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Let's make Hungary trendy!

Rethinking and reorganization of souvenirs

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Abstract

For every country it is quite important to understand what tourists take home from their visit. It is referred to as souvenir, but some call it country merchandising. Among these items there are the usual “favourites”, which can be found in every country with its own label: T-shirt, baseball cap, bag, mug, pen, magnet, key chain, etc.

- In terms of country branding there are numerous problems with this kind of merchandise:
- Most of them are poor quality.
- They are rarely distinctive and unique of the given country.
- Locals would not even think of using or wearing these items, nor would they be proud of doing so.
- There is little or no regulation by the state regarding the visual identity of the country.
- It is even more seldom to find a nationwide plan for this case.

The article will show two recent Hungarian initiatives which try to change this picture. These initiatives end up in satisfied tourists who are able to buy good quality souvenirs and local citizens, who can proudly wear and use them, contributing to a stronger identity. The research is based on in-depth interviews with the leaders of the mentioned initiatives.

Key words: country image, country branding, souvenir, merchandising, Hungary

1. Introduction

Purchasing souvenirs can be deemed as one of the favoured tourism activities that forms an integral part of tourists' travel experiences [1]. There

is no reliable statistical data on how much tourists spend on souvenirs or handicrafts but surveys show that approximately 6% of tourists' overall expenditure is spent on gifts [2].

Souvenirs are usually perceived as a tangible symbol and reminder of the intangible travel experience [3, 4]. Lasusa's article [5] points out that the physical evidence offered by souvenirs is important both from the first-person perspective (the tourist who has had a given experience and collected the souvenir), and from the third-person perspective (friends, neighbours or relatives who see the souvenir without experiencing the place or time of its acquisition).

No wonder that in souvenir purchase decisions, one of many tourists' common goals is to create linkage with a culture, to sample a different way of life [2]. Tourists want unique souvenirs that contain memories of their trip and are unique to the destination they have visited [6]. A prominent motivator for tourism is the quest for authentic experiences, and thus, tourists often extend their searches for authenticity in their purchase of souvenirs. This means that selling cheap, overseas-made products can decrease shoppers' (tourists') satisfaction level, especially when they outnumber locally-made items in souvenir shops [7], [8].

2. Reforming the Hungarian souvenirs

Almost at the same time, Katalin Monostori, the executive director of Memories of Hungary and Ernő Kukla, illustrator, the owner of Souvenir-Air decided to reform the Hungarian souvenirs [9, 10]. The poor and low quality supply of the gift shops situated in Váci Street had a big influence on the foundation of both two companies.

Both firms' conceptions are based on foreign examples. The Memories of Hungary – as a first step – opened a shop at the airport of Sármező in March 2010 where mostly Hungarian premium-foodstuff is sold. Their second shop's varnishing-day was at Ferenc Liszt Airport Budapest on 27 March 2011 where the focus is on non-food category. Their primary target is the young and the youthful foreign people, priority for women; furthermore they strongly emphasize the products for children [9].



Fig. 1. The original plans of 'Memories of Hungary' store at Budapest Airport's SkyCourt



Fig. 2. The 'Memories of Hungary' store a few weeks after its opening

Instead of the example mentioned above, Souven-Air concentrates on Hungarian customers. [10] The Hungarian supporters could wear the brand-new fur cap with 'HUN' title on it, at the Ice-Hockey World Cup this spring in Budapest, as well as at the 2012 Olympic Games in London. The two enterprises are proud that more and more Hungarian craftsmen and artists collaborate with them to reach their aims – to offer goods

produced in Hungarian factories. The repertoire of Souven-Air is colored by the products of special ‘busó’ masc maker, bone and wood-carvers, jewelers and gingerbread assortment of Anikó Orbán. Their mission is to promote our country by renewing traditional motives. Their slogan is “Let’s bring Hungary into fashion”. Enthusiastic artists as Kriszta Katrics, Mónika Mallár, Kriszta Marosi and Szilvia Pálffy help them to transport original Hungarian symbols in their clothes [10]. In the shop of Memories of Hungary in Ferenc Liszt Airport Budapest we also can find creations of young craftsmen and artists [9].

