

EAN UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Modern Languages



MONOGRAPH

**THE TRANSLATION OF IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS AS A MARKETING  
STRATEGY FOR TRAVEL AGENCIES IN COLOMBIA**

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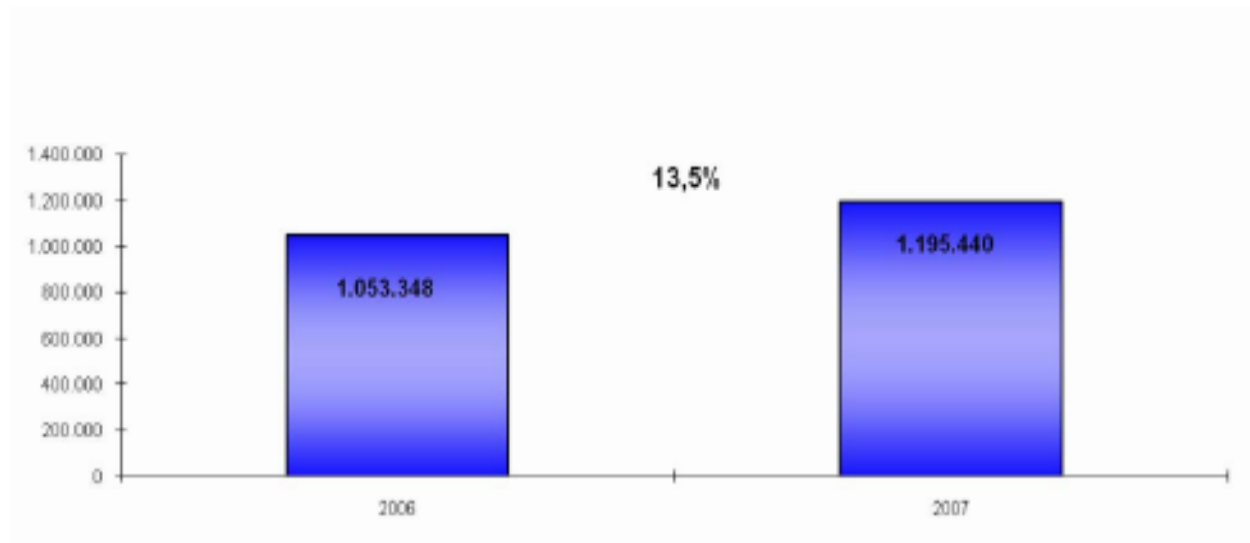
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## ***Introduction***

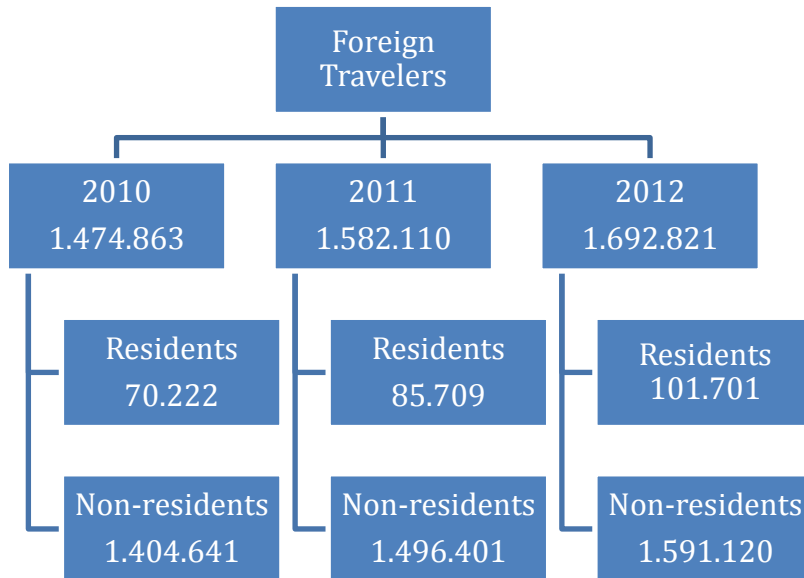
Over the last ten years, Colombia has become a more attractive tourist destination. This is the reason why, whether for its history, its ecosystems, or its people, it is possible to see that there are more hotels, hostels, and even campaigns that highlight and bring up the qualities of the country as mentioned by the Minister Díaz-Granados (MinCIT, 2013).

According to recent statistics more and more tourists have been entering the country. There has been an increase in arrivals since 2007 as shown in Graph 1 and 2. This shows that unlike some years ago Colombia is no longer an ideal but a worth-knowing destination.



*Graph 1. Arrival of tourist 2006-2007*

(MinCIT, 2007, p. 2)



**Graph 2. Total number of tourist arrivals 2010-2012.**

(Economic Studies Office, 2012, p. 38).

Taking into account what was previously mentioned, the country has to look for ways of answering to the interest of foreigners to learn about our culture and make out of this an opportunity to develop tourism and improve the image of Colombia abroad.

One of the key sectors to make the most of this increasing tourism is the travel agencies' sector. Through innovative, attractive, and well structured tourism plans this sector can gain a great part of the movement in both the capital of the country and in other tourist rising destinations for foreigners.

## ***Justification***

The government is now promoting a brand new image aiming to show Colombia as an exciting destination for travelers around the world and travel agencies play a very important role in promoting the country as an attractive destination.

In 2009 Proexport created the slogan “Colombia, the only risk is wanting to stay” with the aim of promoting a positive image of Colombia. The way of disseminating this new positive image is mostly through the Internet where web portals with the latest news and the latest tourist plans are the primary source of information.

On account of this source, travel agencies have to be one step ahead and find out a way to create attractive and innovative plans providing a wider and more interesting portfolio of services to benefit foreigners and give them reasons to make the decision to visit, to invest, or to study in Colombia.

Thinking about strategies to face this new change in a positive way the objective of this project is to analyze if the translation of idiomatic expressions,<sup>1</sup> as a key and innovative way to learn the Colombian culture, could be a marketing strategy for travel agencies in Colombia.

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<sup>1</sup> In this research the translation of idiomatic expressions is conceived as a tool to transmit a message from one language to another. It is not the main reason why the idiomatic expressions could be a marketing strategy for travel agencies.

This project is relevant as a way to answer this increase because idiomatic expressions are exclusive to every culture; these represent the customs, ways of life, visions, and in global terms contain the root of the culture turning them into a tool of cultural diffusion.

