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**Marketing  
communication as  
a tool of building  
tourism destination  
competitiveness –  
selected issues**

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**1. Introduction**

Tourism proves to be a significant determinant of growth for a wide variety of regions and countries. As argued by F. Eysteinnsson and T. Gudlaugsson tourism can be a major sector of the economy and economically very important for the nation (Eysteinnsson, Gudlaugsson 2012, p. 112). Basically, this is an economy sector closely interconnected with many other sectors. In accordance with the guidelines of the World Tourism Organization, 10 out of 17 economic sectors function within the widely understood tourism economy: these include: construction, retail and wholesale trade, hotels and restaurants, transport, warehouse management and communications, financial agency services, real estate services, public administration or education (Meyer 2008, p. 16). Clearly tourism affects various areas with varying intensity. Though, it should be highlighted that tourism demand not only translates into revenues generated by enterprises operating within a typical tourism economy. Tourists directly generate demand

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for products put forward by entities offering other services, e.g. garages, while they indirectly have an impact on the expansion of other industries, e.g. construction.

One of the elements stimulating tourism demand tends to be marketing communication with potential tourists. The objective of the paper is to offer an insight into its specifics on the tourism market, as well as to address the question concerning the best tools to be used for communicating with tourists and which message contents are essential for attracting tourists. To do so, alongside literature studies, poll surveys were conducted among selected group of consumers.

## 2. Destination competitiveness

The significance of tourism drives a quest for ever more effective tools intended to stimulate demand for destination products. As a result, numerous models for building competitiveness of tourist regions crop up. Given their specifics of the product they are typified as extended ones. Destination is defined as an amalgam of what he does at the destination and the services he uses to make it possible. Attractions, accessibility, amenities at the destination (accommodation, catering, entertainment, internal transport and communication, incoming tour operators, etc.) and many intangible elements (such as atmosphere, ambience and friendliness of the local people) are the components of the amalgam (Vanhove 2005, p. 11). The outlined components of the destination product complement each other and are unlikely to be modelled separately. Meanwhile I. Bajcs (2011, p. 548) claims that this is a set of touristic amenities and services which, unlike any other product, is composed of a range of varied attributes. Though this definition is rather general in character, at the same time it focuses on the primary attribute inherent to regional tourism products. This is a product of tremendous complexity which is specifically related to the diverse group of destination stakeholders – entities creating the product, and the intricate group of recipients to which the product is targeted. The group of stakeholders mostly included: local authorities, entrepreneurs and inhabitants. Overall, these entities tend to be responsible for creating the product illustrated. Its fundamental feature is the fact that unlike traditional commercial products, there is no single entity holding ownership rights in relation to the destination, and thus possessing tools enabling unconditional management of the product. Within the group listed the largest rights in relation to the destination are held by local authorities, nevertheless these are not the entities best able to influence the behaviour of entrepreneurs and residents. Above all, they should perform the role of an

instigator and coordinator of activities. As a consequence, the heart of effective destination management appears to be issues of collaboration, partnership among local authorities, entrepreneurs and organizations appointed by the foregoing with the aim of propelling tourist demand.

The other community to be considered as critical for the destination are the recipients of its products. This is also a varied group and hardly likely to be influenced by a single universal product. In view of its diversified preferences, various features of the product discussed prove to be pivotal for the constituent entities. This community may involve: tourists, conference participants or investors, these are the groups further differentiated internally. Therefore, in relation to various recipients diverse competitive advantages may prove to be of significance. Internal differentiation of specific groups makes individual consumers receive signals transmitted in the process of marketing communication in a varied manner. For instance T. Kantanen and I. Tikkanen (2006, pp. 99-110), drawing upon the typology of tourists developed by Mc Kercher illuminate this issue in relation to cultural tourism.

The specifics underlying the destination product, largely its complexity, has an impact on the specifics of competitiveness and building its competitive advantages. It is accordingly worthwhile considering what drives the destination competitiveness. L. Dwyer and Ch. Kim (2003, p. 371) when defining country's competitiveness they write that this is a degree to which a country in free market may produce goods and services which fulfil the needs on international markets, and simultaneously ensure long-term income for the country population. Whereas J. Ritchie i G. Crouch (1999, p. 143) while determining destination competitiveness underline that this is a capacity to effectively tap into resources in the long-term.

