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*Stratégie de marque de la destination Hawai'i : impérialisme américain et
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Strategic destination branding in Hawai'i : American imperialism and myth-making using Barthes' semiotic theory

Stratégie de marque de la destination Hawai'i : impérialisme américain et création mythique à l'aide de la théorie sémiotique de Barthes

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Introduction

- 1 Tourism in Hawai'i is a complex issue. It officially started in the early twentieth century, shortly after the illegal annexation of the islands by the United States in 1898. While there is evidence of tourism activity in Hawai'i from the 1850s onwards (Lemarié, 2018, pp. 89-112), the beginning of the tourism industry is often associated with the creation of the *Hawai'i Promotion Committee* in 1903, which was initiated by annexationists sitting on the boards of the Honolulu Chamber of Commerce and the city's Merchants' Association. Ever since, Hawai'i has been successfully attracting visitors for decades, despite going through a series of global crises, including World War I, the 1929 financial collapse, World War II, the Recession of 1973-75, the Great Recession of 2007-2009, and the COVID-19 pandemic. A year before the pandemic, tourism represented 21 % of Hawai'i's gross domestic product (GDP), with Waikiki alone generating an estimated 7 % of this GDP. About 60 % of visitors were from the mainland United States, 20 % were from Japan, and a remaining 20 % came from other countries.¹
- 2 Numerous approaches to tourism development in Hawai'i are chronicled in the literature. To name a few, previous studies have focused on resident attitudes (Assante, Wen, Lottig, 2012 ; Liu, and Var, 1986 ; Sheldon, and Abenoja, 2001) ; economic impacts (Pratt, 2011) ; coastal engineering (Wiegel, 2008) ; tourism planning (Choy, 1992 ; Mak,

2008); regulation (Rosen, 1998); attractiveness (Meyer, 1996); and sustainability (Bardolet and Sheldon, 2008). But since tourism in Hawai'i grew out of a colonial setting, a body of research in the field of postcolonial studies contends that marketing strategies promoting the islands mainly applied principles of American imperialism at the expense of *Kānaka maoli* or *Kānaka ʻōiwi* (Borgerson and Schroeder, 2003; Feeser, 2006; Costa, 1998; Davis, 2001; Desmond, 1999; Imada, 2004, 2012; Lemarié, 2018; Linnekin, 1997; Medeiros, 2018; Walker, 2011).² Admittedly, advertisements sponsored by the official destination organization of Hawai'i and other transportation companies, such as Matson or United Airlines, implied that *Kānaka maoli* were at the service of Americans residing on the mainland. The principal ideology behind the constructed narrative was that Hawai'i was a paradise with its natural beauty, gentle climate, Hawaiian hospitality (i.e. aloha) and authentic native traditions. Among all native traditions, hula dancing has been extensively studied (e.g. Buck, 1993; Diamond, 2008, Imada, 2012; Johnston, 2002; Linnekin, 1997; Medeiros, 2018). Diamond (2008) and Imada (2012) argued that branding Hawai'i was an extensive enterprise – undertaken by the local destination marketing organization, hotels, and transportation carriers – to present the islands, including their identities and values, to potential and returning visitors through the media and cultural performances,³ most frequently through movies, music, magazines, and cultural performances, featured during exhibitions and tours (Imada, 2012; Schroeder and Borgerson, 2012; Wood, 1999). When writing about the hula, some authors applied certain aspects of Edward Said's concept of Orientalism (1978), including the imposition of a Western understanding of the world on other cultures (Buck, 1993: 161; Costa, 1998; Medeiros, 2018: 214). In these works, scholars have explained that hula shows and tours displaced *Kānaka maoli*, but also argue that they were venues in which to challenge American imperialism (Imada, 2012: pp. 103-152).

- 3 Interestingly, less attention has been paid to surfing, even though wave gliding is a national Hawaiian tradition that has helped boost tourism on the islands. There is only a small body of work considering that surfing and Hawaiian surfers have been an integral part of Hawai'i's brand values (e.g. Desmond, 1999; Lemarié, 2022, Laderman, 2014; Moser, 2020; Walker, 2011). One of the most critical authors is Walker (2011: pp. 83-104), who studied surfing from the late 18th century to the 1950s. In the early 20th century, Walker points out that, despite inaccurate portrayals in books, newspapers, magazines, and other media, male *Kānaka maoli* surfers or *Waikiki beachboys* were able to assert their masculinity because they were winning local, national, and international competitions in swimming, rowing, and surfing. Walker's argument was supported by Moser (2020), who provided interesting documentation of the local Caucasian (*haole*) appropriation of surfing to promote Hawai'i's brand. Moser also showed how *Waikiki beachboys* navigated their own interest in surfing development within a broader colonial context.
- 4 The aforementioned research has been essential to expanding our knowledge of Hawai'i's destination brand. Despite being instrumental, most of these works share one common methodological issue: they did not apply a systematic method to collect or analyze the images portraying *Kānaka maoli* in the role of the *hula girl* or the *Waikiki beachboy*. Often, these images were taken from different mediums – ranging from engravings, paintings, book covers, and album covers, to movie posters – with little attention paid to data collection that was consistent or sustained. These images were either sampled conveniently from personal collections (e.g. Borgerson and Schroeder,

2003 ; Schroeder and Borgerson, 2012) or stemmed from a mixed approach of collecting documents of different kinds (e.g. Laderman, 2014 : pp. 30-33 ; Medeiros, 2018). While informative, these methodological approaches do not allow readers to assess the representativeness of the *hula girl* and the *Waikiki beachboys* in Hawaii's brand personality.

- 5 To further our understanding of the complexity of Hawai'i's brand and the extent to which surfing and hula dancing shaped Hawai'i's brand personality, this paper offers a longitudinal retrospective study of advertisements that were published in *National Geographic* magazine by the DMO of Hawai'i, from its first ad in 1908 to its last blurb in 1965. The research questions are as follows : What is the evolution of Hawai'i's brand image from 1908 to 1965 in *National Geographic*, as supported by Hawai'i's DMO ? How often were surfing and hula images published in the magazine, in contrast to other activities that take place in Hawai'i ? What were the main myths perpetuated when surfing or hula dancing were portrayed ? Was the *hula girl* or the *Waikiki beachboy* consistently linked to *Kānaka maoli* ? To answer these questions and explore destination brand management via the lens of myth-making, this paper describes and analyzes Hawai'i's brand image from 1908 to 1965.

