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**“DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE PROMOTION OF THE CITY OF  
CUENCA DELIVERED BY THE ONLINE RESOURCE GRINGOTREE”**

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## **DEDICATION**

To my angels, both in heaven and on earth: Hernando and Chelita, this dissertation paper is dedicated to you.

To my sister María Paz and my gorgeous nephew Matías.

To Luquita.

To Laurita.

To those friends that supported me from the very beginning.

To the little girl in me, because everything is possible in life, you just have to believe it!

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## **RESUMEN**

En los últimos años, la ciudad de Cuenca ha sido protagonista de un fenómeno migratorio peculiar gracias a la llegada de una ola de expatriados, mayoritariamente norteamericanos, quienes han reconocido en la Atenas del Ecuador el lugar ideal para establecerse y empezar una nueva vida. Como consecuencia, un gran número de sitios de publicidad y ofertas en general han logrado instalarse en la ciudad con el afán de vender una imagen de Cuenca al mundo. GRINGO TREE PUBLICIDAD S.A. GPUBLITREE, es hoy en día, el más importante entre ellos.

La presente investigación se centra en el estudio de la teoría postestructuralista del Análisis del Discurso aplicado en el caso específico de GringoTree. El objetivo es analizar cómo, a través de su página en línea y gracias al uso de la palabra, GringoTree personaliza y caracteriza a Cuenca de cara al mercado exterior. Para el desarrollo del proyecto, se aplicaron entrevistas y encuestas, tanto a personal vinculado al caso de estudio, como a extranjeros residentes en la ciudad a fin de conocer sus experiencias personales y percepciones. Finalmente se procede a ahondar en el discurso manejado por GringoTree mediante el análisis de la información recolectada y un estudio de la oferta de GringoTree en su sitio en línea, esperando contribuir de alguna manera en la realización de futuras investigaciones referentes al tema.



## **ABSTRACT**

In recent years, the city of Cuenca has played protagonist to a very interesting migratory phenomenon, thanks to the arrival and presence of a significant wave of expatriates. Mostly Americans, these expats look at Cuenca as the ideal place to settle down and retire in hopes of starting a new life abroad. Their decision is certainly helped by the various awards and recognitions received by the beautiful “Athens of Ecuador” over the last couple of years. This has resulted in massive proliferation of both online and physical advertising sites, whose main purpose is to present and sell a particular image of Cuenca in diverse international markets. GRINGO TREE PUBLICIDAD S.A. GPUBLITREE, an American online-based advertising portal, is nowadays, the most important among them.

This research focuses on the study of post-structuralist theory of “Discourse Analysis” in the specific case of GringoTree. The objective is to analyze how, through the use of words and language, GringoTree creates a specific representation and characterization of the city of Cuenca on a large scale. For the development of this project, interviews and surveys have been conducted based upon the experiences and perceptions of foreigners who live in Cuenca and who use the GringoTree website. Finally, we delve deeper into the discourse implemented by GringoTree, through the analysis of all data and information collected from primary sources and the GringoTree website itself. Hopefully, results and findings from this investigation will contribute to further research and study on the subject.

## INTRODUCTION

Under the global integration of our days and thanks to the concept of globalization in its various forms (economic, social, political, religious, technological and scientific dimensions of this process), it is also widely accepted to talk about globalization of ideologies, customs, values and human practices. In recent years, the beautiful city of Cuenca has been immersed in a new social and cultural dynamic: the incorporation of a great wave of expatriates, mostly Americans, who deeply moved and captivated by the incomparable charm and many attractions of the city, have decided to accept it as their new home.

Within this particular context, Ecuador and Cuenca face a major challenge due to the growing inflow of foreigners entering the country if we take into consideration all the implications that this process entails. This migratory wave presents not only attractive opportunities for tourism and foreign investment, as well as possibilities for a more insightful study of international migration; but also new and varied ways of life and foreign values in general. These new ways of life are represented by a sudden, yet massive proliferation of information centers, social networks and physical or virtual points of interest destined to provide data and information on the city, and whose main objective is to project and offer a certain image of Cuenca to the world.

Among this vast supply of companies, promotion businesses and online networks that promote and sell Cuenca as a national product based on its peculiar charm and living conditions; there is one in particular that stands out as the most important and influential of the list: the online resource GringoTree Publicidad S.A. GPUBLITREE. Guided by the desire to create satisfactory and positive experiences for all those who wish to live in Ecuador and Cuenca in the specific case, GringoTree provides a website with daily updates on the city, Cuenca's lifestyle and everything the town has to offer.

The information handled by GringoTree covers aspects of everyday life in Cuenca and ranges from a wide variety of news, blogs with political, social or religious

connotations to cooking tips and forums for special aid or expatriate assistance, everything from a foreign perspective. This last point brings up the question that encompasses the subject of this study: Under what terms or parameters is this information delivered and how objective and real can it be coming from foreign hands and different social and cultural angles? All within a framework where local people, cuencanos, seem to have a rather limited incidence and participation on this specific representation of their city.

Thus, we witness the birth of two scenarios: On the one hand, the promotion, representation and image of Cuenca depicted by GringoTree, from a *gringo* foreign point of view; and on the other land, the local context. If we analyze the case study from this angle, it is clearly demonstrated that these are situations and relations of power, conviction, persuasion and promotion through the use of words and language. It is with this in mind that the concept of Discourse Analysis arises as a suitable method for the development of this work, since its premise allows us to further examine this issue from the notion of discourse as a cohesive element and inclusive tactical weapon within society, and as a catalyst for social relations among individuals belonging to a community.

This thesis will serve as a source of information and study of post-structuralist theory of Discourse Analysis in the specific case of GringoTree and the way in which this online resource personalizes, represents and characterizes Cuenca through its diverse networks and information centers on a large global scale. This particular representation and narrative of the city will be examined, placing special emphasis on how Cuenca, guided by foreigners, is being projected and sustained as an eye-catching product in the international market.

For the development and completion of this dissertation paper, the study has been divided into three chapters. In the first chapter, the theoretical and conceptual bases of Discourse Analysis will be covered, thereby unfolding its importance and impact on the design and structure of the social fabric of society. The reader's familiarity with concepts is vitally important at first, as this monograph will be developed under the parameters of this discursive approach that indicates how the use of words and language in certain situations or specific cases, helps us build, reproduce, enhance

and intensify social and power relations within a particular social, cultural or political context.

In the second chapter the proposed online resource GringoTree will be discussed. We will get to know its mission and work vision and we will delve deeper into the activities and several tasks performed by the company in an effort to promote the city as a cultural and tourist destination. Similarly, some general features and aspects of what constitutes the “American Way and Culture” will be outlined. These will serve as a guide for more in-depth understanding of the work of GringoTree in Cuenca. For such purpose, in addition to analysis of the existing literature, interviews and surveys in situ will be conducted with the participation of expatriates that now reside in the city.

In the third chapter a comparative firsthand work between the notions and concepts of Discourse Analysis and all the material collected in chapter two will be carried out, paving the way for the analysis of the general discourse implemented by GringoTree. Finally, conclusions and recommendations will be delivered in the light of the previous analysis and outcome.

## CHAPTER 1

### SETTING THE BASIS OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

#### 1.1 Discourse

In order to properly introduce ourselves into the realm of discourse analysis, its correct use and application as a suitable methodology in special study cases, it is imperative that we understand at first, what a discourse is. There is a large categorization in terms of discourses: one can then refer to a discourse within a political, social, economic, scientific context and even talk about discourses from an entertainment and leisure perspective. In all these cases, the common denominator seems to be the reason for the existence of a specific discourse: its informative, communicative or persuasive purpose.

Humans are linguistic and social beings par excellence: two important notions and key aspects of human nature when weighing the significance of discourses and what they may represent in society. "To understand ourselves as individuals, we need to bear in mind that we are born and created in society, from which we take knowledge, thoughts, ways to structure our surroundings, habits, morals, culture and language" (Vicente Manzano, *El Análisis del Discurso* 1).

Given its multidisciplinary nature and regardless of the approach that it may be granted, a discourse is therefore a manifestation of language in society. "A discourse is more than a collection of sentences. It includes ideology, culture, a complex context. Discourses are compendiums that convey meanings and propose behaviors on matters that can be very specific and very general" (Vicente Manzano, *El Análisis del Discurso* 1). A discourse can then help shape perceptions and reproduce a certain ideology within a given context. Ideologies and contexts that vary and can be adapted according to cultural, political, religious, financial and social manifestations of people's diversity.

From this reasoning, a discourse is undoubtedly a good starting platform to lay the foundations that will allow us to understand and explain how words, evoked by the different actors of society, provide a highly fertile ground for the creation of realities and construction of arguments and versions of the world through the use of language. If a discourse is established as a link for interaction and integration of social relations in a community, the field of Discourse Analysis then, seeks to reveal the different circumstances and meanings of discourses inside society, based on the study and research of language applications, either in oral or written form.

## **1.2 The post-structuralist school: the basis of discourse analysis**

Before delving into the topic of Discourse Analysis, let's take a brief look at two crucial theoretical movements in the area of linguistics, in which the language takes a new leading role, much more important and profound than that of a codified system of symbols and signs. These theoretical strands of thought are Structuralism and Post-structuralism.

The structuralist theory originated thanks to the contributions of who is considered by many, the father of linguistics, the Swiss Ferdinand de Saussure, who states that "language should be studied in itself and for itself" (Chávez Calderón, *Historia de las Doctrinas Filosóficas* 275). In consequence, Saussure proposes a dichotomy formed by *language* and *speech* (*langue* and *parole*) where it is explained that:

Linguistic science lies on language, which is something supra-individual, it is a structural system with laws of its own, independent of the individuals that use it. The use of language by individuals is speech. In speech each individual in their own way, gives concrete form to the capabilities contained in language. (Chávez Calderón, *Historia de las Doctrinas Filosóficas* 275)

It is in this way that Saussure defines language under the model of a solid, unaltered, structured system (hence the name of structuralism), where a dynamic or interactive character is nowhere to be evidenced. Saussure refers to language as a stoic and imperturbable creation where structures are rigidly positioned. Consequently, the idea of language as an autonomous manifestation, enriched through social exchange,

is simply not applicable. Are all human beings subordinated and conditioned by this social structure? Are these unchanging foundations then, the ones that dictate the parameters of what one can say and even think?

Many detractors of these theories would soon emerge whilst attempting to answer these last questions, and it is precisely there, that the post-structuralist school is born, as a theoretical current opposed to Structuralism. It should be underlined that despite the isolation from the idea of solid structures, various post-structuralist authors share the same structuralist doctrines, from which they take principles for future works. In both cases, the analysis or point of reference can be found in the linguistic domain (Pino Andrade, *Análisis del discurso de las Organizaciones Intergubernamentales* 23).

In the post-structuralist school, what is sought is the alienation from the idea of rigorous, culturally or socially established structures, where reality cannot be constructed or modified. "The questioning, from here, is addressed to 'how these structures are formed': to the intervention, the effects and modes of participation that this structure has, to the actors that therein meet and interact, and above all, to history (main actor in the play)" (González Gil, *Post-estructuralismo vs. Estructuralismo*). All this resulting in the incorporation of new facets into the realm of language, enabling us to conceive the linguistic system as something more flexible: a space wherein, through mutual interaction within the framework of these structures, the different actors of society have a strong impact in the configuration of their realities, generating their own ways of understanding and perceiving their surroundings.

The work of Austrian mathematician and philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, is presented as the first guidepost to illustrate the post-structuralist thought. Later on, we shall proceed to discuss the theories and post-structuralist thought of French philosopher and psychologist, Michel Foucault, whose doctrines and principles regarding power and power relations in society are fundamental in the development of this monograph.

In his 1988 publication, *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein takes a peculiar and interesting position on the use of language and words in general. In his study, the

analysis of linguistic systems from the conception of solid structures, lacks support and has no actual applicability. He primarily focuses on the use and management of language in line with what he calls “different circumstances”, under a more permeable outlook since his vision is not limited to seeing and using words as sealed, invariable units. According to Wittgenstein, the behavior of all the participants that utilize language and the dynamism of their interactions within these particular contexts, are two key aspects in the understanding that it is through the trilogy of “language, human beings and their environment,” that words are granted a special significance.

It is interesting to note how in the first pages of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein introduces the reader to the text by presenting a rather basic, even rudimentary conceptualization of “words” describing them as: "a particular picture of the essence of human language" (§1) mentioning that "the words in language name objects" and that "every word has a meaning" (§1). However, a shift in the paradigm is manifested rapidly (and throughout the book), when the reader notices Wittgenstein's rupture and separation from the idea that the only purpose or function of words is to designate things and objects. His analogy of language, when compared to a toolbox, invites us to reflect upon the different functions and usages of words, which take different nuances and directions in accordance to the context in which they are spoken:

Think of the tools in a tool-box: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screwdriver, a rule, a glue-pot, glue, nails, and screws. —The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects. (And in both cases there are similarities) (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* §11)

It is at this point that Wittgenstein presents his argumentation of "language-games" (§7), understanding them as: "the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven" (§7). As in any other game produced by human creation, Wittgenstein's language-games are developed through the application and delimitation of rules, which arise not in a binding, unidirectional sense, but as a product of interaction in society:



A rule is employed neither in the teaching nor in the game itself; nor is it set down in a list of rules. One learns the game by watching how others play. But we say that it is played according to such-and-such rules because an observer can read these rules off from the practice of the game—like a natural law governing the play. (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* §54)

As a result of these language-games, we comprehend that the meanings of words are given in their proper use and context: “the meaning of a word is its use in language” (Wittgenstein §43). And the key to externalize *that* meaning lies in adapting the word to the language game in which it is created in everyday use in a specific context: “Thought, language, now appear to us as the unique correlate, picture, of the world (...) language, thought, world, stand in line one behind the other, each equivalent to each” (Wittgenstein §96).

A plurality of scenarios and games sprout from these situations where words fit together one after the other, modeling a sort of intrinsic network of thought that reaches its highest peak in the so-called communicative reciprocity of human beings. “When I think in language, there aren't 'meanings' going through my mind in addition to the verbal expressions: the language is itself the vehicle of thought” (Wittgenstein §329).

When referring to language as “the vehicle of thought”, several questions arise as to: What is it that influences it or shapes it? How is it that its dynamism enriches it to a greater or lesser extent? And how is it that its reproduction in society permits the transportation of thoughts from issuing instances to the consequent receiver? The criterion on how the collective character and social nature of human beings cannot be detached from any of the fields wherein they relate to one another is thereby heavily strengthened. This is how language, as a means of disseminating thoughts, involves not only the participation of actors, but also social behavioral patterns, customs, traditions, lifestyles, worldviews and even institutions, that coexist as a result of life in common in collectivity:

So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?" —It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in

the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.  
(Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* §241)

Regardless of the multiple uses of language to which Wittgenstein alludes in his *Philosophical Investigations*, it is interesting to remark two scales in particular when setting the objectives of language. First of all, Wittgenstein accentuates its primary role, that of being a provider of communication explaining that: “Not: without language we could not communicate with one another” (§491); and secondly, the author confers on language a special characterization that may sometimes play a secondary role: that of exercising influence in order to achieve a certain effect. Noting that: “—but for sure: without language we cannot influence other people in such-and-such ways; cannot build roads and machines, etc.” (§491), Wittgenstein highlights a more utilitarian side of language identifying it as “an instrument for a particular purpose on the basis of the laws of nature (or consistently with them)” (§492).

*These* are then, the language games that authenticate the existence of codes of conduct and social practices within a communal framework, where humans are able to exercise their rights of social communication and mutual agreement. This is another perspective to be additionally pondered on the Austrian philosopher’s thesis by bringing special attention to speech and the various discursive practices as part of these language games. “Is thinking a kind of speaking? One would like to say it is what distinguishes speech with thought from talking without thinking. —And so it seems to be an accompaniment of speech. A process, which may accompany something else, or can go on by itself” (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* §330).

And so, language plays a pivotal role: besides paving the way for communication and providing significance to what is said; as a tool of human creation, it also offers the possibility of recreating our everyday environment and organizing our thinking, finally understanding how the concepts of “fabric of society” (Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks* 12) and the structure of society itself, are molded through language giving way to unique worldviews and perspectives of our surroundings.

In this social fabric at the same time, the germination of new ideas begins to formulate. The mental conception and consequent implementation of the various human social practices start to take shape on account of the different levels of interaction of language in community. Thus, we return to the previous notion of language that suggests that: “Language is not (as is commonly thought) a system for transferring thoughts or meaning from one brain to another, but a system for organizing information and for releasing thoughts and responses in other organisms” (T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* 57).

In the light of the above, it is concluded that a discourse, a daily manifestation of mankind’s linguistic capabilities, can be as a matter of fact, conceived as a social practice.

### **1.3 Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault and the various relations of power**

We have agreed upon the acknowledgment of discourses as human social practices, but for them to resonate, have a significant repercussion and strike the depths of society, it is necessary that they be delivered from a position of power or authority. Several thoughts, ideologies and conjectures have been developed around the concept, meaning and origins of power and what it *truly* entails. Among the various proposals, two alternatives stand out in the development of this specific paper. First, the analysis and views of Italian Marxist philosopher and politician Antonio Gramsci; second, the research and reasoning of French thinker Michel Foucault. Let's start with the thoughts of Antonio Gramsci.

Throughout human history, a clear tendency with regards to the relation and situation between different groups or states has always been present. In spite of time and geographical differences, a scenario appears to repeat itself: there seems to be a predominant influence of one group or state over another. While it is true that this influence at a certain point, and by own natural laws may collapse, it is also true that after such demise, there is time and space for the rearrangement or rise of a new movement or dominant group. The mutual agreement reflected on this idea of "relations of power" is nothing more than the notion of hegemony or supremacy in its purest form.

It should be clarified firstly, that the following lines will be dedicated to cover Antonio Gramsci's ideas revolving around the concept of hegemony: based not exclusively upon the notion of political, economic or military supremacy; but also founded on variables of morality, political and religious principles, customs, and norms of behavior that project new ways of appreciating the world, all typical and reminiscent of the era in which he lived.

Antonio Gramsci, profoundly concerned about the prevailing reality and cultural situation in his country and in most European states, finds in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' principles of "viewing society in terms of conflict between classes with opposing interests" (*Power and Politics: Theories of Power 2*), the means to theorize this conflictive relation between the ruling class, *the bourgeoisie*, owners of the means of production; and the working class, *the proletariat*, who attempt to gain access to these "sources of power" for the benefit of all individuals. This idea stems from the belief that "the ultimate source of all power in any society is the ownership and control of the means of production" (*Power and Politics: Theories of Power 2*).

In his famous writings, *The Prison Notebooks* (1971), the Italian Marxist theorist elaborates the term "hegemony" (12) to describe the above mentioned class relation. He uses this term to specifically refer to a set of beliefs and ideas that define culture in society, which he sees as the foundation upon which the ruling class privileges are built. To fully credit his concept of hegemony, Gramsci develops the idea that in capitalist societies, the leading class exercises power not only through economic, political and military forces, but also through what he calls "cultural and intellectual hegemony" (12).

Under these claims, Gramsci finds the necessary elements that the ruling classes employ to perform actions resulting in different norms, beliefs, laws and patterns of conduct that provide them with the means to dictate the guidelines for the creation and constant reproduction of the aforesaid hegemony. In this way, a sort of false consensus is created, wherein individuals from the working class adopt the bourgeoisie's principles of social values, beliefs, ideas and norms as their own, undermining all possibilities of challenging the system and questioning the existing status quo.

According to Gramsci's logic, these capitalist societies display their hegemonic culture under the false premise that the spreading of *their ways* will result in positive conditions, from which the working class could also benefit. To achieve this, the ruling classes have at their disposal two mechanisms which help secure their interests. Firstly, a "complex of superstructures" (12), a series of institutions such as the State, the educational and religious system, the press, and "all the institutions which help to create in people certain modes of behavior and expectations consistent with the hegemonic social order" (Cox, *Gramsci, hegemony, and international relations* 124); and secondly, what Gramsci denominates, "the whole fabric of society" (Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks* 12), made up by commonly shared laws, norms, beliefs and cultural aspects in general.

Since hegemony is "firmly entrenched in civil society" (Cox, *Gramsci, hegemony, and international relations* 126), the members of the bourgeoisie do not necessarily run the state themselves. They have someone else doing their job for them. Here, Gramsci delivers the concept of "intellectuals", whom he describes as: "The dominant group's 'deputies' exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government" (Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks* 12).

Through the use of cultural elements, the role of these "functionaries" (Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks* 12) is to insert feelings and perceptions in hopes of shaping people's interests and desires that otherwise, might not be articulated or expressed by their own means. The job of these intellectuals is then summarized in the creation of culture and organization of society. Such deputies, who are also representatives of the leaders, advocate in favor of the elites if we are to believe that, —and in accordance to Gramsci's principles— power is conceived in terms of a vicious circle, impossible to fracture due to the reinforcement of the means used by the ruling class, where those belonging to the proletariat class, understand their condition of subjugation as something natural and beneficial, essentially debilitating the idea of insurrection and revolt.

Here, Gramsci seems to be talking about what Steven Lukes calls the "third dimension of power" (24-25) in his 1974 publication, *Power: A Radical View*, where he implies that power is best exerted through mechanisms of co-optation, that is the

ability of a certain group to make another group believe that what this last group does works in their benefit, when it actually works in the interests of the first group. This particular aspect of hegemonic supremacy works wonderfully for the interests of the elites, since there is no possibility of any conflict whatsoever.

It is really interesting to witness the process through which Gramsci takes the basic ideas of Marxist thought regarding class division and means of production, and inserts them into a new context. Most importantly, Gramsci develops his concepts based on real experiences that help him illustrate and strengthen his argument. Hence the brilliance of Gramsci to come up with a whole new logic that seeks to explain what a hegemonic class-based society might involve. In this sense, Gramsci, although a devoted follower of Marx and Engels' teachings, expands the conceptualization of power around new variables seen through Gramsci's eyes, as a rational response and critique of the capitalist society he was immersed in.

From this brief analysis of Gramsci's ideas, the necessity for social transformation is rescued. Individuals should aim at an urgent revolution rooted in an emancipatory project, in which these archaic relations of power are finally demolished, thanks to a greater sense of awareness and collective union where this type of "coercive control" can no longer be exerted (Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks* 12). It is with this in mind that Gramsci cultivates a concept of power where he stresses its totalitarian nature expressed in the manifestation of authoritative relations of power.

Michel Foucault meanwhile, tries to prove that the elementary notions and ideas that people consider as permanent or mandatory truths about their environment, as well as the ways in which they perceive society, change constantly over time. If we analyze his reasoning from this particular point of view, as noted in his 1976 publication, *The History of Sexuality I, The Will to Knowledge*, Foucault's conceptions of power that: a) refer to it is a changing environment in society; and that: b) indicate that it is intrinsically linked to individuals and the various interactions that occur in these societies within specific contexts (112-113), are reasonably logical.

Furthermore, Foucault's conception of power leaves behind the classic and merely utilitarian categorizations of the term, as explained: "By power, I do not mean

‘Power’ as a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state. By power, I do not mean, either, a mode of subjugation which, in contrast to violence, has the form of the rule” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality I, The Will to Knowledge* 112). For Foucault, power cannot be substantiated in an institution or a structure, —more clearly in the State—, nor in the figure of individuals or prevailing elites.

Similarly, the French thinker understands power not as a possession or as an object but as a network of interactions where relations of power have an emerging nature. These relations stem from the bottom, are not imposed nor should they be considered as independent or strange to their environment; and as long as we decide to accept, recreate and reaffirm them, their consistency will strengthen, what Foucault calls the “constitutive character” of power (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality I, The Will to Knowledge* 112):

It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system. (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality I, The Will to Knowledge* 112)

Correspondingly, he puts the accent on the fact that power is not viewed as something that the individual donates to the State in its role of structure of law or global unit of domination. He also refuses to identify the State or any type of organization that may be regarded as a stage of distribution of power, as instances where it is already present. Foucault prefers to cover the topic of power and relations of power by citing different scenarios in accordance to *these* force relations where “a complex strategical situation in a particular society” is exposed (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality I, The Will to Knowledge* 113).

