

Milenkovska, Violeta; Strezovski, Zoran; Milenkovska, Angela

Article

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UTMS Journal of Economics

Provided in Cooperation with:

University of Tourism and Management, Skopje

Suggested Citation: Milenkovska, Violeta; Strezovski, Zoran; Milenkovska, Angela (2015) : Promotion: Branding tool for Macedonia as a tourist destination, UTMS Journal of Economics, ISSN 1857-6982, University of Tourism and Management, Skopje, Vol. 6, Iss. 2, pp. 355-363

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/146369>

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PROMOTION: BRANDING TOOL FOR MACEDONIA AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

Violeta Milenkovska¹
Zoran Strezovski
Angela Milenkovska

Abstract

In times when competition between countries in the world is stronger, in order to attract as many tourists as possible, and strengthening their brand as a tourist destination, Republic of Macedonia started to build and strengthen its tourism brand. Due to the enormous competition, traditional destinations maintain and improve their brand through new innovative tourist attractions. On the contrary, the new tourist destinations strongly attack potential tourists with intention of gaining a better position on the tourist market.

The subject of this paper is Macedonia as a tourist destination seen through the prism of promotional activities that Agency for promotion and support tourism in Republic of Macedonia realized in period 2009–2012. This paper presents an action research conducted on a sample of 65 tourist stockholders (travel agencies and hotels) in Macedonia in 2012. In this study it will be analyzed what other countries have undertaken regarding the aspect of promotion of their tourist product, concerning promotion of their tourist destination and what Macedonia has undertaken and should undertake regarding that aspect.

Keywords: Agency for promotion, brand, Macedonia, activities, strategic position.

Jel Classification: M31

INTRODUCTION

The branding of a certain country as a tourist destination is a long and continual process that depends of many factors. The destination's brand represents its essential characteristics therefore it is the DNA that defines the destination, which runs through every action of the marketing communication and attitude of any national tourist organization and tour-operators of the destination. This is a dynamic interaction between the destination's conditions and how potential visitors perception and feel it based on their experience there and the presentation of the destination (Anholt 2009).

¹ **Violeta Milenkovska**, PhD, Associate Professor; **Zoran Strezovski**, PhD, Assistant Professor; **Angela Milenkovska**, PhD Student, Teaching and Research Assistant, University of Tourism and Management in Skopje, Macedonia.

Branding Macedonia as a tourist destination is not a simple and rapid process. The results of Murphy, Benckendorff and Moscardo (2007) indicate that where tourists can make an association between a destination and a destination brand personality, and where this association is consistent with their desired holiday experience, a high level of congruity will exist between the tourists' self-image and their perceptions of the destination. According to the famous world expert in branding tourist destinations, Simon Anholt, branding is a long and continuous process without stopping, thus action must be taken even when being on top. Many presidents and prime ministers of the countries asked him: "Let's take action immediately, that we would be well-known and most desired tourist attraction by tomorrow." His answer always was that it is the wrong question to be asked and the real question to be asked is: "What measures and activities should be undertaken now but also continuously in order to be desired tourist attraction after 10–15 years?" (Anholt 2009).

Other countries such as Turkey, begun to implement strategy for development and promotion of tourism in the early 1990s until nowadays. So, 20 years later, Turkey becomes the 8th country in the world according to the number of visits of the foreign tourists. Croatia promptly after gaining independence from Yugoslavia, even during the war that raged on its territory, begun marketing communication with the purpose of establishing of its tourism brand. Certainly, one of the marketing communication tools is the promotion as a special element of the 4P in marketing mix. One of the "mega trends" that has significantly impacted the tourism system, IS the role and use of social media in travelers see in Leung at all. (2013). Branding and social media are very connected, Chan and Gullet (2011) studied size of extent to which social media marketing is being utilized in the Hong Kong hotel industry. There are also many other author that research the same topic like Hudson and Thai (2013). Trembath, Romaniuk and Lockshin (2011) examined an alternative approach to destination branding, which relates to building the salience of the destination to increase the likelihood that the destination will be considered in purchase situations.

