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IMAGE AS AN ELEMENT OF NATIONAL TOURISM MARKETING

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Abstract: *The specific task of the national tourism marketing is to increase the effectiveness and impact of national marketing activities, market information and transparency in order to help diversification of tourism products and markets and sustainable development of tourism in Bulgaria. One of the most significant national tourism marketing challenges is the need for an effective destination positioning strategy. In order to be successfully promoted in the targeted markets, a destination must be favorably differentiated from its competition, or positively positioned, in the minds of the consumers. A key component of this positioning process is the creation and management of a distinctive and appealing perception, or image, of the destination. This exhibition aims to present the image of Bulgaria as a tourist destination, which is crucial for the development of national tourism marketing.*

Keywords: *national tourism marketing, destination image, effective destination positioning strategy.*

1. Introduction

The tourist marketing is purposed to bring economic benefits and development of specific regional economy. It creates, manages and applies techniques that provoke, inform and motivated the potential customers to visit a specific landmark, city, district, state etc.(7) In order to achieve these results, every municipality, resort, district or state has to develop its tourist infrastructure and to unify its natural, historical and cultural granted values into tourist product. Next follows creating of quality advertising campaign, that is to impose a specific tourist brand, to create cognoscibility and loyalty to the audience.

Development of national tourism marketing is part of the national strategy for regional development (NSRD), which is purposed to achieve dynamic and balanced development of the separate regions for planning and considers the tourism not only as a means of “strengthening of the relations between towns and regions and strengthening the social and economic bringing closer”.

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Today's consumers, facilitated by increased leisure time, rising levels of disposable income and more efficient transportation networks, have the means to choose from among this much larger variety of destinations. As a result, tourism marketers are now faced with influencing consumer decision making in an increasingly complex and competitive global marketplace. One of the most significant national tourism marketing challenges is the need for an effective destination positioning strategy. In order to be successfully promoted in the targeted markets, a destination must be favourably differentiated from its competition, or positively positioned, in the minds of the consumers. A key component of this positioning process is the creation and management of a distinctive and appealing perception, or image, of the destination.

This exhibition aims to present the image of Bulgaria as a tourist destination, which is crucial for the development of national tourism marketing.

2. Image as an Element of National Tourism Marketing

The specific task of the national tourism marketing is to increase the effectiveness and impact of national marketing activities, market information and transparency in order to help diversification of tourism products and markets and sustainable development of tourism in Bulgaria. This is associated with the following indicative activities (6, p.6):

- Preparing of medium term and long term national strategies and programs for development and marketing of the tourism and the tourist products;
- Advertising activities such as preparing and distribution of information and advertising materials on the national level, advertizing in the media, participation international tourist fairs, organizing of national tourist fairs, exploring trips, visits of travel agents and touristic operators, authors of guide books, journalists etc.;
- Activities for informing the public such as campaigns for improvement awareness about natural and cultural heritage and the significance of the tourism on national and international level;
- Activities on creating of regional identity and brand, as a voluntary regional certification of places accommodation, attractions and services, introducing of common regional systems of marking, specific for the region norms of behavior and standards etc., developing and introducing of environmental standards for tourist services;
- Organizing events of regional and national extent and impact such as festivals, open events, sport competitions, folklore activities, presenting local/regional traditions, kitchen, handicrafts etc.;

The important role of destination image, both in terms of understanding travel behaviour and in designing effective tourism marketing strategies, underscores the need to develop methodologies to comprehensively and accurately measure this concept. This is necessary to take these into account in the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Tourism estimated tourism-related behavior trends to 2020, namely (5, p.13):

- Increase the requirements of tourists to the quality, specificity, attractiveness and diversity of tourism services as a key factor for the formation of tourist behavior;
- orientation preferences of tourists for the period 2020 to haul (from 1 to 4 hours of air travel), but there was a significant increase in interest in traveling to distant

