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THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN CREATING THE IMAGE OF A TOURIST DESTINATION

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Abstract: The issue of image, personal, organizational, brand, destination, is one of the most important issues that attracts the attention of the social, business and scientific public. This paper draws attention to the need for a comprehensive treatment of the image, the mechanisms of its formation, and especially to the difficulties of considering the image phenomenon in isolation, separated from its basis - identity. Numerous studies of the image of tourist destinations in the past decades, mostly of an empirical nature, remain on the surface of this phenomenon. Their results do not contribute to a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, primarily due to the absence of an appropriate conceptualization and theoretical framework. Regarding the image of the destination, the most important thing is, of course, its end result, but the analysis of the image phenomenon, the separation of one into its constituent factors, different, opposite and contradictory, reveals levers whose shaping and use can influence the end result - the image. The role of mass media in this process, especially in the digital era, is very significant, but not decisive.

Keywords: Media, image, identity, brand, marketing, tourist destination

Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, at the time of the fiercest market competition, issues of image and current reputation are in the increased focus of attention of modern man, the public, the world of business and politics. Their attitude towards you also depends on how people perceive you - what they think of you, how they treat you, whether and how they do business with you, whether they vote for you.

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If you leave the impression of a serious, credible, cultured and modern man with your speech, demeanor, manners, clothing, activities and overall culture, there is a great chance that you will be included in the circle of people who are accepted and respected, with whom you like to hang out, do business, spend free time...

Concern for one's image, however, is not a newly formed concern of the third millennium, but can be traced deep into the past. Forming a positive self-image was a practical concern, the successful results of which facilitated the administration of rulers and the business of merchants. What others think of us, how they see us, is a significant determinant of our social, economic, cultural or political position, but also a determinant of our behavior.

The need to gain the affection of others, which could only be obtained if they saw us in a positive light, almost started to develop with the development of personal identity and can be classified in the category of basic psychological needs. The moment we became aware of ourselves as a being separate from others, we began to make sure that the other saw us positively, as a friend, because their attitude towards us depended on that. That caring, that activity of building one's own image used the media and techniques that were available to the era in question and did not end with interpersonal or group interaction.

As a working *definition of image*, we will accept, due to its wide applicability, Philip Kotler's definition: "An image is a set of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has, which are related to a certain object. People's attitudes and activities towards a certain object are largely conditioned by the object's image" (Kotler 2001).

Today, however, the significantly older, deeper and more comprehensive definition of image given by W. H. Reynolds in 1965 is often overlooked: image is "mental construct developed by the consumer on the basis of a few selected impressions among the flood of total impressions; it comes into being through a creative process in which these selected impressions are elaborated, embellished, and ordered." (Reynolds 1965, 69). Reynolds makes a distinction here between a mental construct and its basis; our construct is a simplified image, and emphasizes the active and creative role of the consumer: he (the consumer) selects only certain ones from the mass ("flood") of impressions and elaborates them through a process that has creative characteristics; he embellish them and puts them in a certain order. We can take this distinction as equivalent to the difference between belief and fact, what people believe about a person or institution (reputation) and what the person or institution and person really are (their character).

Therefore, as valuable, because it points to the distinction between image and reality, we cite the definition of the world's most respected marketing institution -

AMA, the American Marketing Association: "Image is the consumer perception of a product, institution, brand, business or person, which may or may not correspond with reality" (<https://marketing-dictionary.org/i/image/>)

By *media* in this paper we mean mass media, means of impersonal, mass communication, and due to the absence of disputes about the definition, we will accept the Collins dictionary definition as the working one: "Mass media - means of communication that reach a large number of people in a short time, such as television, newspapers, magazines and the radio." (<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/mass-media>)

This paper is of a theoretical nature, and was created on the basis of insight into relevant sources and especially the author's practical experience in introducing the *Montenegro Wild Beauty* brand to the international tourist market. The aim of this paper is to point out the complexity of the formation of the image of tourist destinations, the need to consider the image in connection with other phenomena (the essence of the matter is their connection), to realistically situate the position of the mass media in this process and to indicate the innovations in the image formation process brought about by the digital interaction of consumers.

How does one form an image?