## ***Approach to the Research Problem***

### General Objective

The objective of this project is to analyze if the translation of idiomatic expressions could be used as a key and innovative marketing strategy for travel agencies in Colombia to transmit the Colombian culture.

### Specific Objectives

- To investigate how idiomatic expressions transmit culture.
- To delve into cultural tourism.
- To research the components of a successful marketing strategy.
- To inquire in which way the translation of idiomatic expressions would be innovative.

### Research Questions

- Why and how do idiomatic expressions transmit culture?
- What is cultural tourism?
- What composes a successful marketing strategy?
- In which way would the translation of idiomatic expressions be innovative?



## ***Theoretical Framework***

### Literature review

The main objective of this project is to analyze if the translation of idiomatic expressions could be used as a key and innovative marketing strategy for travel agencies in Colombia, as a way to learn the Colombian culture. This objective has been divided into four main concepts in order to analyze in depth what has been written about each one; the idiomatic expressions, translation and culture, languages, and travel agencies and marketing.

Idiomatic expressions are a very common object of analysis in the academic field of linguistics. The majority of research can be classified into two types: the analysis of idiomatic expressions and its history, role, and development in language, and the analysis of idiomatic expressions and its history, role and development in society.

Concerning idiomatic expressions and language, the published literature shows studies focused predominantly on linguistics. Idiomatic expressions as a term comprises several types of grammatical, lexical, semantic, among other characteristics that have been classified and systematized for the last ten years. Chitra Fernando and Roger Flavell in their book *On idiom: Critical review and perspectives* (1981) make reference to different authors that have various hypothesis and analysis regarding idiomatic expressions in the linguistics field. Even until recently the field is still in the process of classifying idiomatic expressions according

to linguistics features as M. Teresa Espinal and Jaume Mateu show in their paper *Classes of idioms and their interpretation* (2007).

A review of the literature into idiomatic expressions and society reveals how these features have evolved through time and how they have transformed or adapted to specific events. Their formation and use is specific to every culture<sup>2</sup> but there are some that can be found across different cultures. The use of idiomatic expressions in society<sup>3</sup> is now taken into account as a part of education. This occurs not just in schools as part of the richness of the language but also for foreigners to bring them close to the culture they are learning. A very complete analysis on why the idiomatic expressions should be taught to a foreign language learner is done by Alicia de la Peña Portero in her proposal *Propuesta metodológica para enseñar expresiones idiomáticas* (2009).

Some of the topics most reviewed are the way the idiomatic expressions relate to culture and their translation process. Idiomatic expressions are part of the language of any country<sup>4</sup>. They emerge as a complement to the standard language and often their meaning depends on specific contexts to be understood. Some expressions

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<sup>2</sup> Culture defined as “The totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought.” (Pickert, J., 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Society defined as “A group of humans broadly distinguished from other groups by mutual interests, participation in characteristic relationships, shared institutions, and a common culture.” (Pickert, J., 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Country defined as “A region, territory, or large tract of land distinguishable by features of topography, biology, or culture” (Pickert, J., 2000).

arise from diverse historical events or even the characteristics of different countries. Essentially, idiomatic expressions can emerge from any aspect of culture or society as analyzed by Jean Peeters in his article *Sociolinguistique et sociologie de la traduction* (2009). Peeters shows through different theories how the words and its uses are related to its meaning and context.

The translation of idiomatic expressions is a well-researched area. Within the theories and processes of translation known throughout the world culture plays an important role. Regularly, in the translation of a document from one language to another, the translator has to look for the proper words that transmit the message in the most accurate way possible. The key factor for this to happen is the culture.

Authors who have written about translation of idiomatic expressions agree that giving culture a very high position in the process of translating from one language to another is important. Isabel Negro, in her article *La traducción de las expresiones idiomáticas marcadas culturalmente* (2010), emphasizes the importance and the way idiomatic expressions need culture for its meaning to be fully understood.

The relationship between language and the tourism business is strong due to the profit motive of a business –to sell- and the need to attract customers. Every month the Ministry of Tourism, Industry, and Commerce publishes a complete report that summarizes the movements of foreigners inside and outside Colombia.<sup>5</sup> In an effort to boost tourism numbers, the Ministry has been trying to raise the foreign language skill

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<sup>5</sup> MinCIT. *Tourism Statistics*.

level of the people working in the tourism sector with the aim of the sector being more competitive in South-America as set out in the National Development Plan (NDP)<sup>6</sup>.

One of the chapters included in the current NDP outlines a program for travel agencies to train their staff in customer service, tourism in Colombia and languages. The NDP illustrates the increase in tourism and how the country must respond in a positive way to this situation.

As a result of this increase more and more agencies are implementing the use of a second language as a way to expand and explore the market. Translation of their portfolios and their web sites into various languages is one instance of the inclusion of a language-oriented business strategy in travel agencies.

Market research in general is oriented towards how a business can reach the client in a successful way and “the key factors that influence their buying decisions” (Berry, n.d.). This type of approach states how to transmit the message, how to be remembered and how to drive the client into buying the product or service. As for marketing in travel agencies, nowadays the Internet plays an essential role. The paper *Travel Agency Marketing Strategy: Insights from Switzerland* (2007) is an analysis of the future of travel agencies and how the Internet gains importance every day.

As a conclusion, idiomatic expressions, translation and culture, languages, and travel agencies and marketing have been developed each in their own field and each seen

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<sup>6</sup> Chapter: *El Turismo como Motor de Desarrollo*. (MinCIT, 2011)

from a different perspective but not as a whole. This is a reason why this research project will add to our understanding the relation between these topics.

### Hypothesis

The translation of idiomatic expressions, as a key and innovative way to learn the Colombian culture could be a marketing strategy for travel agencies in Colombia.

## ***Methodology***

### Approach

The approach of this project was qualitative due to the fact that the research topic has not been explored to date and that during this type of approach the samples, data collecting, and the analysis were always present throughout the whole process.

### Type of study

This was an exploratory type of study because the research problem has not been studied before and it includes an approximation from different perspectives. This type of study was of investigation because none of the results obtained during this research are going to be applied but it is going to leave the topic open for further studies.

