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# Media Sponsorship as a New Promotional Tool for Tour Operators in Poland\*

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## Abstract

Promotion understood as a combination of forms and methods of social communication in the area of satisfying needs through material and intellectual products of human ingenuity, entrepreneurship, activity and economy is a field that has been dynamically evolving together with the changing society. In order for a product offered on the market to be selected by a potential customer out of all the other available ones, market entities (including tour operators) have to use more and more modern forms of market communication.

Surely, such a form of communication is media sponsorship that is based on promoting own image, name, trademark or offer through participation in the production and broadcast costs of television or radio programs, as well as newspaper articles. Information about an enterprise, which finances a given media material, may come in a form of so called sponsorship billboard or television program trailer.

The paper seeks to clarify the theoretical issues on media sponsorship as a tool and to attempt to estimate the usage of such a tool by tour operators functioning in the Polish tourism market.

The research method used in this study is primarily desk research in the form of an analysis of literature on the subject and industry reports, whereas the empirical part is based on the secondary research conducted by the Institute of Media Monitoring (IMM). Furthermore, logical operations (mainly deduction and induction) and an observation method (especially in terms of practical aspects) were also applied.

*Keywords: promotion, media sponsorship, tour operators*

## 1. Introduction

Promotion understood as a combination of forms and methods of social communication in the area of satisfying needs through material and intellectual products of human ingenuity, entrepreneurship, activity and economy is a field that has been dynamically evolving together with the changing society. In order for a product offered on the market to be selected by a potential customer out of all the other available ones, market entities (including tour operators) have to use more and more modern forms of market communication.

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## **2. Media Sponsorship as a New Promotional Tool for Tour Operators**

Observation of the modern tour operator market reveals that tour operators have started using various types of media, i.e. the television, press and radio, to promote their offer. This situation is a result of high efficiency of such promotional channels in comparison to the use of traditional promotional activities, for example advertisement in the form of paper brochures that has reached a certain level of saturation and which efficiency is now limited.

One of the promotional instruments on the tour operator market that merits special attention, because of its marketing innovation, is sponsorship. The position of sponsorship is on the rise as it is not perceived as an intrusive or too obtrusive form of promotion and there are fewer limitations of its use [1]. Taken the above into consideration, the literature on the subject emphasizes the fact that spending the same amount of funds on sponsorship rather than on advertising may be more effective [2].

A British organization, UK Sports Council is thought to have coined one of the first definitions of sponsorship. According to it, sponsorship is donating a gift or payment in return for providing publicity for the donor. In this definition, the term 'gift' is not appropriate as usually a donor does not expect to receive any consideration from the donee [3]; however, in respect to a market entity that wants to 'exist' in the consciousness of potential customers, there is such an expectation.

Therefore, a more adequate definition of sponsorship, which encompasses the objectives of tour operators in terms of promotion of their offer, is one created by T. Meenaghan, who states that sponsorship means providing support in a monetary or material form by a commercial organization in order to achieve commercial effects [1, 4]. On the other hand, A. Waszyński says that sponsorship is a mechanism for promoting an enterprise or a product offered by it that exploits the association with the sponsored activity. Thus, sponsorship is a type of agreement between business partners in which the sponsoring party receives connections and rights arising from the arrangement in exchange for support, what can result in gaining a competitive advantage [5].

Furthermore, such an activity should be perceived as if at the interface of a few fields, among which there are public relations that have incorporated sponsorship in the brand image building strategy, as well as corporate social responsibility for which sponsorship is one of the methods of supporting its environment [6].

Scientific literature on sponsorship is primarily focused on sports sponsorship while the second most popular type is culture sponsorship. Nevertheless, the vast majority of tour operators which plan to include sponsorship among their marketing activities as a promotional tool [7] select such a kind of sponsorship which enables them to sponsor smaller undertakings – i.e. television programs, namely media sponsorship. Surely, the expenditures are lower than in the case of

sponsorship of games, the Olympics or film festivals. According to an international definition included in the European Directive on Trans-frontier Television, media sponsorship means a participation of a natural or legal person, who is neither engaged in broadcasting nor in production of audio-visual works, in direct or indirect financing of a programme in order to promote its name, trademark or image [1, 8]. The role of media sponsorship is for a sponsor to consciously provide financial means, services or goods, including know-how, to the sponsored entity in order to gain benefits or achieve goals and this requires from the sponsored entity to provide services [5].

