Marketing Strategies Regarding the Offer of Souvenirs in Tourism

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Abstract

The aim of the following paper is to propose appropriate marketing strategies related to the offer of souvenirs in a specific destination. In order to achieve that a literature review regarding the topic is presented. It includes information related to marketing strategies and description of souvenirs seen as tangible tourist products. Furthermore a field research in the form of direct observation of souvenir offer in several specialized shops in Varna, Bulgaria is conducted. The results of the study have proven that one of the most appropriate marketing strategies that should be used by sellers of such goods should be differentiation. Apart from mass-produced souvenirs vendors should propose artisanal crafts integrating some elements of the local culture. This strategy will allow the sellers of souvenirs to attract more and different customers and in the same time to promote the tourist destination.

Keywords: Souvenirs, Marketing strategies, Souvenir shops, Cultural heritage, Tourist destination

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Introduction

Many firms operate in the ever-evolving and strongly competitive field of tourism. In order to choose, develop and implement a successful marketing strategy the company should take into consideration many factors and elements. In the following paper we will focus on the specifics of souvenirs – unique goods related to tourism. The modern consumer is educated, well informed and wants to have an authentic experience, part of which is the search and purchase of such goods. In order to satisfy these needs the firm should adapt an appropriate marketing strategy. This statement is the main focus of the following paper. At the beginning some generic marketing strategies are presented followed by a description of souvenirs and some of their specifics. The taxonomies and some typology of these products are explained. The paper also contains a study of the offer in 5 shops selling souvenirs in the city of Varna, Bulgaria. The main characteristics of the sold products are presented and analyzed. Based on the results a proposition for an appropriate marketing strategy is made.

Literature review

All organizations big or small must make strategic decisions influenced by their external environment. The strategy should pay attention to the customers, the competitors and the market trends. It has to be active and engaging. Hence, the company operating in the field of souvenirs should feel and try to influence the changes in the business environment. By its very nature, marketing determines how the organization interacts with the market. Marketing strategy has to take into consideration three forces known as the strategic three Cs: the customer, the competition, and the corporation. The company searches for ways to differentiate itself from other firms by highlighting its distinctive strengths in order to provide a better value to customers. There are different ways to formulate and implement a marketing strategy. In the following paper we will only focus on generic strategies based on competitive advantage. One of the most famous and widely used even today categorizations is created by Porter. The researcher proposes several generic strategies.

Based on the Table 1 we can distinguish:

➢ Cost leadership. It is a strategy based on the search of overall cost leadership within a certain

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1 Jain, S. Marketing planning and strategy, South-Western pub. 2000, p. 23.
market. A general ways to achieve that is through the use of economy of scale, creating relationships with other firms and organizations, a well based and developed infrastructure.\(^2\)

- Differentiation. The goods and services that are offered to the consumers are different from those of the competitors operating in the same field. The products are distinct with unique features. Sometimes they can be considered a high quality, better alternative and can strive for a premium price. Firms try to differentiate themselves from the competitors but should not forget that what matters the most are the needs of the customers. Therefore companies should also focus on creating customer advantages that will lead to satisfaction and more profits.\(^3\)

Potential sources for the first two strategies can be: Product performance, perception of product, low cost operations, legal advantage, alliances/relationships, superior skills, flexibility, attitude.\(^4\)

- Focus. The firm concentrates its offer in entering or expanding to a narrow specific market. The company should know the specifics of its chosen segment or a niche.

Table 1. Competitive advantage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic target</th>
<th>Strategic advantage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broad industry wide</td>
<td>Uniqueness perceived</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrow specific segment</td>
<td>Low cost position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overall cost leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focused differentiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus cost leadership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Drummond, G., Enor, J. Ashford, R., Strategic marketing, Planning and Control, Elsevier, 2008, p. 152.