1. STUDY AREA: MACEDONIA AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

Tourism in Republic of Macedonia had never been treated as a priority economic activity, not as a priority for the state and the government never places the tourism in its focus of interest. Republic of Macedonia as a tourist destination has been a less unknown, or not perceived at all by foreign tourists. And the perception that was aroused was based mostly from the old times in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Promotion was led by the Department of Tourism in the Ministry of Economy, which according to finances and capacity carried out certain activities primarily through participating in international Tourism fares (Ministry of Economy, Tourism department 2008).

Without any strategy to promote tourism, some "ad hock" campaigns have occurred in several global media without applying and combining other marketing tools. The CNN campaign in 2005 is the suitable example.

The main concern of the domestic tourism workers was the fact that Macedonia cannot be found on the map of recognizable tourist destinations in Europe.

The research presented in this paper is conducted on Republic of Macedonia as a tourist destination and promotional activities realized to strengths the brand of

Macedonia abroad. Result of those activities is increasing the number of foreign tourist in the country.

It includes survey by random choice on 65 tourist stockholders (travel agencies and hotels) in Macedonia in 2013. The survey was made in May 2013. Data for this study were collected through a self-administrated questionnaire distributed to 65 major tourist stock holders in Macedonia. Respondents were approached face-to-face. Period from January till April is very important about promotion Macedonia as a tourist destination on target markets. In that period Agency for promotion and support of Tourism realized promotional activities.

The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions: 3 questions concerning the trip characteristics (first-time or repeat visit, number of visits, length of stay, source of information); 3 socio-demographic (nationality, gender, age); and 8 questions concerning the ways of promotion the country abroad. The questions have scale of answers: completely disagree, agree slightly, agree, significantly agree and completely agree.

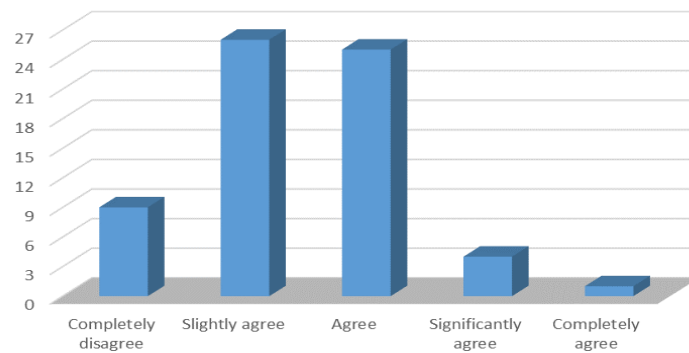


Figure 1. Macedonia is appropriately promoted as a tourist destination

Results from the variable 1: Macedonia is appropriately promoted as a tourist destination

- 9 respondents completely disagree
- 26 respondents agree slightly
- **25 respondents agree**
- 4 respondents significantly agree
- 1 respondent completely agrees

According to the acquired results it can be concluded that vast majority of respondents (40%) agree slightly with the stance that Macedonia is appropriately promoted as a tourist destination.

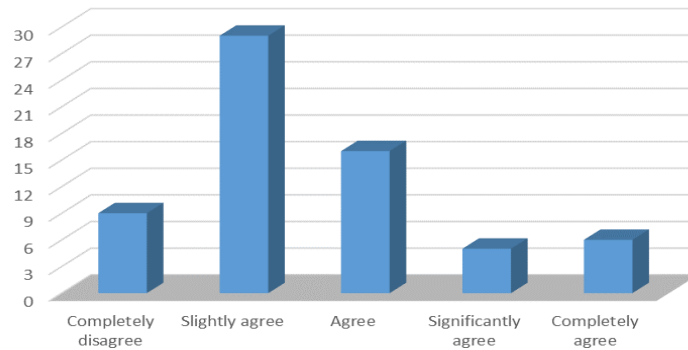


Figure 2. The country allocates sufficient amount of fund for the promotion of the Republic of Macedonia