Theory : Branding as myth-making

- 6 This paper focuses on myth-making in the context of destination branding to better understand the complexity and the evolution of Hawai'i's brand (Gertner, 2011). While there are still disagreements about what constitutes destination branding (Anholt, 2010 ; Kavartzis and Hatch, 2003 ; Kock, Josiassen and Assaf, 2016 ; Tasci and Kowak, 2006 ; Vuignier, 2017 ; Zenker and Braun, 2017), this paper follows the definition provided by Blain *et al.* (2005 : 337), i.e. that destination branding is “[t]he set of marketing activities that (1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination ; (2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience ; (3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination ; (4) and reduce consumer search.” When studying branding, scholars contend that a brand is a myth. According to Bastos and Levy (2012 : 349), “the brand is both a sign and a symbol,” meaning that branding can be understood as a marketing technique performing cultural myths (Holt, 2004). In their analysis of marketing Hawai'i as an ideological construction, Buck (1993) and Costa (1998) and Trask (1999 : 42) explicitly referred to the idea that Hawai'i's brand has been subject to myth-making and that Hawai'i's myths (e.g. paradise, hospitality, aloha, etc.) are damaging to *Kānaka maoli's* identity and culture. Drawing from this approach to branding, our paper applies semiology as a theoretical framework to further our understanding of American imperialism in Hawai'i's brand.
- 7 Semiotic analysis of advertisements is commonplace, and previous research in tourism applied the theoretical framework of renowned semiotics, including Pierce and Barthes (e.g. Lobinger and Mele, 2021). While Pierce focuses on icons, Barthes rather explores the signs which serve as the foundation of myth-making (Shield, 1990). In a paper published in the 1960s, Barthes (1964) analyzed a printed advertisement and applied the foundations of visual semiotic analysis in branding, which correspond to the study of signs, symbols, and interpretations of visual representations of a brand or a product.

These foundations had previously been theorized in his seminal book *Mythologies*, in which Barthes (1957) explored the extent to which everyday objects convey cultural meanings, ideologies, and myths. According to Barthes, a myth is not to be confused with its original meaning, which is an old folktale, ancient story, or legend. As a brand, a myth can be a name, a logo, a good, a service or a place, all of which carry specific meanings. A myth is also a belief held by many that distorts reality and reinforces power structures. It serves to naturalize cultural values, social orders, and domination processes. As such, myths seem like universal and immutable truths (Buck, 1993 : 4). Subsequently, semiotic analysis involves debunking these myths to reveal the underlying cultural meanings and power structures. Barthes believed that one can critically examine signs and symbols within the context of culture and uncover the hidden ideologies that shape our understanding of the world. In applying Barthes' approach, this paper examines the features of American imperialism that are expressed in printed advertising related to Hawai'i's brand.

Study Methods : visual semiotic analysis

- 8 From 1908 to World War II, advertisements featuring surf or hula images in *National Geographic* were sponsored by two major tourism organizations : the Hawai'i Promotion Committee – renamed the Hawaii Tourist Bureau in 1919 – and the Matson Steamship Company. Then, during the post-war years, Pan American Airways and United Air Lines were also important promoters, as their respective market share of carrying passengers to and from the Islands increased at the expense of cruise lines. Throughout the 20th century, the ads commissioned by these four stakeholders were released in American consumer magazines, including but not limited to *Life*, *Time*, *The New Yorker*, *Vogue*, *Sport Illustrated*, and *National Geographic*. Authors who studied these printed ads often applied convenience sampling (e.g. Lemarié, 2022 ; Medeiro, 2018 ; Imada, 2004), and worked on local magazines, like *Paradise of the Pacific*, which was created by the Honolulu Chamber of Commerce for promotional purposes. To broaden the scope of analysis, this article selected *National Geographic* as the only source for data collection. Unlike *Paradise of the Pacific*, *National Geographic* had a large audience, and consistently featured articles and ads about Hawai'i from the 1900s until the 1980s. For example, in 1926, the magazine had 1 million copies in circulation worldwide, up to a record high of 12 million in the late 1980s.
- 9 Using purposive sampling, I searched the digital archives of *National Geographic* between December 2023 and March 2024, typing the terms Hawaii, Promotion, Committee, Bureau, Visitors, and Tourists. I selected ads based on five specific criteria relevant to the research questions : two activities (i.e. surfing and dancing), and three objects (i.e. surfboards, outrigger canoes, and leis). Descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 indicate that the *National Geographic* database returned 155 pages of which 138 (88 %) displayed advertisements about Hawai'i. Other results were articles about Hawai'i and other miscellaneous matters (e.g. Simpich, 1954). The 138 advertisements were compiled into a spreadsheet and sorted out by chronological order from 1908 to 1965. Some 38 % of them displayed a *Waikiki beachboy*, someone surfing, or a surfboard, and another 17 % showed *hula dancing* or a *hula girl*. In other words, 55 % of the advertisements retrieved from the digital archives of *National Geographic* are the focus of this study (see Table 2).

Table 1. Terms used and their associated results (counts and percentage) when searching in the *National Geographic* digital archives on March 28, 2024

Stakeholders	Search terms (case sensitive)	Actual ads about Hawai'i	Other (e.g. article)	Search results
Hawaii Promotion Committee	Hawaii AND Promotion AND committee	5 83 %	1 17 %	6 100 %
Hawaii Tourist Bureau	Hawaii AND Tourist AND Bureau	113 88 %	15 12 %	128 100 %
Hawaii Visitors Bureau	Hawaii AND Visitors AND Bureau	20 95 %	1 5 %	21 100 %
Total		138 88 %	11 12 %	155 100 %

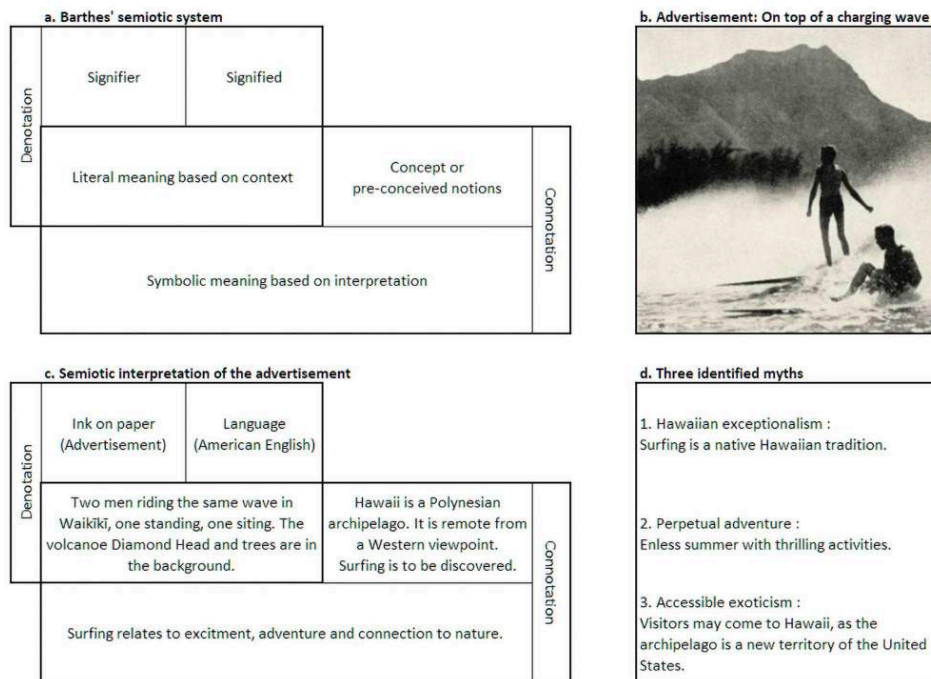
Table 2. Number of ads (counts and percentage), featuring surfing, hula dancing, surfboards, outrigger canoes, or *leis* compared to other ads, in the *National Geographic* digital archives on March 28, 2024

