

ENHANCEMENT OF COMPETITIVENESS OF THE PRODUCT IN THE TOURIST BUSINESS BY HEALTH TOURISM MARKETING MANAGEMENT

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Introduction

This article seeks to solve the problem of enhancing the competitiveness of the Bulgarian tourist business and the opportunities for limiting its seasonality through successful marketing management of health tourism.

Bulgaria is an extremely popular destination for health tourism with its mineral springs and spa resorts visited year-round. The country has rich traditions in this field and for this reason attempts have been made to promote and standardize this type of tourism. But the best decisions that can be made to enhance the competitiveness of the overall tourism in the country are related to the implementation of a successful marketing policy in order to manage the alternative types of tourism among which is the health tourism.

The main limitation of the study is related to the fact that it is limited to exploring and measuring in detail all the marketing aspects of managing health tourism. Marketing as a science and marketing analysis of other types of tourism remain beyond the scope of the survey and it is only studied as a means of adequate health tourism management in our country.

The current research is expected to reveal the aspects of marketing management that can be applied to introduce innovations in the field of health tourism in order to enhance its competitiveness and to establish how it is possible to support the development of the tourism industry through the application of innovative standards and certification systems.

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Exposition

In the present research, the authors **aim to** identify the aspects of marketing management that are applicable in the marketing strategy related to increasing the competitiveness of the product in the tourism business. The aim above is realized by exploring and proving **three main tasks**:

- clarifying the essence and specificity of marketing management and the aspects that are applicable to managing health tourism;
- analyzing the resources and potential of health tourism in Bulgaria as a tourist destination and formulating guidelines and recommendations for development and increasing the competitiveness of the Bulgarian tourism market in the context of health tourism;
- analysis of key aspects such as standardization and certification in the field of health tourism which to be implemented as innovative tools to enhance competitiveness.

The originality of the study is related to the fact that in Bulgaria there is not yet a thorough study of the opportunities of marketing management of health tourism as a year-round form of tourism providing employment and revenues to the tourism business, as well as increasing its competitiveness.

A more impartial analysis of the state of Bulgarian tourism shows that a large-scale national, regional and local policy aimed at the efficient use of our tourism resources is not yet realized, which largely affects the development of health tourism in the country. Today, more than ever, Bulgaria needs a clear strategy, will and action to enhance the quality and efficiency of our tourism industry, which is also related to the **importance** of the topic of this publication.

Successful marketing management of tourism can be achieved through the application of standardized health products in tourist enterprises, which to provide competitiveness at both micro and macro level. For that reason the results of the present study are applicable in practice and are **intended** for both government and people from the business and tourism industry.

By solving the aforementioned tasks it is aimed to prove the **thesis** that by applying the tools of marketing management, the competitiveness of the product in the tourist business is increased. The thesis is proved by solving the assigned research tasks, which are related to **the following working hypotheses**:

All aspects of marketing management combined with health management in the country are applicable to the management of health tourism in Bulgaria.

1. Bulgaria has significant natural resources for the health tourism development. Special and general infrastructure, staff training, legal framework and tourism organization and management are at a good level but further efforts are needed to make Bulgaria a first-class destination for health tourism.

2. Standardization and certification are successfully applied in the field of health tourism as innovative tools in order to increase the competitiveness of the product in the tourism business.

In the research and in the formulation of the results a number of common **scientific methods** are applied - observation, analysis, synthesis, analogy and comparison, etc. By their very nature, they are instruments of the dialectical, historical, inductive-deductive and systemic approach, as well as comparative analysis.

The following research methods have also been used to achieve the objectives and tasks:

- an overview of the theoretical scientific developments of Bulgarian and internationally acclaimed authors;
- an overview of materials of international and European organizations in the field of tourism;
- an overview of company surveys in the areas of competitiveness, marketing management and health tourism;
- survey of the information published in the electronic pages and catalogs of leading tour operators on the European market.

1. Essence and application of marketing management in health tourism

The marketing management allows the objectives of the organization to be achieved through **complete customer orientation** and satisfaction of their desires and needs. According to the American Marketing Association, marketing management is a process of planning and realization of pricing policy, promoting and realizing ideas, products and services aimed at achieving the exchange which satisfies not only the economic but also all the other individual needs of the consumer and organizations applying marketing management. However, it is important to note that organizations carry out marketing management in a particular environment whose elements interact with each other.