In this manner, we move from a situation of consensual control (through authority) and a situation of coercive control (through the use of force), key points of the

victim-victimizer theory of Gramsci; to a situation in which power is exerted from a multidisciplinary standpoint, as Foucault affirms: “power is everywhere” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality I, The Will to Knowledge* 113). Contrasting Gramsci, who examines power as an entity in society manifested in a top-to-the-bottom unidirectional sort of sense, Foucault dubs it as ubiquitous and “omnipresent” (*The History of Sexuality I, The Will to Knowledge* 113), because power comes from everywhere, ensuring the inclusion of all individuals in the framework of these relations of power without the possibility of being considered independently of them.

As another element of divergence, Foucault recognizes the existence of groups that interact and create relations of power in a given society. The greater the interaction that these groups achieve, the higher the levels of access to power that they shall possess (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality I, The Will to Knowledge* 113-114). Gramsci meanwhile concentrates his analysis on the study of the two previously proposed variables, means of production and cultural hegemony (Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks* 12).

Thus, we comprehend that the constant, perennial and antagonistic force relations expressed by Gramsci, seem to acquire new nuances and shades in the predicaments of Foucault. Nevertheless, after explaining some of the differences between these two authors, let’s take a glimpse at a very interesting similarity: in both cases it is noticeably revealed that power pursues an aim or a clear objective. For Gramsci, this aim is institutionalized in the presence of the ruling class, who intends to maintain its privileged position either by authority or through coercion. On the contrary, by asserting that: “Power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality I, The Will to Knowledge* 115), Foucault admits that power entails a goal or intention. For Foucault, these goals cannot be found in the State or in decisions coming from the ruling class, but in specific situations in particularly defined contexts.

In both cases, the importance of an essential component, the power of conviction-persuasion, is highlighted. For Gramsci, it demonstrates the ability of the various dominant groups to present themselves before the masses through safe, innocuous and peaceful means under the premise that their political and moral values are



legitimate and that the capitalist system is the best alternative and ultimate goal because it *actually* works, unlike any other economic systems. Also, Foucault distinguishes the discourse practice as an important tool to reach such power of conviction since it can be regarded as a tactically infallible instrument, with an energetic and strategic nature, albeit rarely neutral:

And for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies. (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality I, The Will to Knowledge* 122)

By establishing its strategic aim and purpose, it is implied that a discourse is always meant to propagate or evoke something in its receiver: “there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality I, The Will to Knowledge* 115). In order to identify their hidden agenda one should logically contextualize discourses under the language-game rules previously indicated by Wittgenstein, never losing sight that it is us, human beings, the ones that validate their presence in our relationships and social practices, for the inclusion or exclusion of variables in our daily speeches rely exclusively on our choices, as Foucault articulates: “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality I, The Will to Knowledge* 123).

And if it is possible to detain such power, it is equally imaginable to profess resistance, another similarity between Gramsci and Foucault. For Gramsci, once authority is questioned by the masses, these offer some type of resistance and it is then, that the coercive ways show up on scene. Foucault also reasons that: “Where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality I, The Will to Knowledge* 116), but not in a one-way direction, but in the different interactions and relationships that are exercised in society. Then, depending on their acceptance or

confrontation, discourses aid in the configuration and shaping of the various social practices of human beings and are in turn, creators of new discourses.

In the formation of these new discourses a certain “discursive struggle” (Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse Analysis* 6) may emerge, in which numerous discourses overlap, each with its own unique worldview representations. These discourses, in an effort to amplify, are “engaged in a constant struggle with one other to achieve hegemony, that is, to fix the meanings of language in their own way” (Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse Analysis* 7). The concept of hegemonic supremacy implemented by Gramsci fits impeccably in this context, since it "can provisionally be understood as the dominance of one particular perspective" (Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse Analysis* 7), whose goals and interests could convey explicitly manipulative or persuasive connotations and more dangerously, in an implicit manner.

#### **1.4 The discourse as a means of power**

It has already been explained what a discourse is and how the different relations of power in society are established. The next point of our analysis is how to build the link between power and discourse. In this regard, let's return to the reflections provided by Foucault, who comprehends that a discourse is an exceptionally useful device and a solid tactical weapon that can also be seen as an integral element of society, depending on the context in which it is developed and spoken. Discourses then may be used in both, situations of power and situations to monopolize power, where it seeks to replicate and strengthen the dominant discourse in the game of "nonegalitarian and mobile" society relations (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality I, The Will to Knowledge* 114).

Foucault's thinking in this respect, contributes to the understanding that power does not stem from the vertical hierarchical interaction between individuals *with power* and individuals on the other side of the language-game rules. The French thinker exposes that we all help make and reaffirm power. It is for us that it exists, is reproduced and takes continuity in space (context) and time. As explained in the following statement:

And the institution responds: “You should not be afraid of beginnings; we are all here in order to show you that discourse belongs to the order of laws, that we have long been looking after its appearances; that a place has been made ready for it, a place which honors it but disarms it; and that if discourse may sometimes have some power, nevertheless it is from us and us alone that it gets it.” (Foucault, *El Orden del Discurso* 10)

As to the relation between power and discourse, Dutch linguist Teun A. van Dijk tells us that: “For our analysis of the relations between discourse and power” we find that: “access to specific forms of discourse, e.g. those of politics, the media, or science, is itself a power resource” (Van Dijk, *El análisis crítico del discurso* 26). Whether it is in the name of politics, religion, sociology, marketing or advertising, it is through and for us that a discourse is created.

At the end of the day, regardless of the theoretical conception about the relations of power or the notion of power itself; there is no doubt about the importance of this phenomenon as a constituent of society, either as a functional component, or as an inherent unity in the diverse relationships and exchanges that characterize these societies. The study and analysis of discourse as an element of power is crucial from this specific point of view. Is it not perhaps through the various social practices, habitudes and customs expressed in the form of discourses that we construct our daily actions and worldviews?

### **1.5 Discourse, society and culture**

In the preceding paragraphs, we have outlined discourses as statements of social practices, deducting thereby that these particular economic and cultural phenomena need to be studied under the basis of a conceptual framework. Within society, it is understood that a discourse contributes to the construction of: “(a) social identities; (b) social relations; and (c) systems of knowledge and meaning” (Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse Analysis* 67).

Teun A. van Dijk proposes two levels in the discursive practices: a "micro-level" and a "macro-level" (Van Dijk, *El análisis crítico del discurso* 25), where the diverse

human exchanges are located, going from domestic instances to more universal spheres. “Language use, discourse, verbal interaction, and communication belong to the “micro level” of the social order. Power, dominance, and inequality between social groups are typically terms that belong to a “macro level” of analysis” (Van Dijk, *El análisis crítico del discurso* 25).

Whilst the distinction between both instances may foster the idea of a gap or differentiating space that separates them, Teun A. van Dijk indicates that: “In everyday interaction and experience the macro-and micro-level (...) form one unified whole” (Van Dijk, *El análisis crítico del discurso* 25), and this is precisely how we should visualize and analyze them. The dynamism between the various actors in society alongside the presence of large superstructures or institutions, contribute to the constitution and reproduction of social practices that sustain or at the same time, resist the reigning regime. The following text enables us to exemplify this declaration:

For instance, a racist speech in parliament is a discourse at the micro-level of social interaction in the specific situation of a debate, but at the same time may enact or be a constituent part of legislation or the reproduction of racism at the macro-level or of the immigration policy of a nation-state. (Van Dijk, *El análisis crítico del discurso* 4)

For this purpose, Teun A. van Dijk formulates a theoretical frame to link both levels. He stresses the significance of the role of “group members” (Van Dijk, *El análisis crítico del discurso* 25), explaining that the different social actors may assume various roles depending on the instances they use to reproduce their discourses. He places here the value of “identities” (Van Dijk, *El análisis crítico del discurso* 25), which may vary in consonance with the context or given circumstances. In consequence, an individual can emit his judgment and position in a discourse, or in turn act as the receiving counterpart, from his role as a man, a parent or professional, a member of a religious or political conglomerate, and even as a representative of a certain nationality, to name a few.

The Dutch author also distinguishes the importance of framing language and discourse within well-defined contextual parameters, where interlocutors perform their previously described roles in a setting that he understands as: “a structure of constraints (...) relevant in the social situation” (Van Dijk, *El análisis crítico del discurso* 26). Moreover, he examines the meaning of context within a “wider social environment” (Van Dijk, *El análisis crítico del discurso* 26), thus for example: “the context of news may be not only the work of the reporter or the newsroom, but also the full newspaper, the relationship between media and politics, or between the media and the public, or the entire role of media in society” (Van Dijk, *El análisis crítico del discurso* 26).

In addition, Van Dijk lays emphasis on the cognitive factor in the various human interactions by avowing that: “actors, actions and contexts are both mental constructs as social constructs” (Van Dijk, *El análisis crítico del discurso* 26). This cognitive dimension of language is expressed through mutually shared representations and demonstrations of human collectivities and cultures, in the form of “knowledge, attitudes and ideologies” (Van Dijk, *El análisis crítico del discurso* 26). The entire congenital formative procedure of learning and gaining knowledge, characteristically attributed to human condition and constructed upon collective interaction with time, should also be taken into account in the comprehension of the link between society and discourse. Consequently, a discourse is not only carried out through social events but also thanks to mental processes (Van Dijk, *Sociedad y Discurso* 5).

These mental processes, nevertheless, should not be analyzed from an individualistic cognitive representation, nor should they be structured unconnectedly from social environments, but rather under the notion that individuals and human groups play an actively dynamic role by being *directly* immersed in the formative process of the social conception of what constitutes their reality, an essential point in the theory of “social constructionism” (Shotter, *Conversational Realities* 7), where it is conveyed that we are all partakers of “events within the contingent flow of continuous communicative interaction between human beings” (Shotter, *Conversational Realities* 7).

Social constructionism is built upon “understandings of the world (...) created and maintained through social interaction between people in their everyday lives (Jorgensen and Philips, *Discourse Analysis* 102). Channeling language and discourse into this debate, Shotter shares that:

Our ability as individuals to speak representationally —that is, to depict or describe a unique state of affairs (whether real or not), as we please, independently of the influences of our surroundings— arises out of us first and primarily speaking in a way that is responsive to the others around us. (Shotter, *Conversational Realities* 6)

Faithfully in accordance with the proposal of Wittgenstein about the linguistic applications of words, social constructionism in the same way, tells us that language is no longer “considered in terms of previously existing patterns or systems formed from already spoken words” (Shotter, *Conversational Realities* 6), but as an organic social practice where “we unknowingly ‘shape’ or ‘construct’ between ourselves (...) not only a sense of our own identities, but also a sense of our own ‘social worlds’” (Shotter, *Conversational Realities* 20).

Speaking of social constructionism, we must not forget the inclusion of ideologies in the diverse communicative processes. Teun A. van Dijk declares that: “ideologies include mental objects (ideas, thoughts, beliefs, judgments and values)” (Van Dijk, *Sociedad y Discurso* 5), labeling them as a “system of beliefs” (Van Dijk, *Sociedad y Discurso* 5). If it is a “system of beliefs” that we are discussing, there is rather little objectivity-rationality about it since what is permissible, acceptable or appropriate for a specific group of people might be perceived as incorrect, confusing and even unthinkable for another. In consequence, through the use of knowledge, thoughts and attitudes, discourses in society may or may not display newly acquired tones and distinctions, resulting in a panorama that could very well be a suitable place for the emergence of centers of resistance and for the production and reproduction of new discursive structures.

It is in this way that Teun A. van Dijk forges the bond between discourse and society, distinguishing it as a product of human social relations, in which several

actors assume leading roles in different contexts or situations where they shape, accept or reject realities and worldviews according to perceptions and ideologies that we, as human beings, have agreed upon as game rules. However, “it is not only our knowledge, but also our desires, needs and preferences, as well as our values and standards, the factors that determine the kind of information that we select, highlight, ignore, transform, etc.” (Van Dijk, *Estructuras y Funciones del Discurso* 87), and it is here that we can integrate the element of culture in the development and dissemination of discourses.

Within this context, it is essential to bear in mind that each human collectivity has a unique culture, providing a lifestyle that in turn, encompasses certain systems of beliefs that encourage the propagation of ideas, attitudes, norms and patterns of behavior. Amadou Mahtar M’Bow proposes to define culture as:

Everything that a community has created and has become thanks to this creation, everything that it has produced in all the domains where it exercises its creativity and all the spiritual and material traits that, throughout this process, have come to shape its identity distinguishing it from other communities. (Malo González, *Arte y Cultura Popular* 40)

From this perspective, language, communication and the many expressions of human comportment are key points in the theorization of culture as they also confer a particular character or identity. There originates the concept of "cultural identity", which can be understood as “the set of features that give a peculiar and distinctive tone to a culture structuring it as a different unit” (Malo González, *Arte y Cultura Popular* 45).

Edward T. Hall lists three fundamental characteristics when talking about culture. He establishes that: "it is not innate, but learned; the various facets of culture are interrelated (...); and it is shared and in effect defines the boundaries of different groups” (T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* 16). Since each human group generates a unique culture with its own idiosyncrasies, worldviews, thoughts and feelings, it is important that these variables be taken into consideration when making reference to discursive practices, inasmuch as it is through the visualization of cultural patterns, that the

large variety of discursive universes acquires a specific meaning amid their participants.

James W. Carey poses the choice to understand communication as propagation of culture. For this purpose, in his book *Communication As Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (1989), Carey uses “two alternative conceptions of communication” (14), and even though he would rather allocate them in the context of American societies in the foreground, their use and applicability in other geographical areas would prove just as acceptable.

Firstly, he catalogues communication as a simile for “transmission” (Carey, *Communication As Culture* 15), where “the idea of communication is the transmission of signals or messages over distance for the purpose of control” (Carey, *Communication As Culture* 15). Here, the author talks about communication in its purest sense, between a transmitter and a receiver who, albeit physically apart, utilize the most propitious channel for the dissemination of the message. “It is a view of communication that derives from one of the most ancient of human dreams: the desire to increase the speed and effect of messages as they travel in space” (Carey, *Communication As Culture* 15).

Secondly, Carey proposes a “ritual view of communication” (Carey, *Communication As Culture* 15). As suggested by the name, here Carey takes a somewhat more ceremonious stance to refer to the act of communication, where it is indicated that its goal or purpose is not purely limited to the act of transmitting information or disseminating knowledge. On the contrary, Carey comments that: “a ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs” (Carey, *Communication As Culture* 18). In this respect, Michel Foucault defines rituals as: “the gestures, behavior, circumstances, and the whole set of signs which must accompany discourse” (Foucault, *El Orden del Discurso* 34), but the French intellectual bestows upon them a rather secondary-superficial characterization.



Superficial or not, we verify the significance of analyzing the underlying background of the different communicative processes. Human habits, common experiences, shared traditions, feelings, values and collective beliefs that nurture us all with the idea of an identity; are then similarly transmitted through communication, not only in space but also in time. This last argument proves decisive in the development of this paper, since one of the premises included in the all-encompassing notion of culture is precisely its factor of reproduction, continuity and longevity in time.

Seeing that “communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed” (Carey, *Communication as Culture* 23), and having declared that discourses respond to the constructionist logic of society and the reality of human beings, their role as conductors of identities and different cultural situations in specific contexts is undeniable, especially if one takes into consideration the fact that “the natural act of thinking is greatly modified by culture” (T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* 9).

### **1.6 Culture, foreign values and homogenization**

The weight that language, communication and the diverse expressions of human creation carry in the formulation of the concept of culture, has already been highlighted. Additionally, it has been explained that these are the elements that help human beings build their own identities. Considering that each human group has its own culture based on unique worldviews, thoughts, feelings, perceptions and traditions, it is important to delimit the parameters amidst the advantages of the unifying process of globalization and the possible threats that may arise as a result of its versatility and competitiveness.

In this process of change, assimilation and constant contact with the outside world, it is extremely difficult for a culture to remain stagnated and absent to the transformations and modifications of its natural environment. On the one hand, we could witness a favorable response that would facilitate its inclusion in the sphere of globalization; and on the other hand, we could observe a sense of resistance and opposition noting that there is a marked weakening and deterioration of values, sentiments and practices in the core of that culture.

Claudio Malo González proposes two situations in relation to the subject. Firstly, he talks about endogenous changes (generated from within the cultures concerned) and then, he explains the significance of interactions of exogenous nature (originated from outside), asserting that the majority of these changes are of exogenous origin given that “they emanate from the almost inevitable interrelation between different cultures and the consequent incorporation of initially strange, foreign traits” (Malo González, *Arte y Cultura Popular* 45).

In many Latin American countries, the concepts and ideas of globalization have been largely present for centuries. It is only necessary to go back to the time of the colonization process, a period of abrupt and exacerbated interventions and interactions that served to exercise cultural, political, ideological power in regions that were culturally very different from those of the conquerors (Moya and Moya, *Derivas de la Interculturalidad* 157). In the case of Ecuador, the aforementioned interventions brought with them a wave of contempt, marginalization and undervaluation of *everything* comprised in the concept of identity of these native populations, as well as the subsequent differentiation between dominant civilizations and dominated peoples; and ultimately, the loss of cultural identity and imminent dissolution of values and native cultural realities.

One would think that in our days, with the acceleration of technology and the vertiginous advances in the diverse communication processes, humans are oriented towards becoming part of a universal culture: a global village (Malo González, *Arte y Cultura Popular* 45). Today’s restless world indicates that this global village is for the most part, characterized by strong capitalist attributes and consumer societies where the archetypes of liberty, democracy, competitiveness, entrepreneurship, innovation, modernization, free market and free enterprise, and freedom of communication are prioritized.

Similarly, in the framework of this global village stands out the importance of the role of collective mass media in the last century, as stated by Malo González:

Global diffusion of the elitist culture on the part of the government; that is, the dissemination of culture understood as the patrimony of elites and the

rising growth of mass media communications as conductors of the same type of culture, have contributed, mutually reinforcing one another, to the expansion of the homogenizing and unifying approach identified in these elitist cultures. (Malo González, *Arte y Cultura Popular* 100-101)

### 1.7 Chapter considerations

Subsequent to this analysis, it would then seem that our life revolves around various discourses, even more so if we conceive our daily acts as a series of conversations in a certain time and space. Minimizing the concept of discourses to mere perpetrators of struggle and social domination systems, would make us fall into the fatal mistake of disregarding its formerly mentioned uses and applications. Many uses and applications that at the same time, dictate the different perspectives that help establish the basis for the creation of the social reality of individuals, in the space of a community where they build their world and actions. All of which will substantially depend on “who is speaking, his position of power, and the institutional context in which he happens to be situated” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality I* 122).

Military, political, social, religious, economic, separatist, inclusive, propagandist discourses have been delivered since time immemorial in accordance with different strategies. These discourses are versatile and can be regarded as a product of the ever-changing relations of power, described earlier in the chapter. Independently of their nature or extent, they are the driving force and the conductors of the different worldviews and mindsets of the groups or individuals who, consciously or *perhaps* unconsciously, decide to either reproduce them or reject them, thereby increasing or reducing their credibility. Once altered —through the adoption or rejection of new elements—, we will have to distinguish how the modifications of these collective cultural patterns also influence the formation and implementation of new discourses.

Nowadays, in a world increasingly interconnected and characterized by interactions within societies, the success of the different facets of the discursive practices lies in their ability to find a way into these communities. Having exposed the importance of discourse in the structuring of society, is not this methodological frame of “Discourse

Analysis” the perfect starting point for the study of the pertinent case? For this, we ought to consider two aspects in the case of GringoTree: a) the delivery of information from *insiders* to a wide audience of foreigners; and, b) to what extent this discursive message helps to shape and build a reality and perception in these newcomers. The discourse that GringoTree uses for Cuenca then, is it a horizontal analysis of the possibilities and advantages of the city, or is it a clear scenario to expose and reveal the formerly mentioned relations of power, that in the long run lead us to believe in the existence of nothing more than self-interests and purposes?

In the next chapter, an extensive detailed list of the various offers and services provided by the online resource GRINGO TREE PUBLICIDAD S.A. GPUBLITREE shall be presented. For the purpose, we will refer to the American online-based advertising site under the “GringoTree” brand name. In addition, we shall delve deeper in the topic of the American Way of doing things, a transcendental point of analysis in the understanding of the discourse employed by GringoTree.

## CHAPTER 2

### GRINGO TREE PUBLICIDAD S.A. GPUBLITREE

#### 2.1 GringoTree

##### 2.1.1 GringoTree: background information

GRINGO TREE PUBLICIDAD S.A. GPUBLITREE, whose brand name is GringoTree, is an e-mail alert service and resource that disseminates information of interest to English speaking foreigners and locals who live in and around Cuenca, and to those who wish to keep up with activities of interest in the Cuenca expatriate community.

GringoTree was created by Penny Ripple and David Morrill, approximately 6 years ago, and launched from the news blog [www.cuencahighlife.com](http://www.cuencahighlife.com) in December 2008. David ran it till early 2011, when Deke Castleman volunteered to share the duties. In June 2012, Richard and Sheryle Verkley, Bob Gordon, and Jonathan Mogrovejo partnered with David and Deke to expand GringoTree, add a website and offer new services. Jonathan Mogrovejo is in charge of the website design, the database development and the Information Technology (IT) department.

GringoTree.com/Cuenca launched on November 12, 2012. Since then, GringoTree has become the number one English speaking website in the country, with over 10.000 subscribers. Just recently, a GringoTree section exclusively dedicated to the city of Quito has been incorporated into the overall concept of the company. GringoTree sells classified advertisements, display, banner, commercial labels, premium advertising and books directly. It also offers services relating to real estate, real estate consultancy, tourist partnerships and associations and is currently pursuing new partnerships with service providers.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from: <http://www.gringotree.com/about-us/>

For four years, GringoTree was a free service, available to advertisers, event promoters, sellers, buyers, recommenders and information seekers (with just a few loosely enforced rules to prevent it from becoming too commercial). It was a not-for-profit service, with David covering the expenses. Between early 2011 and April 2013, GringoTree has nearly tripled in size and is nowadays the number one free e-mail information service with news and information about Cuenca and Ecuador to foreigners living in the country and to future families who have opted for Ecuador as their new home.

GringoTree offers the most important digital resources for the delivery of fresh, new information on a daily basis in hopes of achieving full customer satisfaction to more than 4.000 users that visit the website every day (Soliz, GringoTree Interview 1) (See Appendix 1: Questionnaire of the first interview).

The GringoTree website has managed to cover 70% of the information traffic with respect to foreigners that express their desire to live in Cuenca, Quito and other nearby destinations, collecting more than 10.000 benefactors, who are now subscribed to the e-letter service. Additionally, GringoTree receives the visit of more than 19.000 users every day, some expats living in Ecuador and some considering relocating to the country, mostly Americans; and also predicts a growth of 11.723 future families around the world, who are currently thinking about moving to the Andean country (Soliz, GringoTree Interview 1).

Given these precedents and taking into consideration the possibilities of growth and potential of the website, as well as the various implications and the special significance that GringoTree bears for the growing expat community in Cuenca, there is no doubt then, about the impact of the American online-based resource on the social sphere of the city. With an increasingly extensive repertoire of offers and services with commercial purposes, its incidence on the local, social and cultural environments should not be overlooked. On the contrary, it is the imperious need of pausing for a few moments and reflecting upon this case scenario, which encourages us to study these newly developed interactions in the day-after-day life in Cuenca.