Stakeholders	Search terms (case sensitive)	Surfing, board, or outrigger canoe	Hula dancing, <i>lei</i> , or <i>hula girl</i>	Other : dining, fishing, horse- riding, etc.	Total ads
Hawaii Promotion Committee	Hawaii AND Promotion AND committee	5 100 %	0 0 %	0 0 %	5 100 %
Hawaii Tourist Bureau	Hawaii AND Tourist AND Bureau	40 35 %	18 20 %	55 45 %	113 100 %
Hawaii Visitors Bureau	Hawaii AND Visitors AND Bureau	8 40 %	6 30 %	6 30 %	20 100 %
Total		53 38 %	24 17 %	61 45 %	138 100 %

- 10 After chronologically sorting out the advertisements, I applied Roland Barthes' semiotics system to describe and interpret their images, intentionally disregarding the literal words. According to Barthes, visual analysis identified two distinct layers (Van Leeuwen, 2001 : 94). The initial layer, called *denotation*, corresponds to the signifier and the signified. The signifier can be defined as the tangible entity from which the message is generated, whereas the signified pertains to the written message or the depiction of the subject being portrayed. Within the scope of this research, the signifier

refers to the advertisement itself, specifically the ink on paper, while the signified pertains to the language used to articulate the message in a direct manner, that is American English. For example, the primary visual component depicted in illustration 1 is an ad published in *National Geographic* in May 1932 portraying two surfers on their own surfboard, one standing upright and one sitting, navigating a cresting wave. Diamond Head, the landmark volcanic tuff cone, in the backdrop indicates that this scene takes place in Waikīkī.

Illustration 1 The nature of myths according to Barthes



The tables are adapted from Barthes (1957/2002), and the photograph is part of an advertisement sponsored by the Hawaii Tourist Bureau, and published in *National Geographic* in May 1932.

Hawaii Tourist Bureau, 1932, "On top of a charging wave," *National Geographic*, vol. 61, n° 6, p. Ad22.

- 11 The second layer of Barthes' semiotic system is called *connotation*. It begins with examining the literal interpretation of the image by referring to the symbolic or conceptual ideas that are being understood and expressed. Typically, the concepts or symbols are predetermined by the creator of the ad. The latter aims to evoke comparable preconceived representations within the receiver's mind. Connotation is usually subjective and can lead to disagreement. It depends on historical contexts, societal norms, and the intentions of the creator. For example, the two surfers showcased in illustration 1 connote excitement, adventure, and mastery of a skill that is emblematic of Hawaiian culture. With the trees and the dormant volcano in the background, this ad suggests a connection to nature's forces and a free-spirited enjoyment of the islands' countryside. Moreover, since one surfer is depicted as a man standing on the water, one might take the analysis a step further and make religious interpretations. More myths may be produced by this semiotic system and the receiver of the ad may understand these myths as perfectly natural, even though they imply ideological constructions and subjective interpretations.

- 12 Following this method, the ad in illustration 1 develops at least three myths, all of which are representative of Hawai'i's destination brand. The first asserts Hawaiian exceptionalism, i.e. that surfing is unique to Hawai'i in general, and to Waikīkī in particular. Surfing is presented as one of Hawai'i's competitive advantages over other tropical destinations, even though surfing is not unique to Hawai'i. Second, there is the myth of perpetual adventure: Hawai'i offers thrilling experiences to break the monotony of everyday life, even though time spent in Hawai'i, like anywhere else, can be monotonous, including during one's holiday. Third, there is the myth of accessibility, meaning that learning to surf is quick, simple, and effortless, whereas, it actually requires time, effort, and dedication. In other words, these three myths distort reality. The archipelago is seen as a unique and unparalleled destination for accessible leisure and adventure through the native Hawaiian sport of surfing.
- 13 Barthes' semiotic is applied to printed ads in *National Geographic* throughout the results and discussion sections below, which are presented chronologically and address the research questions posed herein. While most journal articles in the social sciences present the results and the discussion in two distinct sections, the data and the results are unveiled concurrently and interpreted chronologically in this paper to better render the complexities of branding or myth-making. Each decade between 1908 and 1965 is subject to Barthes' semiotic analysis.

Results and discussion

Primitive tourism and the myth of the *Waikīkī beachboy* (1900s-1910s)

- 14 During the 1900s and the 1910s, the tourism industry in Hawai'i was at an exploration stage, counting about 2,000 visitors a year (Mak, 2008: 13), all of whom belonged to elite society, including politicians, wealthy businessmen, actors, actresses, and popular writers. The Hawaii Promotion Committee (HPC) did the lion's share of the marketing through articles written in local magazines, like *Mid-Pacific Magazine*, and "established agencies in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, New York, and Boston" (Moser, 2020: 508). Illustration 2 below is the first ad that was commissioned by HPC in *National Geographic*. The promotion appeared in every issue of the magazine from January to May 1908, (e.g. Hawaii Promotion Committee, 1908) during the 1900s. In terms of representativeness, this illustration was the only portrayal of Hawai'i in *National Geographic*.⁴
- 15 The main image features a native Hawaiian wearing a *malo* (i.e. loincloth), standing on and maneuvering a wooden alia board in the surf. In descriptive terms, the native surfer personifies the characteristics of the destination. His confident stance denotes being adventurous, in harmony with nature, and open to exotic activities. The smaller image depicts another *Kanaka maoli* in an outrigger canoe. He symbolizes a connection to traditional modes of transportation and the heart-felt simplicity of Hawaiian life. The dormant volcanoes of Diamond Head appear in the background, thus informing readers that Hawai'i's destination brand relates to only one place (i.e. Waikīkī). Admittedly, Hawai'i's branding fulfils its promise: Waikīkī was the only place in the world where visitors could watch or learn surfing from *Waikīkī beachboys*, who were

often members of a club called the *Hui Nalu* (Lemarié, 2022; Moser, 2020; Walker, 2010; Timmons, 1989).