All of the generic strategies have in common the fact that that they are all organizationally established at the level of a strategic business segment.\(^5\)

Apart from the mentioned concepts there are many other alternatives and elements that should be taken into consideration, however due to the limited scale of the research the paper will focus only on the previous 3 presented generic strategies and their role in the offer of souvenirs—unique products that exist only in the field of tourism. They are a holder of a specific meaning and are important for tourists, sellers, artisans, local communities. Souvenirs have diverse forms and uses ranging from everyday objects to historical and cultural artifacts.\(^6\) They are universally related to tourism as sales products that help the buyer to recall his experience in the destination.\(^7\) It should be noted that it is difficult to separate souvenirs in their own category. There are several concepts that are similar and it is difficult to distinguish them. For example we can use the term art for the mass consumer/les art commerciaux which according to Graburn includes exhibit objects that can be sold but at the same time preserve their cultural and aesthetic qualities. Today they are mostly created for the tourist market.\(^8\) There is also a distinction between a souvenir and an artifact. The latter is a holder of historical and cultural value and it is worthy for a public or institutional collection.\(^9\) The souvenir is a term difficult to define and categorized. Nevertheless many

\(^7\) Swanson, K., Tourists' and retailers' perception of souvenirs, Journal of vacation marketing, volume 10, 2004.
researchers try to clarify the concept and determine its dimensions. Taking all of this into consideration Swanson and Timothy propose the following taxonomies for this tourist product.

![Souvenir taxonomies](image)

Figure 1. Souvenir taxonomies  
Source: Adapted from Swanson, K., Timothy, D., Souvenirs: icons of meaning, commercialization and commoditization. Tourism Management. 33(3), 2012

The top and the bottom of the figure represent the classification of souvenirs from different points of view. On the one hand we have tourists. For them these goods hold a special symbolic meaning and are a reminisce of a specific place or event. (symbolic reminders). On the other hand we have the opinion of the merchants. For them souvenirs are tourist products indented for sale (tourist commodities). These two definitions don’t contradict each other, instead they provide a fuller conceptual framework for the understanding of the role of souvenirs.\(^{10}\) Another two categories can be added to the previous ones- other commodities and other reminders. The first one includes items that are not souvenirs, but are sold to tourists. An example is toiletries, food and more. The second features products that are not purchased as souvenirs, but are also reminiscent of a past event or place. Typical examples are boarding passes, concert or museum tickets. These specific qualities and characteristics of souvenirs create the opportunity to divide them into several groups. In the scientific literature we have several examples of different classifications of these goods. Among them we can cite the famous typology of Gordon (1986) which includes 5 categories of souvenirs:

- Pictorial images;
- Piece-of-the-rock;
- Symbols of a destination;
- Markers;
- Local products;

Another one is the division of souvenirs by Markers Blundell (1993) in two groups:

- Expensive handmade products;
- Mass-produced goods;

Decrop (2010) presents 4 groups:

- Tourism gadgets;
- Serotypes of the country;
- Documentary souvenirs;

\(^{10}\) Swanson, K., Timothy, D., Souvenirs: icons of meaning, commercialization and commoditization, Tourism Management, 33(3), 2012, pp. 489-499.
Shen (2011) divide the souvenirs in two groups:

- Cultural souvenirs;
- Commercial souvenirs.11

On the basis of the previous statements we can present the most relevant to our research types of souvenirs:

- Mass-produced souvenirs;
- Handmade/artisanal souvenirs;
- Souvenirs representing the stereotypes of the country;
- Souvenirs representing the specifics of the local e tourists destination;

The first two groups are related to the method of production and the second two groups illustrate the specific association towards the object in the mind of the consumer. This differentiation will be used in the field research conducted for this paper.

