## **Tourism and Sustainable Development**

# Travel Services Consumer Behavior Study at Meridian UTB

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Abstract: Purpose of the research is to study consumer behavior purchasing travel services offered by UTB Meridian. The main objectives of the research are: pre-purchase stage, the stage of purchase, post-purchase stage of the tourist product offered, having regard to the customer structure in terms of socio-professional category, age, income, gender. The collectivity investigated is represented by individuals from which the information were obtained, that is the tourists military personnel who have purchased services at UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord. This collectivity is the population from which the sample will be drawn on which the investigation will be applied and the crowd on which the results of research will be generalized. To obtain the information direct contact is used by an investigator for better control of conditions under which the investigation is conducted. Based on this analysis, it appears that the main components of the "mix" of marketing on which we can act to attract tourism consumers and to determine a certain purchase behavior are: product policy, promotional policy and human resources.

Keywords: tourism; tourist service; tourist product consumer; marketing.

JEL Classification: L83; Q26; C12

#### 1. Introduction

It is known that when deciding to purchase tourist spa treatment services, travelers in general evaluate all alternatives to be considered on its own experience in visiting other resorts of its kind in the country or based on information gained from personal and non-personal sources .We found out that the image on the diseases treated and procedures applied in UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord is very clear, with no confusion with other profile companies in the country.

The research aims at studying consumer of tourist services behavior in UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord and is based on a series of objectives related to the three stages of the process of purchasing services in general: pre-purchase, buying and

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post-purchase, taking into account the structure of customers in terms of socioprofessional category, age, income, gender.

In each of the three stages were monitored a number of objectives as follows:

- in pre-purchase stage-determination of tourists needs and motivations who
  make them choose the services offered by UTB MERIDIAN Eforie Nord
  from many specialized profile services on the market and the research of
  sources of information that the target group receives.
- in purchase stage reactions were followed during delivery of services to consumers who take part directly, depending on age, income, residence, gender.
- in post-purchase stage-investigation of reasons of satisfaction or disappointment of tourists and consumer loyalty study of the mentioned category related to services delivered in UTB.

## 2. Method and Methodology

As a method of collecting survey data investigation was used.

As an investigative tool a self-questionnaire was used. The questionnaire used to gather necessary information includes 20 questions and is structured in three parts: introduction, body area, classification area. The estimated time for completion is 15 minutes.

To obtain information direct contact is used by an investigator for better control of conditions under which the investigation is conducted.

Determination of the research sample was made using the formula:

$$n = \frac{t^2 p(1-p)}{e^2} \quad \text{ where:}$$

t = 0.8 - factor represents the probability that results are guaranteed;

p=0.60 - the proportion of the sample components which have the researched feature;

e = 0.03 - limit error accepted.

From calculations results n = 170 persons.

Findings of quality services and the quality-price ratio was made using semantically differential.

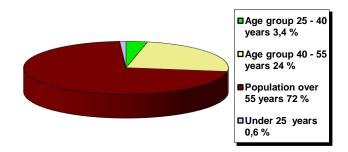
Analysis of the correlation between income level and the decision to return or not at UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord of the sample members was carried out with  $\chi^2$  test.

## 3. Body of Paper

The survey was conducted among members of the sample number of 170. Of these, only 150 people were people who enjoyed the services unit, the other 20 being in the spa treatment unit area by chance or for purposes other than for purchasing travel services. After processing and analysis of data obtained through the investigation conducted has been found that:

72% of sample members are male (108 persons), while 28% are women (42 persons). This can be explained by diseases that are treated in this resort, diseases more common in men than in women.

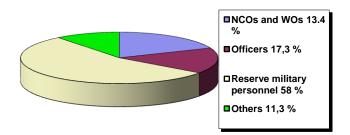
Graphical representation of the structure of the sample in terms of age:



As shown in the sample the age segment with the largest share is over 55 years. In this age group includes persons who seek medical services to treat some age specific diseases and not only. Touristic offer at UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord interest in a very limited extent young people under 25 years (age segment with the lowest percentage) because at this age the diseases and disorders treated here are rare.