Illustration 2



Full-page advertisement sponsored by the Hawaii Promotion Committee, published in every issue of *National Geographic*, from January to May 1908.

Hawaii Promotion Committee, 1908, "Winter Sport in Hawaii," *National Geographic*, vol. 19, n° 4, p. 309.

- 16 The ad expresses at least two entangled colonial myths. The most pervasive involves a depiction of earthly paradise, meaning that Hawai'i is an idyllic, unspoiled place, where visitors can observe natives showcasing their skills in an untouched, pristine setting. But paradise – from a western point of view – also includes a hierarchy and power structure in which the West dominates (Costa, 1998 : 318 ; Desmond, 1999 : 37). Belonging to the United States as of 1898, Hawai'i became a safe tropical tourist destination where Americans could escape from the industrialized world. In these terms, the ad establishes a dualism between the American empire (i.e. complex, industrial, modern, and superficial) and colonized Polynesia (i.e. simple, unspoiled, traditional, and authentic).
- 17 The myth of earthly paradise is further linked to the myth of romanticism, a 19th century Western philosophy focused on contemplating nature, discovering exotic landscapes, and encountering indigenous people. Unlike other races, "the Hawaiian native comes to represent an ideal type in the Euro-American imagery – oscillating between the noble and the romantic savage" (Desmond, 1999 : 57). Interestingly, visitors are not included in this ad, implying that one may simply observe surfing. The idea that sightseeing will suffice reflects tourism behaviour of the 19th century, when most visitors enjoyed watching surfing but rarely took part in the activity itself (Lemarié, 2018 : pp. 89-112). The reader must nevertheless bear in mind that visitors

had already received surfing lessons from professional instructors on an outrigger canoe since 1897 (Clark, 2011 : pp. 70-71) and on a surfboard since 1906 (Lemarié, 2018 : 137). While previous studies often stressed that Hawai'i's brand was associated with degrading feminine figures of the *hula girl* in the first half of 20th century (e.g. Buck, 1993 ; Imada, 2014 ; Trask, 1999 : 143), this first ad indicates that the *Waikiki beachboy* is also an important character. This was particularly true during the 1900s and the 1910s, when no *hula girls* were advertised in *National Geographic*, hence supporting Davis (2001 : 104) when he argues that “the *hula girl*, although common in early postcards, was not featured until the 1930s [in photographically illustrated books].”

Ethnic tourism and the myth of the Hawaiian *hula girl* (1920s)

- 18 The Hawaii Promotion Committee changed its name to the Hawaii Tourist Bureau (HTB) in 1919 following World War II (Mak, 2008 : 105 ; Sperb, 2022 : 16). By 1925, HTB's advertising budget was \$ 125,000 (Diamond, 2008 : 24 ; Imada, 2004 : 118), and the islands welcomed approximately 8,000 visitors on average per year. Hawai'i's destination brand was articulated by three key stakeholders, namely HTB, the Matson Navigation Company, and the Los Angeles Steamship Company (LASSCO). The 1920s saw the introduction of the Hawaiian *hula girl* in printed advertising. Illustration 3 is a painting of a woman in the spotlight dancing the *hula* during a tropical evening before by an audience of elite, formally dressed visitors. This is the first ad published in *National Geographic* that integrates visitors into Hawai'i's brand. The target group appears to be wealthy heterosexual couples. In addition to the *Waikiki beachboy*, the *hula girl* personifies Hawai'i's brand equity, connoting tradition, youth, and grace. These brand features are further reinforced by the setting, which includes palm trees and tropical foliage. The *lei* and the *haku lei* (i.e. flower crown) worn by the *hula girl* connote tropical beauty and exoticism, reinforcing the notion that Hawai'i is an ideal destination. Soft lighting suggests romance, mystery, and relaxation, which are often sought-after qualities in a vacation.

Illustration 3

Spend an unforgettable vacation in the world's new island playground

HAWAII
4 weeks*
4,000 miles of travel*
1400°

The lights go out. From the shadow of the big banyan tree come the quickening strains of an ancient Hawaiian hula-chant. A dancing figure glides into the warm Hawaiian moonlight.

The *hula alapa*—the legendary "hula of the planting of the taro"—is beginning. And you are in a hushed audience at a great hotel—spellbound by the exotic beauty of moonlight filtering through the palm fronds, the music of strange instruments and soft lilting voices, the rhythmic whisper of warm surf on the coral sands of Waikiki.

Tourist the world seems far away—yet in no more time than it takes to cross the Atlantic you found these fairy islands of Hawaii! Tomorrow someone you'll look out upon a painted ocean of violet, indigo, emerald, jade. Go down to breakfast and a soft-fogged Oriental waiter will bring a luscious melon that grew in a tree, or a slice of pineapple only a few hours from the field. You're ready for two

long weeks, or more, in the world's new island playground, where the thermometer stays below 85° in summer, above 65° in "winter."

Brilliant with Interest!

EVERY DAY BEGINS a new adventure—surfboarding and outrigger canoeing at Waikiki; golf on one of a dozen scenic courses; motor drives; treasure-hunting for teak and brass and rope-cloth in the Oriental bazaars; impromptu *luaus*, where one eats *pai* Hawaiian style, and strange-named fish baked in leaves. Teas and dances in perfectly-appointed hotels. Spectacular deep-sea fishing for giant sword-fish, tuna and *hiwa*. Trips to the volcanic Hawaii U. S. National Park, and the gem-like islands of Maui and Kauai, where waterfalls tumble

down velvet-green cliffides.

\$940 to \$500 will cover all expenses of a month's trip direct from Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle or Vancouver, B. C., including first-class round-trip steam-er fare, 2000 miles each way, the finest hotels, and inter-island cruising. Or you can stay in more modest hotels for even less, for the two weeks in Hawaii. Come prepared to stay longer—to shake off humdrum care for months.

ASK ANY TOURIST AGENCY or steamship or railroad office to tell you more about Hawaii—and how inexpensive the trip is from your city to Hawaii via any port on the Pacific Coast. And send this coupon today for illustrated booklet (in color) and a copy of *Touitax*, brimfull of helpful travel information. Address: *Hawaii Tourist Bureau, 312 McCann Bldg., San Francisco; P.O. Box 375, Los Angeles; or 602 Fort Street, Honolulu, Hawaii, U.S.A.*

(USE THIS COUPON)

Please send Hawaii Booklet in colors to the address written in margin below

312

PUBLISHED BY J. W. BENTON & SONS, INC.

