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CASES IN TOURISM MARKETING



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ÁRPÁD PAPP-VÁRY – BALÁZS GYÉMÁNT

ATTRACTIVE ISRAEL

COUNTRY-IMAGE BUILDING WITH THE HELP OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION – ISRAEL

The group of ten excited students, attending one of the most prominent national universities' MSc tourism marketing programme, was eager to hear the question their professor was about to propose to them as their first group assessment in the semester.

The Associate Professor as usual was starting from a far-away distance to introduce the topic. "Let's talk about vacations!" – She started the discourse. "Where would you spend your next summer holiday in the Mediterranean region?"

"In Turkey! Tunisia! The Greek islands!" said the three male students almost unanimously.

"I would rather choose the French Riviera because I don't like spending an awful lot of time doing nothing on the beach. I really enjoy when there are towns and museums to explore in the area" said Eva – who looked like a French Literature major with her oversized glasses.

"That's why I'm choosing Portugal, although I'm not sure if it is on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea." said Erica, whose geographical knowledge was a little sketchy.

"Can you guys name a country on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean where culture, architecture, history and the beach-type of holiday is present at the same time and at same place? I can give you a clue: it is culturally denser than the Riviera."

The classroom was quiet, no one said a word. The silence was finally broken by the professor. "What do you think about Israel?" She asked with a curious manner. There was no answer, everybody kept their mouth closed. A few minutes passed before one of the students timidly asked: "Isn't there a war there? And terrorists?"

"Well, this will be your assessment. You have to investigate the attractions of the country, her accessibility, accommodation options, etc ..."

"Yeah, yeah, the 4As" added Erica who was the eager beaver of the group. Attractions, availability, accommodation and the fourth is...errr...

“Ambiance!” shouted the others at the same time, whose knowledge of last term’s material was somewhat more precise.

“Analysing the 4As is not going to be the only important thing for us, we also have to research the different marketing communication techniques that the Israeli Tourist Office was employing in previous years, including its effectiveness. You see, it’s not enough if only the 4As are appealing” continued the professor. “It is of crucial importance how they communicate their attractiveness. How should a country attract tourists? How should a country show its values and attractions to people living on the other side of the world? What, for whom and how should they communicate the most effectively? The questions are not easy to answer in ordinary circumstances either, let alone the case of this country whose image is rarely seen as positive in the international media. I hope the task is clear; you have three weeks to prepare the presentations. Please share the work in the group and I also expect thought-out arguments at the end.”

Development of the role of international tourism

Three weeks later, the professor was keen to see that the ten students were prepared with different documents, flash-drives, tourism brochures and books for their presentations.

Erica started the presentation, remotely approaching the topic – the way she usually does.

“In the last few decades, the role of international tourism has continuously grown. While travelling to a neighbouring country still caused a problem in the early 20th century, today travelling to the most remote countries is quite straightforward. This is due to several factors. First, there was an increase in people’s income and especially in their disposable income. The introduction of the paid-leave system resulted in an increased motivation to travel.

With the growth of demand, supply was simultaneously stimulated as well. Road travel was quickly becoming better: roads were of a better quality; motorways were built in many countries. An increase in the number of cars was also apparent. It is not a problem today to travel to distant countries either: today the rapid development of air travel and the appearance of budget airlines enable us to travel more frequently and to more destinations. At the same time, many hotels have been and are currently being built worldwide with improved services. The number of travel agencies and tour operators has seen a rise. With the internet we can be our own travel agents: booking is done by a few clicks with the mouse.

In summary, all countries should be happy with this development since, in the long run, they can all expect growing visitor numbers. At the same time, the rate of this growth is not

unimportant. How many tourists will choose a given country, how many nights are they going to stay and how much money are they willing to spend there? What's more, the experiences they encounter at the destination and the stories they are going to tell their friends and family back home is also an important factor – these visitors can attract or keep away potential tourists.

In the meantime, the competition between countries is constantly growing: while the United Nations in 1945 had 51 member states, today it has 192! From the perspective of a tourist, there are even more countries to talk about: the United Kingdom for instance is not regarded as a single country to visit; rather tourists like to look at it as England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. According to the Pareto Principle, there are “top” countries. Seventy percent of all incoming tourism is shared by 15 countries, such as France, Spain, Great Britain, United States of America, Germany or Austria. All the other nations have to “fight” for the remaining 30 %.

This “battle” is conducted by the tools of marketing. The battlefield is nothing else but the hearts and minds of the consumers, so to say, the potential travellers. Countries need to rank in the top positions in their heads. The consumer will choose a country from this list when making a new travel decision. Therefore, it's important for a country to rank well on that list. These country-image development efforts today are known as country-image building or most recently called: country branding.