### 2.1.2 GringoTree products and offers

GRINGO TREE PUBLICIDAD S.A. GPUBLITREE is a resource that is primarily handled online, with the active participation of eight people, four Americans and four Ecuadorians, who share the management and co-ordination of daily tasks and operations. Since GringoTree's aim is to provide reliable cover and information of expat and retiree life in Ecuador to English speaking users, all news, information and articles are written in English. GringoTree should not only be regarded as a virtual zone of operations, for it also has a physical space-area in the city of Cuenca. GringoTree's office is located at Edificio 4 Ríos, Primero de Mayo & Ave. de las Américas.

It has been previously explained that GringoTree relies on Information Technology for its success. The online resource monitors its activities and manages its services through the use of the webpage: <http://www.gringotree.com/>. All the information and details listed below have been drawn from the GringoTree portal itself.



On the website, GringoTree presents a detailed view of all the information circulation directed to the growing expat community in Cuenca: daily community postings, consulting and real estate services, restaurants and bar recommendations, best places to see in town, among others. In this way, GringoTree fulfills its premise of delivering the *hottest* news in Cuenca, turning into the perfect link that consolidates this rapid connection between two cultures, two worldviews: locals and foreigners, with just a few mouse clicks.

The GringoTree website is organized in the following sections. Right after accessing the official Internet domain, the user can easily appreciate two subdivisions: the first one with news on Cuenca and the second one, with relevant information to those living in Quito. With the passing of years, GringoTree has found it necessary to expand its network of activities covering new important territory in the capital, hence its attention towards a new market. It should be emphasized that this dissertation paper will entirely concentrate on the GringoTree proposal in Cuenca.

Besides the Cuenca and Quito subdivisions, the website displays an “About Us” section where some background information on the establishment of the company is provided, “Business Directory” and “Real Estate” sections and finally the “News” tab. More specifically, the GringoTree website design and structure can be further explained in the following manner:

- **Home Page:** Daily posts on different topics of interest to the expatriate community, ads, items for sale and recommendations.
- **Directory:** Relevant information on accommodations, sports, food, tourism, beauty spots, finance, religion, arts and entertainment, following this sectioning:
  - Accommodations
  - Animals
  - Arts and Entertainment
  - Automobiles and Insurance
  - Beauties and Spas
  - Catering Events and Receptions
  - Coaching



- Counseling
- Education
- Express Mail
- Facilitators
- Finance
- Flooring
- Food
- Health & Fitness
- Home Improvement and Services
- Legal and Government Processes
- Lumber
- Outdoor Activity
- Personal Services
- Real Estate Offices
- Religion and Spirituality
- Relocation Services
- Stores and Vendors
- Tourism and Travel

- **News:** Current, candid and reliable information on expat and retiree life in Cuenca. A special place dedicated to relevant news, services, a community profile, articles that cover a variety of topics (history and culture of the city), an event and calendar segment and also the alternative to subscribe to GringoTree's daily newsfeed. This section is divided in the following manner:

- News
- Profiles
- Life and Housing in Cuenca
- Survey

- **Real Estate:** A very important division of GringoTree that offers a list of all properties for sale or rent. It is worth pointing out that the GringoTree Realty Service is under the management of Roberto Cruz and Jonathan Mogrovejo and that it is not owned or partnered with any other Real Estate business.
- **Recommendations:** A large recommendation guide where a wide series of products or services and a top 20 recommendations section are listed. These recommendations are based on the comments and suggestions made by page members and users in general. The categories are:

- Accommodations
- Accountants
- Animals
- Appliances
- Architects
- Arts & Entertainment
- Assisted Living
- Attorneys
- Automotive
- Bakeries
- Bank
- Beauty
- Cafes
- Cell Phones
- Churches
- Clothes
- Coast
- Computers
- Construction & Home Repair
- Cooking Classes
- Counseling
- Craftbeer
- Crafts
- Dance Lessons
- Decorations
- Dentists
- Doctors
- Drivers & Guides
- E-Cigarettes
- Electricians
- Electronic Security
- Facilitator-Facilitators
- Fishing
- Food
- Furniture
- Gardeners and Plants
- Golf
- Guayaquil
- Gym
- Haciendas
- Holistic Health
- Homestays
- Hostals
- Housekeepers

- Immigration Issues
- In-Home Care
- Insurance
- Jewelry
- Laundry
- Marketing
- Massage
- Medical
- Men's Haircuts
- Mexican
- Money/Finances
- Movers
- Movies/Films
- Music Teacher
- Pharmacies
- Photographer
- Physical Therapy
- Pizza
- Psychologist
- Quito
- Real Estate
- Realtors
- Restaurants
- Schooling
- Services
- Shipping Services
- Spanish
- Spas
- Specialty Foods
- Sports
- Tailoring
- Tapas
- Tour Guides
- Tours
- Translators
- Travel Agencies
- Uncategorized
- Upholstery/Carpet Cleaning
- Veterinarians
- Vilcabamba
- Visa
- Windows
- Wonderful Ecuador
- Yoga

- **Questions and Answers:** As suggested by the name, a platform dedicated to the formulation of questions and answers pertaining to life and lifestyle in Cuenca. Members can freely submit their answers. The categories are:

- Accommodations
- Animals
- Arts & Entertainment
- Assisted Living
- Automobiles
- Banking/Financial Services
- Beauty
- Books
- Cable TV
- Cameras
- Cell Phones
- Charity
- Children's Activities
- Classes
- Clothes
- Clothing
- Computers
- Construction
- Cooking/Baking
- Crafts
- Dance
- Dental
- Drink
- Drivers License
- Events
- Expats
- Food and Supplements
- For Sale
- Furnishings
- Health
- Horticulture
- Housekeeping
- Insurance
- Jewelry
- Legal
- Looking for
- Mail
- Medical

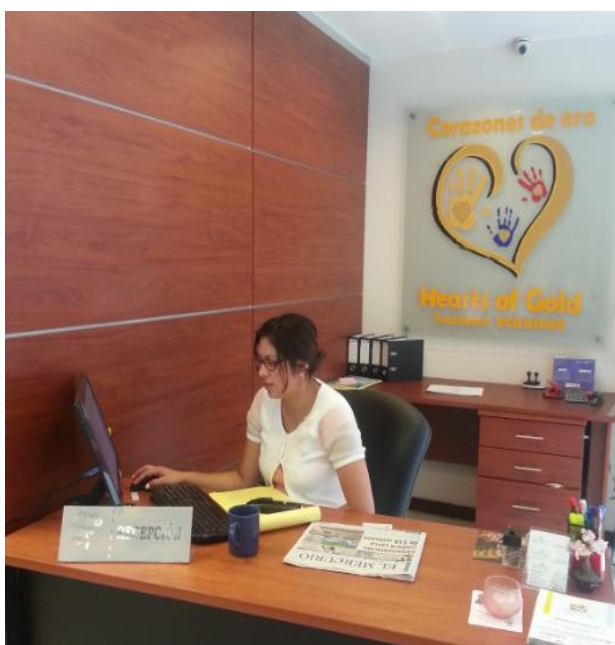
- Money
- Music
- Other
- Outdoors Activity
- Pharmaceutical
- Photography
- Printing
- Quito
- Real Estate
- Religion
- Restaurants
- Safety
- Schools
- Services
- Shipping
- Spanish
- Sports
- Tailors
- Taxes
- Tours / Tour Guides
- Transport
- Travel
- Uncategorized
- Visas
- Weather
- Wifi
- Yoga

- **Store:** Online shopping from GringoTree's selection of books and publications with special information on Cuenca and the city surroundings, available in both physical and digital format. There are also some books published by different authors. This section includes books about Ecuadorian food, places to see and things to do, tourism brochures and guides, a selection of tours and some souvenirs (shirts).
- **Ads:** Information on how to advertise through the services of GringoTree. There, it is stated that GringoTree offers three different types of Front Page advertising: classifieds, display ads and e-mail ads. There is as well, a Premium Listing Silver & Gold option. The price of ads depends on the number of characters (classifieds), size and duration (display and email ads).

As an extra fact, it should be noted in the first place, the existence of “Hearts of Gold,” a foundation that seeks to help those in need and is currently handled by people at GringoTree. Hearts of Gold campaigns to raise funds and volunteers to assist existing non-profit organizations with their work in the Azuay Province. For the Hearts of Gold activities, an executive van is used. This minivan can be easily spotted throughout the city since it also displays the GringoTree logo.

In parallel, the presence of the “CuencaHighLife” website: [www.cuencahighlife.com](http://www.cuencahighlife.com), should also be highlighted. CuencaHighLife is an online newspaper and blog dedicated to delivering hard news, features and opinion columns and is likewise managed and monitored by people working at GringoTree. Lastly, it should be stressed that GringoTree’s latest venture to provide advisory work to local companies regarding fresh patterns and best behaviors to *approach* “gringos,” has resulted in new ways and keys to strengthening the company’s mission (Soliz, GringoTree Interview 2). This last point is particularly interesting because, as Mr. Soliz explains, it is specifically in these instances that cultural clashes and major difficulties may emerge (See Appendix 2: Questionnaire of the second interview).

**Picture №2**  
**Hearts of Gold**



Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

From 1 September 2014, GringoTree announces its new "Delivery! Para Llevar" service, made available to members and users in form of a large menu compilation of several restaurants and cafes in Cuenca. GringoTree will take the order, arrange pick up and see that it gets delivered while the customer stays comfortably at home. Each *delivery* order has a \$3.00 fee *per* location applied to the total cost.

**Picture №3**  
**Delivery! Para Llevar**



Source:<http://ecuador-retirement.gringotree.com/announcing-gringotrees-new-delivery-service/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

After specifying in detail the extensive repertoire of GringoTree, it is evident how thanks to a fusion of several services, both tangible and intangible, the GringoTree community has managed to institute itself as the premier site amid English-language portals in Ecuador, thereby becoming a progressively important linkage that connects two different cultural realities between locals and the expat community in the city of Cuenca.

### **2.1.3 GringoTree's Mission and Vision**

In order to understand the mission of GringoTree it would be convenient to start off by explaining the reason behind the chosen name. According to an interview with Engineer Jamil Soliz, responsible for GringoTree's marketing and sales department, the name was selected with the attempt to reproduce a very special analogy: that of a tree, gradually developing through its branches, attracting more and more people, thus creating a strong network that brings together all types of people. GringoTree is then, a network of gringos, a foreign network that can be viewed as a large family tree. Various members of GringoTree like the idea of presenting themselves as one big family working together by incorporating as many foreigners as possible in its ranks. "We want them to be part of GringoTree, what better way than to offer a high quality personalized customer service and treatment? It is very gratifying to observe how our work helps us create the idea of a global web. A network that is constantly growing as a large tree with deep roots and strong foundations" (Soliz, GringoTree Interview 2).

**Picture №4**  
**Interview Jamil Soliz**



Author: María Auxiliadora Castro



#### 2.1.4 What is GringoTree looking for?

The mission of GringoTree in Cuenca is based on the premise of help and support to foreigners who have decided to adopt the picturesque Ecuadorian city of Cuenca as their new home, by serving as a means to connect the growing North American expatriate community with all kinds of *cuencano* businesses and services. GringoTree aims to be the number one up-to-date source of local information and contact in relation to the foreign community in Cuenca, primarily American but also Canadian. In other words, GringoTree's goal is to attain a seamless connection between *gringos* and life in Cuenca, offering the best news and opportunities throughout this transition process. Thanks to the work done to date, GringoTree has plans to expand its current network of interaction and activities and is now looking for new market niches in major cities like Loja and Ambato (Soliz, GringoTree Interview 2).

When seeking to identify the reason for the need and presence of the GringoTree community in the capital of the province of Azuay, Mr. Soliz has considered appropriate to share one reason in particular. According to a report issued by the American television, radio and news network, NBC (National Broadcasting Company), Cuenca is nowadays one of the most desirable "*top five places to settle down abroad*" for foreigners, especially for the elderly, who accustomed to busy schedules and hectic lifestyles in their home countries, appreciate in the beautiful Athens of Ecuador, the endless opportunities for rest and relaxation, the various leisure activities and the magically tranquil atmosphere that the city projects.

Its great cultural wealth, architectural and historical charm, picturesque streets and countless corners full of history, its artistic manifestations of various kinds, exquisite cuisine, excellent health services, pleasant climate and weather conditions and low cost of living in comparison to prices in the northern hemisphere of the continent, are some of the singularities that help us reinforce the idea of Cuenca as the ideal place for permanent residence abroad. Correspondingly, the friendliness of its people, the warmth, openness, charisma, kindness and charm of *Cuencanos* are weighty factors and attributes when opting for Cuenca as the final destination of their journey (Soliz, GringoTree Interview 2; GringoTree Interview 1).

Soliz adds that the most suitable way to offer the best vision of Cuenca to the entire world and particularly to those residing in Ecuador, is moving on from “formal thought” to “informal thought,” from “formal patterns” to “non-formal means.” To achieve this objective, Soliz clarifies that GringoTree is at this time looking for strategies to help propel forward a broader and more assertive focus with regards to the way in which businesses in Cuenca manage the concept of customer service for gringos and foreigners in general. With the arrival of expatriates and considering what their presence presupposes, *Cuencanos* "realize that businesses in Cuenca are already impregnated with a different culture: we are talking about a more direct, personalized, customer-oriented service, whilst trying to maintain a reasonable price on a scale with the market in order to sustain our viability" (Soliz, GringoTree Interview 2; GringoTree Interview 1).

## **2.2 The American Way: the essence of GringoTree**

To deliver a better understanding of the discourse given by GringoTree, it is necessary that we place ourselves in the proper context, within a frame of reference that will permit us to fathom the reason behind its existence, its *raison d'être*: mission and vision, and how its shared values and parameters have significantly contributed to the achievement of the company's goals, always bearing in mind that GringoTree is constituted as an American society established by and for Americans. Let's proceed then with a brief overview of “The American Way.”

First of all, it is of crucial importance to recall that since the colonial era to the present day, the United States of America, has been par excellence, the country that best defines the immigration phenomenon at the international level. Over time, the United States has been able to consolidate itself as the recipient of a number of groups of different nationalities, all guided by the desire to find better opportunities in all areas of life, enabling them to achieve the so-called, much-cherished "American dream."

We must not forget two significant facts: 1) the United States of America is a nation of immigrants; and (2) the enormous influence that these new groups of humans have had on the formation and construction of what might be called the “American

culture.” Discussing the existence of a *single* American culture however, would make us fall into the mistake of neglecting and overlooking America’s enormous diversity, the product of centuries of global exchange. It is in colonial times perhaps, where the influence of foreign collectivities, especially European, was most noteworthy. The latest European trends and the newest advances and manifestations in the fields of arts, music, literature, painting and different expressions of the Old Continent, knew how to excel and distinguish themselves, eventually finding a way to infiltrate the American society.

All these manifestations of foreign culture were soon met with the approval of many and to the same extent, with the reluctance, reproach and punitive criticism from other sectors. Throughout history it is clear that, in the American case as well as elsewhere in the world, there is a general outcry and widespread clamor for the survival of native autochthonous elements when faced with the paradigm of globalization. In this regard, we witness how these elements are always looking for specific escape routes that will allow them to coexist (although in a position of disadvantage) between their own environment and the one proposed by the dominant culture, refusing in this manner to be completely displaced or forgotten.

In the American case:

As part of their revolution, many Americans also wanted a cultural break with Europe. European art, culture, and society were attacked as being “aristocratic.” They were seen as a threat to the ideal of democracy. They were described as being decadent, degenerate, and unethical. (Stevenson, *American Life and Institutions* 112)

This harsh condemnation of European values and lifestyle led to several arguments from the other side of the Atlantic, that by way of defense (or counter attack), proclaimed that the American culture was erected as “barely civilized” due to the lack of “aristocracy” and “class distinction” (Stevenson, *American Life and Institutions* 112). This behavior can be best assumed as a bilateral struggle in which both sides present a singular argument claiming it to be *their* sort of unshakable truth, giving way to distressing situations and excruciatingly contemptible ethnocentric

attitudes and worldviews, where there is no room for other representations and characterizations of the world, but through their own cultural standards and patterns, (extolling the virtues of what is mine and despising the unknown), thereby shattering the formerly described concept of cultural identity.

It is through the Declaration of Independence and in the form of the Constitution of the United States of America —the oldest written constitution in force in the world— where a series of ideals, personal freedoms and rights of all those who reside in America are gathered. In The First Ten Constitutional Amendments, known as the Bill of Rights of the United States of America (1791), the fundamental rights of any American citizen are declared:

Among these rights —and most had already been stated in Virginia’s Bill of Rights (1776) and Massachusetts’ (1780)— are the freedom of religion, speech, and the press, the right of peaceful assembly, and the right to petition the government to correct wrongs. (Stevenson, *American Life and Institutions* 38)

Under the ideals proposed by the concepts of freedom, fellowship, progress and equality of human beings, the American society is proud of its rich cultural and ethnic diversity and is just as eager to promote the achievement of this great American dream through hard work and sacrifice, in a land of immense opportunities, abundance and wealth where practically everything is possible.

In the United States, every individual is capable of reaching their own version of personal success, whether it is a statement in relation to better living conditions, greater access to health and education services, benefits from economic and social activities, freedom of worship and ideological autonomy, there is no doubt whatsoever as to the importance and reverberation of this representation of the American dream. A dream that is by some means, reminiscent of a historical period characterized by the economic doctrine of *laissez-faire*, *laissez-passer*, where human beings and their many freedoms and liberties, are the backbone that articulate life in society.

In this regard, Douglas Stevenson submits that:

Anyone who was born in the second half of the twentieth century, and who has lived in a land with all the modern media —newspapers and magazines, paperback books and films, radio and television, videos and advertisements of every type— has grown up with hundreds, even thousands of images of America and American life. Because of this, most people have already been to America, even if they have never placed one foot on American soil. (Stevenson, *American Life and Institutions* 5)

From what has been established above, it is worth remarking that this production and reproduction of images takes place not only within American borders, but similarly, on a large scale in different corners of the world. The different media mentioned by Stevenson, help reaffirm and propagate a dream that seeks to be imitated. No matter the place, no matter the hour, no matter the circumstances, the idea of reaching the all-American dream and *gringo* lifestyle proves simply irresistible.

Thus, this American vitality, the nerve center of the “American Way” of doing things, covers a range of areas and scenarios and can be best depicted by typical images of: American soccer games on the weekends in the company of family, friends, neighbors and a couple of beers; the hectic nightlife atmosphere in big metropolises and entertainment venues like New York, Los Angeles or Las Vegas; daily life in America and the limitless colorful mosaics of imagination portrayed by the Mecca of motion pictures: Hollywood; the enormous popularity of multinational corporations such as McDonald’s, General Motors, Google, Coca Cola, Facebook; iconic characters like Batman or Mickey Mouse; the intimacy of social occasions and family celebrations accompanied by the immensely popular “Happy Birthday” melody; the worldwide renowned Broadway shows and haute-couture runways in New York; the euphoria caused by music idols like Madonna or Michael Jackson; Walt Whitman’s poetical greatness; Ernest Hemingway’s melancholic adventures in “The Old Man and the Sea”, etc.

The fact that all these expressions that carry the “Made in America” label, are broadly known and accepted, are just a taster of the examples of the popularity of the

American culture distributed throughout the world and represent only a small fraction of this special modality planted in American society and abroad, that is equally enticing and alluring for locals as it is for outsiders. There are several theories surrounding its particular appeal. Stevenson attributes this popularity to: a) the fact that the American culture has been brilliantly promoted through films, music and television shows; b) the fact that the United States is a nation of nations, therefore embracing everything that can be regarded as common and familiar; and c) its essence or spirit, which he describes as:

American popular culture is internationally associated with something called “the spirit of America.” This spirit is variously described as being young and free, optimistic and confident, easygoing and informal. (Stevenson, *American Life and Institutions* 121)

Independently of the many reasons behind its tremendously striking popularity, its rapid absorption and immersion in international circles secures its position as the number one exporter of culture on a global basis. “In our days we can talk, in all layers of society, middle and lower segments included, about the existence of the “Americanization” phenomenon, that is, the scarcely reflective imitation of American traits, patterns and features pertaining music, clothing, food, etc.” (Malo González, *Arte y Cultura Popular* 101).

From this angle, it would seem that this movement of Americanization comprises the set of goals and ideals formerly described, so heading towards its direction would be our wisest decision if we are to avoid stagnation and the sense of being left behind in the dazzling boom of this unifying process. Paradoxically, an increasing interest can be observed with regards to the way people talk about American imperialism or a new form of *gringo* invasion and neocolonialism, a very interesting and curious aspect to be pinpointed if we take into account the fact that European colonialism and imperialism remained for many centuries, a sensitive topic of discussion.

We then witness how this specific pattern seems to repeat itself in our present day, with a slight shift in the focus of attention nonetheless: this interest is no longer

reserved or confined to countries of the Old Continent, for the United States of America has been automatically included as a subject matter for discussion:

Although direct colonial rule has largely come to an end, much of the world remains entangled in neocolonialism; that is, a conjuncture in which direct political and military control has given way to abstract, semi-indirect, largely economic forms of control (...) Partly as a result of colonialism, the contemporary global scene is now dominated by a coterie of powerful nation-states, consisting basically of Western Europe, the US and Japan. This domination is economic ("the Group of Seven", the IMF, the World Bank, GATT); political (the five veto-holding members of the UN Security Council); military and techno-informational-cultural (Hollywood, UPI, Reuters, France-Presse, CN). (Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* 139)

This new concept of colonialism is flexible and adaptable:

Colonialist discourse is protean, multiple, adopting diver and even contradictory rhetoric. It varies with region, with historical period, and with the ideological needs of the moment. It can condemn the Arab world for overdressing (the veil) and the indigenous world for underdressing (nudity). It can project Africa as hypermasculine, grossly corporeal, and incapable of abstraction, while projecting Asia as dreamy, feminine, and overly abstract. Africa can be a child and Asia a shriveled old man, but Europe always maintains a relational advantage. Both Asia and Africa are seen as constitutively deficient, while Europe always keeps its place at the apex of a value-laden hierarchy. (Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* 139)

This scenario may and has already, matter-of-factly, been transposed to the South American arena. History indicates that this colonialist discourse often comes disguised as false homily, under the phony promise and pseudo premise of the delivery of a compassionate, evangelizing, civilizing and modernizing mission to all colonized nations. Just like in the Asian and African cases, we are shown the feeble,

primitive image of South American peoples, followed by their “Third World” categorization: a region in a desperate cry for help and external protection since it is only perceived as the outer fringes in the core-periphery model represented by the civilized western world. Even though these concepts may shelter ideas that would be seen as archaic and perishable in the current days, the stigma of their sequels of violence in these colonized societies is still blatantly palpable.

### **2.3 Methodology in-situ: The American Way and GringoTree in Cuenca**

Under this introductory framework of the discourse employed by GringoTree, and in addition to resorting to books and specialized texts, the author of this paper has sought to obtain information from primary sources with respect to “The American Way” of doing, acting and living. To this end, the alternative of individual interviews has been considered as an optimal choice at the moment of gathering information for this section of the monograph, since the vis-à-vis interaction with participants has proved to be a greatly enriching experience. The interviewees feel very comfortable sharing their ideas and are manifestly content and proud of their homeland when answering the questions formulated in the interview. They express a special interest and are by the same token, eager to contribute further to the development of this research (See Appendix 3: Questionnaire of the interview).

After answering basic questions about age, sex and previous place of residence, the interviewees are questioned about their main motivation or justification for their mobilization and relocation from the north hemisphere of the continent to Ecuadorian soil, and more specifically Cuenca. It is worth mentioning that, despite living in a country of opportunities and utopias, of peculiar lifestyles (real or imagined), there exists a significant flow of American exiles and expatriates scattered in various corners of the world, perhaps disenchanted with the idea of the American dream and in search of better living conditions.