Marketing management is considered **in three directions**:

- **Activity management** – it assumes that the organization is considered as an open system, and the decision-making process takes into account both the organization's internal capabilities and the external environment requirements, i.e. the organization is market-oriented and is permanently ready to meet its requirements.
- **Function management** – it is formed as a result of changes in the views of management bodies and based on the principle "from the needs of production to the needs of the market". Marketing participates in the decision making process in the production, stimulates the introduction of innovative

ideas and technologies, provides the supply of a competitive product. Both marketing and finances provide an optimal allocation of the organization's resources for obtaining the desired profit. Marketing also addresses issues related to the modern product distribution in order to meet the market needs and obtain profit.

The mechanism for implementing marketing functions is based on the development of a marketing system as a part of the organization's management system, which includes:

- organization;
 - planning (developing plans);
 - information;
 - control.
- **Demand Management** - it is provided through strategic and operational solutions for certain target market segments formed on the basis of a means complex: product, price, distribution and promotion.

Marketing management is based on the **principles of**:

- strategic planning;
- investment portfolio management;
- marketing which allows to evaluate the response of the implementation of the decisions made on the basis of the first two principles.

The advantages of marketing management (Lapshin, V.Yu., Lapshina, I.M.,2014) lie in the possibility to synchronize the structure of demand with the structure of supply by forming the necessary range of tourism products, implementing a flexible pricing policy and creating an effective sales promotion system.

Marketing management is based on **the structure of marketing**, which is a concrete combination of its components for achieving the set objectives and satisfying the target market. The structure of marketing includes everything the organization can make to influence the demand for its product based on its goals. It is a sign of well-built and functioning marketing if all of its elements are developed interlinked and in complex because only in this way they can be used as effective marketing management tools. Managing bodies are addressed the question of the choice of the most appropriate marketing elements, determining how to use them, fine-tuning the scope, timing and place of implementation. This creates variant combinations which in the context of a particular strategy contribute to a successful marketing policy. (Sirakova, L., 2013)

Along with everything mentioned so far, marketing management is a **purposeful activity** related to the process of ensuring sustainable competitive advantages for the tourist organizations on the market, which include **elements** such as:

- environmental analysis;
- situation analysis and forecasts of the market and the potential opportunities for the organizations;
- defining goals and developing behavior strategies;
- planning marketing goals and organizational behavior tactics in a particular situation;
- marketing-mix planning and implementation;
- organizing, managing and controlling the implementation of marketing events;
- evaluation of the results of the marketing activity.(Marinov, St., 2014)

*The third direction of marketing management is obligatory for exploration of tourism demand for **health tourism** opportunities in Bulgaria. The research of the anthropogenic resources, the legislation and the opportunities provided by the superstructure available are a priority of the marketing specialists and a necessary condition for the development of the health tourism in particular tourist destination.*

Marketing management is carried out to develop the attractiveness of a particular destination which satisfies the consumer demand at a maximum level. Furthermore, as an object of marketing efforts, not only the individual elements of the tourist product are considered (natural resources, historical sights, routes, etc.), but the complex product which main part is the whole territory, attracting and welcoming tourists as a whole. (Tsonev, N., 2015)

Thus, the marketing of tourist destinations is becoming a permanent and continuously functioning management system which reconcile the volumes and structures of its proposals with the needs of the market and contribute to effective economic and social transformations in the tourism market.

Effective marketing management makes it possible to synchronize the supply and demand structure by creating a number of tourism products, implementing a flexible pricing policy, and creating a successful sales and promotion system. Besides these **economic transformations**, **social** ones can also be taken into account, namely increasing the welfare of the local community in tourist destinations. Thus, thanks to the implementation of marketing techniques in destination management, integrated knowledge is attained, which underpin the marketing concept. (Lapshin V. Yu., Yazykova P. Yu., 2012)

The main result achieved so far in the study is related to the fact that the characteristics of marketing management and their application in health tourism have been identified. Also, recommendations are made on which aspects of marketing management can be applied to introduce innovations in the field of the health management in order to increase the competitiveness of Bulgarian health tourism.