### Study population and samples

According to the context in which the results were expected to be found, the population to be interviewed was the travel agencies; the study was applied to tourism agencies specialized in cultural tourism as well as agencies with wider tourism perspective. The other type of population to be interviewed was the foreigners that live, visit, or work in Colombia. According to their current situation their experiences and answers were different; this is why the amount of interviews to be made depended on the amount of data collected.

The type of sample to be used was the voluntary participants' sample in which the participants answer positively to an invitation to be involved in the research.

### Data collection

Given that one of the best ways to collect information for the qualitative type of research is the interview, the data to support the project was collected through two interviews where the interviewee could share opinions, experiences and knowledge. Each interview was precisely designed to collect specific information as shown in the Appendixes A and B.

### Data processing

Taking into account that this was an exploratory type of study with a qualitative approach, the data processing was always constant and went along the development of the entire project.

Throughout the collection, the data was read and reviewed in multiple occasions until the amount of information required was complete.

Once the research ended it was analyzed and tabulated into graphs along with the pertinent review.

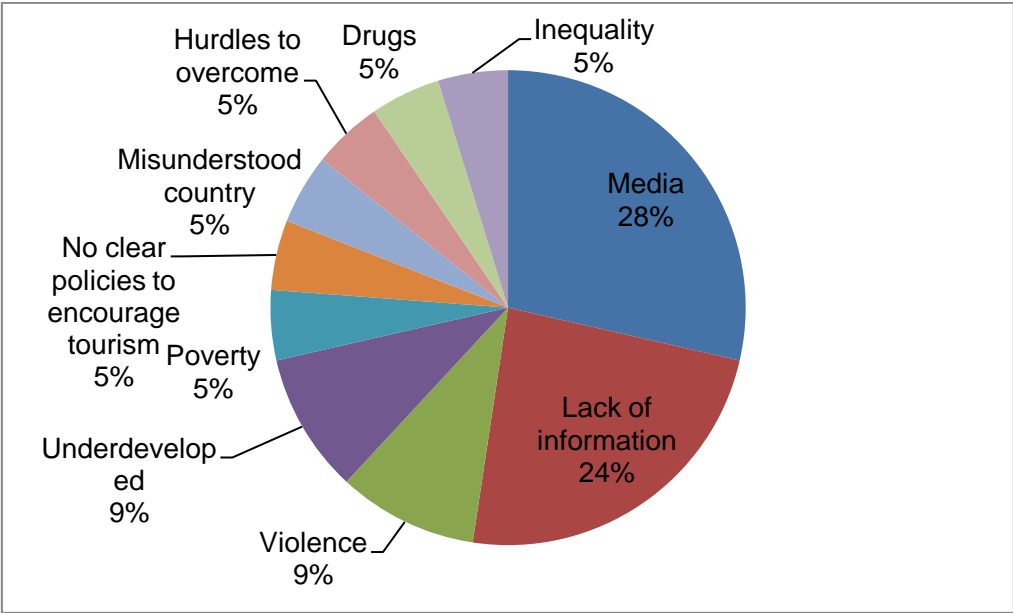
**Results / Findings**

To gather the results to conclude this investigation, two types of interviews were conducted. The first one with foreigners that live, work and visit Colombia and the second one with Colombian travel agencies.

The foreigners' interview focuses mainly on four topics: Colombia, travel agencies, language, and cultural tourism and its promotion.

In general terms, foreigners have both a positive and a negative perception of Colombia. The negative image is given in great amount by the Media and what they learn about Colombia in their native countries is that Colombia is a country where violence, drugs, and political and social hurdles overshadow its diversity and beauty.

**Colombia: Negative**



Graph 3. Negative views of Colombia according to interviews with foreigners.

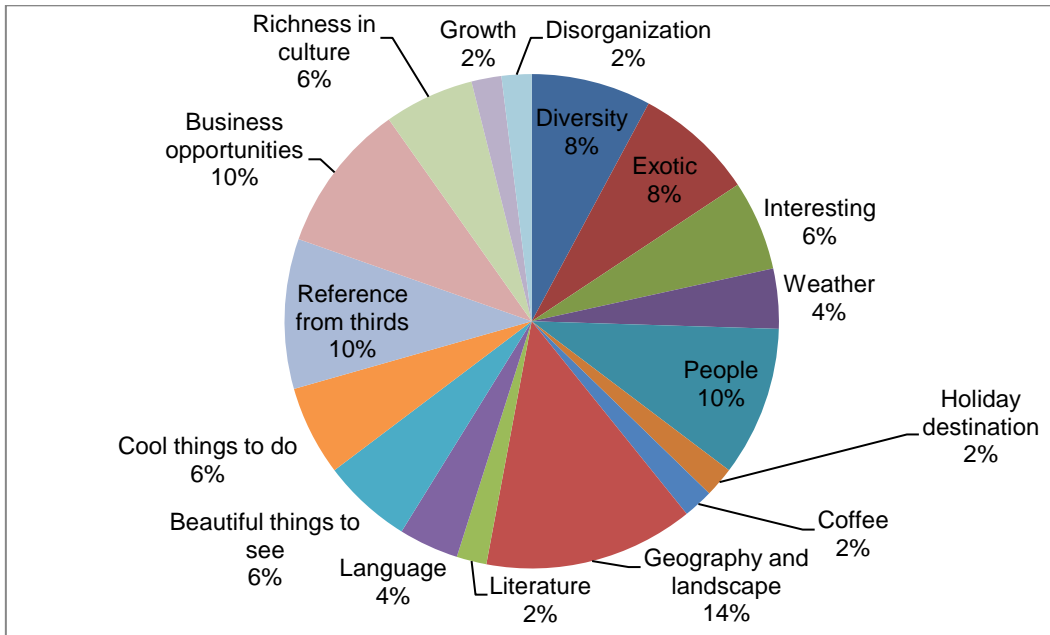


Despite the information the Media provides all over the world, in the last years the image of Colombia abroad has been improving. What foreigners learn from the Media is that Colombia is an insecure, violent, and underdeveloped country with high poverty rates, but nowadays the government has been implementing new strategies to change that image. Most of the interviewed foreigners affirmed that Colombia is very different to what they had learnt back in their native countries; there is a huge difference in what Colombia is said to be and what it really is. In very few words, Colombia is a “misunderstood country” (Appendix I, personal interview, March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013).