**Research and findings**

Souvenirs are important goods offered at every tourist destination. In order to integrate an appropriate marketing strategy, innovate and provide a better and more adapted to tourist's needs product, a detailed research of existing offers should be conducted. The following paper examines the souvenirs sold in several specific places in the city of Varna, Bulgaria. The town is a famous tourist destination in the country and attracts annually many local and foreign tourists. The city has various famous natural and anthropological resources. Due to an usually warm weather, favorable location at the coast of the Black sea and the organization of many events such as "MTV Presents Varna Beach"12, The international music festival "Varna summer", Contempo – the international expert festival of Contemporary Art , International film festival "Love is folly"13, "World festival of animated film", 14Varna is a "all year-round" destination. According to the National Statistics Institute in 2017 the number of tourists that have spent at least one night in the city is 1141572 and 794031 of them are foreigners15 (around 20% of the total for the country). As one of the most visited cities in Bulgaria it is only logical that different souvenirs are proposed to travelers. In order to analyze the offer of these tourist goods a field research was conducted. The offer of 5 souvenir-selling businesses was observed: 2 souvenir shops, 2 mall kiosks and 1 supermarket with a dedicated to souvenirs area. The chosen places sell souvenirs during the whole year and are frequently visited by local and foreign tourists. The observation took place between August and September 2018. In the table below are presented the main characteristics of the researched subjects.

**Table 2. Characteristics of the five souvenir-selling shops**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Price-range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shop A</td>
<td>Souvenir shop</td>
<td>City center</td>
<td>Average-expensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop B</td>
<td>Souvenir shop</td>
<td>City center</td>
<td>Average-expensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop C</td>
<td>Kiosk</td>
<td>Shopping center</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop D</td>
<td>Kiosk</td>
<td>Shopping center</td>
<td>Low-Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop E</td>
<td>Supermarket</td>
<td>Shopping center</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author's compilation

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12 www.mtvvarnabeach.com
13 www.visit.varna.bg
14 www.varnafest.org
15 www.nsi.bg
As we can see from the previous table the shops are different, they have different locations and price range. Nevertheless they are strategically positioned and visited by various tourists. They were chosen in order to analyze and present a fuller and more coherent image of the offer of souvenirs in Varna. Each selling spot has its own specifics. The observation and evaluation of the offer of each shop is based on the quantity and the quality of the four types of souvenirs presented in the previous part of the researched paper. They are mass-produced souvenirs, handmade/artisanal souvenirs, souvenirs representing the stereotypes of the country, souvenirs representing the specifics of the local tourist destination. Another added element to the observation is the price range of the goods. The results for each shop are as followed:

- **Shop A.** The shop offers different souvenirs at a high to average price. We can find medium range of mass produced as well as some locally made souvenirs. The majority of the items sold represent stereotypes of the country and only very few represent the destination of Varna, but their quality is average.

- **Shop B.** The shop sells souvenirs at an average to high price. The offer includes hand-made and mass-produced objects representing the stereotypes of the country. Items representing the destination are almost nonexistent.

- **Shop C.** The shop is a kiosk located in the biggest shopping center in Varna. The prices are average. The items featured are in their majority mass-produced. They represent stereotypes of the country. Several trinkets such as magnets or postcards represent the destination of Varna.

- **Shop D.** The kiosk is located in a smaller less frequented by tourist's shopping mall. The items are sold at an average to low price. There are many mass produced and hand made products representing the stereotypes of the country. There are many poorly made souvenirs representing the destination, often with no direct relation to the specific heritage of the place.

- **Shop E.** The last place selling souvenirs is a supermarket also located in the biggest shopping center in Varna. It has a large variety of products. In the shop we can find a special corner dedicated to souvenirs. It has a large variety of mass-produced cheap and sometimes poorly made products representing the stereotypes of the country. In contrast to the other observed places, here we can find a variety of food and beverages representing the country, but not the specific region.

Some good examples of souvenirs representing the local culture include: handcrafted wooden boat, some jewelry boxes made from local seashells, clocks with sailors, wooden crafted pictures, small jewelry - replica of the oldest gold found in the world (near the city of Varna), some handmade magnets with the Dormition of the Mother of God Cathedral - a famous monument of the city.

Some bad examples of souvenirs found in the five locations are: A set of klinex with pictures of the country, apple cider with no relation to the destination nor the country, an ashtray in the form of a half eaten apple with some pictures of famous monuments of the country in the bottom, wooden motorbike with no relation to the country or destination, a coin purse made in china with the name Varna written in front, a magnet in the shape of an owl with the word Varna written on it.

