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# INNOVATIVE USE OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION TOOLS IN PROMOTING PILGRIMAGE SITES

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## **Abstract**

The submitted paper deals with the religious tourism while using innovative marketing communication tools in promotion. The first chapter presents theoretical background for religious tourism while pointing at its present state in the Slovak Republic. The second chapter brings in the interaction between the marketing communication in the framework of religious tourism while highlighting the importance of innovative marketing communication tools when promoting religious tourism. The third chapter consists of proposals and recommendations for improving the present state of promotion of religious tourism when targeting the young audience.

*Keywords:* religious tourism, pilgrimage sites, innovations, marketing communication

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## **1. Introduction**

Religious tourism belongs to one of the fastest growing segments with potential for further growth. Paying a visit to the sites with a religious character has always played a crucial role for the believers. These are willing to overcome even thousands of kilometres only to worship a particular holy site. A person performs these activities in order to satisfy his/her spiritual needs. Various activities of religious tourism such as religious tours, pilgrimage or ceremonies are one of the possible ways how to do so.

Due to growing competition and higher dynamicity of markets – when the offer exceeds the demand – marketing communication has become a key to success in business. Handling marketing communication represents a competitive advantage how to differentiate the successful from the unsuccessful, which is also applicable for the field of religious tourism.

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## 2. Characteristics of religious sites

Religious tourism is older than the notion of tourism itself. Pilgrimage used to be known and popular in the period of prehistoric religions. The bloom occurred mainly in the Middle Age – however, at present, it is becoming one of the most preferred ways of spending free time. While a decade ago religious tourism was linked only to pilgrimage to holy sites, nowadays this notion refers to a greater number of possibilities for tourism based upon faith [1]. In the expert literature the notion of religious tourism is often interchangeable with that of spiritual tourism. However, Violeta Pușcașu distances herself from that. She emphasises pilgrimage tourism while pointing to the fact that pilgrimage and religious tourism form a so-called ‚holy couple‘ [2]. The majority of experts consider religious tourism as a part of cultural tourism as most of elements and ideas of this form of tourism are reflected in religious tourism.

### 2.1. Religious tourism in the Slovak Republic

The Slovak Republic as a country with a traditionally high degree of religiousness offers a wide choice of remarkable regions and towns – most of them are pilgrimage sites with the Marian tradition marked with worshipping the Holy Virgin. The pilgrimage is mostly concentrated on two parts of the country – in the South-West in Podunajská nížina (*the Danube Basin*) and in the East in Spiš and Šariš regions where the junction between the Roman Catholics and Greek Catholics is located [3]. Nowadays there are more than 55 pilgrimage sites in Slovakia of which 8 belong to the Greek Catholic Church [4]. The most often visited pilgrimage sites are as follows: Marianka, Nitrianska Blatnica – Rotunda of Saint George, Levoča – the Marian Mountain, Litmanová – the Zvir Mountain, Lutina or Šaštín – Stráže. The sites are stated as holy because the Holy Virgin is said to have appeared there or mainly thanks to numerous provable therapeutical recoveries and spiritual exercises and prayers of pilgrims. Pilgrimage is held annually on the occasion of the Marian holidays, mainly in July, August and September. They are also organised regularly on particular holy days, e.g. the Ascension Day of Holy Virgin (15 August) or the Day of Birth of Holy Virgin (8 September). The greatest pilgrimage tradition in Slovakia is held on 15 September, for the commemoration of the Day of Holy Virgin, the patroness saint of Slovakia [4].

Therefore, Slovakia bears great potential for developing religious tourism from the part of the offer but mainly when it comes to primary potential, i.e. localised cultural and historical monuments. The obstacles arise, however, when it comes to implementation and promotion, which is one of the main reasons for failing to develop religious tourism despite such a rich offer of products. Various experts in religious tourism talk about dead potential for growth or even a dropping interest in this form of tourism in the Slovak Republic.