Most of the interviewed foreigners declared coming to Colombia by way of references. This is very important because all those references were from people that live or already came to visit Colombia. They acknowledge the conflicts that Colombia has, but they have experienced the side of the country that few people abroad know, the side that the Media does not show.

The foreigners interviewed came to realize that most of what they knew was partly true, but there was much more to see. One of the most common opinions the interviewed foreigners have is that one of the best and most attractive things of Colombia is the geography, landscapes and its diversity. The mystery and exoticism of Colombia are very common impressions as well as the business opportunities for foreigners. The unexpected, the warm and friendly people, the richness in culture, among all these positive aspects surpass those negative ones and provide a real image of what Colombia is.

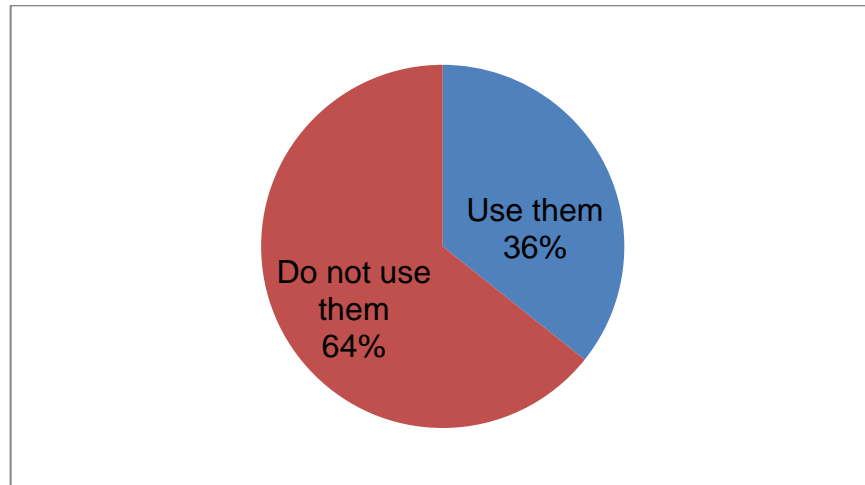
## Colombia: Positive



*Graph 4. Positive views of Colombia according to interviews with foreigners.*

The opinion towards using travel agencies is divided. On one hand and it being the strongest position, most of the foreigners claimed not using or being interested in using a travel agency for their trips. The general opinion is that the types of plan provided by travel agencies are expensive, very general and boring.

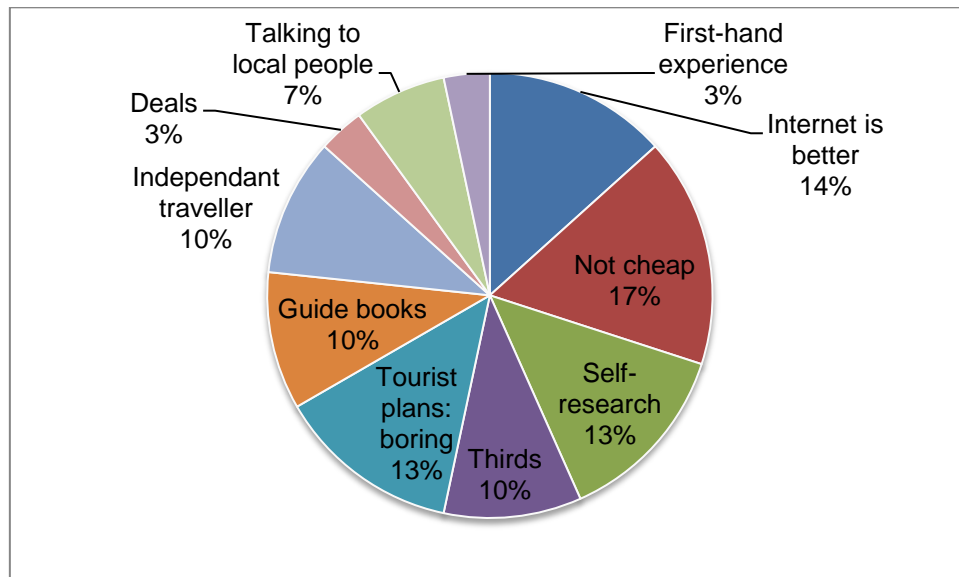
## Use of travel agencies



*Graph 5. Use of travel agencies by foreigners in Colombia. Data from interviews with foreigners in Colombia.*

Taking into account that most of the interviewed foreigners are young people (25-35 years old), the mass tourism and the commercial tours are not an interesting choice. Young travelers have a know-how when travelling. They prefer to make some research by themselves using the Internet and guide books, talking and travelling with friends and to create their own plan which definitely will be more interesting and cheaper.

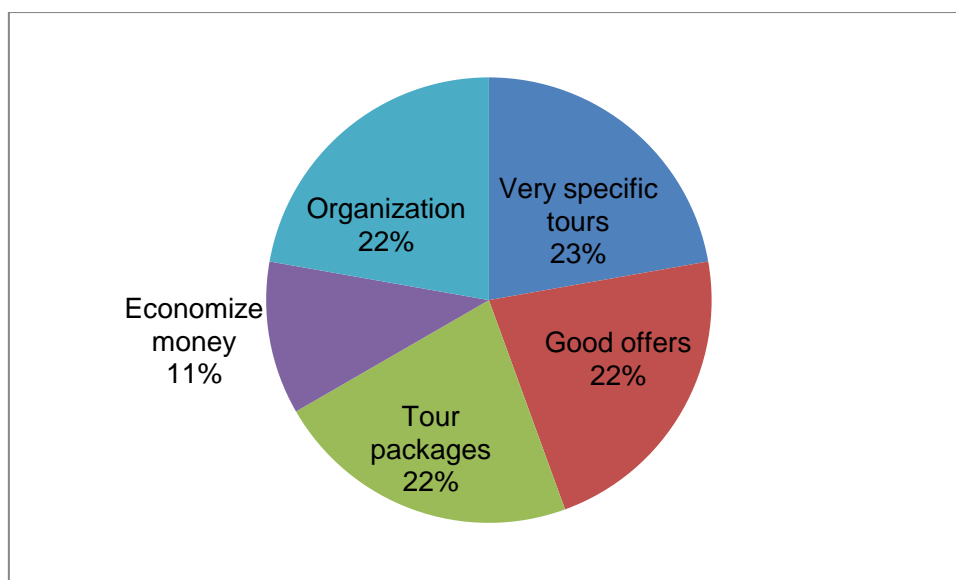
## Travel agencies: Reasons for not using them



*Graph 6. Travel agencies: Reasons for not using them. Data from interviews with foreigners in Colombia.*

On the other hand, a minor group of foreigners prefer and have used travel agencies for their trips. This group is mainly composed by people that are married and have children. They prefer to have an organized plan when travelling because it is a way of knowing for sure what to do and how much to spend.