Full-page advertisement sponsored by the Hawaii Tourist Bureau, released twice in February and April 1928

Hawaii Tourist Bureau, 1928, "Spend an unforgettable vacation," *National Geographic*, vol. 53, n° 2, p. Ad64.

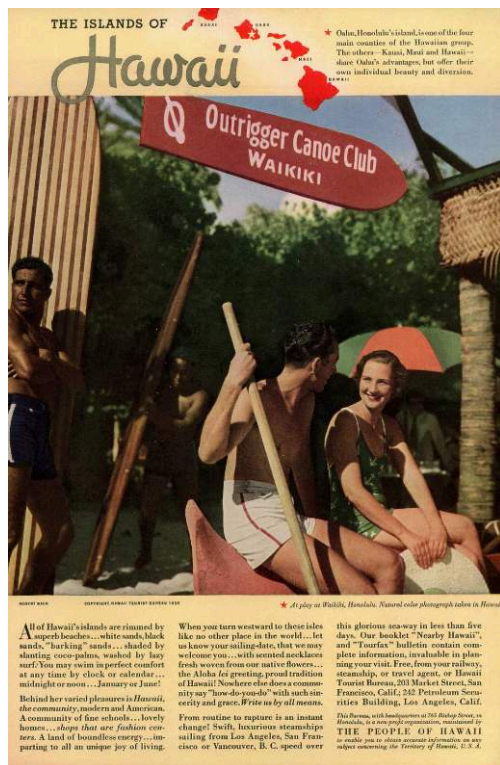
- 19 A great deal can be interpreted from this ad including, I would argue, at least three principal myths. First, the myth of paradise is still the most prevalent. The image suggests that one may temporarily leave behind the routine of everyday life and lose himself or herself in a world of sensory delights and natural beauty. Second, the myth of romanticism in regard to Hawaiian racial exceptionalism is foregrounded (Desmond, 1999 : 57 ; Miller-Davenport, 2017 : 831), this time by way of a hula girl. The depiction of the cultural practice of hula dancing is adapted to the promoter's understanding of Western expectations. The *hula girl* wears a short *ti* leaf skirt instead of the traditional loincloth dress and is systematically represented with a *lei* made of tropical flowers (e.g. orchids, tuberoses). This Hawaiian tradition is staged, as in many other ads, and the *hula girl* becomes a lascivious, sexualized visual icon of the ideal female (Imada, 2004 : 125 ; Medeiros, 2018 : 27 ; Skwiot, 2010 : pp. 92-93). The eroticization of Hawaiian female bodies had existed since the third expedition of Captain Cook (Imada, 2012 : pp. 12-13) and further fueled a venerable western and male version of paradise, stemming from Greek and Roman mythology (Costa, 1998 : 319). Yet, as shown by Imada (2012 : 262), "hula performance and its global circulation can be read neither as wholly complicit with a colonial or neocolonial system nor unproblematically resistant to it." Hula performers – like *Waikiki beachboys* who taught visitors how to surf – made their living thanks to tourism while navigating the complex broader context of colonialism and American imperialism (Allen, 1934 ; Laderman, 2014 : pp. 17-33 ; Moser, 2020 : 526 ; Walker, 2011 : pp. 57-82).

- 20 In other ads of the 1920s sponsored by HTB, Hawai'i's brand is personified by both the *hula girl* and the *Waikiki beachboy*, indicating that Hawai'i's brand personality is dualistic, alternating between a male and a female figure. Although the *hula girl* received more attention and was portrayed as a key figure of Hawai'i's brand personality in the literature (e.g. Wood, 1999; Diamond, 2008: 25), her representativeness in our data set is relatively low, considering that in the 1920s and 1930s, she appears in only 20 % of ads commissioned by HTB, compared to 35 % featuring the *Waikiki beachboy*. Likewise, the *Waikiki beachboy* appears eight times in ads sponsored by Matson during the 1920s, while the *hula girl* appears only three times. As a result, Hawai'i's brand personality was both male and female at the time, thus buttressing American imperialism by creating the myth that *Kānaka maoli* embraced patriarchy. Men asserted masculinity and courage as they surfed, while women embodied sensitivity as they danced.

Social Tourism and the myth of romance among visitors (1930s)

- 21 Throughout the 1930s, until the beginning of World War II, tourism in Waikiki experienced only moderate growth given that the Great Depression of 1929 significantly impacted visitor arrivals. While the islands received 22,000 visitors in 1929, only 10,000 visitors came to Hawai'i in 1933, and 24,000 in 1939. In fact, Hawai'i's tourism infrastructure was prepared to absorb a much larger influx of visitors with the building of high-rise hotels such as the Royal Hawaiian in 1927. The hotel was owned by Matson and increased Waikiki room capacity by 50% (Stephenson, 2008: 274). During the troubled decade of the Great Depression, ads were still released in *National Geographic*, while our data set suggests that the myths being perpetuated appeared to change. In the 1920s, Caucasians were added to Hawai'i's brand, but ads were still showing active *Kānaka maoli*. In other words, the two races coexisted, with native Hawaiians in the foreground entertaining passive visitors. However, during the 1930s, the *hula girl* or the *Waikiki beachboy* either entirely disappeared from the ads or remained as less assertive figures in the background.

Illustration 4



Full-page advertisement sponsored by the Hawaii Tourist Bureau and published in February 1936. Hawaii Tourist Bureau, 1936, "The islands of Hawaii," *National Geographic*, vol. 69, n° 2, p. Ad8.

- 22 For example, illustration 4 is a colour advertisement showing four individuals on a beach front featuring tropical foliage: two fair-skinned visitors are in the foreground and two dark-skinned beach boys are in the background, under the sign of the Outrigger Canoe Club (OCC) in Waikīkī. The visitors seem to be a heterosexual couple sitting on the edge of an outrigger canoe. The woman is smiling and holding a hat – indicating relaxation and sunny weather – while the man is grasping a wooden stick, potentially a paddle, denoting action. Their attitude and attire suggest an active, beach-oriented lifestyle. As for the *Waikīkī beachboys*, they appear to be at the service of the visitors. One is standing straight and acting as a security guard, while the other is carrying a surfboard out of the OCC. The OCC sign connotes exclusivity, meaning that Hawai'i offers privileged access to a welcoming and social sphere.
- 23 At least three myths can be inferred from this ad. The myth of paradise is prominent, just as it was in earlier ads. Paradise is associated with warm and sunny weather, the beach, and social harmony between host (the beachboys) and guest (the visitors), as well as among the visitors themselves. Socializing is an important part of the highly educated social class, and the emphasis on recreation at the club's elite setting propagates the myth of Hawai'i as a place for exclusive social reproduction. The third important underlying myth is that of romance. Hawai'i's brand reproduced the gender roles of the era by explicitly linking travel to romantic encounters between a man and a woman. In this ad, the man gazes towards the women, which suggests a connection to her, especially since she is smiling back at him. Her relaxed pose connotes admiration... and possibly consent.