What is it then that motivates them to leave their own land of charm and endless opportunities? It should be made clear that the purpose of the interviews is to compile first-hand information from all the participants, giving them the freedom and



confidence to share, as a sort of testimony, their experiences and anecdotes since their arrival in Cuenca.

From the applied methodology, the particular vision of the American Way that predicts great economic boom but is at the same time loaded with individualistic connotations, typical of capitalist societies like the United States, is the one that stands out among the majority of respondents. The idea of striving for economic prosperity as a fundamental pillar of society is maintained, but simultaneously, this scenario leads to a deeper reflection on the consequences and the paradoxes of this lifestyle. Thus, the American dream seems to take on a new form and direction for it becomes a more elastic and malleable concept.

Rachael Pryor expresses a very strong criticism in this regard stating that: “America is free if you can afford it.” In her own words, the American society is immersed in a purely capitalistic system and is excessively consumerist. People feel the imperative need to have the latest gadgets, accessories and electronic devices in general, “the fastest car and the hottest technology available.” Rachael indicates that this is what she has been taught since her childhood. To her, this is the way the world works and everything relies on consumerism. “Ever since you’re five you’re told you have to have the latest innovations in technology. You want them, you need them because they make you feel good. They make you feel like you finally fit in! You need them to make up for that emptiness that you feel due to the lack of social interaction.”

The interviewee defines the essence of the American Way in the following paragraph:

In the States you don’t talk to people you don’t know. Individuals are concerned about the idea of making more money. It’s crazy! You got to work all the time, that’s the main reason Americans are feeling so frustrated and stressed nowadays. We don’t have time to relax. We don’t even have time for our own families anymore. The American Way of doing things is really exhausting since it consumes all your energies. (Rachael Pryor)

She understands that the United States is a global economic superpower and that this individualistic attitude and approach can be derived from the fact that it is perhaps

best to feel safe and isolated from the world than to show oneself as vulnerable and accessible out of fear that someone might interfere in private or personal affairs:

It's a good thing to be "isolated" so no one can mess with you, so no one would mess up with what you have, so no one would touch your things. If you're American you don't want to put yourself out there in the open, people might hurt you. We don't know how to react. We turn to violence and prefer to keep at arm's length. We want to get out of our reality, that's why we adopt this attitude. We're so individualistic we don't realize there's a whole world out there. We prefer to lock ourselves into our own little world because it's better this way. That's how we're told the world works. Unfortunately, in America you don't see a sense of family or community, no social awareness either. (Rachael Pryor)

In the same train of thought, Alexander Russell shares:

I think for us things are a lot more formal than personal. Importance is put on simplicity, efficiency, and the least amount of time possible. The business side of the work is also highly centered on the consumer/client and to make it as easy for them to consume or buy products as possible. Everything in America is very consumeristic. People buy new things like appliances and furniture for absolutely no reason other than they are tired of looking at the same thing. Values include going to school, getting a job, getting a wife, and working until retirement. That's the basic message that is sent to people. (Alexander Russell)

On that American individualism, Neil and Thom are energetic in their responses:

America is very fast paced, very stressful. If you're in the working environment, you don't do things the way you do them here in Ecuador. In America it's all about working 24/7, things are much more stressful and chaotic. I think it's a different mindset, a different culture. Everything you learn at a young age remains with you for the rest of your life. You learn that money makes you happy, maybe that's the reason we've become such selfish

individuals. We don't want to be burdened. During my free time I want to do what I want to do, we need some time to decompress, that's why we value our free time but instead of spending it with our loved ones, we do things on our own, that's kind of selfish. A very individualistic statement indeed. (Neil Nagle)

I love America and everything my country stands for! However, I'm really saddened to admit that our ideals of freedom, equality and fraternity are slowly fading away. We are caught up in the middle of a brutal capitalist war that teaches you that money is the most important asset that you possess. The American Way can be very cold and unappreciative. You finally land in America and try to adapt only to end up feeling like you're being absorbed by the whole system. In the South, where I am from, people are very friendly and kind, but in the North, people are very blunt, very straightforward, selfish and not very tactful. (Thom Davis)

Progressively, the interviewees bring up new topics of conversation that allude to the particular entrepreneurial spirit that characterizes American people. Nevertheless, the conclusion on the subject of American individualism and materialism seems to be the same:

I would describe Americans as entrepreneurs, there's always the desire to make things better, but we are also very spoiled and immature. There's a very marked consumerist approach to the way we do and perceive things. We're trying to make everything "more American", more efficient. We believe buying three cars, two televisions and the latest technology gadgets will help us achieve all that. We're a nation of immigrants, a mix of different collectivities but at the same time we are very selfish people. We talk about "culture mingle" but I honestly don't believe we know what it truly entails. (Lyle Rhoades)

Lastly, Nancy, one of the participant ladies shares her thoughts on the American Way of doing things telling us that it is best understood in a single phrase: "Time is gold".

She adds:

The American Way? Let me put it this way: Right here, right now is when people want things or want things done in America. You know what they say, time is gold and there is no time to lose. That's how we like it in America. We are very impatient due to the usual way things are handled in the United States. It's all about money and stress. Me, myself and I! (Nancy Turpin)

In the next chapter we shall proceed to the examination of the discourse presented by GringoTree through the analysis of data and material from the surveys, interviews and information drawn directly from the official GringoTree website.

## CHAPTER 3

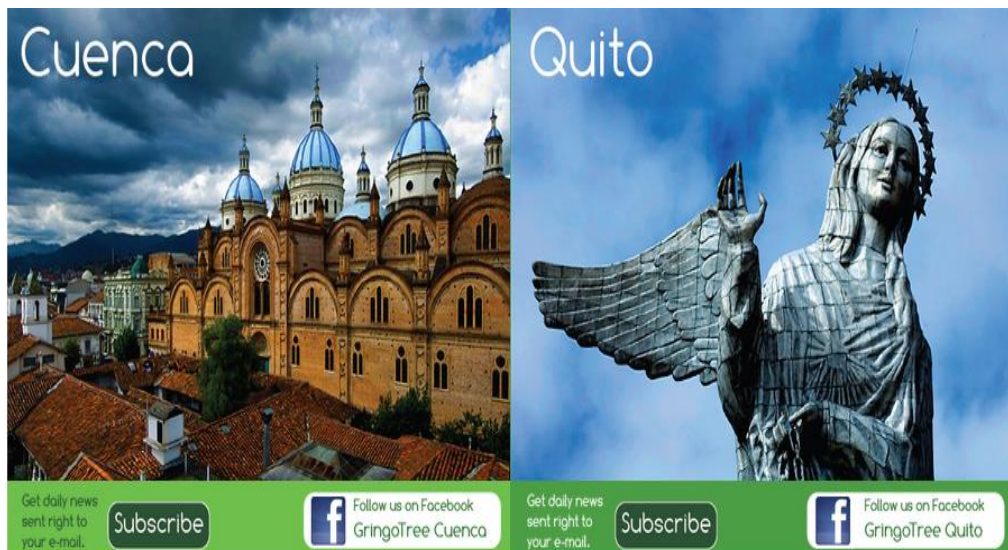
### THE DISCOURSE OF GRINGOTREE

#### 3.1 The American Way of GringoTree

The visionary outlook that encapsulates the essence of GringoTree is better reflected in the following statement:

Picture №5

#### GringoTree: Number One English-Language Website in Ecuador



#### Number One English-Language Website in Ecuador!

GringoTree is your trusted source when it comes to living abroad in Ecuador. We are dedicated to providing you with valuable information and opportunities so you can enjoy the cultural diversity and international excitement that accompany life at zero latitude. Let GringoTree be the place you can count on in Ecuador.

Source: <http://www.gringotree.com/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

With these lines we begin the analysis of the discourse implemented by GringoTree. From the very first moment the home page is presented, the user receives the clear message that Cuenca is a spectacularly beautiful city and that those that are part of GringoTree are indeed the most qualified candidates to offer its visitors all the necessary information and assistance in their process of transition.

What is really interesting about this statement is the way in which GringoTree uses the language-game, (previously described by Wittgenstein) to proclaim themselves the number one source and link between expatriates and lifestyle in Cuenca. The existence of several adjectives and the use of words like “trusted source,” “valuable information and opportunities” on the website, speak of an image and identity in the purest manifestation of that particular American style covered in chapter two. A style that will be consistently portrayed, maintained, and reinforced in the various news and articles on the website.

### **3.1.1 The survey**

After this brief introduction and in order to support the theory of Discourse Analysis, a number of 70 surveys have been conducted among a large group of foreigners living in the city of Cuenca, most of them Americans. For such purpose, these surveys have been delivered to expatriates that regularly gather in Cuenca’s most visited and famous spots, such as shopping malls, supermarkets, restaurants, bars and tourist attractions. Interestingly enough, after the completion of the surveys, the author of this dissertation paper takes rejoices in sharing that she has also engaged in pleasantly casual conversations on the city streets.

The following survey questionnaire was applied:

**Picture №6**

**Survey**



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Survey №.:

Hello, my name is María Auxiliadora Castro. I am a student from the International Studies School of the University of Azuay in Cuenca, Ecuador. I am currently working on my thesis project in order to get my Bachelor's Degree in International Studies. My dissertation paper involves discourse studies and my case study is based upon the experiences of foreigners that now live in Cuenca and use the website "GringoTree." The purpose of this survey is to gather information that will allow me to carry out my research, and the results will be used in a confidential manner. Thank you in advance for your time and cooperation.

**1. Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **(optional)**

**2. Gender:** F ☐ M ☐

**3. Age** \_\_\_\_

**4. Country/State where you come from** \_\_\_\_\_

**5. How long have you been living in Cuenca?** \_\_\_\_\_

**6. What brought you here? What was your motivation? Tick the option that best represents your answer.**

Weather Conditions	<input type="checkbox"/>	Health Benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>
Low Cost of Living	<input type="checkbox"/>	Benefits for Retired People	<input type="checkbox"/>
Affordable Cost of Real State	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tourism	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cuenca's Lifestyle	<input type="checkbox"/>		

**7. How long do you plan to stay?**

Temporary ☐ Permanent ☐ Undecided ☐

**8. Did you get any relocation assistance or did you do everything on your own?**

Yes, I had some assistance ☐ No, I did everything on my own ☐

**9. How did you first hear about the option to retire in Cuenca?**

Internet research	<input type="checkbox"/>	Previous trips to Ecuador	<input type="checkbox"/>
Friends/Family experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	Television reports	<input type="checkbox"/>
Magazines about retirement abroad	<input type="checkbox"/>		

**10. Which of the following options do you prefer to keep yourself informed about current and upcoming events and news regarding Cuenca?**

Newspaper	<input type="checkbox"/>	Internet websites and blogs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Television	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other _____	

**11. Have you Heard of GringoTree?**

Yes ☐ No ☐

**(If the answer is No, the survey is complete. Thank you)**

**12. How often do you use the website?**

Daily ☐ Several times a day ☐ Several times a week ☐  
Not very often ☐



**13. Are you subscribed to the newsfeed?**

Yes ☐

No ☐

**14. Besides GringoTree, do you use any other similar websites?**

Yes ☐

No ☐

**If the answer is Yes, please name them.**

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**15. Have you used any of the services provided by GringoTree?**

Yes ☐

No ☐

**If the answer is Yes, please describe them.**

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**16. What do you mostly use the website for? Please give a number in order of importance (1 the most important, 7 the least important)**

Cuenca News ☐

Interacting with Expats ☐

Reviews & Recommendations ☐

Questions and Answers ☐

Business Directory ☐

Items for Sale/Classifieds ☐

Calendar and Events ☐

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**17. Do you think the information published by GringoTree is:**

Accurate ☐

Useful ☐

Irrelevant ☐

Undecided ☐

**Why?**

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**18. Do you see a difference between what GringoTree advertises or publishes and actual lifestyle and reality in Cuenca?**

Yes ☐

No ☐

Undecided ☐

**19. Is there something in GringoTree that you would like to see more or less of?**

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**20. Please name three things that you like and dislike about the GringoTree website:**

Likes

Dislikes

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**21. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate GringoTree?**

—

*Thank you for your cooperation*

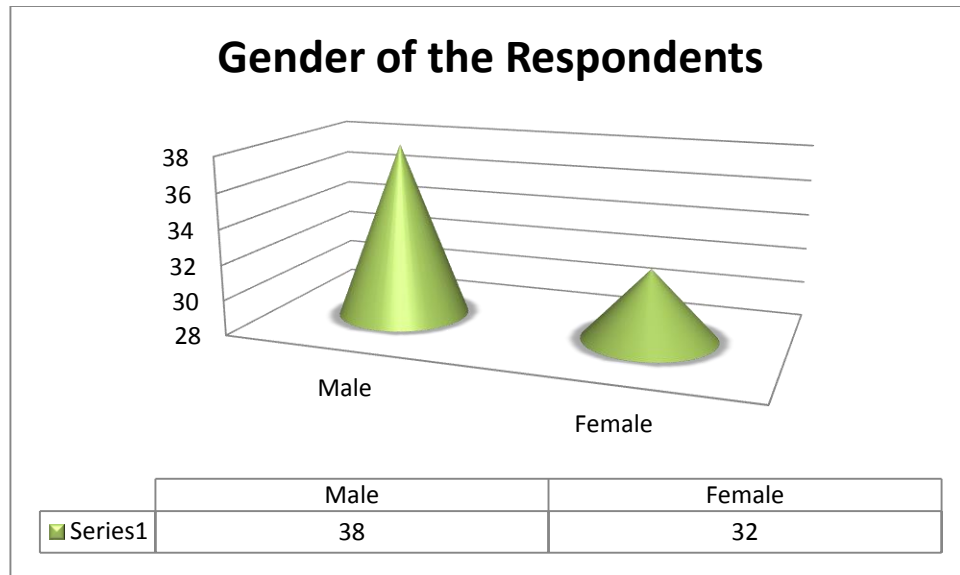
*If you have any questions, please write to: maru\_ec\_1986@hotmail.com*

Upon completion of the survey process to 70 foreigners living in Cuenca during the third week of November 2014 (17<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>), data has been analyzed according to the number of responses for each question and its percentile in certain cases. The following charts present the observed results:

The obtained data indicate that, with regards to the gender of the respondents, 38 are male, while the remaining 32 are female.

**Figure № 1**

**Gender of the Respondents**



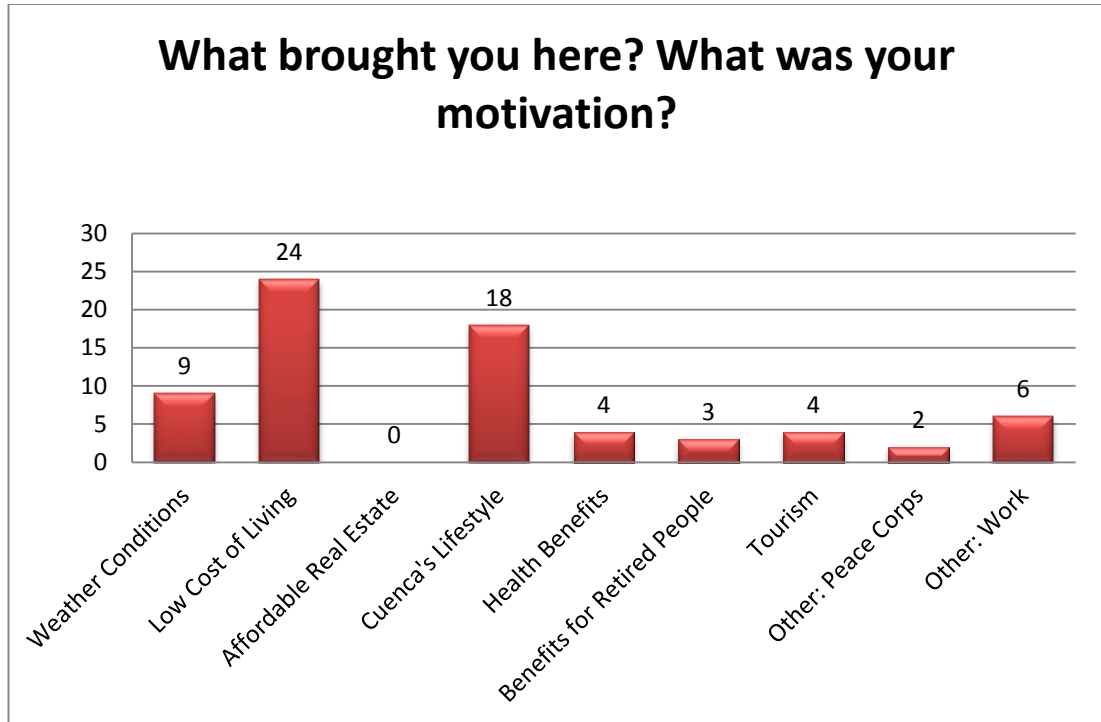
Source: Data from the survey

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

Regarding their main source of motivation to settle down in Cuenca, respondents show a preference for the low cost of living in the city as their first answer with 24 respondents who opt for this choice. Secondly, 18 of the 70 respondents choose Cuenca's lifestyle as the perfect justification for their decision to migrate. The third and fourth places are shared between weather and climate conditions and work options, with 9 and 6 answers respectively. Then benefits in health and tourism are the next reasons for immigration with an equal number of 4 respondents. Finally we have benefits for retired people and Peace Corps volunteering programs with a number of 3 and 2 respondents in each case.

**Figure №2**

**What brought you here? What was your motivation?**



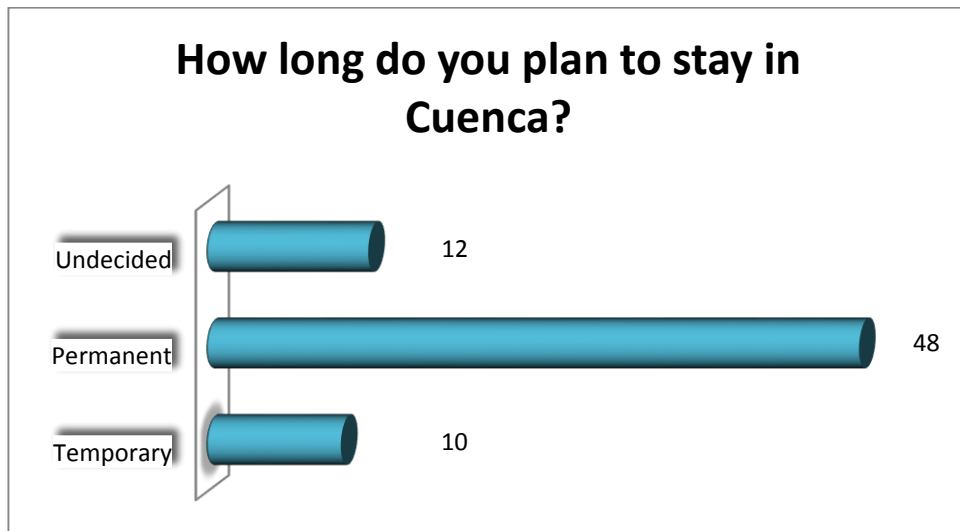
Source: Data from the survey

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

It is worth stressing that 48 of the respondents indicate their preference to remain permanently in Cuenca, compared to 12 people that are still undecided about their decision to stay in the city and the remaining individuals (10) that have adopted the beautiful Athens of Ecuador as their temporary home.

**Figure №3**

**How long do you plan to stay in Cuenca?**



Source: Data from the survey

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

The next question examines whether the respondents received any relocation assistance when moving to Ecuador or whether, on the contrary, did everything on their own. 50 of the interrogated people deny to have had some assistance, whilst 20 of them claim to have hired a facilitator to this end.

**Figure №4**

**Did you get any relocation assistance?**



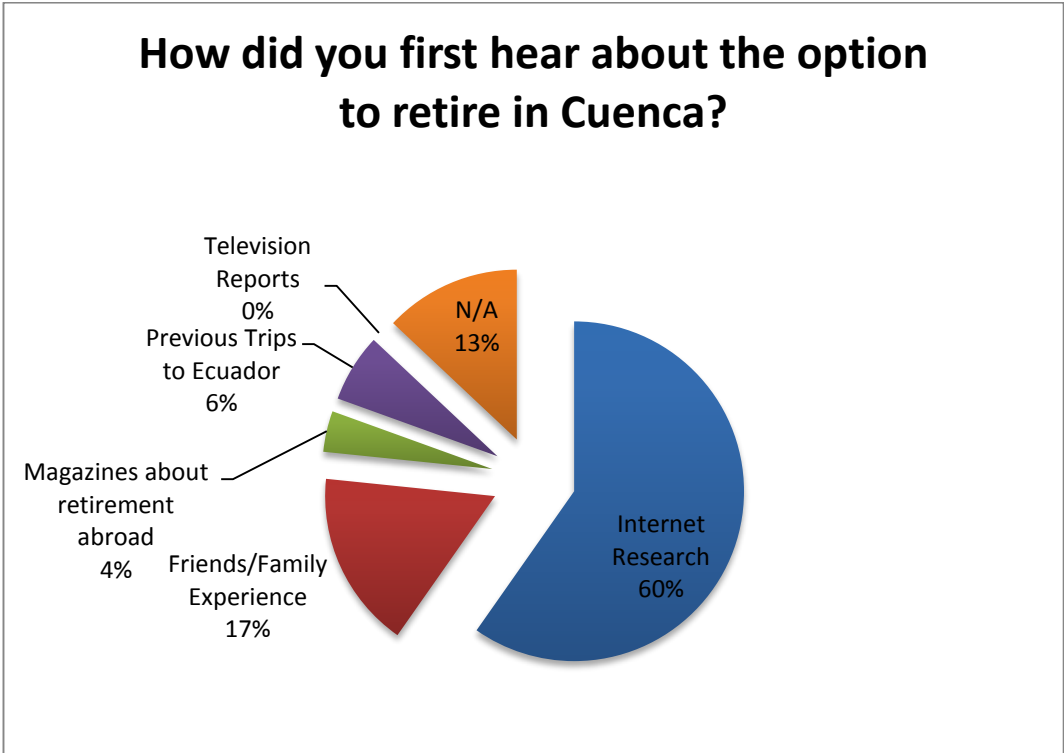
Source: Data from the survey

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

The next part of the survey is directed towards obtaining data on the role of information technology and communication (IT) as promoters of certain decisions. 60% of the respondents named the Internet as their main source of information, either through blogs, tourism related websites, forums, social networks or online documentaries. 17% of the individuals replied that they learned about the benefits of Cuenca through the experiences of friends or family in the city. The 13% figure that does not apply refers to foreigners residing in the city but not as retirees. 6% of the people say that previous trips to Ecuador, especially to three of the largest cities, Quito, Guayaquil and Cuenca helped them form a better understanding of life in Cuenca, whereas the remaining 4% has collected information from magazines about retirement abroad. Lastly, none of the respondents mentioned television reports as a source of information on the option to retire in the capital of the province of Azuay.