## Travel agencies: Reasons for using them

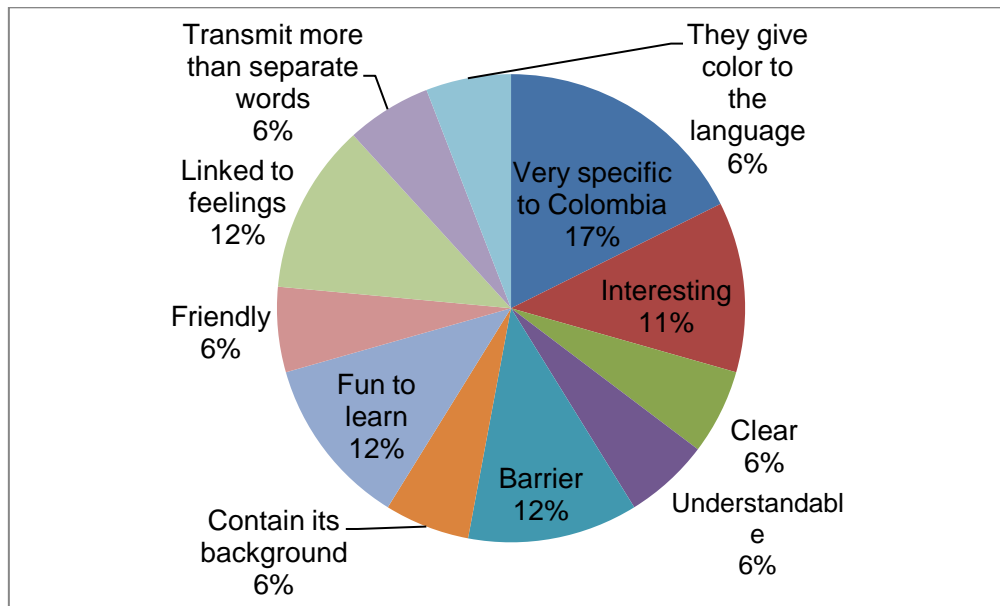


*Graph 7. Travel agencies: Reasons for using them. Data from interviews with foreigners in Colombia.*

Another topic covered in the interview is the Spanish language focused on idiomatic expressions. The total of the interviewed foreigners speak Spanish and know what idiomatic expressions are. The answers the foreigners gave revolve around two main points: idiomatic expressions and its relation with culture.

According to their opinion, idiomatic expressions give color to the language since they are linked mostly to feelings and express more than simple words; the concept or concepts they represent encapsulate the emotional aspect. Idiomatic expressions are part of the culture because their origins are related to specific Colombian situations and both Colombian characteristics and behaviors. Nevertheless they can also represent a barrier when communicating due to the context needed to understand their meaning.

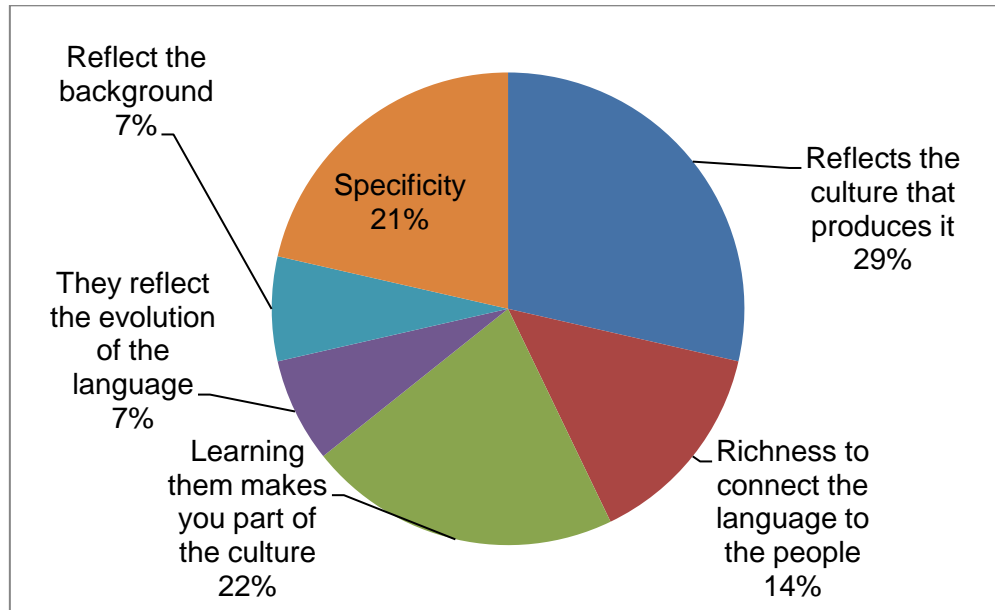
## Idiomatic expressions



Graph 8. View of idiomatic expressions according to interviews with foreigners in Colombia.

The idiomatic expressions' relation with culture is represented through their specificity and ability to integrate people. This specificity is reflected in the concepts used, as the case of *Dar papaya*, one of the most quoted idiomatic expressions. This idiomatic expression is very specific to Colombian culture due to the origin of this fruit and it reflects the culture.

