

Chapter 21

Changes in Tourism Sales and Marketing Post COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

What kind of new sales and marketing methods tourism businesses follow post-pandemic constitutes the research problem. Within this scope, this study aims to discover what kind of changes hotel businesses and travel agencies have experienced in sales and marketing post-COVID-19 and how these businesses direct their marketing strategies. At first, relevant studies in the literature were reviewed, and document analysis was conducted. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interview forms as well as a short questionnaire form. The sample size consists of 17 hotels and nine A group travel agency managers. The data were collected by e-mail. Discourse analysis was conducted on qualitative data. In conclusion, it was determined that the COVID-19 pandemic had a compelling effect in tourism businesses revising their marketing strategies and increasing their product diversity. To persuade consumers and win them back, it was observed that tourism businesses had made an effort to guarantee safe holidays and travel against the pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

The tourism and travel industry has been one of the industries most negatively impacted by COVID-19. Due to security flaws in the COVID-19 Pandemic process, travel restrictions and curfews are imposed many times worldwide at national and international levels (AlJazeera, 2020; Zhang et al. 2020). According to Beirman (2003: 6) health and safety perception are two important factors in visiting a destination. Terror incidents, crime rates, natural disasters, epidemics harm the destination's image and travel motivation. In addition to terrorist incidents (Samitas et al. 2018), natural disasters such as floods, great fires, tsunamis (Ghaderi and Henderson, 2013), and earthquakes (Huan et al. 2004) pose health and safety threats. Such events create serious travel barriers to the destination by creating anxiety and concern for the consumer. In this study, changes in tourism marketing post-COVID-19 pandemic are investigated.

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Accommodation businesses, travel agencies, and food and beverage businesses form the basis of the tourism and travel industry. These three service businesses are among the most affected by COVID-19.

The introduction of travel restrictions for various reasons negatively affects national and international tourist movements. Travel plans had to be postponed or canceled. Moreover, those who made a holiday program started to experience grievances. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in many countries of the world, serious financial losses have been experienced in the travel and tourism industry, and the industry has almost come to a standstill due to the lockdowns and strict travel restrictions applied to prevent the spread of the virus (Arezki and Nguyen, 2020; Stezhko et al. 2020; Yang et al. 2020). All the same, in parallel with the measures taken and regulations brought worldwide, tourism businesses also try to fulfill their duties and responsibilities. The pandemic also necessitates some changes in sales and marketing methods and strategies of tourism businesses. The hotel businesses, which the COVID-19 pandemic has seriously challenged, are restructuring their product, marketing strategy, distribution channels, delivery methods, and consumption points (AIEST, 2020). It is stated that they have become more competitive due to the business model of branded hotel chains and the advantages of disaster management mechanisms during the pandemic process (Hao et al. 2020). For example, large-scale chain brands are accelerating the transition to digital transformation to remain competitive in the post-epidemic world. Because hotels can improve their performance by using digital and smart tools. COVID-19 causes permanent changes in customer preferences and consumption behaviors (Valle, 2020). Hotel businesses and travel agencies, on the other hand, take some precautions and make regulations in the face of these changes. While on the one hand, hotels are making these preparations, on the other hand, they try to re-establish trust by announcing their marketing efforts to their consumers. For example, by stating that they offer contactless services, hotels want to create the image that they use technological facilities well. Hotel businesses seize the opportunity to increase their market share and actively collaborate with large businesses to ensure transformation and improvement (Hao et al. 2020).

The situation is even worse for travel agencies. It is stated that agencies have an extremely difficult time trying to overcome this troublesome process (İbiş, 2020: 95). It is stated that a similar situation is also a matter of the Central European countries. For example, it is understood that many travel agencies are in a difficult situation in Slovakia and Czech travel agencies lost 80% of their jobs in 2020 compared to the previous year. It is stated that layoffs have started and one of the long-established travel agencies has already collapsed in Hungary, and Poland's situation is not very good (Grancay, 2020: 93).

In this study, it was searched an answer to the question of “what kind of sales and marketing methods” are followed by hotel businesses and travel agencies post-COVID-19. The results obtained are discussed in the “Main Focus” section of the research. This section's main goal is to discover how hotel businesses and group A travel agencies reflect their preparations for safe travel and vacation in the post-COVID-19 period to the sales and marketing process and what kind of marketing methods they follow in this process. The aim is to reach important results and conclusions about what kind of guarantees these businesses provide to consumers who plan a vacation. The secondary data in the relevant literature were reviewed, and document analysis was conducted on the secondary data. Secondly, the questionnaire and interview forms prepared for accessible hotel businesses and especially A group of travel agencies operating in Turkey were sent via e-mail. Qualitative data were collected through a semi-structured interview, and discourse analysis was conducted. This study's conclusions were compared with the secondary data in the literature, and important clues for tourism businesses have been obtained.

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