The consequence of the specifics underpinning the destination product is the diversity of its competitiveness models and a wide spectrum of factors driving the level of destination competitiveness. L. Dwyer and Ch. Kim (2003, pp. 400-405) presumably specify their largest number as they identified 6 groups, 21 sub-groups comprising the factors listed in the amount of 114.

G. Crouch (2011, pp. 27-45) produced a certain evaluation of these determinants distinguishing attributes exercising the biggest impact on tourist destinations, these included: physiography and climate, culture and history, infrastructure, tourist facilities, image special events, entertainment, accessibility, positioning. Though the author does not emphasise adequate marketing communication, it should be kept in mind that it is a key factor behind the image and positioning of the destination. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider the fact that touristic

assets will gain in importance once tourists become informed about them, which falls into the remit of marketing communication.

A departure point for creating destination competitiveness are its resources which, according to the authors listed, comprise natural resources, culture/heritage, created and supporting resources. Resources of the destination, determining the level of its attractiveness, are subject to management, and the key creators of the product are government (state administration) and entrepreneurs. Destination resources, alongside situational conditions arising from the settings, determine the demand for its product, and equally they affect the destination's competitiveness. L. Dwyer and Ch. Kim fail to classify marketing communication as a separate factor of destination competitiveness, yet it is an element of marketing management of the region. The entities being charged with the foregoing operations strive to develop resources and destination attractiveness. However, to guide this development in a proper direction as well as to maximize effectiveness of exploitation of destination resources, two factors need to be in operation:

- those managing the destination should possess information on tourists' preferences so as to shape the product in line with their needs,
- potential tourists need to be informed about attractions of the destination.

Both tasks specified are executed through marketing communication appropriately pursued.

### **3. Marketing communication as a factor of creating destination competitive advantage**

An overarching aim of the process of destination brand management perceived as one of key forces of its competitiveness is, in effect, to design a coherent communication strategy (Upadhyaya 2012, p. 41). When creating attractiveness of the destination it is not enough to build its high level, but it is necessary to effectively inform potential tourists of the product features as well as to acquire feedback revealing customers' preferences. Crucially, execution of the foregoing tasks, whether within an enterprise or region, relies on the marketing communication process.

As stressed by R. Varey, marketing communication is often boiled down to promotion tools through which a message sender, an entrepreneur, attempts to encourage a recipient, a consumer, to purchase a product. Meanwhile, the definition of the phrase of communication is centred on the dialogue, intentional exchange of signals by both parties (Varey, 2002, pp. 10-12). Therefore, marketing

communication, taking into account two-way flow of signals may be considered as a set of information (signals) emitted by the company from various sources towards not only its clients but to other entities around the marketing environment (suppliers, agents, competitors, opinion leaders, etc.) as well as a set of information collected by the company from the market (megatrends, needs, customers' preferences, growth tendencies in economy, etc.) (Pilarczyk 2004, p. 17). Whereas D. Dasgupta (2011, p. 171) citing the approach taken by Pickton and Broderick defines communication as a talk between a brand and its audience, and as a collective notion for all acts of communication used in marketing of goods and services.

According to J. Wiktor (2001, pp. 11-12), the core aspect of communication consists in the transmission of information between a sender (chiefly an entrepreneur) and its setting within the use of specific communications means and channels. The author classifies 6 elements of the marketing communication process: sender, message, channel, recipient, noise and context. It appears that from among elements outlined, a particular role is played by two of them: the message and the message channel. These two components of the communications process displayed come under the control of the sender who applies them to deliberately influence consumers' behaviour. Equally, the author will put spotlight on these two elements in research presented in further part of the paper. The result of such an approach will be an emphasis of deliberations on the narrow understanding of promotion implying transmission of information by the sender to the recipient.

A desired effect produced by activities performed within the realm of marketing communication to promote destination is to provoke tourists to undertake efforts as expected by a signal sender. Signals sent by means of selected channels should arouse their interest in a destination and then induce them to choose it as a journey target. For the purposes of this study, the process of behaviour exhibited by a tourist who opts for a given destination by the simplified model (figure 1).

