Place attributes and company names: an empirical and conceptual study into public branding and business strategies

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Abstract

Purpose – This research finds out to what extent companies' names are influenced by the place's attributes versus the official branding policies of a place and, consequently, whether and how local companies "buy into" the place's strategies put forth by official bodies.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper is both conceptual and empirical, as a mixed quantitative and interpretive approach is used. The companies' names of a tourist industry (the tour and guiding companies) in three destinations are compared and pitched against the branding of these cities. The companies' names are classified into categories to ascertain whether they reflect (or diverge from) the official strategies. Finally, a conceptual model is developed to explain the findings: the strategic naming model (SNM).

Findings – Our main finding is that the overall business features of a place being stronger determinants to the naming strategies than tourist destination branding initiatives. The intrinsic features of a place seem thus to be "above" destination branding policies. The researched features account for different naming strategies, such as highly original names, flat names or non-strategic names.

Research limitations/implications – As the work is based on a convenience sample, it cannot claim strong representativity. The fact that each of the three data sets was processed by a different researcher might bring up personal biases.

Practical implications – This work is a call for a more intensive use of naming strategies to the companies' advantages, as naming is found out to be strategy used to a very low degree. Thanks to this research, companies will understand the different naming possibilities and be able to apply them to their strategies by choosing names which express "uniqueness" or "belonging". Practitioners will also be aware of whether they are communicating towards the industry or towards the market.

Introduction and goals

This research work investigates to what extent a place's attributes (eventually after a public branding process) influence the names of the companies established in that place and offers a new conceptual model to explain this. When the promotion of a place is activated, a public authority or an agency launches campaigns about its competitive features to attract targeted groups, such as investors, students or tourists (Dinnie, ed., 2011). In the case of tourist destinations, the local tourism promotion agencies (generally called Destination Management Organizations, DMO for short) pick up the most salient or profitable tourist attributes of the place in order to sell them to selected markets. This particular feature of the visitors' industry, which sees companies embedded in a larger setting (the 'destination'), is crucial to their business strategy in general and their brand dynamics in particular (Polese *et al.,* 2018). Tourist companies operate in a local environment whose planning and promotion they control on a limited basis (Sheehan *et al.,* 2007). Contrary to industrial companies, tourist businesses rely much more on the effective promotion of the place's assets, as they are not part of the 'main' offer in the destination, functioning instead as supporting services (Augustyn and Ho, 1998; Butnaru and Miller, 2012; Dumitru *et. al.,* 2016). In fact, the power relations between DMOs (be they public, private or mixed) and the local enterprises have been intensively researched. The literature repeatedly posits that place branding must be carried out in agreement with all of the concerned stakeholders (Rosa *et al.,* 2018; Zenker and Seigis, 2012), otherwise these will 'disengage' from the place brand (Bassols and Leicht, 2020).

Therefore, the way a place promotes its attributes may influence the local companies in their strategies. As the place seeks to attract its adequate target market, companies must respond to that by adapting their offer to the targeted segment. While these responses to the promotional strategies have been well-studied (Stajčić *et al.,* 2016), the influence of a place's attributes on the names of the companies located in that place has been researched to a much lesser degree. Some commentators have established certain relations between these two in very specific terms (Marjavaara et al., 2022), with major brands as field work (Mariutti, 2017) or using a conceptual discussion (Arora *et al.,* 2015), but no research was found empirically investigating the influence of place attributes on the formation of the names of local companies. Furthermore, no studies were found about the role of the typology of a DMO (public or private) in the companies' naming processes; these are the gaps this research intends to cover. Within a tourist destination, the tour and guiding companies are especially sensitive to the place's features, the place branding and the shifts between these two, since the product any guiding company offers is the locality itself (Paulino *et al.,* 2022). Therefore, this subsector is especially interesting for our research purposes.

Following the above considerations, the field work to this research is of a quantitative and interpretative nature: the names of the guiding tour companies and incoming travel agencies in three destinations are pitched against the places' features and the local branding strategy. This empirical procedure is hoped to deliver clues as to whether the

enterprises 'have bought' into the DMOs' strategy and to what extent. Also, comparing different branding approaches and agency types is hoped to give sound insights into the issues we pursue in this article. The findings are summed up and explained with an original conceptual model: the Strategic Naming Model (SNM). This model relates the most important strategies found in the research work, giving a clear visual explanation of the possible naming strategies local tourist companies may adopt.

Literature review: naming, company names and place names

The name of a product has long been recognized as part of its brand, thus positively influencing consumer choices (Hillenbrand *et al.,* 2013). Speaking about product naming strategies, Danesi (2011) claims that the brand name has the ability to 'breathe life into a product'. He further asserts that nowadays many product brands have come to designate the company which manufactures them. Consequently, company names have also been acknowledged to influence consumers' decisions (Alamgir *et al.,* 2010; Birtwistle and Freathy, 1998) by eventually evoking trust and therefore augmenting loyalty (Eskine and Locander, 2014). So, business names may potentially add value to the brand (Alserhan and Alserhan, 2012).

Three decades ago, Robertson (1989) established some desiderata for a brand name, including meaningfulness and recordation above all, so a good business name shall distinguish the company in its market and make it unique (Hernik, 2019). Company names also have an obvious 'psychological' side (Bulatović *et al.*, 2016), which has been underpinned through many name studies based on psychological or linguistic methods. This reveals the importance of giving the company the 'right' name in the technical sense: Arora *et al*. (2015); Fox (2011); Liu (2021); Hsu *et al*. (2022) and many more. These efforts are not in vain: according to Green and Jame (2013), fluent company names are higher valued and awake more investor interest. Chen (2022: 43) posits the requirements to a well-functioning company name: 'it shall meet legal and professional standards, and more importantly, have industry characteristics, good brand effects, and close contact with the market.' So, if a brand is to distinguish a company but also has to give it 'industry characteristics', we see two possible name features: 'belonging to' and 'being unique', which we intend to test in this work.