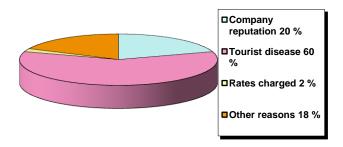
From the responses given by subjects interviewed, show that at UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord come tourists from all counties except those in the west of the country (Timiş, Arad, Bihor) and the Transylvanian plain. This is explained by both long distance and especially by the existence of the resorts in the area "Felix" and "Herculane". It is interesting to note that a significant number of respondents are residing in Buzău and Ialomița counties - counties where there are competing stations ("Amara"-Ialomița, "Sărata Monteoru"-Buzău).

Structuring the sample according to socio-professional category of its members may be represented graphically as follows:



By analyzing the reasons behind tourists who purchase services in UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord, we find that the largest share is held by those who come here to improve or cure their disease - 60%. Of the respondents 20% were attracted by the prestige of the spa treatment unit for the results obtained in the treatment of diseases and disorders by the application of spa procedures. The lowest share have those who have chosen this tourist destination because of the attractive tariffs charged: 2%. Of the tourists military personnel who come to the resort for other reasons: 18% - should be noted that 14% chose UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord from a sense of fidelity. This percentage is added to those who have expressed their intention to return to the resort - 65%. This proves favorable interest rate on the respondents for the services offered by UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord.

The category "other reasons" include: distance from place of residence, the vehicle required for travel, transportation costs to destination, the effects felt by beneficiaries in the application of spa treatments, the results obtained by relatives, friends, knowledge in the treatment of the same disorders as the respondents.



The analysis of information sources conclude that most subjects interviewed learned about the services provided in UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord from personal sources (relatives, friends, acquaintances), or following the doctor's advice. Their proportion is 64% and 32%, which indicates that information was

acquired mostly through rumor. The percentage of 4% indicates that a very small number of subjects obtained information from non-personal sources.

To analyze the reasons of satisfaction or disappointment of tourists, were taken into account assessments of respondents regarding:

- a) The quality of spa treatment services, as they are the defining element of the spa treatment unit in question;
- b) The quality of services offered in UTB MERIDIAN Eforie Nord, in general: accommodation, recreation, treatment;
- c) Correlation between the quality of benefits and the price paid for them (price-quality ratio).

In considering these findings we used the semantic differential.

a) For spa treatment services, respondents were asked to express their views on the quality of benefits for each treatment group separately. Each attribute was evaluated in terms of quality on a five-step scale: very good, good, no opinion, unsatisfactory, highly unsatisfactory.

Each stage of assessment was associated with a grade: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. Intensity of assessment is determined by the level that a person indicates on the scale. Finally a weighted score for each attribute (treatment) is calculated.

#### Grades given by groups of spa treatments

	Very U (1)	U (2)	No opinion (3)	G (4)	Very G (5)
Major Procedures	-	-	4	67	79
<b>Minor Procedures</b>	-	-	29	56	65
Others	-	-	127	12	11

We illustrate the calculation for major procedures:

Major procedures = 
$$\frac{0 \times (1) + 0 \times (2) + 4 \times (3) + 67 \times (4) + 79 \times (5)}{150} = 4.55$$

In conclusion, the findings of the subjects investigated on the spa treatments offered in UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord are generally favorable. In the procedures delivered ranks first major procedures (with a score of 4.55), followed closely by minor procedures (with a score of 4.24), indicating that patients are satisfied with the results of their application.

Lower score (3.22) obtained by the last group of treatments is because new services are less known by those interviewed on the one hand, and secondly that they are charged separately, not included in the price of treatment ticket. These procedures have a higher price than others, and therapeutic indications and their effects are not sufficiently known. The fact that few of the subjects purchase spa services from the last group can be explained by the fact that most customers of the spa unit are older persons, characterized by a certain reluctance to "new" and said change. It must be mentioned however, that investigated persons who benefited from these services appreciate that their quality tends to "Good" (favorable).

b) To study the findings of tourists on the spa unit activity in general, they were asked to express their views for each service: accommodation, meals, entertainment, treatment. Hierarchy of assessments of interviewees was made using a seven steps scale. The grades were awarded from 1 for "extremely poor" to 7 for "extremely good" with 4 for neutral feedback - "No opinion". Next to each note is passed the number of respondents from the total 150.

