AFFECTIVE IMAGE OF SPA AND WELLNESS DESTINATION BULGARIA

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Abstract: *The aim of the study is to estimate affective image of SPA and wellness destination Bulgaria. To assess the affective image, four semantic differential scales proposed by Russel and Pratt and seven additional author's scales are used, by which foreign tourists define their attitude to Bulgaria as a SPA and wellness destination. The findings of the study have significant managerial implications for destination marketing managers in SPA and wellness tourism.*

Keywords: *SPA and wellness destinations in Bulgaria, affective tourist image, bipolar dimensions, semantic differential*

1. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In [4], [1], [2], [12] it is shown that the image of a destination is considered as a key factor in taking travel decisions. The multilateral nature of Bulgarian image as a SPA and wellness destination is still a subject of research in order to determine how it has been formed and what the determinants of this process are. This process in turn will enable its effective advertising and its ability to take strong positions in Western receptive markets.

There have been a lot of studies on the image of a tourist destination so far. Terms such as "idea", "perception" or "mental performance" of a tourist destination are commonly used to give an idea about the image of a destination. It is mainly used as a subjective concept [3], [6], [9] as the reality of a tourist destination can be significantly different from the perceived image [7], [8], [13]. Therefore, there is need for identification of the aspects that tourists use to form the image of the destination as well as the role of psychological factors (internal factors) in order to improve the target market positioning of the destination.

It should be noted that in forming the destination image, managers should include not only its physical characteristics but also the whole set of emotions and feelings, which a destination can awaken in tourists' minds [10]. On the other hand, marketers need to understand that in order to influence the affective evaluations of a destination, they must take into account both its characteristics and tourists' motivations.

2.   OBJECTIVES

For the purpose of the study, a questionnaire has been designed to gather primary information about Western European tourists' perceptions of Bulgaria as a tourist destination. The questionnaire assessing the image of Bulgaria as a SPA and wellness destination is consistent with the

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imposed by Echtner and Ritchie's image framework [5], which uses a combination of open and closed questions in order to achieve a reliable picture of an image destination.

For the affective aspect of Bulgarian image as a SPA and wellness destination, it has been used eleven pairs of dimensions (Familiar/Unfamiliar; Famous /Unknown; Relaxing/Distressing; Pleasant/Unpleasant; Uplifting/Sleepy; Exciting/Gloomy; Hospitable/Inhospitable; Cheap/Expensive; High quality/Poor quality; Authentic/Inauthentic; Prestigious/Unprestigious) with five categories of the scales: respectively from 1 to 5 (Likert scale) where the distance of 1 answer of a respondent is closer to the opposite dimension. For the rest of the questions, it has been also used the five-point Likert scale, where 1 means "at least" and 5 "the most".

The results are processed with Microsoft® Excel® 2010, IBM® SPSS® Version 18, IBM® SPSS® Version 23®.

3.   RESULTS

The researched target group includes 460 foreign tourists, who visited Bulgarian SPA and wellness centers during the summer and autumn of 2015 and 2016.

The analysis of the socio-demographic profile shows some interesting facts that differ from the global trends of SPA and wellness tourists. Almost half of the respondents are not middle-aged. They are between 18 and 30 years old. The second is the group of 31 to 40 years old tourists. This fact, together with the fact that 35.5 percent of them have an annual income up to € 14,999 and 22.10 % are still students proves that Bulgaria attracts mainly young tourists. Another proof is that most of them – 29.7 percent undertake only one; 35% - two trips outside the country in order to rest and for recreation purposes.

The gender breakdown is also interesting. Globally, more women than men practice SPA and wellness tourism. However, genders are divided almost equally here and even the equality is violated by 2.00 % predominance by men. This shows a recent trend among men for health prevention and "well-being".

It has been confirmed that the imposed trend that Bulgarian SPA products are aimed primarily at people with higher education – 66.60 % and secondary education – 28.20 %. Except students, the tourists are also mainly employees in private companies – 17.8%, managers – 14.9% and 14% of SPA visitors are retired or they do not work.