2. Opportunities and potential of health tourism and its development in Bulgaria

Health tourism is a specialized type of tourism, in which usual tourist activities are associated with an active pursuit of improving the health of the people. Scientific literature abounds in terms that correspond to this definition, i.e. medical and healing tourism, balneo or spa tourism. They all correspond to the traditional concept of health tourism based on the use of natural healing resources to treat patients (tourists) in a resort setting. The terms "recreational" or "healing" tourism including fitness and wellness echo the relatively new trends in health tourism. The main idea of this innovative trend is the improvement of the physical condition of the client / tourist and their health which is not necessarily related to the application of the natural healing resources.

The term "health tourism" should not be confused with the term "medical tourism" which main focus is surgical interventions. Health tourism means body and soul care through procedures that make people feel good - massages, herbal treatments and exfoliation, workouts, water baths, diets. Health tourism also means diagnostic tests for identification of possible health problems, rehabilitation courses including physical and psychological consultations as well as stress relieving programs, dietary changes programs, programs for reducing trauma caused by physical effort and even programs for sex life improvement. Health tourism helps a person's mind to relax and relieves his body from unpleasant pain and strain. (Padilla-Meléndez,A, Aguila-Obra, Ana Rosa, 2016)

Bulgaria as a popular destination for health tourism

Bulgaria is a popular destination for health tourism and prophylactics. Our country has **rich traditions** in that field for several reasons such as the availability of proven mineral health springs which is among the most popular areas of health tourism in Bulgaria. Many spa resorts all over the country offer a variety of specialized **professional services**.

Bulgaria is among the countries that combine low prices for medical services with the professional experience of the medical staff and has the potential to become a destination of choice for so-called health tourists. It is a particularly suitable destination for health tourism due to **several key factors**:

- The country has excellent geographic, climatic and natural conditions.
- The unique combination of seaside, mountains and mineral water makes Bulgaria a suitable place for health promotion practically throughout the year.
- Long-standing traditions in balneology and balneo tourism.
- A number of refurbished medical and rehabilitation centers and hotels.
- Moderate climate with four seasons and significant Mediterranean influence.

- Highly qualified specialists and experienced medical staff.
- Relatively low price of medical services in Bulgaria according to European and world standards.
- Well-developed network of private cosmetic surgery and dental clinics.

Between **700 and 1000 mineral springs** are known; hundreds of destinations for active health tourism rank the country in the top 5 of the SPA destinations in Europe. **Among the most popular destinations** for health tourism in Bulgaria are:

- **Velingrad** – it is one of the richest cities in Bulgaria in terms of diversity of mineral springs. It has mineral waters with temperatures between 28 ° C and 91 ° C. There are over 70 springs in the city.
- **Sandanski** - there are more than 80 springs in the region with temperatures between 42 to 81 ° C. The water has low mineralization and diverse chemical composition.
- **Sapareva Banya** - here is the thermal spring with the highest temperature in our country. It is also the only geyser (fountain type) with a temperature of 103 ° C in the country and across continental Europe.
- **Bankya** - this is one of the most accessible balneological resort in Sofia. The mineral springs have a natural temperature of 36.5 - 37 ° C, low mineralization and hardness.
- **Hissar** – it is one of the oldest balneological SPA resorts in the country. In the extremely small territory of Hissarya over 22 springs have been mapped, which makes the region popular with the high density of healing springs with diverse physico-chemical composition, characteristics and temperature (about 41 to 52 ° C).

Types of health tourism and regulatory framework in Bulgaria

In order to more precisely distinguish the types of tourism and the use of uniform terminology, based on officially accepted and market imposed definitions in the world, a **classification of the main types of tourism and their subdivisions** was adapted to the realities in Bulgaria.

Like any classification, this one is somewhat conditional. It is based on three key **criteria** - *motivation for taking the trip, type of tourist activity and environment for its practice.*

According to the subject of this report, **health tourism is classified** into three **subdivisions.**

Table 1. Subdivisions of health tourism

SPA and wellness tourism - related to body and soul comfort procedures based on various natural resources and products (mineral water, essential oils, healing mud, wine, chocolate, etc.)
Balneo tourism - related to effective treatment and rehabilitation under medical control, through mineral water, curative mud, etc.
Medical tourism - the main purpose of the trip is the improvement or recovery of health through medical intervention.