As shown in figure 1 a few steps are likely to be identified in the consumer behaviour process on a tourist market. Firstly, a great importance is attached to the "travelling impulse" that stokes an interest in a given destination, urges to consider the possibility of visiting it, and begin seeking for more detailed information on it in order to make a decision. These impulses may be diverse and flow from various sources, it may be from a talk and friend's recommendation, it may be a film whose plot is set in a given place, it may be a photo posted in Internet or a number of other cues. A further step is to verify and search

for possessed information on the destination. In the course of this phase a consumer seeks more or less detailed news on a specific place and possibilities for spending time there. Verification of information should conclude travelling decision meaning either a journey and purchase of the destination product or a new search. In successive phases a consumer sets off and enjoys a destination product. If he is satisfied with it, a state which should be sought by destination marketers, he may recommend it to others after his return, and then go back to the place which is, in turn, an optimal consumer behaviour from the standpoint of the product offerer.

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6
Travelling impulse-interest in destination	Verification and quest for information on destination	Decision to travel	Travel	Recommending or discouraging others	In future possibility of returning to the destination

**Figure 1. A model of behaviour exhibited by the consumer on the tourism market**

Source: own study

In the survey conducted, the author focused on two initial steps made by a consumer of tourist services, being of critical importance from the standpoint of the marketer responsible for running marketing communication for the destination. To effectively reach a tourist, he needs to find the complete response to a few questions which include:

1. What are the sources of „travelling impulse” i.e. what makes a potential tourist take an interest in a given destination, which communication channels will be the most suitable in that case?
2. In which manner and through which channels, does a potential tourist verify information on a given destination?
3. Which information is the biggest incentive for a potential tourist to come to a destination, thus what should be the message content to maximize the effectiveness of the message?

By providing answers to the above questions it should help a recipient to select an adequate channel for message transmission and help determine appropriate content of signals sent.

#### 4. Marketing communication on a tourist market – own research

A further part of the study contains findings from research concerned with marketing communication applied for promotion of the tourist destination. Research was carried out in June and July 2012 on a randomly selected group of 224 students from higher education institutions in Warsaw. Sampling had relevance to research findings for two primary reasons. Firstly, these were people without higher education which resulted in a relatively lower income, and consequently a decreased level of expenses for tourist goals. Secondly, though the survey attracted largely students, on extramural studies, it could be presumed that young persons would constitute a huge majority. Indeed such situation occurred. Persons below 25 years accounted for 51% of research participants.

Research conducted was divided into two distinct parts, principally the author brought particular focus into the issues dealing with selection of communication instruments enabling effective reach to potential visitors, as well as the issues devoted to the substance of the message transmitted.

**Table 1. Sources of information giving rise to impulses to consider a journey to the specific destination**

Source of impulse	Percentage of indications	Source of impulse	Percentage of indications
Participation in tourist fairs	2%	Friend's recommendation	71%
Press information on a specific place	24%	Post on a social portal or discussion forum	25%
Noticed billboard promoting a specific place	15%	Advertisement of the locality in Internet	40%
Advertisement of the place in TV	15%	Brochures, leaflets promoting a specific locality	20%
Promotional activities of enterprises operating in a specific locality	8%	Operations of travel offices (agents for sale)	18%

Seen film whose plot is set in a specific locality	12%	Press ads of the locality	8%
Sporting event being held in a specific locality	12%	Previous business trips to a specific locality	21%
Article in a tourist press devoted to a specific place	21%	TV programme on a specific place or TV programme broadcast from a specific place	21%
Cultural event being held in a specific locality			25%

**Source:** own study based on research conducted

Notice: Respondents could indicate any number of factors, from among the answers placed in the cafeteria in the course of designing the survey questionnaire

The first question to be answered in the research discussed (in line with a model presented) was an enquiry about impulses prompting tourists-consumers to take an interest in a specific destination. Table 1 provides synthetic answers given by the respondents. Topping the list was a friend's recommendation winning the biggest number of indications by far from 71% of the respondents. Such a result is symptomatic and translates substantially into practice. If recommendations play such a vital part on a tourist market, it is therefore necessary to nurture the tourist's satisfaction (of among others, through quality and appeal of the product offered) so as to stimulate expression of positive opinions about the destination. Snagging the number two was Internet. It should be remembered that this is a tool that offers diverse communication methods, an aspect not taken into account during research. Yet, it should be highlighted that this is a tool to be increasingly exploited and may be also utilized for giving as well as receiving absorbing recommendations, which continued to be in correlation with the answer "friend's recommendation". Further „sources of impulse" spots were taken by such drivers as: cultural events, press article or TV programme devoted to the destination, or press information on the specific destination. However, all impulses listed did not surpass the value of 25% of indications.

