

COMMUNICATION MODEL OF THE CAMPAIGN »MEĐIMURJE DAJE VIŠE«, WITH THE AIM OF REDUCING THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF THE COVID 19 VIRUS PANDEMIC ON THE TOURIST RESULTS OF MEĐIMURJE COUNTY

KOMUNIKACIJSKI MODEL KAMPANJE »MEĐIMURJE DAJE VIŠE«, S CILJEM SMANJENJA NEGATIVNIH UTJECAJA PANDEMIJE COVID 19 VIRUSA NA TURISTIČKE REZULTATE MEĐIMURSKE ŽUPANIJE

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SUMMARY

The paper deals with the communication model and the results achieved by the campaign »Međimurje daje više«, (»Međimurje Gives More«) led with the aim of reducing the negative economic consequences of the COVID 19 pandemic on the tourist results of Međimurje County from 15.6.2020 to 15.9.2020.

The starting point is the fact that the outbreak of a pandemic plays an important role in the social habits of tourists and results in changes in their needs, but also the capabilities of providers and users of tourist services / offers.

The paper identifies and analyzes the factors of the persuasive communication model that will positively influence the sustainable tourism and recovery of Međimurje as a tourist destination through nudge tools.

The paper is based on descriptive and developmental research, descriptive methods of synthesis and analysis, comparisons, and the collected data are systematized and compared and qualitatively and quantitatively presented in tables and graphs.

The central point of the paper is the thesis that the use of new, alternative communication models and tools is crucial for the crisis management, as well as professionalism of employees at all levels of the tourism industry.

Key words: sustainable tourism, Međimurje, COVID 19, communication models, communication tools

Ključne riječi: održivi turizam, Međimurje, pandemija, COVID 19, destinacije, katastrofe i krize, persuazija, nudge, komunikacijski modeli, komunikacijski alati

INTRODUCTION

UNWTO (2014) defines tourism as “a social, cultural and economic phenomenon that involves the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business / professional purposes”. The logical question is whether tourism is just a movement, a change of place of residence for a specific usually shorter period of time?

Denti (2012:11) considers tourism “in itself a cultural, intercultural dialogue process whose participants are travellers / tourists who explore new areas, eager to meet and discover new worlds, new languages and new discourses, and are also promoters of tourist destinations they visit, discovering different aspects and patterns of their cultural identity.” Tourism is, therefore, more than a mere entertainment or professional activity; it can be seen as representing and revealing the cultural identity of a country, region or a city.

At the time of the pandemic¹ of the COVID 19 disease caused by the coronavirus, everything stopped for a few months, and the biggest disturbances were recorded in the tourism sector.

Methods to bring back tourists or attract new ones to a destination in the inter and post pandemic period require changes in approach, ad hoc solutions through modern communication tools.

“Promotional texts, such as tourism texts, are an example of variability (presented in promoted destinations) that systematize the tourism industry in advance and, in this context, as pre-packaged displays, are transformed into objects of tourism consumption” (Francesconi 2007: 6).

Međimurje was the first tourist destination in the Republic of Croatia that recognized and accepted the fact already in March that a prompt action is needed once the crisis caused by the coronavirus passes, but also in the period of relaxation of preventive measures, albeit not in the same way as it was before the crisis. Regardless of the fact that it was a good way, as evidenced by numerous awards² at Croatian and European level and the continuous increase in the number of arrivals and overnight stays, new communication techniques and tools are needed corresponding to the psychological, social and economic factors.

The paper researches the persuasive communication model and the effects on sustainable tourism and economic recovery in the inter and post ‘corona’ period. The following hypothesis H1 was set: *“The application of persuasive communication techniques and tools through the campaign “Međimurje gives more” resulted with the same or better tourist results in the period between 15.6. and 15. 9.2020 compared to the same period in the previous year, regardless of the crisis caused by COVID 19.»*

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of the analysis, the data from the e Visitor system about the number of arrivals and overnight stays by the Tourist Board of Međimurje County for the periods between 15 June and 15 September 2019 and 2020 were used as primary, and books, scientific and professional articles and online sources were used as secondary sources. Collected data were systematized and compared using descriptive methods of synthesis and analysis as well as comparisons in order to provide an overview of the impact of new communication techniques and tools in the promotional campaign “Međimurje gives more” on the overall tourist results in Međimurje County during the COVID-19 crisis.

The paper applies descriptive and developmental research. The data are quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed with the Microsoft Office Excel and are presented in tables and graphs.

¹ gr. πανδημία: all the people, the spread of a disease over large areas, i.e. to several countries, the whole continent or the whole world. (Croatian encyclopaedia, online edition. Lexicographic Institute Miroslav Krleža, 2020. Accessed January 2, 2021. <<http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=46397>>)

² Međimurje is the only destination in Europe that has won three awards European Destination of Excellence (2007, 2016, 2019, Golden Flower of Europe with a silver sign 2010, The Swiss Tourism Award 2016, Golden INTERSTAS 2017, Best Continental Tourism Destination 2019 (source TZMŽ)

CAMPAIGN “MEDJIMURJE GIVES MORE” - PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION MODEL AND THE EFFECTS ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM, ENDING INCOME DROP IN TOURISM IN THE INTER AND POST CORONA PERIOD

Environment and destination profile during the COVID-19 pandemic

On March 12 2020, the World Health Organization officially declared the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus a pandemic.³ Travel was limited and / or completely suspended by individual government decisions, recommendations, but also due to the unknown nature of the virus and fear, so people stopped travelling, especially as tourists.