Source: Tsonev, N., Yaneva, M., "Effective Marketing Management of Destinations for Economic and Social Transformation in Tourism

In the context of the specialized types of tourism and the health tourism in particular, it is necessary to define the respective sites offering these types of tourism. The sites are also the subject of marketing management related to the internal capabilities of marketing organizations of destinations.

The legislation (Ordinance No.2, 2016) in the country related to health tourism is limited to the Tourism Act, which defines it as a separate type of specialized tourism, as well as to the **ordinance** with which the Ministry of Tourism in Bulgaria has supplemented and adapted this type of tourism: **the ordinance** on the terms and the procedure for certification of a "balneo-healing (medical spa) center", a "spa center", a "wellness center" and a "thalassotherapy center" according to which the types of centers to be certified according to the services provided in them are: balneo-healing (medical spa) center; spa center; wellness center; thalassotherapy center.

On the basis of this work classification, a specialization is offered for each tourist region. **The main specialization** is a combination of two types of tourism, which combine the uniqueness of the regions. **The expanded specialization** includes the basic types and also up to 4 complementary types of tourism. (Tsonev, N., Yaneva, M., 2016)

Guidelines for development and enhancement of the competitiveness of the Bulgarian tourism market in the context of health tourism

Considering the aspects and directions of marketing management of health tourism, the State can take corrective measures in its policy in order to enhance the competitiveness of the Bulgarian tourism market. In health and tourism policy of the state the following measures can be taken:

- Development of a strategy and plan for the development of health tourism in Bulgaria.

- Creating opportunities for multifunctional year-round use of resort areas and their resources since a lot of destinations with highly developed health tourism are used seasonally.
- Creating conditions for year-round functioning of balneo-healing and spa centers in the Black Sea resorts by renewing the provision of medical and prophylactic programs that combine the seaside vacation with treatment. Such measures would also eliminate seasonality when visiting our Black Sea resorts.
- Encouraging employers in tourism to invest in the formation of new professional skills in the training and qualification of health tourism staff as there are fewer specialists than both supply and demand of health tourism services at the moment.
- Ensuring the rational use of mineral healing waters for health promotion and restoration of the citizens and enhancing social well-being.
- Enrichment of the spa and wellness product by implementing new methods, procedures and programs. Application of non-traditional means of prevention and treatment. Such measures are necessary due to the need of innovations implementation in every aspect of the provision of tourism services.
- Increasing the interest in spa and balneal products as additional services to the mass tourism forms. Except as a type of specialized tourism that can be an individual activity, health tourism can be combined with any other form of tourism that would enrich and diversify it.
- Improving the mechanisms of interaction between institutions which have competence in the field of health tourism.
- Application of standardized health products by tourist enterprises, which will be studied in more detail in this article.

So far, the potential of health tourism has been determined in the study and the opportunities for its development in Bulgaria are outlined. Additionally, the factors that prove that Bulgaria can be promoted as a destination for health tourism are outlined. Also, the guidelines for development and improvement of the competitiveness of the Bulgarian tourism market in the context of health tourism are defined.

3. Application of innovative approaches in tourism activity through the development and implementation of standardized health products

Innovative approaches as a theoretical concept concern all ideas and innovations that have a practical application. They are also a means of creating a competitive advantage. Innovation can take various forms such as improvement of

technologies, implementing new products based on new standards, new methods, markets, structures, organization, management and others.

One aspect of creating and implementing innovation is by developing new or modifying existing *standards*. Standardization is considered as an activity for defining prescriptions for general and recurrent implementation, referring to actual or potential problems aimed at achieving optimum order in a particular set of circumstances. It includes the processes of developing, approving, issuing and implementing standards, while respecting generally accepted core principles and rules for standardization work. Standards are developed and published in interest of the society and are a powerful tool for information and mutual understanding between partners. (Tsonev, N., 2015)

Standardization in tourism includes the following stages: 1) Study of "good practices", customer desires, established models for offering tourism services and products, 2) Development of standards; 3) Approval of standards; 4) Publication (issue) of standards; 5) Application of standards; 6) Forms of control in applying the standards.