While ordering the aspects concerning promotion, the groups of audience of sponsorship as form of promotion should be listed, and these include [1]:

- company customers, buyers of company products (current and potential customers),
- suppliers,
- enterprise employees,
- public opinion,
- local authorities,
- professional organizations and key decision-makers,
- representatives of mass media,
- shareholders and stockholders,
- financial institutions.

In order to effectively use sponsorship to achieve a defined goal, a type of sponsorship appropriate for it must be selected. The diversity of forms and types of sponsorship depends on the criteria used to make such divisions [9]. There might be many of them, but in respect to tour operators, the most significant are:

- goal criterion (it may be divided into such goals as gaining publicity or creating a suitable enterprise and/or its product brands image),
- sponsored field criterion (e.g. sport, culture, socioeconomic area, science, ecology etc.),
- number of sponsors criterion (it may be divided into exclusive sponsorship or co-sponsorship),
- character of sponsorship criterion (e.g. financial, material, service, license),
- public disclosure of a sponsor's name or surname criterion.

In the characterization of media sponsorship used by tour operators it should be emphasized that its goal is to achieve publicity, inform public opinion about the available tourism offer, increase the level of brand awareness and create an appropriate image by transferring the image of the television program onto the sponsor. Therefore, the main task of a particular tour operator's personnel in the sponsorship selection is to choose an appropriate television channel (and a television program) which image corresponds to the desired image of a tour operator. The idea is for the image of both entities to have some shared values and not to be too distant from each other.

Obviously, it is naturally linked to the segment of people that the sponsor reaches. An example of good use of media sponsorship is when a tour operator that offers family holidays finances a television program that is part of breakfast television which is dedicated mainly to women who bring up children.

Summing up the issue of media sponsorship in promotion of tour operator offer, according to the marketing concept of tourism organizer operation, such sponsorship should be treated as one of promotional elements and its objectives should fit into the overall promotion objectives. A comparison of sponsorship and advertising reveals that the sponsorship goals are usually long-term similarly as in public relations activities. This stems from the fact that it is not possible to improve the level of brand visibility or the image of a tour operator in a short time. Therefore, by selecting

sponsorship as a form of promotion, it is important to realize that its promotional effects will be achieved in a longer perspective [1].

### 3. Tour Operators in Poland

According to the Act of Tourist Services, a tour operator (tourism organizer) is an enterprise that organizes a tourism event. It is required of tour operators and travel agents (whose business activity is to execute, on behalf of a client, legal and factual acts associated with concluding agreements on providing tourism services) to be included in the register of tour operators and travel agents, in order to conduct business activity [10].

According to the Central Register of Tour Operators and Agents (abbreviation in Polish: CEOTiPŚ), there were 2968 entities registered in Poland in 2013, among which tour operators comprise 66.7% (1980 entities). There is a similar number of tour operators in such countries as France or the United Kingdom (Tab. 1). The largest number of tour operators (5731) exist in Italy.

Comparing the number of tour operators to the population, reveals that Bulgarians and Swedes have the largest number of tour operators per person what means that each operator provides services to 7.1 and 7.4 thousand people, respectively (that is there are more than 13 tour operators per 100,000 thousand people). Statistically, a tour operator provides services to around 10 to 13 thousand people in such countries as Italy, Norway or the Netherlands. There are around 5 tour operators per 100,000 citizens in Poland, which means that one tour operator services more than 19,000 people on average.

**Tab. 1.** Number of tour operators in selected European countries (2013)

Country	Number of people per tour operator	Number of tour operators per 100.000 people	Number of tour operators
Bulgaria	7 182	13.9	1012
Sweden	7 418	13.5	1293
Italy	10 445	9.6	5731
Hungary	11 075	9.0	886
Norway	11 198	8.9	454
Slovakia	12 295	8.1	441
The Netherlands	12 482	8.0	1346
<b>Poland</b>	<b>19 208</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>1980</b>
Greece	18 652	4.8	522
Denmark	22 462	4.5	251
France	33 378	3.0	1913
Germany	33 979	2.9	2374
UK	35 599	2.8	1822
Belgium	60 740	1.6	185
Austria	72 000	1.4	118

Source: own work on the basis of: [11, 12]

