

Romania on the Way of Creating a Competitive Country Image as an European Tourist Destination

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Abstract

The *main objective* of the presented study is to analyze the current situation of Romania's efforts to create and to promote its own country image, focusing on the domains such as: exports, tourism, foreign direct investment, public diplomacy, sports and culture. In this respect was done an *analysis of the efforts made up to present by governmental agencies* (The Agency for Governmental Strategies, The Romanian Agency for Foreign Investment, The Romanian Trade Promotion Centre), and *by professional organizations* involved in the creation of a country's image (The National Authority for Tourism). The research was focused on the activities of the agencies playing an important role in tourism activities, in the promotion of Romanian exports, in the attraction of foreign investments and in Romania's diplomacy at international level.

Keywords: tourism, exports, culture, investments, country image.

1. Introduction

Promoting travel destination has been practised since the era of the Athenians and Romans antecedents, whereas cities strived to promote their respectful countries in winning a bid for hosting international sports (Olympics). In today's context competition has transcend to an international level encompassing other economic areas such as tourism sector, which has received a due recognition. Notably, most countries compete to place on market their destinations in attracting trade, investment and tourism. There is an increasing involvement of countries in marketing their destinations as, as economic importance of country image is plausible for most countries [1-3]. Hence, research suggests that the trend is shifting, and understanding consumer's psychology and perception (*image*) towards the destination is significant in marketing strategy [4-7].

There are many definitions surrounding the concept of country image, but reviewing them we could say that "*country image*" represents a set of beliefs and perceptions that people have about a given country [8-10]. Further on, we can make the assumption that country image is constituted of history, geography, art, music, citizens, events and a diverse package of variables and auxiliary factors[11-14]. Arguably, media and entertainment industry are cited to be significant vehicles in constructing cues of a country image [15-17]. The image we have about a country has a huge impact on how we view it as a tourist destination, a place to invest in, or a place to buy the brands we love from [18]. In today's globalised market the battle for tourism, exports, and inward investment is extremely intense as brands have become more and more the vehicles for communicating national identity [19-21].

2. Materials and methods

To achieve this scientific approach we performed studies about tourism management referring to

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historical resources, statistical data and other researchers studies.

3. Results and discussion

The issue of country image in Romania reached in 2004 a considerable enthusiasm, when the famous Wally Olins came to Bucharest and explained the importance of this concept. A short period after, the Workgroup for Romania's image abroad was established, having as members Government representatives, Opposition's representatives and cultural personalities. The Committee performed several ad-hoc meetings, but lacking organizational structure, ceased its activities.

Continuing the trend, the year 2005 was of an extraordinary effervescence regarding the subject of country image and branding. By contrast, 2006 was very discreet in terms of the concept's publicity in media. Nowadays, the subject moved with priority on the internet, thanks to a website (www.brandingromania.com) and a discussion forum managed by Grapefruit, a branding agency. The main initiatives for building Romania's country image in the last years are presented on the types of activities. *Tourism* was the main domain that attracted the most controversial campaigns in the past years experience.

In 2001, Romania launched its first promotional campaign at international level with the declared scope of improving its image abroad and attracting foreign tourists. We are referring to „*Romania, simply surprising*”, a TV broadcasted campaign and outdoor displays, produced by Ogily&Mathers Romania. The campaign was severely criticized due to its high cost (around \$20 million) and to its connections with PSD government, although it enjoyed a correct media planning: it was broadcasted on European TV stations, during vacation period. Targeting medium-level educated Europeans with ages between 30 and 55 years, „*Romania, simply surprising*” aimed to change foreigner's perception about our country and to announce that things have improved in Romanian tourism. Currently the campaign was abandoned without making public its final results.

Other projects focusing on Romania's image as a destination for tourism were: the photo album „*Eternal and Fascinating Romania*” (1996), framed by a huge political scandal in which PSDR Parliament members were accused of taking

bribes and of abusing their authority and "*Imagine Romania*" (2005), an initiative of several youth associations reunited under the name of The Initiative Group for Promoting Romania's Country Image. Its purpose was to organize seminars and workshops aiming to debate over Romania's image with the finality of initiating projects to promote country's image.

At the end of 2005, *The Agency for Governmental Strategies* (AGS) took over the problem of country branding, and in spite of a small budget and an insufficient organizational structure overloaded with various other responsibilities, it realized several steps forward by ordering studies on Romania's image that were performed in Spain and Germany.

Concomitantly, *The National Authority for Tourism* (NAT) ordered several studies to discover Romania's image as a destination for tourism, studies conducted in countries like: Austria, Germany, Italy, Finland, Hungary, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom, Spain, France and Denmark. One of the main conclusions was that the majority of foreigners' travels to Romania are a sort of vacations with the purpose of visiting friends and relatives, rather than a typical holiday. By contrast, Turkey and Hungary are typical destinations for tourism.

Creating Romanian's loyalty for Romanian brands comprised several measures undertaken in order to improve Romanians' perceptions and consumption of national products. In this category we can easily include the „*Made in Romania*” campaign, launched in 2000 as a result of the continuous decrease of the internal production. The program proposed a unitary and coherent promotion of the products and brands in order to achieve continuity of activity for national producers, but it failed as sales of the participating firms did not increase as expected.

The Romanian Chamber of Commerce initiative called „*Producea în România*” went alive almost at the same time, creating confusion on the market.

Other *sectoral initiatives* regarding the creation of „common brands” were undertaken in the IT sector or in the wine production sector.