Results from the variable 2: The country allocates sufficient amount of fund for the promotion of the Republic of Macedonia

- 9 respondents completely disagree
- 29 respondents agree slightly
- **16 respondents agree**
- 5 respondents significantly agree
- 6 respondents completely agree

According to the acquired results it can be concluded that vast majority of respondents (44.6%) agree slightly with the stance that the country allocates sufficient amount of fund for the promotion of the Republic of Macedonia

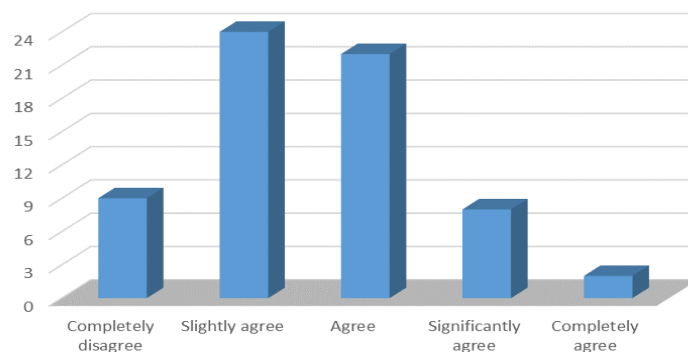


Figure 3. The promotional material of the Republic of Macedonia as a tourist destination is of good quality

Results from the variable 3: The promotional material of the Republic of Macedonia as a tourist destination is of good quality

- 9 respondents completely disagree
- 24 respondents agree slightly
- **22 respondents agree**
- 8 respondents significantly agree
- 2 respondents completely agree

According to the acquired results it can be concluded that vast majority of respondents (36.9%) agree slightly with the stance that the promotional material of the Republic of Macedonia as a tourist destination is of good quality

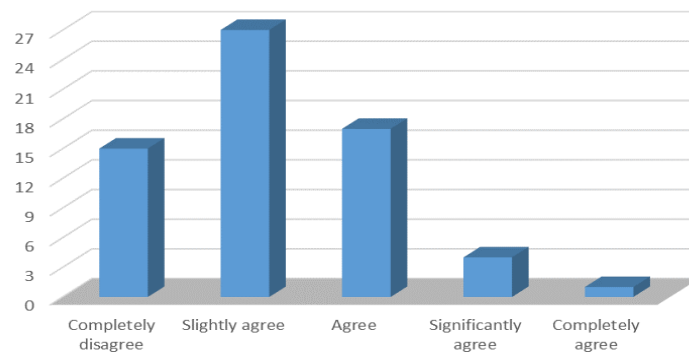


Figure 4. The promotional material of the Republic of Macedonia as a tourist destination is produced in a sufficient amounts

Results from the variable 4: The promotional material of the Republic of Macedonia as a tourist destination is produced in a sufficient amounts

- 15 respondents completely disagree
- 27 respondents agree slightly
- **17 respondents agree**
- 4 respondents significantly agree
- 1 respondent completely agrees

According to the acquired results it can be concluded that vast majority of respondents (42.2%) agree slightly with the stance that the promotional material of the Republic of Macedonia as a tourist destination is produced in a sufficient amounts

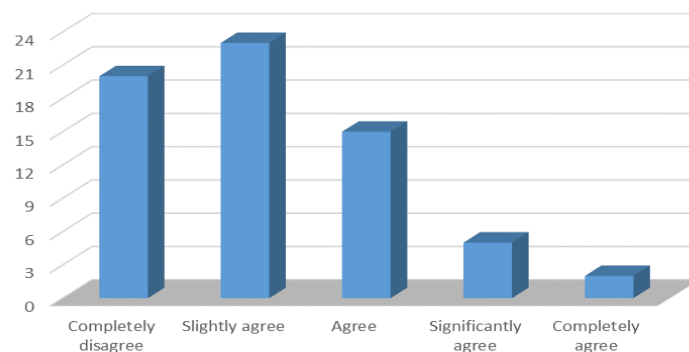


Figure 5. The country is appropriately promoted at International tourism fairs

Results from the variable 5: The country is appropriately promoted at International tourism fairs

