

KEY INSTRUMENTS OF PR PROMOTION OF A REGION IN THE DOMESTIC TOURISM MARKET IN RUSSIA (BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE REPUBLIC OF TATARSTAN)

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ABSTRACT

Contextualization: The study is devoted to the specifics of applying public relations tools in the promotion of the Republic of Tatarstan as a tourist destination. The features of PR technologies concerning the promotion of the territory are considered. Particular attention is paid to a retrospective analysis of the use of PR in managing the image of a tourist region and the attention of its potential target audience under the influence of macroeconomic, social, and geopolitical changes based on the example of Tatarstan.

Objective: This study examines the regulatory and legal aspects of promoting Tatarstan as a tourist destination. It aims to assess the effectiveness of PR strategies within the framework of existing regulations and legal frameworks governing tourism promotion.

Methods: The research employs a multifaceted approach, combining a retrospective analysis of macroeconomic, social, and political factors with an assessment of the legal and regulatory environment governing tourism promotion in Tatarstan. Data sources include official reports, statistical data, social network analysis, case studies, and a literature review.

Results: Tatarstan has demonstrated success in promoting tourism and adapting its strategies in response to external challenges. Legal and regulatory frameworks have supported these efforts. Key findings include the region's pivot toward domestic tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic, effective engagement with media and digital platforms, and a focus on event tourism. The study also highlights the importance of continuous adaptation to changing circumstances for sustainable tourism promotion.





Keywords: public relations; PR; PR technologies; tourist destination; tourist region; promotion; PR strategy; Republic of Tatarstan.

1 INTRODUCTION

The systemic approach to the promotion of a region as a tourist destination now constitutes one of the vital factors in its general socio-economic development. Amid the rise in the number of regions competing in the market of Russian domestic tourism, which is also accompanied by changes in the consumer behavior of Russians, a comprehensive and systematic approach to public relations promotion becomes the leading objective of both local self-governments and all the stakeholders in general. Increasing consciousness of Russians in choosing a particular tourist destination, as well as the considerable expansion of the geography of planned trips, are the factors that force stakeholders to take a closer look at the effectiveness of the promotional tools used (Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VTsIOM), 2023). At present, ill-conceived use of PR tools without a thought-out PR strategy not merely causes pointless waste of material and human resources, but in some cases can even harm the image of the tourist destination.

The leading goal of PR in tourism is to build a long-term strategy of maintaining two-way communication between different groups of the public to identify common interests and achieve mutual understanding. These groups include, on the one hand, not only tourists but also competitors and current and potential investors. On the other hand, there are tourist organizations and local self-government bodies responsible for territorial development. There are two main directions of PR work in tourism: the use of PR technologies by tourist firms to attract clients and the use of PR technologies to promote the region as a tourist destination in general. In the latter case, the leading role is played by representatives of state bodies that are not only responsible for all the attraction measures but also coordinate the implementation of the overall strategy for the development of the tourist destination (Goodal & Ashworth, 2013; Gaisina et al., 2021).

2 METHODS





Prominent researchers have proposed various technologies for the promotion of territorial tourism, yet not all of them have proven effective in practice. Despite numerous studies in this sphere, the issue of the most efficient design and implementation of PR strategies to promote tourist destinations still stands. The present study was carried out within the framework of systemic and structural-functional approaches, which enabled a retrospective analysis of macroeconomic, social, and political factors affecting the promotion of the Republic of Tatarstan as a tourist destination. The source base was made up of official reports on the work of the State Committee on Tourism of the Republic of Tatarstan, statistics on tourist flow to Tatarstan over the past years, and data from social networks.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tatarstan consistently ranks among the leaders in the rating of socio-economic development of Russia's regions and has been in the top five for several years (RIA Rating, 2023). By the results of 2022, Tatarstan ranked 7th in the rating by the volume of tourist flow among Russian regions (State Committee on Tourism of the Republic of Tatarstan, 2022). According to the State Committee on Tourism of the Republic of Tatarstan, tourist flow to Tatarstan in 2022 amounted to 3.7 million people, which slightly exceeds the level of the last pre-COVID year 2019, which totaled 3.6 million people. The greatest share of visitors to Tatarstan is made up of residents of Bashkortostan, Udmurtia, and Moscow. The predominant age groups of tourists are from 25 to 34 years old (25%) and from 35 to 44 years old (19.3%) (State Committee on Tourism of the Republic of Tatarstan, 2022).

