

Chapter 7

The Importance of Happiness and Well-Being Experience in Health: The Case of Vidago Palace Thermal Spa

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ABSTRACT

This research explains the importance of happiness and well-being in unique health experience and the effect on satisfaction and loyalty in consumer's health thermal spa through a qualitative methodology. The brand chosen is the Vidago Palace Thermal Spa located in the north of Portugal. The combination of different options creates some unique health experiences, which follow the major trends of happiness and well-being, and contributes to a better health and lifestyle. Those attributes built great experiences and support consumer satisfaction and loyalty in health thermal spas.

INTRODUCTION

Brand experience has emerged in recent years as a very important topic in marketing and consumer behaviour research. Indeed, brand experience is increasingly recognised as important in managerial practice (Andreini, Pedeliento, Zarantonelo & Solerio, 2019). Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) operationalised and defined brand experience based on an experiential marketing approach (Schmitt, 1999). However, as Brakus et al's (2009) work suggested, consumption changes in the market, that is, the proliferation of, for example, themed vacations, conferences, dinners, etc. held in different contexts, among them thermal spas, suggests the need for more research into brand experience and a more critical look at the marketing management of the construct (Schmitt, Brakus & Zarantonello, 2014).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3034-4.ch007

Hall (2011:6) defined health tourism as “a commercial phenomenon of industrial society which involves a person travelling overnight away from a normal home environment for the express benefit of maintaining or improving health, and the supply and promotion facilities of destinations which seek to provide such benefits”. This type of tourism aims at achieving better physical and mental well-being. Cunha (2006) distinguished between groups; those seeking therapeutic treatments, groups looking to achieve well-being, and a third group seeking health resorts to rest in, to escape the harshness of everyday life, and to relax in natural environments. The wellness and spa sector is a multi-million euro global industry that is expected to continue to grow (GWI, 2018). The spa industry can be viewed as a homogenous entity; research has demonstrated that consumers use spas for several reasons, namely: health, sport, tourism and recreation (Baloglu, Busser & Cain, 2019; Dryglas & Salamaga, 2017).

In recent years the health and wellness tourism sector has become more challenging and interesting for business managers. “Tourism is currently developing based on the search for new spaces and environments” (Guerra, 2016:114). Tourist destinations need to develop new and distinct offers, with an emphasis on rest, leisure and, above all, emotional stimuli, and to propose novel experiences. Health tourism is associated with other areas, such as beauty and slimming treatments, cosmetic surgery, and with thermal resorts; in the Portuguese case thermal resorts were, in the latter part of the 20th century, abandoned or declined over time. Many have since progressively been recovered and adapted to new requirements and trends. Recent health and physical concerns have (Stephen, 2016) triggered a debate between medicine and tourism (Smith & Puckzo, 2009), as this area of tourism integrates mental and physical health. Thus, some authors find difficulty in establishing a clear difference between health/medical tourism and wellness tourism (Berg, 2008; Smith & Puckzo, 2009). The Tourism of Portugal report (2006) even distinguishes between three types of health and well-being: health tourism, general well-being and specific well-being. These designations were extended into the Report of the Portuguese Association of Tourism and Welfare (2013), thus explicitly integrating medical tourism, thermal spas, thalassotherapy, aesthetic tourism, health and wellness resorts.

A health spa experience has been defined as a series of interconnected events facilitated by a company in order to engage a consumer in a memorable and unique way (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). This memorable and unique healthy experience leads to more satisfied and loyal consumers.

This work is made up of three parts. The first is a general introduction to the themes of happiness, well-being and brand experience, highlighting their importance for health. The second develops the basic concepts of happiness, well-being and brand experience, and their influence on health. The third part presents data on the welfare sector in global terms and in relation to Portugal. Finally, the chapter ends with a case study – the Vidago Palace Thermal SPA, and outlines some challenges, and presents some recommendations, related to the theme.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Happiness

Happiness has been examined from different angles, from an undifferentiated approach (Layard, 2005), from a subjective perspective that reflects different states for different people (Gilbert, 2006), and even from the viewpoint that happiness varies with age and culture (Mogilner, Kamvar, & Aaker, 2011; Tsai 2006). Mogilner (2012:430) argued that happiness can be understood as “excitement, elation and enthu-

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