For almost a month, Međimurje County successfully resisted the outbreak of the COVID 19 virus, despite the large number of daily and weekly labour migrations of residents to Zagreb, Slovenia and Austria, where a much higher number of cases was recorded in early March 2020. From 25.2.2020 to 2.7. 2020, there were only 11 people infected with COVID 19 virus and there were no deaths.

Until 15.6.2020 Međimurje had been without new COVID-19 cases for 61 days and a “corona free” county for 35 days. Also, opening of the borders announced by the Decision of the National Headquarter of the Civil Protection came into force on June 15. (Headquarters of the Civil Protection of the Republic of Croatia).

The experience of recovery of the tourism sector after the pandemic caused by the SARS virus was also analyzed.

The post-pandemic SARS experiences in the tourism sector showed a rapid recovery. Beijing was one of the heavily infected areas and the last city in mainland China removed from the list of areas with local transmission (June 24, 2003). Occupancy fell to just 10% in May and then returned to 52% in July, 65% in August and 70% in September (STR.com).

Also, according to the survey “What are we looking forward to about life after the pandemic?” conducted from 24 to 30 March 2020 in the UK, after only seven days of quarantine, travel was one of the ten things in the narrowest focus of the respondents.

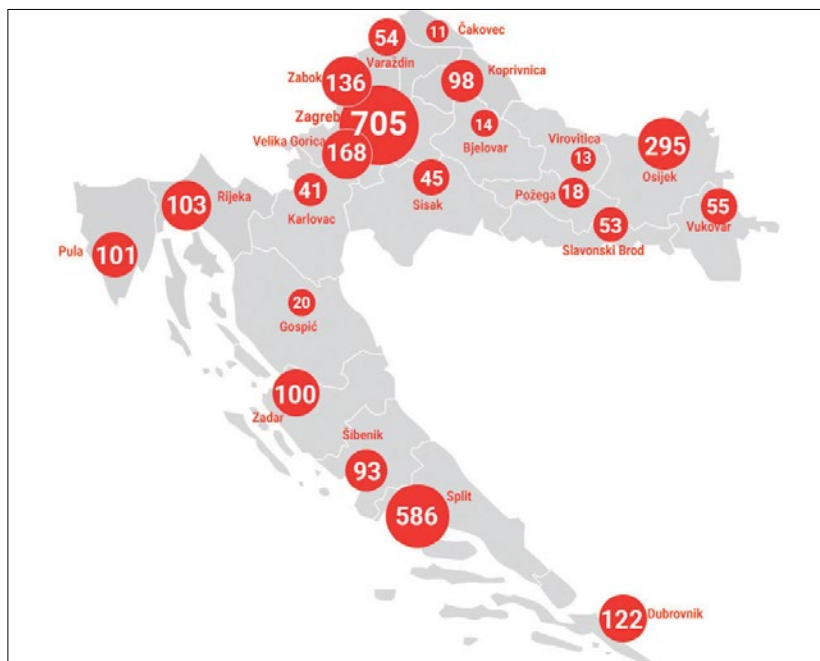


Photo 1: Map of the Republic of Croatia with the number of patients with COVID 19 virus from 25.2. to 2.7.2020

Source: index.hr 2.7.2020.

³ Statement by the Director-General of the World Health Organization <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-March-2020>, accessed 23.1.2021.

