

BRAND POSITIONING –TOURISM STRATEGY SUPPORT

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Abstract:

The investigations carried out so far have showed that Romania currently has a rather negative image and one of the main objectives is to make Romania known as a tourist destination. One of the ways that can increase awareness is running a campaign sustained by promotion to address a target audience whose profile is defined in a brand strategy.

The overall objective of such a campaign is to promote the national tourist brand in order to create a positive image of Romania as a tourist destination, by better ranking our country at international level and increasing the demand for tourism in Romania, on the main priority markets identified.

Promoting a successful national tourist brand will enable Romania to create its positive view as a quality tourist destination based on its natural and cultural heritage that meets international standards as to delivery of products and services, and to achieve sustainable development of its tourist sector in a growth rate superior to other tourist destinations' in Europe. Therefore, more information and promotion campaigns need to be carried out to support a brand and convey communication messages to the target groups taken into account.

Key words: *tourism brand, tourist destination, positioning, brand identity*

JED Classification: L83, M31, M37

INTRODUCTION

The development of a national tourist brand has an impact on medium term both on the country brand development as well as on the growth of domestic and foreign tourist markets. Tourism is one of the axes that generate income to the government and a tourist brand is only a part of a country brand - indeed an important one through the high visibility it enjoys. The development of a national tourist brand is particularly important as Romania does not have a sharp image as a tourist destination, with its internal and external promotion quite inadequate and undersized.

Therefore, this activity must overcome the identity crisis that Romania faces today. A wider involvement in promoting national resources and values would generate benefits for various categories: raising living standards through the expansion and development of economic activities, openness to what a value system means in tourism and sustainable tourism, attracting foreign investors, new business opportunities, increasing public confidence in the business environment, international fundraising for developing ecological and cultural projects etc.

THE ANALYSIS OF THE SPECIALIZED LITERATURE

In order to develop a brand, it is very important how it is placed on the market (Temi Abimbola, 2008). Placing a brand's image means identifying its position on the market, the position it should have to a certain consumer segment as compared to competitors, taking account of buyers' needs and the level of their cultural background.

Placing a brand must comply with functional, emotional and cultural needs of the targeted segment and convey the advantages it is to get and the time stability of the brand's elements. It must:

- be highly popular not only from the perspective of the tourist percentage knowing its name, but also from the perspective of its attributes, features, values, essence etc;

- be trustworthy, namely it must reflect the potential of a destination, its unique resources and sights, specialists' ability or skills in launching a new tourist product or in bringing forth a new destination on the tourist market;

- be relevant, distinct and easy to remember.

To a certain extent, every destination is differentiated but not every different feature is important and taken into account by tourist consumers (Evans N., Campbell D., Stonehouse, G., 2003). Therefore, a destination must carefully choose differentiation direction in compliance with the following criteria:

- ▶ **Importance.** It is a pretty attractive and important advantage to most tourists (along with relaxation and entertainment, one can benefit from health treatments as well);

- ▶ **Genuineness.** This attribute is either not used by competitors, or it is used in a specific form (the only region where one can cure a certain disease, for example);

- ▶ **Superiority.** It is a feature superior to all other ways to get the same advantages (one can have several activities in the same place, for example).

In an environment where there are several similar models of business, products and services, where the struggle to be the best in a world of similarities is harder and harder and consumers are provided with enough options, being different can mean the major factor in a customer's decision taking.

It is known that the most famous tourist destinations are very well placed to a tourist consumer and that is why it is difficult to influence opinions that already exist. In order to create and promote the image of a destination as to tourists, the following strategic alternatives can be applied:

- ✓ Strengthening the current position as related to tourist consumers;

- ✓ Finding and occupying the free position that might be recognized by most tourists;

- ✓ Outdoing competing destinations or repositioning them.

Accomplishing the goal of competitiveness growth in an area requires more and more actions that aim at developing and promoting an area as a tourist destination at national and international level as well as developing a sustainable tourist industry.

The sustainable growth of tourist promotion, the design and promotion of a tourist brand are a basic constituent both in order to reach normal, best levels regarding the image an area has on the national and international markets as a well customized destination, distinct from other competitive destinations, and to attract investors and other strategic partners for the growth of tourist industry.