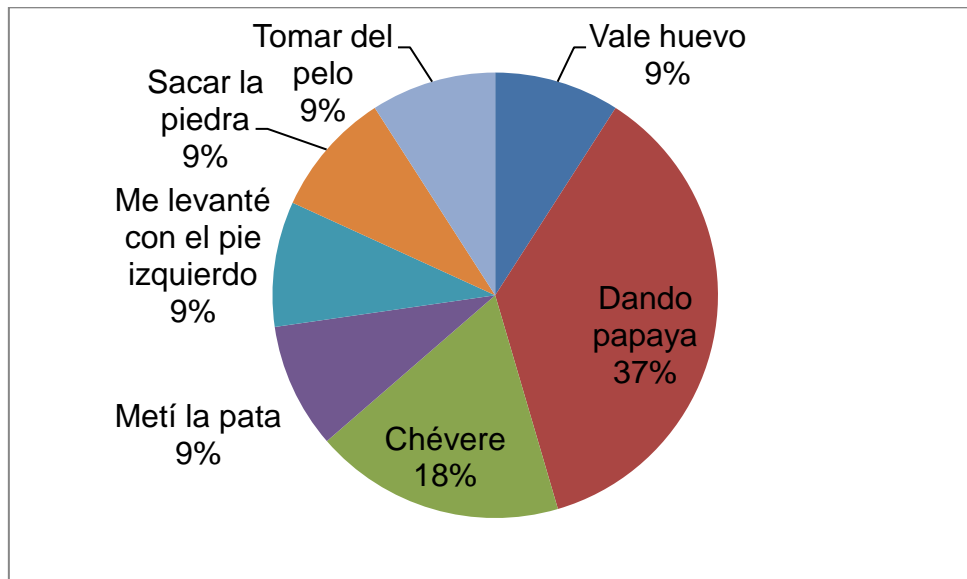
## Relation with culture



*Graph 9. Connection between idiomatic expressions and culture according to data from interviews with foreigners in Colombia.*

For most of the foreigners, learning Colombian idiomatic expressions is a way to get closer to Colombian culture. They make them feel less a tourist and more a Colombian considering that idiomatic expressions provide a richness of means to connect the language to people.

## Examples of idiomatic expressions



*Graph 10. Examples of idiomatic expressions known by foreigners. Data from interviews with foreigners in Colombia.*

The final topic discussed in the interview was cultural tourism and its promotion. To start with, the foreigners explained or guessed what cultural tourism is and then they stated their opinion in terms of promotion.

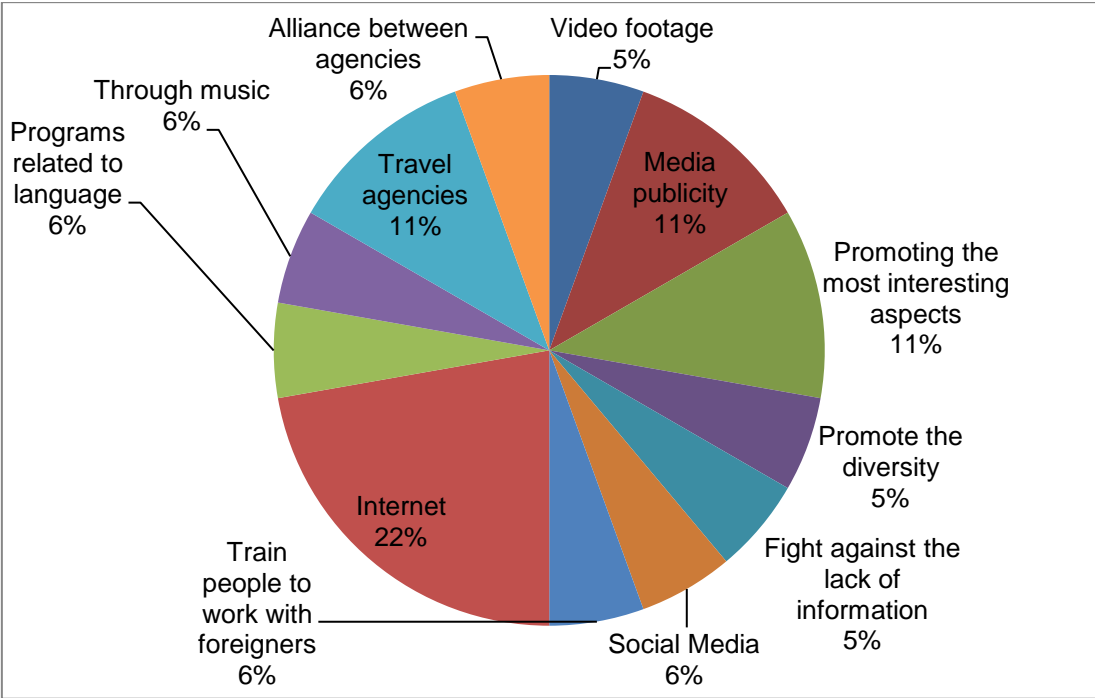
As a general approach, cultural tourism involves every concept and characteristic related to culture, for instance cultural and historical highlights, traditional aspects as dance, costumes, food, artisanal crafts, etc, visiting different types of communities, among others. It is a way of experiencing culture in the most authentic way as possible as opposed as going to the beach, etc.

Concerning the promotion of cultural tourism several ideas emerged. Foreigners agree on the diversity and the all the positive aspects Colombia has to offer; this is the reason why for them it is important to take the most interesting and positive aspects, things people would be interested in and promote them through video



footage and Media publicity. Another way of promotion is through alliances between both national and international agencies to emphasize on this type of tourism.

### Promotion



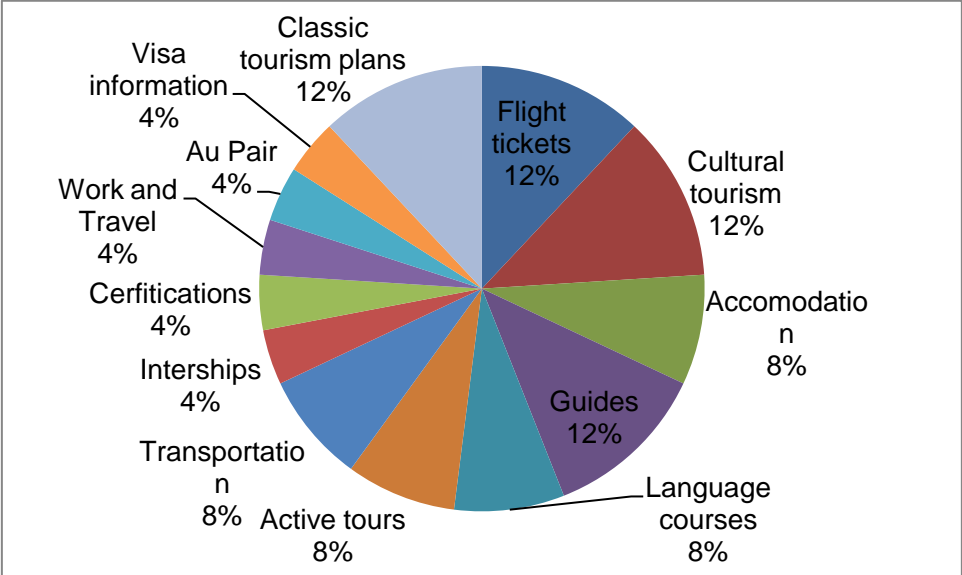
Graph 11. Promotion of cultural tourism. Data from interviews with foreigners in Colombia.