**Figure №5**

**How did you first hear about the option to retire in Cuenca?**



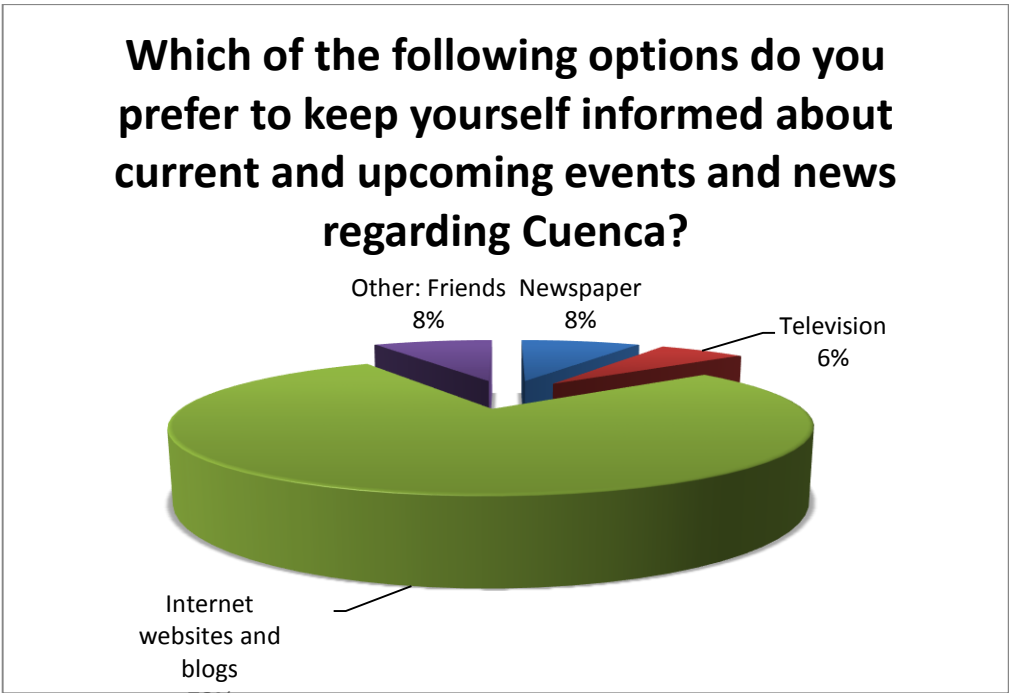
Source: Data from the survey

Autor: María Auxiliadora Castro

As data and information are analyzed, the relevance of information technology in today's world becomes clearly visible. The same can be applied in the case of Cuenca as the chart below helps us corroborate this idea. Out of all the interrogated people, 78% declared that they prefer internet websites and blogs to keep themselves informed about current and upcoming events and news regarding Cuenca. 8% referred to the written press (newspapers, magazines, news bulletins) as their second choice, followed by an equal percentage of people that affirmed that the best way to know what is going on in Cuenca is through conversations with friends. Finally, 6% of the individuals mentioned their preference for television.

**Figure №6**

**Which of the following options do you prefer to keep yourself informed about current and upcoming events and news regarding Cuenca?**

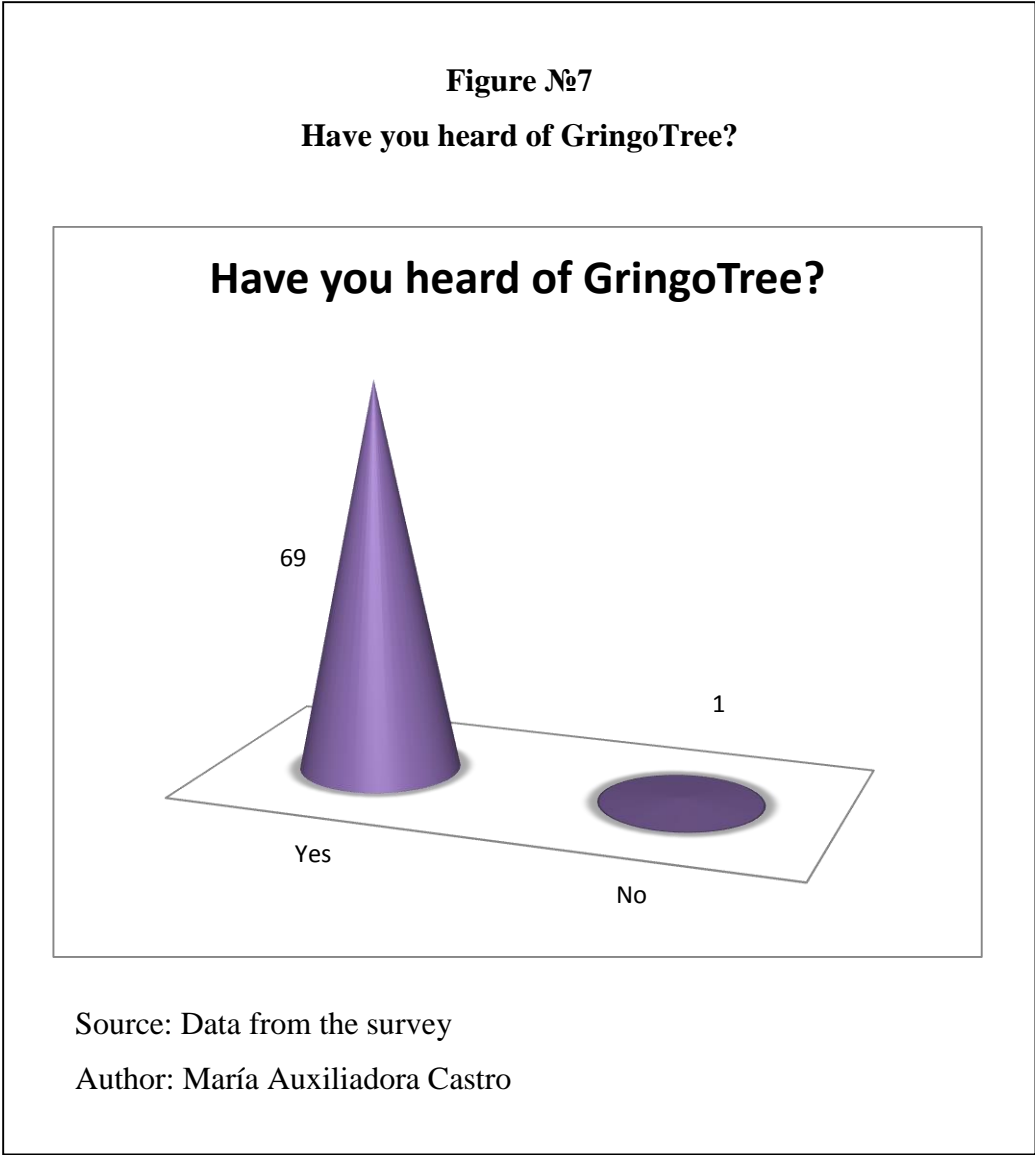


Source: Data from the survey

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

It has been previously stated that GringoTree is the number one English-language website in Ecuador. The following chart highlights the importance of the American

internet-based portal. The answers were clear towards a positive response: 69 out of 70 respondents indicated they had heard of GringoTree, with only one person responding negatively to the question.

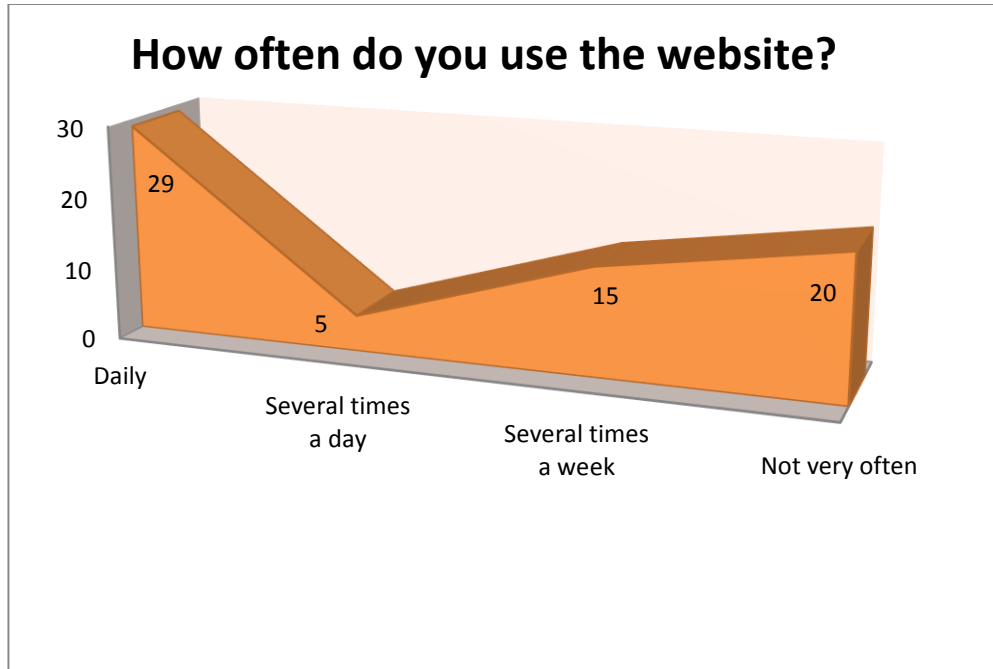


From now on, for data interpretation purposes, only the answers and opinions belonging to the 69 respondents who have acknowledged the existence of GringoTree will be taken into consideration. 29 out of those 69 people access the website on a daily basis, 20 do not visit it very often, 15 check it several times a week and 5 people prefer to use it several times a day.



**Figure №8**

**How often do you use the website?**



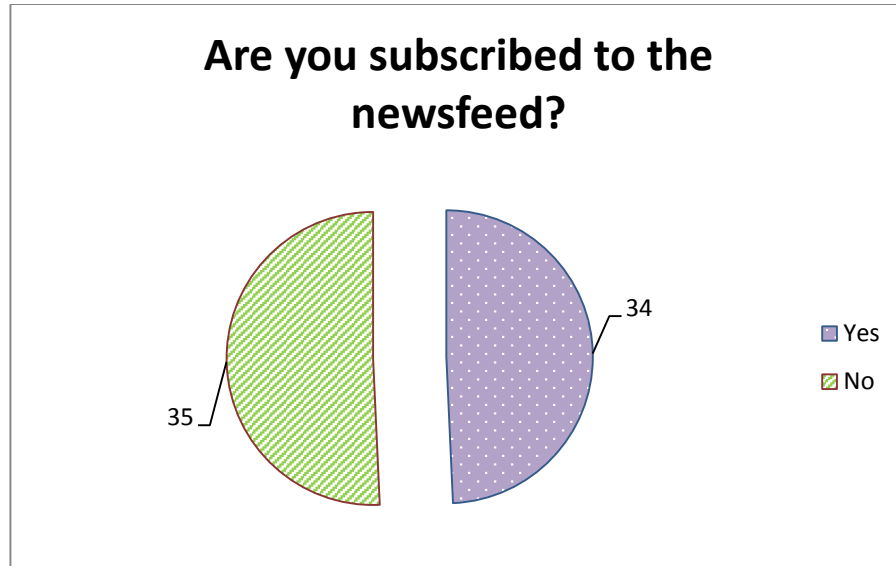
Source: Data from the survey

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

One of the most effective tools that help strengthen the link between GringoTree and its visitors, as previously stated by Sales Manager Jamil Soliz, is the daily newsfeed service provided by the online resource. In this regard, 35 people responded that they are not subscribed or have not heard of the newsfeed service, whereas the remaining 34 confirm they receive it every day. This particular outcome is very interesting since it could be erroneously assumed that the majority of respondents are subscribed to the daily newsfeed service.

**Figure №9**

**Are you subscribed to the newsfeed?**



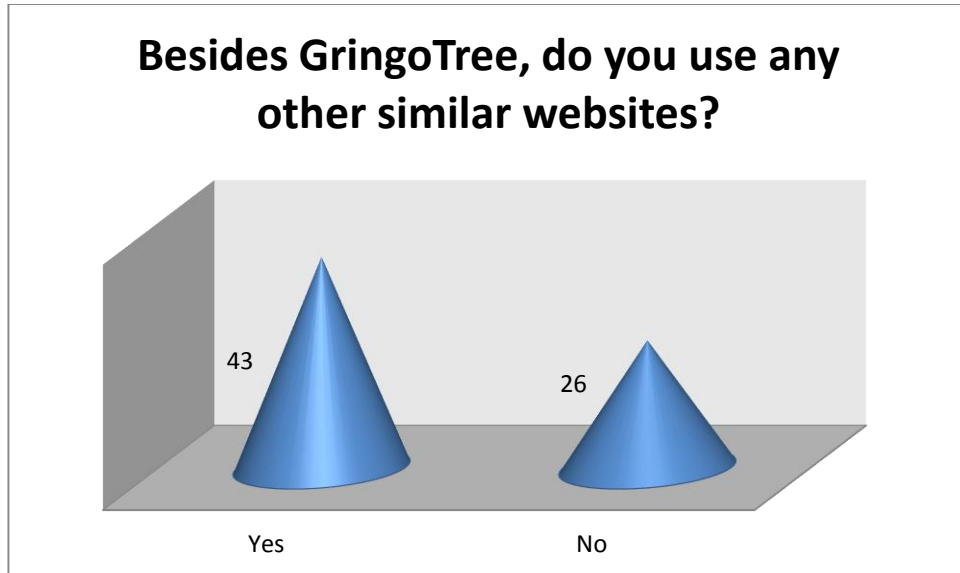
Source: Data from the survey

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

Even if it has been widely acknowledged that GringoTree is the number one English-language website in the country, it is certainly not the only one. There are a variety of blogs, online websites with all sorts of tourist information, forums, discussion groups and other types of online social networks, whose purpose is also to deliver current news and information regarding Cuenca. 43 out of 69 participants reveal that they visit similar websites, while 26 respondents claim that GringoTree is their only alternative.

**Figure №10**

**Besides GringoTree, do you use any other similar websites?**



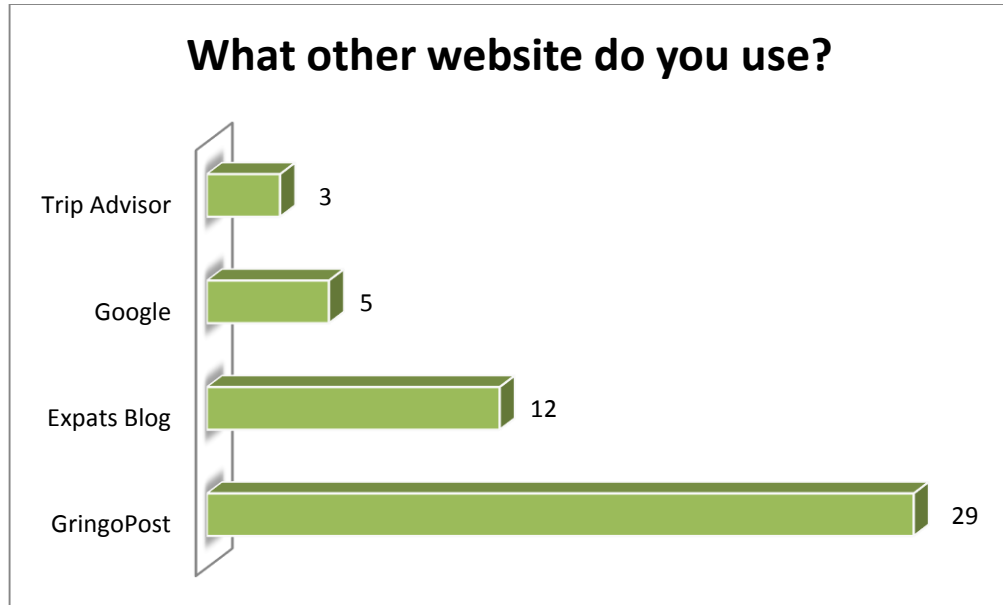
Source: Data from the survey

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

Among these similar websites, the following are the most important. In the first place, we have GringoPost, perhaps GringoTree's closest and heaviest competitor. Secondly, the Expats Blog, an online expats community where users can easily share experiences, ask questions and get direct answers from other members. This particular community stands out among the survey participants because it leans more towards becoming a large information exchange platform rather than solely focusing on pursuing commercial purposes. Thirdly, we have the world's biggest search engine Google; and finally, the American online website Trip Advisor, which specializes in counseling, comments, tips, reviews and recommendations on travel-related topics.

**Figure №11**

**What other website do you use?**



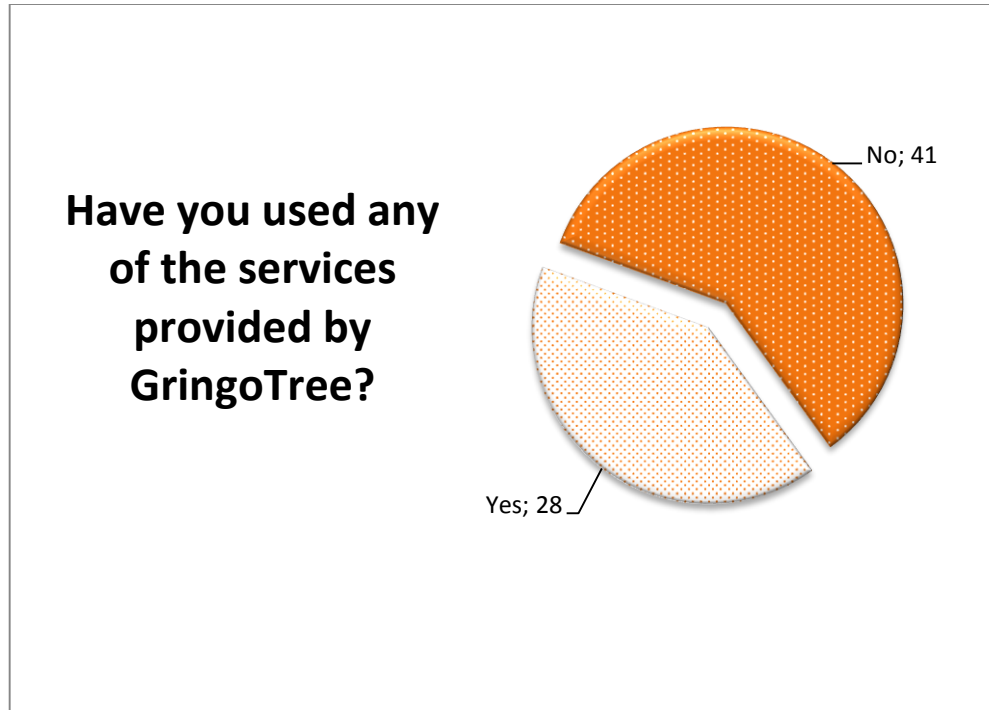
Source: Data from the survey

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

People at GringoTree take pride in recognizing that they do all they can to make the web content and online services immediately available to users, no matter what section of the site they are visiting. With regards to this matter, data from the surveys show that most of the participants, 41 out of 69, claim that they have not used any of the services provided by GringoTree, whereas 28 of the people say they have benefited from these services. It is thus concluded that the majority of the people that access the website, use it to keep themselves informed about current and upcoming events and news in Cuenca, instead of actually deciding to do business online or promoting personal services that could grant them monetary benefits.

**Figure №12**

**Have you used any of the services provided by GringoTree?**



Source: Data from the survey

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

The respondents' answers regarding these services are:

- Purchase and sale of several items: cell phones, books in both physical and digital formats, small kitchen appliances, living-room and dining-room furniture and electronic devices in general.
- Getting assistance whilst seeking services provided by lawyers, doctors, dentists, drivers, housekeepers and translators/interpreters.
- Item exchange.
- Real Estate Services.
- Classifieds.
- Detailed information on trips to Cajas National Park, Chordeleg and Gualaceo.

- Reviews and recommendations on several topics: how to unlock a cell phone, best pizza in town, best place to find ingredients that are essential in American cuisine.
- Questions and answers about food, nutrition and cooking related words, as well as a variety of topics on health and politics.

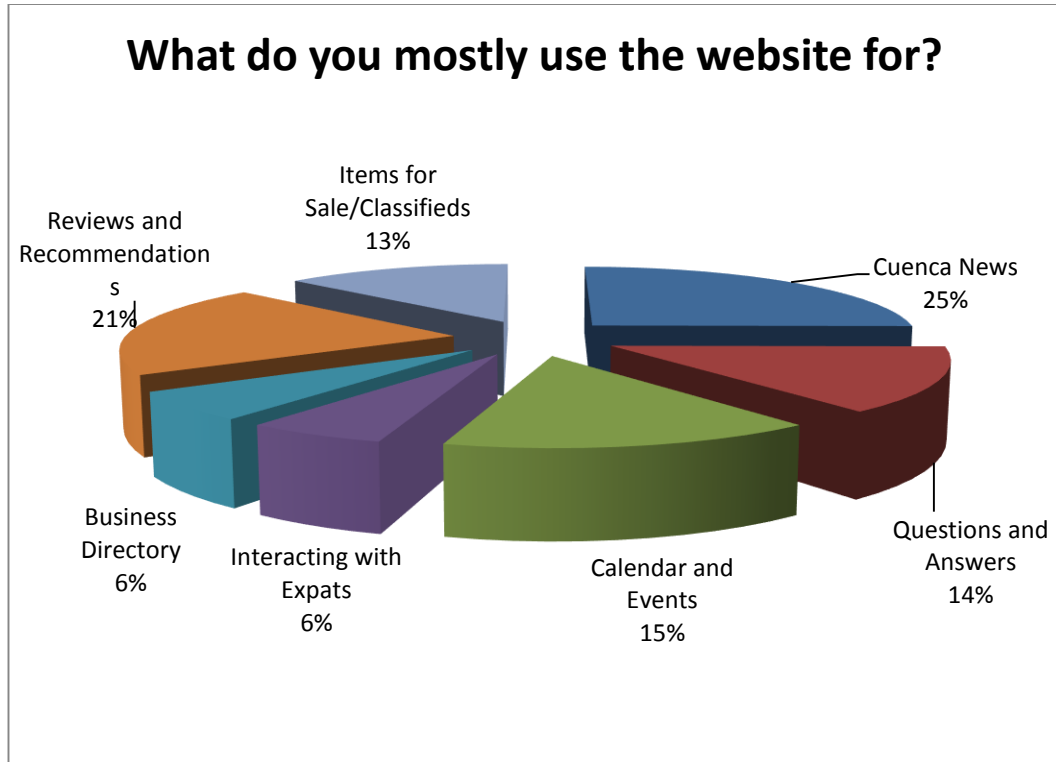
In the previous chapter, special emphasis was placed on the long list of products and services offered by GringoTree. For this very purpose, and attempting to get more information on the “number one item on the list,” the following question was formulated in the survey: What do you mostly use the website for?

In response, the following percentages have been obtained. 25% of the participants responded that they use the website exclusively to keep themselves updated on news in Cuenca. 21% of the respondents said they prefer the reviews and recommendations section while 15% of them manifested their preference for the calendar and events service. With a similar percentage, 14% of the participants chose the questions and answers section, 13% of them expressed that they use the items for sale and classifieds service more frequently, 6% prefer the business directory tab on the website, and the remaining 6% of the people avow they use it to interact with other expatriates.

As explained above, a significant number of respondents visit GringoTree’s official website for news, information and articles about Cuenca. The data gathered in the survey help back up this assessment.

**Figure №13**

**What do you mostly use the website for?**



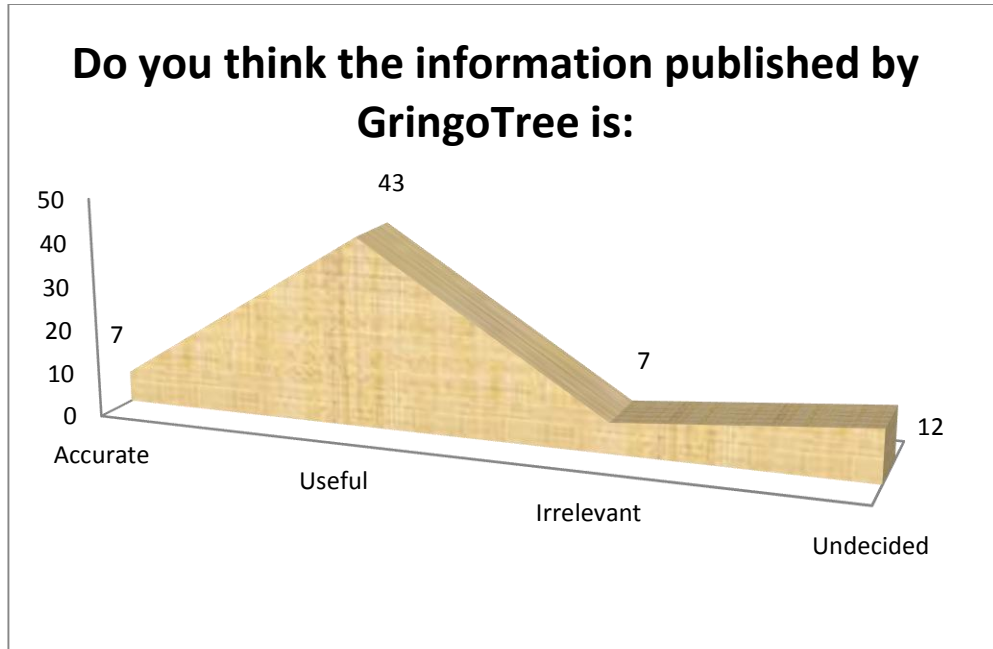
Source: Data from the survey

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

The opening lines on GringoTree’s home page: “trusted source” and “valuable information and opportunities,” served as motivation in the formulation of the following question. All the respondents were asked to qualify, through the use of adjectives, the kind of information advertised by GringoTree. The chart below demonstrates that the majority of the participants, 43 out of the total, think the information is useful. 12 individuals remain skeptical and say they are undecided, 7 prefer to refer to it as accurate and the rest of the people, 7, report it is irrelevant.