The decisive power of the mass media in image creation is almost commonplace in mass knowledge today. Often, continuous and positive presence of a person, organization or community in the media, either in *news* communications - through news, reports, reportages, guest appearances in the studio, etc., or in *market* communications - through ads, spots, billboards - opinion is - forms favorable and positive image of a person, company, organization, community. According to the opinions of this type, the power of the media is unlimited: "He who holds power and authority, who controls the public media, who has privileged access to information and who knows persuasive techniques, he can convince anyone to *think, believe and do anything*. He can say: 'I took it upon myself to set your head right'" (Thomas Aquinas)" (Šušnjić, 2014)

Without disputing the persuasive power of the media in the field of politics, especially not the media culture that they form and which, through the reduction of the ability for abstract thinking, generally leaves undesirable traces on the intellectual abilities of a large part of humanity, we must note that the phenomenon of forming and changing attitudes and opinions and creating impressions cannot be reduced to the manipulative power of the media, mediators, but necessarily includes at least

two more parties - the one who "convinces" (subject - person, organization, community) and the "convinced" (object - citizen, consumer, voter).

Focusing on the presence and intensity of presence in the media, and the character of the media presentation (positively), focusing on the use of the media, the said opinion nevertheless almost completely abstracts the essential *qualitative characteristics of the subject*, the object, that is, the reality about which ideas, beliefs and impressions are formed.

The formula for achieving a successful image, an image that is not short-lived, does not lie - as history shows - in the mass media and communications, but in the object or subject of the image, not in the media evaluation and distribution of positive impressions, but in the object of evaluation - in high or socially desirable values that brings a person, a product, a brand, an organization, a place or a destination about which impressions are formed. We find this in the (positive) experience gained in interaction with the subject/object and which is determined by the qualities of the subject itself (person, product, organization, community). "That it is principally deeds which create public perceptions, not words and pictures" (Anholt 2010. p. 9). We must also not ignore Socrates who claims: "The way to gain a good reputation, is to endeavor to be what you desire to appear" (<https://www.forbes.com/quotes/8710/>)

This shifting of the focus from the media, the intermediary, to the object, which, on the other hand, is also the subject, will be discussed later through the question of the role of the media in creating the image of a tourist destination.

Definition of image by W.H. Reynolds and the American Marketing Association, through an indication of a possible discrepancy between perception and perceived reality, indicates the impossibility of considering the concept of image in isolation, without insight into its basis, without analyzing the object of perception.

The *object of perception*, as we have already stated, can be a person, product, brand, company, organization, destination, community, nation... And each of these objects of perception is a subject in its own domain. An individual acquires an appropriate education and culture, sets his life goals, creates and practices an appropriate way of speaking and behaving, develops his visual identity and style. A company and organization build a strategy and structure to achieve their goals, form and practice the appropriate culture and behavior, create an appropriate value proposition, design and communications that match that supply.

Both the individual and the organization - through the aforementioned elements - form their identity through which they want to be recognized and through which they enable other people to describe them, to remember them and relate to them.

The unique set of associations we strive to create is the essence of the identity creation process in the business sector.

On the other hand, identity is a key element of an individual's personality, but also of every brand. It provides both man and brand with direction, purpose and meaning (Aaker 1996). Identity, however, is not given, but set task, we shape it through a long and painstaking process, "we constantly review and modify it, because identity is not a state but a process" (Golubović 1999). The philosopher Furio Ceruti compares the process of identity formation to a wall: the construction of identity "necessarily must build a wall that will separate one's own property from the other's, which will thus become someone else's... An open identity, an identity without a wall, contradicts itself. It recognizes itself only in that it differs from the other, that is, in what the wall symbolizes". (Cerutti 2009) Or, to put it another way, "the 'I' consists precisely in distinguishing it from the other" (Ricoeur, according to Golubović 1999).

The principle of difference therefore appears as one of the most important determinants of identity.

Identity can be defined as a set of characteristics, attributes by which a person or organization is presented, positioned and differentiated - visually, verbally, by activity, behavior and it represents the foundation of the image. It is the ability to preserve the internal identity and continuity of the subject. Unlike identity, however, image is in the mind, in the head of the audience (Melewar 2008, 9-11).

The difference between image and reputation should be emphasized here. While image reflects recent experiences, beliefs, feelings, knowledge, associations and impressions about a person, product, company, reputation represents a perception formed over a long period of time and results from the reflection of historically accumulated impressions and experiences (Melewar 2008, 13). Image, despite its "stickiness", can change relatively quickly, reputation, however, requires a consistent image over a long period of time and can be marked by a permanent perception.

