



## **A Semiotic Critique of Neocolonial Visual Identity Branding in Seychelles Tourism**

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### **Abstract**

Seychelles' tourism branding, framed globally as a tropical island paradise, mobilises visual signs that risk reproducing a neocolonial imaginary of a "paradise without people." While destination branding research has focused on strategy and image outcomes, less attention has been paid to the semiotic function of visual identity and its interpretation by diverse audiences. This study adopts a semiotic perspective to examine how four groups: local residents, tourists, designers, and a general audience, interpret the visual identity of Seychelles tourism branding through a single official promotional image. Using a survey-based design, participants evaluated a stimulus poster drawn from the Seychelles' official Brand Guidelines (2022). Analysis covers meaning-making through logos, typography, colour, photography, composition, and people-nature content. Findings show that photography and colour dominated attention, with green and blue powerfully signifying nature and environmental purity. The slogan "Another World" achieved strong recall despite its typographic execution disrupting readability. Crucially, interpretations of the brochure diverged: tourists associated authenticity with pristine, people-free landscapes, while local residents sought cultural presence and everyday Seychellois representation. This study reveals the visual imaginaries through which different audiences interpret the same image, demonstrating how tropical tourism visuals mediate neocolonial, environmental, and cultural meanings.

**Keywords:** Semiotics of tourism, Seychelles, destination branding, neocolonial imagery, visual identity, tropical island tourism, tourism branding

## Introduction

Tourism destinations increasingly compete on image rather than product alone. As global markets expand and visitor expectations diversify, destinations' capacity to craft and communicate a strong brand identity has become a central concern in practice and research (Dinnie, 2015). Branding is no longer confined to consumer goods or services; instead, nations, cities, and regions deploy branding strategies to differentiate themselves in a crowded marketplace. At the heart of this lies destination branding, where visual and narrative cues together convey the promise of place.

In theoretical terms, visual identity is a subset of brand identity that comprises logos, typography, colour palettes, imagery, and composition (Kladou et al., 2017). These elements work in concert to produce recognisable associations and lasting impressions. Logos function as symbolic anchors, typography conveys tone and character, colour encodes emotion and symbolism, photography projects authenticity or aspiration, and composition determines clarity and emphasis. In tourism, these elements are particularly powerful because destinations are consumed first and foremost through images and imagination (Morgan & Pritchard, 2007; Marine-Roig, 2015). The effectiveness of a campaign often hinges on whether its visual components can cut through clutter, achieve recall, and align with audience expectations.

Despite widespread recognition of the importance of destination branding, gaps remain in evaluating how visual identity is perceived across multiple audiences. Much research emphasises either the managerial perspective (how brand strategies are designed) or macro outcomes such as tourist arrivals, but relatively less attention is given to showing that visual cues are interpreted differently by locals, visitors, and external audiences. Such visual analysis is important as inauthentic images alienate host communities or fail to resonate with target markets (Fang & Xiang, 2023).

Seychelles offers a timely and important case for such inquiry. Seychelles' identity is rooted in its colonial history. Originally uninhabited, the islands were colonized by France and then Britain, until gaining independence in 1976. Plantation slavery and labor migration formed a diverse Creole society with African, European, and Asian roots. Post-independence, tourism replaced agriculture as the dominant economic force. This transition integrated Seychelles into global leisure economies, fundamentally shaping its visual representation and cultural positioning as it shifted from colonial plantation to marketed tropical paradise.

Tourism accounts for a major share of the national economy, making branding effectiveness not only a matter of image but of economic sustainability (McEwen & Bennett, 2010). The archipelago has projected itself through slogans such as “UNIQUE BY A THOUSAND MILES” and “Another world”, drawing on its pristine beaches and romantic appeal. Nevertheless, this positioning also reflects a neocolonial tourist gaze, where islands are framed as empty paradises for external consumption rather than as lived spaces with cultural depth. This aligns with critiques of neocolonial tourism practices in the tropics, where branding erases or minimises local identities while reinforcing exotic stereotypes. At the same time, the dominance of natural imagery situates Seychelles within global discourses of environmental tourism, raising questions about the commodification of fragile ecosystems. As recent research notes, the challenge is to balance visual branding with cultural authenticity and sustainability imperatives (Atayi, 2021). Recognising these challenges, Sophola and Dharmalingam (2025) developed a brand alignment toolkit that integrates visual and narrative elements to guide tourism operators in consistent messaging. Their work underscores Seychelles’ efforts to strengthen its brand identity at a strategic level.

Yet, while strategic frameworks are emerging, less is known about how visual elements of branding are actually perceived by different groups who interact with Seychelles’ promotional materials. If logos go unnoticed, typography is unreadable, or photography is perceived as inauthentic, then even the strongest strategic toolkit cannot achieve its goals. This gap is especially pressing because Seychelles’ imagery often leans heavily on natural beauty, raising questions about whether cultural presence is being eclipsed, and if brand marks and textual anchors perform as intended.