**Figure №14**

**The information published by GringoTree is:**



Source: Data from the survey

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

When trying to figure out the nature of their responses, the survey takers declare that:

The information published by GringoTree is useful because:

- There is a constant flow of information and recommendations.
- It is as though we can rely on a single place to satisfy all our needs.
- The fact that people share their different experiences, anecdotes and recommendations help promote a unique lifestyle in Cuenca.
- People who have had experiences here in Cuenca share them and make useful recommendations.
- Articles and calendar/events keep us updated.



- They are really good at providing information on places to visit and things to do in Cuenca: garage sale, restaurant reviews.
- Articles and news are up-to-date and very well written.
- The perfect guide in Cuenca.
- GringoTree is a useful tool.
- The business directory section is very helpful.
- The recommendations from other members have proven useful.
- People at GringoTree seem to be experts in Cuenca.
- All the information available comes from other gringos, friends helping friends. From expats for expats, mostly.
- Whenever I need something, I know I can find it on the website.

It is accurate because:

- It gives me real data and facts that I need to live in Cuenca.
- The effective implementation of projects and coordination of events.
- Activities I have been part of have been carried out in a timely manner.
- Good writers and editors.
- Information is accurate but with temperance.
- Information is precise, from their point of view.

It is irrelevant because:

- You have hundreds of expats who do not speak Spanish, all trying to be experts on a specific topic. Often what people do not understand, they interpret as anti-gringo or backwardness.
- Recommendations have proven useful. News section is not always accurate and then there is no restriction when a certain story proves false. I read an article about a man who fell off of balcony on Ordoñez Lasso, it all turned out to be false.
- I do not trust what they write, what is their source?
- Information is not accurate; some articles seem to be their own invention.
- Too much advertising, pop-up ads can be really annoying.

- Sometimes information is not complete.
- Who writes the articles? Who edits the news?

Undecided due to:

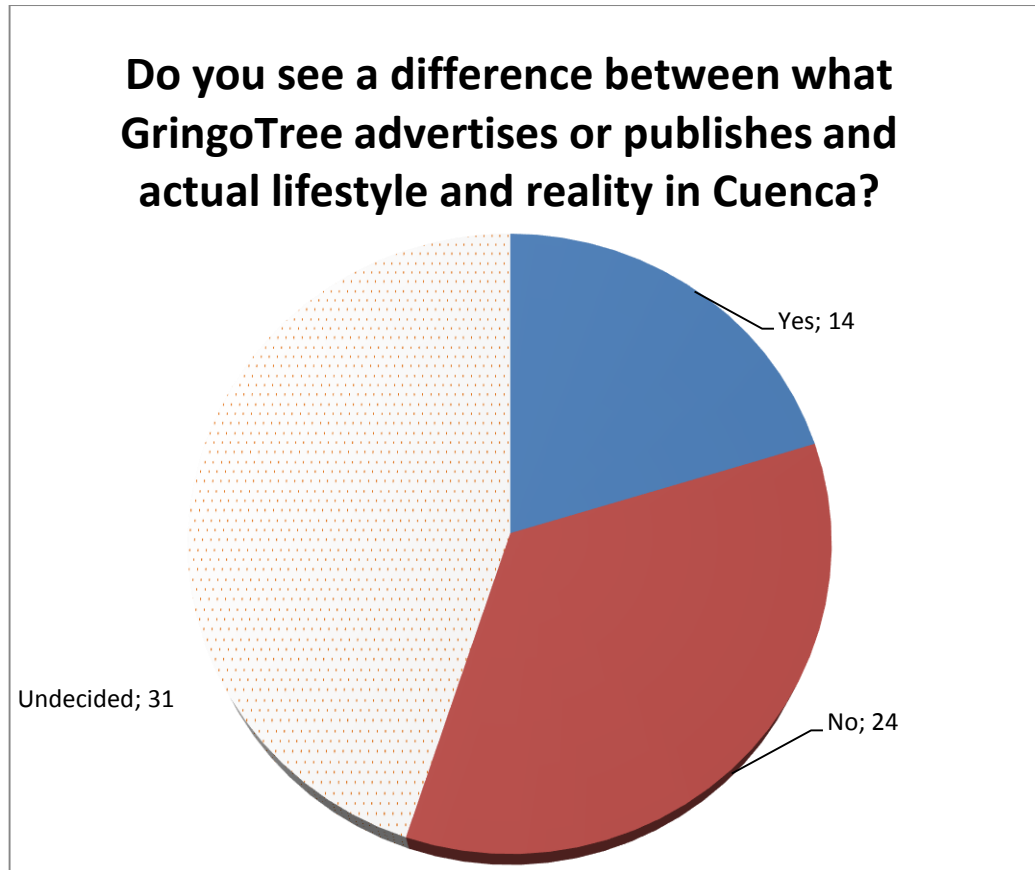
- Lack of impartiality. GringoTree is clearly biased.
- Information is not useful. There seems to be a hidden agenda.
- Preference for similar websites.
- Do not read thoroughly, just quick glance.
- Their rather alarmist and sensationalist approach.
- The direction over GringoTree has changed compared to two years ago.
- It is news from “the grapevine.”

When opting for the word “useful,” it is not absolutely necessary that the information be presented as a true event or verified fact due to the prioritization of personal experiences and opinions over facts. The weak preference for the “accurate” option could be explained by the absence of the original source from which the information is directly retrieved.

Moving on with the survey, when inquired about a possible difference between what GringoTree advertises or publishes and actual lifestyle and reality in Cuenca, 31 respondents replied they are undecided, 24 people declared they do not see any difference whilst 14 of them said they do.

**Figure №15**

**Do you see a difference between what GringoTree advertises or publishes and actual lifestyle and reality in Cuenca?**



Source: Data from the survey

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

The following is an open question type of inquiry. At this point in the survey, participants were asked whether there is something on the website that they would like to see covered or discussed to a greater or lesser extent. The outcome shows that there is a clear consensus expressed by an overwhelming preference towards the Cuenca News section. On the contrary, respondents shared the perception that the excessive amount of ads and advertising posts in general, together with the negative opinions and views presented by certain members, are detrimental to the page agreeing that those are the main things they would like to see less of.

Some opinions:

What would you like to see more of?

- Ecuador news, not only Cuenca news.
- A more up-to-date calendar.
- Relevant news on everyday life in Cuenca.
- Active participation and involvement of locals.
- Positive information.
- A bigger Questions and Answers section.
- More personal ads and requests.
- Business opportunities and premium business partnerships.
- Immigration and Foreign Policy information.
- A more balanced presentation of dissenting, negative opinions.
- More information regarding the home delivery service.
- More consistency between what is shown on the website and what you actually see in “real life” in Cuenca.
- More specific details on calendar of events. Sometimes date is on the day of the event and it is hard to plan in advance.
- More about important cultural events: parades, All Saints day, festivities, music festivals and stuff that interests local people.
- Opinions from gringos that actually make an effort to integrate and be part of the local community.
- A platform to welcome opinions from locals.
- Information on apartments for rent, we all want good deals.
- More activities or advice for younger people.
- A more rigorous, strict control in the publication of news and recommendations.
- Real-time chat software.

What would you like to see less of?

- Ads.

- Hearts of Gold self-promotion.
- Irrelevant news and articles.
- Gossip.
- Editorial news.
- Useless, never-ending quarrels between members that jeopardize the smooth and correct functionality of the website.
- The newsfeed e-mail I get daily is too overwhelming sometimes.
- Personal opinion, more facts.

Finally respondents were inquired to distinguish three aspects or elements that they like and dislike about the GringoTree website. Once again, the Cuenca News and Events and Calendar sections take the number one and number two places respectively. As explained in the answers to the previous question, the abundance of advertising material is the one item or section that participants mostly dislike. In this regard, it is worth emphasizing that the quality of information, news writing and editing, and the particular manner in which articles are written, add up to the list of negative traits.

### **3.1.2 Analyzing the GringoTree website**

Once the surveys and interviews process has been completed, and in order to support the various comments, theories and opinions delivered by the respondents and interviewees, the next step takes us directly into the analysis of the GringoTree website. For this reason, both positive and negative articles, news and data in general have been extracted from the website in an attempt to exemplify the previous theories and comments exposed by all the participants. Due to the increasing flow of news and information, it has been agreed that one or two examples be presented in each case, divided into sections in order to facilitate the reader's comprehension and understanding of the website.

#### **3.1.2.1 Positive aspects**

What you like about the GringoTree website:

- Current News.
- Questions and Answers.
- Reviews and Recommendations.
- Categorization.
- A long, detailed list of articles on Cuenca's lifestyle.
- It is easy to surf.
- Everyone can use the website.
- Immediate availability on items for sale.
- Anyone can share their opinions and advice.
- Items for Sale.
- Classifieds.
- There is a big effort to cover current and upcoming events.
- Different perspectives.
- It offers the chance to interact with other expats.
- The GringoTree website design is very attractive.

Here are some examples:

- **Questions and Answers:**

### Picture №7

#### Looking for Bridge Club in Cuenca

##### Looking For Bridge Club In Cuenca

We are planning to arrive in Cuenca on Wednesday, December 17 and would like to know if there is a bridge club that meets in Cuenca? Any details would be appreciated!

### Gulliver Expeditions

Discover Ecuador and Galapagos with our expert agents



3 RESPONSES TO LOOKING FOR BRIDGE CLUB IN CUENCA

[Click to comment](#)

**[Christine Collins](#)** | [December 14, 2014 at 12:45 pm](#) | [Reply](#)



Email [cuencagringobridge@hotmail.com](mailto:cuencagringobridge@hotmail.com) if you are interested in playing duplicate bridge with the Bridge Club. Have fun!

**Larry Gann** | [December 14, 2014 at 9:43 am](#) | [Reply](#)



There is a bridge club that meets on Wednesdays and Sundays from 1:00 to 4:30 p.m. We play duplicate. The cost is \$2.00 a day or \$15.00 per month. We meet at Ricardo Darquea and Reginaldo Arrizaga.

**Diane Hall** | [December 14, 2014 at 8:42 am](#) | [Reply](#)



Party bridge or duplicate?

Source: <http://ecuador-retirement.gringotree.com/cuenca-questions/looking-for-bridge-club-in-cuenca/>


Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

- **Recommendations:**

Best bagels and bagel products in Cuenca and some recommendations:

### Picture №8

#### Bagels in Cuenca and some recommendations

 HOME DIRECTORY NEWS REAL ESTATE **RECOMMENDATIONS** Q&A'S ADS ITEMS FOR SALE

---

**#3 Rich Westcott's Not So Schmart Bagels Y Más**  
August 7th, 2013  
[41 Comments »](#)

Best handcrafted homemade bagels and bagel products in Cuenca. Want a special order, like a giant bagel for a party? Just ask. Many different kinds of bagels and bagel products. No imitator can come close to his quality and value.

Contact: [magicbywestcraft@yahoo.com](mailto:magicbywestcraft@yahoo.com)

Recommended by Anne Cooley Sangine, [annesangine@gmail.com](mailto:annesangine@gmail.com)

---

**#4 Alex Samaniego**  
June 17th, 2013  
[36 Comments »](#)

Great driver, fixed my laptop, helps me with everyday fetching. Straightforward, punctual, and honest are just a few of his qualities.

Contact him: [alexisspanish@gmail.com](mailto:alexisspanish@gmail.com) or his movistar phone 099-902-3962.

Source: <http://ecuador-retirement.gringotree.com/top-20-2/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

### Picture №9

#### Interior, Exterior Painter

#### Jorge Berrazueta – Interior, Exterior Painter

February 13th, 2014  
Posted in construction-home-repair | [4 Comments »](#)

Jorge Berrezueta, has got to be one of the best, quickest and hardest working painters you could hire. He and his crew painted my whole condo, around 2000 sq. ft. in 3.5 days and did a fabulous job. He operated his own painting and decorating company in New York with a crew of 10 working for him. He knows "painting." His estimates are Ecuadorian prices and he delivers on budget and on time. Jorge is a genuinely nice person and he speaks English. His contact cellphone: 099 813 7559 or 099 807 2211. Recommended by Gail Kilmer: [gkilmer2011@hotmail.com](mailto:gkilmer2011@hotmail.com)

Source: [http://ecuador-retirement.gringotree.com/recom\\_cats/construction-home-repair/](http://ecuador-retirement.gringotree.com/recom_cats/construction-home-repair/)

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro



- **Calendar and Events:**

**Picture №10**  
**December Events**

December Events							
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	
1	2	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Christmas Bazaar at Common Grounds</li> <li>Social Security (IESS) Conference</li> <li>Hearts of Gold Christmas Gala</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Christmas Bazaar at Common Grounds</li> <li>First Friday Art</li> <li>Christmas Carol Sing-A-Long</li> </ul>	6	7	<b>AA Meetings</b>  There are English speaking AA in Cuenca at Borrero 7-68 between Sucre and Presidente Cordova, second floor, room facing the street.  Every day noon, open Meeting.  E-mail Gerard at <a href="mailto:gtretton@ya.com">gtretton@ya.com</a> for more information or call (09
8	9	10	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Panama Hat Event and Craft Fair</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aquaponics Urban Farm Event</li> <li>Holiday Tea Tasting @ Néctar</li> </ul>	14	<b>Religious Services</b>  International Christian Community  10:30am every Sunday
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	

Source: <http://ecuador-retirement.gringotree.com/whats-on-in-cuenca/>  
 Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

**Picture №11**  
**Future Religious Services and Meetings Schedules**

**Religious Services**

**Calvary Chapel Of Cuenca**

Sunday Services are 10 a.m.  
 English Service and 9 a.m. and 11 a.m.  
 Spanish Services, Wednesday Spanish Service at 7:30 p.m.

**Location:** Corner of Belisario Andrade 3-124 and Av Solano one block north of the Three Bridges  
**Contact Info:** 072882198 or 07281074  
**Website:** Calvary

**Services**

**OA Meetings**

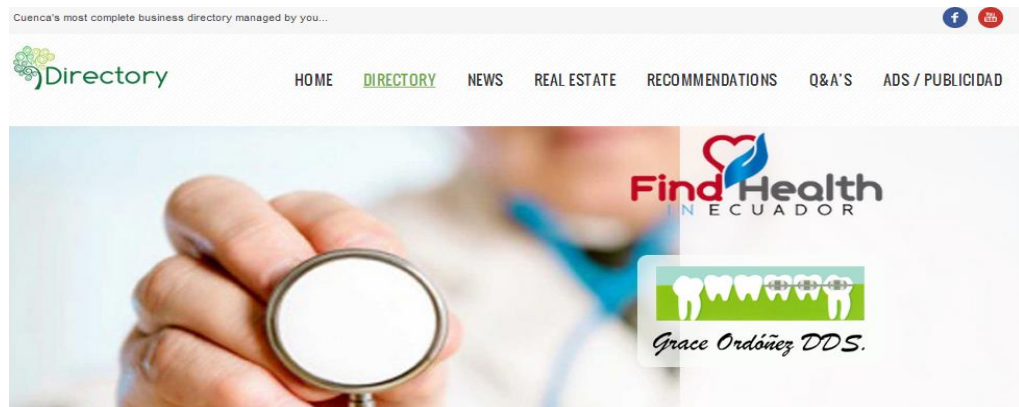
OA (Overeaters Anonymous) meetings on Wednesdays at 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM at 7-68 Borrero, between Sucre and Presidente Cordova, second floor, room facing the street.

Source: <http://ecuador-retirement.gringotree.com/whats-on-in-cuenca/>  
 Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

- **Business Directory:**

**Picture №12**

**Directory**



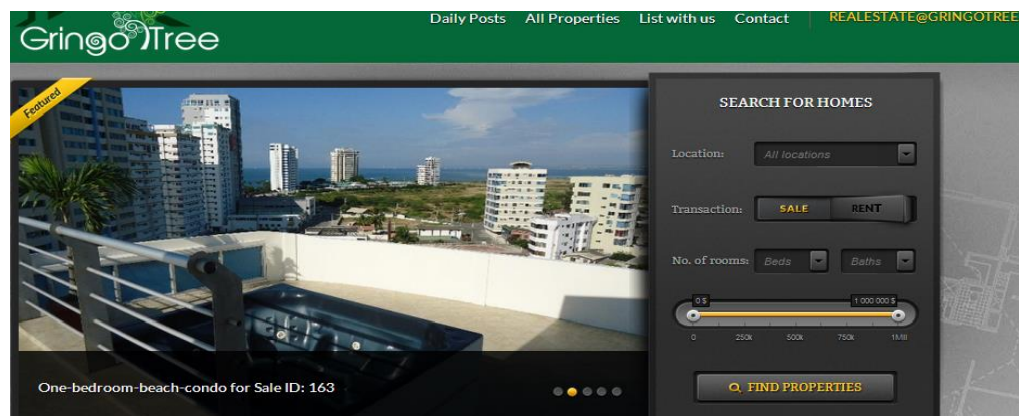
Source: <http://cuenca-directory.gringotree.com/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

- **Real Estate:**

**Picture №13**

**GringoTree Real Estate**



Source: <http://www.gringotree.com/realestate/ecuador/#re-posts>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

- **Items for Sale:** (clothes, computers, animals, electronics, furniture, cell phones, office supplies/equipment)

## Picture №14

### Items for Sale

#### Items For Sale

All classifieds expire 2 weeks after their publication date. This keeps all classifieds current.

#### Trucks For Sale Wholesale

Choose from IM+ Verified Suppliers. Contact Directly & Get Live Quotes!

Animals (5)	Clothes (2)	Help Wanted (1)
Appliances (4)	Computers (5)	Household Items (9)
Art (2)	Dogs (5)	Medical (1)
Beds (4)	Electronics (16)	Men's (1)
Bicycle (2)	Food / Supplements (1)	Moving/Garage Sale (2)
Camera (1)	Furniture (8)	Office Supplies/Equipment (2)
Cellphones (6)	Gold or Silver Coins (1)	Tools (2)

Google Custom Search

Search

#### Descargar Mapa Satelital

Planes de Rutas, Callejeros, Tiempo y Tráfico.  
(Gratis en tu Navegador)

AdChoices

[Garage Sale](#)

[Classifieds for Sale](#)

[Craigslist Classifieds](#)

#### Recently Added Items

[Oxyven Concentrator for Sale](#)

December 26, 2014

[Restaurant/Bar POS System for Sale \(Ex. La](#)

[Terrace\)](#)

December 23, 2014

[Hummingbirds Painting For Sale](#)

December 22, 2014

[Moving or Selling Furniture, Appliances, or](#)

[More](#)

December 22, 2014

[King Bed Top Quality Solid Wood](#)

Source: <http://ecuador-retirement.gringotree.com/cuenca-classifieds/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

## Picture №15

### Laptop for Sale

#### Laptop Computer For Sale

Classified posted in computers on January 29th | Comments Off

This has been a totally trouble free computer for me. It has a brand new keyboard and battery.

Screen Size 15.6 inches

Max Screen Resolution: 1366x768

Processor: 2.2 GHz

RAM: 4 GB DDR3

Hard Drive: 250 GB

Operating System: Windows 7 Home Premium (64-bit)

Source: [http://ecuador-retirement.gringotree.com/classi\\_cats/computers/](http://ecuador-retirement.gringotree.com/classi_cats/computers/)

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

- **Cuenca and Ecuador News:**

**Picture №16**

**Cuenca and Ecuador News**

**Spanish transportation consultants advise Cuenca to make the historic district more pedestrian friendly**

Posted By [Admin](#) | Published: December 7, 2014 00:14

Everyone agrees that Cuenca's historic district needs to improve its pedestrian friendliness. The problem is balancing the area's social, cultural and tourism needs with those of businesses that depend on motorized transportation. A group of planners from Andalusia, Spain, working wit... [\[More\]](#)

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Tags:

Actions: [Send to Friend](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Permalink](#)

**Indigenous leader murdered in the jungle; Some say his death is linked to opposition to mining operation**

Posted By [Admin](#) | Published: December 7, 2014 00:06

By Jonathan Watts Ecuador plans to drill for oil in the Yasuni Amazon reserve, as president Rafael Correa seeks to exploit his country's resources, in part to pay off debts owed to China. The body of an indigenous leader who was opposed to a major mining project in Ecuador has been... [\[More\]](#)

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Source: <http://cuencahighlife.com/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

### 3.1.2.2 Negative aspects

What you mostly dislike about the GringoTree website:

- Abundance of ads.
- Excessive Hearts of Gold self-promotion.
- Some posts and articles are not relevant.

- Inaccurate information.
- Emphasis on politics.
- Complaints and misinformation.
- Lack of original source.
- When did it become so commercial? GringoTree started as a questions and answers sort of website.
- They are always trying to get you to buy something.
- Stubborn members trying to impose their ways and conditions.
- Offensive, tactless member comments that border on ridiculousness.
- Inaccurate, inflammatory and biased articles.
- Negative personal experiences that do not necessarily portray the universal truth.
- Redundant information. It can get overwhelming.
- Some articles are written in a particular way that if you were not a native English speaker you would not be able to understand them. It all comes from a very heavy American perspective.
- Focus on violent news.
- Search is not always productive due to the huge list of articles and news.
- Some articles offer a poor image of Cuenca and Ecuador.
- There seems to be a hidden agenda.
- Prices are ridiculously high if you want to use their website for promotion. Unfortunately there are no other alternatives.

Here are some examples that back up these comments:

- Excessive Advertising:

## Picture №17

### GringoTree Ads

The screenshot shows the GringoTree website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like HOME, DIRECTORY, NEWS, REAL ESTATE, RECOMMENDATIONS, Q&A'S, ADS, and ITEMS FOR SALE. Below this, a large banner for Banco del Austro is visible. The main content area is filled with various advertisements and posts. On the left, there's an ad for GringoVisas featuring a woman's face. In the center, there's a search bar and a post about 'El Maliz' restaurant. To the right, there's a 'Daily Posts' section with a post about 'Apartments For Rent In The Historic District'. Below this, there's an ad for the British School of Language. Further down, there's an ad for Lord Guau Pet Services and another for Hearts of Gold. The right side of the page features a '10 DAY WEATHER FORECAST FOR CUENCA, ECUADOR' and a 'Your taxi one touch away!' ad. The bottom of the page has a 'Source' and 'Author' section.