Grades Service Accommodation Meals Leisure **Treatment** 

Table 1. Grades awarded for each service provided in UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord

For example, the score for accommodation is calculated as follows:

Accommodation = 
$$\frac{0 \times (1) + 0 \times (2) + 0 \times (3) + 4 \times (4) + 9 \times (5) + 59 \times (6) + 78 \times (7)}{450} = 6.40$$

Based on these calculations we can conclude that the overall picture on the quality of tourism services provided in UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord is favorable with an average of 6.13.

In the unit activity, the spa treatments ranks first with a score of 6.52, followed by accommodation services (score 6.40) and meals (score 6.37), on the last place recreational services with a score of 5.26.

While in general travel services consumers in UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord welcome spa treatments in terms of beneficial effects experienced as a result of their application, they are unhappy with the organization to carry out the procedures. Thus, 60% of those surveyed believes that in the treatment rooms

expect too much, while 40% consider that the time limit for a procedure is too small.

Regarding the treatment base, the subjects investigated welcome the existence of modern equipment and facilities used for various treatments and staff competence showed in spa procedures.

Quality of touristic services provided in UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord can be studied also according to socio-professional category and income levels of respondents. Thus an individual score for each attribute was obtained and overall score is found by calculating the arithmetic average.

Table 2. Grades awarded according to the socio-professional category

	Socio-professional category.					
	Officers	NCOs and WOs	Reserve	Oth.		
Accommodation	6.03	5.9	6.59	6.64		
Meals	5.96	5.8	6.57	6.64		
Leisure	3.07	2.75	6.44	5.52		
Treatment	6.07	6.25	6.58	6.70		
General Average	5.28	5.17	6.54	6.37		

It is noted that the highest score is given by elderly people (6.54). The smallest grade, still tending to a positive assessment is given by the Officers and NCOs.

Grades awarded by each socio-professional category result from the following tables:

Table 3. Officers and NCOs: 20 persons = 13.4% of all subjects investigated

Commiss	Grades							
Service	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Accommodation	-	-	-	2	2	12	4	
Meals	-	-	-	1	6	9	4	
Leisure	3	2	12	3	-	-	-	
Treatment	-	-	-	1	1	10	8	

Table 4. Officers: 26 persons = 17.3% of all subjects investigated

g .	Grades								
Service	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Accommodation	-	-	-	2	4	11	9		
Meals	-	-	-	3	3	12	8		
Leisure	2	5	8	11	-	-	-		
Treatment	-	-	-	2	3	12	9		

Table 5. Reserve personnel: 87 people = 58% of all subjects investigated

Service	Grades							
Service	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Accommodation	-	-	-	-	3	30	54	
Meals	-	-	-	-	2	33	52	
Leisure	-	-	-	1	8	30	48	
Treatment	-	-	-	-	-	36	51	

**Table 6. Other socio-professional categories: 17 persons = 11,3% of all subjects** investigated

g .	Grades								
Service	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Accommodation	-	-	-	-	-	6	11		
Meals	-	-	-	-	-	6	11		
Leisure	-	-	-	2	7	5	3		
Treatment	-	-	-	-	-	5	12		

c) Analyzing the answers of those investigated, it appears that the relationship between the quality of benefits received and prices paid for these benefits is considered favorably by 66% of those investigated, 26% had no opinion and 8% considered a negative price-quality ratio. This percentage (8%), consists of sections: officers, NCOs and WOs who are very demanding in terms of services quality. On the other hand, they have higher incomes compared to socio-

professional categories visiting the spa treatment unit and are willing to pay more money to get a high quality.

Jacob and Kyner define loyalty as "indirect behavioral response expressed over time by a given individual, on one or more brands taken from a whole in terms of a psychological process of decision."

So loyalty is the result of a psychological process resulting in a preference and expression of a particular social behavior towards a brand, meaning that specific adhesion. For service firms, nurturing a sense of loyalty among customers is by providing quality services at a level expected by them. And the sample under analysis, consumer expectations on quality of services have two levels of expression of interest: accepted and desired. Between these two levels there is a tolerance area which is the limit in which a service is assessed as satisfactory in terms of quality. The tolerance area varies from one touristic consumer to another in the degree of training, personality, intelligence, the degree of his culture and sex, as well as from a service to another for the same consumer.