Those countries, that do not have a long period of statehood or had previously belonged to one or more empires are in a particularly difficult situation regarding country-image building. Such independent countries can be found in Asia, Africa and South America that once were colonies. Similar to these are those countries born after the collapse of the Soviet Union. We do not even need to go that far, just think about our former southern neighbour, Yugoslavia. Today, there are six independent countries in the same territory: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Slovenia and Serbia. Kosovo may be listed here as well but there are many countries that have not recognised Kosovo as an independent state. All these countries would like to show their innate particularity and thus attract tourists and income into their nation. There are areas where fast development is seen, such as in Croatia and Estonia, but other areas still need improvement, which is the case for the Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.”

2. Israel as a tourist destination

"The case of Israel is unique from many different points of view. At the same time, this is one of the most ancient and relatively younger nations. Although there was an Israel thousands of years ago, the territory has been invaded by different peoples. So, the independent Israel, as a state has only existed since 1948."

Eva continued the presentation:

"We can't fully understand Israel as a tourist destination if we don't take a short look at her history, since in our case history is part of the tourism product. So, let's see how it goes! The appearance of the ancestors of the Jews in the territory of today's Israel, according to the Bible, was around the first half of the second millennium BC. The Bible says that Abraham, one of the Hebrew patriarchs, left the Mesopotamian town of Haran with his family to look for a homeland that his Lord showed him. The Lord had said to Abraham, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

The golden age of the historical Israel, the united Jewish state, was in the 11th century BC, when it became famous due to King Solomon. After his death, the state was divided into two parts and from that time, despite some shorter periods, the area always belonged to a different empire. In a few hundred years the Assyrians, the Babylonians and the Persians ruled here, later the Greeks led by Alexander the Great and the Syrians. The acts of Jesus however happened during the time of Roman rule. It was the Romans who later exiled the Jews to more distant parts of the empire, such as Europe, Africa and Asia. This is how the Jewish Diaspora was born. Most of these Jews also maintained their ancient traditions outside the Holy Land.

The motherland was occupied in the 7th century by the Muslims, who were followed by the Crusaders in the 11th century in Jerusalem. 1516 marked the start of the period of Turkish rule by the Ottoman Empire. During these centuries, the Jews eventually became a minority in Israel. Only in Jerusalem did the Jewish people remain in a majority.

Meanwhile, the Jewish Diaspora in Europe had been persecuted over the centuries. Nationalism became more prevalent in the 19th century. As a response to this, the Zionist movement was formed with the aim of creating a new Jewish state and to represent collectively the interests of the Jews in the Diaspora.

The first half of the 20th century marks the era of the greatest persecution of the Jews. The idea of an independent state had already been recognised even during the First World War and actually became a reality after the Second. In 1947, the United Nations divided Palestine into separate Arab and Jewish canonised territories. A year later a war broke out with the neighbouring Arab countries.

Israel became an independent state in 1948 with the Jews returning to Israel by making Aliyah. This means the immigration or returning home of the Jews to Israel from all parts of the world. Between 1948 and 1958 the population of Israel grew from 800,000 to 2 million. At the same time, 700,000 Arabs left the country.

The history of the independent Israel has not lacked conflict. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict grew, because both nations wanted the ancient land for themselves. In a nutshell, on the most basic level, Israel faced war situations from time to time with the neighbouring countries. With television's popularity growing, these conflicts immediately made headlines in the international media. So, the country became known by more and more people, but not from a positive aspect."

After the short historical summary, Peter continued with the research conducted for the image of Israel as a tourist destination.

"The independent country image research done in the beginning of the 21st century shows an interesting portrait of what potential visitors think of Israel. People were asked what comes to their mind first about Israel. They said the following:

- Jews
- Conflict
- Terrorism
- Explosions
- Suicide attackers
- Desert
- High tech
- Holocaust
- Land of the Bible
- Jerusalem
- Jesus"

"Wow, this is a very contradictory image!" interrupted Erica who was burning with desire to tell her proposal about what she thought Israel should do to change her country image.

Peter continued his presentation. "It can be seen from the list that there are also some negative factors regarding the image. The result was similar when the online search engines were used in the research. After typing "Israel" in Google's image search, the first images were of female soldiers, military airplanes and maps. Typing "Brazil" on the other hand mostly resulted in football stars, the beach and hot girls."