This study examines how four distinct groups: Seychellois residents, tourists, designers, and an unfamiliar general audience, interpret visual branding in Seychelles’ tourism. Shifting focus from brand effectiveness to semiotic meaning, the research explores how seven key components (logos, text, photography, colour, composition, content, and style) function as resources to construct “imaginaries” of the destination. Using a descriptive, comparative approach, the study identifies where interpretations converge or diverge when groups engage with the same imagery, revealing how visual identity is culturally situated and perceived across different social perspectives.

To ensure ecological validity, the survey used a stimulus image drawn directly from the current official brand guidelines of Tourism Seychelles. This promotional visual incorporated the brand's prescribed logo, typography (“*Another World*”), colour palette, and photographic style, providing participants with an authentic representation

of how the destination is currently marketed. Using an official guideline-based image rather than a researcher-designed stimulus allowed responses to reflect how Seychelles' branding performs in real communicative practice.

This study empirically examines how Seychelles' tourism visual identity functions as an ideological sign system. Through a semiotic lens, it demonstrates how logos, imagery, and colour shape historically situated imaginaries of place (Kladou et al., 2017; Sawyer et al., 2020). The findings reveal how branding reinforces neocolonial tropes—framing destinations as pristine—while audiences simultaneously interpret and contest these representations, which often marginalise local cultural presence in favour of idealised natural landscapes.

### **Visual Identity in Tourism Branding**

Visual identity is a central component of destination branding, encompassing design elements such as logos, colours, typography, imagery, and composition. These cues operate as symbolic shorthand, helping destinations differentiate themselves and gain recognition among global audiences. Research emphasises that logos and visual signs frequently embed references to local heritage, culture, and sustainability (Liang & Cheong, 2025; Adamus-Matuszyńska et al., 2021). Visual simplicity, in particular, has been shown to enhance perceptions of authenticity, though this effect is moderated by familiarity and cultural resonance (Wang et al., 2023).

Tourism contexts often deploy imagery that highlights natural beauty or cultural icons, while logos and colour schemes reinforce broader brand positioning. Typography and legibility also matter: certain fonts are more easily processed in short-exposure contexts, influencing how quickly messages are received and remembered (Sawyer et al., 2020). However, scholars caution that while visual elements are essential for recognition, their direct behavioural influence may be weaker than broader experiential or narrative dimensions of branding (Kladou et al., 2017).

### ***Semiotics in Tourism Visuals***

Semiotics offers a critical framework for understanding how tourism destinations are visually represented and how meaning is constructed through images and design elements. Rather than seeing tourism visuals as neutral, a semiotic approach conceptualises them as sign systems where elements operate as signifiers, producing culturally embedded meanings (Barthes, 1972). Following Barthes, imagery functions on a denotative (literal depiction) and a connotative (deeper cultural/ideological associations) level. Within tourism studies, semiotic analysis of

promotional materials like posters and brochures shows that imagery relies on recurring visual codes: pristine landscapes, empty beaches, and traditional motifs, to construct myths of paradise, authenticity, and escape (Culler, 1981; Urry & Larsen, 2011). These representations guide the "tourist gaze" (Urry & Larsen, 2011), directing attention toward difference and novelty while marginalising or erasing local contemporary life. Island and tropical destinations are especially prone to these constructions, with marketing often privileging nature over people, creating imaginaries of untouched, timeless paradises (Dann, 1996; Bonarou, 2021). Postcolonial tourism scholarship critiques this pattern for reinforcing exoticised and depopulated visions of the tropics. When local people appear, they are often reduced to decorative figures rather than active social participants, transforming lived places into consumable images aligned with external expectations. Semiotic theory also distinguishes between types of signs: visuals may function *iconically* (resembling landscapes), *indexically* (pointing towards environmental qualities like purity), and *symbolically* (invoking culturally learned meanings of paradise or authenticity) (Naghizadeh, 2021). Design elements like color and typography contribute to these layers. For instance, dominant blue and green tones commonly signify natural purity and ecological harmony. Postcolonial theory highlights neocolonial continuities in tourism, where visuals render destinations consumable while obscuring local history. This is structured by the tourist gaze (Urry, 1990; Urry & Larsen, 2011), prioritising landscapes over people and thus constructing an imaginary of the tropics as timeless, sensuous paradises, while erasing social realities (Lundberg et al., 2022). From a critical semiotic perspective, these representations align with Barthes' notion of myth, naturalising ideology by stripping historical context. Thus, tourism imagery functions as myth, concealing the neocolonial power relations embedded within idealised, "untouched" tropical landscapes.

Crucially, semiotic approaches prioritise the need for *interpretation* over measurement of effectiveness. Meaning emerges through the interaction between visual signs and viewers' cultural frameworks and expectations, meaning different audiences may interpret the same tourism image divergently. Adopting this semiotic lens allows this study to treat survey responses as interpretive evidence of meaning-making, revealing how Seychelles' visual identity is read and culturally situated by different groups, rather than simply evaluating branding performance.

