

MARKETING ALBANIA THROUGH FOREIGN SOCIAL MEDIA

Irena SKENDO

Foreign Languages Department, University of Vlora, Albania

Abstract: *This paper seeks to study the status of the Albania's promotion through foreign social media a new country regarding tourist relations but old as far as a nation, culture and traditions or one of the oldest people in the Eastern Balkans. Its aim is to analyze the current situation of Albania being promoted worldwide via social networking but not only, its cultural values, traditions, sportive activities and more. This research paper will also draw conclusions that help to know and understand this type of tourism promotion. Moreover, there will also be some research into these websites and concrete examples will be brought concerning the travelers reactions and their expectations towards this country. Nevertheless, research will also consist of the impact and reaction this phenomenon is having on the Albanian society and the people themselves. The methodology that will be utilized is that of descriptive and comparative. A number of conclusions will be drawn at the end of this research paper so that to demonstrate this phenomenon's outcomes into the society. This research is proposed to be conducted through a content analysis and description of some foreign social sites advertising Albania in many European and Mediterranean counties using English as means of communication.*

Keywords: *cultural values; Albania; tourism; the English language; foreign media*

1. INTRODUCTION

Travelling has always helped people improve, enhance or use these skills in order to understand particular behavior, enter into relations, gain cultural knowledge and why not adopt. A new form of all these movement has been transformed into tourism. Albania is facing such a phenomenon at a large scale only in the 20th century because it has been somehow unknown to the world accounting for this not only the geographical position but mainly the communist regime ruling and isolating Albania for fifty years. Nevertheless, leaving back this grey period and welcoming people from all over the world visiting and seeing Albania has completely altered people's beliefs, thoughts, stereotypes, perceptions. Thus, contributing to the country's economy, its further development and to its process of being integrated into the European Union. It is worth mentioning here the English language which is the main means of communication among Albanians and foreigners, a language which is spreading at substantial rate throughout all institutions in Albania and becoming a lingua Franca here. Sometimes foreigners experience some cultural shock and they make efforts to learn some of the symbols and rituals of the new environment such as words to use, how to greet people, when to

bestow presents etc. Therefore, these social networks have somehow sorted out the dilemma.

In a way, the visitor in a foreign culture returns to the mental state of an infant in which the simplest things must be learned over again. This experience usually leads to feelings of distress, helplessness and hostility toward the new environment. The technology of the internet has played a crucial role towards this phenomenon, serving as a precious source for people's movements and insights of the other countries, assisting them in choosing the proper place or getting acquainted with the new environment. With the quick proliferation and popularity of social networks, information or videos fly in time. Social networks have substantially helped Albania being advertised to the world not only as a country but also bearing its values and traditions.

This paper will outline a range of examples and experiences of visitors shared through social networks and will also analyze its impact.

2. NEW MEDIA AND GLOBALISATION

"The world has shrunk into a much smaller interactive field"; this what Chen and Zhang (2010) have stated in their studies. This phenomenon has come as a result of technology and its huge steps in the development of social

media as well as contributing to globalization. Nowadays, multicultural encounters have been multiplied at a fast pace due to the advances in travel and communication technology. Possessing intercultural and communication skills assist people deriving from diverse backgrounds in achieving successful discussions and conversations as well as avoid misunderstandings.

If we ask people to define social media, numerous explanations and definitions come up based on people's experience or their relation to the media. In 2009 Safko and Brake in their publication defined social media as an online world where people interact with each other through comments, posting, liking or sharing. Globalization is part of our daily life affecting life, language, food, lifestyle, even social behaviours. The technological advancement and in particular the Internet have strengthened and united the relation or connection between social media and globalization.

3. BENEFITS FOR THE DOMESTIC COUNTRY

In order to determine the impact these social media have on the promotion of Albania as a whole and specifically its cultural values as well as the reaction of viewers and whether there has been any significant rise in tourism in the country, this research paper will focus on the below listed objectives: (1) The impact foreign social sites have in the promotion of Albania as a new democratic country towards European Union; (2) The identification of the benefits for the domestic country; (3) The language used and its spread in relation to other countries of the world.