### **3. The interaction between religious tourism and marketing communication**

People see travelling as a source of relax and knowledge. Therefore a marketing message should be simple, comprehensible, original and eye-catching. Based upon experience, we can assume that sightseeing is much more interesting if it provides fun and interactivity to a visitor [5]. However, each visitor has own idea of fun. These ideas may share with others, as well as others sources that derive feelings of happiness and enthusiasm. Moreover, expressions of hapiness and satisfaction of the pleasant moments have many authentic forms of expressions [6]. For marketers it is important to notice any form of expression and respond to by adequate marketing message.

Communication is a key part of tourism. It can be said that communication has positive impact on tourism itself [7]. As the products of religious tourism offered to customers are more or less intangible, changeable, unseparable from the person of a provider, communication is considered as primarily important for all the subjects involved in the process [8]. For marketers it is important to identify the specific target group in various phases of its development, in particular the skills to accept and understand marketing messages, to analyze the possibilities of marketing communication tools, as well as to formulate the basic preconditions of effective marketing communication with identified target group [9]. The aim of marketing communication in the framework of religious tourism can be described as properly describing a product and appealing to the target audience so as it catches attention of a customer [10]. As a result, such a campaign should draw customer's attention to the product and persuade him/her to visit a destination.

These are considered to be the strongest communication tools in religious tourism:

- **direct sale** – sale connected with presentation in tourists information centres as well as at specialised fair trades and exhibitions;
- **advertising** – press adverts, TV and radio commercials, outdoor advertising, internet advertising;
- **sales promotion** – special offers, competitions, discounts, fair trades and exhibitions;
- **PR** – public relations with the media, sponsorship;
- **direct marketing** – sending out promotion leaflets on tours and visits to chosen destinations. In connection with on-line marketing we specialise in sending customised newsletters to e-mail addresses of clients representing special target audience.

#### ***3.1. Using innovative marketing communication tools in religious tourism***

Religious tourism is one of the fields suitable for using unconventional approaches to marketing communication.

**Viral marketing** is based on the ability to persuade customers to spread the news about a destination which is worth visiting by word of mouth. The Knights of Malta is one of the monks' orders located in Slovakia. Its members make an annual pilgrimage to Lourdes in order to worship Holy Virgin and look after the handicapped and the suffering. Their web page contains various videos which are furthermore shared on socialising websites amongst thousands of members of the Order throughout the world. The large number of members along with the emotions those videos usually generate pave the way for other members to join the Order and pay visit to the most favourite pilgrimage sites within Europe.

It is obvious that in Slovakia there are a lot of outstanding pilgrimage sites while some of them are also promoted by this marketing communication tool. It is worth mentioning mainly the Pilgrimage centre of Basilica Minor in Ľutina. The video which is published on the web page targets the young audience and it promotes the activities of young believers since 1986 until now. The video is being shared on socialising websites by the young. When taking in consideration huge popularity of socialising websites among the youngsters, it can be assumed that this message will target the audience it is addressed to. We can also highlight the Project Katarínka which is under way at the ruins of the same name in Dechtice. In the video message the young talk about what connects them with Katarínka in a captivating and interesting way. The whole video is funny and amusing, which even emphasises its potential to be spread among the youngsters.

Particular attention should be paid to **event marketing** in religious tourism. The untraditional environment contributes to generating a stronger experience arising out of the event. In Slovakia we can mention the event called *By special train to Lourdes – Comfortable and safe*. The event is divided into seven days while the programme includes the train journey, refreshments, accomodation in Lourdes and a pilgrimage tour. The event is extremely successful and as a result, it can only positively influence the image of the destination itself.

Spreading the information about the event through the media increases public awareness and an interest in visiting not only a particular event but also a pilgrimage site linked herewith.

### **3.2. Proposal of marketing activities to increase an interest in religious tourism among the youngsters**

The following part of our paper deals with the proposals for implementing additional marketing activities aimed at the target audience – namely children, teenagers and university students. It is highly important for children to get to know the history in a playful way and through the language they are familiar with. Thus we decided to make use of the techniques which are mostly short-term, but easy to remember and containing mnemotechnic tools. Our proposal presents the memory game where the pair consists of the letters in the Latin

alphabet and the Cyrillic. The main aim of this activity is to get the children familiar with a basic construction element of the language which had been brought to our territory by Saints Cyril and Method. The cards of the memory game show the letter in the two types of the alphabet (Figure 1). The children should memorise them in a playful way in order to develop their memory.