### ***Authenticity and Perception in Tourism Visuals***

Authenticity is one of the most debated yet crucial constructs in tourism. It influences whether visitors perceive promotional imagery as "real" or "staged," and firmly shapes satisfaction, loyalty, and revisit intentions (Kumar et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2023). Tourism research distinguishes between objective authenticity (linked to

genuine objects/sites), constructive authenticity (socially shaped meanings), and existential authenticity (personal, lived experiences) (Wang, 2023; Nguyen, 2020; Lin & Liu, 2018). Studies confirm that both object-related and existential authenticity significantly enhance memorability and satisfaction in heritage and cultural tourism (Lee et al., 2022; Lu et al., 2022; Yi et al., 2021). Visuals play a key role in these perceptions. Deceptive imagery—where places are over-glamorised—erodes trust and damages the tourist experience when reality fails to align (Fang & Xiang, 2023). Conversely, congruent use of cultural endorsers and consistent visual narratives can strengthen authenticity (Dong et al., 2023; Marine-Roig, 2015). Meta-analyses also show that objective authenticity exerts the strongest influence on loyalty, followed by constructive and existential forms (Yin & Dai, 2021).

### ***Comparative Perception Across Stakeholders***

Stakeholder groups interpret destination visuals differently. Tourists often prioritise scenic or iconic imagery, while locals focus more on cultural cues and representations of community values (Marine-Roig, 2015; Prawira et al., 2025). Recent authenticity studies confirm that place attachment mediates these perceptions: locals assess branding more critically against lived realities, while tourists emphasise atmosphere and aesthetics (Cong et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2023).

### ***Synthesis and Research Gap***

Across the literature, visual identity elements (logos, colour, typography, composition) are confirmed as central to destination branding (Liang & Cheong, 2025; Adamus-Matuszyńska et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2023; Sawyer et al., 2020). Authenticity, strongly mediated by visuals, shapes satisfaction, loyalty, and sustainable tourism outcomes (Kumar et al., 2022; Zheng et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2023). Research highlights the risks of deceptive visuals (Fang & Xiang, 2023) and the potential of consistent, culturally aligned branding to enhance trust (Dong et al., 2023; Can et al., 2024). Methodologically, visual identity studies increasingly combine surveys with participatory visual methods, yet surveys remain indispensable for cross-group comparability.

Despite these insights, there is limited research disaggregating perceptions of specific visual identity elements and comparing them across stakeholder groups. This study addresses that gap by examining how tourists, locals, designers, and general audiences perceive Seychelles' branding in terms of colours, typography, logos, and composition, and how these perceptions shape authenticity.

## Methodology

### *Data collection*

This study adopts a survey research design using a visual stimulus. Survey methods are widely used in tourism and visual identity research because they allow structured comparisons of perceptions across multiple stakeholder groups (Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2008; Zheng et al., 2023). The survey method was selected to capture both quantitative and qualitative perceptions of Seychelles' official brand identity elements, including colours, typography, logo, and overall composition.

The stimulus used in the survey was a promotional poster from the *Tourism Seychelles Brand Guidelines* (2022). This poster incorporates all core elements of the national visual identity: the multi-coloured bird logo, the slogan "Another World" in a distinctive typography style, a photographic background featuring nature, and a specific arrangement of text and image. The choice of this official material ensures ecological validity, as it represents the image presented to international and domestic audiences.

**Figure 1. Promotional Poster**



Union, 2022. <https://www.union.co.uk/case-studies/paradise-revisited>

Participants were divided into four distinct groups:

- **Tourists:** international visitors currently in Seychelles, representing the primary external audience.

- **Locals:** residents of Seychelles, providing the community's perspective.
- **Designers:** professionals or students in design fields, who bring expertise in evaluating visual identity.
- **General Audience:** individuals who have never visited Seychelles, serving as a neutral baseline.

A random sampling strategy was applied within each audience group through online outreach. Survey links were distributed via personal social media stories (Instagram, Facebook) and shared to WhatsApp groups to reach a broad and diverse audience. Tourists and locals were recruited online through these channels, while designers were primarily reached through academic networks, particularly the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati Design Department. This approach allowed access to geographically dispersed participants and ensured that each group had an opportunity to participate without researcher selection bias. Designers and general audience respondents were recruited randomly from professional networks and online platforms like Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp. The survey remained open for one week, allowing sufficient time for responses to accumulate across all groups. The target sample size was 30–50 participants per group, consistent with prior visual perception and authenticity studies (Yang et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2023), yielding an overall sample of approximately 120–200 respondents.

Questions combined multiple-choice, checkbox, Likert scale, and short open-ended formats, allowing a mix of quantitative and qualitative data. Question wording was tailored to each audience group to ensure clarity: tourists and locals were presented with simple, non-technical phrasing, while designers received slightly more technical wording (e.g., on composition and hierarchy).

### ***Data collection***

Data analysis followed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of visual identity perception.

Quantitative analysis included:

- **Frequencies and percentages** for multiple-choice and checkbox items (e.g., which colours were noticed most often).
- **Means and standard deviations** for Likert scale responses (e.g., perceived balance, readability).