The standardization stages in tourism, as well as the different levels of standardization, can be used to determine the indicators for analysis and the system of the studied object measures. Specifically, the indicators are: 1) Level of verifiability of each standard according to the real practice in the tourism industry; 2) Link between the different stages of standardization and marketing tools in tourism; 3) Using the widest possible range of marketing tools at the different stages of the standard validation process.

Long-standing worldwide practice shows that standardization is the most effective way to facilitate trade, regulate the economy, protect human and animal health, preserve the environment and achieve certain social and political goals. *Using it, marketing management can apply good practices by implementing them as company standards modified, of course, according to the specifics of the particular enterprise.*

Over the last 20 years, standardization has been successfully applied in all categories of hotels and other accommodation types in order to increase their services and products and attract new customers. Therefore, standardization activity has crossed national borders long ago and it is now organized at different levels.

Winning the trust of people and/or the market is one of the most tough and difficult tasks in the business. The need for businesses to gain trust when completely unknown to foreign markets has led to the creation of international quality standards. International standards fully correspond to national standards and apply uniform criteria to establish basic and minimum requirements. They guarantee that companies do things rationally and methodically by ensuring continuity and improving continuously their procedures, productivity and profitability and

control all their processes. International Standards of International Standards Organization (ISO) have been set up for this purpose. These standards inspire confidence on the market that goods are produced by certified companies in a particular way that is universally standardized and recognized by international organizations. This accreditation or certification of companies and enterprises guarantees to their prospective customers that the business and the overall activity are managed diligently and consistently.

Another important tool for implementing innovation is through *certification*. It is a procedure related to the confirmation of production activity result conformity to the regulatory requirements by which a third party certifies documentarily that the product (process or service) meets certain requirements.

The main subjects of the certification are:

- Certification of quality management systems;
- Certification of the offered safety services and service quality;
- Enterprises certification – it entirely encompasses business activities in their various content areas taking into account its impact on the environment;
- Equipment certification – it aims to establish suitability and compliance to the requirements of production technical factors (for example, suitability of aircraft in aviation);
- Certification of raw materials;
- Certification of organizations performing repair and maintenance of equipment;
- Certification of training organizations and institutions;
- Certification of individual professional qualification.

At the beginning of 2016, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Tourism adopted an ordinance on the conditions and procedure for certification of the balneological, spa, wellness and thalassotherapy center. Its adoption defines *the terms and conditions for certification of independent and adjacent to accommodations balneo-healing (Medical SPA), SPA, wellness and thalassotherapy centers located in resort and urban areas, as well as minimum mandatory requirements for construction, furnishing and equipment, scope of services, professional and language skills of the staff which the respective centers need to receive a certificate* (Ordinance № 2 of 29 January 2016 on the terms and procedure for certification of "a balneo-healing (medical spa) center", "a spa center", "a wellness center" and a "thalassotherapy center" - issued by the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Health). The entry into force of the Ordinance interrupted the vicious practice that hotels with minimum equipment are self-identified as spa centers. This also protects users who are already aware of what to expect when paying for a particular service and where they can get it. For this purpose a register of certified centers has been created as a part of the National Tourist Register, which will be accessible online.

In organization's activity management, we distinguish the internal capabilities of the organization and the requirements of the external environment. The following factors related to **the external environment** are ascertained: the aging population in Europe (today, people on the continent over 65 years old, who have free time and purchasing power, account for more than 20% of the total population of Europe), the increase in the number of tourists with difficult mobility and specific needs (it is expected to be 127 million in the world in 2020) and *the ever increasing demand for health services globally*. Health tourism is becoming a fast-growing industry in a number of countries - Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Dubai, Turkey, Brazil, the countries of Eastern Europe. (Stoynov, P. , 2015)

On this competitive international market, Bulgaria has a significant potential to develop health tourism with a focus on balneology (Medical SPA) and SPA (Wellness SPA). The opportunity and necessity for specialization in balneology and SPA tourism determine the actuality of such problems.

In the final stage of the research, innovative approaches for development and implementation of standardized health products have been identified in tourism activity.

