

## **STUDYING THE RELATION „BRAND – LEADERSHIP” ON THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET OF SEASIDE TOURIST DESTINATIONS**

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### **—Abstract—**

The leadership of a certain tourist destination on the international market is intrinsically related in customers’ minds to the identity and popularity of the destination, which have been formed as a result of a focused strategically intended behaviour on the target market audiences, both by the businesses providing tourist services (tour operators, tour agents, hotels, restaurants, aqua parks, museums), and by the government and municipal authorities. Namely, the interrelation between the image of the destination on the market and the customers’ preferences form the relation „brand – leadership” on the international tourism market.

The present study is based on a questionnaire survey conducted in three countries providing seaside tourist packages (Bulgaria, Turkey and Greece), where respondents were 550 tourists of 5 nationalities. The study has shown that the brand positions the respective destination on the market, creates its reputation and wins customers’ loyalty over time on the basis of the vision, quality and invoked trust epitomized by the destination.

**Key Words:** *leadership, brand, seaside tourist destinations, tourist market*

**JEL Classification:** M31

## **1. THE BRAND OF THE DESTINATIONS AS A PREREQUISITE FOR ACHIEVING LEADERSHIP ON THE TOURIST MARKET**

### **1.1. The brand of the tourist destination and its customer behaviour based added value**

The brand in tourism is kind of a tool, which identifies the destinations and differentiates the tourist products and services offered by them from the tourist packages of the competitors. Actually the brand of the tourist destinations is characterized by its own distinctive functions, which are altered as a result of the market “noise” and the fight for consumers. The positive alterations in the image and reputation of the destination and in the increase of customer loyalty and trust, create a significant competitive advantage of the destination on the tourist market and becomes the consecutive but not the last step in brand evolution. This is how brand equity was established and positioned in the strategic management, it is attributed by the tourist and is in no way physically produced in a specific tourist destination. This customer-based brand equity includes in itself “theoretic advantages and management practices in understanding and influencing customer behavior” (Keller, 1995: 45).

Typical for the customer-based brand equity is its “differentiating effect”, since the created knowledge of the brand of the destination in the mind of the tourists affects their choice of holiday or other tourist packet in it. This choice reflects:

- the marketing efforts of the tourist enterprises, operating on the territory of a specific destination;
- the municipal and state policy carried out in the sphere of tourism.

Customer-based brand equity is successful, when:

- the destination has won a favorable attitude and customer trust to the tourist products and services produced in it;
- the possible expansion of the portfolio of the tourist destination does not evoke negative reactions on the target markets;

- the increase of the price of tourist products and services of the destination does not result in diminishing its image on the international market;
- it stimulates a bigger demand of the tourist packets offered by it.

The customer-based brand equity of the tourist destination depends on factors such as favourable associations in the mind of the tourists, which it can influence through the marketing mix and consistently constructed identity. Quality-related indicators are based on the previous experience of the tourists with the tourist products and services of the concrete destination and the recommendations received from a close circle of people, and the reliability associations are a result of lasting relations between the consumer and the brand.

Loyalty to a specific tourist destination depends on internal circle of variables – it brings the tourist more benefits than the price, which they pay for a given tourist packet. This is “the heart” of the brand equity (Aaker, 2013), for which of significant importance are the size of the group of loyal tourists and the intensity of their loyal attitude.

At the same time, the added value of the brand is subject to the specific conditions of the environment, where the tourist destination exists and develops. The key factors here are:

- maturity of the respective market;
- presence and power of competition;
- level and features of consumer culture;
- standard of living;
- cultural specific characteristics;
- legal restrictions;
- priorities in national tourist policies.

## **1.2. Criteria determining leadership of seaside tourist destinations on the international market**

Summer seaside tourist destinations realize added value in global aspect, based on a brand, by maintaining the competitiveness of the tourist products and services offered by them. Global advantages of the destinations today are based not only on quality and servicing, but also on innovation, creativity, flexibility and swiftness in offering and realizing seaside tourist packages. All this leads to sustainable business results, allowing reinvestment in strategies for development and growth.

According to the 550 tourists, who participated in the research, the criteria to research the leadership of seaside tourist destinations on the international market can be summarized to:

- competency, focused on the identity of the destination promoted on the market;
- respect, based on focus upon the expectations of tourist and investors;
- uniqueness and differentiation corresponding to the destination identity;
- comprehensiveness taking shape in commitment with various market segments;
- efficiency, focused on trust, ethics, and integrity;
- relevance, based on adequacy of the strategy;
- maintaining price and added value.

## **2. STUDYING THE RELATION „BRAND – LEADERSHIP” ON THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET OF SEASIDE TOURIST DESTINATIONS**

### **2.1. Leadership of seaside tourist destinations of Turkey, Greece, and Bulgaria on the international market, based on a brand**

The questionnaire distributed among 550 tourists in three countries providing seaside tourist packages (Bulgaria, Turkey, and Greece) distinguished five seaside destinations – leaders, each of them having different brand, vision, quality characteristics and image:

- Antalya – the most visited Turkish seaside destination, referred to as “the pearl of the Turkish Riviera” in the world tourist journals, which has received more than 11 million tourists only for the first six months of 2013;
- Ölüdeniz – with its “Blue lagoon” the turquoise seaside of Turkey has long ago become the emblem of the Turkish tourist product;
- Santorini – the tempting island with its white houses and blue-domed churches is a favourite destination for tourist from all over the world;
- Mykonos – with its specific architecture with low white houses, with its rich palette of cafes, fish restaurants and numerous souvenir shops, it creates the feeling of magic, which mixes with the pulsing energy night life, which turns the island into one of the hottest European holiday destinations;
- Golden sands – one of the cheapest seaside tourist destinations and popular party destination.