#### Quality Level

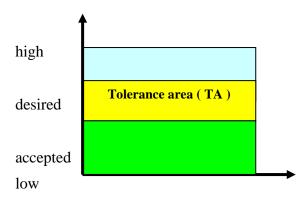


Figure 1. Tourist services

It appears that due to the high quality of tourist services, spa treatment unit has managed to cultivate among its customers a sense of loyalty. Thus, 30% of surveyed came at UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord several consecutive years. In the percentage of 30% are represented all socio-professional categories mentioned in this marketing research, but in the reserve personnel has the largest share (68.75%), followed by officers and NCOs (16.25%) and other (15%).

Then we use the  $\chi^2$  test to analyze the correlations between a number of variables and the intention to return to the UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord: 1. Analyse of correlation between income levels and sample members decision to return or not to UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord.

The calculated value of  $\chi^2$  is determined using the formula:

$$\lambda^2 = \sum_{i=1}^r \sum_{j=1}^k \frac{\left(Q_{ij} - A_{ij}\right)^2}{A_{ij}}$$

Qij = frequency of line i and column j that results from observation

Aij = frequency of line i and column j that is expected under the null hypothesis;

 $Aij = \frac{Total line \times Total column}{Total subjects surveyed}$ 

r = number of rows, k = number of columns.

Table 7. Distribution of answers of subjects investigated:

Visiting Frequency Income levels	Plans to return	Undecide d	No intention to return	Total
< 1,200	28	14	6	48
1,200 – 1,800	38	14	12	64
1,800 – 2,400	18	11	9	38
Total	84	39	27	150

Setting the null hypothesis, that the distribution of the total assessments should have the same proportions in each subgroup, the frequencies should be:

Table 8. Null hypothesis:

Visiting frequency Income level	Plans to return	Undecide d	No intention to return	Total
< 1,200	27	12	9	48
1,200 – 1,800	36	17	11	64
1,800 – 2,400	21	10	7	38
Total	84	39	27	150

The calculated value of  $\chi^2(\chi^2 \, cal.)$  is:

$$\chi 2 \text{ cal.} = \frac{(28-27)^2}{27} + \frac{(38-36)^2}{36} + \frac{(18-21)^2}{21} + \frac{(14-12)^2}{12} + \frac{(14-17)^2}{17} + \frac{(6-9)^2}{9} + \\ + \frac{(12-11)^2}{11} + \frac{(9-7)^2}{7} = 3.201$$

The theoretical value of  $\chi 2$  corresponding to (r-1)(k-1)=(3-1)(3-1)=4 degrees of freedom is 5.991.

Comparing  $\chi^2$  cal. with  $\chi^2$  theoretical is obtained 3.201 <5.991. So, at a significance level of 0.05, the intention of returning at

UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord does not depend on the income of those investigated.

2. Analyse of correlation between socio-professional category of those interviewed and their intention to return to the UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord.

Table 9

Socio-					
professional category Visiting frequency	NCOs and WOs	o	Res.	Oth.	Total
Plans to return	13 (15)*	5 (11)	61 (49)	5 (9)	84
Und.	8 (7)	9 (5)	15 (22)	7 (5)	39
No intention to return	5 (4)	6 (4)	11 (16)	5 (3)	27
Total	26	20	87	17	150

### (\*) = Null hypothesis

The calculated value of  $\chi^2(\chi^2 \text{ cal.})$  is:

$$\begin{split} &\chi 2 \text{ cal.} = \frac{(13-15)^2}{15} + \frac{(8-7)^2}{7} + \frac{(5-4)^2}{4} + \frac{(5-11)^2}{11} + \frac{(9-5)^2}{5} + \frac{(61-49)^2}{49} + + \frac{(15-22)^2}{22} + \\ &\frac{(11-16)^2}{16} + \\ &+ \frac{(5-9)^2}{9} + \frac{(7-5)^2}{5} + \frac{(5-3)^2}{3} = 18.768 \end{split}$$

For (r-1) (k-1)=(3-1) (4-1)=2 x 3=6 degrees of freedom, the value of  $\chi^2$  theoretical is 12.592

As  $\chi^2$  cal. >  $\chi^2$  theoretical (18.7682 > 12.592), the null hypothesis is not accepted. So, the intention of returning at UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord is influenced by socio-professional category of selected sample members.