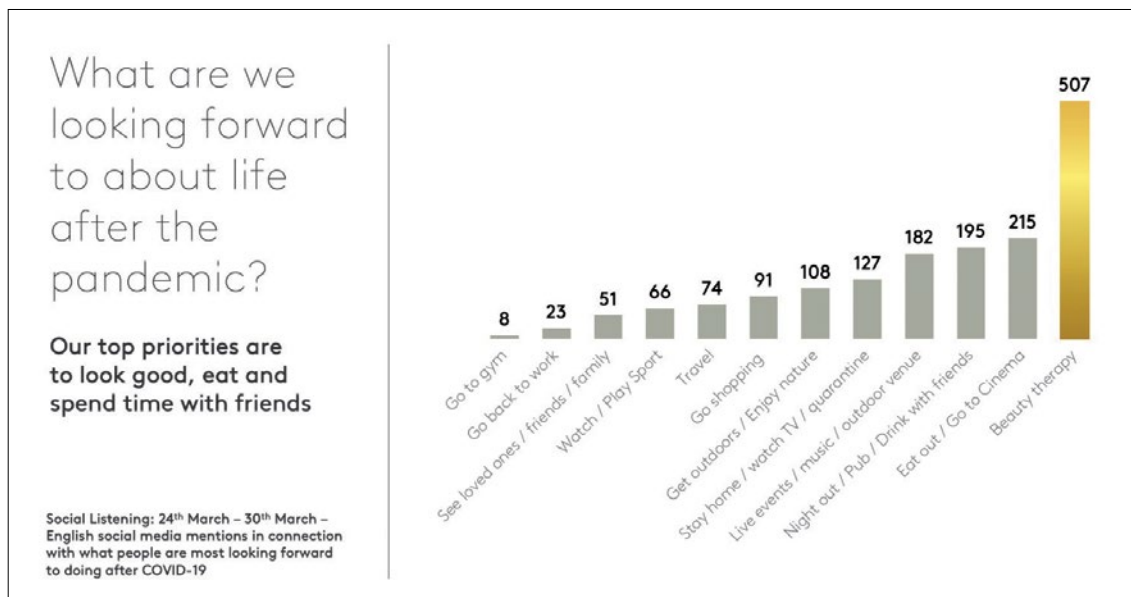


Photo 2: “What are we looking forward to about life after the pandemic?”

Source: Kantar.com

Just after a week of quarantine, it was obvious that people were thinking about their next vacation. Many just wanted to go somewhere or just book without a special destination in mind.

Based on these and similar studies, the generally present psychological factor of the “desire to escape”, the promotional campaign “Međimurje gives more” was completely designed in March, during the lock-down.

Table 1: destination profile

| DESTINATION PROFILE | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| DESTINATION | THE MEĐIMURJE COUNTY | | |
| COUNTRY | Republic of Croatia | | |
| COUNTRY BORDER | The Međimurje County borders with the Republic of Slovenia in the north and west, with Hungary in the east, with Varaždin County in the south, and with the Koprivnica-Križevci County in the southeast. The boundaries of the county are mainly determined by the natural flows of the Mura River in the north and east and the Drava River in the south. In the west, the natural border with the Republic of Slovenia is not so clearly defined, and it is partially formed by hills in Međimurje. | | |
| THE LOCATION | FEATURES | | |
| Position | Distance from the capital | The main forms of tourism and popular activities | Top five of the most popular attractions (natural environment, cultural attractions) |
| Međimurje County is located in the far northwest of the Republic of Croatia and geographically and geotraffically forms part of Central Europe | 90 km FROM Zagreb | Health tourism Active holidays MICE tourism Enogastronomy | 1. St. Martin Spa 2. Međimurje wine road 3. Old Town Zrinski 4. Mill on the Mura river 5. Regional Nature Park Mura-Drava |

Source: Međimurje county Tourist board

Campaign settings »Medjimurje daje više«

Campaign planning was approached extremely rationally. The state of existing capacities, potential offers, financial possibilities were analyzed, with an emphasis on the importance of revenue management strategies in order to stabilize the business in the long run. It was assessed that the reduction of prices, halting all projects in progress with the aim of reducing costs is only favorable in the short term because it does not generate new demand and new revenues, and then it is difficult to return to old prices or increase existing ones after the crisis. The data obtained from the survey through the ETIS⁴ system for 2017 and 2018, which is available only in Međimurje County in the Republic of Croatia, were also used. The research showed that “the responsibility of managing a tourist destination as well as the financing system entirely depends on the destination itself, specifically politics, which puts the management of a tourist destination aiming for sustainable tourism and sustainable development in the hands of the local authorities and stakeholders.” (Haluga et al., 2019: 1)

The same research shows that Međimurje County, as a small destination, bases its development on sustainable tourism, has a good and recognizable image with an emphasis on the optimal ratio of quality of service and high preservation of natural and social resources, which was the basis of the campaign “Međimurje daje više”. Considering the total lock-down in which economic losses are an indisputable fact, the idea was to offer a bonus based on consumption, instead of competing with lower prices, and thus stimulate potential guests to decide for their vacation in Međimurje.

The bonus is conceived in such a way that each guest receives one coupon for every HRK 250.00 spent from an accommodation provider, catering (restaurant, cafe, family farm...) or other commercial tourist service provider. The partner who provides the service hands over a coupon upon service delivery (arrival at the accommodation facility, paying the bill at a catering facility). With the coupon received from the partner, the guest can visit one of the public tourist facilities, or use a tourist service provided free of charge by public or commercial partners in the project.

The conditions and manner of using the coupon are published on the website specially created for the campaign [www.visitmedimurje.com /](http://www.visitmedimurje.com/), which was designed to accompany the promotional campaign, and on the leaflet that was distributed with the coupon.

The campaign involved 50 tourist and cultural institutions and tourism entrepreneurs who provided guests with more than 100 different free experiences. During the campaign, new partners were involved and the offer was enriched.

A prize game was also organized. All used coupons (with guest information) were submitted by the partners to the County Tourist Board as the project holder, which organized a prize draw at the end of the campaign, and special prizes were awarded in the form of a return visit to Međimurje. Detailed sweepstakes rules and prize value were also posted on the campaign website.

The promotion of the campaign was carried out by the Tourist Board of Međimurje County in the national and regional media on the Croatian and Slovenian markets. The campaign lasted from 15.6. to 15.9.2020. All costs related to the organization, implementation, production and distribution of promotional materials, website development and advertising were paid by the Tourist Board of Međimurje County with the co-financing by Sveti Martin Spa.