A special case of company names are those which contain geographical names (also called toponyms) which may indicate the location of a company or establish a connection between a company and a place. At the crossroads between place marketing, local politics and cultural geography, the study of place names has evolved in recent times to focus on their commodification process. Some have studied the political site of these processes and the contestation around them under the keyword 'critical toponimies', cf. most contributions to Berg and Vuolteenaho, (eds., 2009). These editors reflect on historical and philological studies of place names as they state that 'it seems to us that traditional name research has not only been afraid of politics, but it has also failed to honestly reflect on its own complicity in power struggles over toponymies' (Vuolteenaho and Berg, 2009: 6). For his part, Rose-

Redwood (2011: 34) states that the 'social production of space' involves not only politics or officials but also private companies, as they brandmark, create or appropriate public spaces using naming strategies. This critical turn in place name studies was also conceptualised by Rose-Redwood *et al.* (2010). Furthermore, Medway and Warnaby (2014) report about these commodification processes from different points of view concluding that place name studies need to be more interdisciplinary and take into account different stakeholders, internal and external. The commodification process of urban place names is also examined by Light and Young (2015), who posit a two-way influence: company names are increasingly used as place names, and vice versa: a growing number of companies incorporate place names in their naming strategies. White (2012) also points to the reciprocity of this effect: not only do geographical brands influence the products' perceptions but the inverse also holds true. Therefore, when place names or place features are adopted by the local companies in their naming processes, this also means that the organizations in the locality 'approve of' the enacted place branding strategies, a fact which we intend to test empirically. Finally, company naming studies confirm that brands thrive better when sided by positiveness-loaded geographical names (Sloan, 2018), a finding especially interesting to our research.

In the case of toponyms being a naming strategy, the organization chooses to 'have a stake' in the place and ties its image to the place's image and perceptions (Bowen and Bennett, 2020). Amine and Chao (2005) uncovered mutual beneficial effects for country brand and company brand, when both instances are cooperatively managed. On a more general vein, Mariutti (2017) posited that, at least at a country level, connecting place reputation to place management has positive outcomes. The 'country of origin' strategies (Thakor, 1996) are evolving and highly contextual (Beverland and Lindgreen, 2002), so they must be applied or studied case by case. Universities, for instance, are 'tied' to a territory by their names in many cases, therefore experiencing these effects (Koku, 2022) – see also Peluso and Guido (2012) with their interesting finding that region names are better brands than city names for universities, which opens up the question of geographical scales in naming strategies. Special forms of 'country of origin' are the 'denominations of origin', i.e., those brands protecting a process or a place of production. These are essential to the primary goods sector to avoid commodification (Agnoli *et al*., 2014; Guerrero, 2001). These brands also influence the consumers' perception of the quality of the products (Sjölander-Lindqvist *et al*., 2020; Thakor and Lavack, 2003). Crucially, the studies named so far are either based on conceptual discussions or investigate the effects of places on products. None deals with the effects of place features or local branding on companies' names, exposing thus a gap in research.

In tourism, MacCannell was among the first to realize the importance of names, as these are an essential part of 'markers', i.e., those constructs pointing to tourist sights. The final stage of what he calls 'sight sacralization' happens 'when groups, cities, and regions begin to name themselves after famous attractions.' (MacCannell, 1999/1976: 45, 124-126, 148-150). Tuan (1991: 688) ascertained the force of the language as a place maker in geography: 'naming is power'. For his part, Light (2014) went deeper into the intersection of names and their commodification in the context of tourist consumption. Gauchon (2022) illustrates how certain tourism policies or promotion strategies gave names to destinations in France.

In the literature relating tourism to branding, it is acknowledged that positively-managed and communicated place brands help to attract visitors (Almeyda-Ibáñez and George, 2017; Foroudi *et al*., ed.s, 2020), though their benefits trickle down only in the mid-term and under the stakeholders' general consensus (Donner *et al*., 2014). Finally, it is important to point to the work by Marjavaara *et al*. (2022): in their study about the emergence of the adjective 'Arctic' among company names in Sweden, they found that said adjective is an 'exotic marker', therefore a likely puller of visitors, and it has been increasingly incorporated into firm names over recent years. This article intends to further pursue this issue via a large comparative empirical study, and by proposing a way of categorizing and weighing the companies' names.

Context: three cities and their destination brands in Colombia, South America

The three selected destinations in our field work are among Colombia's most significant tourist destinations, i.e., they are well-establihed tourist places. The choice of these three cities was due to the following three reasons: (1) Representativity – they account for 55% of the overall arrivals to the country and a similar percentage of the country's tour and guide operating companies; (2) Geographical variety – two of them are seaside destinations (combining beach with culture in one instance and with nature in another one) and the third destination is a large inland city; (3) Different institutional arrangements – the three of them are 'districts', which in Colombia stands for devolved cities with a certain financial independence. Bogota is even a 'departamento', that is, a first-tier sub-national territory with many devolved political, administrative and financial matters. However, their DMO's are different in nature: Two of them are public agencies belonging to their municipalities, and one of them is a public-private corporation. All these different geographical features and institutional arragements are hoped to yield insights into the questions pursued in this article. Figure 1 shows the destinations' localizations.