3. Building the touristic image in Israel

"With such a general picture or country image, it is certainly difficult to start" Peter cut to the chase. "Israel" he continued – "wanted to get a bigger slice of the tourism industry cake to take advantage of the increased desire to travel. A positive observation was that reality in Israel is not as simple and negative as the country's image. All in all, this is the Holy Land; this is the land where Jesus walked. Not to mention Jerusalem which is the headquarters for three world religions. The size of the country is 20,000 km² that is four and a half times smaller than Hungary, but the nature is very varied. Israel has beaches, mountains and deserts. Her climate is Mediterranean but, depending on the different parts of the country, it means different temperatures. While, along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, temperatures can rise to an enjoyable 30 °C, the mountains are cooler, while the Jordan River and the Negev desert are boiling hot."

"The extraordinary Dead Sea is also a part of Israel. This is the world's largest spa where we can get free mudpacks" interrupted Erica who was really into cosmetics.

"Yes, that's right, don't forget the Red Sea either, which has thousands of different fish and divers," commented Thom on the topic who was actually more into fish after they were grilled. "Besides the historical museums and sites, trendy art galleries can be found. The wines of the country are delicious, and the food is peculiar because of the impacts from different cultures."

"Another extraordinary thing," Steven joined the presentation, "is that most of the country was built from nothing, literally from the arid rock desert. And today's Holy Land is really developed, one of the high-tech centres of the world."

"All of these points are right guys," said the professor. "Finally, the thing of which most people are not aware is that Israel is very diverse. While in the centre of the country, in Jerusalem, people are extremely religious and there are lots of orthodox Jews walking around, along the beaches in Tel Aviv one can find a very liberal party town. Not to forget that Tel Aviv is the gay and lesbian centre in the Middle East. Yes, that's right. Israel is the only

country in the region that does not prohibit or ban homosexuality. So, what do you think from all of the above? How can a country image be built?"

"Well, from my research I think that the Israeli Tourist Office wanted to show all we heard today," said Eva who really got herself deep into Israel's destination campaigns. "They wanted to get rid of the one-sided view of Israel. As part of this, Israel was positioned as a Mediterranean country rather than as a Middle Eastern country. They did not want another Middle Eastern destination on the menu of tourism but they rather wanted to move towards the West on the map. Their aim was to compete with Cyprus, Greece and Turkey that are very popular tourism destinations.

Most countries, when promoting themselves outside their home territory, are targeting a general audience. The campaign is for everyone who has some extra money for travel. The ads usually show a popular sight from the country, with smiling faces having fun and enjoying themselves. These ads usually become too general and lose their uniqueness. This was not the case with Israel. Research shows that different groups of people see the country from different perspectives therefore a general campaign would not be effective. Adding to this was the fact that in the different tourist-sending countries and among the different demographic groups, different messages would be important. The Tourist Office that is responsible for the advertising campaigns came to the point where they would mostly focus on countries that already sent large numbers of tourists or at least their citizens were willing to travel to the Holy Land. This is why they primarily focused on the USA and some European nations."

"The Tourism Ministry, taking all of this into consideration, created a different campaign for every target country" continued Erica. "They would even do sub-target groups in each country, she added. In the United States, for example, one of the most important target groups is the religious Christians who go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Among this group, two different campaigns were created: one for the Catholics and one for the Protestants. The Catholics are mostly interested in the historical locations and scenes from the Bible that they consider holy. The Protestants, on the other, hand are motivated by the Holy Spirit and want to inhale the spirituality of the land. The slogan that they use in the campaigns encourages these target groups that their life will change after the trip: "Visit Israel. You'll never be the same". They are trying to evoke a strong emotional effect that is helped by the recommendations from prominent religious leaders, "celebrities". Christian leaders were given inspirational videos and pilgrimage route-planner kits, free of charge, to encourage the members of their congregation to visit Israel."

"Another channel in the United States was aimed at a more general audience. The first big campaign was in 2007 costing USD 12 million. The ads showed no priests, no crucifixes or stars of David. Ordinary people were shown at different Israeli locations. A female chef in front of the old town of Jerusalem, a farmer on his horse in the fields, an archaeologist on top of a fortress, an engineer by the base of skyscrapers and a dancer on the Tel Aviv beachfront. The smile on her face, the dynamic movement of her legs and the white buildings in the pinkish sunset in the background made this the most well-known piece of the collection. The motto is the same on all the ads: "You'll love Israel from the first 'Shalom'". Oren Drori, the head of marketing of the Tourism Ministry said in a ynetnews.com interview that they "were looking for an icon. If the French have the Eiffel Tower, we have the 'shalom.' True, it's not visual, but it's extremely well known and very positive – it is portrayed as Hawaii's 'aloha'." Shalom means peace, but in everyday life it is like saying hello in Hebrew. The ads were placed in magazines, travel newspapers, on billboards and at bus stops in big cities. It made it to the official websites: goisrael.com and thinkisrael.com. A TV ad was also created."