3. Hungarian markings

Both initiations would modernize the Hungarian souvenir market by recreating authentic signs and motives. The gifts distributed by the Memories of Hungary contain freshened flower motives and new markings. One part of the souvenirs represents the motive-system built up by the font designed by Villő Farkas, on others the cross-stitched Budapest and its monuments are presented. Not be left out of the line of the motives, the authentic yellow trams of Budapest, and the figure of cavalryman was also redesigned – regarding children's needs [9]. The main symbol of Souven-Air is the already mentioned self-designed ‘HUN’ label, that’s letters are clamped by an arrow – referring to the international abbreviation of Hungary and the history [10].

“An important component of the Hungarian traditions is the spa culture that is almost unique all over the world. Even so the home-produced supply regarding to the spa world are mostly poor designed and unassuming wrapped” – shares her experiences Katalin Monostori. Therefore beside the distribution of the already existing Hungarian soaps, spa balls etc. the Memories of Hungary launched the improvement of cosmetic products. Their goal is to promote quality items made of Hungarian natural raw materials – lavender, chamomile – for tourists [9].

4. Hungarian celebrities

In addition to the self-made products, one of the most famous Hungarian “brand”, Ferenc Puskás’ relics, retro T-shirts, the record of the “6:3” match against the English national team in London are available in their store, as well as in both two companies’ online shops [9, 10].



Fig. 3. Ferenc Puskás, the most famous Hungarian is important part of both initiatives

Ernő Rubik's world-known games – like Rubik's Cube – are also parts of these initiatives' supplies. The acquisition of the royalties of the use of the Hungarian-birth famous people's name and portrait is in progress and hopefully tourist visiting Hungary can return home in T-shirts of Ferenc Liszt's or Tony Curtis' portraits.

But tourists have the opportunity to take home some intellectual values as well. The shop of Memories of Hungary – at Ferenc Liszt Airport – sells literary works from Péter Esterházy, Ferenc Molnár or Sándor Márai and children's book [9].

Besides literature, they plan to redesign the package of classical music CDs and DVDs and to sell contemporary Hungarian performers' – like Balkan Fanatic, Bea Palya or the Csík zenekar – discs as well [9].

Most of all, both two companies would like to become excellent in the non-food category but some gastronomic Hungaricums will take place in their offers. The foreign guests can buy honey, marmalade, wines, traditional Hungarian brandies (pálinka) in the shop of Memories of Hungary at Sármellék (close to Lake Balaton) but they can also order

specialities of Tokaj, brandies, paprika from Kalocsa and different hand-made chocolates from the website of Souven-Air [10].

5. I love Hungary

In 2011, the Souven-Air Kft invites four applications to promote Hungary in another way. The main patron of these is the first lady, the wife of the President of The Hungarian Republic, Katalin Makray Schmittné. All applications have an own message and try to move foreign and national people more and more. One of these is announced for Hungarians who are tourist in another country. Thus, their task is to take photos in a T-shirt that promotes – e.g. with labels – their mother country. Contrast, the “Take a picture” movement is for those who are spending their holiday in Hungary. In this case, they can apply with their photos taken at Hungarian monuments [10].



Fig. 4. Competition for Hungarians: take a picture in a foreign country wearing a Hungary or Budapest t-shirt



Fig. 5. Let's Bring Hungary into Fashion – Initiative of Souven-Air Hungary

Furthermore, they invite the “Hungary = I love it” application. For this contest, the participants can apply with their short videos that are about their feelings to their country. The fourth application, which is a drawing contest has already been announced but there will be some changes compared the previous year. Its name is changed from “My place of birth wholeheartedly” to “My place of birth without borders”. The target of this modification is that Hungarians beyond the borders can express their thoughts and feelings about their home country towards the world [10].

For the future, the Memories of Hungary is planning to open their next shop near to St. István Basilique to reach tourist-by-bus [9]. Later they would like to appear at Lake Balaton as well. The Souven-Air's first own shop will be opened in the momentarily building new shopping mall, “Cet” (“Whale”) that is located next to the Corvinus University of Budapest. Their next mission is to form their products to cities, therefore boosting city-merchandising in Hungary [10].

Like both two companies' leaders say that this work is more about just love rather than business but they believe it will have market fund in the future as well [9,10].

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