All these ideas are strongly relevant due to the lack of information abroad. Before the increase in tourism rates, the Colombian government had no clear policies to encourage Colombians to prepare for the arrival of a greater number and variety of tourists. Right now, due to the increased tourism, Colombia is creating new strategies to show Colombia as a worth-knowing destination.

The other type of interview which concerned travel agencies focused mainly on its services, cultural tourism, its clients, the promotion of these services, and possible strategies.

These travel agencies offer all types of tourism services such as flight tickets at good prices, accommodations according to the needs of the customers, and general tourist packages among which cultural tourism plans are included.

### Travel agencies: Services

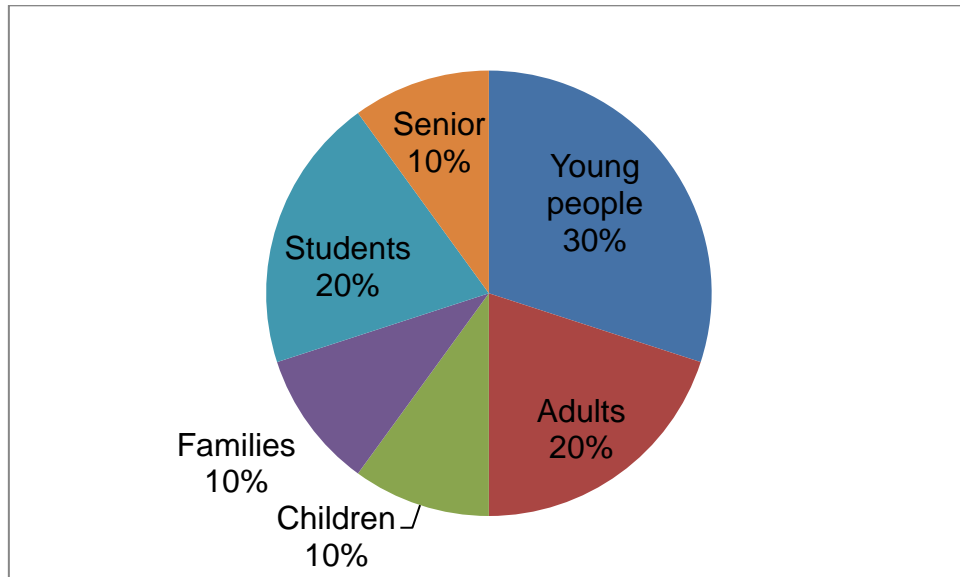


Graph 12. Services travel agencies in Colombia offer.

These agencies conceive cultural tourism as a way of seeing the country as it is, understanding it, and getting in touch with the typical and everyday aspects that comprise culture. Whether by tourism plans focused on culture or by visiting indigenous communities, these agencies bring its clients closer to the culture and apprehend it as an important part of travelling.

The clients these agencies cater to are mainly young people but they do not segment the market in a drastic way. According to the interviewed managers most of the plans they offer are for young people but it is usual for families to go looking for classic tourism plans.

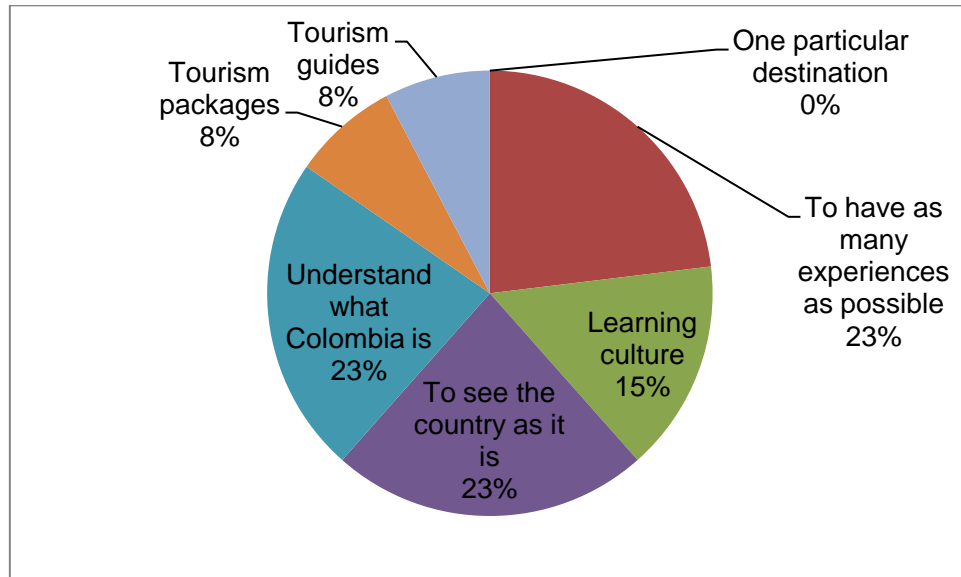
## Type of clients



*Graph 13. Type of clients travel agencies in Colombia cater to.*

Clients are essentially looking not just for one destination; they are interested in including and combining different aspects of culture, exotic and new destinations and having as many experiences as possible.