The efforts to place itself as an attractive destination from the tourist perspective is difficult to an area especially in an age when consumers are more and more skilled and competition is becoming harsher and harsher. An area's ability to win in this "struggle" is firstly connected to becoming aware of the strengths and weaknesses that tourism has, to its better organization and its efficient promotion.

In order that a tourist region should become an important tourist destination, it is necessary that adequate marketing elements should be intensely used as well as proper distribution channels should be set up (Evans N., Campbell D., Stonehouse, G., 2003).

BRAND RANKING

Each tourist destination in the world has a "brand image". If carefully developed, a brand serves to differentiate the former from its competing destinations. However, some destinations do not have a well-defined brand strategy supported by substantial advertising campaigns and thus they have a confusing image to potential customers. In this context, an image must always be controlled by a clear projection of brand identity, because when consumers decide on a destination for holidays or a business conference, several "brands" compete for their attention. A powerful brand has several competitive advantages and has an attractive appeal to consumers. In tourism, factors such as the cost of travel, comfort, quality and facilities are important when choosing a destination, but the most powerful motivator is a "brand". It can add a destination on a consumer's "shopping list" and creates an emotional trigger, which increases the chances for that destination to be chosen before others.

The official advertising and promotion of a country as a tourist destination should be based on a well-defined brand strategy. If a destination brand is *false, incorrect, inaccurate*, they will find it difficult to compete with the brands created by competing countries.

Developing a strong brand for any destination requires a coherent, effective, ranking strategy based on a thorough understanding of consumers' needs which encourages them to believe they have made the best choice from among all the existing destinations.

Ranking assumes identifying brand elements that provide satisfaction and a high level of recognition as a tourist in a new destination, a slogan linking brand identity and its real image (Pike 2005, 258) which lead to a winning a better position of the destination on the market. A destination brand firstly involves connecting a place with a clear imagine, producing a positive mental view that values everything defining the place. If the images come in bulk, the result can only be confusion or forgetfulness and so a failure of communication to a target group. To make a brand well-known, one must act on the principles of integrated communication mix (Papadopoulos and Heslop 2002, 310) that is to involve both the government and professional associations (through mass-media advertising) as well as travel agencies, associations and individual firms (personal selling and incentives). Since tourism involves services and experiences that cannot be evaluated before purchasing them, personal and social communication is a trustworthy source of information about a potential destination (Sonmez and Sirakaya 2002, 195).

The importance a destination brand has acquired in time was anticipated by Morgan and Pritchard (2001, p 214) a decade ago who stated that "the fight to gain customers in tomorrow's tourism industry will not refer to price, but to the minds and hearts of customers –a brand (...) will essentially be the key to success".

Brand identity and brand image are necessary ingredients for a successful brand destination (Qu et al., 2010, p 2). Whereas identity is created by a transmitter and supported by all or some (natural and / or artificial) tourist attractions, history, people, in other words elements that can constitute reasons for choices, an image is perceived by a receiver and supported by previous experiences and communication strategies of a transmitter (according to Kapferer, 1997, p 32). Between these two concepts, in many cases there are differences because when choosing a tourist destination, tourists can take account of peculiarities such as nature monuments, climate, infrastructure, arts monuments and so on, and / or intangible characteristics such as feelings of freedom, security, relaxation, energy amount, etc.. Therefore, determining a target group is essential to developing a brand, as some aspects of a destination can be positive to a segment of tourists and negative to another (Fan, 2006, p 11).

CASE STUDY: TOURISM BRAND POSITIONING ELEMENTS IN ROMANIA

In order to rank a brand, the model used includes four elements: the target group, the reference background, differentiating elements and reasons to believe. In a nutshell, the ranking of Romania brand is shown in the figure no.1.

