

Marketing Communications in Territorial Brand Promotion: The Regional Aspect

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ABSTRACT

Branding has become one of the most powerful ways to develop territories. Branding tools increase recognition and attractiveness, as well as help territories to compete for the end consumer in highly competitive industrial markets. The main research purpose was to identify such effective marketing communications tools that will ensure the promotion of the ecological resort region. The article reveals the relevance of marketing communications in the development of territory branding. It names new popular marketing communications tools that need to be included in the regional development strategy and in the strategy for building a territorial brand. The analysis of available research on "brand" and "territorial brand" categories allows formulating the copyright definition of the territory brand notion. The authors underline the importance of a wide range of audiences, which should become the target of activities aimed at building the brand of the territory. The cases of the most successful territorial brands identified during the implementation of geo-branding practice in Russia have been considered. The analysis of research literature results in emphasis on errors leading to failures or to a zero result in the implementation of strategies for creating and promoting the brand of the territory. One of the Russian regions, the Stavropol Kray, has become the case for estimating the current state of branding and for identifying the potential for creating a successful geo-brand. The article singles out the main factors that influence the success of an eco-resort region brand, including its development and growth, creativity, attractiveness of the territory, support and control. The authors make conclusions on the importance of marketing communications in creating a strategy for forming a territory brand.

Keywords: brand, territory branding, marketing communications, territory promotion strategy, geo-brand

1. INTRODUCTION

The state policy of Russia in the field of tourism shows that, despite the difficult economic situation around the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the industry is systematically integrating into a highly competitive business environment, while maintaining its social and cultural functionality.

In the context of the current political, economic, epidemiological situation, strategic approaches and operational measures to promote Russian tourism products in the international arena and in the domestic market require transformation and implementation of a holistic conceptual approach,

including the one focused on the branding of the territory.

On the threshold of electronic visa policy spread to all regions of the Russian Federation, challenges, trends and opportunities for expanding tourism export dictate the need to consider new marketing promotion tools, deeper behavioral segmentation of target audiences, scenario design of consumer experience, modernization of the concepts of tourist locations development in regards to marketing, branding and PR-technologies. Optimization of organizational and economic mechanisms, digital and program processes in the field of tourism presupposes new scientific and methodological

recommendations for territory branding and the use of a holistic marketing approach to the strategy for the regional tourism development.

Territory branding is one of the topical areas of modern marketing. Researchers in the field of territorial brand pay enough attention to this concept, considering it from different points of view, first of all, referring to the concept of “brand”.

American Marketing Association defines “brand” as a name, term, sign, symbol or any other value that differentiates the goods or services of one seller from the goods or services of other sellers [1]. Many researchers criticize this definition, pointing out that it rather defines the concept of a trademark, whereas a brand is associated with an emotional and rational perception of a product or service [2]. The same ideas of perception are also applicable for the concept of a territory brand, since nowadays, not only goods, services or people, but also territories can be considered as brands.

The concept of “territory brand” differs from the categories “image of the territory” and “reputation of the territory”, which are revealed by a number of contemporary researchers [3]. They dwell in details upon marketing of the places, the issues of the territory image architecture, the complexity of the image transformations of tourist locations [4, 5]. The analysis of the research works shows that there are several approaches to the branding of territories; thus, some theories can be called traditional [6], others try to combine the traditional and innovative elements [7]. A number of authors, on the contrary, suggest promoting the territories mostly through the latest advertising and PR-technologies, for example, more actively seeking the support of opinion leaders, travel bloggers, ambassadors, etc. Some researchers pay great attention to the role of stakeholders in territorial branding [8].

Another direction is the study of the political and economic component in the promotion of the territory. The main request for the effectiveness of promotion is addressed to the executive and legislative authorities of the region; the tools that the authorities can turn to are thoroughly studied [9, 10]. The research shows that only territories with highly developed democratic institutions can claim high rates of popularization.

In addition, there is an interesting approach which considers the brand of the territory a cultural phenomenon carrying certain meanings [11]. First of all, it concerns the attitude of local residents to their region [12], the awakening of their active stand

aimed at representing and defending the values of their region [13].

One of the benchmark definitions of the term “brand of the territory belongs to I. Vazhenina; she treats the brand of the territory as “a set of unique qualities, universal human values, reflecting the uniqueness, original consumer characteristics of a given territory and community that have become widely known and recognized, that enjoy a stable demand from consumers of this territory” [14].

After analyzing the approaches of the researchers, we can conclude that the brand of a territory is an image that contains emotional ideas about the territory in the minds of people, as well as their assessment of certain qualities and distinctive features that are fixed in the minds of people for a specific territory on the basis of the information disseminated.

In this case, the formation of the communication image of the territory is emphasized. However, the effectiveness depends on the degree of popularity of the place (location) with the target audience located thousands of kilometers away. That is why branding of the territory is, first of all, the direct communication with the external and internal environment provided with the help of marketing tools.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Thus, the main research purpose is to determine the marketing communications tools that can ensure the effective promotion of the eco-resort area.

