's image from preset connotative codes, which sometimes result in worn-out stereotypes that lack representativeness. The selection of advertising signs responds more to visual intentions than to a solid elaboration of Cuba's country image.

DISCUSSION: CHALLENGES OF ADVERTISING TO CONVEY CUBA'S COUNTRY IMAGE

Cuba has few options to promote its country image from television channels with international broadcast. Smartly employing its potential, from all the aspects of the conception of country image, favors its insertion in the world and enhances the knowledge of its population, idiosyncrasy, geography and national heritage, as well as its commercial possibilities and services export.

The analyzed spots delve into these issues, but partialize Cuban reality with established iconic references to attract international tourism; they also have the evident purpose of underlining the social system from the aspects of well-being, pleasure and the island's security. As a basic purpose of advertising, they combine image, sound, effects and texts, and the anchoring function prevails in each of the spots. Thus, they facilitate a simple reading about the comfort of the island, its people and the cultural diversity that characterizes it, while they can also connote different sensations, according to people's experience regarding the country.

Both the name of the project of *Cuba, su gente* or the channel's motto *esta es Cuba, esta es su gente* (This is Cuba, this is its people), allow the audience to relate to the Cuban reality and the channel, in addition to emphasizing the specificities and daily life of the nation from of its own inhabitants. Although both slogans clarify what product they are advertising, they lack

commercial originality, as they turn to basic references: the country and its people.

The above complements the persuasive character of the advertising spots that promote the complex product that results in Cuba's country image and all those derived from said image. The resources under analysis only present the primary function of the verbal level, anchoring, since they make evident the idea of showing a nexus of authenticity between territory and inhabitants, which corresponds to a commercial vision of the nation to represent Cuba's country image.

It can be concluded that Cuba's country image promoted by *Cubavisión Internacional* uses elements and signs based on national identity, which allow to show specific issues of the country, physical and geographical aspects, as well as cultural and historical, social, political, economic and human. However, it does not summarize the essence of Cuban identity, since it shows an image devoid of signs that deepen into historical elements, positioned mainly from a Havana vision, obviating the historical and natural wealth of other regions of the country, responding more to commercial interests to promote tourism.

The representation of Cuba's country image cannot be static; it varies according to the context and Cuban advertising projects should focus on this: showing an image rooted in traditions, but that reflects the novel changes, the new cultural patterns, the symbiosis between today and yesterday.

NOTES

1. Popular figure of the Havana streets dressed in the style of an English gentleman.

2. Figure of the Cuban sugar production of the colonial period.

3. Cuba's sociopolitical system is socialism, and it is one of the few countries in the world with this option, which is essential to understand the country's sociopolitical reality. The Communist Party of Cuba is the governing and only political body within the country. State property is the core of economy and the socialist enterprise is the main source of income. Among its political leaders there are world-renowned figures such as Fidel Castro Ruz, who led the country as president from 1976 to 2008; subsequently, Raúl Castro was elected as president of the country until 2018, a significant year due to the election of a new president, Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez. In 2019, a new constitution was approved in a popular referendum. The country's main economic resource is tourism.

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