The aim of the project was to achieve the largest possible number of arrivals and overnight stays of guests in Međimurje in the rest of the year, to extend the average length of stay of guests in Međimurje, to encourage visitor consumption by guests who chose Međimurje for vacation. At the same time, it was meant to encourage the consumption by the local population in catering and other tourist facilities, minimize the reduction of prices of tourist services, and, consequently, the decline in the overall quality of the destination and keep as much employment as possible in tourism and catering companies.

⁴ ETIS European Tourism Indicator System - designed as a process managed at the local level and designed to monitor, manage and strengthen the sustainability of a tourist destination. It was developed on the basis of the conclusions of previous initiatives of the indicator system and is adapted in the following way to the feedback obtained from field tests. It was launched by the European Commission in 2013

The media campaign began on the first day of the opening of borders on June 15 2020 with a press conference and a Facebook campaign, broadcasting videos lasting 7 sec. on N1 and RTL television and digital promotion.

Persuasive elements of the campaign »Međimurje daje više« and nudge tools

Settings of the campaign show a very serious and thoughtful approach to the promotional campaign. The fact is that Međimurje has been developing and growing into a very desirable continental tourist destination for many years. The situation caused by the COVID 19 virus was new and required new ways of reacting and a completely different approach from the aspect of communication with potential tourists / guests. The English dictionary Macmillan (2007: 350) defines a crisis as “an urgent, difficult or dangerous situation” and a catastrophe as “something very bad that happens and causes great damage or kills a lot of people” (Macmillan, 2007: 416). In order to avoid a catastrophe when it comes to the tourism sector, price reductions were most often used as a standard, the simplest and the fastest response to the new situation, which would result with even bigger problems after the crisis finishes, and a destination will need to invest much more additional effort and resources to restore the image and prices from the time before the crisis. A better approach, which can be seen in the campaign “Međimurje daje više” is not to damage the acquired destination image, but to highlight and promote it, with new communication techniques and tools, focus on the domestic market and potential domestic tourists because they know about the destination and Međimurje County Tourist board does not need to make efforts and invest extra funds in the presentation of the destination, and use nudge tools for a little “push” for potential tourists to visit the destination.

The crisis caused by the COVID 19 virus has affected people's attitudes about health, illness, safety, and life in general. According to Katz (1960: 163) “Attitudes can be divided into three parts: the emotional component, the cognitive component, and the behavioral component. Although each position consists of these three components, they are not equally represented, and individual positions are more often based on one primary component. Accordingly, persuasion may be directed at one of the components of the attitude, provided that the change of one component will lead to a shift in the other component.” Due to the uncertainty everyone felt, there is a consequent feeling of insecurity, which is primarily an emotionally conditioned attitude. According to Aronson, Wilson, and Akert (2005), emotional attitudes can arise from affect, sensory or aesthetic reactions, classical or operant conditioning that lead to an object's preference or aversion to it. Attitudes that are primarily cognitively based are thus based on beliefs about the characteristics of the object of the attitude. According to Fazio (1989: 154), the strength of an attitude is determined through the arousal of an attitude, which is defined as the strength of the association between an object and the evaluation of that object, and is measured by the speed of expressing oneself about the question or object of the attitude.

In persuasion, the creation and change of attitude are not categorically distinguished, but are observed on a continuum between the absence of attitude and a strong attitude (Petty, Wegener, 1998). Therefore, the persuasive technique used in the promotional campaign “Međimurje daje više”, in circumstances caused by the COVID 19 virus was a good choice. Perloff (2003) defined persuasion as a symbolic process in which a communicator tries to persuade others to change their attitudes or behavior about an object through the transmission of a message in an atmosphere of free choice.

When the possibility of a free choice is given, all that remains is to encourage a little, to push the one for whom the message is intended. Međimurje has been doing this for the last ten years, but nudge as a tool is unfortunately insufficiently known in our country. The Cambridge dictionary defines “nudge”⁵ as gently, lightly pushing something or someone to gain their attention or to attract and encourage someone to a particular activity. Thaler and Sunstein (2008: 6) define the term nudge as any aspect of the architecture of choice that changes people's behavior in a predictable way without prohibiting any options (decisions) or significant changes in economic incentives.

⁵ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/nudge> (02.01.2021)

Content analysis of the campaign »Međimurje daje više« (slogan, visuals, bonus coupon)

The initial assumption is that the content of the campaign or, in this case, promotional material is not only text (language) and photos (sent image), but also a set of culturally and functionally dependent ways, which contribute to the overall meaning and work as a complete communication system.

The analysis will be based on the assumptions that the texts and images in the sent message are interconnected, and since they are intended for domestic tourists, they represent intracultural communication from the product design to the development of promotional tourism products for domestic audiences. It will examine whether the selected model has obtained a successful result.

Halliday (1985a: 4) defines ways as a set of systems of meaning that include language but also artistic expressions such as painting, sculpture, music, dance and other forms, or “forms of exchange”. Therefore, the study of meaning is the study of this set of interconnected texts and images used in the promotional campaign “Međimurje daje više”.

