

Use of stereotypes and styles used for the

Marketing Strategy of Serbia:

The burden of ineffective and negative stereotypes

Summary of the Bachelor Thesis

Aleksandra Tanackovic

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The research examines the use of stereotypes in the marketing strategy of Serbia. It seeks to link and compare the relationship between the issues and amount of usage of negative stereotypes and the recent “turbulent history” of Serbia of the last two decades.

According to Pearce (1988) stereotypes are publicly, common mental picture of a destination. They can be used and manipulated as a marketing tool to develop desirable destination image in the minds of travelers.

Also, the objective is to get an insight and understanding of the marketing strategy of the National Tourist Organization of Serbia (NTOS) for their official website. To explore if the marketing style of the NTOS for their website is rather active or passive, where under active marketing style an aggressive approach to persuading visitors of the website of the presence of positive traits and quality of a destination is assumed. Likewise, passive marketing style shall mean the one where marketers use just pure facts about the tourist product, without adding any special distinctive stereotypes to promote the destination.

A choice of Serbia as a case study makes it of particular interest, as the country has been recently stroke by a difficult period of economical and political stagnation and isolation from the rest of the Europe and World.

It is of main importance to discover which category of stereotypes the NTOS communicates to the visitors of the website, and additionally to see if it relies on the usage and mentioning of negative stereotypes in its tourist promotion, as some of the countries from Eastern and Central Europe do.

For the purpose of obtaining the results and being able to answer the research question, content analysis- a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts(or meaningful matter to the context of their use) (Krippendorff, 2004) is applied. For obtaining the information on the share of stereotype categories, a content categories count technique is accepted as the most fitting technique that counts the frequency of appearance of each stereotype category in the text and images on the website.

Beerli and Martin (2004) developed a model listing dimensions that determine the perceived destination image. The dimensions determining the destination image can be: 1.natural resources, 2. general infrastructure, 3. tourist infrastructure, 4. tourist leisure and recreation, 5.

culture, history and art, 6. political and economical factors, 7. Natural environment, 8. Social environment, and finally 10. atmosphere of the place. Each of the dimensions is constituted of several sub- dimensions. These sub- dimensions will be treated as stereotype groups for the purpose of this research.

The research consists of three parts. The first part dedicates to qualitative analysis of text and image content of the website of NTOS. Second part is quantitative analysis that concentrates on obtaining the information of shares of previously established stereotype categories. This will help to get an overview of the stereotype groups that NTOS considers and promotes as the competitive advantage of Serbia as a tourist destination. Finally, in the third part the collected qualitative and quantitative information on the website content will be then critically evaluated with adding the suggestions for further website development and marketing strategy.

The dominating theme is culture with the stereotypes of museums, historical buildings and monuments with a frequency of 16%, followed by stereotypes belonging to the category of the wealth of countryside with 9%, entertainment and sports theme with 8% share, diversity of unique flora and fauna 7 %, customs and ways of life 6%, religion 5% share, the economic development and gastronomy with 4% share each, the good reputation of places which is mentioned in 4% of stereotype count, and beauty of the scenery stereotype group with 3% share. There is a big mixture of stereotypes holding each 2% share and less. Their values were added and presented under the “other stereotypes” result.

From the results that were obtained and mentioned in the chapter on content analysis of the website sample it could be deduced that the NTOS prefers to make use practically exclusively of positive stereotypes and tries to leave behind Serbia’s recent past which has been a reason of the mistrust in Serbia as a safe travel destination. The reason for such a marketing strategy decision could be legitimated by the possible thinking that the inclusion of such negative information can provoke fear and distrust in the minds of possible visitors. Still, such thinking overlooks the possibility that most of the destination images formation process can be, among other factors, influenced by autonomous information sources including mass media broadcasting news, documentaries, films, television programs (Beerli and Martin, 2004). As it was involved in the negative mass media during the last two decades, the removal of the negative stereotypes requires a relevant effort. Instead of such an approach, Serbia as a destination, and the NTOS as its most representative tourism body, should consider ways of

communicating those negative stereotypes, still held by many tourists, in a new and positive ways as some of its neighboring countries from Central and Eastern Europe did.

In the case of the NTOS the marketing strategy of the website could not be clearly associated with either an active or passive marketing style. It rather engages a neutral marketing style with the combination of pure facts and persuading statements. Although positive stereotypes are used in the majority of the content, there is a deficit of interesting stories, showing authenticity or unique selling propositions.

It is possible to assess the NTOS's marketing strategy as well directed and well rationalized, according to the choice of the stereotype groups and tourist products it chose for the destination promotion. However, competitive advantage might be created also through core competencies - for example, host community's unique capabilities in attracting potential visitors and hosting them during their stay; service value; organization of civil life; education; or its work ethic. This combination of promotional tools is what is usually referred to as place identity or the product offering's anchor. Some consider that the essence of place marketing is the projection of this identity (Melissen, 2004, cited by Govers and Go2009).

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