Source: <http://ecuador-retirement.gringotree.com/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro



- **Emphasis on Politics:**

## Picture №18

### Politics



[Click here to sign up for our E-Letter](#) [Cuenca's free email news service](#)



#### It's Ecuadorian workers vs. China after hydro plant accident; Government says there was no 'malicious intent'

Posted By [Admin](#) | Published: December 18, 2014 00:09

According to several constructions workers at the Coca Codo Sinclair hydro-electric plant east of Quito, employees have been warned by project managers not to discuss last weekend's deadly cave-in on the site with the media. The 1,500 megawatt plant is scheduled to become operational in earl... [\[More\]](#)

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Tags:

Actions: [Send to Friend](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Permalink](#)



**Opere con  
\$40.000  
invirtiendo  
solo \$100**

**Conviértase  
en un  
operador  
profesional  
con nuestro  
entrenamiento  
personal**



#### Ecuador, Latin America applaud U.S. - Cuban decision to reestablish relations; Is it Obama's greatest act?

Posted By [Admin](#) | Published: December 18, 2014 00:02

By Kate Kilpatrick Latin America's top officials appeared unanimous in their celebration Wednesday of a new chapter in United States-Cuba relations, which will witness the renewal of diplomatic ties and the easing of sanctions that have helped raze the Cuban economy. Latin Am... [\[More\]](#)

[Delicio.us](#) | [Digg It!](#) | [Furl](#) | [Reddit](#) | [StumbleUpon](#)

Tags:

Actions: [Send to Friend](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Permalink](#)

#### Proposed municipal ordinance would crack down on 'informal' tourist services, including some by expats

Posted By [Admin](#) | Published: December 17, 2014 00:02

Local tourism agencies are proposing a new city ordinance to stop what they say is the rapid spread of illegal tourist services in Cuenca. The Azuay Chamber of Tourism and Cuenca Tourism Foundaton with assistance from hotel and restaurant owners, tour and transport services, say the ordinance ... [\[More\]](#)

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Source: <http://cuencahighlife.com/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

## Picture №19

### Politics 2



#### Weekly town meetings help keep President Correa's popularity high; So far, he's held more than 400 of them

Posted By [Sylvan Hardy](#) | Published: December 16, 2014 00:09

Enter search term



**Cuenca  
RealEstate**  
*Serving adventurers and  
investors since 1998*  
Sales, Rentals, Tours,  
Relocation Services  
[www.CuencaRealEstate.com](http://www.CuencaRealEstate.com)

By Sylvan Hardy He preaches, he cajoles, he pleads. He laughs, he cries.

Sometimes, he dances and sings. Almost always, the audience applauds. Or, laughs, cries, sings and dances with him. Two weeks ago, President Rafael Correa marked his 400th weekly town meeting in the rural village of G... [\[More\]](#)

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Tags:

Actions: [Send to Friend](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Permalink](#)

#### Ecuador's legal battle to win oil pollution settlement from Chevron Oil moves to the Canadian Supreme Court

Posted By [Admin](#) | Published: December 16, 2014 00:07

By Jane Gerster On the banks of the Aguarico River, where the only respite from stifling humidity and the blazing sun is a dip in the contaminated water, Eduardo Silvio Chapal's grandchildren splash, oblivious to the decades-long battle over who is responsible for cleaning up their jungle... [\[More\]](#)

[Del.icio.us](#) | [Digg It!](#) | [Furl](#) | [Reddit](#) | [StumbleUpon](#)

Source: <http://cuencahighlife.com/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro



**Rentals  
Cuenca**  
Turn Key & Short Term



- Absence of original sources:

## Picture №20

### Articles that lack original source



Enter search term



Ríos is lobbying local and national governments to provide more incentives for businesses to expand in Cuenca. "The growth of industry has slowed and we need to provide reasons for investment from both within the city and outside," she says. She adds that a recent reduction in the corporate income tax rate is a good start but more needs to be done.

She also says that public and private infrastructure needs to improve to allow industry to grow. "We don't have large transport facilities and container yards that are important to sustain industrial growth. And, the current industrial park allows no room for growth." She says the Chamber of Industry is working with local officials to build new parks but this will take time.

"Given all of our handicaps, Cuenca's industrial development is remarkable," Ríos says. "It is because of our people and their drive to build a better a life. Now, we need to build a framework that will allow us to move to the next level."

*Photo caption: A worker prepares a refrigerator for shipment at Cuenca's Indurama manufacturing plant.*

[Del.icio.us](#) | [Digg It!](#) | [Furl](#) | [Reddit](#) | [StumbleUpon](#)

Tags:

Actions: [Send to Friend](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Permalink](#)

Source: <http://www.cuencahighlife.com/post/2014/11/04/Cuenca-has-become-the-manufacturing-center-of-Ecuador-following-centuries-of-isolation3b-Incentives-for-growth-are-pursued.aspx>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

## Picture №21

### No Original Source 2

#### **Correa says ‘dollarization was a bad idea’; says that Ecuador’s reliance on the dollar puts country in a financial ‘straight jacket’**

Published on December 21, 2014 by: CuencaHighLife | Comment

President Rafael Correa repeated on Tuesday his criticism of Ecuador’s decision to use the U.S. dollar as its currency.

His comments come as oil prices, which are based on the dollar, are approaching five-year lows. Correa said that if Ecuador had its own currency or was using a regional South American currency, as he has advocated, the effect on the country would be less severe.

“Dollarization was a bad decision,” Correa said. “Right now, it is doing exactly the opposite of what it must do to address the scenario of falling oil prices.”

Ecuador, which is the smallest member of OPEC, has used its oil revenues to upgrade the country’s infrastructure and social services. With oil prices slumping, Correa says Ecuador needs a flexible currency now more than ever. “In these difficult times, we will see just how important it is to have a national or regional currency.”

Ecuador adopted the U.S. dollar in 2000 after the value of its former currency, the *sucre*, nosedived in 1999.

Correa has long warned that the continued use of the dollar is holding back the economy, once describing it as a “straight jacket.”



*President Rafael Correa*

Source: <http://cuencahighlife.com/correa-says-again-that-dollarization-was-a-bad-idea-says-that-ecuadors-reliance-on-the-dollar-puts-country-in-a-financial-straight-jacket/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

It must be highlighted that in these two articles belonging to the “Absence of original sources” section, the writers and editors have decided to omit the original source of information.

After a four month daily visit/access to the website, the author of this thesis can confirm that it is only very seldom that a small reference to the original source is included below the picture or image that accompanies the text of the article.

- **Violent news:**

### Picture №22

#### Violent News

### Ecuador's murder rate continues to drop as Latin America keeps its reputation as the world's most murderous region

Posted By [Admin](#) | Published: December 10, 2014 00:09

While Latin America maintains its position as the world's most murderous region, the number of murders in Ecuador is dropping sharply. As of July 2014, Ecuador showed an annual murder rate of nine per 100,000 population, the first time Ecuador has been in single digits in the category. Th... [\[More\]](#)

[Del.icio.us](#) | [Digg It!](#) | [Furl](#) | [Reddit](#) | [StumbleUpon](#)

Tags:

Actions: [Send to Friend](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Permalink](#)

Source: <http://cuencahighlife.com/post/2014/12/10/Murder-rate-continues-to-drop-in-Ecuador-as-Latin-America-continues-to-be-region-with-the-most-murders.aspx>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

### Picture №23

#### Crime and violence

### Crime

### Crime rate declines 14% in Cuenca and Azuay Province in 2014; Police focus on crime hot spots and enforcing liquor laws

Published on December 24, 2014 by: CuencaHighLife | [Comment](#)

Ecuador's National Police statistics show that crime in Azuay Province declined more than 14% in 2014 with a similar drop for the city of Cuenca.

Azuay home burglaries dropped 23% while crimes against persons were down by 26%. The number of murders also declined, from 44 to 37, a drop of 19%.

Germán Cevallos, regional police commander, credits new strategies for the decline. "We are committing more resources to areas that have historically had the most crime and enforcing liquor laws and ordinances," he said. "We are also increasing our intelligence gathering in high crime areas," he said.



Police and customs official close liquor store on Saturday.

Source: <http://cuencahighlife.com/crime-rate-declines-14-in-cuenca-and-azuay-province-in-2014-police-focus-on-crime-hot-spots-and-enforcing-liquor-laws/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

These are very strong connotations regarding crime and violence in Latin-American countries and in Cuenca. Could this be the so-called sensationalistic approach most respondents and interviewees were initially referring to? Special emphasis should be placed on the absence of original sources in both articles.

- **Articles that mix both, personal opinions and information taken from local newspapers:**

#### **Picture №24**

#### **Opinion or fact?**

### **Rescue Efforts Cause City Council To Consider Pet Protection Ordinance**

Posted on [December 14, 2014](#) | Comments Off

Stray animals can be found roaming the streets of virtually every neighborhood in Cuenca. A number of organizations such as Rescate Animal Cuenca, Fundación ARCA, and FAAN work to combat this growing problem through various methods of sterilization, removal from the streets, and adoption protocols.

And one North American Expat has joined the fight. Trish Tiura, a Seattle native, has lived in Cuenca for more than 4 years, and is a long-time lover of animals. After settling in to her new home, Tiura was struck by the incredible number of stray animals found throughout the city of Cuenca. It was her compassion for these animals that gave birth to the Refugio del Mejor Amigo.

Refugio del Mejor Amigo is one of the largest animal shelters in Cuenca. At the moment it is home to over 120 abandoned dogs and cats. Their animals range from domestic pets who were abandoned by their owners, to deformed mutts, to strays that have lived their whole lives on the streets.

Source: <http://cuenca-news.gringotree.com/rescue-efforts-cause-city-council-to-consider-pet-protection-ordnance/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

In the original article published by local newspaper “El Mercurio”, the first three paragraphs posted by GringoTree, are nowhere to be found. The first paragraph contains a brief introductory explanation in reference to a new pet protection ordinance. The second and third paragraphs go a step further by detailing the extensive work carried out by an American expat whose love and compassion for animals have played a fundamental role in the approbation of this new pet ordinance and protocol.

What is really interesting is the fact that in the article contemplated by GringoTree, there seems to be an unequivocal affirmation that homeless, stray animals are found in practically *every* neighborhood in Cuenca. The ferocity of these affirmations is strikingly peculiar and talks more of a personal point of view or perception rather than actual facts. The rest of the article seems to be a mix of opinions and bits and pieces of information taken from the original local newspaper.

## Picture №25

### Opinion or fact 2

#### **Pase del Niño parade mixes the sacred and profane and highlights Cuenca's Christmas season**

Published on December 21, 2014 by: CuencaHighLife | Comment



For tourists and foreign residents, and traditional, Christmas Eve's Pase del Niño (the Passing of the Child) parade is a colorful and often bizarre mixture of the sacred and the profane. To locals, it's a time-honored combination of Catholic and indigenous traditions that produces a festival of homage to the Christ child.

But tourist, foreigner, or local, everyone considers it Cuenca's most colorful and fun annual event.

Introduced to Latin America by the Spanish almost 500 years ago, the Pase del



Source: <http://cuencahighlife.com/pase-del-nino-parade-mixes-the-sacred-and-profane-and-highlights-cuencas-christmas-season/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

In this example, the author has opted for the incorporation of strong terms such as “bizarre” and “profane” to refer to the “Pase del Niño” tradition in Cuenca. It is perhaps through their foreign worldview or outlook that this choice of words can be better understood and perhaps even justified. Nonetheless, the writer's assumption and general assertion that all foreigners and Cuenca visitors associate the local



festivities and traditions with the idea of what constitutes the bizarre and profane should be handled smoothly and taken with a grain of salt. It is quite possible that the author's intention was to deliver the image of Cuenca's characteristic folklore and colorful traditions: music, dances and typical food. Nevertheless, the combination of such lexicon may not have resulted in the most suitable alternative to illustrate his purpose.

The rest of the text shows some charts and figures and provides a detailed explanation of this special local tradition. Finally, it is to be noted that just like in the previous examples, this article does not include any references to the original source, nor does it state if it merely represents a personal opinion.

- **Articles regarding Cuenca and why it is the perfect place to expatriate:**

**Picture №26**

**Why Expatriate to Cuenca?**

---

**Why Expatriate To Cuenca?**

Posted on [September 22, 2014](#) | [11 Comments](#)

Because you want to.

Because you've always loved to travel and the idea of actually moving to and living in a new country is inspiring, exhilarating, and represents an optimistic approach to life and the future.

Because it reverberates in your head, resonates in your heart, and itches in your feet.

Because it's a one-of-a-kind siren song and if you're lucky enough in this life to hear it, you have no choice. You simply must answer its call. Because it's your destiny to do it and you will.

Beyond that, there are as many reasons, perhaps, as there are current and future expats. You have your own history and circumstances and dreams. It's one of the biggest decisions you'll ever make, so it's intensely personal.

That said, there are numerous common denominators among expats. This is why people who expatriate together tend to relate together. In other words, most new expats find and make friends with one another fast: They have a lot in common.

**Why Cuenca?**

Source: <http://cuenca-news.gringotree.com/why-expatriate-to-cuenca/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

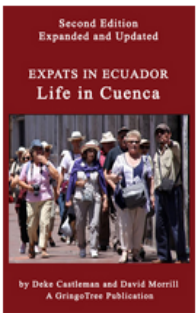
Let us begin with a brief analysis of the very first lines of this last article. It is clear to see that the introduction to the entire text is very well designed to purposely catch the reader's attention: an allegory that seeks to appeal through a special combination of words and expressions in a poetic manner. Next, the author offers some data and information on Cuenca as well as some observations and opinions based on personal experiences with regards to what exactly foreigners and visitors can expect during their stay in town.

The interesting thing is that at the end of the article, the writer adds that everything the reader has been presented so far is only a small extract from a GringoTree digital publication called "Expats in Ecuador: Life in Cuenca" by GringoTree founders David Morrill and Deke Castleman. Furthermore, in case the reader is interested in purchasing the e-book publication, a link to the store section on the website is also provided:

**Picture №27**

**Expats in Ecuador: Life in Cuenca**

Life in Cuenca - Second Edition  
Categor a: [Tienda](#) > [GringoTree Publications & Others](#)



REF 00043

Disponible

[Me gusta](#) [Compartir](#) 10

Instant Download

ebook (+\$9.99)

Cantidad

[Add to Bag](#)

[Compartir](#)

The first edition of Expats in Ecuador: Life in Cuenca, published in February 2013, provides an overview of moving to and living in Cuenca - the big-picture perspective, the context of adopting a Cuenca expatriate lifestyle, more than the content on how to navigate through day-to-day life. That book casts a wide net, examining the issues new expats

Source: <http://ecuador-retirement.gringotree.com/store/#!/Life-in-Cuenca-Second-Edition/p/33491813/category=4642151>

Author: Mar a Auxiliadora Castro

## Picture №28

### Cuenca: Expat-lifestyle laboratory

#### How did Cuenca turn into the world's greatest expat-lifestyle laboratory? A brief history of Ecuador's and Cuenca's expat boom

Published on December 26, 2014 by: CuencaHighLife | Comment

##### We're All Gary's Children

Gringos lived and worked in Ecuador long before Gary and Merri Scott showed up around 1995, but the Scotts, almost single-handedly, put Ecuador on the radar screens of thousands of pilgrims to the Middle of the World. Almost all of us Cuenca expats can trace our knowledge of Ecuador as an expat destination back to Gary and Merri, even if we don't realize it (or don't want to admit it).

In the very early 2000s, Gary was the first Ecuador correspondent for International Living, the magazine and Internet-based information service for North Americans considering moving overseas.

The Scotts are extraordinary marketers who, based on their travels and expat experiences, identified a growing trend of internationalism among the North American middle class. Gary, especially, experienced expat life in Hong Kong in the 1960s and London in the 1970s; he was a founding contributor to International Living way back in 1980.



Source: <http://cuencahighlife.com/how-did-cuenca-turn-into-the-worlds-greatest-expat-lifestyle-laboratory/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

Both examples give special attention to previous articles published by the famous online magazine International Living that has granted Cuenca the title of “Best destination to retire in the world.” These two GringoTree publications are relevant not only for their informative value but also because the discovery of Cuenca as expat paradise is 100% attributed to an American couple, founders of the International Living project back in 1980. The paternalistic approach and sometimes condescending tone used by the author are both equally striking. The writer decides to end the article with an interesting proposal: “*Want to know more about Cuenca? Do not forget to subscribe to our daily newsfeed: [cuencahighlife.com](http://cuencahighlife.com)*”



Concerning the cited online magazine and through the various interviews and surveys carried out throughout the streets of Cuenca, it has been noted that International Living is not the most popular option in terms of information accuracy, veracity and authenticity. Some of the interviewees claim to have run into deceitful and misleading publications:

International Living tells you that you can live in Cuenca on a \$ 600 budget. They also tell you about endless job and business opportunities. What they fail to mention is that competition is tough and that life in Cuenca is very expensive. I've heard people say Cuenca is the most expensive city in Ecuador, you know what? They're all right! (Neil Nagle)

International Living offers a \$ 3,000-5,000 exploratory trip to Ecuador. You know what? Total rip-off! The trip is utterly disappointing and ultimately frustrating. Highly dissatisfying service and experience. (Alexander)

Three members of the GringoTree community show their utmost discomfort and uneasiness with respect to their International Living personal experiences:

The user **tfpob1** manifests the following statement:

**Picture №29**  
**International Living Opinions**

 [Q&A's](#) [Q&A CATEGORIES](#) [ASK A QUESTION](#)

[5 RESPONSES TO INTERNATIONAL LIVING VIP MEMBERSHIP](#) [Click to comment](#)

**tfpob1** | [September 17, 2014 at 11:59 am](#) | [Reply](#)

Buyer/Reader Beware! You can't trust everything you read in International Living!



Source: <http://ecuador-retirement.gringotree.com/cuenca-questions/international-living-vip-membership/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro


**DnG** claims that:

**Picture №30**

**International Living Discomfort**

**DnG** | [September 16, 2014 at 4:21 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

**International Living = International Lying. Please don't be duped by hype.**



Source: <http://ecuador-retirement.gringotree.com/cuenca-questions/international-living-vip-membership/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

**Charlie** is a bit more energetic stating that:

**Picture №31**

**GringoTree and International Living**

**Charlie** | [September 16, 2014 at 5:28 pm](#) | [Reply](#)



IL, Live and Invest Overseas, TransAndean Trading and all of their competitors are just scam artists that the public is finally catching on to. The shills that work for these organizations will defend them to the death so it is important to identify what people's motivations are when they say good things about them. David Morrill, one of the founders (no longer owner) of Gringo Tree, is a shill for IL and IS TransAndean Trading. That said, Gringo Tree seems awfully darned objective and tolerant when it comes to publishing negative comments from the IL, LIOS etc. detractors.

Heck, every once in a while, they even let that old curmudgeon, Charlie, post some of his vitriol.

Charlie

Source: <http://ecuador-retirement.gringotree.com/cuenca-questions/international-living-vip-membership/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

Charlie's discomfort and rage stem from the fact that GringoTree is "awfully darned objective and tolerant when it comes to publishing negative comments from the IL (...) detractors."

Apparently, this is not the first time that GringoTree adopts this position when dealing with comments by the same community member. On a June 20<sup>th</sup> 2013 post, **Charlie** demonstrates his discomfort with a hint of irony and sarcasm. As a response to **Charlie's** comment, another member, **Beth Gavilanes**, shows some support:

### Picture №32

#### GringoTree members show their discomfort

**Charlie** | June 20, 2013 at 7:42 pm | [Reply](#)



So much for fairness and objectivity when it comes to publishing negative comments. Yesterday, I tried to post a negative comment about Cuenca Realty and it wasn't published, while some of my other negative comments were. Let's not be coy about this. Kathy Gonzales is the partner of David Morrill and their rental arm is run by David's girlfriend, Graciela Quinde. As everyone knows, Gringo Tree is one of David Morrill's ventures. Suppressing information like this only encourages gossip and back talking one to one and it is usually far more damaging than what is honestly published in the light of day.

**Beth Gavilanes** | June 21, 2013 at 6:47 am | [Reply](#)



I totally agree...When I have tried or a customer of mine that was dealing with Cuenca Real Estate had a bad experience it was not published. I run several rental units in a building where they have some units and I had a customer come to me complaining and asking for help because the unit was in a terrible state. I then helped them and a few days later got a letter from their attorney telling me I am taking away customers from them. How does someone take away customers if they are happy dealing with the person they started with.. I know she is involved with Gallo Cardenas who is an attorney that does closings. If you want to know about him and the horrible things he has been involved with please email me. [bccuenca@hotmail.com](mailto:bccuenca@hotmail.com) I will be happy to tell anyone what took place and is public record.

Source: <http://ecuador-retirement.gringotree.com/recommendations/cuenca-real-estate/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

The association of David Morrill (one of the founders of GringoTree) to the [www.cuencarealestate.com](http://www.cuencarealestate.com) and International Living websites, and the fact that GringoTree has proven reluctant in the publication of not so favorable opinions and comments about Cuenca Real Estate and International Living may be some examples of that lack of impartiality and bias most respondents and interviewees refer to.

- **Curious Publications:**

**Picture №33**

**Is Cuenca's Water That Good?**

HOME DIRECTORY NEWS REAL ESTATE RECOMMENDATIONS Q&A'S ADS ITEMS FOR SALE

## Aqua Ultraviolet

Want Clear, Healthy, Clean Water? Try The Leader In UV and Filtration

● ○

[← Very Beginner Spanish with Martha Mays](#)[Garage Sale Starts This Saturday →](#)

### Is Cuenca's Water That Good?

Posted on [November 5, 2014](#) by [GringoTree](#) | [26 Comments](#)

Since moving here to Cuenca, I was told that the water was the best in Ecuador. However, I did some research and found out that Cuenca water has chlorine and fluoride. Both are thyroid gland disrupters. Chlorine enhances the hardening of the arteries and fluoride is a neurotoxin. The latter has been deemed so by the "LANCET," which is a prestigious British Medical Journal. I hope that this will serve as a warning to all those who value their health!

This entry was posted in [Health, Wellness](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

[26 RESPONSES TO IS CUENCA'S WATER THAT GOOD?](#)[Click to comment](#)

Source: <http://ecuador-retirement.gringotree.com/is-cuencas-water-that-good/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

## Picture №34

### Gringo Prices

#### “Gringo Prices”

Posted on [November 2, 2013](#) | [28 Comments](#)

by Deke Castleman and David Morrill

“*Los precios gringos*” or gringo pricing, also known as the “gringo gouge” and “gringo tax,” is a hot topic in expat communities all over the world. The various terms refer to the price you pay over and above what a local pays for the same goods or services, simply because you’re a foreigner. It’s a time-honored tradition, a game, almost a national sport, to suck a little extra *dinero* out of often-clueless immigrants to new countries and cultures.

Ecuador is no exception. You’ll hear about it and probably experience it (even if you don’t realize it) not long after you arrive.

Some of the most common opportunities for gringo pricing are in shops and stores where the prices of goods aren’t marked and the proprietor has an opportunity to size up the customer before determining a final price.

This is common, for example, at the *mercados*. When you shop by yourself, you’ll pay one price. If you shop with an Ecuadorian, you’ll pay a lower price. Sometimes the difference is notable.

Source: <http://cuenca-news.gringotree.com/gringo-prices/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

These are the first paragraphs of the article published by GringoTree founders, Deke Castleman and David Morrill. The “gringo prices” topic has also been discussed by some of the interviews participants:

Ever since I landed in Cuenca, I have not been subject to the “gringo price” problem. I have been lucky enough to travel all over the world, so that is not something that I am deeply concerned about. Always remember this: Americans screw Americans worse than the Ecuadorians do with all the gringo price argument. Whenever we see an opportunity, we seize it. We know how to take advantage of a particular situation. It is unfortunate to know that once we

leave the States, we prefer to place the guilt and blame on someone else. (Neil Nagle)

Thom Davis wholeheartedly agrees with Neil's statement:

Before coming to Ecuador I did some previous research. Never had anybody trying to take advantage of me. Cuencanos are very nice people, always kind and friendly. With regards to the "gringo prices" topic, I would suggest that future Cuenca visitors try to read as much as possible. No gringo prices for me, when we are purchasing something, we ask some local folks to help us. I should know now what I should expect to pay. Forget all the gossip and misleading information, remember it's just an opinion. In the end it's all up to you. (Thom Davis)

### Picture №35

#### Superlearning + 3 Day Spanish

##### Superlearning + 3 Day Spanish

Posted on [November 20, 2014](#) by [GringoTree](#) | [Comments Off](#)

Spanish in 3 days? Impossible! That's what I thought until I took the course. This breakthrough course focuses on two things :

Learning how to learn and how to tap into your learning potential.