- 24 Despite conveying romantic messages, Hawai'i's brand did not systemically represent romance between male visitors and the *hula girl* or between female visitors and the *Waikiki beachboys*. While this idea was correctly identified by scholars (Imada, 2012 ; Trask, 1999 ; Walker, 2011), romance does not occur between races in this ad. It happens between visitors and suggests that Hawai'i is a safe place where one can connect or reconnect with a potential soulmate. The myth of romance, between visitors only, is often disregarded by scholars, but many ads promoting Hawai'i show intimate Caucasian couples dining and engaging in a romantic relationship. This fact, in addition to our ad analysis, supports the theory that Hawai'i's brand imposes imperialistic and patriarchal ideologies on both *Kānaka maoli* and visitors (Brown, 1982).

Adventure Tourism and the myth of female emancipation (1940s)

- 25 During the 1940s, Hawai'i's tourism industry was severely impacted by the involvement of the United States in World War II. Between 1942 and 1945, advertisement campaigns ceased and Hawai'i experienced minimal tourism activity given that Waikiki hotel facilities were "leased to the navy [...] as a rest and recreation center for the Pacific Fleet" (Laderman, 2014: 38). But prior to the Pearl Harbor attack on December 6, 1941, the islands saw a record high of 31.000 visitors, and ads published in *National Geographic* in 1939, 1940, and 1941 (see illustration 5) featured Caucasian women surfing, paddling an outrigger canoe, or holding a surfboard.

Illustration 5



Full-page advertisement sponsored by the Hawaii Tourist Bureau, released in May 1940.

Hawaii Tourist Bureau, 1940, "Islands of unparalleled pleasure," *National Geographic*, vol. 77, n° 5, p. Ad15.

- 26 This illustration was published in May 1940, and according to Barthes' approach to visual analysis, this photograph captures two outrigger canoes carrying three people each, and three surfers sitting or paddling on their surfboards. The two *Waikiki beachboys* and the female visitor paddling the outrigger canoe in the foreground convey the most prominent message. They are catching a very small wave, but the inclination of the photograph dramatizes the scene and the excitement of an outrigger canoe ride. Four smaller black-and-white images suggest that Maui, Kaua'i, O'ahu, and the Big Island are also worth visiting.
- 27 As is the case in previous ads on surfing, the ocean, sunny weather, and thrilling outdoor activities serve to encapsulate the myth of paradise. More significantly, since this action-packed scene implies adventure, teamwork between a female visitor and local beachboys, excitement, and an active lifestyle, the myth of female empowerment is foregrounded as well. The scene propagates the idea that female visitors who engage in risk-taking activities that are traditionally performed by men may be empowered. In contrast to the ads previously examined herein, Caucasian female visitors are liberated, powerful, and inspirational, whereas native Hawaiian women are frequently sexualized and subjugated in the form of the hula girl. This dual system in Hawai'i's brand personality (i.e. empowered Caucasian women in opposition to diminished Hawaiian women) has not been identified by scholars, apart from Goss (1993: 681). Although there were a few ads from the 1920s and 1930s featuring strong white women surfing in an outrigger canoe or standing upright on surfboards, the number of these images increased during World War II and the post-war years, given that the western female participated in war and post-war efforts (Brock et al., 2015). The myth that travel and tourism empowers western female visitors emerged in the early 1940s and continued into the post-war era, not only in the advertisement published by Hawai'i's destination marketing organization but also in ads sponsored by United Airlines and Pan American Airways.

Cultural appropriation and the myth of the light-skinned *aloha girl* (1950s)

- 28 The 1950s was one of the most important decades for tourism growth in Hawai'i's history. There were 46,000 visitors to the islands in 1950, and the influx soared to 243,000 in 1959, when the territory became the 50th state of the union. Hawai'i's tourism industry entered a "sustained growth stage" (Kato and Mak, 2013: 233), mostly due to the ability of the Hawai'i hotel industry to accommodate visitors arriving on new airlines that were authorized to operate to and from the islands on a commercial basis (e.g. United Airlines, Northwest Orient Airlines, Qantas, and Japan Airlines, among others). Hotel capacity expanded with the opening of the Surfrider hotel in 1952; the Princess Kaiulani hotel in 1953; the Biltmore Hotel and the Reef Hotel in 1955; and the Hilton Hawaiian Village Beach Resort and Spa in 1956. One of the major additions to Hawai'i's brand personality was the light-skinned *hula girl*, whether depicted *hapa haole* (part-white, part-Hawaiian) or *haole* (white or tanned white), as portrayed in illustration 6.

Illustration 6

So excitingly different . . .

A South Sea Autumn Vacation in *Hawaii*

Take equal parts of sunshine and trade winds... seasons with South Sea romance... add lush tropical flowers for aroma and color... serve under the bluest of skies... and you have the incomparable vacation recipe of Hawaii! You need no passport to savor it... you maintain your own standards of living while you enjoy it. ● Folkways of ancient Polynesia...surf sports and games at Waikiki...delicious, luscious, exotic cuisines of the Orient...the smoldering volcano, Mount Loa, and enchanted Pearl Harbor...the dream like beauty of tropical isles await in sapphire seas... there will be among a thousand settings on your memory! ● Air and steamship lines link Hawaii with San Francisco, Los Angeles, Portland, Seattle, Vancouver. You can go one way by air, the other by sea, or round trip by either. From Honolulu, on the island of Oahu, short flights take you to the other major islands of the Hawaiian group... Maui, Hawaii, Kauai. Let your Travel Agent help you plan to visit them all at moderate cost.

ALOHA WEEK
Oct. 22 to 29—An island king and chief garbed in brilliant, priceless feather, disks and helmets, had a coronation of ancient sports, hula, lanterns and floral parades, land and water pageantry!

Hawaii invites you with your "round chair. Come any time... come NOW!

A 50 DAY TRIP BY LUXURY LINER
BY BOATS BY LUXURY PLANE

HAWAII VISITORS BUREAU
If you prefer reservations maintained for your service by THE PEOPLE OF HAWAII

Full-page advertisement sponsored by the Hawaii Visitors Bureau, published in September 1950.

Hawaii Visitors Bureau, 1950, "So excitingly different...", *National Geographic*, vol. 98, n° 2, p. Ad2.

