

Main channels of regional image making on the Internet

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Abstract. The article describes the problem of territorial image making. The authors investigate ways of territorial image making available in modern information society. Official online outposts like sites of administrations and regional leaders, online media, blogs, regional subject's pages in social networks are analysed as main channels of regional image making. Considering channels of territorial image making on the Internet the authors come to conclusion about web-based character of a territorial image that is formed by absolutely different subjects.

[Lashova S.N., Zykova N.A. **Main channels of regional image making on the Internet.** *Life Sci J* 2014;11(9s):77-80] (ISSN:1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 14

Keywords: regional image, internet-technology, image making channels, web-based character of an image

Introduction

Currently one of the most effective ways of improving image in Russia, as many experts think, is forming a positive image of Russian regions. Certainly, a positive image is important for a territorial subject. Effective regional image politics allow it to achieve many goals focused on regional development: investments attraction, extension of the market for selling regional products, entering the international market, federal budget allocation, etc. Therefore, investigation of positive territorial image making is the object of interest at this time.

Material and Research Methodology

Problems of territorial marketing are described in works of following scientists: M. Oborin, A. Plotnikov, E. Vladimirsky [1] (studied positioning of therapeutic resort complex of the Perm region), B. Müller, B. Kocher, & A. Crettaz [2], J.N. Kapferer [3], M. L. Santos-Vijande, A. B. del Río-Lanza, L. Suárez-Álvarez, & A.M. Díaz-Martín [4].

First of all it is necessary to give the definition of "image". There are many definitions of this term. D.Marconi thinks that a territorial image is a persistent image of a region in public conscience [5,p.89]. The state's image, according to D.P. Gavra, is a set of opinions about the state, including irrational opinion, based on stereotypes and biases [6, p. 92–93]. From our point of view, a successful definition of a regional image is given by Y.V.Taranova, who described a regional image as "a set of symbolically expressed relatively persistent emotional, rational and irrational opinions about peculiarity and specific features in public groups' conscience" [7, p.196].

We highly appreciate D.P.Gavra's statement that a regional image is forming during communication process/flow, which represents a complex of purposeful and spontaneous messages from different sources. Therefore, it is very important

(it should be taken into account during image making), that a regional image integrates spontaneous and purposefully formed opinions about a region. Image success largely depends on the balance of spontaneous and official components. Official sources in a greater degree include information activity of governmental regional actors; in a smaller degree information activity of other regions including competitors and allies; information activity of non-governmental actors (businessmen, social organization, etc.); spontaneous sources are region inhabitants' activity, tourists, Internet users - Web-wave members [8, p. 10].

Certain factors influence on the region's image making and its positioning. A.A. Osetrova offered the concept of "absolute factors of regional image making" [9]. Concepts of "objective" and "subjective factors of regional image making" are offered by I.P. Chernaya [10]. Absolute or objective factors include geographic position, reserves of natural resources, infrastructure development, intellectual and innovative potential, and development level social sphere. Subjective factors include communicative flows depending on the territory's evaluation by native and foreign politics, businessmen and tourists based on personal impressions, observation, experience and gossips. This variety of factors defines the complex (spherical) character of a territorial image.

The research object is the "regional image" category. The research subject is ways of regional image making available in modern information society. The research goal is discovering new ways of territorial image making. The research objectives are:

- to reveal main channels of territorial image making on the Internet;
- to uncover web-based character of a regional image.

Results and discussion

According to the spherical approach to territorial image making [11, p. 15], an image of a territorial subject has a complex structure including topically allocated image spheres (political, geographical, social and economic, historical, cultural, scientific, sport, investment, touristic). These components of a regional image interact and influence each other. For instance, inflow of tourists facilitates social and economic development of the region by means of investments attraction, investments to the touristic sector in their turn attract more tourists; natural and geographical features of the region influences directly on touristic image making of the region and tourism development in the region; influence of historical and cultural heritage on a touristic image of the territory is evident – tourists come to the region specially to visit sights, and tourism has beneficial effect on keeping and developing cultural heritage. Therefore, road condition in the Perm region can be included in several categories - social and economic and touristic components of the regional image, events and festivals – in cultural, historical and touristic components, etc.

The key role in territorial image making event PR plays, for example, such traditional for Perm and the Perm region events as “White nights”, “Textura”, “SlovoNova” festivals, “Pilorama” forum-festival, etc. Within these events social community forms the opinion about the Perm region as the region with deep ethnical roots, the region which is responsive to everything new in art, culture and politics. Event PR attracts foreign investments, too, because such events are visited not only by cultural workers, but by businessmen from different regions of Russia and foreign countries. 2507 events have been held during “White nights” festival in 2013, where 14 613 persons took part, 1814 among them are from different regions of Russia and 408 foreigners. Foreign participants represented 30 countries: USA, Germany, France, UK, Israel, Mexico, Ukraine, Argentina, Zimbabwe, Ghana, etc. Musical groups from Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District, Morocco, Haiti gather annually on the concert venues of the international ethnic festival KAMWA.

In this case event PR forms cultural, political, investment and ethnographical image spheres of the region.

In the contest of information society a lot of opportunities for territorial image making are given by internet-technologies.