It should be kept in mind that a travelling decision is not an impulse purchase made emotionally. Therefore, it is natural that the information included in the message, being a source of impulse, should be verified. For that reason, the survey covered a question related to verification methods or expanding knowledge of the destination. Synthetic responses to the said question were featured in table 2.



**Table 2 Methods of searching (acting on the first impulse) for detailed information about a given locality**

Method of searching for information	Indication percentage	Method of searching for information	Indication percentage
Seeking for friends' opinions	43%	Reading tourist guidebooks	20%
Seeking for opinions on the locality in Internet	86%	Searching through local tourist portals	29%
I do not seek for detailed information, I quickly make travelling decisions	4%	Others (which?).....	4%

**Source:** own study based on research conducted

Notice: Respondents could indicate any number of factors

As shown in table 2, seeking for opinions in Internet definitely took the top spot, followed by (with half as many indications seeking for opinions among friends). These results remain in close relation to the answers presented in Table 1. In both cases, recommendation plays a critical part, and the Internet appears to be an essential tool for research. When analysing the findings as revealed in table 2, it is worthwhile emphasizing the fact that tourists ascribe lesser meaning to "information, or what may be found in guidebooks or local portals.

To sum up the first part of the research, attention should be put on the impact of the Internet as a tool for communication and recommendation motive which should be harnessed in it. Another question for which response was sought was a question on message contents. To this end, the respondents were asked about the factors taken into consideration when making a travelling decision. A synthetic compilation of answers provided were presented in table 3.

**Table 3. Factors taken into consideration when making travelling decisions**

Factor	Arithmetic average	Factor	Arithmetic average
Possibility to practise various sports disciplines, related facilities	2,89	Variety of holiday-recreation offer (swimming pools, cinema, parks, children's playgrounds)	4,24
Destination brand (known, popular)	2,31	Quality and effectiveness of local transport	3,28

Special events, festivals	3,1	Easy access to attractive spots	4,37
Easy access	3,98	Climate	4,43
Presence of places of worships	1,7	Quality of catering	3,90
Architectural attractions, museums	2,83	Folk art on a given area	2,28
Quality of sleeping accommodation	4,22	Natural virtues (wildlife)	4,14
Quality and easy access to shops	3,71	Clubs, theme parks	3,55

Source: own study based on research conducted

Notice: Respondents were asked to assess specific factors within the scale 1-5

As shown in the table, the largest number of indications were given to climate, which is translated into the weather conditions during the journey. Further spots in assessment by the respondents were taken by the factors such as: easy access to attractive places, variety of holiday-recreation on offer, quality of sleeping accommodation and natural virtues. It should be stressed that among factors enjoying the largest number of indications are both factors included in the resources defined by Kim and Dwyer as “inherited resources” which are unlikely to be created by those managing the destination, e.g. natural virtues as well as factors comprising “created resources” - the variety of the offer and “supporting resources” - quality of sleeping accommodation. These findings are crucial as they reveal that the destination equipped with attractive “inherited resources” may also design an attractive offer appealing to tourists.

**Table 4. Factors determining respondents’ satisfaction with staying in a given destination**

Factor	Arithmetic average	Factor	Arithmetic average
Uniqueness of natural assets	4,16	Variety of holiday-recreation offer (swimming pools, cinema, parks, children’s playgrounds)	4,16
Quality of restaurants, food	3,87	Quality and effectiveness of local transport	3,36

Safety	4,2	Easy access to attractive spots	4,13
Easy access	3,84	Climate	4,27
Quality of hotel, guesthouse	4,21	Possibility to communicate in a foreign language	3,21
Weather	4,53	Architectural attractions, museums	2,9
Access to tourist information	3,38	Well-developed general infrastructure, shops, financial services, etc. .	3,4
Destination brand	2,74	Folk art on a given area	2,19
Special events, festivals	3,16	Possibility to practise various sports disciplines, related facilities	3,11
Atmosphere, place "climate"	4,40	Clubs, theme parks	3,5
Quality and easy access to shops	3,55		

Source: own study based on research conducted

Notice: Respondents were asked to assess specific factors within the scale 1-5

The results provided in table 3 demonstrate those factors carrying the biggest weight in influencing travelling decisions, thus they should be most exposed in the message while running the marketing communication. The answers given were supposed to be verified by a successive question dealing with factors that arouse satisfaction with staying (table 4). The results were corroborated, yet despite the factors indicated in the previous question, the respondents pointed to two others likely to be assessed after the journey: security and atmosphere, "climate" of the place. These are the drivers which equally affect tourist's satisfaction, and in compliance with a model displayed, an important element of purchaser-tourist behaviour is recommendation of the destination of the destination product which, as supported by research, has a key impact on travelling decisions.