- 20 respondents completely disagree
- 23 respondents agree slightly

- **15 respondents agree**
- 5 respondents significantly agree
- 2 respondents completely agree

According to the acquired results it can be concluded that vast majority of respondents (35.4%) agree slightly with the stance that the country is appropriately promoted at fairs

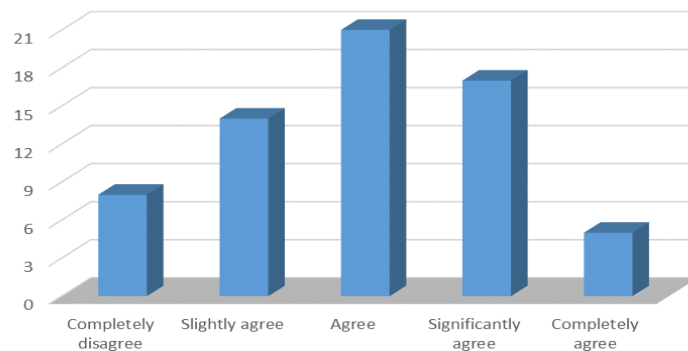


Figure 6. The country produces quality video materials

Results from the variable 6: The country produces quality video materials

- 8 respondents completely disagree
- 14 respondents agree slightly
- **21 respondents agree**
- 17 respondents significantly agree
- 5 respondents completely agree

According to the acquired results it can be concluded that vast majority of respondents (32.3%) agree with the stance that the country produces quality video materials

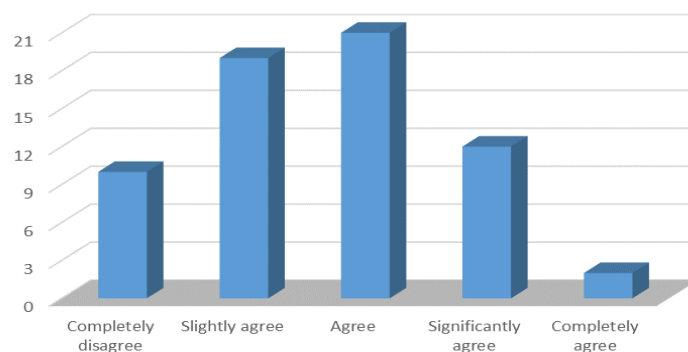


Figure 7. The country produces quality printed materials

Results from the variable 7: The country produces quality printed materials

- 10 respondents completely disagree
- 19 respondents agree slightly
- **21 respondents agree**
- 12 respondents significantly agree
- 2 respondents completely agree

According to the acquired results it can be concluded that vast majority of respondents (32.8%) agree with the stance that the country produces quality printed materials

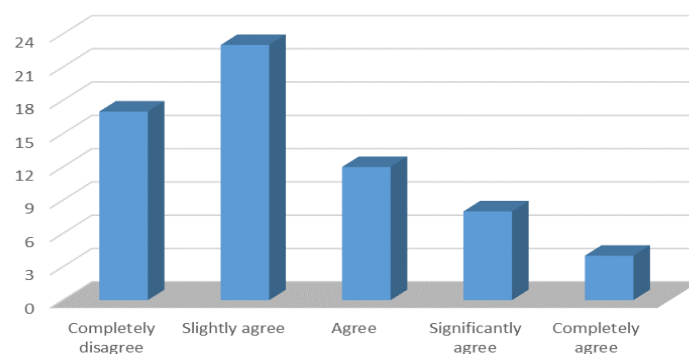


Figure 8. The country participates at appropriate international tourism fairs for the promotion of the Republic of Macedonia