At the beginning of regional internet space formation main (and almost the only) channels of regional image making on the Internet were official

online outposts of regions – sites of administrations and regional leaders. At this stage sites were exclusively information resources without the opportunity of feedback from their visitors. Nowadays, relation to such type of sites has been changed. Modern site is considered as an effective tool of necessary image making. For this reason online reception offices are widely spread (democratic character of politics), that allow to organize feedback from sites’ visitors; special site development for specific population groups (social-oriented character of politics); site development both in Russian and English languages, that gives potential investors an opportunity to get acquainted with local authorities and their politics.

External social groups have much more opportunities to get the information about regions with appearance and development of web mass media. More efficiency, absence of information volume limits, additional services, interactive communication with the audience, hyperlinks for connection of different information blocks– all of them give new prospects for regional image making. Web mass media includes internet digests, informational agencies, web-versions of “offline” mass media and exclusively online mass media (online magazine, online newspaper).

New media include widely spread web-diaries – blogs. Due to interactivity of new mass media bloggers express their opinion online freely and comment actively all potentially interesting events that happen in the region, influencing on its image making. In this case a notice of T.S. Yakovleva seems to be absolutely reasonable: “Bloggers become active members of informational flows, joining the interesting ones and completing them with their information and comments” [11, p. 212]. One of Perm bloggers has chosen these words for his slogan: “I know what I want and know when and how I will achieve it. I live in the Perm region and I like it” (www.effectmecht.wordpress.com/tag/).

Government authorities cooperate with popular bloggers on a more frequent basis, especially with those who often visit the region or sometimes post the information about it. The most popular ways of cooperation include holding special events for bloggers to attract their attention and get more positive reminiscences that will be seen by thousands of Runet users. To attract journalists (including young ones) to purposeful and regular coverage of youth policy realization in the Perm region the Perm regional department of a national social organization “Child and youth social initiatives” with the support of the Ministry of culture, youth policy and mass communications of the Perm region organized a

competition for “The best blogger of the Perm region” in 2013.

From our point of view, governors’ blogs play the great role in territorial image making. And governors use this opportunity actively. The most cited bloggers among regional leaders are Ramzan Kadyrov (Chechnya), Alexander Tkachyov (the Krasnodar Territory) and Rustam Minnikhanov (Tatarstan). The leader of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov for several months remains the most cited blogger in mass media. The Perm region governor Viktor Basargin is on the fourth place. Drawings up the rating blogger’s activity and his citedness have been taken into account.

Another technology has a huge potential for regional image making, it is social networks. Social networks allow quickly informing on events, finding and creating groups on interests and accumulating the information. Regional social networks give an opportunity for communication among regional inhabitants and with inhabitants of other regions (information exchange, establishing and keeping contacts, job searching), and for cooperation of network members for regional goals achieving, organizing mutual social help of network members, regional image making.

There are a lot of pages, devoted to territorial subjects in the social network “Vkontakte”, all of them position a certain regional image. For instance, following pages are devoted to the Perm region: “Active Perm” – more than 52 thousands of followers, “My city is Perm” – more than 140 thousands of followers, “Beautiful Perm” – more than 23 thousands of followers, “History of Perm” – more than 17 thousands of followers. Names by themselves give the opportunity to understand that these pages position the Perm region as a dynamically developing region with unique nature features, beautiful nature, and long history. Moreover, it is necessary to notice that social network pages due to their interactivity allow forming the most demanded image of the region.

In information society when almost every representative of the regional public is capable to various extents influence regional image making, existing communicative flows with many involved subjects get increasing value along with absolute factors of objective reality.

In addition to division of information flow subjects in spontaneous and official, it is possible to differentiate them on nature of involvement (on the base of J. Bernoff’s social technological method, adopted to a region) [12]. Some subjects create the content (have blogs about a region/city, publish videos, etc.), others criticize and review the created content (leave comments to posts in blogs and on

forums, edit articles about a region in Internet encyclopaedias, write reviews about hotels and restaurants on touristic sites), and the third monitor the content and analyse it (read posts and comments in blogs, watch videos, read forums, accumulate and synthesize the information). All of them are directly involved in regional image making.

According to D.P.Gavra, currently the creator and killer of regional images is a searching engine, which uses reviews. As the researcher notes, at the new stage of society development “image transforms from a rigid structure to a flow, and the meaning of this transformation is connected with principal change of information environment... In the industrial times territorial image making was strict elite’s monopoly, in information society (with the Internet, forums and blogs), territorial image making is a product, created by both elite and different subjects’ personal experiences” [13, p. 43]. Before appearance of blogs, social networks and forums, regional image had been formed as a result of information perception from mass media (media image), currently so called “territorial web-image” is the most relevant.

S. Anholt, famous regional branding researcher, author of competitive identity concept, noted that it is not enough to make image artificially by means of marketing communication and creativity only to form positive regional image. It is necessary to work actively and essentially to force the city benefits people, attracting modern branding tools: enhancing of touristic and investment attraction, motivation for talented people, organization of big events, cultural exchange, etc. [14, p. 25]. Forming image should correspond to reality and expectations of locals and consider variety of their interests.

Conclusion

Not only groups of regional elite, but every inhabitant should be interested in positive regional image making. It is necessary to use the complex approach, using all advantages and considering possible communicative challenges, that created by large web-society. Regional social networks and communities, groups in popular social networks, devoted to regions and cities, reviews on forums, ratings, viral videos and Twitter messages appear and will appear, so it is impossible to manage broadcasting of impressions in such variety of social resources. It is necessary to monitor attentively the region’s reputation in these spontaneous publications. It should be borne in mind that mismatch of spontaneous and official images results in invariability of a regional image, positioned by the authorities.

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5/27/2014