The research objectives are to identify the specifics of the eco-resort region as an object of promotion, to analyze the experience of using marketing tools in territorial branding and to determine the aspects of the use of marketing communications in promoting the eco-resort region.

The methodological basis of the research is formed by the concepts and constructs found in the works by foreign and domestic scientists specializing in PR, branding and marketing of territories.

To solve the research problems, general scientific methods and approaches were used, such as the structural-system approach, functional analysis, and the institutional-discursive method. Methods of analogy, systemic and comparative analysis were used to study the experience of image and reputation transformations, the structure and current state of brands of foreign territories and Russian regions.

3. RESULTS

Marketing communications are essential in the process of creating and promoting a territorial brand. Today, they acquire the meaning of territory branding, and their goal is to promote the territory itself.

In a general sense, marketing communications mean creation, distribution and delivery of information to target audiences. A.P. Pankrukhin defines marketing communications as “a set of means and specific actions for the search, analysis, generation and dissemination of information that is significant for the subjects of marketing relations” [15]. For target audiences, the definition is the basic and one of the most important aspects of marketing communications. The target audiences are residents of the territory, representatives of internal business, investors, tourists, qualified personnel, and external media. It is at them that marketing tools necessary for creating and promoting a successful geo-brand that can ensure the competitiveness of the territory due to the influx of economic and social resources are aimed.

Marketing communications tools include strategy development, visual methods of influence, advertising and PR tools. It is worth mentioning the importance of opinion polls as one of the methods of regular research in the field of creating a successful brand of a territory. It is caused by the necessity to study the general public mood. The main advantages of this method are the opportunity to find out the opinions of a large number of respondents, the flexibility of the form of implementation, the possibility of statistical data processing.

One should take into account the fact that territory branding cannot be formed from scratch, because each tourist destination has its own history, heritage and infrastructure, and, therefore, when creating and communicating a territory brand, marketers should consider all these factors [16]. As a result, marketing communications in combination with the territory’s “own” characteristics produce the effect of a successful symbiosis.

Among the most successful examples of creating a territory brand in Russia, when the promotion of territories was combined with image, investment, tourism and social aspects of their development, are the towns of Zheleznovodsk, Myshkin, Suzdal, Veliky Novgorod, Veliky Ustyug, Sochi, and Uryupinsk. In many of these cases, already existing, but inefficient and unsatisfactory brands became the

basis for the further, more successful, development. Some of them could be considered in more detail.

One of the latest projects aimed at creating a successful comprehensive brand of the territory is the resort town of Zheleznovodsk. The traditional goals of the project include landscaping and creating a comfortable environment. But there is a non-traditional innovative goal of the project – digitalization.

Within the framework of the Zheleznovodsk project, such sights as the Cascade Staircase and the fountain at the Smirnovsky spring have been reconstructed. New sculptures and art objects have been installed; cozy public gardens have been laid. Also as a part of the landscaping, ramps and benches appeared; it is essential for an area used for long walks. A new embankment and piers have been built on Lake Kurortnoye.

In the resort town, “Italian Thermes” have been opened; it is a unique for Russia, large health-care complex with five swimming pools filled with heated mineral water. There is a SPA-zone, a salt sauna, a Roman bath, etc. But the attributes reflecting the specifics of the city deserve special attention. The pavement tile of Ferrum Square displays the image of elements from the periodic table, namely K19 (potassium), NA11 (sodium), FE26 (iron), SO₄ (sulfate), HCO₃ (bicarbonate ion).

In 2019, the world’s first literary well-room-book was opened in Zheleznovodsk. A unique attraction built on the Cascade Staircase of the resort town has the form of a huge book, decorated with excerpts from the literary works by M.Yu. Lermontov. The architects used notes made by M.Yu. Lermontov in the notebook of Prince A.I. Odоеvsky, as well as illustrations for the writer’s works [17]. There are bas-reliefs of Alexander I, General A.P. Ermolov and writers A.S. Pushkin, M.Yu. Lermontov, and L.N. Tolstoy who glorified the city of Zheleznovodsk in their works. The well-room was also placed on the new logo of the town.

As for digitalization, Zheleznovodsk has become one of the sites for the Smart City pilot project. One of the tasks of this project is the management of production processes, particularly, in the communal infrastructure operation. For example, a number of kindergartens and schools have installed sensors that monitor the consumption of water, electricity and heat. Round-the-clock monitoring of the use of resources allowed saving about 20% of the previously consumed amount [18].

The complex of works carried out to create a new brand for Zheleznovodsk undoubtedly increases its attractiveness among its residents who form one of the main target groups in creating a territorial brand. In addition, there is an evident influx of tourists, which, as a result, attracts investors. Both tourists and investors are important target groups for territory branding. All this testifies to the success of creating a renewed image of Zheleznovodsk.