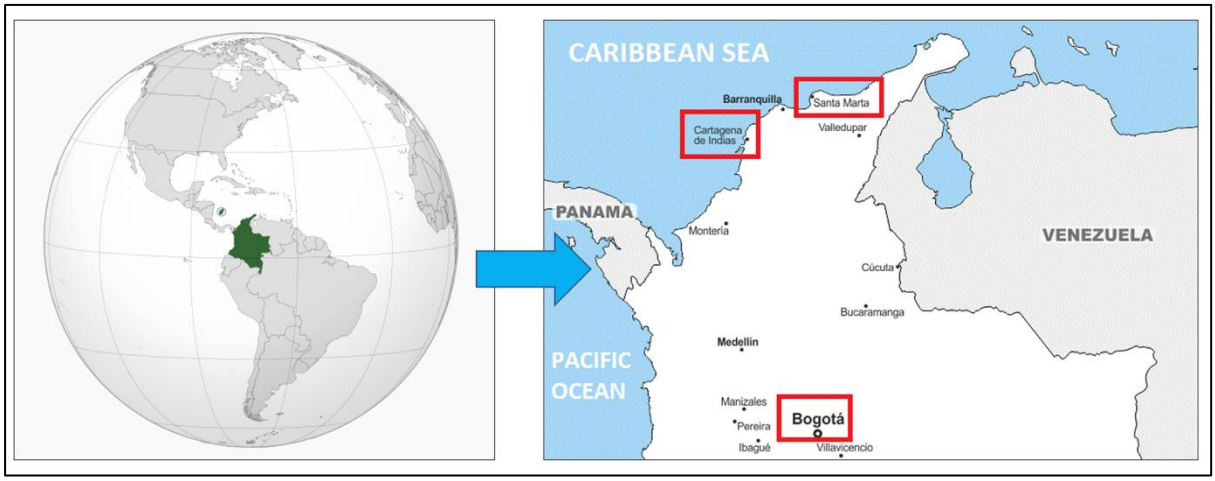


FIGURE 1: Colombia's location in South America (left map). The three studied destinations are highlighted with red squares on the right-hand side map: Bogota, the capital city (below), and the two Caribbean destinations of Cartagena de Indias (above left) and Santa Marta (above right). Sources: Wikipedia (left) and authors on a free map by D-Maps (right).

Bogota

The historic and current capital city of Colombia is -by far- the country's largest city and its economic, administrative and political centre. It is a megalopolis of almost 11 million residents, the fourth largest urban agglomeration in Latin America after Sao Paulo, Mexico City and Buenos Aires. Located in the country's geographical centre, it is a prime node for transportation and logistics, which includes its airport El Dorado, the second-busiest in Latin America in 2022 in terms of passengers.

Located in the Andes Mountain range on a high plateau standing at 2630 metres above sea level, Bogota's past remains evident in its historic centre around Bolívar Square and La Candelaria neighbourhood. The city is flanked to the east by a mountain range and surrounded by the Cundinamarca region, both offering a 'next-door' range of natural tourism sites and activities. However, its competitive advantage is being Colombia's largest business hub, thus it has developed MICE and business tourism in the last 10 to 15 years, including the construction of large-capacity facilities such as the Exhibition Grounds and the International Congress Centre. Urban and food tourism have followed suit (Colombia, Bogotá D.C. Travel, 2022). The city's business facilities and opportunities account for the fact that 24% of foreign visitors in 2010-19 were business visitors. However, given the large population and the significant numbers of them who have relatives abroad, 'Visiting friends and relatives' (VFR) was the largest tourism typology in the city, accounting for 38% of visitor motivations throughout the last decade. Accordingly, leisure activities only account for 19% of visitor motivations, with some absolutely niche typologies: only 1.8% of the visitors came for cycle tourism, 0.3% did bird watching and 0.2% practised some form of ecotourism (Colombia, Instituto Distrital de Turismo IDT, 2022). As for arrivals, according to the official statistics portal portucolombia.com, in 2019 there were 9.74 million domestic arrivals and some 1.26 million international tourists.

Bogota's tourism policies and destination promotion

The tourism typologies listed further above have been pushed organically by the market as well as by the local DMO authority, a public agency called *Instituto Distrital de Turismo* (IDT for short), which was set up in 2007. Rozo (2019) states however that, since IDT's creation, the city's promotional image has been chiefly centered on culture.

In 2011, the municipality legally endorsed the tourism development plan drawn up by the IDT. Therein, the development of a vast range of tourism typologies was recommended, from cultural or business tourism (the tourism staplers, see above) to more niche forms such as religious, rural or communitarian tourism. The document by Contraloría de Bogotá (2020) confirms the IDT are working on the following tourism typologies for the city: business, urban, cultural, nature and gastronomy.

This broad range of promoted activities and attractions may produce a 'blurred' image of the city, with a tourism development plan combining typologies which actually require different promotion strategies for different market segments. The current city's imalogo with stars is reminiscent of the slogan 'Bogota, 2600 metres closer to the stars', that went

down well with many residents in the past, but suggests more of a natural rather than urban environment.

Cartagena de Indias

The fifth largest city in the country and second-largest along Colombia's Caribbean shores, Cartagena has more than one million residents. It is the second-largest merchant port in the country in terms of exported containers, and an important business and administrative hub in the Caribbean region of Colombia. Founded in 1533, it became a key port in the Spanish colonization process of the Americas. This had the colonisers building a consequent set of walls and fortresses in and around the city, which were marked by UNESCO as world heritage in 1984.

The city is considered Colombia's 'first' tourist destination and in fact the tourism industry has been part of Cartagena for the last 100 years. After being a cruiser port of call in the 1930s and 1940s, it developed as a sun and sand destination from the 1960s due to its Caribbean character and also international demand (Bassols and Leicht, 2021: 170). The growing importance of its historic centre and built military heritage did not became apparent to the local tourist authorities until the late 2000s. Since then, the city's walls and fortresses have been promoted as the main product in the destination, complemented by the beaches. Also, the city boasts consequent facilities for congresses and exhibitions. In recent years, intangible products and experiences related to the local food, music and dance are coming to the fore, though these have been endorsed by the DMO only very recently. According to the tourist statistics portal portucolombia.com, in 2019 the city received some 2.24 million domestic tourists and some 529,000 foreign tourists. A yearly average of almost 200 cruise ships docked at Cartagena at the end of the past decade. The motivations of foreign visitors tend to be more on the cultural side, however, for domestic visitors, Cartagena is essentially a relax destination.

Cartagena's tourism policies and destination promotion

CorpoTurismo is the local DMO (Corpoturismo Cartagena de indias, 2022), which was founded in 2001 as the nation's first and it works under a public-private management scheme, quite a unique case in the country. The fact that Cartagena is considered a highly successful destination in Colombia and Latin America rests on various factors, such as a well-restored built heritage combined with Caribbean beaches. The long tourist tradition in the city, as well as having the oldest DMO in Colombia, may also be contributing factors. In fact, the DMO has partly taken over tasks of destination development (Bassols and Leicht, 2021) since tourism development plans have not been carried out or updated over the last decade (Colombia, FONTUR and MinCIT, 2013) due to stakeholder disagreements.