Based on the previously presented key points of the observation we can conclude that the offer of souvenirs in Varna in one-dimensional. The majority of the proposed items are mass produced not very expensive trinkets representing the stereotypes of the country. They can be found elsewhere and are not related to the specific destination. Locally made food and beverages are rarely featured in the shops. There is a lack of souvenirs representing the cultural heritage of Varna. Also the offer of locally made high quality artisanal items is very limited. The results of the study will provide information which marketing strategy can be used by the sellers. The research however has some limitations due to the fact that the statistical data regarding the offer of souvenirs in Varna, Bulgaria is very scarce and that the full observation of every souvenir shop in the city requires more time and resources.
Discussion

The assessment of the benefits of the tourists is based mainly on their expectations and their perceptions of the quality of their promised services. In general, it is influenced by the way a tourist company satisfies their needs. The added value of the tourist products and services contributes to the fact that the company needs not only to create them in order to fulfill the wishes of the consumer, but it must before this productive stage understand the needs of the customer, create adapted products in order to gain the confidence of the tourists. This approach is essential to the marketing strategy of the company selling tourist goods including souvenirs. Based on the literature review and the conducted research we can make the following statements:

- The souvenir is a specific good related to tourism that holds a special added value for the customer;
- The souvenir is important for the tourists but also for the local community, because it represents their cultural heritage;
- The souvenir should integrate the specifics of the destination. There are different ways in order to achieve that- the product can be handmade by a local artisan using local raw materials or methods typical for the region or it could feature some cultural elements of the place, such as famous historic and natural sites.;
- The souvenirs in Varna are mostly mass-produced and cheap goods without any distinguishing features;
- The souvenirs in Varna are mostly dedicated to stereotypes representing the country and not the destination;

The mentioned statements lead to the conclusion that: The most appropriate marketing strategy for the offer of souvenirs in the city of Varna should be differentiation. The market is filled with mass produced cheap generic products. In time tourists will lose interest in them, because the modern consumer is educated, well informed and wants to have an authentic experience, part of which is the search and purchase of souvenirs. Therefore a business selling these tourists goods should try to satisfy a large number of segments by providing various and different form the competitor's products. The most appropriate ones should be artisanal handcrafted quality souvenirs integrating elements of local culture.

The mentioned strategy is global and can be used in any tourist destination, but it should be adapted to the specifics of the place. The results are based on the observation of souvenirs selling places in Varna and therefore are not conclusive for the current offer of souvenirs in tourism in general. A much more detailed analyze is necessary in order to establish a reliable marketing strategy regarding this product.

Conclusion

Around the world the production of souvenirs and their acquisition (consumption) play an important role for sustaining the tourism economy, local community's relationships, cultural structures, traditions and heritage. Therefore in-depth knowledge of the product is necessary. Businesses compete to serve the customer needs, the field of tourism and souvenirs in particular is no different. In order to satisfy the buyers, firms develop different strategies based on numerous elements. The tree most famous generic marketing strategies are cost leadership, differentiation and focus. In order to choose the most appropriate one regarding the topic a field research of the offer of souvenirs in the city of Varna, Bulgaria was conducted. The results of the observation of the five places offering these products to travelers led to the conclusion that the strategy of differentiation.

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can be used. This is due to the fact that most tourists search for authentic experiences, but are offered cheap, mass-produced generic goods with no relation to the visited place. Instead vendors should propose artisanal handcrafted quality products integrating elements of local culture. As a result of the almost non-existing statistical data regarding the number of souvenir selling places in the tourist's destination of Varna and their revenue it is very difficult to create a detailed image of the offer of such goods. Therefore, the results of the observation are limited. A much more in-depth analyze in the future is necessary in order to conclude with certainty which marketing strategy should be implemented. The main purpose of it is to attract more and different customers and in the same time to promote the tourist destination.

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