Identity and activities on the formation, nurturing and maintenance of identity, specific values by which we are individualized, by which we are different, are those fundamental activities that in the long term contribute the most to image creation and represent its basis.

In the world of economics, brand identity is defined as "a unique set of brand associations that brand strategists aspire to create or maintain. These associations represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers from the organization members. Brand identity should help establish a relationship between

the brand and the customer by generating a value proposition involving functional, emotional or self-expressive benefits". (Aaker 1996, 68). By breaking down brand identity into twelve dimensions organized into four perspectives, Aaker formed a deeper understanding of brand identity and brand building.

In order to better understand the mechanism of image formation, it is necessary to understand the four key aspects of identity mentioned by Aker: product, organizational, personal and symbolic. With (A) the product-related associations include (1) product scope, its connection with the product class, (2) product attributes (offering something extra or better than others), (3) quality and relationship with value, (4) functional benefits, (4) associations with occasions in which the product is used, (5) associations with users and (6) links with the country of origin.

(B) The organizational aspect of the brand focuses on organizational attributes rather than product attributes ie services. These attributes (customer focus, care for the environment, commitment to technology, local orientation, etc.) are more durable and resistant to competition than product ones and can include emotional and self-expressive benefits such as admiration, respect and liking.

(C) An identity that considers the brand as a person is richer and more interesting than one based on product attributes. A brand can look competent, impressive, youthful, intellectual, formal, classy, trustworthy, etc. In this way, space can be formed for the brand to become a tool through which the consumer, the user expresses his personality (self-expressive benefit) and the basis for forming a relationship between the brand and the user. *Apple* computer users have always perceived this brand as a sign of top professionalism and creativity and through it communicated and expressed an image of them.

(D) A brand is also a symbol, and a strong symbol provides cohesion and structure to an identity and enables easy recognition and recall. Its absence can be a serious handicap. Anything that represents a brand can be a symbol: programs, a slogan, a visual metaphor, a character, a logo, a color, a musical note, a gesture, packaging or a unique pricing policy. Three types of symbols are most prominent: visual images, metaphors, and brand heritage.

By completing the formation of these four groups of brand identity components (product, organizational, personal and symbolic), the brand identity should provide a value proposition to the customer - a statement about the functional, emotional and symbolic benefits provided by the brand.

This projecting of the goals that the brand should achieve is also a key difference between IDENTITY AND IMAGE: identity is active and looks to the future; it outlines

how the brand wants to be perceived. Image is passive and looks to the past; it shows how the brand has been perceived (until) now. The value proposition that is actively communicated to the target audience represents the brand's position and is part of the brand's identity.

Image in tourism

In the field of tourism, image has an incomparably greater importance than in other areas of economy and society. Most tourism products are services rather than physical goods and can usually compete only through image. In the world of services, to which tourism belongs, what is bought is intangible and therefore risky, inseparable, variable, perishable and easily substitutable. (Ratković et al. 2023)

Intangible - unlike a physical product, you cannot see, taste, feel, hear or smell a service before you buy it. The consequence of intangibility is the increased risk in deciding on a tourist purchase. Before boarding the plane, the passenger only has a ticket and a promise, and when he leaves the hotel he can only show the receipt. Therefore, in order to reduce the uncertainty and risk caused by the intangibility of the service, the customer looks for signs and tangible evidence of quality that will provide him with information and confidence in the service.

Inseparability - the service is provided and received (used) at the same time. Both employees and guests are part of the product, which is why managers manage both employees and consumers.

Variability - the quality of services depends on who, when and where provide them, so they are highly variable. The service is created and consumed simultaneously, which limits the possibility of quality control. Perishability - the service cannot be stored to be sold later during a period of high demand. "A 100-room hotel that only sells 60 rooms on particular night cannot inventory the 40 unsold rooms sell 140 rooms next night. Revenue lost from not selling the unsold 40 rooms is gone forever" (Kotler et al. 1999, 43-44.).

This intangibility of the destination, the impossibility of trial or testing before purchase, brings the question of the importance of the destination's image to a "red-heat". That is why destinations are differentiated through the creation of brands, through the construction of a competitive identity, what makes the destination distinctive and unforgettable. "The image that the product creates in consumer awareness, how the product is *positioned*, however, for the ultimate success of the

destination is more important than its actual characteristics" (Morgan at. al. 2002, 12, underlined by V.Z.).