As for its branding, in 2010 the city launched a big, expensive branding campaign but, due to technical issues and the non-acceptance by some stakeholders, the city's brand has become quite invisible (Bassols and Leicht, 2020). No other attempt at branding has been undertaken since. Cartagena, at least to Colombians, is known by slogans such as 'La Heroica' [The hero city] or 'Corralito the piedra' [Stone little corral] which are reminiscent of

the city's historical and cultural past. However, this destination is still waiting for a powerful branding action.

Santa Marta

With some 538,000 inhabitants, Santa Marta is the third-largest city on Colombia's Caribbean coast and the third-largest merchant port in the country. Its location and history have blessed it with a variety of highly-valuable tourist resources. As for natural attractions, the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (the world's highest coastal mountain range, with its Peak Colón towering at 5775 metres above sea level) was declared a Biosphere Reserve and World Heritage Site in 1979. Another natural jewel is Parque Tayrona, a big tropical forest natural park boasting extensive biodiversity. The native Amerindian communities Kogui, Arhuaco, Arzario, Chimilla and Wayuu are established in the park and the Sierra. Their cultures were marked as immaterial world heritage by UNESCO in 2022. Santa Marta's historic centre, which has been refurbished in recent years, is the country's oldest European settlement, and the second-eldest of its kind in South America, dating from 1525. A highly symbolical place in the city is the Quinta de San Pedro Alejandrino manor house, where Simón Bolívar, the most notorious of the nation's independence leaders, died in 1830.

Despite all these unique and strong pulling attractions, however, the destination has traditionally thrived on sun and sand tourism, because of its different types of beaches and the robust domestic demand from Colombia's big inland cities. This has been the general trend for decades (Guardiola, 2019). In fact, a consistent 90% of international arrivals declare 'holidays and leisure' as the main motivation for visiting Santa Marta (though for Colombians, the main motivation is VFR before holidays). The destination's capacities and arrivals' figures, however, are less than the other two compared here, so Guardiola (2019) found this to be a secondary destination in its context. In 2019, the city received some 31,000 foreign tourists and 1,140,000 domestic tourists (portucolombia.com).

Santa Marta's tourism policies and destination promotion

In Santa Marta, the local DMO is the public agency *Instituto de Turismo de Santa Marta* (INDETUR for short) which was founded in 2016 (Colombia, Instituto Distrital de Turismo de Santa Marta, 2022). Preceding it, in the mayoral period 2012-15, some general outlines for tourism development were approved. It was acknowledged that, while Santa Marta's tourism was mostly about sun and sand, it was to turn towards ecotourism, nature tourism and wellness tourism as well; the latter because of the beneficial climate for older visitors (Colombia, Municipality of Santa Marta, n. d., p. 87).

Furthermore, following the National Plan for Nautical Tourism Development from 2013, and given its current infrastructure, Santa Marta also aims to be a nautical station and cruiser port, though smaller than Cartagena.

The city's current strategic plan (Colombia, Municipality of Santa Marta, 2020) sees tourism and agriculture as the main two revenue sources. In the current tourism development plan, wellness has been replaced by rural tourism, to try to spread out the tourist activity towards

Santa Marta's rural and wild areas. Nature tourism is also promoted further in the current plan, together with cruiser tourism.

As for branding, Santa Marta has been popularly known as 'La perla de América' [America's Pearl] and, for most of the past two decades, it sported the motto 'La magia de tenerlo todo' [The magic of having it all]. This latter motto was endorsed by some leading local stakeholders until 2018, and the destination branding campaigns pushed for a general and undefined strategy. Then INDETUR launched the new slogan 'Naturally magic' following agreement by a large group of stakeholders (Código Prensa, 2018). Nevertheless, this initiative does not seem to resound with the municipal authorities, as there are signs of a low buy-in from public officials.

Summary of the contextual findings

Two of these cities follow a general approach in their strategies, although they could be branded as specialized places; Bogota (which could be branded as a business destination) and Santa Marta (which could be branded as a nature destination). The other city, Cartagena, has followed a consequent specialization in the last decade, placing its military-built heritage as the destination's flagship. Perhaps, as the former two cities have public offices as DMOs, they must 'please' as many companies in the destination as possible, whereas the latter, as a public-private institution, has more freedom to steer the destination towards more defined goals. Consequently, the rest of this paper focuses on how local tourist companies have reacted to the promotion and branding pushed by their DMOs and which naming strategies they have adopted as a consequence.

Methodology and field work

In order to pursue the research goal of this paper, the features and promotion policies of the three cities described in the previous section were pitched against the names of the tourist companies in each one. The approach was quantitative but also interpretative. While acknowledging that company names have phonetic, syntactic and semantic components (Arora *et al.*, 2015), for our work we only needed to consider the latter ones, as company names were singled out according to their meaning and denotation.

The data for the company names comes from the public official database RNT (*Registro Nacional de Turismo – National Tourism Registry)*. As of December 2022, the RNT included some 150,000 companies operating (or having operated) in the Colombian tourism industry (Colombia, Registro Único Empresarial y Social - Registro Nacional del Turismo RUES-RNT, 2022).

The RNT includes all of the country's companies devoted to tourism such as hotels, transport liners, event organizers, restaurants, etc. However, only those companies related to tours and guiding were selected, as the population or universe under study. This was the first sampling filter or criterium. In the RNT system, these companies come under the generic sectoral denomination 'travel agencies,' which in turn contains four sub-categories: operator travel agencies, travel and tourism agencies, tour operators and tourist

representative bureaux. In a second samping step, we singled out the company names of the businesses founded (i.e., first registered) between 2010 and 2019. This gave us a broad time frame with sufficient records for the three cities, while also avoiding possible biases introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2022. In terms of RNT registration numbers, the 2010-2019 decade corresponds approximately to records numbered 20,000 to 85,200. Therefore, companies with numbers below or above this interval were omitted. Subsequently, the data were further cleaned and expunged from different errors in information; for example, companies with several branches or denominations were counted just once. For each of the three destinations studied, the records were manually downloaded and entered into an Excel spreadsheet. Fig. 2 displays this sequential process:

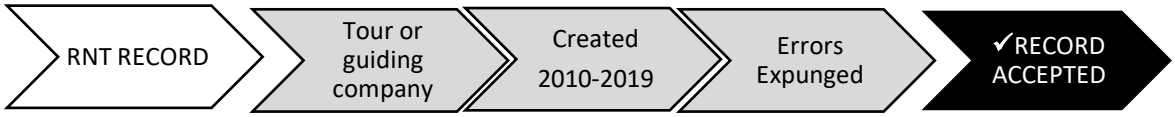


Figure 2: The data collecting process. Drawing by the authors.

