

COMPONENT OF MARKETING IN AUTHENTIC ROMANIAN RURAL TOURISM

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Abstract

The article addresses the importance of marketing in authentic rural Romanian tourism, highlighting the close connection between local traditions and fundamental principles of tourism marketing. The article emphasizes the importance of providing authentic and quality experiences in traditional Romanian households, paying attention to details such as architecture, interior design, gastronomy, traditions, and local customs. To attract tourists to these authentic places, various promotional channels are employed, including specialized websites, social media, local partnerships, and themed events. The role of modern technology is highlighted in facilitating the tourist experience and collecting feedback, contributing to the continuous improvement of services and their promotion. Additionally, the article underscores the importance of active involvement of locals in the development and promotion of rural tourism, which can lead to the creation of authentic tourist products and sustainable community development. In conclusion, the essential role of marketing in promoting and developing authentic rural tourism is emphasized, with its positive impact on raising awareness of the concept of authenticity in rural areas, attracting tourists, strengthening brand image, and fostering economic growth in rural communities. Through a well-conceived and implemented marketing strategy, the resources and tourism potential of rural areas are leveraged, offering tourists authentic and memorable experiences.

Key words: rural tourism marketing, authentic, marketing components

INTRODUCTION

Relevant in the context of sustainable development and tourism promotion, authentic Romanian culture leaves its mark on rural tourism marketing [19, 9, 11]. Anticipating to tourists seeking authentic experiences, unspoiled nature, local traditions, and genuine interaction with local communities, this domain marketing contributes to the sustainable development of rural areas and promotes Romania's cultural and natural heritage [16, 12]. This paper reviews elements of authentic Romanian culture represented by architecture, interior design, local gastronomy, customs and tradition closely tied to the basic principles of this specific sector of tourism marketing, highlighting their close connection and impact. In the context of a lack of coherence in the application of the principles of marketing and effective promotion of Romanian rural tourism, as it appears from the

official documents, [17] of the lack of a public statistical reports regarding the topic addressed, the clarification of the theoretical concepts in relation to the Romanian authenticity, represents in our opinion a solid starting point for future research and development.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Although it represents an area of permanent interest, marketing in rural tourism being addressed in local specialized literature through specific scientific works, the connection between the criteria of authenticity in rural tourism and the component elements of marketing in this sector is highlighted occasionally. This paper aim is to analyse and focus on identifying and satisfying the needs of tourists interested in authentic experiences, shaping an ideal customer avatar that includes a passion for traditions, the curiosity of an explorer, an appreciation for local

gastronomy, community support, and a love for natural landscapes. We will further analyze the importance of authentic Romanian culture in (1) building relationships with customers, (2) understanding the tourist market and potential clients, (3) developing products offered in the tourism circuit, (4) promotion channels, and (5) receiving feedback.

(1). Understanding the tourist seeking authentic Romanian experiences is crucial for shaping the customer avatar and establishing an optimal relationship. The ideal customer avatar represents a symbolic image of a person who perfectly aligns with the products or services offered in this field [7] (Figure 1).



Fig. 1. Authentic rural space – product components
Source: own processing according to Dobre et al. [7].

Let's explore some characteristics of this avatar:

Tradition Lover: Tourists who appreciate authentic Romanian culture are passionate about traditions, customs, and local culture. They seek to experience the authenticity of Romanian villages.

Curious Explorer: This ideal customer is open to discovering new places, interacting with locals, and understanding their way of life. They seek authentic and unique experiences.

Local Cuisine Enthusiast: Tourists appreciate traditional Romanian cuisine, are interested in tasting local dishes, participating in traditional meals, and learning about the ingredients used, cooking in households alongside hosts.

Nature Lover: Tourists appreciate the beauty of nature and are drawn to the picturesque

landscapes of Romanian villages. They seek peace, clean air, and landscapes untouched by human influence.

Community Supporter: The ideal customer understands the importance of local involvement, supports artisans, buys local products, and contributes to the sustainable development of rural communities.