4. Empirical study of standardized health tourism products

The survey identifies which of the marketing management tools can be applied and in which of them new innovative approaches to tourism can be implemented, to be set in standardized procedures in order to increase the competitiveness of the health tourism establishments.

To obtain a methodological framework of research, by selecting a system of criteria and indicators for analysis and evaluation of a standardized health tourism product, are applied different marketing tools, divided by criteria and indicators, which concern the three directions of the marketing management presented in this report and in more detail the second.

A broad range of methods have been used in the methodology of the study to play an important role in the standardization process of the tourism product on a micro level. The methods we apply are the following:

1. Using the survey method

- A) Exploring and evaluating the opinion of managers/ CEO's/ hotel managers of the importance on marketing tools in standardization at sites of the Health Tourism sector;

- B) Exploring and evaluating the opinion of the users of spa and wellness services of hotels on the importance of marketing tools in standardization at sites of the health tourism sector.

2. Use of semi-structured interviews with experts in relation to the ranking of the significance coefficient of the indicators.

For the purpose of the study three complex methodological tools have been created, such as: 1) self-assessment methods with criteria and indicators for accurate assessment (questionnaire) - two different surveys for the two sub-samples; and 2) a semi-structured interview with key questions - for each of the two tools that have been studied on a micro level in the health tourism.

The survey was held through two questionnaires.

The first questionnaire is intended for *marketing specialists and other executives*. It contains two types of questions: in the first part - Likert-type scale and in the second part of the type with two alternatives YES/NO. There are only closed questions in this questionnaire. This approach implies very easy processing and many possibilities for using criteria and metrics from the scoring statistics (correlations, regressions and dispersions). It has 25 questions and each of the criteria we identified as relevant to the marketing tools in the table below is covered by a number of questions that explain in detail the respondents from the group of employees at the sites (hotels).

The second questionnaire is targeted at the *users of spa and wellness services* and the questions also are structured according to the individual criteria and indicators for the complex evaluation described in the table.

The semi-structured interview is held through 11 key questions and additional questions that clarify the main issues.

Table 1. Criteria and indicators for the assessment of standardized health tourism sites

No	Criteria	Indicators	Coefficient of significance
1	Product quality	1.1. Standardized health tourism products (assessment of nomenclature and assortment) 1.2. Product Program (Nomenclature and Assortment Assessment) 1.3. Tourist Trademark/Brand (Provided that will be judged, depending on whether the trademark has become a brand.)	0,25
2	Price	2.1. Pricing on a competitive basis; 2.2. Pricing on a market demand basis; 2.3. Pricing on production costs basis (cost method).	0,15
3	Placement	3.1. Indicator for direct form of sale 3.2. Indicator for indirect form of sale	0,20

4	PR and advertising	3.3. Advertising for specialized health products 3.4. PR policy for the specialized products on the site	0,20
5	Equipment, furniture and maintenance	5.1. Equipment 5.2. Furniture 5.3. Technical maintenance	0,05
6	Standardized technology service	6.1 Internal company standards for the technology for servicing the health products in offer.	0,10
7	Staff	7.1. Appearance 7.2. Behavior during service	0,05
		Total:	1,00

Source: Expert Systematization

For the purpose of the study, two samples are planned and executed:

1) the first sample is on specialists and hotel managers. Their total number is 90 respondents - 15 from each of the predefined objects of study, namely Augusta Hotel, Marinella Hotel (Sofia), Arte Spa Park Hotel (Velingrad), Rose Gardens Apart Hotel (Pomorie), Infinity Hotel (Velingrad), Wine and Spa Complex STAROSEL (Starosel).

2) The second sample is on consumers (tourists) of health tourism sites that have been studied. The total number is 240 respondents - 40 users of each of the pre-defined objects of study - the above-mentioned hotels.

The surveyed individuals from both samples were chosen on a cluster basis, with the first sample being followed by a partial quota principle: preferred managers, and in case of an insufficient number - of experts and professionals working in the hotels. The second sample follows the principle of user quotas in different time segments (day, weekend, public holiday, and season). Questionnaires are filled in during non-working hours for the first sample and after using the hotel services - at departure, for the second sample. Both sample studies are voluntary and, in case of refusal, each pre-selected person is replaced by another from the same "cluster" of the sample and the same quota.