The above filters yielded the following final sample sizes for each of the three cities:

- **Bogota *n*=1021**
- **Cartagena *n*=340**
- **Santa Marta *n*=264**
  TOTAL *n*=1625

Due to the specificities of this research, a very particular selection of sampling criteria was required, which is why the sample ended up being a non-probabilistic one, i.e., a convenience sampling.

Once the data gathering was done, the next step was interpreting the company names by performing word counts and tagging them with one, or several, features. This allowed the researchers to reveal the most represented tourism typologies, geographic denominations, self-references, etc. in the company names. This data procedure involved the following six counts and possible taggings:

> ***Count 1:*** Names indicating sectoral and economic activity ('tours', 'travel', 'agency', etc.), eventually combined with a person or a family name. We call these 'self-referencing terms' following previous literature.
>
> Examples from our data: **Colombia Travel Express**: Toponym + sectoral name; **Cartagena Mágica Excursiones** [Magical Excusions Cartagena]: Toponym + sectoral name; **Halima Travel**: Person's name + sectoral name; **Aventour Rodadero**: Tourist Typology + sectoral name + sub-local toponym

Count 2: Names indicating tourist typologies ('sierra', 'beach', 'ethno-', etc.). These were grouped into four main categories: niche modalities, sun and sand, cultural/ethnical tourism and nature-based tourism. Examples from the data:

Niche : **Escuela de Buceo Reef Sheperd** [Diving School Reef Sheperd]; **Taroa Adventures**
Sun and sand: **Playa Bravas Tour** [Brave Beach Tours]; **Miramar Travel**
Cultural/Ethnical: **El Mundo Kogui** [The World of the Kogui]; **Ethnic Taganga**
Nature: **Sierra Travel**; **Tayrona Birding Nature Guides**

Count 3: Toponyms or geographical places. Five levels were assumed here: sub-local level (toponyms indicating places within the destinations, but not monuments or sights), local level (the three destinations' names); supra-local names ('Andes' and 'Caribbean', i.e., the sub-national demonyms for the studied places as well as other regional denominations), the national level ('Colombia') and the supra-national one ('America (s)'). Examples from the data (the toponyms are underscored for the benefit of the reader):

Sub-local level: **Ecotours Boquilla**; **Gaira Travel**
Local level: **Inter Viajes** [Inter trips] **Bogota**; **Cartagena World Tours**; **Jet Boat Santa Marta**
Supra-local level: **Andina de Turismo**; **Caribbean Tours Agency**
National level: **Turismo Colombiano** [Colombian Tourism]; **Colombian Rider**
Supra-national level: **Panamericana de Viajes** [Pan-American Travels]

Count 4: Companies' names in languages other than Spanish. In our case, English was the only foreign language used, save for one instance of a company name in French. Several examples of English names are found in the above three counts. The only French name in the data base is **La Mer** [The Sea].

Count 5: Vocative forms in the companies' names: these may include adjectival forms taking on positive connotations such as 'marvelous', 'nice', or similar, funny and remarkable names or any reinforcing expressions of the company's purpose as seen in its name. Examples:

Alegre Aventura [Happy Adventure]; **Inspira Colombia Travel**; **Sí, Sí, Caribe** [Yes, Yes, Caribbean]; **Colombia Fantástica** [Fantastic Colombia]; **Ya Tours** [Tours right now]; **La Gracia de Dios Tours** [Grace of God Tours]; **Kiero Karibe** ['Wanna Karibbean', purposely written with typos].

Count 6: Finally, the 'no-strategy' names, that is, those company names sporting either just their own name (be it a family name or a made-up name) or just a sectoral indication, or an unclassifiable name, in any case not following any of the previous five mentioned strategies.

Examples: **Juan Ballena**, **Martín Ezea** (people names); **Aviatur, Opitour, TuCultura** (made-up, partially-signifying names); **Nihuali, Pitahayas** (made-up names, no apparent meanings).

The above procedure was followed for each of the three cities. We remind the reader that multi-tagging was carried out, so an entry might be counted in several counts. As an example, the above name **Taroa Aventures** was counted as niche tourism, English name and sub-local strategy (Taroa is a landscape in the far northeast of the country). The results of these counts above are summed up and graphically laid out in Table I, see next section.

Furthermore, in order to better understand the overall company strategies in each of the three researched destinations, the findings are grouped (Table III, Table IV) and subsequently explained with a conceptual model (Figure 3) that we call Strategic Naming Model, SNM. Partly inspired by some of the ideas by Chen (2022) and Arora *et al.* (2015) discussed further above, the authors considered a set of four features to build the SNM model:

i. The UNIQUENESS feature: this stands for the 'distinction' strategies, i.e. the geographical names and the names related to tourist typologies, that is, count 2 plus count 3 above. As the more 'identitarian' names, we regard them as distinction strategies for companies stating their geographical and typological areas of work and ambitions.

ii. The BELONGING feature, that is, the 'belonging to the industry' strategy. This feature is equivalent to count 1 above, as self-referencing stands here for the identification with the industry.

iii. The MARKET feature: this sums up the marketing strategies found in a name, i.e. having a name directly appealing to markets. It includes count no. 4 above plus count no. 5.

iv. The NO-STRATEGY feature. This is equivalent to count 6 above.