It took one decade after the opening up of the economy until Romanian authorities began noticing that state funds could be channelled towards country branding built on one country' most successful export items. When deciding

what products deserve being promoted internationally because of their reputation, national authorities like the Department of Foreign Trade (DFT) had chosen a range of hand-made or natural products (e.g. wines, mineral waters, rural tourism, organic food) plus, a notable exception, the information technology (IT) sector. Their reasons, as presented for example by Lianu (2005), are well-grounded: these are domains where the sensitive issues of quality control and uniqueness of competitive advantage are more easily tractable. Nevertheless, the fact that no item of the targeted products has any exemplary export performance is indicative of the difficulties ahead.

A source of problems resides in the lack of experience with the market economy functioning of various professional organizations. One laudable initiative to promote ARC as a quality trademark of the Romanian Meat Association (ARC) ended in acrimonious disputes over whose interests are actually supported. A lack of preparedness in jointly defining what interests may or may not be perceived as common, and malfunctioning intra-industry dialogue became lessons in dealing with further sectoral initiatives. Finally, a national policy of country branding is severely constrained in its product selection. *Auro* is a DFT-sponsored program of export brand recognition which focuses on just two sectors, i.e. wine and IT. These sectors' own schemes dating back in 2002 seem to stand for the only criterion of choice. Foreign models (e.g. Germany, Italy, Spain, and South Africa) and financial support (e.g. GTZ of Germany, USAID of the US) concur in underpinning the national efforts. That may represent a positive contribution to the national brand, but only after the previous two challenges are tackled and virtuously integrated into a coordinated national design.

Foreign Direct Investments are promoted by ARIS, The Romanian Agency for Foreign Investments and by fiscal measures applicable to foreign investments in Romania.

The Romanian Agency for Foreign Investments (ARIS) initiated its most important project aiming to attract foreign investments in the country: "*Romania, an attractive destination for foreign investments*". The project aims to change the Romanian business environment, in order to reduce the restrictions the foreign investors have to face. In this respect, the

promotion in target countries of the Romanian investment environment is to be organized.

The "Local Investment Priorities" project considers making a study aimed at inventorying those economic objectives, which need foreign capital in order to improve and modernize the existing capabilities, according to existing traditional sectors, the economic development strategies and comparative advantages, on a county, regional and national level.

In the close past the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs envisaged the promotion of the Romanian cultural phenomenon, both through its historical component, of traditional values, and through its contemporaneous component, of movements of ideas and artistic trends asserted during the past decades. Therefore, the process of creating Romania's image outside the country, through the promotion of the various components of the cultural phenomenon can be considered as being part of the political foreign affairs strategies.

The concern regarding the elaboration of a framework project of *sustainable cultural development* was materialized at the National Culture Forum, when two major projects were launched (2005):

- the modern organization abroad of the *Romanian Cultural Institute*, according to well established models from the countries having a long tradition in this field. The *Cultural Institutes and Information Centres* within the structure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs promote and disseminate Romanian culture abroad. Such Romanian Cultural Centres abroad are in Berlin, in Rome, in Venice and Budapest, Paris and New York. In addition to these, new Institutes have been established in Athens, Beijing, Belgrade, Istanbul, Lisbon, London, Madrid, Moscow, Prague, Stockholm, Tel Aviv, Warsaw and Vienna.
- **The Romanian Culture Decade** conceived as a comprehensive framework for the display and reflection of the cultural phenomenon, through thematic cultural actions (Eminescu, Brâncuși, Caragiale years).

„*Romania's fabulous spirit*” is the new campaign initiated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote the country's image in the European

Union. The concept was launched in March 2007 and it has already raised many controversies. The advertising agency that „won" the project is Gav Scholz and Friends. The agency was chosen for its results in promoting Sibiu as „the cultural capital of Europe". According to MFA representatives, the campaign will last several years, period in which Bucharest needs to communicate positive messages, not only defensive messages such the ones for dismantling critics and stereotypes. MFA will order perception studies in order to evaluate the results of the campaign.

According to Lucian Georgescu, partner at Gav Scholz and Friends, „Fabulouspirit" represents a brand of Romania, a speech which aims to break the silence about the Romanian spirit". In Georgescu's opinion, „fabulouspirit" (the words of „fabulous" and „spirit" merged together) can be understood as „a disc inserted into the computer which is self-executable, and runs by itself". In spite of the fact that the name of the campaign is seen as sounding better in Romanian than in English, branding specialists consider that there is potential in this campaign through which, if successful, Romania can show part of its soul on top of the world.

Conclusions

As far as Romania is concerned, there is the need for creating and repositioning of its image abroad. A required element of a strategy to connect the competitive potential to *tangible* benefits derived thereof should consist in taking advantage of the existence of a space of trust in favour of Romania. As is the case, the EU Member Countries represent the obvious target for exports, tourism and investments. The task is compounded by the European public perception of Romanian values. One way of approaching the creation of an integrated country image is to look back to our origins, to try to express who we are, as a people's origin legitimates it and is in conformity with the truth.

Another way would be to capitalize on the positive images already existing abroad about Romania (with which also the Romanian people identifies itself) and in this context Nadia Comăneci, Gheorghe Hagi, Constantin Brâncuși, Eugen Ionesco, Mariana Nicolesco, the Romanian

beautiful women and maybe the People's House and Dracula Castle should be used as Romanian symbols to promote Romania abroad.

Complementary, new images can be created, images in accordance with the Romanians' identity, the way Romanians see themselves and how they wish to present themselves outside the country. Features such as hospitality, cultural heritage, sociability, enjoyment, friendship and outspokenness can represent Romanians inside and outside the country.

Obviously, all the negative heritage needs to be combated and those images to be replaced with new ones, closer to reality and emphasizing on the positive side of Romania and the Romanian people.

As was already debated a country's general positive image has a great contribution and a huge role in the reinforcement of all specific actions in promoting tourism, products and investments and this is also what Romania needs, now in the period when it's redefining its role at international level.

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