In conclusion, the customer avatar appreciating authentic Romanian culture is someone passionate about authentic experiences, local culture, and the beauty of rural Romanian villages.

(2) In satisfying the needs and desires of tourists with all the concerns mentioned above, the host will meet them with a positive attitude, quality services throughout their stay, good customer service, attempting to connect them to all components of authentic Romanian culture starting from architecture,

traditional interior design, gastronomy, traditions, and customs, all stemming from a perennial cultural heritage perfectly reflected in the rural household. The customer represents the purpose of the entrepreneur's activity, and the experience thus obtained will be authentic, with the customer feeling part of rural life.

This tourist experience will represent the unique selling point (specificity, originality, individuality) highlighted through promotion channels [1].

Authentic Romanian culture develops in a tourist market characterized by several parameters: tourist profile (related to age, income, education, ethnicity, religion, living environment), biogeographic area (landscape, biodiversity), traditional activities specific to the rural destination (crafts, sale of local natural or manufactured products), travel trends (increased demand for cultural, ecological, adventure tourism), infrastructure and facilities, competition, and growth opportunities [18]. Understanding these aspects helps the entrepreneur continuously monitor and evaluate rural tourism performance, allowing for strategy adaptation based on market changes and customer feedback.

(3) In 1971, Grubb and Stern defined the concept of a product as congruent with the consumer's personal perception, who actually dominates this domain. In this context, a tourist educated in authenticity aspects in rural tourism will respond to product offers [10].

We can enumerate and exemplify some of the authentic tourist products: "From Wine Cellar to Wine Cellar", "Picking Plums in the Orchard", "On Horseback or On Foot on the Hill", "Carpentry in Grandpa's Workshop", "Wooden Flowers in Grandpa's Workshop" (original ideas from author). These types of products offer a note of originality, authenticity, and attractiveness, and can be found in rural tourism, especially at the level of traditional peasant households. The diversity of these products is ensured by the difference between the ethnographic areas of the country regions, each with its own attributes favorable to the development of quality, sustainable rural tourism. In addition

to the concrete elements ensuring absolute tourist quality necessary for hosting (services for which the tourist pays at the assumed tariff category level, they benefit from equipment and facilities in perfect working order, and last but not least, they must be protected from the hygiene, health, life, and personal property points of view). Furthermore to these absolutely necessary principles of modern tourism, the tourist benefits from specific aspects of authentic Romanian culture (rooms built according to recognized traditional methods as offering clean, airy, and comfortable spaces, room design is specific to each area, etc.). The staff interacting with the tourist must have a proper attitude and appropriate attire [2].

(4) To meet the needs of tourists and attract them to authentic Romanian households, entrepreneurs rely on using educational marketing in a mix of promotion channels. Thus, ethnocultural biographies will be developed and exhibited through traditional channels: TV, radio, press - especially through articles and shows - but also through social networks (Facebook, podcasts, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, QR codes, Pinterest); own websites. The variety of existing promotion channels, especially through the development of the online environment, offers a vast promotion framework and, with constant efforts from the entrepreneur, but also through a well-defined strategy, they can reach the above-defined target audience. Here are some promotion channels that, used together, can ensure the entrepreneur's visibility:

Specialized websites: Creating a website dedicated to rural tourism in Romania can be a crucial step. It should provide detailed information about destinations, available experiences, accommodation facilities, and outdoor activities.

Social media: Using social platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube to promote destinations and tourist experiences is essential in the digital age. Regular posts, beautiful images, and interaction with the community can increase awareness and engagement.

Local partnerships: Collaborating with local authorities, tour operators, local producers,

and other businesses in the area can help mutual promotion and create attractive tourist packages.

Participation in tourism fairs: Presence at tourism fairs and exhibitions, both domestically and internationally, can draw attention to rural tourism in Romania and generate potential partnerships or sales.

Blogging and influencer marketing: Collaborating with travel bloggers and influencers with a relevant audience can generate visibility and credibility for rural destinations and experiences.