Results and discussion

First, we would like to draw the reader's attention to Table I, which sums up the field work. The numbers in parentheses after an item relate it to the counts further above:

CITY	*Bogota*		*Cartagena*		*Santa Marta*	
ANALYZED CRITERIA	*Qty*	*%*	*Qty*	*%*	*Qty*	*%*
General information about the sample						
Sample size (number of companies)	**1021**		**340**		**264**	
Total word count of the sample	**2520**		**963**		**776**	
Company names in a foreign language (4)	326	31.9	125	36.8	35	13.3
Self-referencing terms in the sample (1)	917	36.4	289	30	133	17.2
Vocative forms in the sample (5)	41	4	27	7.9	38	14.4
Tourism typologies in the companies' names (2)						
Niche tourism	72	7.1	50	14.7	42	15.9
Sun and sand tourism	20	2.0	25	7.4	30	11.4
Cultural/ethnical tourism	13	1.3	26	7.7	14	5.3
Nature-based tourism	44	4.3	13	3.8	27	10.2
Toponyms in the companies' names (3)						
Explicitly naming the destination	42	4.1	91	26.8	14	5.3
Implicit and sub-local place denominations	10	0.9	13	3.8	47	17.8
Supra-local place names: Andes, Caribbean…	2	0.2	15	4.4	19	7.2
National name: Colombia	161	15.8	25	7.4	26	9.8
Supra-national name: America(s)	10	0.9	1	0.3	2	0.7
No strategy names (6)	502	49.2	134	39.4	109	41.3

TABLE I: Comparing the companies' naming strategies in the three destinations. Source: authors based on RNT data from 2022.

The findings of the six counts are summarized and discussed here below:

Count 1: Self-referencing names: In assessing the self-referencing names in our sample, we see that our results correlate significantly with Arora *et al*. (2015) as they ascertained that self-referencing names also constituted the largest part of their database. However, our results mediate theirs: the fact that our three cities are below Arora *et al*.'s result of almost 40% of self-referencing names is due to the increased need, for tourist companies, to take on strategic names. In our sample, only Bogota shows a high number of self-references (38%), whereas Cartagena shows less names of this kind (30%) and Santa Marta a very low occurrence (17%). Therefore, self-reference names fall in numbers when the place bets highly on tourism and the competition among the local companies grows.

Count 2: Tourism Typologies: 'Niche tourism' is the main typology sported in company names. This may be due to the fact that companies offering highly targeted products (either activities with vehicles or extreme sports) or targeting special segments (such as the luxury or the social segment) need to announce this clearly, so they include it in their names. This is in line with the previous paragraph, so we may say that strongly competitive environments call for strong naming strategies. Some intermediate results here are interesting, such as Cartagena's or Bogota's relatively low naming related to cultural tourism, though this typology has been heavily promoted by both cities in the past decade, especially so in the former (see contextual section). Another disagreement is seen in Santa Marta's companies sporting a low number of names related to nature-based tourism, even below 'sun and sand'. In comparison with our contextual findings, this reveals that local

companies have not really 'bought into' their DMO's policies. Finally, the overall figures in this naming strategy are also interesting: in Bogota only 15% of the companies use it, in Cartagena 34% and in Santa Marta a staggering 43%. Again, we see that Bogota's company names tend to be quite 'flat': their larger use of self-referencing names and low use of typology names is opposed to Santa Marta, which uses the typology strategy profusely, thus escaping from the self-reference strategy. In both instances, Cartagena takes the middle path.

Count 3: The toponymic strategies: It is interesting to notice that the companies in each of the three cities show very distinct and clear strategies: when Bogota's companies include a place name, this is 'Colombia', identifying the capital city with the nation's name. Cartagena's businesses display an acute preference for their city's name, indicating that, among the possible naming levels, Cartagena's companies think that the name of their city is a safe value. In fact, as laid out in the contextual section, Cartagena is, in some ways, Colombia's most developed destination and this is confirmed by the companies' strong preference for the place's name. Finally, the companies in Santa Marta prefer the sub-local strategy, i.e., naming themselves after a certain area in the destination. As established in the contextual section, this city includes some highly iconic places and, apparently, the businesses there see more value in these venues' names than in the city's name. The overall figures of the geographical strategy are coherent with our results so far: Bogota's companies use this strategy very sparsely (21%), whereas Cartagena's (43%) and Santa Marta's (41%) double Bogota in their use of the geographical strategy.

Count 4: Companies with a foreign name: As for the numbers of companies that have adopted a clear international market strategy in their names (that is, companies with a name in a foreign language, this is almost exclusively in English), Cartagena is the more 'international' destination, closely followed by Bogota, while Santa Marta has the least number of companies named in English. So, in the latter city, most companies effectively run a national market strategy.

Count 5: The vocative names: The use of this strategy also confirms the creativity of the smaller destinations: this strategy is used only by 4% of Bogota´s companies, 7.9% in the case of Cartagena's companies and 14.4% of Santa Marta's businesses, each instance almost doubling the previous one.

Count 6: 'No-strategy names': As expected, the pattern in the above paragraph is continued when looking at the non-strategic names: regarding Bogota these make up half of the sample, whereas in the other two cities they are around 40% of the sample. Bogota is confirmed as the 'flattest' of the set as it contains the most non-strategic names, the least names related to a tourism typology and the least vocative names.