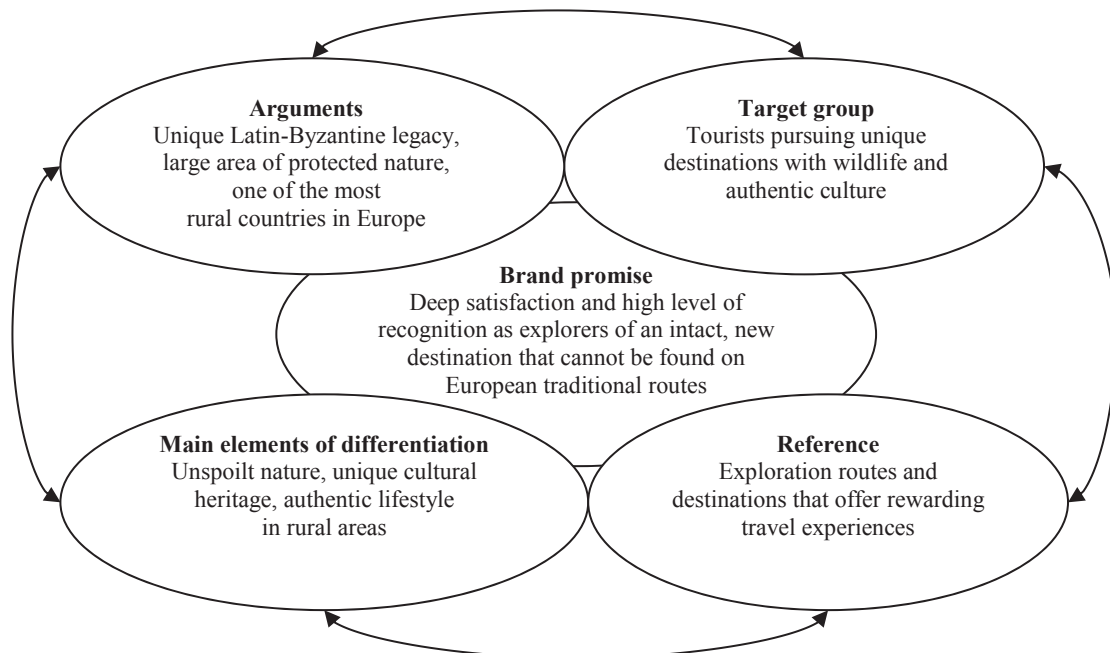


Figure no. 2. The brand ranking model
Source: the authors, adapted from MRDT (2010)

A **target group** is represented by a discerning traveller, a well-defined global concept for the professionals in the tourism sector. The key idea that all discerning travellers share is looking for unique experiences and places that are less explored or discovered by the masses. Discerning travellers are opinion leaders and trend setters. Attracting them is likely to generate a "tracking" trend from other segments.

In a study (Strizhakova, Coulter, and Price 2008, 62) the opinion of a younger population considering global brands was determined, and it was pointed out that in developing countries, research indicates that young consumers, who seek to better their economic position and that of their country are likely to embrace brands as a discourse of power and to believe that buying global brands enables them to participate in that global arena by empowering their own local companies and nations. According to them, young people look for new experiences and traveling to new destinations. Such consumers are often very web wise, complementing other advertising and public relations media activity. Today's tourists are not asking 'What can we do on holiday?' but 'Who can we be on holiday with?,' they are increasingly looking less for escape and more for discovery, and that creates a basis for emotional connection.

A target group includes people aged between 25 and 35 years old who prefer to enjoy independent travels. These visitors often seek adventure, they are always ready to push their limits and start exploratory trips. Another type of traveller focus can be placed upon are the so-called "empty nesters" who enjoy good health, have time to travel alone, without children, and often have a high financial potential.

Discerning travellers mainly come from metropolitan areas; they long for landscapes and natural, healthy lifestyles. In addition, their interests in cultural and historic life are above average and that is why Romania is a great place to meet the expectations of such a target group. Since they form opinions and trends, they will be

the first to come to know our country and by their direct and online recommendations, they will open the way for more and more visitors.

Reference background is represented by Romania which is a country for those who have a strong desire to "explore *destinations outside ordinary paths*" with authentic wildlife and culture, and to live rewarding experiences.

In short, a reference background summarizes those travel expectations of a target group that Romania can offer. What benefits will they get by visiting Romania? The answer to this question will allow one to find destinations that offer similar benefits and therefore competitors it must differentiate from.