**Figure 1.** Proposal of the memory game.

The second proposal presents a simplified model of each of the monuments as different stages of the journey. The particular architecture of the monuments ensures easy remembering and construction of the models. As construction material we can use wooden blocks or LEGO (Figure 2). The building site would have a floor plan or a construction manual. On each construction site the children would collect the stickers which they would change for a treat or a reward at the end of the journey, e.g. a book.



**Figure 2.** The Church Katarinka in Dechtice and wooden construction blocks.

One of the ways how to get the children interested in the Old Slovak language is by teaching them poems and prayers written in the Old Slovak (Figure 3). The aim of this activity is expand their vocabulary through the texts they are familiar with. We came up with two educational forms. In the first one the children would learn one verse of a particular poem or a prayer in every stage of their journey and at the end they would know the whole poem or prayer. In the second case, the children would learn a short poem or a prayer in every stage of the journey.

The teenagers' group consists of the pupils/students at primary and secondary schools aged 14-18. For this group we prepared the concept of an innovative interactive theatre performance (Figure 4). The proposal presents a 45-minutes' performance showing e.g. Saints Cyril and Method or any other

historic events linked herewith. The performance is set to be innovative as the participants will be able to take part herein through the application Sli.do designed for communication among the people and the participants in the performance.

Otče naš, iže esi na nebesĥā,  
da svētitsĥ imĥ Tvoĥ,  
da priiĥdetā carstvie Tvoĥ,  
da budetā volĥ Tvoĥ, jakō na nebesi i na zemli.  
Hlĥbā naš nasuštĥnyj dažd' namā dnes':  
i ōstavī namā dolgī našĥ,  
jakože i my ōstavlĥemā dolžnikōmā našymā:  
i ne vvedī naš vo iškūshenie,  
no izbavī naš ōt lukavagō.

Figure 3. Prayers of 'Holy Father' in the Old Slovak.

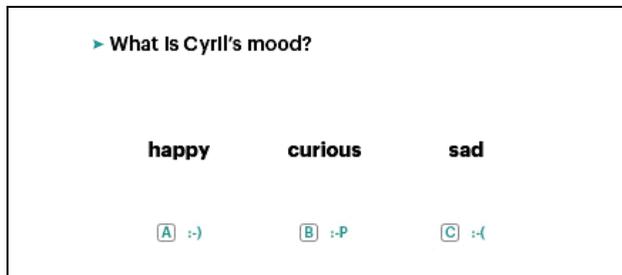


Figure 4. Examples of an interactive entry to a theatre performance.



Figure 5. Visualisation of augmented reality from Layar App.

University students are also part of this target group. For these we suggest coming up with an innovative and interactive way how to obtain information about each stage of the pilgrimage on a holy site. At the beginning, all the participants would be given special bracelets with a GPS function recording all the data about the location of every participant, his/her actual speed and vital functions. In every stage, the visitors would pass through an interactive digital quiz thanks to their smartphones combining digital technologies and augmented reality. The participants would obtain the points for each successful completion of the quiz. In order to take part in the competition, all the students are required to download a free application Layar supporting augmented reality (Figure 5).

#### **4. Conclusion**

Getting to know one's own culture and history is important for every generation. As the young aged 6 to 14 represent a heterogeneous group, it is extremely difficult to catch their attention despite the fact that the present generation is more apt to take in a great deal of information. Our proposals mostly present those activities which seem to be natural to them. They will not feel being pushed to studying as historic events will be presented to them in an amusing and funny way. At present teenagers are known for their excellent command of information technologies. In most cases, they own a smartphone or a notebook at least. As teenagers are familiar with information technologies and the digital environment, we proposed an additional marketing activity linking a traditional teambuilding activity with the techniques of the modern digital environment. University students are also well-educated in information technologies. As they use their smartphones, notebooks, tablets or any other modern gadgets on a daily basis, our proposals for additional marketing activities were adapted to their wants and needs.

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