**Qualitative analysis** focused on the open-ended questions. Responses were subjected to thematic coding, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, to identify recurring themes such as elements perceived as inauthentic, confusing, or out of place. Comparisons were then made across groups to detect variations in interpretation—for example, whether locals emphasise cultural cues more than tourists, or whether designers critique composition more closely than general audiences.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Definition of Visual Identity Elements***

In the context of destination branding, visual identity refers to the set of designed elements that work together to create a consistent, recognisable, and meaningful image of a place (Klaxon et al., 2017). While brand identity encompasses a broad mix of verbal, experiential, and symbolic cues, the visual dimension has particular power in tourism marketing because destinations are consumed primarily through images and imagination (Morgan & Pritchard, 2007; Marine-Roig, 2015). The visual identity of a destination thus becomes both a representation of place and a strategic communication tool.

For the purposes of this study, seven key visual identity elements were considered:

#### **1. Logo**

The logo functions as the primary visual signature of the destination brand. In tourism, logos are often paired with slogans or graphic motifs to enhance recall and association (Liang & Cheong, 2025).

#### **2. Typography/ Words**

Typography conveys tone through style and weight, while slogans provide a linguistic anchor that frames the destination. Slogans are short, memorable, and evocative, and their visual rendering (font, placement, hierarchy) affects both legibility and impact.

#### **3. Photography/ Imagery**

Visual imagery is the dominant communicative medium in tourism marketing (Marine-Roig, 2015). Photography not only captures scenery but also signals what aspects of

a destination are considered central: natural landscapes, cultural life, or staged tourist experiences. Image choices construct the narrative of what is authentic, desirable, or memorable about a place (Fang & Xiang, 2023)

#### **4. Colour**

Colour involves symbolic meaning and emotional responses. In tourism contexts, blue is often tied to sea and sky, green to nature and authenticity, and warm tones to vibrancy and energy (Adamus-Matuszyńska, 2019; Lin et al., 2023). A consistent palette reinforces brand recognition, while imbalance or over-saturation can reduce credibility.

#### **5. Composition/ Layout**

Composition governs how visual elements are arranged, balanced, and framed. Layout choices affect hierarchy—whether the eye is drawn to logos, slogans, or imagery—and influence perceptions of professionalism and clarity (Sawyer et al., 2020). In destination branding, composition must harmonise diverse elements without cluttering the central message.

#### **6. People/Nature elements**

Beyond formal design elements, what the imagery shows—landscapes, cultural symbols, animals, or people—is central to brand identity. Tourists often associate destinations with natural icons (beaches, wildlife, greenery), while locals expect cultural authenticity (traditional dress, daily life, local figures) (Marine-Roig, 2015). Content choices thus signal what aspects of place are emphasised or erased.

#### **7. Miscellaneous Details**

Secondary treatments such as frames, shadows, or decorative overlays shape an advertisement's perceived professionalism and clarity. While often subtle, these details can either support coherence or distract from the core message (Sawyer et al., 2020). Inconsistent or excessive embellishments may reduce brand credibility and weaken visual hierarchy.

Taken together, these seven elements form the lens through which the survey findings were analysed. In the following subsections, we present how each group of participants—locals, tourists, designers, and the general audience—responded to

these components in Seychelles' advertising materials, integrating the results with relevant literature to discuss their implications for destination branding.

### **Logo**

From a semiotic perspective, the limited noticeability of the logo suggests that it functioned weakly as a signifier within the visual field, failing to anchor meaning consistently across audience groups. For locals ( $n = 37$ ), it was mentioned but often with critique, including poor blending with imagery, awkward placement, and problems with background removal and resizing. Improvement requests from locals frequently called for cleaner integration, removal of distracting frames, and simplification of visual flourishes. Tourists ( $n = 7$ ) largely did not notice the logo at all, and when they did, it was usually to remark that it was "too small" or "hard to read." This indicates that the logo's semiotic role as a stabilising brand sign was overshadowed by other visual elements, particularly photography and colour, which carried stronger symbolic weight.

Quantitative ratings of the logo's clarity and visibility reflected these concerns. Designers gave an average score of 3.08 ( $SD = 1.17$ ) on a 5-point scale, while locals rated it 3.37 ( $SD = 1.3$ ), and the general audience median was 3.0 ( $IQR = 2.0$ ). These moderate values suggest that while the logo was not seen as wholly ineffective, it did not achieve strong visibility across groups.

When asked which features of the logo stood out, groups highlighted different aspects. Designers most often selected the **wings** (34.2%), **shape** (29%), and **colours** (29%). Locals similarly noticed the **colours** (36.8%) and **shape** (34.2%), with some also identifying **wings** (26.3%). The general audience overwhelmingly noticed **colours** (47.3%), followed by **wings** (31.6%) and **shape** (21.1%). Text and minor details like tails, petals, or fins were rarely selected.

Taken together, the results suggest that while the logo's individual components, particularly its colours and wings, were visually identifiable, the overall brand mark lacked consistent salience and recognition across audiences.

### **Typography/Words**

Typography and words emerged as much more salient elements than the logo across all groups. The phrase "*Another World*" was the most consistently recognised slogan: noticed by 89.7% of locals, 94.4% of the general audience, and 89.5% of designers. The alternative phrase "*The Seychelles Islands*" was recalled by smaller proportions—

21.1% of locals, 7.9% of designers, and 5.6% of the general audience—while only a handful of participants recalled the web address (*Seychelles.travel*).