The image differentiates one destination from another and today it plays a crucial role in choosing a destination. "What, for instance, is the difference between hiking in Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Crete or Montenegro; or between sailing in Greece, Turkey or Croatia? And, when all other actors such as hiking terrain, offshore wind conditions for sailing and visitor facilities are equal, the answer usually lies somewhere in the potential visitor's perception the destination and its emotional appeal. (UNWTO 2009, 52)

However, image formation is not a simple, one-sided, or one-way process that can be successfully implemented using the mass media. It (formation) is intricately intertwined with the destination selection process whose starting point is the totality of all possible destinations - (1) *initial opportunity set*. (Goodall 1991, 58-77.) This initial set is - through discarding those that are not considered because they are not known and the elimination of other destinations that are not available due to money, time, etc. - quickly turns into (2) *realizable opportunity set*. Since this set is almost always too large, it is reduced to (3) *consideration set*. If this set is still large, additional evaluation is undertaken and the number of destinations is reduced to (4) *choice set*. In this phase, the attributes of each destination are evaluated separately and the destination is evaluated against the expected benefits, which determines the destination's potential for satisfaction. After evaluating the attributes of each destination, (5) *decision set* is formed (*evoked set* by other authors). The size of this decision set is small and usually consists of three or four destinations. The final evaluation of the destinations that are in the *decision set* results in the final selection of the destination.

According to this model, the image of the destination becomes an important component of the selection as soon as the individual makes the decision to travel. Only destinations of which the decision maker is aware (*awareness*) can be included in the *opportunity set*, which assumes that the image of the destination exists in the mind of the decision maker. As more and more destinations are eliminated through the evaluation process, only those destinations that have a strong image for the type of activity that the decision-maker chooses remain for further selection. Thus, the image of the destination can be seen as a "pull" factor, and understanding the mechanism of image formation is crucial for developing the attraction potential of the destination.

Numerous studies indicate that the main forces of image formation are stimulus (informative) and personal factors (Baloglu and McCleary 1999, Beerli and Martin 2004). Stimulus factors include external stimuli, different amount and type of

information sources, which forms the secondary image, and the previous experience of visiting the destination - the primary image. (Phelps 1986). Personal factors include social and psychological factors of the percipient (motivation, socio-demographic characteristics, above all age and education and vacation experience).

The destination image is formed through three different and hierarchically connected structural components: cognitive, affective and conative and plays a key role in the destination selection process. (Gartner 1993, 191-215). Cognitive image represents the understanding of the product in an intellectual way and is derived from facts, and due to the impossibility of trying out the tourist product beforehand, the tourist image is often based more on perception than reality. But as consumer behavior research shows, perception is reality. '*If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences*' – Thomas' theorem (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_theorem). According to other sources, S. Pike, S. Page 2014, p. 215: "*What is defined or perceived by people is real in its consequences*")

The affective component of the image refers to the motives that an individual has for selecting a destination. Motives determine what we want to get, the expected benefits from the object that we consider in the selection process and thus influence its evaluation. This component is activated in the *choice set* phase, the evaluation stage of destination selection, when the attributes of each destination are evaluated separately (after the *consideration set* phase is completed).

The conative component is analogous to behavior because it is the action component. The connection with the previous two components is direct and depends on the image developed during the cognitive and evaluated during the affective phase.

Cognitive image, on the other hand, is formed in different ways. The mental construct formed under the influence of the destination, its marketing efforts, through induced agents, produces an induced image, and the destination image is created organically, from sources that are not directly related to the destination and over which the destination has no control (newspaper articles, books, documentary programs, films, schooling, family and friends, and other unbiased sources) represents an organic image. (Gunn 1972).