Tatarstan is the only region of Russia that has four sites under the protection of the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Centre, namely: the Kul Sharif Mosque, the Bolgar Historical and Archaeological Complex, the Assumption Cathedral and Monastery of the town-island of Sviyazhsk, and the Engelhardt Astronomical Observatory. Statistics of the State Committee on Tourism of the Republic of Tatarstan indicate that the top three most visited attractions are those located in Sviyazhsk, Bolgar, and Elabuga. One of the most popular attractions in Bolgar is the ruins of the Cathedral Mosque, which dates back to 1260. A prominent landmark of Elabuga is the Elabuga Gorodishche – the remains of a fortified settlement on the bank of the Kama



River, near the town of Elabuga, which is the oldest historical monument in Tatarstan. The most preferred types of tourist recreation in Tatarstan include outdoor recreation (about 30% of tourists prefer to rest in country houses) and health tourism (Tatarstan has 45 sanatoriums and health resorts) (State Committee on Tourism of the Republic of Tatarstan, 2021).

A strong advantage in promoting the tourist destination of Tatarstan, in our opinion, is the availability of the official website of the tourist brand "Visit Tatarstan". The website presents extensive information about the region, including directions on how to get there, what sights there are and their detailed characteristics, how best to spend a vacation day, places to visit, and unique travel routes (Tourism portal of the Republic of Tatarstan, n.d.). In addition, the website has a feature that allows users to create their travel itinerary in Tatarstan and download it in PDF format. It is also possible to purchase a plane ticket to Kazan from anywhere in the world on the same website, which is a pleasant bonus. According to the Strategy for the Development of Tourism in the Republic of Tatarstan, the region plans to receive about 7 million tourists by 2030 (State Committee on Tourism of the Republic of Tatarstan, 2017).

Analyzing the work of Tatarstan's State Committee on Tourism over the past eight years, we can see both a unified strategy for the region's development as an attractive tourist destination and a certain paradigm shift in its development due to several force majeure circumstances. Until the end of 2019, Tatarstan placed a special emphasis on increasing the awareness of the region's tourism potential in the international arena and attracting tourists from foreign countries. Efforts were made to attract tourists from Finland, China, Germany, Italy, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, Turkey, and several other European, Middle Eastern, and Asian countries.

Among such measures, press tours and advertising and information tours for foreign journalists, travel companies, tour operators, and bloggers were actively conducted. Furthermore, Tatarstan participated in major international travel exhibitions in Turkey, China, Finland, the United Kingdom, Germany, and the UAE. Travel shows were filmed and broadcast on foreign TV channels, and advertising campaigns were launched with the placement of information materials in foreign periodicals, TV channels, radio stations, Internet resources, and airports. From 2015 to 2019, Tatarstan participated with its stand in 16 foreign tourism exhibitions, held more than a hundred press tours for foreign journalists and tour operators, and organized about 20 advertising campaigns in Finland, Germany, China, and Iran. Owing to this, the





number of foreign citizens in Tatarstan rose to 335,576 people by 2019, as indicated by the Migration Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Tatarstan. Most foreign tourists were from China, Germany, Turkey, India, and Italy (State Committee on Tourism of the Republic of Tatarstan, 2019).

In 2020, due to the spread of the novel coronavirus infection, the tourist flow sharply dropped. The COVID-19 pandemic led to the closure of borders with foreign countries and restricted the movement of tourists within the country. Under these conditions, the focus of the State Committee on Tourism of Tatarstan shifted to the internal Russian audience and domestic tourism.