Quantitative ratings reinforced these patterns. Designers rated the main slogan highly for prominence and clarity, with a mean of 4.29 (SD = 1.14) on a 5-point scale. By contrast, they gave low ratings for font blending (mean = 1.55, SD = 1.01) and readability (mean = 2.32, SD = 1.21). Similarly, the general audience gave a median score of 5.0 (IQR = 1.5) for slogan prominence, but low medians of 1.5 and 2.0 for blending and readability, respectively. Locals, in open responses, also emphasised the visibility of the words but frequently requested improvements to readability and simplification of the typographic style.

Taken together, the findings suggest that while the slogan “Another World” operated as a highly salient linguistic signifier, its typographic execution complicated meaning-making by disrupting visual coherence and legibility across audience readings.

### ***Photography/Imagery***

Photography and imagery consistently dominated attention across all groups. For locals, the first noticed elements were **nature (47.4%)** and **people (36.8%)**, followed by the sky (13.2%). Their secondary attention reinforced this split, with people (36.8%), nature (34.2%), and the sky (21.1%) most often mentioned. General audience respondents showed an even stronger preference for **nature (63.2%)**, followed by people (26.3%), while their secondary attention shifted toward **people (47.4%)**, alongside the sky and nature (21.1% each). Designers' attention was more dispersed but still centred on **people (29%)**, **nature (23.7%)**, and **sky (21.1%)**, with smaller proportions noticing text, photography quality, or layout features. Their secondary attention similarly emphasised people (26.3%) and nature/sky (18.4% each), with a minority noting typography (13.2%) and other details.

Across groups, then, photography of **people and natural scenery** dominated both first and secondary attention, with words, logos, and other design features comparatively overlooked.

### ***Colour***

Across all groups, **green and blue consistently dominated colour perception**. Among locals, the first noticed colour was **blue (64.1%)**, followed by green (33.3%). In checkbox responses, **green (66.7%)** and **blue (35.9%)** were again most common, with smaller mentions of yellow (17.9%), red (10.3%), white (7.7%), and sand (2.6%).

Their average rating of the colour palette was relatively high at 4.03 (SD = 1.1) on a 5-point scale.

The general audience also identified **blue (73.7%)** as the first noticed colour, with green (15.8%), grey (5.3%), and beige/sand (5.3%) less frequent. In checkbox responses, **green (73.7%)** was most dominant, followed by blue (21.1%), with yellow and red both at 10.5% and sand at 15.8%. They also rated the palette positively, with a median of 4.0 (IQR = 1.5).

Designers differed slightly, with **blue (73.7%)** overwhelmingly first noticed, followed by green (18.4%) and small mentions of yellow, brown, and logo colours (each 2.6%). In the checkbox, **green (60.5%)** and **blue (36.8%)** again dominated, alongside secondary mentions of white (21.1%), beige/sand (10.5%), grey (10.5%), red (10.5%), brown (5.2%), and black (2.6%). Their average rating of the palette was more moderate at 3.55 (SD = 1.03).

Semiotically, blue and green functioned as dominant chromatic signifiers, repeatedly activating culturally familiar associations with sea, vegetation, ecological purity, and tropicity across audience groups.

### **Composition**

Across all groups, the photograph of people and nature was the most consistently noticed element. Designers (63.1%), locals (76.3%), and the general audience (77.8%) all directed their initial attention to this feature, while secondary elements were mentioned less often. Words attracted some attention—21.1% of designers, 13.2% of locals, and 11.1% of the general audience—while the logo was identified by only 5–10% of participants. Minor details such as the frame, shadows, or background were rarely mentioned.

When asked which elements disrupted the overall layout, participants most frequently pointed to the words: 44.7% of designers, 52.6% of locals, and 63.7% of the general audience considered them distracting. The photograph itself was also described as a distraction by a significant minority in each group (approximately one-third of participants). The logo was occasionally cited as disruptive, particularly among locals, while only a handful of respondents mentioned the frame or sky as problematic.

The moderate evaluations of composition reflect not failure but interpretive friction, where competing visual elements disrupted a stable hierarchy of signs. Designers gave an average score of 3.61 (SD = 1.1), locals rated it 3.29 (SD = 1.06), and the general

audience median was 3.0 (IQR = 1.75). These values suggest that participants considered the composition acceptable but not strong.

### ***People/Nature Elements***

The theme of people/nature emerged strongly across Q15a and Q15b. For **locals**, people/nature references dominated both attention and improvement categories. They highlighted beaches, sea, greenery, and sky, but also expressed a strong desire for more **authentic cultural and natural cues**—turtles, coco de mer, traditional dress, and locals rather than staged tourists.

For **tourists**, nature cues were even more central. Beaches, trees, and turtles captured their attention, while improvement requests focused on **more nature, fewer people**, and less text. Tourists equated authenticity with **unspoiled landscapes and wildlife**, rather than human presence.

Designers and general audiences acknowledged people/nature, but often more in terms of how imagery was executed (balance, realism) rather than content expectations.