The results of the two samples are transferred to spreadsheets (EXCEL) and entered into the statistical SPSS program for processing. Primary data processing is related to encoding and classification of individual variables. The combined results for each indicator are named for each basic variable (a separate question

in the questionnaire), which is then aggregated (summed) by indicators in global variables - one for each indicator.

To obtain the methodological framework of research, by selecting a system of criteria and indicators for analysis and evaluation of a standardized health tourism product, are applied the marketing tools, set out in criteria, which concern the three directions of the marketing management presented in this report, and the second in more detail.

Criteria and metrics for conducting the study are designed, as marketing tools, for the assessment of standardized health tourism sites and their products, also applicable through the seven elements of the marketing mix, namely:

- Production and Product Strategy - Product;
- Placement - Place;
- Pricing policy - Price;
- Promotional activities - Promotion;

In the field of tourism they are complemented by:

- People - the team providing the product;
- Physical evidence - the material evidence of the possibility of the product being supplied and used - *the hotel building, the interior, the equipment, the furniture and others.*
- Process - the way in which services are provided as a complex of activities.

Thus, it is also created the criterion system for research and analysis.

The significance factor is determined by the experts. The maximum qualitative assessment is used to build up the system of criteria and indicators for assessment of a standardized health tourism site.

The question of the basic model or the leader in the industry for the purposes of the empirical research is clarified by selecting world leaders in the industry whose best practices serve as a benchmark in the evaluation of the research sites and also to apply their innovations through marketing management.

As a result of consultations with experts, healthcare companies, which are ranked in different categories of this type, are selected. This choice is based on the selection given in the selection of sites in Bulgaria as well as on the geographic and cultural market focus. The base objects of study are: Schloss Elmau, Germany, Cocoon Medical Wellness Retreat, Indonesia and SHA Wellness Clinic - Alicante, Spain.

As a result of an empirical study analysis, the conclusion is that some of the marketing management methods can be standardized and innovated in products and operations based on research and evaluation of sites as well as introducing leading ones.

A summary of the empirical study has led to conclusions about innovation opportunities in some standardized marketing management procedures related to the method of managing functions. In order to an optimal allocation of resources

of the organization, in terms of the most significant marketing tools applied - product, distribution and communication policy, the emphasis is associated with the modern forms of distribution of various product health tourism programs, by nomenclature and assortment, and also the introduction of internal company standards for the service process of the specialized programs in the rehabilitation centers.

Based on an analysis of best practices of some of the international leaders in the tourism market (Grand Resort Bad Ragaz, Germany, Cocoon Medical Wellness Retreat, Indonesia, SHA Wellness Clinic - Alicante, Spain) are recommend some innovative solutions to the studied health tourism sites in Bulgaria with the aim of introducing them through standardized rules in the management of the studied sites in Bulgaria.

Based on the study of best practices in hotel Grand Resort Bad Ragaz and the empirical research we suggest:

- offering and advertising of products through their own website and pages in various social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and others;
- using package prices of the specialized services related to health tourism programs through various online platforms related to tourism such as tripadvisor.com, booking.com and others;
- offering the so-called "Gift Cards" for people wanting to surprise someone close to them with a vacation package and other various services included;
- offering special membership cards to attract and create lasting customer relationships;
- offering different programs according to the target group, programs for two, families and groups;
- distributing and advertising through www.tripadvisor.com, www.trivago.uk.com, www.theleadinghotels.com, www.expedia.com, www.americanexpressfhr.com, www.virtuoso.com

Based on the good practices of Cocoon Medical Wellness Retreat, Indonesia and the empirical research, the following innovative solutions are suggested:

- developing holistic beauty programs using specialized non-surgical anti-aging, aesthetic and wellness harmony procedures;
- marketing managers of health tourism sites in Bulgaria shall explore and implement the Cocoon Medical Wellness Retreat's holistic approach to factors such as diet, stress, chronic pain and hormonal imbalance;
- marketing managers of health tourism sites in Bulgaria shall explore and implement the Cocoon Medical Wellness Retreat ,s integrative approach to assist detox, increase vitamin levels, increase energy levels, and treat problems including weight gain, abdominal swelling, cellulite, low libido and fatigue.