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destinations, particularly to China, USA, Canada, South America, Indonesia and others.;

- targeting the preferences of tourists from one country to destinations and countries, ensuring security and peace, and - to the specific forms of tourism - spa tourism, balneology, hobby and extreme tourism, eco and rural tourism, sports and health tourism adventure and more;
- increasing the supply of tourist trips at lower prices from tour operators, airlines and others. The emergence of new low-cost (low cost) carriers as a prerequisite for substantial reductions in air fares and demand for travel at the last moment;
- increasing travel by the elderly for treatment, prevention, rehabilitation and recovery;
- Increase the proportion of children and youth travel, especially to students for participation in cultural and educational tourism, travel for training in other countries, student teams and others;
- increasing the proportion of marine cruises, especially for tourists solvent;
- significantly expand the role of ICTs in the hotel and tour operator in terms of demand planning and implementation of travel.

Tracking these trends in tourist behavior are essential for increasing the efficiency of the national tourism marketing. They will contribute to improving the image of Bulgaria destination and increase tourism revenues by using modern marketing techniques to reach the tourist markets.

The result can be expected to improve awareness and image of the country as a destination for tourism all year round, offering a variety of products, routes and places for tourism, increase the number of visitors and change their structure (new markets, wealthy consumers) more evenly seasonal and spatial distribution of tourism with an expected greater effect on specialized products and lesser-known places and regions in the country.

It is commonly recognized that destination image -“the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination (1, p. 426)”- is an important aspect in successful destination marketing; so one important aspect of destination marketing is “destination image management”. Image is a simplified model of multiple memories and information that an entity (single or group) has a tourist region (4, p. 94). He created the potential and actual tourists for its own use imitating the likeness of the actual object. Murphy, Pritchard, and Smith (9, p. 267) have defined destination image as a sum of associations and pieces of information connected to a destination, which would include multiple components of the destination and personal perception. Destination image consists of functional characteristics, concerning the more tangible aspects of the destination, and psychological characteristics, concerning the more intangible aspects (2, p. 43).

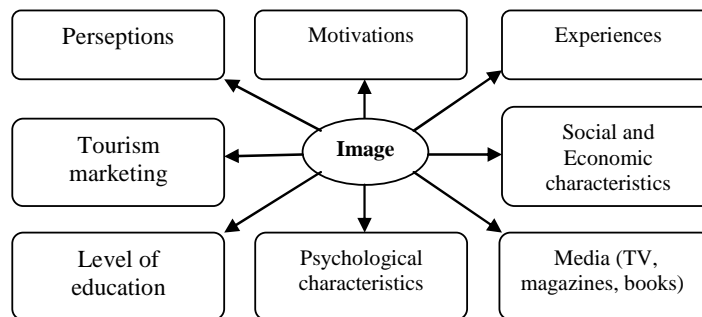
However, the latest guidelines for national tourism marketing admit that the development of the image of a tourist destination is based on the consumer’s rationality and emotionality, and as the result of the combination of two main components or dimensions (3, p. 17):

- Perceptual and cognitive: there is a primacy of the importance and value given to each attribute of tourist destinations. In other words, the destination image is evaluated by the attributes of its resources and attractions which motivate tourists to visit that destination .

- Affective: referring to feelings and emotions raised by tourist destinations . This emotional component is also strongly affected by the motivations of tourists.

Image is therefore the most important concept for interpreting the choices made by tourists but they warn that it is difficult for tourists to gain a clear image of a destination without having visited before . In this context where the tourist has no experience in locum, there are three factors that affect their image of a tourist destination: tourism motivations, demographic variables and information about the destination. In Figure 1 is presented another factors which influence the process of forming the image of a tourist destination .