### ***Miscellaneous Stylistic Details***

In Q15b of the survey, participants across groups called for the removal of **frames, brush strokes, shadows, extra text, and background effects**. Locals in particular criticised these embellishments, associating them with clutter and reduced professionalism. Designers echoed this critique, identifying shadows and overlays as distractions. Tourists, though less specific, described compositions as "too busy" or "distracting."

### ***Cross-Group Comparison***

A cross-group synthesis highlights both convergences and divergences in how Seychelles' visual identity was perceived. **Locals** emphasised authenticity, seeking visuals that reflected Seychellois culture and natural heritage rather than imagery staged for tourists. Their critiques of logos and typography reflected concerns with coherence and cultural representation.

**Tourists** consistently prioritised natural scenery: beaches, trees, turtles, and ocean views—while text and human figures were often considered distracting. Their tendency to neglect the logo altogether suggests that brand marks did not perform their recognition function.

**Designers** focused on executional qualities such as balance, palette, and technical integration. They were especially attentive to layout flaws, shadows, and typographic blending, offering a professional lens on quality that complemented locals' authenticity concerns.

The **general audience**, though a smaller sample, largely mirrored tourists in prioritising natural scenery and green–blue palettes, reinforcing the centrality of environmental imagery for external audiences unfamiliar with Seychelles.

## Discussion

### *Logo*

Logos are conventionally considered the central identifier of brand equity (Kladou et al., 2017). The muted visibility and criticism of the logo in this study raises questions about the effectiveness of Seychelles' current brand mark in applied advertising. While quantitative ratings placed the logo in the **moderate range** (means around 3.0–3.4), this level falls short of the clarity and recognition typically required for a successful brand symbol. Literature suggests that logos must maintain visibility and consistency across applications (Liang & Cheong, 2025).

The findings further suggest a disconnect between recognition of **individual components** and perception of the logo as a whole. Respondents across groups identified colours, wings, and shape as noticeable features, yet the logo in its entirety failed to stand out as a cohesive identifier. Locals often described it as obstructive or poorly blended, and tourists frequently failed to register it at all—indicating a breakdown of both functional recognition and aesthetic acceptance.

For a destination brand, this is not a trivial issue: without a consistent visual marker, the brand risks depending entirely on contextual imagery (beaches, nature) for identification. The Seychelles' logo, at least in its current executions, may not be serving as an effective shortcut for recognition. Instead, it becomes an element to be corrected or even omitted. This finding underscores the need for refinement of placement, contrast, and scaling in applied media, in line with Sawyer et al. (2020) on logo integration.

### *Typography/Words*

Typography, and especially the use of words, functions as a linguistic anchor in destination branding (Morgan & Pritchard, 2007). The prominence of *"Another World"* confirms its salience, with recall rates approaching 90% across all participant groups.

This supports earlier research showing that short, evocative, and consistently applied slogans achieve high memorability (Wang et al., 2023). Quantitative ratings reinforced this, with high scores for slogan prominence among designers and the general audience.

Nevertheless, the results also reveal a critical weakness: while the words succeed conceptually, their **typographic rendering undermines effectiveness**. Designers and general audience respondents both rated font blending and readability poorly, and locals requested clearer text and reduced clutter. This reflects a broader design principle: text must not only capture attention but must also maintain legibility across diverse layouts.

Thus, in the Seychelles campaign, words appear successful in recall but flawed in execution. Addressing typographic integration, hierarchy, and readability would strengthen the balance between visual imagery and textual anchoring, ensuring the brand's linguistic promise aligns with its visual delivery.

### ***Photography/Imagery***

Photography and imagery remain the strongest drivers of attention across all audiences, aligning with prior research that destinations are often consumed through visual landscapes (Marine-Roig, 2015). Locals primarily noticed **nature and people together**, but their improvement requests highlighted a preference for more authentic cues—such as turtles, coco de mer, local dress, and Seychellois individuals rather than staged tourists. This reflects a desire for cultural authenticity within natural imagery. Tourists were even more skewed toward **nature alone**, consistently highlighting beaches, sea, and wildlife while requesting fewer people in the frame. Designers and the general audience largely followed the same pattern, confirming that natural scenery dominates recall, while typography and logos are peripheral. Yet designers additionally noted aspects of photographic quality and balance, consistent with their training in visual evaluation.

Taken together, the findings suggest that while photography is Seychelles' strongest branding asset, it risks reinforcing a **neocolonial "paradise without people" narrative** if cultural presence continues to be minimised. For Seychelles to align authenticity with global appeal, photographic execution must balance **natural icons** with **representations of local identity**.

## ***Colour***

In this study, **green and blue emerged as the most dominant colours**, confirming Seychelles' palette alignment with common associations of tropical destinations: blue for sea and sky, green for lush vegetation. This echoes earlier work noting that destination marketing often foregrounds water and nature hues to signal environmental appeal (Pan et al., 2014).

The prominence of **blue as the first noticed colour** suggests its immediate salience in visual hierarchy, while **green gained strength when participants reflected on multiple palette elements**, pointing to its anchoring role in environmental identity. Quantitative ratings were generally positive, especially among locals and the general audience, but designers were more critical, rating the palette moderately. This divergence highlights how **design-trained viewers may be more sensitive to over-familiar or clichéd palettes**, whereas non-expert audiences view these colours as fitting and appealing.