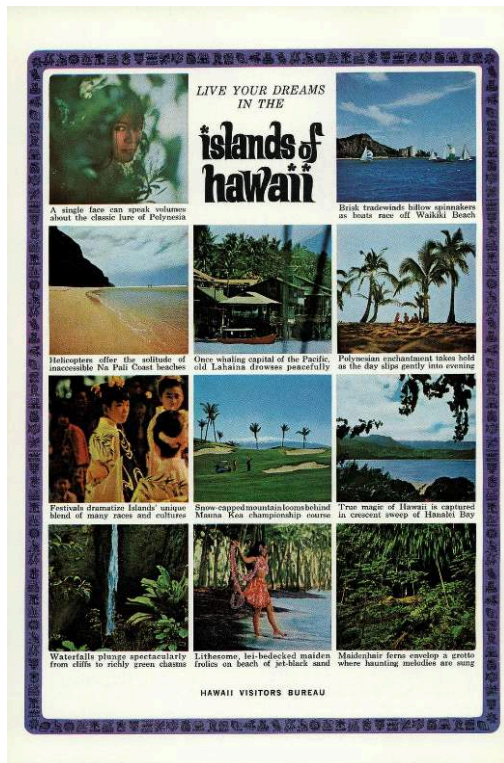
- 29 The advertisement consists of seven images, the largest of which features a tanned Caucasian woman wearing a one-piece swimsuit, with a lei around her neck. She is sitting on the grass while leaning against a tree. A dog is stretched out beside her, and both are staring at the reader. The ocean and the flora appear in the background, evoking natural beauty and tranquility. This full-page advertisement includes six smaller vignettes, featuring three staged hula dancers; various interactions between tourists and locals; a picturesque view of Waikiki and Diamond Head; and a portrayal of historical Hawaiian chiefs in honor of Aloha Week.
- 30 The three myths that are perpetuated in the advertisement are paradise, American exceptionalism, and romance from a male perspective. While the myth of paradise remains a staple in Hawai'i's brand, based on a gentle climate, ocean views, and relaxation, the myth of American exceptionalism is reinforced in the ad as well. In this context, American exceptionalism can be seen in three vignettes and corresponds to the positive local acceptance of American visitors. In addition, the text exhorts readers to visit other islands and partake in different activities, which fuels expansionist ideology and the exploration of new lands with friendly locals. The destination marketing organization still highlights Waikiki in this ad, but also explicitly redirects visitors to other possible destinations.
- 31 Through the myth of romance, the welcoming and sexualized women in this ad denote cultural appropriation. Until the late 1940s, hula girls were mostly Hawaiian or Asian-Hawaiian, but they became *hapa haole* or light skinned from the 1950s onwards. Even though the *hula girl* myth had been a male and western interpretation of the ideal female Hawaiian from the beginning of advertising in Hawai'i, this ad implies that some

visitors can be hula girls as well, which reinforces cultural appropriation. During the post-war years, hula dancers wearing the *raffia* skirt continued to be on display, but they shared Hawai'i's brand personality, with the light-skinned *hula girl* wearing a swimsuit, adorned with a *lei* around her neck and/or a hibiscus flower in her hair. Rather than dancing, she is passive, domesticated – as evidenced by the presence of the dog – and is sexually available. The fact that the myth of romance acquired new meanings through the fair-skinned *hula girl* suggests that visitors from mainland USA may also embody paradise, and even became ambassadors for Hawai'i's brand.

Mass tourism and the myth of a multi-racial Hawai'i (1960s)

- 32 During the 1960s, Hawai'i turned into a mass tourism destination. Between 1958 and 1969, visitor arrivals jumped from 171,367 to 1,526,074, and in 1965 the tourism sector was valued at \$ 186 million, second only to the sugar industry. Several internal and external factors contributed to the growth of mass tourism, but the two that had the biggest effects on visitor arrivals were statehood and the introduction of commercial jet aircraft in 1959. Compared to propeller planes, jet aircraft cut travel time from 9 to 5 hours between California and Hawai'i, and the length of stay on the islands decreased from 25 days in 1951 to 11 days in 1975 (Schmitt, 1977: 276). Statehood was also the occasion for the Hawaii Visitors Bureau (HVB) to set itself apart from the Honolulu Chamber of Commerce. For HVB, this meant a decrease in private funding and increased State ownership – up to a record high of 80% in 1962 (Mak, 2018: 105). State ownership helped HVB negotiate substantial funding, and the early 1960s were marked by the implementation of a five-year tourism development plan involving a mass media advertising campaign aimed at filling hotel rooms, especially on O'ahu's Neighbor Islands, as well as leveraging investments made in previous decades. HVB began stressing the diversity of the Hawaiian Islands in its "Come to Hawaii" campaign that featured ads in magazines with a national scope, including but not limited to *Time*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Newsweek*, and *Sunset*. Interestingly, the number of advertisements in *National Geographic* was relatively limited, with only two ads appearing during this decade. The last ad ever published by HVB appeared in 1965 (see illustration 7).

Illustration 7



Full-page advertisement sponsored by the Hawaii Visitors Bureau, released in November 1965.

Hawaii Visitors Bureau, 1950, "So excitingly different...", *National Geographic*, vol. 128, n° 5, p. Ad27.

- 33 The advertisement is a collage of images showcasing various aspects of Hawai'i's brand, including a Polynesian face, sailboats in Waikiki, a helicopter over the Na Pali Coast, the town of Lahaina, a Polynesian cultural event, a Japanese festival, a golf course, Hanalei Bay, a waterfall, a hula dancer on the beach, and a fern grotto. Each image in the collage connotes different aspects of the Hawaiian experience – from adventure and solitude to cultural richness and natural beauty. Together, they suggest a multifaceted destination and produce a new myth: the harmonious melting pot of ethnicities. Diversity is celebrated and contributes to the islands' unique character, and my semiotic interpretation echoes the findings of Miller-Davenport (2017) who demonstrated that "the tourism industry often sought to depict Hawai'i as both a place of distinct ethnicities and of 'mixed-up', Americanized culture" (2017 : 820). In other words, a revitalized brand was developed, based on "overlaying the Polynesian image with that of modern Hawai'i" (Chaplin, 1965 : B2). The portrait of traditional Hawai'i still foregrounded its gentle climate and untouched nature, but no longer highlighted the *Waikiki beachboys*. Modern Hawai'i, for its part, meant proximity to mainland USA, affordable trips, diverse tourism activities, and multi-ethnic tolerance.