In June 2016, the number of entities registered in CEOTiPŚ was 4058, which means an increase of around 25% in comparison to 2013. Simultaneously, the number of entities per 100,000 people rose from 7.7 to 10.5, and the number of people serviced by them decreased from 12,970 to 9,482 (Tab. 2). The largest number of tour operators and agents are located in the areas characterized by high population, what ensures demand for their services. Voivodeships with population higher than 3 million people (Mazowieckie, Śląskie, Małopolskie, Wielkopolskie) are also areas with the largest number of tour operators and travel agents (897, 525, 531, 309, respectively). Together with the Dolnośląskie Voivodeship, where population exceeds 2.9 million and the number of entities is 339, they constitute more than 63% of all registered entities. The biggest number of entities per 100,000 people can be found in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship (ca. 17), the Małopolskie Voivodeship (ca. 17), the Pomorskie Voivodeship (ca. 13) and the Śląskie and Dolnośląskie Voivodeships (ca. 11). The lowest number of tour operators and travel agents operate in the Lubuskie (61), the Opolskie (77), the Świętokrzyskie (74) and the Podlaskie (85) Voivodeships.

However, the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship has the lowest number of entities per 100,000 people (5.5). Despite a relatively high increase in the number of registered entities between 2013 and 2016, there were no major changes in regional distribution, although the number of entities per 100,000 people almost tripled in the Lubuskie Voivodeship.

**Tab. 2.** Entities registered in CEOTiPŚ by voivodeships (2013, 2016)

Year	Number of entities	Percentage	Number of entities per 100 000 people	Number of people per tour operator
<b>POLAND</b>				
2013	2968	100	7.7	12 970
2016	4058	100	10.7	9 482
<b>Dolnośląskie</b>				
2013	246	8.3	8.4	11 830
2016	339	8.3	11.7	8 580
<b>Kujawsko-Pomorskie</b>				
2013	80	2.7	3.8	26 168
2016	115	2.8	5.5	18 174
<b>Lubelskie</b>				
2013	100	3.4	4.6	21 585
2016	134	3.3	6.2	16 028
<b>Lubuskie</b>				
2013	49	1.7	2.3	20 855
2016	61	1.5	6.0	16 726
<b>Łódzkie</b>				
2013	148	5.0	5.9	16 995
2016	204	5.0	8.1	12 275
<b>Małopolskie</b>				
2013	390	13.1	11.6	8 612
2016	531	13.1	15.8	6 343
<b>Mazowieckie</b>				
2013	611	20.5	11.5	8 693
2016	897	22.0	16.8	5 947
<b>Opolskie</b>				
2013	54	1.8	5.4	18 622
2016	77	1.9	7.7	12 998

Year	Number of entities	Percentage	Number of entities per 100 000 people	Number of people per tour operator
<b>Podkarpackie</b>				
2013	110	3.7	5.1	19 440
2016	138	3.4	6.5	15 429
<b>Podlaskie</b>				
2013	67	2.3	5.6	17 842
2016	85	2.1	7.1	14 023
<b>Pomorskie</b>				
2013	205	6.9	8.9	11 191
2016	295	7.3	12.8	7 804
<b>Śląskie</b>				
2013	404	13.8	8.8	11 393
2016	525	12.8	11.4	8 735
<b>Świętokrzyskie</b>				
2013	58	1.9	4.6	21 875
2016	74	1.8	5.9	17 070
<b>Warmińsko-Mazurskie</b>				
2013	96	3.2	6.6	15 075
2016	125	3.1	8.6	11 560
<b>Wielkopolskie</b>				
2013	225	7.5	6.5	15 400
2016	309	7.5	8.9	11 238
<b>Zachodniopomorskie</b>				
2013	125	4.2	7.3	13 752
2016	167	4.1	9.7	10 272

Source: own work on the basis of: [13, 14, 15]

According to the newest tour operator ranking [16] from 2016, the largest tour operator in Poland is still Itaka, which number of customers (even though it decreased in comparison to the previous year) is more than double that of the second biggest company – Rainbow (Tab. 3).

However, out of the top 3 biggest tour operators Itaka was the only company that did not undergo any key changes (customer base fell by 1.8% and profits rose by 1.1%). At the same time, Rainbow increased its customer base by almost 18% (while profits went up by 18%) and TUI Poland by 30% (and profits by 25%).