Gartner sets the process of image formation as a continuum along which there are separate formative agents (informational sources or stimulus factors in Baloglu and McCleary 1999) that act independently or in some combination to form an image unique to an individual. Here it is worth mentioning the agents in question, without their elaboration:

1. Overt induced I - direct attempts to form an appropriate image, through traditional forms of advertising, TV, radio, billboards, brochures, etc. The person receiving the message clearly identifies the sender of the message.
2. Overt induced II formative image agents include information obtained from tour operators and other organizations that have an interest in the process of making tourist decisions.
3. Covert induced I - use of recognizable spokespeople, celebrities.
4. Covert induced II - the person being influenced is not aware that the promoters of the destination are involved in the development of the projected image. Most often through familiarization trips for tourism journalists.
5. Autonomous agents consist of independently produced newspaper articles, documentaries, feature films, etc., and there are two basic agents: (1) newspapers and (2) popular culture that portrays people and places through films, documentaries, and *non-news* TV programs. Both agents have high credibility and market penetration.
6. Unsolicited organic agents mean information from unsolicited individuals who have either visited a destination or believe they know it.
7. Solicited organic agents - when the destination in the selection process becomes part of the *consideration set*, then information is sought from knowledgeable, well-informed sources, usually friends and relatives. This stage of seeking information is often called *word of mouth*.
8. Organic - At the end of the continuum is the organic formation of the image and it consists of information about the destination acquired through the visit. It has the most credibility because it is based on personal experience.

The selection of an appropriate mix of image-forming agents depends on a number of factors: the amount of money available, the characteristics of the target market, demographic characteristics, timing, the type of image projected and the type of product.

At all stages of the destination selection process, image helps determine which destinations remain for further evaluation and which are eliminated from further consideration, so the image formation process is intertwined with the destination selection process.

The knowledge of formative agents and hierarchical components does not seem to be sufficient for understanding the destination image. The key components of destination image elaborated by Echtner and Ritchie (Echtner and Ritchie 1991 and 1993)

are missing. Destination image, according to the authors, should be viewed through two main components, those that are based on (1) attributes and those that are (2) holistic. Drawing on Martineau's research in retailing (Martineau 1958), the authors state that each of these components contains functional, tangible and psychological or more abstract characteristics. Functional are those that are directly visible or measurable, while psychological characteristics (friendship, atmosphere) cannot be directly measured. Both, however, play a critical role in image formation.

The perception of individual product attributes as well as the total, holistic impression can be based on the functional or psychological characteristics of the product. By crossing these components, we get the perception of individual functional attributes, the perception of individual psychological attributes, the functional holistic image and the psychological holistic image.

The dimensions of the destination image do not end with the 4 mentioned dimensions, because the image can be based on common, general (functional and psychological) features, but also on unique characteristics, events, feelings or aura.

At one end of this continuum is the image, which is made up of characteristics on the basis of which all destinations are usually evaluated and compared, common functional ones, such as price level, type of accommodation, natural attractions and environment, transport infrastructure, climate, etc., and common psychological characteristics such as friendship, security, familiarity, etc.

At the other end of the continuum, the image of a destination can include unique features and events (functional features) or aura (psychological features). Examples of unique features and events are numerous: Brazil is associated with the Amazon and Carnival in Rio, Paris with the Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe, Rome with the Colosseum and the Vatican, the Bavarian village of Oberammergau with the Passion Play, Valencia with La Tomatina. A unique aura is more difficult to build, but a number of destinations differ in their special atmosphere. Around Paris floats the aura of the city of romance, around Nepal an aura of mysticism, around the Vatican of the holy place.

The problems of research and understanding of the destination image are multifaceted. In a review of 262 studies of destination image, published between 1972 and 2007, Pike (Pike 2002 and 2007) indicates that almost half of the studies (129) investigated destination image in isolation, without reference to competing places; that only a few studies were not limited to the conceptualization of image in terms of a list of common attributes, but also investigated holistic impressions; that only 37 researches took into account the travel context (consumers look for different attributes and benefits in different contexts and therefore prefer different destina-

ons for different situations, for example *business, conference or holiday trip*); that most studies focused on cognitive attributes, and that only 6 out of 142 studies showed an explicit interest in affective image, etc.

There is no doubt that the customer buys a holiday exclusively on the basis of symbolic expectations initially created by communication through words, images, sounds... The experience of a holiday is literally constructed in the imagination through the communication of content and values, only partly through mass media, and the creation of mental images becomes strategic business of tourism producers.

However, the fact that a number of destinations, despite the successfully created mental images widely mediated by the mass media and other communication channels, failed to take a more serious position on the world tourist market and to create a favorable and attractive image, indicates that there are some forces that represent an obstruction for the openly and covertly induced agents of image formation, i.e. effective commercial use of mass media in tourist communications.

The media, of course, play an important role in mediating the tourist reality and forming an initial favorable image, but other factors affect the final success, and exposure to them is often more significant than the images created by communications.