This metafunctional framework was adopted and expanded by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) and applied to a wide range of semiotic systems (or modes), including images, music, and sounds. The communication theory arising from this application is defined as multimodality.

Tourism is an area where a combination of verbal and visual communication is necessary since the goal is to attract and ultimately convince a potential tourist to choose a particular destination by sending an appropriate message in the phase before the tourist decides to travel.

According to Halliday (2004) the processes that take place in a verbal group can be of different types. Depending on what they describe, they can be: material, mental, verbal, behavioral, existential, and relational.

Based on these settings, the campaign “Međimurje gives more” will be analyzed. Material, mental and behavioral processes are analyzed for the reason that there is no verbal (oral message), and also the campaign is not correlated with the existential and relational process and will not be analyzed.

Material process - describes the processes of doing, concrete actions. Factors are the actor (executor of the action), the process (performance of the action), the user (participant who benefits from the procedure), the goal (participant to whom the procedure is directed) and the circumstance (where, when, how and why the processes occur).

Table 2: Material process

| <i>Međimurje</i> | <i>to you (unwritten)</i> | <i>gives</i> | <i>more</i> |
|---|---------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| actor and in a certain way circumstance | user | process and goal | process and goal |

Source: authors

In this case, Međimurje is both an actor and a circumstance. Even though it is not written, the message is clearly aimed at the user. The phrase “gives more” means process and the goal.

Conversely, processes that encode the meaning of a thought or feeling are defined as mental processes. All mental processes have two participants, who are labeled as Sensor (participant who perceives, thinks and feels) and Phenomenon (what is perceived, thought and felt).

Table 3: Mental process

| <i>Međimurje</i> | <i>to you (unwritten)</i> | <i>gives</i> | <i>more</i> |
|------------------|---|----------------|----------------|
| Phenomenon | Sensor (participant who perceives, thinks, feels) | mental process | mental process |

Source: authors

The third type of process is defined as behavioral: it refers to the type of action that the person to whom the message is sent must consciously experience. Most behaviors have only one participant. The behavior and participant to which the process is directed is a Phenomenon.

Table 4: Behavioral process

| <i>Međimurje</i> | <i>gives more</i> | <i>to you (unwritten)</i> |
|------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Phenomenon | behavioral process | Senser |

Source: authors



Photo 3: campaign visual

Source: Međimurje County Tourist Board

“*Storytelling*” - is one of the most important components of modern communication approaches in the tourism sector for the purpose of promotion, but also to differentiate products and / or services in tourism. Storytelling is also a persuasive technique that can inspire and ultimately convince a person to choose a particular product, service or in this case destination with a well-designed and told story without creating pressure.

The Tourist Board of Međimurje County has been telling stories for more than ten years, but it is also continuously upgrading the story of Međimurje as an ideal vacation spot, as evidenced by numerous awards and recognitions. Not only destination managers but also tourist workers, without whom there is no successful storytelling, have a significant role in this process.

Visual content is an important component of this campaign as well, since only a story with visual elements creates a complete impression by means of visuals, photos and videos, providing the opportunity to read and see what is specifically offered. There is a well-known proverb that pictures speak louder than words.

From the perspective of the narrative process, the visual of the campaign “Međimurje daje više” suggests movement, relaxation, refers to rest and fun by applying invisible vectors consisting of young men on bicycles. It is possible to perceive the processes that are realized by them. The actual picture of the environment can help contextualize and give a better perception of the environment offered to potential tourists for vacation. The image activates the affective responses of pleasure in the figurative sense that, staying in Međimurje, visitors can optimally combine relaxation, fun and recreation, regain strength, feel the harmony of nature, bring joy back to life.

Finally, “Međimurje daje više” - is entirely a persuasive message by which the communicator offers (gives) more, without specifying what exactly, in an atmosphere of a completely free choice. The message is also specific and can be received consciously in its entirety. The Tourist Board of Međimurje County is a reliable source that with its authority and already established positive perception of Međimurje as a developed part of Croatia, well-connected and thus more easily accessible, quiet, green,

evokes interest and has all the predispositions to attract attention and trust of potential tourists. The promotional material uses the recognizable logo of the Tourist Board of Međimurje County (italic stylized letters), which also indicates the destination (Međimurje). In the message, Međimurje gives more, the word *gives* is highlighted, thus immediately attracting attention, as well as the phrase “gives more” which is written on a red background.

The message itself is short, clear and the Tourist Board of Međimurje County should definitely keep it in future promotional campaigns / activities. It can be without additional bonuses, in the form of coupons used in the campaign “Međimurje daje više”. Međimurje as a destination can be presented as a destination of continental tourism which gives more - whether in the form of content, beauty and preservation of the environment, accommodation facilities, eno and gastronomic offer...

Finally, both websites (the campaign page and the Međimurje County Tourist Board) through which the campaign was monitored, allow users to easily obtain the necessary information about the destination, content, offers and attractions. The websites are interactive and well organized. The content on the websites has been successfully grouped and linked for navigation. There are various user interface components that help visitors to find information and encourage them to take desirable actions.