Similar to other regions of Russia that have tourism potential, Tatarstan saw a decline in key industry indicators in 2020 (Official news portal of RBC, 2020), including in tourists' expenditures on accommodation, food, transportation, shopping, and entertainment (2019 – 21.7 billion rubles, 2020 – 13.7 billion rubles), tourist flow (2019 – 3.6 million people, 2020 – 1.9 million people), and hotel occupancy, which fell to the level of 2009 and totaled 41% (State Committee on Tourism of the Republic of Tatarstan, 2019, 2020).

Tatarstan has demonstrated a positive experience of anti-crisis PR in promoting the brand of the region on social media. These efforts preserved the attractiveness of Tatarstan as a tourist destination for residents of other Russian regions, affirmed its status as a region with a rich historical and cultural heritage for both locals and visitors, and showed even greater opportunities for educational and recreational tourism for both external (residents of other Russian regions) and internal (Tatarstan residents) audiences.

For the sake of maintaining tourist flow and attracting new tourists under crisis conditions, press tours and advertising and information tours were organized in Tyumen, Kaliningrad, and Kaluga, and advertising campaigns were held in Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Voronezh, Chelyabinsk, and Samara. Tatarstan obtained the rights to use the trademark "Imperial Route", which is a national tourism project aimed at popularizing the history of the family of Emperor Nicholas II (National tourism project "Imperial Route", 2023). Thus, Tatarstan became part of the unified brand "Imperial Route", which allowed it to increase the region's visibility in the country and promote it in the tourist market (Andrades & Dimanche, 2017). In addition, to increase tourist flow, the "Two Plus One" and "Three Nights for the Price of Two" promotions were launched, and the "1001 Pleasures Over the Weekend" travel program was developed, which



became a new brand. In 2020, Tatarstan conducted only four advertising campaigns, which were exclusively in Russia. Apart from this, advertisements inviting visitors to Tatarstan were placed at Tatneft gas stations. Advertising banners were also put up in Voronezh, Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Samara, and Chelyabinsk. Five travel programs were filmed exclusively for Russian television channels.

For the tourism sector, which is one of the economic sectors most affected by the consequences of COVID-19, the use of Internet marketing tools becomes a growth point and an opportunity to popularize tourist destinations (Official news portal of RBC, 2020). Thus, with the support of the President of the Republic of Tatarstan R. Minnikhanov and Tatarsan's blogging community, the #прекрасныйтатарстан [#beautifultatarstan] hashtag was launched (#прекрасныйтатарстан, n.d.). The main goal of this flash mob was to popularize travel around Tatarstan and promote the appearance of new attractive photo and video content about the most interesting and unusual places of the region on social media, the amount of which reached more than 10 thousand publications in 4 months.

In 2021, Tatarstan was gradually recovering from the pandemic, yet the State Committee on Tourism still concentrated on attracting tourists from the nearest regions of Russia, since restrictions associated with COVID-19 were still preventing international tourism. Nevertheless, Tatarstan held roadshows and presentations in Azerbaijan, Japan, Uzbekistan, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia. Over the year, Tatarstan managed to organize four press tours, 13 advertising and information tours for Russian journalists, and three road shows in Uzbekistan, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia. The key PR activities of this period were aimed at attracting tourists from Russian regions, namely Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Bashkortostan, Mordovia, and Murmansk.

Once again, event tourism became an important direction for the promotion of Tatarstan. Due to competent planning and organization of events to increase tourist flow to the region, Tatarstan took 2nd place in the national rating of the Russian Event Awards 2012-2020 (Karimov, 2021).

In 2022, due to the aggravation of the global political situation, air connections with foreign countries were restricted again. On the one hand, this has complicated the development of international tourism and led to an even greater decline in foreign audiences. On the other hand, domestic tourism is becoming increasingly popular. The work of the State Committee on Tourism of the Republic of Tatarstan was directed at





the development of nature, countryside, and ecological tourism, the development of the Laishevo tourist area, and the advancement of event tourism.