SEO (Search Engine Optimization): Ensuring that the website and associated content are optimized for search engines can increase online visibility and attract organic traffic.

Publications and specialty magazines: Publishing articles and advertisements in travel magazines and specialty publications can help draw attention to authentic Romanian rural tourism.

Themed tours and excursions: Organizing themed tours and excursions in rural areas, focusing on traditional and authentic experiences, can attract tourists eager to discover local culture and traditions.

Local events and festivals: Participating in and promoting local events and cultural or gastronomic festivals can draw attention to rural tourism and offer tourists opportunities to experience local authenticity.

Reviews and testimonials: Gathering and promoting positive reviews from previous tourists can strengthen confidence in rural destinations and tourist experiences.

The mix and match of these channels according to the specifics of each destination and target audience can contribute to the efficient promotion of authentic Romanian rural tourism [14].

(5) Recent studies demonstrate the beneficial influence of smartphone usage on the tourist experience [6]. Modern technology facilitates the collection and analysis of various types of information with great accuracy, allowing for spatial and temporal knowledge of tourist activities [4]. Entrepreneurs can benefit from a better understanding of social media's

influence on consumer perception and how this perception influences tourists' behavior and choices [5]. An important component of marketing is the feedback provided by tourists. The level of tourist satisfaction is easily transmitted using modern technology. Collecting tourists' reactions contributes implicitly to better promotion of the services offered. Parameters such as the perception of the value of the tourist product [3, 15,], service quality [13], tourist-personnel relationship, and tourist-tourist relationship characterize the customer satisfaction level [8].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This paper highlights the importance of authentic Romanian culture in rural tourism marketing by emphasizing the connections between marketing principles and authentic Romanian elements. Each component of rural tourism marketing finds applicability in authentic rural tourism. The transition between traditional and modern facilitated by technology benefits both tourists and bearers of authentic Romanian culture (Figure 2).

There is a constant concern for the growth and development of tourism, as it appears from the National Strategy of Romania for the Development of Tourism 2023-2035, in terms of the marketing component, the aspects are being developed [17].

It can be noted the lack of various institutional instruments, at government level, for the collection and analysis of statistical data necessary for a relevant market analysis, for example surveys on the level of satisfaction of tourists, as well as instruments for monitoring and evaluating the results and effectiveness of marketing instruments and promotion [17].

Statistical studies regarding the impact of marketing in the field of rural tourism were not identified through the analysis of public databases at the national level.

Development direction is crucial for assisting research-intensive activities in the field of tourism marketing, carried out by higher education institutions and competent centers.



Fig. 2 .Marketing in rural tourism main components
Source: own processing.

These activities enable the creation and implementation of the instruments required for market studies (authenticity in marketing integrated parameters) that analyze tourist flows, visitor behavior patterns, segmentation of the market, and adaptation of customer attraction strategies.

We have demonstrated that rural tourism relies on authentic experiences, linked to traditions, customs, and the lifestyle of local communities.

Authenticity is a key factor in attracting tourists and creating a positive image of rural destinations. Promoting regional cultural diversity can attract tourists interested in authentic and unique experiences.

Marketing in rural tourism can educate tourists about the locals' way of life, traditions, and their impact on the community. Thus, tourists can become more aware and respectful of rural environments. Active involvement of locals in the development and promotion of rural tourism is essential. This can lead to the creation of authentic tourist products and the sustainable development of communities.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, marketing plays an essential role in promoting and developing authentic

rural tourism, contributing to raising awareness of authenticity in rural areas, attracting tourists, strengthening brand image, and boosting economic growth in rural communities.

Although it is easy to intuit the impact of this concept in the development of rural tourism, further research is needed through specific statistical validation tools to be able to monitor various market indicators, to provide an objective image of tourism activity focused on authentic local elements: landscape, regional/national cultural heritage.

Through a well-conceived and implemented marketing strategy, the resources and tourism potential of rural areas can be exploited, offering tourists authentic and memorable experiences.

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