Bulgaria, unlike Turkey and Greece, which are undoubted tourist leaders in Europe, is a less known tourist destination, related mainly with good opportunities for seaside tourism at an affordable price. At this stage, Bulgaria has a rather one-layer image (mainly of a seaside tourist destination) in the mind of the foreign tourist. Turkey and Greece have a leading position on the market of cultural-cognitive, historical and congress travels, as well as on the seaside tourist packages market since a long time.

However, distinguishing the five seaside destinations is an indisputable fact for high tourist satisfaction and is a prerequisite for repeated visits and loyalty to the destinations.

The associations inspired by Turkey, Greece, and Bulgaria in the foreign tourists are related to the focus on the 3S (sun, sea, sand) but for the Bulgarian seaside resorts there is one more significant valid feature – low prices.

Based on the conducted analyses four main seaside competitive markets are outlined on the Balkans – Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, and Croatia. Key factors in choosing destinations by the tourist are:

- prices;
- climate;
- nature;
- infrastructure;
- possibilities for sightseeing;
- cleanness;
- security of the respective destination;
- quality of offered services;
- comfort;
- servicing.

The three competitive seaside destinations rely on long-term efficient communication of the brand and in accordance with their strategic goals the desire is to position themselves as modern, year-long destinations with specific vision and typical national identity (natural, architectural, cultural), preserved cultural traditions and nature. The efficiency of the three tourist brands aims to instill the sense of quality of the offered tourist service. For Bulgaria the final goal, pursued by the brand, is the perception of the country as a “cheap destination” to become “a good ration between quality and price”.

As key target markets for the three destinations stand:

- Germany, which is with extremely high level of priority;
- Russia;
- Romania;
- Great Britain.

The evaluation system for determining the main target markets of the three competitive countries on the tourist market should be based on:

- evaluation of the market potential;
- current market share of the researched destinations;
- income per tourist;
- number of realized nights;
- growth in tourist flow compared to income growth.

## **2.2. Relation “brand – leadership” on the international market of seaside tourist destinations**

Leadership on the international market of summer tourist destinations is mainly revealed in recognition of the brand of the relevant destination. Summer resorts, which have a leading position in a given market segment, are distinguished with a sustainable and lasting reputation. The research among 550 tourists of five nationalities shows that the destinations-leaders offer excellent service, diversified products, exclusive tourist services and bind the activities for growth and development with the desired by the tourists brand.

The relation “brand – leadership” on the international market of seaside tourist destinations is revealed in recognition of the destination identity, binding the expectations of tourists and investors with the realized growth and development strategy. The expectations for the destination brand on the international market for tourist travels become the criteria for strategic behaviour of the tourist enterprises

globally – the brand logic redirects their vision, mission and values, while the focus is on what are the quality competitive advantages and the distinguishing key factors.

Leadership requires unique and excellent tourist products and services, with long-term orientation to adding value both for the tourists, and for the destination. The leading destinations adapt their main tourist products and services to the strategies and goals of their own market policy. Creating and establishing the brand on the international tourist market of summer destinations demands focusing both on main and substantial, as well as on modern and distinguishing elements of leadership.

The brand of the researched seaside tourist destinations of Turkey, Greece, and Bulgaria is based on binding leadership in terms of quality and results with tourists identity, with the strategy relying on a complex of planned expectations and adopted standards, typical for the destinations – leaders. Leadership is a process through which the tourists identity transforms into a targeted brand, positioning seaside destinations on the international market, creating reputation and winning loyalty of tourist demand in time.

The relation “brand – leadership” on the international market of seaside tourist destinations based on the research of seaside resorts in Turkey, Greece, and Bulgaria is revealed in the following tendencies:

- The brand multiplies the perceived by the tourist usefulness and value of the resort, and the success of the seaside destinations – leaders is measured by the added value, which they create for the tourists, investors and their employees.
- Leadership of seaside tourist destinations on the international market binds the strategy with the targeted target groups.
- The brand of the leaders among the seaside tourist destinations has long-term orientation and is bound both with the current tourists and the market changes.
- The brand creates unique and differentiated view of the tourist products and services of the destinations corresponding to their leadership identity.



- The brand of the seaside destinations – leaders provides long-term adequate to the tourist needs products and services and is sustainable in time.
- The brand of the seaside tourist destinations is based on the desired identity in terms of leadership – trust, ethics, honesty, quality, uniqueness, diversification.
- Tourists pay averagely one third more for branded destinations, and the seaside destinations – leaders add more value compared to other destinations.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The research of relation “brand – leadership” on the international market of seaside tourist destinations carried out among 550 tourists from five nationalities draws the following main conclusions:

- Leadership of Turkey and Greece as seaside tourist destinations is purposefully developed according to the expectations and needs of the potential tourist markets and investors in the resorts. This long-term goal-oriented policy provides tourists and business with the security that the destination has an image today and will be stable and sustainable in terms of attendance in future.
- Leadership of seaside tourist destinations is based on a focus on:
  - ✓ business – forms strategic context for establishing sustainable tourist product leading to lasting penetration on new target markets;
  - ✓ employees – manages human resources in order to achieve commitment to establishing permanent clients for a long period;
  - ✓ competitive advantages – focuses on sustainable establishing of distinctive characteristics and qualities;
  - ✓ results – it is based on business results.
- The seaside tourist destinations of Turkey and Greece bring high added value for the tourists, the tourist business and the investors and are highly competitive, since they are based on strong national brands.

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