## 5. Summary and conclusions

In summing up, it should be stated that, as highlighted in the paper, possessing or merely developing an attractive destination product proves to be insufficient for maximizing economic gains from development of tourism.

A high level of destination resources creating a high attractiveness of the product definitely attracts tourists, though the demand will soar in the case of running an adequate marketing communication with surrounding environment, chiefly with potential tourists.

Fundamental elements of the marketing communication process are a message and the channel of its distribution. These issues were addressed in key research questions to which answers were sought by the author: what are the best tools of communication with tourists and which message contents are critical for attracting visitors. As presented in the research, key impulses stirring an interest in a given destination as a potential holiday spot is personal recommendation. What's more, opinions voiced by others are also the most sought-after information verifying knowledge on a given destination. Such findings suggest that it is worthwhile to invest in tourists' satisfaction and cultivate positive relations with them so as to stimulate recommendations in line with the model shown. They are provided directly by friends, but the Internet is used even more widely as a channel for their distribution. In the light of the findings from research conducted, it is a medium mostly applied in the process of obtaining information on the destination and it appears as a predominant channel for promoting tourist services.

It needs to be underlined that the respondents strongly emphasized the significance of recommendation in research conducted. Hence, it appears that this motive could be tapped into in promotional messages which in turn, in line with the findings obtained, should centre on natural resources, climate, diversified offering, quality of sleeping accommodation, and building an image of destination "uniqueness" originating from its specific "climate"(or ambiance).

The factors detailed appear to be crucial for purchase decisions made by consumers-tourists, though the responses are fairly differentiated. That's why it is expedient to extend research, e.g. interviews made in focus groups aimed to advance knowledge possessed on motives driving the selection of the given destination, and factors affecting satisfaction from staying there.

## Summary

### **Effective marketing communication as an element of building competitiveness of tourist destination**

For a wide range of regions tourism is a critical element of their development. In effect, profound intensification of efforts intended to advance the destination's competitiveness may be observed. A principal source of competitive advantage

in the region is its product including such elements as: natural attractions, cultural attractions, festivals, sleeping accommodation, or communication infrastructure. However, it should be kept in mind that an effective tool for stimulating the tourist demand is suitable marketing communication pursued for the destination. In the paper the author provides insight into core aspects of the destination competitiveness as well as marketing communication. Theoretical contributions) were expanded by the author's surveys designed to feature the most effective channels for communicating with a potential customer, as well as to identify key message contents, and factors at the heart of making a travelling decision.

*Key words:* destination, competitiveness, marketing communication.

#### **Streszczenie**

##### **Efektywna komunikacja marketingowa jako element budowania konkurencyjności destynacji turystycznej**

Dla wielu regionów turystyka jest istotnym elementem ich rozwoju. W efekcie można zaobserwować duże nasilenie działań, mających na celu rozwój konkurencyjności destynacji. Podstawowym źródłem przewag konkurencyjnych regionu jest jego produkt, w tym takie elementy jak atrakcje przyrodnicze, atrakcje kulturowe, festiwale, baza noclegowa czy też infrastruktura komunikacyjna. Należy jednak pamiętać, że efektywnym narzędziem stymulowania popytu turystycznego jest właściwa komunikacja marketingowa prowadzona na rzecz destynacji. W prezentowanym artykule autor przedstawia istotę zarówno konkurencyjności destynacji jak i komunikacji marketingowej. Rozważania teoretyczne zostały poszerzone o badanie własne autora, którego celem było wskazanie najefektywniejszych kanałów komunikowania z potencjalnym klientem jak również identyfikacja kluczowych treści przekazu, czynników, które są najważniejsze dla podjęcia decyzji wyjazdowej.

#### **Słowa**

*kluczowe:* region turystyczny, konkurencyjność, komunikacja marketingowa.

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