While Seychelles' branding benefits from the clarity of this natural palette, it also risks **visual predictability**. If blue and green dominate excessively, they may reproduce generic tropical imagery rather than a distinctive national identity. Balancing these colours with culturally grounded tones could enhance both recognisability and authenticity.

## ***Composition***

Composition, though less immediately salient, acts as the **structural glue** of visual identity. As Fang and Xiang (2023) argue, poor layout can undermine otherwise strong elements like colour or typography. In these results, critiques of borders, frames, and contrast, point to an executional weakness: while Seychelles' imagery and colour palette remain strong, their arrangement sometimes **dilutes impact**.

This is particularly problematic for slogans and logos, which depend on careful placement to achieve recognition. The fact that tourists (a group less likely to articulate design terms) noticed compositional flaws suggests the issue is perceptually significant. Simplification, removing clutter, and allowing natural imagery to breathe, may help align execution with audience expectations.

## ***People/Nature Elements***

Across groups, natural elements, particularly sea, sand, and trees, were the most frequently noticed features, underscoring the salience of landscape in first

impressions. People were also consistently visible, but their role diverged: tourists often regarded human figures as distracting, preferring imagery of untouched landscapes and wildlife, while locals associated authenticity with the inclusion of Seychellois people and cultural presence.

This divergence reveals competing semiotic imaginaries: tourists predominantly read authenticity through signs of untouched nature, while locals interpret authenticity through cultural presence and lived representation. For Seychelles, privileging only pristine nature risks reinforcing a neocolonial “paradise without people” gaze, while privileging only culture risks underplaying the natural assets that drive tourist appeal. A dual strategy—featuring both iconic natural imagery and Seychellois cultural representation—would enhance authenticity, inclusivity, and balance across audiences.

### ***Miscellaneous Stylistic Details***

Stylistic additions such as frames, shadows, and decorative overlays were mentioned less often than core elements, but when noticed, they were overwhelmingly viewed as clutter that undermined professionalism. Such embellishments are often intended to add character, yet as Sawyer et al. (2020) note, they can distract from core brand elements when overused. Participants' frequent calls for their removal align with contemporary minimalist design trends, which prioritise clarity and simplicity. For Seychelles, stripping away these stylistic distractions would sharpen focus on its strongest brand assets—natural scenery, evocative words, and colour—thereby improving overall credibility.

### ***Cross-Group Implication***

Taken together, the data suggest that Seychelles' visual identity is strongest when anchored in natural assets—especially photography of landscapes and the green–blue palette—but risks invisibility when logos and typography underperform.

Several implications emerge for brand strategy:

- Logos require cleaner, consistent integration and better scaling across applications.
- Typography should retain its prominence but improve readability and blending.
- Photography must balance paradise imagery, which appeals to tourists, with authentic cultural representation valued by locals.

- Composition should be simplified, reducing clutter, borders, and distracting details.
- Wildlife and landscapes should be foregrounded while ensuring Seychellois culture is visibly represented.
- Miscellaneous stylistic flourishes should be minimised to enhance clarity and professionalism.

In sum, Seychelles' visual identity benefits from strong foundational assets—nature, colours, and an evocative slogan—but suffers from executional inconsistencies that weaken recognition and authenticity. Addressing these gaps could align the brand's visual delivery with both local expectations and international appeal.

## Conclusion

This study evaluates how four stakeholder groups: local residents, tourists, designers, and a general audience, perceive Seychelles' destination branding. Using a stimulus image from the official 2022 Brand Guidelines, participants assessed visual identity elements including logos, typography, photography, and colour. By analysing immediate attention and suggested improvements, the research employs a mixed-methods approach to address gaps in understanding how audiences interpret tourism branding. The findings reveal tensions between promotional “paradise” tropes and local cultural representation, highlighting how different groups engage with and contest tropical imagery.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

Across the seven elements of visual identity, several clear patterns emerged. **Logos** were minimally noticed across all groups, with quantitative ratings averaging only around 3.0–3.4 on a five-point scale. Locals critiqued the logo's poor blending and scaling, while tourists largely ignored it. **Words** proved much more salient: nearly nine in ten participants across groups recalled the phrase “*Another World*”, and it received high prominence ratings (mean 4.29 among designers; median 5.0 among the general audience). Yet blending and readability scored very low, and participants frequently requested clearer typography and less clutter. **Photography** consistently dominated attention. Nature: beaches, trees, turtles, sea—was most often noticed first, particularly by tourists and the general audience, while locals also valued the presence of people and cultural cues. Tourists asked for fewer staged figures, while locals asked for more authentic representation of Seychellois people and culture. **Colour** was another consistent strength: green and blue were the most recognised and recalled

tones across all groups, aligning with sea and vegetation. Locals and the general audience rated the palette positively (means around 4.0), while designers were more critical (mean 3.55), suggesting sensitivity to over-familiar or predictable schemes. **Composition** was rated moderately (3.0–3.6 across groups): while photographs dominated attention, words were often seen as disruptive, and several participants highlighted clutter, poor hierarchy, or distracting borders. **People/nature content** revealed a split between locals, who equated authenticity with cultural presence, and tourists, who equated it with untouched landscapes. Finally, **stylistic details** such as frames, brush effects, and shadows were widely dismissed as clutter, with participants consistently calling for their removal.