Visitors can receive unique tourist experiences through journeys that involve exploring nature, Romanian culture and trips in places that are inspirational. Being travellers who explore and usually travel without children, such a target group prefers among others voyages about the country, holidays in the mountains, parks or natural reservations, rural areas and active holidays.

Romania is a great destination for them, offering the opportunity to explore new destinations, authentic local life and culture and to live personal experiences that provide deep satisfactions. Romania is a place where a journey itself is the reward, not a check on a travelling list. The type of experiences offered by Romania allows visitors to establish contacts with its inhabitants and enjoy unscheduled meetings, even if all communication sometimes confines to smiles and gestures. Romania gives visitors the opportunity to make themselves part of their travel experiences.

Differentiation elements are those factors which render the country unique. They distinguish it from other destinations, so that a target group will prefer Romania to other destinations that offer similar benefits for travel.

Romania's natural wealth is unrivaled in Europe. There are real treasures, unique geographical areas that are still wild such as the Danube Delta and the Carpathians in certain regions. In addition, Romania has many ecologically protected areas - with unpolluted flora and fauna, species that can hardly be found in other countries. Romania is a call for nature lovers and adventurers seeking to reconnect themselves with nature.

Ranging from fresh healthy food and natural wines, from the original local festivals, to the accommodation experiences in villagers' households or in modest but warm and welcoming guesthouses, all this is authentic, entirely Romanian and is provided open-heartedly. Rural traditions in particular are visible to visitors, and their values are inherited from generation to generation. Peasants distinguish themselves through their great warmth and native sense of humor and visitors will find it as a treasure.

The Romanian people's culture is an exceptional mixture of Byzantine influences upon an ancient foundation of Latin origin, a cultural combination that is unprecedented in the world. You can see it, hear it and enjoy it in almost every town, city, monastery or historic site in the country.

Table no. 1

Main differentiation elements

What can be found in Romania?	Where to find:
Unaltered nature and scenic landscapes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well protected nature and national parks, • Isolated beautiful landscapes, • Areas with rare flora or fauna, • Sound ecosystems.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Carpathian Mountains • Inland hilly areas, • The Danube Delta.

What can be found in Romania?

Where to find:

Genuineness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ancient traditions, • Simple rural life • Locally produced organic food • Typical local architecture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In every rural area of Romania e.g. in Transylvania, Maramureş, Bucovina, Dobrogea • In medium-sized villages or towns, • Generally in small hotels, guesthouses and restaurants.
Unique cultural heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sites of UNESCO world heritage, • Latin and Byzantine historical cultural heritage, • Castles, monasteries and churches, • German cultural heritage, • Well-preserved historical urban centers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ancient cities of Sibiu, Braşov, Sighişoara • Painted monasteries, • Dacian fortresses, • Wooden churches of Maramureş • Painted monasteries of Bucovina.

Source: *the autors, adapted from MRDT (2010)*

Arguments are the factors determining the credibility of tourist destination’s differentiating elements. Romania’s differentiating elements can be identified by an overview of our country that will make people understand why pride regarding the Romanian landscape and culture is justifiable.

Even in the 21st century, *genuineness* in Romania is still at home, our country being one of the those in Europe having the best kept traditions and one of the last getaways in terms of traditional life styles. A shelter for century-old legends and folklore, for organic food in its original meaning, Romania offers unique local music, playing the pan flute being perfected by the Romanians along with dances typical of each region. Genuineness is noticeable everywhere, our guests being able to enjoy a traditional soup or a glass of plum brandy, the freedom to merely wander on the streets of fortress cities such as Brasov, Mediaş, Sighişoara, Sibiu – a European Cultural Capital in 2007.