Navigation feels like an invisible hand that helps users navigate the site resulting in a good flow of information within the domain, allowing the tourist to be well informed about topics of their particular interest. The data is clearly arranged and it is possible to get the impression that the website is a “one-stop-shop” and no further visit to another website is required.

Campaign »Međimurje daje više« in the media

The campaign “Međimurje daje više” was well received in all media (TV, radio, portals, social networks). According to the press clipping of the Tourist Board of Međimurje County (Appendix 1) with 63 announcements / news, the campaign itself was followed and all announcements were positively connoted.

A Facebook campaign had the largest range with 528,161 views, 223,216 unique views and 8256 unique clicks.

Web campaign from 15.6. - 15.7. 2020 records a total of 11,203 visits, 10,951 unique visits, 23,075 page views. Visits are recorded from 45 countries (from Croatia 10,494, Germany 187, Slovenia 96, Austria 81, USA 8). There are less than 50 visits from other countries, and the duration of the visit is between 0.30 - 4.30 min on average.

One mega board and one billboard were placed at the border crossings at the entrance to Croatia from Slovenia and Hungary.

There was also a TV campaign on N1 and RTL television, a 7-second video, and according to data obtained from the Međimurje County Tourist Board, the reach was more than a million viewers.

In conclusion, there was a great interest for the campaign “Međimurje daje više”, which was highly positively evaluated by journalists and the profession, as the news was also published on portals related to the tourism sector (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, turizam.hr portal, etc.).

RESEARCH

Results achieved by the campaign “Međimurje gives more”

This is a quantitative study of the effects of the promotional campaign “Međimurje gives more” during the crisis caused by the COVID 19 virus, when there is a decline in arrivals, overnight stays and tourist spending even in Croatian coastal destinations.

The subject of the research is the results of the campaign “Međimurje gives more” which was conducted from 15.6. to 15.9.2020 with the aim of reducing the negative impact of the COVID 19 virus pandemic on the tourist results of Međimurje County.

The main goal of the research is to obtain reliable, current and representative, qualitative and quantitative information on the possibilities of new communication techniques and tools in tourism promotion. That is, whether and to what extent a modern promotional campaign can influence the improvement of results during crises, in the observed case of the COVID 19 virus pandemic?

The results of the research provide a basis for future monitoring of the effects of tourism policy and marketing activities of the Tourist Board of Međimurje County, but also a basis for monitoring the sustainable development of tourism in Croatia. Given the fact that this is a study conducted according to comparable methods, on comparable samples, one of the main objectives of the study is the future continuous monitoring of trends in domestic tourism, which were neglected in most destinations, and during the crisis caused by COVID 19 virus proved to be an important segment of guests who deserve special attention in future promotional campaigns and activities in tourism. The objectives of the research are to determine the effects of the promotional campaign “Međimurje gives more” on stopping the trend of price reduction, layoffs in tourism, and out of board consumption.

Hypothesis H1 was set: The campaign “Međimurje daje više” resulted in the same or better tourist results in the period between 15.6. to 15.9.2020 compared to the same period in the previous year 2019 regardless of the crisis caused by COVID 19 virus disease.

Four auxiliary hypotheses were also set:

H1.1. The campaign “Međimurje daje više” achieved the same or higher number of arrivals and overnight stays of domestic tourists compared to the same period in the previous year 2019

H1.2. The campaign “Međimurje daje više” generated tourist consumption of guests who chose Međimurje as a holiday destination

H1.3. The “Međimurje daje više” campaign minimized or completely stopped price reductions in order to maintain the quality of the destination.

H 1.4. The campaign “Međimurje daje više” contributed to employment in the tourism sector.

Arrivals and overnight stays in the period between 15.6.2020 and 15.9.2020

The campaign “Međimurje gives more” was aimed primarily at domestic guests given the circumstances caused by the COVID 19 virus. At this level, the goal of the campaign was to achieve at least the same number of arrivals compared to the same period in 2019.

Table 5: Number of foreign and domestic tourists from June 15 to September 15, 2019 and 2020

| TOURISTS | 2019 | 2020 | %2019 | % 2020 |
|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Domestic | 8.715 | 9.567 | 32,71 | 52,04 |
| Foreign | 18.085 | 8.805 | 67,29 | 47,96 |
| Total | 26.800 | 18.327 | 100,00 | 100,00 |

Source: eVisitor, Međimurje County Tourist Board

Table 6: Overnight stays from 15 June to 15 September 2019 and 2020

| Duration of tourist stay (days) | 2019 | 2020 |
|---------------------------------|------|------|
| Domestic | 2,40 | 2,44 |
| Foreign | 3,03 | 3,30 |

Source: Medimurje County Tourist Board/ e Visitor

As expected, the number of arrivals and overnight stays of foreign tourists has decreased, but at the same time the duration of their stay in the destination has increased. It can be assumed that the reason is that tourists are less inclined to change their destination due to the circumstances of the COVID 19 virus.

Also, it is possible to confirm the auxiliary hypothesis H1.1. The campaign “Međimurje daje više” achieved the same or higher number of arrivals and overnight stays of domestic tourists compared to the same period in the previous year 2019.