"I brought some images with me. Take a look at this for example" she showed a poster on which a girl was dancing in the sea with a street full of modern hotels in the background.



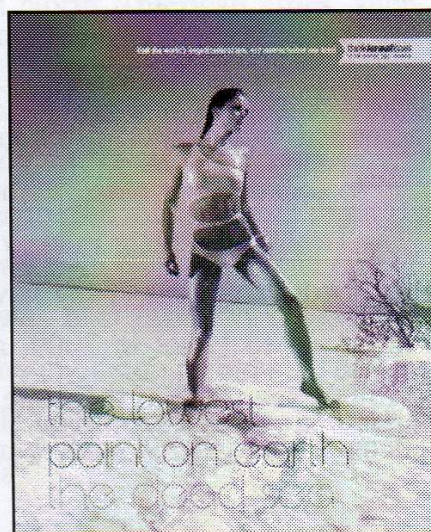
Source: Israel Government Tourist Office (UK)

"Besides advertising, public relations is also used in the USA. The most exciting PR stunt was of beautiful Israeli female soldiers striking poses for the July 2007 issue of Maxim, a men's monthly magazine. The pictures showed the gorgeous girls at breathtaking Israeli locations. The story was followed up on CNN, ABC and other big TV stations. This unique approach was very successful for Israel that finally became known from a different angle (other than the results of the previous country-image researches). Opponents raised their voices at the same time: should the image of the Holy Land be like this?

Summing up, the American campaigns above proved to be successful in 2008 when more than 650,000 American visitors entered Israel, which is a 25% rise from 2006 and resulted in USD one billion income for the country.”

“Not all of their campaign elements were clear!” joined in Eva. “The British campaign from 2007 was more like an illustrated editorial from a men’s magazine. The marketing gurus decided they would shake up the cold-blooded British men with some swanky Israeli ladies. The photos reminded me of fashion shots that the guys are really hooked on. When I was looking for the product being advertised, I only found thinkisrael.com. Besides that, there were only a few short sentences in a funky font, like “Where rain never falls: Eilat.” “The 24hr Mediterranean city: Tel Aviv” “The lowest point on earth: the Dead Sea.” In a country like Britain, that has not always been viewed as pro-Israel, this campaign received both good and bad reviews. Ads were put on London taxis but some people said it was too much to label them in such a sexy way. These promotional taxis were not only branded from the outside but their drivers were prepared about the country, too. If one of their passengers had a question about Israel, the driver knew from where more information could be gained that was on the website.”

“Since most of the above advertisements were targeted at males, the creative team wanted to come up with something for females. Probably, this is one reason why the ad campaign in 2008 took a different route: “You can travel the entire length of Israel in six hours. Imagine what you can experience in seven days?” Each and every version of this campaign showed a sample itinerary on how to spend a week there. For example three days in Tel Aviv, one in Jerusalem, one in Galilee and two days’ rest by the Dead Sea and Eilat. This shows that recreation, wellness and the “never-ending” supply of Dead Sea mud was the main pulling factor for British women.”



Source: Israel Government Tourist Office (UK)

"Not only the general public advertising campaign was strong, but the business-to-business strategy was quite significant. Israel participated at many tourism trade shows around the world, including the largest ones in Britain and Germany" Peter continued. "Besides giving away tons of brochures and flyers, cultural and fun programmes were organised at the stands including dancing, listening to local music, exploring a city virtually, eating hummus, etc. At the Berlin fair, a mini Tel Aviv beach was created where one could play beach ball or just chill out in a deck chair. The leading message behind the German campaign was family, adventure and wellness tourism. The ads were not as witty as the British ones; they were too precise, too German. For the Russian campaign, personal experiences were added to the photos and the French were given a more cultural feel in their Israeli ads."

"Let's not forget about the modern tools" Steven continued, who was the high-tech geek of the team. "Not only classical tools were used but great emphasis was put on the online marketing too. On the official website, they are trying to cater for everybody by creating subgroups with special information suited for their group. At the goisrael.com website a choice of three different options were given, depending on the interest: Christian, Jewish or general interests, regardless of religion. Each has different information depending on which one the visitor picks. The website is available in many languages: British and American English, Hebrew, Russian, French, German, Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, Finnish, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch, Japanese and Arabic. The same website can be reached at another address that is thinkisrael.com. The domain name and the campaign with the same slogan clearly show the aim of the country-image builders.