The next example, which arouses a certain interest, is the town of Myshkin located on the Volga River. Myshkin is an example of a brand created practically from scratch.

Myshkin is a small town and an excellent example of successful branding of small Russian towns, as well as an outstanding example of how one can effectively manage one's name. The brand is based on the idea of creating a unique "town of the mouse". The main goal was to create a tourist brand.

The mouse has become the basis for creating a tourist destination object. It is depicted on the logo. In Myshkin, the world's only Mouse Museum has been opened, where various figurines of mice are exhibited. Besides the main museum, eight more museums were established in the city of Myshkin, among them Museum of Rural Architecture, Museum of Russian Boots, Museum of Unique Technology, the latter exhibits spinning wheels, grain mills and attributes of such a bygone profession as lamplighter and others [19].

Museum of Living Crafts is worth visiting. There are real workshops – pottery, blacksmithing, glassmaking, carpentry, weaving. The fascinating thing is that one can watch the work in the workshops and also make oneself a souvenir.

An entertainment complex "Myshkiny Palaty" with a zoo has been built in the town; there one can see various rodents. In addition, the town holds the annual Mouse Festival.

Such transformations helped the town of Myshkin become a tourist location where visitors can arrive not only by car, but also by motor ships, which make regular tourist cruises along the Volga River.

But at the same time, there are certain failures in building the brand of the territory, which can lead to insufficient results or even their absence.

Such errors include:

- misunderstanding of the target audience,

when the strategy assumes that the brand will be of interest to absolutely everyone; in this case it is necessary to clearly highlight those audiences who will be interested in this brand;

- emphasis on the well-known features of the territory, because most territories have practically no publicity, and, therefore, cannot be attractive to a wide audience; in this regard, it is necessary to highlight, design and correctly present to target audiences what they will perceive as attractiveness; these could be completely unexpected features that have nothing to do with old ideas;
- triviality, reliance on local nature and local attractions, while the current, rather sophisticated consumer, first of all, needs something special, unique;
- the main stake is on the creation of a new logo; as a rule, the creation of a brand of a territory does not rely only on a visual component, therefore, creating a new logo for a place will not solve the problem of implementing a successful branding strategy;
- absence of competitive analysis, which can help in identifying the unique, attractive features of the territory that distinguish it from competitive destinations.

Most regions suffer from such errors, which can only be avoided by a well-built strategy for branding the territory.

To highlight the regional aspect, let us turn to the assessment of one of the Russian regions – the Stavropol Kray. The region has a fairly wide potential due to its inherent features: nature, landscapes, cultural and historical monuments, water and mineral resources. The most important socio-economic characteristics of the Stavropol Kray include high industrial capacity, developed tourist infrastructure, high professional, educational and cultural level of the population [20].

However, at present, the region has no image attractiveness. It does not have a strategy for creating a territorial brand. We can talk about its presence only within the framework of the "Strategy for the socio-economic development of the Stavropol Kray until 2035". This strategy includes the position "Tourism complex of the region" as one of the areas of economic development.

Thus, in our opinion, the Stavropol Kray cannot attract tourist due to the lack of a well-thought-out strategy that should combine a set of marketing communications focused on the above-mentioned “innate” characteristics of the region.

4. DISCUSSION

The research resulted in defining some aspects of using marketing communications for creation and development of the eco-resort regional brand:

- the aspect of development and growth: further growth of the territorial unit potential can be ensured on the basis of diagnosing the interests of target audiences with the help of sociological research;
- the aspect of creativity: the identification of the creative potential of the human resources of the region and its competent use will ensure the development and sustainability of the creative industry contributing to the differentiation of the region among competitors;
- the aspect of the attractiveness of the territory: creating and supporting a positive image of the eco-resort region through advertising campaigns and the implementation of public relations activities will attract additional investment;
- the aspect of support and control: the implementation at the state level of control and support for the development of an eco-resort region is possible provided that the latest marketing communication channels are used.

5. CONCLUSION

The Stavropol Kray has unique natural and climatic conditions for the development of a tourist and recreational complex. The region includes the Caucasian Mineral Waters – a specially protected eco-resort region of the Russian Federation. However, studies have shown that the natural advantages of the territory have not been fully used, because the region still does not have the proper image attractiveness. The ongoing negative processes in building the brand of the Stavropol Kray can be leveled, particularly by introducing the latest marketing communication tools into the system for building the brand image of the territory. Moreover, such tools should complement both each

other and the existing and recognized classic marketing technologies. Only a comprehensive and consistent application of various communication technologies in branding a territory in a market economy will allow the authorities to think over a strategy for the development of a region, as well as to plan an algorithm of actions to implement such a strategy.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The authors made an equal contribution to the study: collection and analysis of material; definition of goals and objectives, research methods; formulation and scientific substantiation of conclusions, registration of key research results in the form of an article.

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