Figure 1. Factors influencing the formation of the image of tourism destinations



For this last factor - information about the destination - sources of information are magazines, celebrities (opinion leaders), television and the internet, which will ultimately influence the image that potential tourists will have of a tourist destination. In information technology, social networks on the Internet can play an important role as a source of inside information for potential tourists, whether through images, interaction and multimedia on the Web, making it possible to configure a stronger and lighter image of a destination. There are two levels for the image of a tourist destination, based on the type of information transmitted to the tourist (10, p. 309) :

- Organic image: i.e. all of the information transmitted unintentionally by representatives of tourism destinations. Such information may be transmitted either via television, radio, books on geography or history, newspapers, magazines, or by people living at a tourist destination.
- Induced image: i.e. the image formed by the promotions and communications of the tourism organizations involved in a region. It is naturally true, in this context, that both reference or membership groups and opinion leaders can have a powerful influence on the perception tourists have of a particular destination.

In forming the image of a tourist destination should be considered and any conditions such as:

- The complexity of the tourism product whose most important elements are the signs of the tourist;
- The image of a tourist destination is created in the minds of potential tourists, often without physical contact with the object;
- Lack of control on perceptions of a tourist destination, due to information independent of the targeted entities acting on the creation of image;

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- The formation of the tourist destination image is created by multiple actors (tourism business, travel agencies, tour operators, etc.), who have different viewpoints.
- Strategy for the formation of the image causes consequences for a long period of time as the already established image of a tourist region remains in the minds of tourists for decades.
- Image of an individual country as a whole has a significant influence on perception to a tourist spot.

3. Image of Bulgaria in Serbia Touristic Market

In order to increase the effectiveness of the national tourist marketing and as a reply to the need of information and information provision in the tourist sector, Ministry of Economy, Energy and Tourism, successor of State agency for tourism, implemented a project BG161PO001/3.3-01/2008/001-1 „Marketing research and estimation of effectiveness of national marketing”, funded under the Scheme for grant BG161PO001/3.3-01/2008 „Support for effective national marketing of the tourist product and improvement of information services” of Operative program “Regional development 2007-2013”. In order to accomplish that task Ministry of Economy, Energy and tourism conducts extensive marketing research in 10 countries, that represent the largest generating markets for Bulgarian tourism among them Serbia. The research includes general research of tourist demand and travelers’ behavior as the quality of research of the consumers through focus groups.

Destination Bulgaria is among very important foreign destinations for Serbia market with market share of 9% for all travels abroad and 12% vacation travels abroad. When compare Bulgarian market share with that of other destinations in the region of East Mediterranean and Black see one can reveal that for vacation segment Bulgaria has weaker position than Monte Negro (18%) and Greece (14%), but stronger position than Croatia (9%) and Turkey (7%) and mostly Romania (1%) (11, p. 2).

As a tourist destination our country has positive image among Serbian citizens. As reasons of negative image could be mentioned bad experience of previous time and prejudices.

For Serbian citizens that are interested in undertaking of holiday in Bulgaria services and hospitality clean and well-equipped beaches and sea water are very important. Calmness good shelter and accommodation as good food and cuisine are also significant.

Positive **image** is very important for development of tourism in a certain region or country. It serves as an additional capital. When he is about to visit a certain country the tourist decides depending on how attractive it is in regard of cultural, residential, financial, educational and others of his interests. For example some countries are preferable than others by the tourists, because of options for free entry and exit and safe movement around the country. However overall tourist image of Bulgaria is rather positive than negative on the Serbian market. The current presence of Bulgaria (as a whole, but also as a tourist destination) in Serbian media is very weak. Foreign holiday destinations they make most of reports in Serbia media are Greece and Croatia. Positive aspects that are related to image of Bulgaria on the Serbia market are:

- Very good prices, accessible vacation destination
- Summer holidays and sea side holidays

- Excellent destination for winter holiday, ski holiday
- Friendly people, hospitality
- Similar mentality and language
- Proximity, easy access

Sea side holiday is the most related to Bulgaria followed by winter sports holiday, ski holidays. Bulgarian are perceived as warm hospitable people of similar language and mentality. Feelings for our country are positive, (country where you have a good time) and the values associated with it are related to the aspect “progress and development”. The colors and images associated with Bulgaria are mostly related to the sea (brown) and nature (green).