**Tab. 3.** Tour operators with more than 100,000 customers in 2015

	Number of customers in 2015	2015/2014 Number of customers in %	Turnover (PLN) in 2015	2015/2014 Turnover in %
<b>Itaka</b>	607 000	-1.80	1,656,265,060.60	1.10
<b>Rainbow</b>	300 200	17.90	902,774,000.00	18.00
<b>TUI Poland</b>	312 000	30.2	853,969,530.00	25.10
<b>Wezyr Holidays</b>	189 406	no data	416,234,269.40	1.80
<b>Grecos Holiday</b>	137 000	13.20	348,117,650.98	13.60
<b>Neckerman</b>	142 594	-3.0	289,534,644.93	-15.20

Source: own work on the basis of: [11]

The increasing number of tour operators and agents together with the current world political and economic situation (terrorist attacks, refugee issue in Europe) that strongly affects tourist behaviours have impacted the significance of marketing activities (mostly promotion) for the operation of tourist entities on the market. A media house, Codemedia reports that expenditure of the tourism sector (including: travel agencies, catering, transport, accommodation and region promotion) on promotion in 2015 totalled 227.5 million zlotych which constitutes an increase of 13% in relation to 2014. Catering, travel agencies and transport made up 80% of expenditure. The largest portion of that was spent on catering (69.5 million zlotych, around 30.7%), while the smallest on tourism region promotion (19.6 million zlotych, decrease of 17% in comparison to 2014).

Travel agencies spent almost 57.5 million zlotych (25,4%) on promotion in 2015 – which is a similar amount as in 2014. There has been a clearly visible increase of expenditure on the promotion of travel agencies as in 2008 they amounted to less than a half of current expenditure (around 25 million zlotych) and to even less than 20 million zlotych in 2012. More than 90% of promotional expenditure of travel agencies is allocated to tourism and recreational offer, around 8% to booking tickets and the remaining 2% to specialized offer [16]. The main promotion channels in 2015 were the television and the Internet. The tourism industry spent 67.8 million zlotych on television commercials in 2015 (around 29% of all expenditure, an increase of 19% in comparison to 2014). Promotion on the Internet cost around 65 million zlotych (around 28%, an increase of approx. 4%), whereas the press accounted for 17% of promotion expenditure, the radio was around 11%, outdoor advertising around 10% and the cinema 5%.

#### **4. Media Sponsorship in the Process of Tour Operator Offer Promotion. A Case Study**

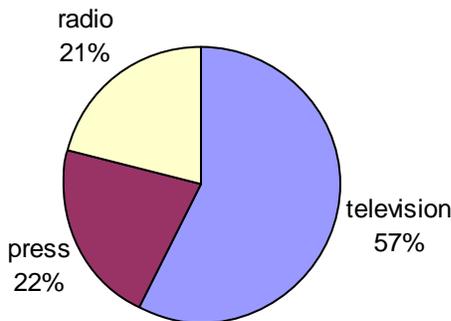
In order to achieve the objectives of this paper, a case study will be presented in the form of an analysis of results of a report on the usage of media by tour operators for the promotion of their brand and offer. The data was collected by the Institute of Media Monitoring [17], which mission is providing high-quality services connected with gathering and analysing information published in the media. The timeframe of this analysis is the first half of 2014, more precisely between 1 January 2014 and 25 June 2014. A certain limitation of the presented data is that IMM holistically analyses promotional instruments used by tour operators in the media, without any distinction between advertising and sponsorship. On the other hand, as indicated in the introduction, thanks to the use of observation method for practical aspects, i.e. observing the media, it can be undoubtedly noticed that before many television and radio programmes there is information that they are sponsored by a particular tour operator.

For the sake of accuracy, it must be stated that the data analysed by IMM about expenditure on the ‘presence’ in the media made by tour operators has been collected as a result of researching 30 television channels, 65 radio stations and 470 newspaper outlets. The expenditure was calculated on the basis of the official net price lists of channels, stations and newspapers, without considering discounts.