Based on the good practices of SHA Wellness Clinic - Alicante, Spain and the empirical study it is suggested:

- to apply programs with an assortment structure of: Shiatsu massage, hydrotherapies, acupuncture, as well as programs for the treatment of a one unique problem, such as the cellulite;
- if possible to create cinema halls and spacious wellness halls in some site;
- to create as additional services offices with specialists for medical, nutritional and psychological counseling;
- to create training programs for healthy cooking;
- to apply programs with assortment structure: yoga and meditation for children;
- to create, as per the SHA example, an academy, conference section, relaxation, breathing, sensory and other programs or courses.
- to organize and conduct training courses in cognitive stimulation of the visitors on the site;
- to create innovative programs for weight control, anti-stress, smoking cessation.

The suggestions made can be implemented as technological operations introducing innovations in the studied specialized sites for health tourism in Bulgaria.

Conclusion

In the end of this work, some **conclusions** can be drawn about which aspects of marketing management that can be applied to introduce innovations in the field of health management in order to enhance the competitiveness of Bulgarian health tourism; how the application of innovative standards and certification systems could support the development of the tourism industry.

Firstly, a change in the overall strategy for management, development and stimulation of health tourism in Bulgaria is necessary. More time and financial resources need to be invested in developing a successful marketing policy.

In addition, health tourism should be considered not only as a specific type of tourism but also as an opportunity to complement and introduce innovations in any other type of tourism, as well as an opportunity to use the material and technical base of the seasonal complexes in new directions taking into account market demand.

An important aspect of the marketing management is the demand management. There is a need of developing a strategy to attract new market segments outside of the usual tourist health services. This can be achieved through an innovative approach that mixes different types of tourism and travel purposes.

Last but not least, an important element is the successful tourism management through the implementation of standardized health products in tourism enterprises as they contribute to the growth and prosperity of the tourism business, generally helping to attract more and more satisfied customers, which in turn has a positive effect on the revenue and long-term economic profitability of the sector.

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ENHANCEMENT OF COMPETITIVENESS OF THE PRODUCT IN THE TOURIST BUSINESS BY HEALTH TOURISM MARKETING MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

The actuality of the examined problems is determined by the fact that the Bulgarian tourism is looking for forms of achieving non-seasonality in the tourist supply.

The object of research is the health tourism, **the subject of analysis** is the aspects of marketing management of health tourism in Bulgaria. **The thesis** is that, by applying marketing management tools, the competitiveness of the product in the tourism business is increased. **The purpose of the research** is to establish which aspects of marketing management can be applied to introduce innovations in the field of health tourism in order to increase its competitiveness.

The purpose of the article is realized through study and validation of **basic tasks** such as: Clarifying the essence and specificity of marketing management; Analyzing the resource capacity and potential of health tourism in Bulgaria; Theoretical issues regarding health management; Analysis of key aspects such as standardization and certification in health tourism; Study and evaluation of specialized sites on health tourism in Bulgaria.

The following **research methods** have also been used to achieve the objectives and tasks: An overview of the theoretical scientific developments; An overview of materials of international and European organizations; An overview of company surveys; Empirical study.

Main results / directions, groups /: A) **Tourism Business Direction - results:** The characteristics of marketing management and their application in health tourism have been identified; The potential of health tourism has been determined and the opportunities for its development in Bulgaria are outlined. B) **Product Competitiveness Direction in the Tourist Business in Bulgaria - results:** The factors which prove that Bulgaria can be promoted as a health tourism destination for are outlined; Innovative approaches have been identified in tourism to develop and implement standardized health products; Recommendations were made on which aspects of marketing management can be applied for introducing innovations in the field of health management.

Conclusions: A change is required in the overall management of the health tourism in Bulgaria; Implementing innovations in the specialized sites for health tourism is required;

Practical consequences: Successful marketing management in tourism can be realized through the application of standardized health products in tourism enterprises.

Originality: Currently in Bulgaria the opportunities for health tourism marketing management are still not thoroughly explored as a year-round form of tourism.

Key words: competitiveness, tourism business, health tourism, marketing management, standardization.

JEL: L83, L21, O26.