3.  $\chi^2$  test is also useful to analyze the correlation between income level of the interviewed and visiting frequency at UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord.

Table 10

Income level				
Visiting frequency	<1,200 lei	1,200 - 1,800 lei	1,800 - 2,400 lei	Total
Frequently	20 (15)*	21 (20)	5 (11)	46
Rare	6(9)	9 (13)	14 (7)	29
By chance	5(5)	5(8)	6(3)	16
First time	17 (19)	32 (26)	10 (14)	59
Total	48	67	35	150

#### $(*) = \overline{\text{Null hypothesis}}$

The calculated value of  $\chi^2(\chi^2 \text{ cal.})$  is:

$$\chi 2 \text{ cal.} = \frac{(20-15)^2}{15} + \frac{(6-9)^2}{9} + \frac{(5-5)^2}{5} + \frac{(17-19)^2}{19} + \frac{(21-20)^2}{20} + \frac{(9-13)^2}{13} + \frac{(5-8)^2}{8} + \frac{(32-26)^2}{26} + \frac{(5-11)^2}{11} + \frac{(14-7)^2}{7} + \frac{(6-3)^2}{3} + \frac{(10-14)^2}{14} = 21.08$$

 $\chi^2$  theoretical value corresponding to (r -1) (k - 1) = (4-1) (3-1) = 6 degrees of freedom is 12.592.  $\chi^2$ cal.>  $\chi^2$  theoretical (21.08> 12.592) so, at a significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is not supported, ie the frequency of visits to the firm depends on income level respondents.

4. Finally, analysis of the correlation between gender of subjects investigated and the frequency of visits to UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord, shows that the frequency of visiting the unit is influenced by the gender of visitors.

Table 11

Gender of visitors			
Visiting frequency	Male	Female	Total
Frequently	38 (35)*	10 (13)	48
Rare	18 (20)	11 (9)	29
By chance	7 (12)	9(4)	16
First time	45 (41)	12 ( 16 )	57
Total	108	42	150

## (\* ) = Null hypothesis

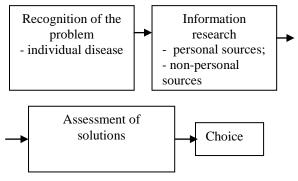
The calculated value of  $\chi^2(\chi^2 \text{ cal.})$  is:

$$\chi 2 \text{ cal.} = \frac{(38-35)^2}{35} + \frac{(18-20)^2}{20} + \frac{(7-12)^2}{12} + \frac{(45-41)^2}{41} + \frac{(10-13)^2}{13} + \frac{(11-9)^2}{9} + \frac{(9-4)^2}{4} + \frac{(12-16)^2}{16} = 11.316$$

Theoretical value of  $\chi^2$  corresponding to (r -1) (k - 1) = (4-1) (2-1) = 3 degrees of freedom is 7.815.  $\chi^2$ cal.>  $\chi^2$  theoretical (11.316> 7.815), so the null hypothesis is not accepted.

#### 4. Conclusions

In the pre-purchase stage, touristic consumer behavior can be described as founded on the following decision process:



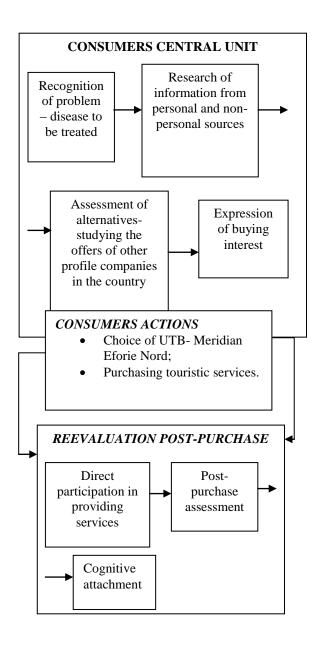
- Most subjects especially appreciates the kindness of the staff from the accommodation and catering facilities and staff competence in the treatment units.
- Diversity of treatment procedures offered by competent medical personnel is assessed positively.

- Equipment in the treatment facilities and modern equipment, enjoy a positive assessment from those interviewed.
- Among the complaints relating to services may be mentioned those relating to: the organization of carrying out treatment procedures, length of procedures applied, the movement of tourists from the hotel to the treatment, the level of information provided about spa procedures and their effects to treat diseases.