That is to think of the country from a different view and to think of Israel as a possible travel destination.

It is not only websites that are part of Israel's online communication strategy. There are many informal channels including tourist blogs and fan sites on Myspace, Facebook, Flickr and Twitter. Travel videos are uploaded to the special Youtube channel. Even more, they encourage everybody visiting Israel to upload their own personal photos and videos to share their experiences with the world. The Israeli Consulate in New York is doing a great job with web2.0 by creating innovative, new media channels. They have done a press conference via Twitter and, during the visit of the Pope to Israel in 2009, a special quiz application was created on Facebook to be able to follow the route of the Pope in the Holy Land. The Tourist Office also invites famous bloggers on press trips and study tours to Israel."

4. Controversial methods in creating the country image

“Some of the tools that Israel used were ethically questionable for me” said Eva. “Targeting the young audience, viral videos were used. The point of the viral video is that users don’t get it from an official organisation, but the ads are passed around by the end-users who forward and share the videos with their friends. More and more people pass around the videos if they are innovative, funny or shocking. Israel has created a couple of these short clips. In one of them two American guys are gazing at the hot girls at the Tel Aviv beach. Their eyes pop open and they mutter “holy shit...holy Jesus...holy Mother of God”. One of the girls accidentally throws the ball in front of the guys, so she walks there in a bikini – in slow motion – to grab the ball from the sand. She is smiling at the guys who are in heaven by this time, she grabs the ball, turns around and leaves. At the climax, the camera focuses on the girl’s back part when the slogan appears: “Israel. No wonder they call it the Holy Land.”. I personally think this is too strong and may be counterproductive” said Eva.

“The same theme was used in another video” said Peter. “In that video a bunch of guys are playing football in the sandy beach of Tel Aviv. The ball is stuck in the sand from time to time, when the eyes of the male players follow a sexy girl passing by or taking a shower. One of the players doesn’t understand the reaction of his team-mates and why they are not concentrating on the game until a handsome guy appears in the white waves of the sea. His eyes are set on this guy. And the motto goes: “Israel. No wonder we didn’t make it to the World Cup.”

“I hope you didn’t forget” the professor continued “that these big tourism marketing campaigns took place around two anniversaries: Israel celebrated her 60th birthday as an independent state in 2008, while Tel Aviv had festivities in 2009 to mark the city’s centenary. In 2009 in some European and North American cities, such as New York, Copenhagen and Vienna, an artificial sandy Tel Aviv-style beach was created with palm trees, cocktails and Israeli DJs spinning the records. Vienna had a traditional Israel-branded tram with multimedia applications that would stimulate all the senses for those who took a ride to become familiar with Israel. The guest of honour for the international Paris Book Fair was Israel and there was a public photo exhibition in downtown Budapest at an open air space that is frequented by the young. The photo exhibition was also taken to the Sziget Festival, a huge outdoor music festival in Budapest, to show the cool side of Israel. The aim in every activity was to show a different side of Israel so people could experience the country from a more diverse view, not only from the news in the media.”

“OK, let’s look at how effective these campaigns were!” the professor proposed.

"The campaigns presented today surely played a role in the growth of incoming tourism in Israel during the last few years," said Eva. "2007 saw 2.3 million visitors arriving in Israel, which is 25% more than in the previous year. The record was broken in 2008 when almost three million visits were registered at the Ben Gurion Airport. The country expects five million tourists by 2012. This is what they aim for by using ever and newer tools and different approaches. They also know that the number of tourists in Israel does not only depend on marketing."

"I think," the professor added, "that a precise picture can only be drawn after the impact analysis of the previous campaigns have been conducted. Let's now have a look at what the group thinks of this, shall we?"

Questions:

1. Why do people experience totally contradicting images in the news and in real life about Israel?
2. According to what criteria can Israel position herself?
3. How did they choose the different target groups for the tourism campaigns of Israel? To which other target groups would it be worth opening?
4. Why does Israel want to influence the senses when attracting tourists?
5. Was it worth showing sexy female soldiers in the American campaign? Why?
6. What type of online marketing tools does Israel use and what other online tools could be added?
7. Why do you think Israel is encouraging visitors to share their experience on the internet after returning home?
8. Do you think the unique viral videos improved or worsened the country's image?
9. What other types of viral videos would be worth making?
10. How has the number of visitors to Israel changed in recent years? On what factors does it depend?
11. Which marketing communication methods and tools should Hungary adapt from Israel's marketing portfolio?

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