Creating phrases and sentences to get you up and running quickly with everyday conversational Spanish.

What you already know will amaze you!

There are over 4,000 words that are the same or similar in English and Spanish.

There are 17 simple rules that enable you to convert English words to Spanish.

By stripping away the conventional methods of teaching grammar and complicated verb conjugations, this course enables you to create sentences and speak Spanish that is used in everyday conversation. The course has been created for beginners – from students, to business people, to retirees of any age – who want to learn conversational Spanish. Those who have been frustrated by conventional textbook learning will also find this course easy to understand, fun, and rewarding.

Click [www.3davspanish.com](http://www.3davspanish.com) for a course overview and introduction to the instructor, John Fisher.

Source: <http://ecuador-retirement.gringotree.com/superlearning-3-day-spanish-2/>

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

### 3.2 Some opinions

Concluding the primary sources data analysis, let's take a quick look at some of the respondents and interviewees' opinions and comments regarding their views, perceptions, experiences and thoughts on the GringoTree website:

GringoTree is a very useful tool, I use it all the time. It's a valid source for recommendations about Cuenca's lifestyle. I like knowing more about what's going on in town. I check it every day, mostly to keep in touch with the rest of the expat community. They do a really good job and they're getting better all the time. I love the news and articles section and the events and calendar sections as well. Whenever I need something, I go there to check it out because I know I will find it. Before coming to Cuenca I had never heard of GringoTree, then we found out a bit more about the site and now I am proud to say we work with them and the Hearts of Gold foundation. I believe GringoTree is successful because they always do their best to keep us all informed.

Information is as accurate as it can be from the source they use. You have so much going on all the time that I believe it is really hard to keep up. I do not see a big difference between the information published by GringoTree and the reality in Cuenca. You could say we're talking about a perspective. Everyone has a different perspective, especially if you come from a foreign land. It's the editor's input, what they think and what they want to show. Everyone has different experiences, it's rather subjective. It also depends on how rapidly you integrate into the company. There are a lot of things to be improved. I believe it will get better when they get their hands around events and the calendar becomes more comprehensive. I would also like a more complete list of what's going on in town and more accurate information. (Bard McCollum)

Just like Bard, Lyle seems to be very pleased and content with GringoTree. The American website has successfully managed to satisfy his wife and his own needs. However, Lyle insists on the imperative necessity to include relevant information about cultural events and artistic festivities in town. After engaging in different

conversations with the participants, the author of this thesis can corroborate that many of the respondents share the same feeling. Lastly, the interviewee mentions the significance of the link between ethics, Internet and credibility:

Of course I've heard of GringoTree, I visit the website several times a day. My wife really likes it, she's found out important information about restaurants and ladies meetings. We also visit Gringo Post but that site's mostly about recommendations. Information is always good and accurate. There are of course certain exceptions but it's mostly little things and details (wrong address, wrong date, wrong buses itineraries and streets) Like for example, last night I read there would be a concert at Teatro Sucre, we went there and there was no concert. We also once read that "Common Grounds" was offering a movie, but the movie was not there. I wish GringoTree would offer a full report on restaurant and services, kind of like what TripAdvisor does. That would be appreciated, but at the same time, I also wish they would focus more on "culture" over recommendations (Cultural events, museums, real art, things that are sometimes hidden).

I find that GringoTree is a satisfactory source of information. It is part of our culture to write about stuff in hopes people will read it. Since human interaction is becoming less and less regular nowadays, writing stuff on blogs and the internet can be an efficient way to reach out to people. In any case you have to make sure that what's being posted or published is accurate. A lot of people rely solely on that information, you want to get your facts right. (Lyle)

Thom thinks it is important to include topics that cover Cuenca and Ecuador politics and governmental affairs because he is accustomed to reading them back home. He reckons there are a few minor things he would like to see improved but altogether, he strongly believes GringoTree is a worthy representative of American culture and standards:

The GringoTree website is very informative. I really appreciate it when they talk about the government and changes in politics. It is a very good source of information. I wish they would share more information regarding cultural



events. My wife has put some things there, trying to get information on certain events, our visas and a lawyer. We have received help when inquiring about the services of a lawyer and a dentist. Information is pretty accurate and very useful. If they could tell us a list of upcoming events, keep us more up-to-date about things that are going on in Cuenca, that'd be super helpful. Also if they could find a way for people to post their reviews on different things, kind of like what Trip Advisor offers. I have also purchased a couple of books. It is a very good page according to American standards and that is something that I love because it makes me feel as though I'd never left home. (Thom)

Nancy is subscribed to the GringoTree daily newsfeed. Supporting other participants' comments and observations, Nancy would rather the American online resource focused on local news and articles instead of delivering personal thoughts and judgments, for she steadfastly defends the view that the former contribute to a better understanding of the city, whilst the latter may be misleading and ambiguous and ultimately lead to erroneous assumptions:

I get daily e-mails from GringoTree. Look for recommendations sometimes. Information is okay, sometimes wrong (stating a concert is free when it's not) and you can also find bad typos, which I believe is unacceptable. I don't think they should be getting involved in the "politics" of a foreign country. It started out as more a questions and answers and recommendations site, now they're trying to be the new "it" site, continuously posting people's opinions that are just that, opinions and not always truth. I would like to see less editorializing and more articles followed by their original sources. Recently there have been editorials/articles that are basically someone's opinion, not necessarily the same thing as others find it. As far as I'm concerned, that is the main source of misunderstanding and confusion. (Nancy)

Joseph has been following the website since its very roots and beginnings. It is with profound melancholy and a deep nostalgic sentiment in his tone of voice that he shares his thoughts on the "old" GringoTree:

I know the website very well, been there since the very beginning. A lot has changed. Started out as a reviews and recommendations website, after all they've been through it's only logical that the entire site is part of a more profit-making system now. It used to be a gringo-for-gringo sort of place. Even though they have a new approach I keep asking myself this question over and over again: Why has it changed so much? You have so many gringos visiting the website all the time that you start to wonder if all the information there comes from a reliable source. GringoTree is now a nest for negativity and turmoil. This could seriously backfire, you know? Keep posting these articles and news, then there will be no more gringos in Cuenca and only then, you will realize your own business is at stake. (Joseph)

Danielle prefers to concentrate on Cuenca's more cultural and artistic side since her constant visits to the website have only resulted in rapid proliferation of unpleasant experiences due to some members' stubbornness and willingness to quarrel:

Cuenca, cradle of poets, artists, painters and many illustrious individuals, a vast land of immense art and culture... Why won't they focus on that? I have observed that many of the comments and recommendations are the primary source of fights and generalized discussion. Such a biased approach will only lead to more negative repercussions. Is that the general image of the city they want to portray? If you have any problems and complaints, or if you are in any way dissatisfied with the service, please keep in mind it is only a personal experience you are sharing and also try to remember that you should not persuade or encourage others to follow the same behavioral patterns.

Rachael accesses the website as often as possible. In her shared testimony, the interviewee says that nothing is more important to her than the feeling of belonging to a certain group or community. She prioritizes personal experiences over any kind of information circulating on the web. Rachael also claims that she greatly enjoys all the efforts made by her and her husband in order to integrate into the local society because it is only through frequent interaction with the locals that she believes she will be able to adapt and finally feel like a true cuencana:

I visit the website on a regular basis. Remember when we talked about the “American way” of doing things? Same thing here! News and articles are good and informative but I don’t see any plans to go beyond this closed circle of American expats living in Cuenca. I use the website for recommendations on health services, found a dentist there. It’s a good way to keep yourself informed, but it’s not the only option, you know. Sometimes the information you read is not accurate (wrong address). Sometimes it is incomplete and that is exactly why I always verify my sources.

Just like in daily “real” life, I see people arguing, trying to impose their ways and personal beliefs, posting opinions and stating facts as if they’re experts on the subject. I’ve mentioned before that’s the way things work back in the States, we feel good about conquering others. It gives us power, it makes us feel invincible. I am afraid the same thing will happen in Cuenca. Why don’t you go out there and talk to cuencanos? I am sure they will give you a nicer view and perspective on the city. The language barrier may complicate things, but I think it is our duty to try and adapt ourselves to another language and culture. I really appreciate the locals’ opinions, they are more important to me than any piece of information you may find on the Internet. (Rachael)

To conclude, it is worth mentioning that to the date of the completion of this dissertation paper, the GringoTree website has undergone considerable modifications in its interface and content. All this after being forced to close down by the Internal Revenue Service for a period of approximately one week, December 4<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> 2014, based on the failure to deliver invoices and sales receipts in accordance with the law.

**Picture №36**  
**GringoTree's Closure Notice**



Source: [www.gringotree.com](http://www.gringotree.com)

Author: María Auxiliadora Castro

Some of these modifications include:

- At times, the inclusion of original sources from which news and articles are retrieved. Mostly from local newspapers “El Mercurio” and “El Tiempo.”
- CuencaHighLife’s interface.
- The stress on articles that focus on the several free of charge services offered by GringoTree.
- The opportunity to subscribe not only to GringoTree’s daily newsletter, but also to CuencaHighlife’s newsfeed.

After returning to its normal cycle of activities on December 23<sup>rd</sup> 2014, the CuencaHighLife website issues a publication where it is announced that the entire page will benefit from an exciting and vibrant makeover. In this particular message to all page members and visitors, (which can be found on the following link: <http://cuencahighlife.com/cuencahighlife-gets-a-makeover-and-launches-an-e-letter->

service-plans-an-expansion-of-information-services-for-the-expat-community/) Deke Castleman, one of CuencaHighLife founders indicates that:

Our purpose is the same as it's always been, to provide news and information that has genuine value for expats and potential expats (...) As we've done for nearly seven years, we continue to regularly post content for expats and English-speaking locals, which reports events and features issues that affect their lives.

On the same web address, David Morrill, another founder of CuencaHighLife, promises that:

The redesigned CuencaHighLife aims high in terms of the quality of its reporting and writing. We won't simply rewrite, in English, articles that appear in Ecuadorian newspapers or on websites (...) Our reporters look for new angles and new sources and when there's an expat tie-in, they always include it (...) These journalists have covered Cuenca and Ecuador for years and have old-fashioned noses for news.

Additionally, it is announced that:

The site has never and will never shy away from controversy. I come from the Ambrose Bierce, Mark Twain, H.L Mencken school of journalism that doesn't mind stirring things up occasionally," Morrill says. "We look for writers who understand that sacred cows sometimes make the best hamburgers."

## CONCLUSION

After analyzing the constant flow of online news and articles on the GringoTree website over the last four months, and taking into account the opinions and different points of views of the interviewees and survey participants, it is concluded that:

The articles extracted from the page demonstrate that both editors and publishers share the same approach and that the American criteria and standards are common in the diverse publications. Topics vary extensively, principally as regards the ideas and conceptions of what is *truly* important for foreign readers and the American society in general: politics, business and economy expansion, topics that are related to health, fitness, personal wellness, food, nutrition and diet, concern for the environment and the quality of life. Nevertheless, certain notes are written in such a way that if the reader were not an English native speaker it would turn out to be very difficult to understand them.

The language is direct, blunt and intimate (your trusted source, let us show it to you), strong and uninhibited (bizarre, profane, join the battle), thought-provoking, spirited and lively (reverberates in your head, stimulating, siren song), and fits perfectly with the idea expressed by Eng. Jamil Soliz, that speaks of a change of mentality seeking to be instilled in Cuenca's society, transitioning from a formal approach to a more informal attitude since the latter is the prevailing focus in the various interactions between members belonging to the American society and American culture.

The opinions suggest that in general standards, GringoTree is a good source of information. From a marketing standpoint, GringoTree performs a brilliant task. It is interesting to appreciate how the website starts out as a "Questions and Answers" and "Reviews and Recommendations" sort of page, and then gradually integrates "News" and "Articles" sections, instituting itself as the largest representative and most significant mediator for the foreign community residing in Cuenca. Its audience, mostly American, remains appreciative of the direct and personalized service they are provided. The charming characterization and picturesque representation of the city is what is most striking. The language that GringoTree uses to refer to Cuenca is

largely loaded with adjectives and literary allusions that extol the virtues, merits, beauty, and marvels of the capital of Azuay. The words are clear and flow effortlessly and delicately. They are as appealing as they are seductive (colorful Cuenca, expat laboratory, boom city, your best option). Cuenca with its pros and cons, is shown irresistible and ready to embrace this new wave of expatriates, its new children.

Although the categorization with adjectives makes inroads for subjective opinions and interpretations, we should not fail to appreciate the positive observations and perceptions of the respondents with respect to the type of information handled by GringoTree. Evaluating the credibility, truthfulness and veracity of data is a complex and multifaceted task considering the great flow of daily information. It would be of paramount importance to proceed with a comparative statistical analysis that encompasses not only numeric data, but also researches on qualitative studies of attitudes, behaviors and ways of life in works subsequent to the present. In any case, the results are eye-catching and the views justifying their existence equally interesting and varied.

While there is some questioning as to the source of the news, articles and data, the widespread opinion is that GringoTree keeps up with its informative task in compliance with its obligations and responsibilities and in accordance with its niche and target. There is no doubt that the information provided by GringoTree is useful and that the atmosphere in which all news and articles are delivered remains fresh and up-to-date. Advertising on the webpage does not appear to be aggressive, but it is comprehensible that it may be uncomfortable to some readers. The Directory tab is well achieved and can be viewed as an escape from the advertising flow on the home page. However, for those who prefer the GringoTree portal to receive information about lifestyle, recommendations or help in legal issues, all the news that cover political and government issues may be regarded as a simple addition, a mere appendage or “filling” material.

Under the previously exposed background, that makes reference to the intention of the expatriate American community in Cuenca to switch scenarios detached from the world of politics; realizing that the pattern seems to repeat itself in their new home

may result in discomfort by the excess of information that may not be considered to be of interest.

### **Final Considerations:**

In the same way that readers assume responsibility to make good or bad use of material of interest and look for alternatives that best satisfy their information needs, that or those online resources that have succeeded establishing themselves as an important source of information —especially in a foreign country— have similarly, a large set of responsibilities, obligations, moral duties and a code of ethics under which they are bound to operate.

It is relatively easy for information to become unstructured and a clear target of manipulation, mainly if it is generated in public instances. Whether we are discussing self-made material or material taken from others sources, personal comments or editorials; it is essential to take into consideration that what is acceptable and even real for a group of people, may not be so for another conglomerate. To affirm something from a certain position, privileging what is consistent with a particular reality; and on the contrary, detracting from foreign attitudes, traditions and customs, may lead to problems and conflicts, where individuals become part of this rather arrogant exchange of interactions where it is assumed that everything is known and that everything has been seen.

It is necessary to handle all information with subtlety, without passing from one end of demonization or astonishment towards “all that is foreign,” to another scenario of excessive admiration and extravagant praise. Having exposed the weight that words hold in the configuration of social contexts and in the valorization of perceptions and attitudes, the conclusions that qualify something as "good" or "bad", should be examined and regarded as mere personal opinions. Positive and negative estimations and criteria are solely the result of personal experiences and in no way reflect a widely held view to be used for purposes of persuasion or manipulation. Each individual is capable of making their own decisions. Unfortunately misinformation, the excess of circulating news and sometimes, the absence of discernment or poor judgment, may result in rumors and gossip, triggering chaos and clashes. An opinion



is just an opinion and should be taken as such; it is not right or wrong. It simply is what it is.

To start as a recommendations site and then opt for a more commercial and profitable tactic is just an extension of market-oriented logic and speaks of that special American entrepreneurial spirit that the respondents and interviewees refer to. Apparently, the transition process has been quick, prolific and fruitful. Covering all areas of information can nonetheless become unfavorable and harmful in the long run. It would be convenient to perchance pursue one of the two roads, the informative or the commercial alternative, or at least try to delimit them properly, in a more organized and elaborate way, avoiding confusion and saturation, principally in a foreign country where despite fighting for insertion into the new welcoming society (either partial or complete), the seal of guest is maintained.

Regardless of the profitable background that every commercial firm may or may not pursue, let's not redefine Cuenca as a product; let's not reduce Cuenca to a business object; let's not limit it to a source of financial gain. Cuenca is much more than that. Cuenca is tradition. Cuenca is culture. Cuenca is art. Cuenca was, is and always will be a land of colorful charms, kindness and bewitching enchantments. Long before the boom of the migratory phenomenon, Cuenca knew how to distinguish itself, managed to excel and present itself to the world as a suitable candidate with unique and distinctive characteristics.

As displayed by the data generated from the surveys and interviews, it is not possible to speak of the existence of one single discourse under which the image of Cuenca is constructed or manipulated. The most suitable thing would be to speak of several discourses wherein the city Cuenca is created, glorified or minimized. There are numerous representations of Cuenca, the colonial Cuenca, the commercial Cuenca, the cultural Cuenca, the gastronomic Cuenca, the political Cuenca, the social Cuenca, the version of Cuenca that offers business opportunities and privileges to all newcomers; and finally our own version of Cuenca, the Cuenca that locals and foreigners help build on a daily basis.

In view of the exposed, it would be nearly impossible to measure the impact and incidence of GringoTree in Cuenca as a positive or negative factor for the city. It would be similarly complex to draw conclusions and attempt to estimate the footprint of the American immigration movement in Cuencan soil. The reality of the Cuenca and GringoTree case indicates us that it is indispensable to pay attention to two perspectives, two cultures, two ways to appreciate the dailyness of life. Only in this way would it be possible to coincide that Cuenca is extensively qualified to be a place of mutual encounter in which both parties can benefit from an enriching cultural exchange, respecting worldviews, traditions, customs, ideas, and above all, our unique differences.

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## **APPENDIXES**

### **Appendix 1: Questionnaire of the first interview**

#### **1. Please tell us a bit more about GringoTree.**

For four years, GringoTree was a free service, available to advertisers, event promoters, sellers, buyers, recommenders and information seekers. GringoTree is nowadays the number one free e-mail information service with news and information about Cuenca and Ecuador to foreigners living in the country and to future families who have opted for Ecuador as their new home. GringoTree offers the most important digital resources for the delivery of fresh, new information on a daily basis in hopes of achieving full customer satisfaction to more than 4.000 users that visit the website every day.

#### **2. Given the importance of the website, what can you tell us about figures and data?**

The website has managed to cover 70% of the information traffic with respect to foreigners that express their desire to live in Cuenca, Quito and other nearby destinations, collecting more than 10.000 benefactors, who are now subscribed to the e-letter service. Additionally, GringoTree receives the visit of more than 19.000 users every day, some expats living in Ecuador and some considering relocating to the country, mostly Americans; and also predicts a growth of 11.723 future families around the world, who are currently thinking about moving to Ecuador.

#### **3. What's the reason behind the existence of GringoTree?**

According to a report issued by the American television, radio and news network, NBC (National Broadcasting Company), Cuenca is nowadays one of the most desirable "top five places to settle down abroad" for foreigners, especially for the elderly, who accustomed to busy schedules and hectic lifestyles in their home countries, appreciate in the beautiful Athens of Ecuador, the endless opportunities for

rest and relaxation, the various leisure activities and the magically tranquil atmosphere that the city projects.

We want to offer the best of Cuenca to the world. We want to be there for all these new American expats. We want to give them the best opportunities in Cuenca.

**4. How many people work for GringoTree?**

We have four people working for us at the moment, four of them were born in the United States, four of them are born in Ecuador.

**5. Besides the services detailed on the website, what else do you offer?**

We offer advertising opportunities and we are constantly looking for new ways to connect American expats with Cuencanos. We want to create a link between businesses in Cuenca and this new wave of expats.

**6. Number one service on the website?**

The Real Estate section, definitely! Also the restaurants and directory sections.

**7. Before concluding this first interview, please tell us in a few words whether or not GringoTree has managed to fulfill its expectations.**

Oh yes, absolutely. We have managed to establish ourselves as the most important source of information in Ecuador.

Thank you very much Mr. Soliz, we shall continue the next time.

## **Appendix 2: Questionnaire of the second interview**

### **1. Could you please tell us a bit more about GringoTree's mission and vision?**

The name was selected with the attempt to reproduce a very special analogy: that of a tree, gradually developing through its branches, attracting more and more people, thus creating a strong network that brings together all types of people. GringoTree is then, a network of gringos, a foreign network that can be viewed as a large family tree. We want them to be part of GringoTree, what better way than to offer a high quality personalized customer service and treatment? It is very gratifying to observe how our work helps us create the idea of a global web. A network that is constantly growing as a large tree with deep roots and strong foundations.

### **2. What do you do to help all these American expats coming to Cuenca?**

Before coming to Cuenca we tell them that they need to come prepared. They need to do their homework and read as much as they can. Once they arrive, we provide assistance. They tell us: "Help us find a place to stay, a nice house or condo." We look for a nice place for them, a hotel or a small flat. Then we invite them to visit us here at GringoTree and then we give them a detailed list of our real estate options. You don't want to come here without a plan, improvisation is not good.

### **3. What is the image of Cuenca that you want to portray?**

GringoTree aims to be the number one up-to-date source of local information and contact in relation to the foreign community in Cuenca, primarily American but also Canadian. In other words, GringoTree's goal is to attain a seamless connection between *gringos* and life in Cuenca, offering the best news and opportunities throughout this transition process. We are there when clashes arise, we are there to give them our support. We want them to see how beautiful our city is by providing them help and assistance.



**4. Tell us a bit more about CuencaHighLife and GringoPost please.**

CuencaHighLife is an online newspaper and blog dedicated to delivering hard news, features and opinion columns and is likewise managed and monitored by people working at GringoTree. We do not have any sort of relationship with GringoPost.

**5. What about Hearts of Gold?**

Hearts of Gold is a foundation that seeks to help those in need and is currently handled by people at GringoTree. It campaigns to raise funds and volunteers to assist existing non-profit organizations with their work in the Azuay Province.

**6. How do you choose the kind of information you want your users to read?**

We use articles taken from local newspapers, blogs and the Internet. There are several editors and writers. We have one person in charge of Ads and Classifieds, as well as two other people who manage our Facebook and social network accounts. We try to keep information as fresh as possible.

**7. Do you have plans to expand your network of operations?**

Thanks to the work done to date, GringoTree has plans to expand its current network of interaction and activities and is now looking for new market niches in major cities like Loja and Ambato.

**8. Is there a chance to have a Spanish version of the website?**

We do not have any plans for a Spanish version of the page.

**9. Something that you would like to improve?**

The page is going to go under interesting modifications in the next couple of months. We plan to add a new Delivery! Service, GringoTree users will be able to select from a wide range of restaurants and options. We have plans to improve our Call Center

service, especially for those users who do not speak Spanish. We try to provide assistance in English. We also have a couple of new ideas, we would like to add new services, engage in group chats and roundtables. We have not been able to reach an agreement with the Chamber of Commerce in Cuenca, but we will not give up.

### **Appendix 3: Questionnaire of the interview directed to expats living in Cuenca**

1. How long have you been living in Cuenca?
2. What brought you here? What was your motivation?
3. Did you get any relocation assistance or did you do everything on your own?
4. What do you think of Cuenca as an expat yourself?
5. Please describe “The American Way” of doing things.
6. How would you describe Americans and Cuencanos?
7. What are the main differences between Cuenca and the United States?
8. Have you heard of GringoTree?
9. Pros and Cons of GringoTree as a “gringo yourself.” Things you like and dislike.
10. What’s your opinion of the website?