According to the data presented in the Institute of Media Monitoring, tour operators spent more than 37 million zlotych on promotion in the television, radio and press between 1 January 2014 and 25 June 2014. There was a two-fold increase to an analogical period in 2013 during which the expenditure on advertising in the media was 17 million zlotych for the whole industry. Such a scale of expenditure on promotion of the offer in the media can lead to a conclusion that tour operators had assessed this promotional channel to be effective enough to warrant a broader presence in the

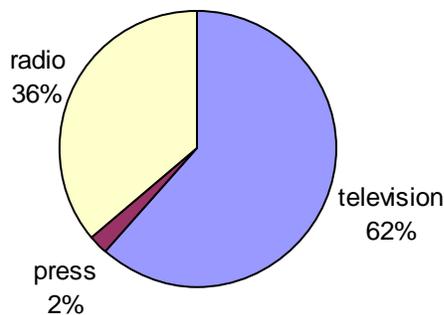
media in the following year. It could be also presumed that some tour operators decided to use, among other things, media sponsorship because of benchmarking, i.e. due to the fact that their biggest competitors have already conducted promotional activities in the media.

Most promotional content on the tour operator offer could be seen in the television media as there were 13,000 TV spots shown (expenditure on this medium was estimated at 21 million zlotych). Marketing budgets spent on the press and the radio were almost the same, i.e. 8 million zlotych and about 500 pieces of press coverage and 7.7 million zlotych and 7.7 thousand radio spots. The percentage structures of expenditure on presence in the media made by tour operators and the amount of media coverage on tour operators and their offer are presented in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2.



**Fig. 1.** Percentage structure of expenditure on presence in the media made by tour operators

*Source: own work on the basis of: [17]*



**Fig. 2.** Percentage structure of the amount of media coverage about tour operators and their offer

*Source: own work on the basis of: [17]*

The data presented in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 shows that over a half (57%) of all tour operators' expenditure on promotion in the media was allocated to the television. It was also the television that broadcast most promotional content about tour operators and their offer (62%). Moreover, it can be concluded that promotion in the press is the least effective method in terms of quantity as, while it generated 22% of promotional costs, in terms of the quantity of promotional content, it resulted in only 2% of media coverage. Promotion in the radio seems to be the most cost-effective in terms of the quantity of promotional content, as generating 21% of promotional costs resulted in radio spots broadcast in this medium at the level of 36%, so the quantity effect is almost double.

The most common promotional content that was broadcast on the television was attributed to the following tour operator brands and their offer:

1. Rainbow Tours,

2. Grecos Holiday
3. TUI (TUI dominates the radio advertisement)

The television channels most often selected by tour operators were:

1. TVN,
2. Polsat,
3. TVP1.

In respect to the radio, tour operators most often chose to promote themselves in the Radio Zet station.

According to the IMM report, the press media were placed outside top 10 places were tour operators' offer was promoted. The most common newspaper chosen for promotion was Gazeta Wyborcza.

The report of the Institute of Media Monitoring also included an analysis of the tourism and travel media which showed that package holidays providers promoted themselves most often in the National Geographic television channel and in such magazines as National Geographic Traveler, Podróże and Voyage.

Summarizing the data on the use of media sponsorship in the promotion process of tour operators' offer, the increasing role of the Internet should be mentioned as it is perceived as a medium. The TUI travel agency dedicated the largest part of their promotional funds to this medium-mostly to social media in the form of Facebook and the [www.gazeta.pl](http://www.gazeta.pl) online forum.

These are also characteristic places for a discussion for all researched travel agencies. According to the 2015 IMM report on the presence of tour operators in the media, it is the Internet, and more precisely the social media, that in the future can pose a serious threat to other media as it may become a competitive promotional channel for a tour operator brand and offer.

## 5. Conclusions

The presented theoretical and empirical data can lead to a conclusion that media sponsorship as a tool has been slowly becoming important in modern marketing communication of tour operators with potential tourists and it may become a basic element of a communication strategy in the future.

This instrument is not used as often by tour operators as online advertising or paper brochures, but this may change with time.

Only the most recognizable tour operator brands can afford such a form of promotion because of their higher budgets for marketing activities in comparison to what smaller tour operators can spend.

The advantage of media sponsorship as a marketing tool over other forms of market communication is surely its unconventional approach to building relations with customers together with a subtle influence of promotional message. Among the benefits of using such an instrument, the following should be mentioned: awareness increases of tour operator brand or name, possibility of creating a planned image of a tour operator and making it credible in the eyes of potential customers.

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