Tatarstan actively organized information tours for Russian travel agencies and tour operators, press tours for Russian journalists, as well as advertising campaigns in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. To retain interest in Tatarstan, roadshows were held in the UAE, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan. During the year, eight advertising and information tours for travel companies were organized. Tatarstan was visited by representatives of 90 travel agencies from Moscow, Sochi, Ekaterinburg, Saint Petersburg, Nizhny Novgorod, Ufa, and other Russian cities.

Four press tours were held for journalists and bloggers from the Tomsk region, Chechnya, and the Irkutsk region in 2022. 14 presentations were held for Russian tour operators from Moscow, Saint Petersburg, the Orenburg region, Chechnya, the Irkutsk region, and Sakha. As a result of the work done to attract tourists to Tatarstan from Russian regions, the region managed to reach and even surpass the tourist flow of 2019 in 2022.

In 2023, the tasks established by the State Committee of the Republic of Tatarstan included the creation and development of beach areas on the banks of the Volga and Kama rivers and small rivers and lakes, the creation of a tourist code of the city center, and the development of the health resort complex. This strategy confirms the vision of the region's promotion not only as a destination for excursion tourism but also as a region where all types of recreation and tourism opportunities are represented.

Let us highlight the main advantages of the PR strategy used to promote Tatarstan in the tourist market. The main specialized body responsible for promotion, namely, the State Committee on Tourism of the Republic of Tatarstan, carries out comprehensive PR promotion. This includes active interaction with the media (from 2017 to 2022, with the participation of the Committee, 14,335 articles about the tourist potential of Tatarstan were published in various media) (State Committee on Tourism of the Republic of Tatarstan, 2022), posting information about tourist attractions in Tatarstan in thematic periodicals, the use of fair and festival potential in the summer season, and participation in tourism exhibitions and economic forums. In addition, the State Committee annually organizes tours for journalists, bloggers, tour operators, and travel agencies to demonstrate the tourism potential of the region and arranges the filming for various travel programs on major Russian federal channels, which increases





awareness of the tourism potential of the region in the domestic market. Among such shows are "Neputevye zametki" ["Scampish notes"] for Channel One; "Unikalnye mesta Rossii" ["Unique places of Russia"] for Zagorodnaya Zhizn; "Poedem, poedim" ["Let's go eat"] for NTV; "Bolshaia strana" ["Big country"] for OTR; and "Po sekretu vsemu svetu" ["In secret to the whole world"] for Russia 1.

Yet despite the advantages, several problems require special attention in the future. The volume of tourist flow has a pronounced seasonal character. Thus, according to the statistical data of the State Committee on Tourism of the Republic of Tatarstan, tourist flow to Tatarstan in the winter season of 2022 amounted to 548 thousand people, while in the summer season, the region was visited by 1,603,774 tourists (State Committee on Tourism of the Republic of Tatarstan, 2022). Thus, the tourist flow in the winter period is almost 3 times lower than in the summer period.

Most events are held in Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, and in the Bulgarian Historical and Architectural Museum-Reserve. In addition, a significant part of the materials filmed as part of travel programs is devoted to tourism in the capital, and only a few films mention Chistopol, Sviyazhsk Island, and other potentially attractive tourist attractions with convenient transport accessibility.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Tatarstan, being one of the most popular tourist destinations, has a strong potential for development in terms of promotion and, accordingly, attracting more tourists. Considering the opportunities and development strategy of the region in the direction of recreational tourism, it is worth expanding the angle of promotion in this respect, creating conditions for the development of tourism not only in the points of attraction but also in other regions of Tatarstan. The search and expansion of the range of events towards all-season coverage will allow the region to increase tourist flow in the off-season periods (December, February, March).

The political and economic situation and current trends in the development and promotion of territories dictate the conditions for timely changes in the strategy of the region's promotion. Therefore, Tatarstan should continue to constantly adapt to the changing internal and external conditions of development to maintain the existing



indicators of tourist flow among other regions of Russia and to search for new ways and tools for its increase and uniform all-season distribution.

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