In this research paper a question has been risen on whether foreign social media are a fruitful and successful way in promoting Albania as a country to the world. In order to address this point, there are some sites demonstrating concrete examples of this phenomenon. Besides some obstacles, I faced during this research paper is the lack of prior research studies on the topic. Secondly, there is limited access to reliable data or figures on the benefits this type of promotion had brought to Albania, be that economic, governmental or even territorial. Finally, the right choice on the official websites taken as samples in this paper.

4. SURFING FOREIGN SITES

4.1 Must Do Travels is a registered seller of travel in California, Washington, Hawaii and Florida founded on October 15th 2016. Its official

facebook page is Must Do Travels with more than 8.345.315 fans and the largest community of travel enthusiasts from around the world. Looking at it, you encounter posts of places and countries around the world, even some never seen before. Among them you spot Albania posted on August 22nd 2018 describing it with the following words "Spectacular" with 3.1M views and 3.1 comments (Hysi *et al.*, 2015). The comments provide quite useful and interesting information regarding the country and its cities by recommending it to the people worldwide. Most of them are marveled by what it offers and describe it as a low budget holiday.



Fig.1 Pictures from Must Do Travels

4.2 Another foreign website which devotes a whole article to Albania promoting it widely is **Culture trip**, a global hyper-growth startup operating in travel, media and entertainment with 7,161,336 followers on facebook. The article accompanied my pictures and videos was updated by Feride Yalav-Heckerth 31st October 2017. At first sight while visiting the site you encounter the following lines:

Currently becoming one of the world's most sought-after travel destinations, Albania is growing fast to accommodate visitors but also staying true to its strong rural culture. From beautiful nature to the more modern urban attractions, there's so much to discover (Yalav-Heckerth, 2017).

As we see here the language used is English becoming the main means of communication in Albania as well as spreading at a high speed throughout the country. What strikes your eye is not only the pictures of the crystal sea waters or the mountains but it makes reference to some aspect of lifestyle. By introducing the sheep, people understand that they many Albanian families take care of their needs through their own garden and livestock which means that rural culture still dominates. It is also worth mentioning that the article is not just confined to tourism but it also deepens into Albanian people and their traits. Describing them as friendly and hospitable

Albanians are a very happy people who are very fond of visitors. So if you ever do get lost, don't be afraid to ask for help; there is always someone who speaks a little English who will be happy to guide you in the right direction (Yalav-Heckerroth, 2017).

Moreover, Albania's history and cultural heritage does not stay apart. Some of its most ancient cities reveal its most beautiful architecture carrying cultural and historical values.



Fig.2 Pictures from Culture Trip

4.3 National Geographic Traveller a worldwide website ranks Albania in Top 21 Best Destinations to visit. While searching into its networks I came across a u-tube video where Albania is being promoted depicting its coastal, mountainous and historical beauties. The video has 89.872 views and 149 comments, all referring to the untouched treasures awaiting to be seen and appreciated by foreigners.



Fig.3 Picture from National Geographic Traveller

5. ALBANIA AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

Albania is being promoted by international media as the next best tourist destination. All the articles and posts about Albania besides the tourism potential also highlights the quality-price ratio. Official data from the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) confirmed that the number of tourists from the European and worldwide target market has increased. Thus, the number of international tourists that visited Albania in 2013 was 3.255.98, in 2014 3.672.591, in 2015 4.131.242, in 2016 4.735.511 and finally in 2017 was 5.117.700 (INSTAT, 2017).

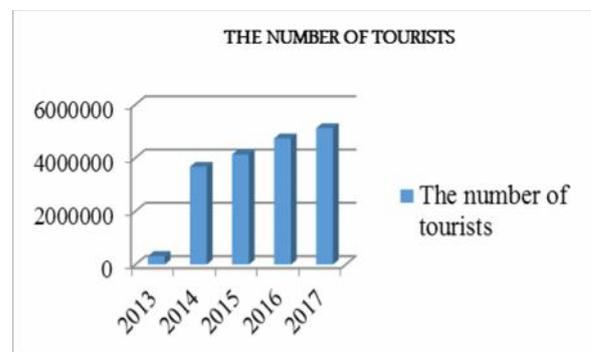


Fig.4 The number of tourists in Albania (2013-2017), apud INSTAT (2017)

In the meantime, figures show an increased number of visitors from England, Poland, Germany, France, and Sweden. The number of tourists from

Ukraine during 2016 increased by 111 percent, visitors from Sweden increased by 63 percent, Norwegian by 33 percent, Bulgarian by 42 percent, Polish by 30 percent, and Croatian by 22 percent.