Compared to the same period in 2019, the number of domestic tourists in the destination increased, the number of domestic tourist overnight stays increased and the duration of stay of domestic tourists in the destination increased.

From all the above, it is clear that the campaign “Međimurje daje više” in terms of the number of arrivals and overnight stays of domestic tourists, and given the circumstances caused by COVID 19 virus when most destinations recorded a decline in arrivals and overnight stays, was extremely successful.

Employment in the period between 15.6.2020 and 15.9.2020

In June, Međimurje County had a registered unemployment rate of 5.8%, i.e. 2,529 persons (CES PU Čakovec, Annex 2). For the purposes of this paper, the data on leaving the unemployment register in the field of hospitality (accommodation and catering) during the months of June, July and August, i.e. during the campaign “Međimurje gives more” were observed.

Table 7: Exit from the unemployment register in the period between 15.6.2020 and 15.9.2020

| MONTH | June 2020. | July 2020. | August 2020. |
|--|------------|------------|--------------|
| TOTAL number of persons leaving the records | 334 | 346 | 280 |
| ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD SERVICE ACTIVITY (number of persons leaving the records and percentage) | 52 (21,4%) | 59 (22,4%) | 24 (11,7%) |

Source: Croatian Employment Service, Čakovec Regional Office

It is evident from the obtained data that, according to the unemployment records of the CES, Čakovec regional office, in the three observed months a total of 135 persons left the record in the field of hospitality (accommodation and catering), and it is possible to confirm the auxiliary hypothesis H1.4. The “Međimurje daje više” campaign contributed to employment in the tourism sector.

Consumption and prices in the destination in the period from 15.6. to 15.9. 2020.

One of the basic settings of the campaign “Međimurje daje više” was to offer a bonus based on the realized consumption, instead of competing with lower prices, and thus stimulate potential guests to decide for a vacation in Međimurje.

Table 8: Prices of accommodation in Golf and spa resort “Sveti Martin”

| YEAR | 2019 | 2020 |
|--|--------|--------|
| HOTEL SPA GOLFER (standard room) | 608 kn | 710 kn |
| APARTMENTS REGINA (standard apartment) | 600 kn | 888 kn |

Source: Golf and spa resort “Sveti Martin”

Lifeclass spa Sveti Martin is a generator of tourism in Međimurje County. From the compared price lists for 2019 and 2020, it is clear that the prices of accommodation in the hotel “Golfer” and apartments “Regina” in 2020 slightly increased despite the crisis caused by COVID 19 virus, so we can confirm the auxiliary hypothesis H1.3. The “Međimurje daje više” campaign minimized or completely stopped price reduction in order to maintain the quality of the destination.

Regarding the consumption itself, according to the data of the Tourist Board of Međimurje County, 3.75 million kuna of tourist consumption was generated in Međimurje in just thirty days of the promotional campaign “Međimurje daje više”.

“Specifically, if we know that the campaign is measurable, because guests receive one coupon for every 250 kuna spent, we can conclude that in the first month, tourist spending of 3.75 million kuna was realized in Međimurje. Which is the exclusive and measurable result of the campaign “Međimurje daje više!”. Also, the consumption is even higher, because every guest who used the coupon certainly gen-

erated additional consumption, such as visiting a winery and buying wine, but this cannot be further measured.” (Rikelj, 2020).

According to the Međimurje County Tourist Board, a total of 18,450 coupons were used.

Table 9: Used coupons by facilities:

| The name of the facility where the coupon was used | Number of used coupons | GUESTS | |
|--|------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| | | foreign | domestic |
| Potrți kotač | 110 | 20 | 90 |
| PG Geler | 460 | 230 | 230 |
| ČK bazeni | 190 | 10 | 180 |
| Apartmani Polanec | 60 | 0 | 60 |
| Međimurski dvori | 450 | 310 | 270 |
| OPG Hažić | 780 | 69 | 90 |
| Toplice Sveti Martin | 13.390 | 670 | 12.720 |
| Apartmani Lapaž | 290 | 0 | 290 |
| Zadrevec | 70 | 0 | 70 |
| TZO Nedelišće | 220 | 0 | 220 |
| Muzej Međimurja | 200 | 0 | 200 |
| TZO Sveti Martin | 1.240 | 150 | 1.090 |
| OPG Dvanajščak Kozol | 60 | 0 | 60 |
| Centar Med dvemi vodami | 170 | 0 | 170 |
| Restoran Terbotz | 700 | 30 | 670 |
| Hotel Castellum | 60 | 0 | 60 |
| | 18.450 | 1.489 | 16.470 |

Source: Međimurje County Tourist Board

It is clear that the tourist consumption in the amount of HRK 4,612,500.00 was realized with coupons only, which does not represent the total realized consumption, since it is to be assumed that tourists bought some of the products having sampled them, or after using the free service, additionally paid for one of the other services offered.

It is also possible to confirm the auxiliary hypothesis H1.2. The campaign “Međimurje daje više” generated tourist consumption of guests who chose Međimurje as a holiday destination.

Discussion

All collected and analyzed data show that the campaign “Međimurje daje više”, by means of modern persuasive communication techniques and nudge tools in the form of coupons, gave good results: increase in the number of domestic tourists, increase in overnight stays and stays of domestic tourists, tourist consumption and employment in the tourism sector.