Though there are also some deficits and problems, relating to the image. The Serbian tourists indicate some of them (8, p. 164):

- Unattractive sea, sea water (isn't so “clean and blue ”as that of Mediterranean sea).
- It is not safe, negative behaviour of border control and police.
- Negative prejudices from past time (for e.g. lower standards of quality and services).

To remove deficits of image (negative prejudices of past times, quality of sea water, problems with safety), it is necessary to use the strategy for improving and expanding of the image. This strategy is directed also to increasing the information about offering of holidays with winter sports in Bulgaria. Having in mind that some measures for communication and promotions could be sued in order to expand the image mostly related to holidays with winter sports and building the brand “Bulgaria”.

As about 70 % of Serbian citizens that are interested to visit Bulgaria, use Internet, the internet page of Bulgarian national tourist administration is an ideal instrument for communication and promotion of Bulgaria on Serbian market. It should be in Serbian language and to include the whole important information about what is offered by Bulgaria accomplished with excellent pictures and video clips and should be well structured with easy navigation. The page should include also options for links with social media, which should help to generate viral marketing, which is the variant “word of mouth” in 21st century. The quality information, submitted via Internet can remove the need of “structured” tourist office on the Serbia market and also to eliminate the need of some expensive printed information materials.

Because of the need of improving of Bulgarian image on the Serbian market, it is very important to conduct an image campaign directed to the users. It is recommendable to use advertising means such as additional pages and advertisements in catalogues of touristic operators (basically in printed version), Internet advertising, for example campaigns with key words in search engines that are used by Serbian citizens, banner advertisements, for example internet pages of tourist operators, target advertisements in Facebook etc., as the advertisements in magazines (it should be considered within the general marketing budget).

4. Conclusion

As a conclusion it is needed to be underlined that the research of the markets, segmentation and the choice of target markets, submitting of needed profiled information about tourist, tourist consumption management through management of tourist flows and

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creating of variable individualized tourist products, are very important for developing of sustainable, quality tourism in the country.

In the process of successfully creating a positive image of a tourist destination may be useful following tools:

- The motto and the accepted values that have contributed mightily to reinforce positive perceptions of tourism destination;
- Generalized messages and guidelines for development of tourist destination and the mission, which should find a public domain;
- The logo or characters involved in visual promotional tools to advertise the tourist destination (leaflets, brochures, albums, videos, posters);
- Different events or events occurring in regions of a tourist destination
The position tourist destination amongst other tourist areas worldwide, including specific aspects in which it differs from them.

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IMIDŽ KAO ELEMENT MARKETINGA NACIONALNOG TURIZMA

Rezime: Konkretni zadatak marketinga nacionalnog turizma je da uveća efikasnost i uticaj nacionalnih marketing aktivnosti, tržišne informacije i transparentnost, kako bi se pomoglo u diverzifikaciji turističkih proizvoda i tržišta i održivi razvoj turizma u Bugarskoj. Jedan od najznačajnijih izazova marketinga nacionalnog turizma je potreba za strategijom efikasnog pozicioniranja destinacije. Da bi bila uspešno promovisana na ciljnim tržištima, destinacija mora da se razlikuje od konkurencije, ili pozitivno pozicionirana u glavama potrošača. Ključna komponenta procesa pozicioniranja je kreiranje i upravljanje prepoznatljivim i privlačnim destinacijama ili imidžom. Cilj ovog rada je da predstavi sliku Bugarske kao turističke destinacije, što je od ključnog značaja za razvoj marketinga nacionalnog turizma.

Ključne reči: marketing nacionalnog turizma, imidž destinacije, strategija efikasnog pozicioniranja destinacije