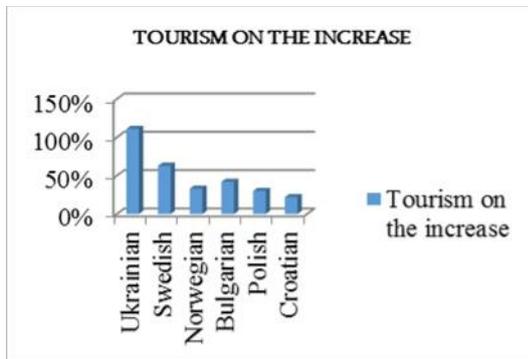


Fig.5 Tourism on the increase, *apud* INSTAT (2017)

The rising number of the foreign visitors in Albania has contributed to many benefits for the tourist communities. Bars, cafes and restaurants have blossomed as a result of tourism and the interaction with tourists could cause a sense of cultural pride and open new windows to the world for the locals. Some interesting finding that is also worth involves the discovery of the locals' history and traditions and an insight in the real values while such promotion initiates.

6. CONCLUSIONS

With the rise of technology and its spread in each corner of the world, the proliferation of information has been made possible with just one click. Now, observed even from the above research it is easier than ever before to be acquainted even with the most unknown, unfamiliar or distant place on the planet in few seconds. Taking into consideration the country being discussed in this paper, we see the numerous benefits Albania has gained by being advertised and recommended by the most prominent and prestigious sites in the world. Firstly, its economy has had a significant rise with the coming of tourists entering the country. Secondly, the Albanian culture covers a great part in their articles something which has made tourists visit it and make its values tangible. Hospitality, friendliness, helpfulness, kindness are some the qualities this nation is characterized by. Moreover, ruins, ancient cities some protected by UNESCO, thousand year castles dominate in these foreign networks creating a link between the present people and the past. Thirdly, it is worth mentioning the diverse sports this new country offers ranging

from winter to summer ones offering tourists the opportunity to experience adrenaline, energy and thrill. Finally, such world with diverse backgrounds, religions and languages, as a result of this encounter is quite explicit. In some parts of the world, people find it difficult and complex to cohabitate and tolerate one's behavior or manners. However, the great travels and movements of people have facilitated such encounters, making it easier for people to understand each other and why not avoid misunderstanding.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Burns, P. (2004). Introduction: Tourism and Social Identities. *Tourism, Culture and Communication*. 5, 1-2.
2. Chen, G.M. & Zhang, K. (2010). New media and cultural identity in the global society. In R. Taiwo (ed.), *Handbook of Research on Discourse Behavior and Digital Communication: Language Structures and Social Interactions*. Hershey, PA> Idea Group Inc. 801-815.
3. Hysi, Vjollca; Gorica, Klodiana & Luzi, Sokol. (2015). Social Media: Opening New Doors for the Domestic Tourism Industry in Albania. *Acta Universitatis Danubius. (Economica)*. Vol.11. No.2. 168-178.
4. Instituti I Statistikave (INSTAT). (2017). Turizmi në Shifra, 2013-2017. *INSTAT* [online]. URL: <http://www.instat.gov.al/al/temat/industria-tregtia-dhe-sh%3%A%20Brbimet/turizmi/publikimet/2018/njoftim-p%3%A%20Br-media-turizmi-n%3%A%20shifra-2013-2017/> [accessed March 2019].
5. Safko, L. & Brake, D. (2009). *The Social Media Bible – Tactics, Tools & Strategies for Business Success*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
6. Yalav-Heckerth, Feride. (2017). The 8 Most Beautiful Places in The Balkans. *Culture Trip* [online]. URL: <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/bulgaria/articles/the-8-most-romantic-places-in-the-balkans/> [accessed October 2017].
7. ***. (2012). What is Social Media Marketing? *Brick Marketing* [online]. URL: <http://www.brickmarketing.com/what-is-social-marketing.htm> [accessed March 2019].
8. ***. (2018). Albania is simply spectacular! *Must Do Travel* [video, online] URL: <https://www.facebook.com/mustdotravel/vide-os/spectacular-albania/2105388763055767/> [accessed March 2019].