Taken together, these results indicate that Seychelles' branding is most effective when relying on its natural assets and consistent palette, but risks weakening its impact through poor logo visibility, flawed typography execution, compositional clutter, and unnecessary stylistic embellishments.

### ***Theoretical Contributions***

This study contributes to destination branding research in several ways. First, it provides empirical evidence that **audience reception of visual identity is as critical as its strategic design**. Prior work such as Sophola and Dharmalingam (2025) has focused on strategic toolkits for aligning Seychelles' brand, the current findings reveal how logos, words, and imagery are actually received—and often critiqued—by different groups.

Second, the study demonstrates that **audiences interpret the same visual identity in divergent ways**. Locals emphasise cultural authenticity, tourists foreground natural authenticity, designers critique technical execution, and the general audience gravitates toward nature but lacks the vocabulary to describe compositional flaws. This extends theoretical debates on authenticity versus exoticism (Fang & Xiang, 2023), showing how these tensions manifest not only in discourse but in actual reception of brand elements.

Third, the research advances visual identity theory by suggesting that beyond the five conventional components—logo, typography, photography, colour, composition—two further categories should be recognised: **people/nature content** and **stylistic executional details**. Both emerged as recurrent themes in participant responses, shaping how branding was understood and critiqued. This indicates that visual identity frameworks should explicitly account for **content** (what is depicted, not just how) and **executional quality** (the presence or absence of clutter, frames, shadows).

Finally, the study demonstrates the value of a **mixed-methods approach**, combining quantitative frequencies and Likert ratings with open-ended qualitative coding. This dual strategy captured both the breadth of perceptions (e.g., 90% recall of the slogan, moderate logo ratings) and the depth of critique (e.g., locals requesting cultural imagery, tourists rejecting staged people).

### ***Practical Implications for Seychelles***

Several actionable lessons emerge for policymakers and practitioners. First, the logo requires cleaner, more consistent integration if it is to function as a recognisable brand marker. Its individual features (colours, wings, shapes) were noticed, but the overall mark failed to register as cohesive. Second, the phrase *"Another World"* is a valuable linguistic asset, but typography must be rendered more clearly, with stronger blending and readability. Third, photography should balance natural icons—beaches, turtles, ocean—with authentic Seychellois cultural presence, avoiding the erasure of local identity. Fourth, colour use should continue to emphasise green and blue, but should be managed carefully to avoid visual clichés; secondary tones such as sand and white could offer variety. Fifth, composition should be simplified, reducing cluttered borders and distracting word placement so that brand markers gain prominence. Finally, stylistic embellishments such as shadows and brush effects should be minimised to achieve professional clarity. Collectively, these adjustments would allow Seychelles' branding to align more closely with both local expectations and international appeal.

### ***Limitations***

The study has several limitations. The tourist sample was small, limiting statistical generalisability for that group. The survey was conducted over a single week, providing only a snapshot of perceptions. The use of a single stimulus image, while ecologically valid, means that responses reflect one execution of the brand rather than the full spectrum of Seychelles' promotional materials. Finally, as with most survey-based studies, findings capture **perceived salience and self-reported critiques**, rather than behavioural outcomes such as recall over time or actual decision-making.

### ***Future Research Directions***

Future research could build on these findings in several ways. Comparative studies across other small island destinations such as Mauritius, the Maldives, or Fiji could identify whether weak logo salience, cultural erasure, or palette dependence are shared challenges in tropical island branding. Audience segmentation across Seychelles' major source markets (Europe, Asia, Africa) could examine how visual identity is received across cultural contexts, particularly given different colour associations and levels of visual literacy. Experimental methods such as eye-tracking

or reaction-time studies could complement survey data by measuring actual attention to logos, text, and imagery. Digital-focused research could examine how Seychelles' visual identity performs across social media, websites, and mobile platforms, where audiences increasingly encounter brands first. Finally, longitudinal studies could explore how Seychelles' branding evolves over successive campaigns, tracing whether adjustments improve recognition and authenticity.

### ***Closing Statement***

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that Seychelles' visual identity is strongest when grounded in natural imagery and a green–blue palette, but weaknesses in logo integration, typography, composition, and stylistic execution undermine its effectiveness. The divergence between locals' desire for cultural authenticity and tourists' preference for natural authenticity highlights the challenge of balancing domestic representation with global market demands. More critically, the findings illustrate how Seychelles' current branding risks reproducing a **neocolonial “paradise without people” gaze**, sidelining Creole culture in favour of exotic nature. At the same time, its reliance on fragile ecological imagery situates it within environmental tourism discourses, raising questions about sustainability and over-commodification. For Seychelles, and for destination branding more broadly, the key lesson is that visual identity must not only be strategically designed but also empirically tested with diverse audiences. Only by listening to how logos, words, colours, and images are actually perceived can destinations ensure that their brand identities remain credible, authentic, and competitive in a global tourism marketplace.

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