We sum up the main strategies ('belonging' strategy, 'uniqueness' strategy, 'market' strategy and 'no-strategy' (see final paragraphs of the Methodology section) for each city's companies in the following Table II:

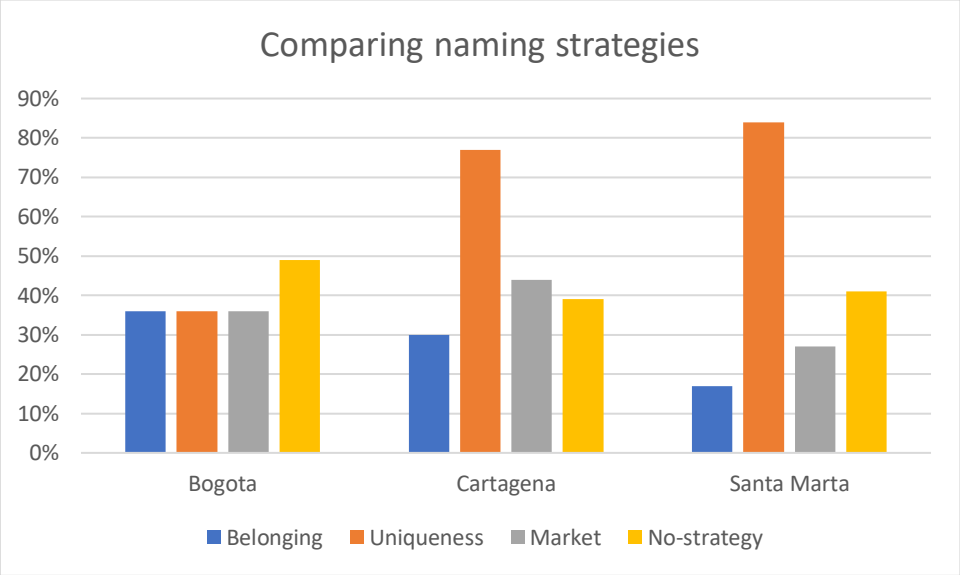


TABLE II: Naming strategies by the companies located in each of the three studied cities Source: Authors.

As a most interesting result in Table II, we see the inverse relationship between 'belonging' naming strategies and 'uniqueness' naming strategies, which are level in Bogota but differentiate considerably in Cartagena and even further in Santa Marta. Therefore, these two destinations are the most creative ones in the set. This moderates the requirements by Chen (2022): true that company names reflect industry traits and unique traits, but these traits are used in an inverse proportion. As companies in Bogota do not use these strategies, there is a much higher number of 'no strategy' naming companies in this city.

Notice that our field work confirms that, regarding the studied company names, 'uniqueness' is often an opposite feature to 'belonging'. The same happens to the 'no-strategy' versus 'market' features. So each of these two pairs build up a 'dimension' which can be represented as opposite forces along a line. Notice also that the first two make up the communication dimension towards the industry, whereas the other two make up the communication dimension towards the target market. These two dimensions correspond to the 'internal' vs 'external' stakeholders, as posited by Medway and Warnaby (2014: 161). Thus, by intersecting these two dimenions, we may set up a matrix model to help classify the companies' names, a model which we call 'Strategic Naming Model', SNM (Figure 3).

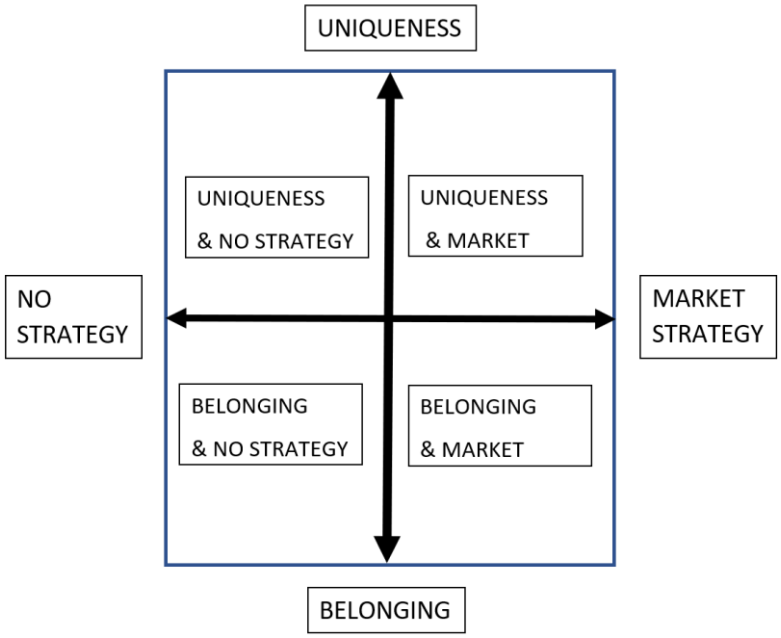


FIGURE 3: The Strategic Naming Model (SNM). Source: Authors

We can now set up a table with the field work results and summarise them via the SNM, see Table III and Table IV:

		Results (%)	Differ.
BOGOTA	No strategy	-49	-13
	Market strategy	36	
	Belonging	-36	0
	Uniqueness	36	
CARTAGENA	No strategy	-39	5
	Market strategy	44	
	Belonging	-30	47
	Uniqueness	77	
STA MARTA	No strategy	-41	-14
	Market strategy	27	
	Belonging	-17	67
	Uniqueness	84	

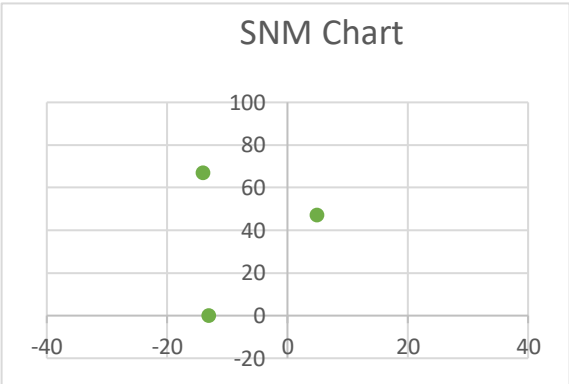


TABLE III (left) and TABLE IV (right): Implementing the SNM Model. Each result on Table III comes from Table II. The two components of each dimension (No-Strategy VS Market Strategy and Belonging VS Uniqueness) are graphically transferred to the SNM Model, resulting into a two-dimensional graph (Table IV). Source: Authors.

In Table IV, our three destinations display low X axis values, meaning that they are quite neutral (and similar in this particular set) in terms of market strategies. The companies seem much more interested in positioning themselves along the Y axis, that is, towards their internal stakeholders or concurrents.