It is possible to confirm the set hypothesis H1: The campaign “Međimurje daje više” resulted with the same or better tourist results in the period between 15.6. and 15.9.2020 compared to the same period of the previous year 2019 regardless of the crisis caused by COVID 19 disease.

Also, it is clear that it is necessary to plan and react in a timely manner, systematically analyze and, when it comes to crisis situations, to predict the course of events in a post-crisis situation. The basic goal of the “Međimurje daje više” campaign should be especially emphasized - offering additional content in the form of bonus coupons gave a number of excellent results as opposed to competing with lower prices, which is difficult to reverse later on as is the perception of the destination.

Despite clear evidence of the need to introduce new communication models, techniques and tools, the possibility of a complete transformation of the tourism system with sustainable tourism as the only real and certain future of tourism requires global transformation given the circumstances caused by COVID 19 virus.

CONCLUSION

Tourism, as one of the most endangered branches of the economy, in the post-pandemic period requires changes in approach, which leads to the necessary transformation, which consequently strengthens modern communication paradigms and tools for implementing promotional campaigns.

The crisis caused by the COVID 19 virus pandemic must be mitigated by new answers to old questions, a new “ad hoc” approach that must be effective in encouraging visitors to return or choose a destination for the first time.

Through its tourist community and regional government, Međimurje was the first destination in the Republic of Croatia which predicted the situation in a timely manner. Already at the beginning of March during the corona crisis, concrete products began to be prepared which will be offered to tourists through new and unused or rarely used communication approaches and tools once the crisis ends. The campaign “Međimurje daje više” was ready and set for the first day of the relaxation of preventive measures, i.e. the opening of the state border for potential tourists from the European Union.

Crisis management included a reactive response in the tourism of Međimurje, in contrast to the state of proactive anticipation found in other destinations. The systematic contribution of human resource management has been identified as a way to assist tourism companies in preparing for and resolving crises.

It should be noted that the impact on the perception of tourism is reflected in subjective factors that arise under the influence of objective circumstances of socio-economic and / or political circumstances. The crisis is not a challenge, the crisis is a problem that needs to be solved. The campaign “Međimurje daje više” can certainly be a good example, a model of how the crisis can be turned into a new opportunity to promote and further develop the destination as a whole by choosing appropriate promotional techniques and tools to face up to the consequences of the crisis, in this case COVID 19 virus.

It is possible to avoid losses and achieve satisfactory tourist results by timely quality assessment of changes that consequently follow each and every tourism sector during the crisis, by taking appropriate measures, in this case by choosing promotional persuasive techniques and nudge tools, by asymmetry of perception of potential losses and their non-acceptance.

In conclusion, in order to achieve all of the above, the key factor of success and good results in tourism under both normal and extraordinary circumstances are definitely professionals able to predict, react, plan and act, and then success is inevitably achieved.

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SAŽETAK

Rad se tematizira komunikacijski model i rezultate postignute kampanjom »Međimurje daje više« vođene s ciljem smanjenja negativnih ekonomskih posljedica pandemije bolesti COVID 19 virusa na turističke rezultate Međimurske županije od 15.6.2020. do 15.9.2020.

Problematiziraju se i transformativne mogućnosti turizma zbog pandemije, uvođenjem persuativnog modela te nudge komunikacijskog alata, do sada rijetko korištenog na području turizma.

Predviđanje, priprema i djelovanje s ciljem smanjenja posljedica krize izazvane COVID 19 virusom važan su izazov s kojim su suočene turističke destinacije u cijelom svijetu, a male su destinacije, poglavito ako je riječ o kontinentalnim destinacijama, s obzirom na ograničene financijske i ljudske kapacitete najugroženije.

Polazišna osnova je činjenica da izbijanje bolesti pandemijskih razmjera igra važnu ulogu u društvenim i socijalnim navikama turista te rezultira promjenama potreba, ali i mogućnosti pružatelja i korisnika turističkih usluga/ponude.

Temeljem dostupne literature u radu su identificirani i analizirani čimbenici persuazivnog komunikacijskog modela koji će kroz nudge alat pozitivno utjecati na održivi turizam i oporavak Međimurja kao turističkog odredišta koje, ako postignu očekivane rezultate kroz promatrano razdoblje od tri mjeseca, mogu dovesti do preusmjeravanja turizma te pridonijeti politikama održivog turizma primjenjivim i u drugim turističkim destinacijama.

Rad je temeljen na deskriptivnom i razvojnom istraživanju, odnosno deskriptivnim metodama sinteze i analize, usporedbama, a prikupljeni podaci su sistematizirani i komparirani te kvalitativno i kvantitativno prikazani tabelarno i grafički.

Središnja točka rada je teza kako je korištenje novih, alternativnih komunikacijskih modela i alata ključno za sanaciju i upravljanje kriznom situacijom u turizmu, a stručnost zaposlenika na svim razinama turističke industrije važna komponenta pripreme i upravljanja destinacijom za vrijeme i nakon krize izazvane bolešću COVID 19 virusa.