The customer buys the promise of a vacation formed by communications (overtly and covertly induced, autonomous, unsolicited and solicited organic agents) without experiencing the product itself, and after the end of the annual vacation, i.e. after the consumption of the product the customer summarizes his impressions and compares them with the promises and expectations, i.e. the projected image by the destination. The vacation experience, the experience with the destination (and also with the product, organization, community, person), comparing promises and expectations with the experience, becomes the key, crucial factor that confirms, strengthens, weakens or destroys the previously formed image. This final impression is what Hankinson calls a complex image, which is the result of "the interaction of the actual experience of visiting the destination with the previously held images" and is the final stage of the continuum that starts with the organic image, goes to the induced one (destination marketing programs aimed at strengthening or changing the existing organic image) and ends with complex image. (Hankinson 2004, 7).

A significant change into the process of forming a destination image is brought about by the entry into the digital era, the turning point of which is the emergence of the possibility of digitally mediated consumer interaction of Internet users, based on the development of Web 2.0. This development of interaction challenged the hierarchical structure of information in which information is broadcast from a few centers

to the masses of recipients and significantly reduced the social power of the mass media in the field of tourism (UNWTO 2009). Now Internet users and recipients of information gain the power to create content, and the development of social media opens up a completely new space in the creation of a destination image. A number of tourist and general social networks (Tripadvisor, Facebook, Instagram, etc.) are changing the way of gaining information and forming opinions about the destination. Those who until then were in a position to only receive information from official sources, begin to create and distribute it, to comment on official, induced information and to independently create informative content. The same means the strengthening of organic versus induced agents in the process of image formation. People increasingly rely on the opinions of others (consumers) and communicate directly, without the need to rely on business intermediaries or official sources, which, among other things, significantly accelerates the formation of impressions about the destination. The possibility of exchanging photos, video content and creating personal stories about destinations contributes to the same.

The key characteristic of social media is the creation of content by users, *user-generated content* that is not created by a professional team of creators/journalists, which characterizes mass media. Already a huge number of content creators and an enormous amount of information that is produced every minute creates communication anarchy and permanently creates a dilemma for all users and consumers regarding the question which source to trust and how to select information from the mass of ungraded information.

The other, often neglected dimension of interactivity refers to the possibility of forming a clear and vivid image of the destination without direct experience with it. Access to multimedia, numerous video contents posted on social networks, official destination sites or company commercial sites and live web video cameras that show the destination in real time enable a virtual visit and a virtual experience of the destination. The creation of virtual tours and their mediation to digital users can significantly contribute to improving the image of each destination. (Govers and Go 2003)

Marketing of tourist destinations, it is important to point out, very rarely starts from scratch. Destinations with a long political history, rich cultural heritage and art scene, strong economy, famous people and export brands, etc. they usually have a strong positive organic image. On the other hand, a long history of economic decline and poverty, political turbulence or cultural backwardness of a country can result in a negative organic image, and such an image cannot be changed by marketing communications alone: "Changing a negative organic image requires a change in the destination product itself" (Hankinson, 12).

That is why (1) the organic image, formed by long-term exposure to information and impressions about the destination, through education, books, films, culture, daily information about the country that is a tourist destination and (2) the experience of the visit, interaction with the destination are the key forces on which depends a strong positive image of the tourist destination.

The image of a place, therefore, in addition to the created media communications and the experience of the visit, is influenced by numerous other factors, which are not under the control of those who manage the place, and they are positive and negative, contemporary and historical:

- newspaper articles,
- movies and books,
- works of art,
- cultural events,
- fashion and design,
- spoken communication (*viva voce*),
- wars and significant historical events (seen in the emitting country),
- export products and services,
- jewels of architecture,
- exceptional natural beauty,
- religion,
- diplomacy,
- government policy,
- international sports triumphs,
- character of national cuisine,
- language and folklore,
- iconic leaders,
- movie and rock stars,
- historical figures, inventors, etc.