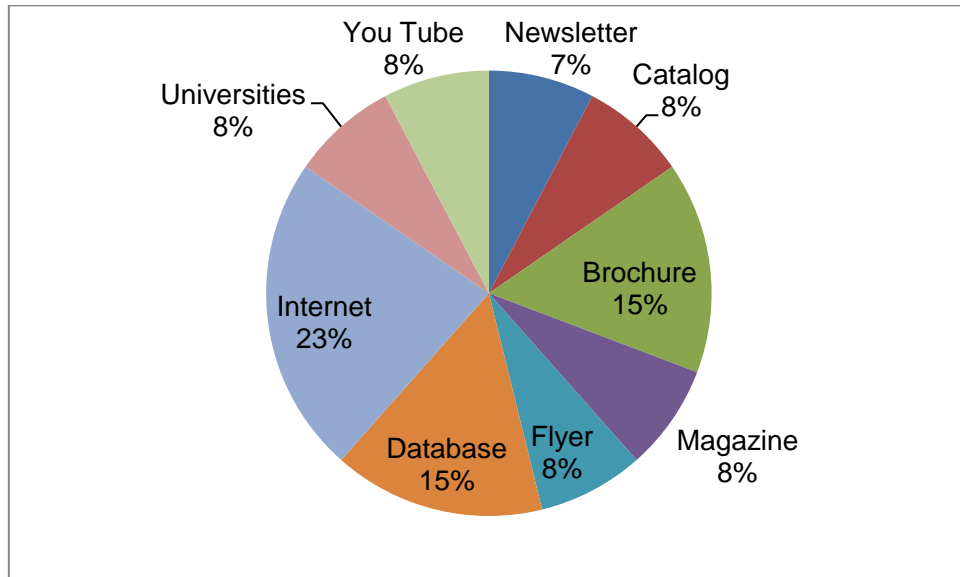
## What do foreigners look for in Colombia?



*Graph 14. What foreign travelers in Colombia look for. Data from interviews with travel agencies.*

Due to this fact, the promotion in each agency is focused primarily on cultural plans and non-traditional tourism. They use different means to promote the plans as newsletters, catalogs and brochures, magazines, flyers, databases but the most important mean which nowadays is really effective is the Internet.

## Means of promotion

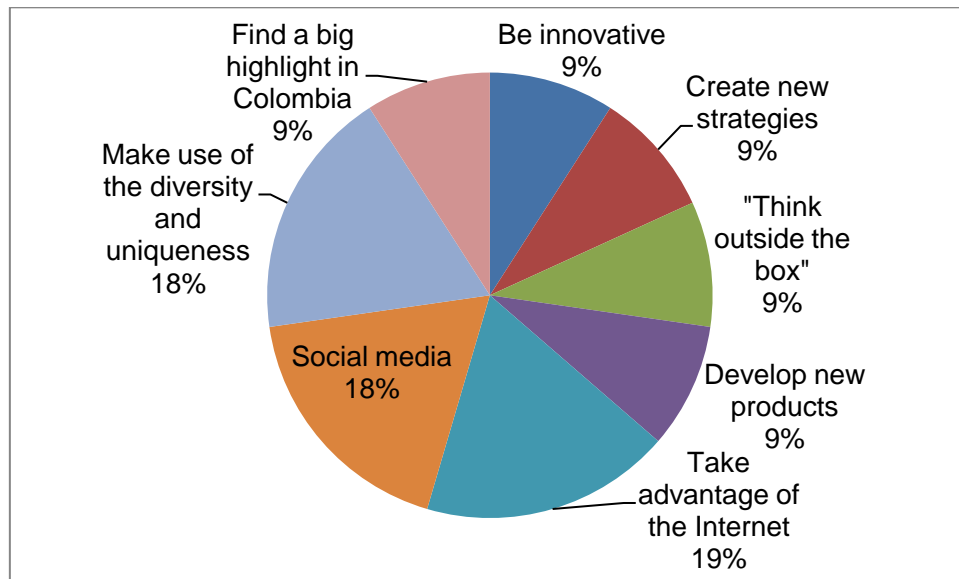


*Graph 15. Means of promotion for travel agencies in Colombia.*

The Internet provides a connection with the whole world; the rank of clients that can be found through social networks and web pages is outstandingly greater and they provide more results than the physical and current means of promotion.

As a conclusion for the interview the managers were asked to answer what a successful marketing strategy comprises. Several ideas came by as always being innovative, creating new strategies to attract customers, “thinking outside the box”, and developing new products for the clients, among others.

## Travel agencies: Strategy



*Graph 16. Travel agency strategies according to data from interviews with Colombian travel agencies.*

Among these ideas there were two opinions worth further mentioning. A particular agency uses the Internet as its main tool of promotion. Through the Internet it uses blogs, music channels, web pages, social networks such as Twitter and Facebook, to get in touch with its customers and not just to take advantage of selling and promoting its plans but to get to know them in a different kind of way rather than just a customer-vendor relationship.

The other opinion is fundamentally related to the way Colombia is seen abroad. Countries such as Peru and Brazil have clear highlights such as Machu Picchu and the Rio Carnival but Colombia has no clear highlight to be used as something representative abroad. A successful strategy has to include the diversity and uniqueness of Colombia and its people because "it is something special to travel

here, it is one of the best kept secrets in the world.” (Appendix II, personal interview, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013)

## ***Conclusion***

The hypothesis of this monograph is to analyze if the translation of idiomatic expressions, as a key and innovative way to transmit the Colombian culture, could be a marketing strategy for travel agencies in Colombia.

This investigation reveals that the translation of idiomatic expressions can be a marketing strategy for travel agencies due to four main reasons:

First of all it is safe to say that according to the results obtained in the interviews, Media is not the best option to promote Colombian tourism. Nowadays the image of Colombia abroad has been changing due to the improvement of tourism in the country but the hurdles Colombia has to overcome are still the most transmitted abroad. Despite this image, once foreigners come to Colombia the positive aspects they learn through their experience in the country surpass in every way the negative ones.

Regarding language and idiomatic expressions, it can be concluded that both are a way to connect foreigners to Colombian culture. One of the main aspects of language is to express and transmit ideas. Foreigners can learn about and connect to the Colombian culture considering that the use of idiomatic expressions and understanding their meaning strongly depends on their relationship with a context, specifically and in this case Colombian context and culture.

Respecting the promotion strategies of travel agencies it can be concluded that the Internet is the most effective way to reach both current and new customers.



Nowadays given the development of technology it is easier to reach people all over the world and transmit information in a faster and more efficient way.

Finally, cultural tourism is a strong tool to help transmit the culture. It is true that currently there is not a recognized highlight in Colombia as an historical attraction or cultural event that can be promoted as other places in the world; the lack of appropriate promotion is the biggest factor for this not to happen but the travel agencies through the Internet can change that.

The combination of these aspects could turn out to be a successful marketing strategy to let the world know that Colombia is in fact a special place to visit, “one of the best kept secrets” in the world.

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