Results from the variable 8: The country participates at appropriate international tourism fairs for the promotion of the Republic of Macedonia

- 17 respondents completely disagree
- 23 respondents agree slightly
- **12 respondents agree**
- 8 respondents significantly agree
- 4 respondents completely agree

According to the acquired results it can be concluded that vast majority of respondents (35.9%) agree slightly with the stance that the country participates at appropriate fairs for the promotion of the Republic of Macedonia

Since 2008, the Government of R. of Macedonia, turns to a stronger tourism industry taking some coordinated activities in terms of promotion and establish Macedonia as a tourist destination abroad.

Thus began a series of activities in terms of promotion with the creation of tourism videos under the name “Macedonia Timeless”, more videos for wine, culture, mountain tourism, lake tourism, gastronomy, consequently forming a coordinated and continuous campaign on more global media (CNN, Fox, National Geographic), established a national agency for promotion and support of tourism and its main task was promotion the country abroad. (Annual report of the Government of R Macedonia 2009)

Agency for promotion and support of tourism in Republic of Macedonia has taken certain promotional activities of Macedonian tourist product such as (Agency for promotion and support of Tourism, Annual report, 2012)

- Promotion on International Tourism fairs on target markets. Macedonian Tourist offer was presented by stand which is branded on the color of Macedonian flag and motives of Macedonian historical and culture monuments, printed promotional materials on different languages and presenters on the booth. On the stand is organized different activities such as Happy Hour, Video presentations, interactive communication with international tour operators, promote Macedonian traditional food and music etc.)
- Macedonian Agency for promotion has organized outdoor (billboard) campaign in the capital cities of the target countries on the region and targeted markets with a duration of one month, it organizes FAM tour for journalist of printed and electronic media from different target market.
- Study tour for foreign tour operators from targeted countries and B2B activities with Macedonian hoteliers and travel agencies.
- Promotion through advertisements in specialize tourism magazines for segmented audience,
- Create and printing promotional materials on different forms of tourism, Organize a day of Macedonian tourism in capital cities of certain targeted countries, etc.
- Promotion in global electronic media organized by the Agency for Foreign Investment (spots on CNN, BBC, Fox, National Geographic), and a campaign aimed at domestic tourists under the slogan "Explore Macedonia"

CONCLUSION

From the analysis indubitable we can draw certain conclusions. The promotion activities are essentially more or less the same in countries that treat seriously tourism concerning their aim is to be a recognizable tourist destination, The Agency for the promotion and support of tourism should be more institutionally strengthened and continually increasing its budget. Republic of Macedonia through the Agency for the promotion and support of tourism should continue coordinated promotional campaign with intensified pace and focus on targeted segmented markets. Adequately combining the instruments of the marketing mix and promotional mix in marketing communications abroad. permanently to attack and opening new markets especially in Europe (Austria, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Czech Republic, France, Nordic countries), and strengthening the brand's on existing markets in the region. Enhancing promotional activities and enrich with new activities. More about country marketing see in Hall and Tribe (2003), and Elgin-Nijhuis, Maurer and Munro (2014). Continuously analyzing the reports on the effects of a promotional campaign conducted in a particular country in order to successfully combine the instruments of marketing. The presentation in international fairs to actively engage local governments and chambers of tourism (consistent with a template of other states). Republic of Macedonia will be truly established as a tourist destination in the next 10 to 15 years. But, the most important perception is the one that tourists have for a particular destination or their gained experience on the destination. That means when tourists visit Macedonia they should be satisfied in order to recommend the destination to their friends. Macedonia with the measures taken in recent times is on a good way to become recognized and desirable destination for the European tourism market in a period of 5 till 10 years. However, it requires coordinate joint action of all subjects and stakeholders in

tourism starting from the state level up to the local level, the faculties of tourism and tourist workers in a tourism chambers.

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