Certainly, citizens and potential guests are introduced to the largest number of image-creating factors listed here through mass media. About wars, crime, corruption, sports successes, cultural and artistic achievements, natural beauty, diplomacy, films and film stars, architecture and other things, citizens of foreign countries get to know through the process of education and (their own) domiciled media, but the media do not play an active role here, they do not form value attitudes under the influence and control of the identity bearers. It is more the transmission and distribution of informative content - of course through the optics of that country, which is not free from prejudices and stereotypes - the mediation of what is, the reality of

a country. Especially, because the bearer of the identity is in a completely different, distant country and without real opportunities to control the media in the country where the content is transmitted. Therefore, the influence of the mass media in creating the image of a place or destination in the international framework encounters objective limits set by the nature of tourism and the international order.

Attitudes about the omnipotence of the media in creating an image, on the one hand, find their basis in the character of contemporary culture, which precisely thanks to the commercial existence of the mass media has acquired the character of a mass culture whose basic feature is the homogenization of the cultural product. In order to be a profitable product, it must be standardized and acceptable to the majority of the audience. This commercial need for cost-effective production forces producers to establish the lowest common denominator in content creation, and it corresponds to the recipient of the lowest elementary education. "In search of a means of communication, more universal and simpler than the poorest language, mass culture often turns to the image. Outside of film and television, where it is a natural element, the image competes with words in the press as well." (Kloskovska 1985, 262).

"If once the word was a mediator between people, now it becomes an image, so the whole culture is increasingly understood as the production, exchange, reproduction and consumption of images, which means that the perception and understanding of reality descends to a lower spiritual level, which leads to uniformity, homogenization". (Šušnjić 2014, 406)

The second point of support for the position regarding the omnipotence of the media may be found in mass culture, but in the segment of media culture that, through an industrial process, artificially creates fame through the media. This rapid creation of media stars and celebrities, mostly personalities from the world of entertainment and sports, who are "famous for being famous", with the separation of fame and achievements and the suppression of those persons who were famous for great deeds, is possible to form the impression that the same it can be done so easily with the same techniques with products, organizations, communities, places and destinations.

Here, however, we are talking about the continuous "interest of the media industry to continuously produce new media personalities, whose fame is of an ephemeral character" (Vukadinović 2013, p. 19). The approach that can be achieved with people, the overnight formation of fame and fame on the local or domestic market, is difficult to achieve with products, brands, organizations and destinations on the international market.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of image creation will increasingly attract the attention of the audience as well as professional, business and scientific public. Since with technological and market development, products and services have become more numerous and more similar in their characteristics, and as it is more and more difficult to create products that are physically different, the processes of occupying a place on the market and market competition will turn more and more to people's mind. Brands, not products, have already become the main weapon of market competition and the stars of market communications.

Achieving success in such circumstances is not easy. No matter how much access to the media and its intensive use seems to be the solution to the problem, history shows that the customer, guest, citizen, is not dull and is not ready for "unconditional obedience". Talking positively about yourself and bragging about your qualities every day will not bring success. Talking about oneself, as communication experts warn, is actually the least effective and most expensive method. Mass media, especially in highly developed western markets which are also the most important tourist target markets, are very expensive, breaking through media congestion (*saliency*) and the flood of commercial information is extremely difficult, and the degree of credibility of market communications is usually relatively low. The customer is aware that the information is paid for and highly controlled.

That is why it is important to understand that people's perception of a certain place is formed depending on what is happening in that country, the products of that country, what others say about that country and, lastly, on the way a certain country talks about itself.

Although mass media is an important channel of communication of what a certain brand, place, destination or country is doing, image and reputation are not built by mass media and communications, nor can it be changed by them. The destination must be intriguing, inspiring, innovative, dynamic, full of events and must show internal quality (by which it satisfies the needs of its users), the interaction between the destination and the user must meet expectations, so that the promised becomes and is realized and continuously creates high satisfaction of users, consumers, in order to they could eventually form strong positive impressions. "The way to gain a good reputation, is to endeavor to be what you desire to appear".

The analysis presented in this overview article has its limitations, which arise primarily from the fact that it represents a theoretical research, an overview of the conceptual framework in which the role of the mass media in the formation of the image of

tourist destinations is realized. Future qualitative empirical research in the form of case studies of the role of the mass media in creating the image of specific tourist destinations will make a significant contribution to the illumination of this issue.

Based on the overall analysis, it can be concluded that the aim of this paper has been fulfilled. The complex, multifaceted, relative and dynamic nature of the image has been presented, the need to consider it in connection with other phenomena has been confirmed, as well as the realistically situated position of the mass media in the process of formation and the new position of the consumer, i.e. visitors in the communication brought about by the digital era and social media.

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