The results are visually summarized for each destination in the following table, which pitches the branding strategies of the three cities versus the naming strategies of the companies located in them (Table V):

	DESTINATION BRANDING STRATEGIES			*TYPES OF BUSINESS OPERATIONS*	*COMPANY NAMING STRATEGIES*	
FEATURE → CITY ↓	*General VS Specialised*	*Major Assets*	*Type of DMO*		*No-Strategy VS Market Strategy*	*Belonging VS Uniqueness*
Bogota	General	Business Tourism assets	Public	Organizational (non-final)	No-Strategy	(UNDEFINED)
Cartagena	Specialised	Cultural Tourism assets	Public-private	Operational (final)	Market Strategy	Uniqueness
Santa Marta	General	Nature Tourism assets	Public	Operational (final)	No-Strategy	Uniqueness

TABLE V: Summarizing the destinations' features and the results. Source: Authors.

The results on Table V show that Cartagena, the country's most mature and consolidated destination, turns out to be the only one with companies majoritarily sporting 'maket strategy and uniqueness.' Unsurprisingly, Bogota is the closest to the 0.0 point in the SNM model. Santa Marta has a higher proportion of companies betting on uniqueness, but (somewhat unexpectedly) falls into the 'no-strategy' side. Given the strong competition, one would expect more 'market' naming strategy in Santa Marta, but this is not the case. Perhaps, the 'market strategy' and the 'no strategy' features are not opposed forces and therefore need to be researched further in terms of their components.

Conclusions, practical implications, limitations and further research

According to our results, a few factors primarily account for the influence of places in the names of the companies located in them: the overall business functions of a place, local competition, the particular features of that place, and geographical scales – the latter two being especially significant in the case of tourism enterprises. Another industry-related factor we have pinpointed is the strong forces pushing towards place features and the local stakeholders compared to the forces pushing towards customers. We detail these concluding points here below.

(a) The strong coherence between naming, the business functions of the place and the existing local competition: This emerges from the contextual study's conclusions when seen through the lens of the SNM. Cartagena and Santa Marta are 'final destinations' (Table

V) quite dependent on tourism with companies mostly on an operative level. They need names that relate them to the destination and/or differentiate them in a competitive marketplace. A closer view of Bogota's database reveals that most of its companies are intermediaries or serve as national hubs or representative offices, having a more organizational than operative role. Accordingly, they choose self-referencing names more often than tourist typology or location names. Under these circumstances, a high degree of coherence emerges between business naming and place function in the three destinations.

Another similar coherent instance regards naming in foreign languages: Cartagena's and Bogota's high number of foreign-language names make these cities the two international destinations in the set. Santa Marta sports a much lower proportion of these names, revealing itself as domestic-centred destination. This is in line with the current positioning of the three cities. Also, Santa Marta's companies' profuse usage of vocative names may be due to increased competition among local enterprises and the city's very high dependence on tourism, the highest in the set.

(b) A place's inherent features influence naming strategies much more than local promotion or branding: There is a remarkable incoherence in the results when we see the opposite strategies adopted by Bogota's and Santa Marta's companies. In these two cities, the same multi-strategy, generalist push towards diversification by their public-led DMOs has resulted in very different naming strategies. The conclusion is that the place's overall features are much more determinant factors when it comes to naming the tourist companies than the promotion strategies, the branding campaigns the DMOs undertake or even the local DMO's status (public vs private). This is a fundamental finding from this research and connects our work to previous literature (Mariutti, 2017).

(c) There is a preference for communication directed towards industry and local stakeholders rather than towards the market: Relating to the previous point, it must be noted that the overall use of market-driven naming strategies is relatively low across the dataset, particularly in comparison with 'uniqueness' strategies. This suggests that the features and attractions of a place have a higher influence on naming than the customer segments targeted by the companies. Interestingly, this trend of highlighting a place's features over customer-driven communication is also observed by Donaire and Galí (2012) in their study on the slogans for Catalan destinations. While this conclusion requires further empirical research, it seems that the statements made in the first paragraph of this article about the particular relationship between tourist companies and their surroundings (compared to industrial companies), are upheld.

(d) When companies can choose among different geographical scales in naming, they choose the most positively-connoted scale: The results of count 3 above echo Marjavaara et al. (2022) as well as Sloan et. al. (2018) who concluded that companies only use positively-connoted toponyms. However, our study offers a more fine-grained view of this conclusion, because we investigated naming across different geographical scales. Our field work leads us to the conclusion that, when companies can choose from several geographical scales in their naming strategies, they select the most positively-connoted

scale. This also settles the debate about city vs region names for universities (Koku, 2008 vs Peluso and Guido, 2012) and similar discussions.

With the conclusions discussed above, companies and practitioners can gain new insight to consider naming strategies in depth. First and foremost, the industry must understand that naming is an important business strategy, albeit an underused one, as revealed by the high numbers of no-strategy or self-referring names in our data. Furthermore, thanks to the SNM model, companies can obtain a clear vision of how to position themselves in terms of naming. The conclusions outlined above may also alert companies to the possibility of 'going off the beaten track' or 'being mainstream' in their naming strategies, as they choose names targeted towards their markets or towards their local environment and stakeholders.

A matter of interest for further research is whether our conclusions also hold for other industry sectors and/or other countries: the field work and the results call for more empirical studies such as this one in order to assess the overall validity of our claims and of the SNM model. Especially, it would be interesting to further test our claim that 'belonging' and 'uniqueness' , as well as the 'no strategy' and the 'market strategy' are converse naming strategies. Further empirical studies based on the intensity the use of naming strategies would also be very welcome. Notice also that the SNM model is useful to analyse any cluster of companies to ascertain their naming strategies towards each other and their surroundings.

The limitations of this work lie in the fact that convenience samples cannot claim strong representativity. Further, each of the three data sets was captured and processed by an individual researcher, which might pose personal bias issues. Categorizing the companies' names was sometimes a matter of hair-splitting, as a number of them would allow for different classifications: semantic classifying is much more prone to subjectivity than structural classifications. Nevertheless, via frequent online meetings, authors did their best to work under the same criteria so as to keep personal subjectivity to a low.

A final practical recommendation is to grow stakeholder consensus as this is required to avoid some gaps we have found and to align the places' overall business features with the tourism promotion policies. Thereafter, each city's brand will be clearer and may be much more supported by the local companies, who are essential place ambassadors.

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