On post-purchase stage from the research of reasons of satisfaction or disappointment of spa care recipients in UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord, one can draw the following conclusions:

- Treatment procedures applied are rated favorably by most consumers.
   Perception of their quality in terms of effects felt by every tourist is "good" to "very good".
- Treatments to prevent premature aging and acupuncture are relatively new spa services introduced in the portfolio of services and spa facility and they are less known by the subjects interviewed. Advertising measures are necessary so to make known these services and their application in treating the effects of disease.
- The quality level of all services rendered at UTB MERIDIAN Eforie Nord: accommodation, meals, recreation, treatment is considered favorable.
- Report of tariffs and the quality of tourism benefits is considered favorable, in general, but differentiated by socio-professional categories. Officers and active NCOs looks very demanding in terms of diversity and quality benefits, and the previous analysis shows that not all services satisfy these requirements. It is therefore necessary measures for the improvement and diversification of services (recreation).
- Through the high quality benefits and outstanding results obtained in the treatment of disorders and diseases, health treatment unit has managed to cultivate among a large number of customers a sense of fidelity with beneficial consequences on the activity of the spa business unit.
- In terms of age, the best segment of the population represented, is aged over 55 years. In this respect we can conclude that offer of the spa treatment unit is adapted to the manifested demand. It is of course the case of reserve military personnel.
- Between age, socio-professional category and income levels of members of the sample studied there is a direct connection: the highest weight belongs to retired military personnel whose incomes mainly fall between 1,200 and 1,800 lei.

Using lessons learned from the analysis made in the previous chapter, we can develop a model of the process of purchasing travel services offered by UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord.



Based on this analysis, it appears that the main components of the "mix" of marketing on which one can act to attract touristic consumers and to determine a certain purchase behavior are: product policy. promotional policy and human resources.

Regarding the product policy to improve the quality and increase the attraction force of the benefits of the tourist product the following measures are proposed: diversification of recreational facilities, additional facilities and modern equipment in the treatment base, improving the organization of carrying out treatment procedures, building own base of treatment, measures to conserve natural healing factors (water and mud from the lake) exposed at risk of pollution.

With regard to promotional policy UTB MERIDIAN - Eforie Nord, bear in mind that whatever the nature of media and techniques used promotional activities must meet specific objectives integrated into a promotional program .We recommend the following measures:

- 1. Making a sales promotion campaign to increase touristic demand and stimulate the fidelity of consumers towards the unit. The main instruments to promote sales may be:
- a) at point of sale advertising, ie advertising activities conducted on: commandments garrison, pensions and social security departments, inspectorates county gendarmes or other places of sale of the tourist product offered by UTB MERIDIAN Eforie Nord (travel agencies, various companies).
- b) advertising contests: organized to create an atmosphere of interest around the spa treatment unit and for nurturing a sense of loyalty among consumers. These contests can be based on the promise of a substantial gain or stay free (suitable for two people) received from a competition that calls for the qualities of observation, insight and creativity of the participants, and their knowledge of resort "Eforie Nord UTB in general and MERIDIAN Eforie Nord in particular.
  - 2. Making an advertising campaign (national and local television, local radio station and national in particular Radio Romania News through posters, leaflets, newspapers) to help promote a brand name on the one hand and act on potential consumer, causing a buying behavior, on the other side.
  - 3. Setting up inside the unit of a public relations department.
  - 4. Putting posters on the occasion of the organization of local and in neighboring towns of artistic, cultural and sporting events (soccer, volleyball, entertainment, etc.).
  - 5. Printing of promotional brochures to be made known the activity of the spa unit, treatments provided, diseases treated and the attractions of the resort.
  - 6. Participation at domestic trade fairs and exhibitions on topics of tourism in general and medical spas in particular.

7. Establishment of a site in which to summarize the main advantages of the spa unit facilities and touristic services and the possibility of contacting representatives of the spa treatment unit for additional information.

Regarding the human resources policy is required:

- Hiring an optimum number of specially trained health professionals to better serve patients in treatment units;
- To improve patient-medical specialist relationship is needed for the latter to provide additional information about the procedures used and their effects on diseases treated;
- Measures for providing incentives for staff aiming to a high quality service.

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