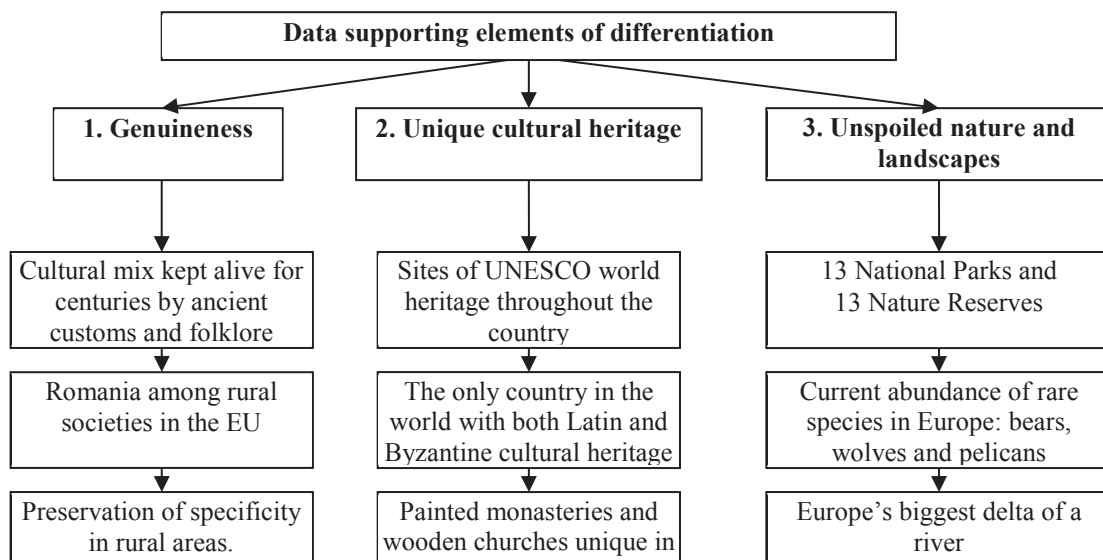


Figure no. 3. Landmarks supporting differentiation elements

Source: *the autors, adapted from MRDT (2010)*

Culture refers to the unique cultural heritage of Romania reflected in the sites of UNESCO World Heritage (i.e. the fortified sites and churches in the villages of Transylvania, the Hurezi Monastery, Moldavian churches, the historical center of Sighişoara, the totality of wooden churches in Maramureş, the Dacian fortresses in the Orăştie Mountains, the Danube Delta Biosphere Park), spread across the country. These are essential elements of unparalleled

culture: there is no other place where you can find such a mix of cultural heritage. Ranging from the Roman and Dacian ancient influences to Byzantine, Slavic and Latin influences, Romania is a special blend of heritage items. Picturesque testimonies of our country's uniqueness are for example the painted monasteries which can be found only in Romania.

Nature. There are thirteen protected natural areas covering more than 7% of Romania, representing clear evidence in favor of our country's intact nature. Our country is crossed by the longest part of the mighty river, the Danube, the longest river in the European Union, which flowing majestically into the wonderful delta it has formed on our country's territory. The Danube Delta provides shelter for many species of insects, birds and animals, of which some are endangered in other areas. Above all, the mystics Carpathians overshadow our country's land, being one of the largest mountain ranges in Europe with many areas still unexplored. Our country's forests host 40% of Europe's number of brown bears, one third of the world's number of wolves and many rare species. Romania is a paradise for nature lovers.

CONCLUSIONS

Brand personality reflects both Romania's view seen from abroad and the Romanians' opinions, both among travellers and among those who work in tourism. To really highlight and achieve the recognition of interests and differences, creative thinking is needed not only to express brand identity but also in basic messages communicated through the media mix used to accomplish a desired brand exposure.

Strategic thinking is required to ensure that messages are correctly sent to the right people at the right time ... and more importantly they have the desired effects.

How to start or develop a brand involves a series of steps that take into account both domestic plans and the reference market context. Many times things are done step by step, intuitively, depending on immediate opportunities and constraints, overlooking the usefulness of a well-developed plan, covering all the objectives, stages, resources, means of implementation and results' evaluation criteria. A strategy is what most often acts in favor of a brand or another.

In order to meet the requirement of promoting national tourist destinations, attention needs to be paid to the implementation of promotion, advertising and public relations activities having a role in increasing awareness regarding destinations and tourist products through personalities that have national and international recognition in different fields such as arts, culture, sports, science and the like, as vectors for promoting Romania's tourist brand.

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