Conclusion

- 34 Drawing upon semiotic analysis of surf and hula images in printed advertising, this research project examined the evolution of Hawai'i's destination brand from 1908 to 1965 through a series of myths perpetuated by the islands' official destination marketing organization. The study elucidates how Hawai'i's brand has dynamically

evolved over the decades, shifting from a focus on the *Waikiki beachboy* as a symbol of primitive tourism in the 1910s to the inclusion of the *hula girl* in the 1920s. The advent of the *hula girl* meant that the destination brand personality became dualistic, both male and female. In the 1930s, the myth of romance prevailed. Romance was not only personified by the sexualized *hula girl* or the romanticized *Waikiki beachboys*, but also by Caucasian visitors. This fact serves as our basis for the following argument : American imperialism through advertising not only defined *Kānaka maoli's* behavior in their homeland, but also visitors during their tropical vacation. This point was confirmed in the 1940s, when the destination brand exposed the myth of *haole* female empowerment, during World War II and the post-war years. Caucasian women nevertheless ended up being sexualized, like their Hawaiian counterparts in the 1950s, in ads portraying the fair-skinned *hula girl*. This nuanced approach reveals the complexity of Hawai'i's brand, rooted in a combination of dualisms (man/woman, native/*haole*, active/passive, hosts/guests) all concerned with gender roles and social hierarchy, in the broader contexts of American imperialism and cultural appropriation. The myth of multi-racial Hawai'i eventually prevailed in the 1960s with the advent of mass tourism.

- 35 Despite adding new concepts to postcolonial literature, the authors of this study acknowledge its limitations. For the most part, the work relies on visual analysis and has disregarded the textual elements presented with the illustrations. A textual analysis of these advertisements could help identify other myths and provide a broader context for interpretation. Additionally, our project applies a Western theoretical framework (i.e., Barthes' semiotic), and future studies could benefit from using a native theoretical framework to offer alternative perspectives on the politics and consequences of branding native Hawaiian culture. Moreover, the paper focused solely on surf- and *hula*-related images to the exclusion of other activities represented in Hawai'i's brand, including dining, fishing, and sightseeing. One must bear in mind that these situations were portrayed in 45 % of ads identified in *National Geographic* and that they are worth studying. Such work will provide a more complete representation of Hawaii's brand as portrayed by the islands' official destination marketing organization. It may be further suggested that future research apply a more exhaustive methodological approach by considering ads commissioned by other stakeholders, such as Matson or United Airlines.
- 36 In conclusion, this study contributes to our understanding of destination branding in Hawai'i by highlighting the dynamic interplay between cultural representations, socio-political contexts, and tourism marketing strategies. It calls for a more systematic and nuanced approach to researching and conceptualizing destination branding, recognizing the power of advertising in shaping and reflecting the complex identities and experiences of both *Kānaka maoli's* and visitors.

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NOTES

1.

According to the United Nation tourism website, "A visitor (domestic, inbound or outbound) is classified as a tourist (or overnight visitor), if his/her trip includes an overnight stay, or as a same-day visitor (or excursionist) otherwise." Retrieved from <<https://www.unwto.org/glossary-tourism-terms>>, accessed May 29, 2024.

2.

In academia, native Hawaiians are also called by their native designation *Kānaka maoli* or *Kānaka 'ōiwi*. In this paper, the term *Kānaka maoli* is the preferred nomenclature. According to the Cornell Law School, Legal Information Institute, "The term 'Native Hawaiian' means any individual who is— (A) a citizen of the United States, and (B) a descendant of the aboriginal people, who prior to 1778, occupied and exercised sovereignty in the area that now constitutes the State of Hawaii, as evidenced by— (i) genealogical records, (ii) Kupuna (elders) or Kama'aina (long-term community residents) verification, or (iii) birth records of the State of Hawaii." Retrieved from <https://www.law.cornell.edu/definitions/uscode.php?width=840&height=800&iframe=true&def_id=42-USC-818188487-694047094&term_occur=999&term_src=>>, accessed May 29, 2024.

3.

According to the American Marketing Association, “a brand is any distinctive feature like a name, term, design, or symbol that identifies goods or services.” Retrieved from <<https://www.ama.org/topics/branding/>>, accessed May 29, 2024.

4.

This advertisement was previously discussed by Lemarié (2022: 49).

ABSTRACTS

Hawai'i's tourism destination brand perpetuates the myth of paradise. In Hawai'i, this myth originates from the early 20th century and has been based on a set of tangible and intangible assets, including environmental beauty, relaxation, hospitality, and native Hawaiian traditions. In examining Hawai'i's brand, most postcolonial scholars focus on the *hula* to illustrate the politics of American imperialism, paying less attention to other Hawaiian traditions like surfing. Previous research studying a range of advertisements portraying the *hula girl* often used convenient sampling to collect data. To further our understanding of Hawai'i's brand personality, this article examines the representativeness and the meaning of ads featuring both the *hula girl* and the Hawaiian surfer – known as the *Waikiki beachboy*. Using Roland Barthes' approach to semiotics and visual analysis, our research method draws on purposive and systematic sampling of printed advertisements that were sponsored by the destination marketing organization of Hawai'i and released in *National Geographic* magazine from 1908 to 1965. Results confirm that the destination marketing organization perpetuates the myth of paradise, but this myth is less personified by the *hula girl* and more embodied by the male and female surfers. As a result, Hawai'i's brand personality – often perceived as female and embodied by the *hula girl* – is more dualistic, with gender roles being both reasserted and challenged in advertisements featuring male and female surfers.

La marque de la destination touristique Hawaii perpétue le mythe du paradis. Aux Hawaii, ce mythe remonte au début du 20^e siècle et repose sur un ensemble d'attributs matériels et immatériels, comprenant la beauté de l'environnement, la relaxation, l'hospitalité et les traditions hawaïennes indigènes. Lorsque les chercheurs en études postcoloniales examinent la marque des Hawaii, la plupart d'entre eux se concentrent sur le *hula* pour illustrer la politique de l'impérialisme américain, avec moins d'attention accordée à d'autres traditions indigènes, comme le surf. Les recherches antérieures étudient souvent une gamme de publicités représentant la *hula girl*, avec comme méthode de collecte de données un échantillonnage par commodité. Afin de nourrir notre compréhension de la construction de la marque Hawaii et de sa personnalité, cet article examine la représentativité et la signification des publicités mettant en vedette la *hula girl* et le surfeur hawaïen – connu sous le nom du *Waikiki beachboy*. En utilisant l'approche théorique de Roland Barthes en matière d'analyse visuelle, la méthode de recherche s'appuie sur un échantillonnage ciblé et systématique des publicités publiées dans le magazine *National Geographic* de 1908 à 1965, qui ont été commanditées par l'office du tourisme des Hawaii. Les résultats confirment que l'office du tourisme perpétue le mythe du paradis, mais que ce mythe est moins représenté par la *hula girl* et plus incarné par des surfeurs masculins et féminins. En conséquence, la personnalité de la marque Hawaii, qui est souvent comprise comme féminine et incarnée par la *hula girl*, est en fait plus dualiste, avec des rôles de genre étant à la

fois réaffirmés et remis en question dans les publicités mettant en vedette des surfeurs masculins et féminins.

INDEX

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