Bulgarian SPA and wellness products are the most popular on British (27.70 %), German (24.60 %), and Danish (10.50 %) market. There is an interesting fact, which shows that the Bulgarian SPA products are becoming more popular – the third place is occupied by French SPA and wellness tourists and it reaches 13.10 %. It must be emphasized that 76.80 percent of all tourists that visited Bulgaria have already visited Bulgarian SPA centers.

To assess the affective image, the method of semantic differential is used, by which respondents define their attitude to Bulgaria as a SPA and wellness tourist destination.
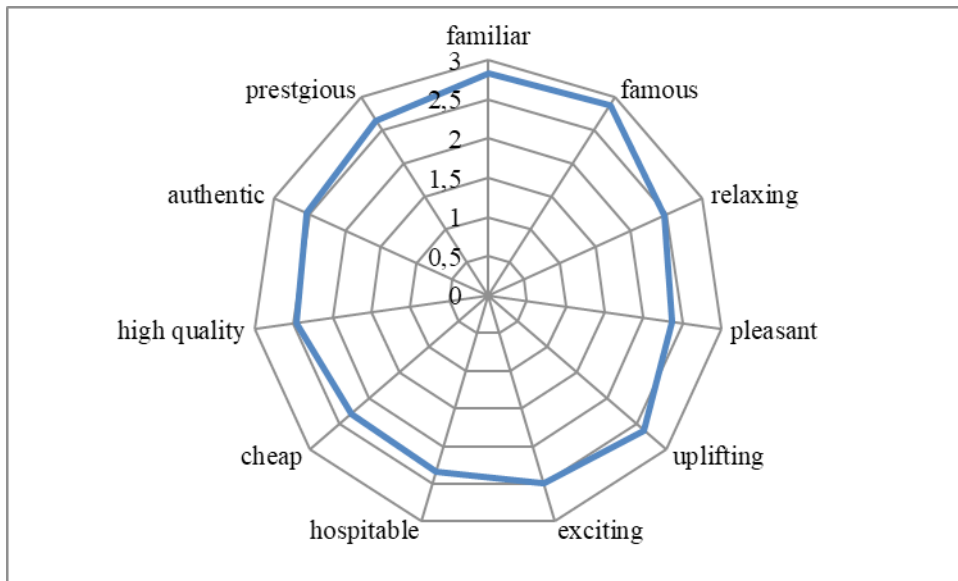
Figure 1: A polar graph for the affective tourist image of Bulgaria
as a SPA and wellness destination

Bipolar dimensions of the affective tourist image of SPA and wellness destination Bulgaria	1	2	3	4	5	Total number N / %	Mean	Standard deviation (б)
familiar (1) -	73	105	161	67	54	460	2.84	1.2
unfamiliar (5)	15.90%	22.80%	35.00%	14.60%	11.70%	100%		
famous (1) -	54	118	161	82	45	460	2.88	1.14
unknown (5)	11.70%	25.70%	35.00%	17.80%	9.80%	100%		
relaxing (1) -	135	122	98	68	37	460	2.46	1.13
distressing (5)	29.30%	26.50%	21.30%	14.80%	8.00%	100%		
pleasant (1) -	131	127	125	53	24	460	2.37	1.16
unpleasant (5)	28.50%	27.60%	27.20%	11.50%	5.20%	100%		
uplifting (1) -	87	126	152	60	35	460	2.63	1.15
sleepy (5)	18.90%	27.40%	33.00%	13.00%	7.60%	100%		
exciting (1) -	113	116	146	57	28	460	2.5	1.17
gloomy (5)	24.60%	25.20%	31.70%	12.40%	6.10%	100%		
hospitable (1) -	126	137	129	49	19	460	2.34	1.11
unhospitable (5)	27.40%	29.80%	28.00%	10.70%	4.10%	100%		
cheap (1) -	136	108	101	72	43	460	2.3	1.33
expensive (5)	29.60%	23.50%	22.00%	15.70%	43.00%	100%		
High quality (1) -	72	119	185	63	21	460	2.46	1.06
Poor quality (5)	15.70%	25.90%	40.20%	13.70%	4.60%	100%		
authentic (1) -	108	122	142	49	39	460	2.54	1.2
inauthentic (5)	23.50%	26.50%	30.90%	10.70%	8.50%	100%		
prestigious (1) -	72	133	169	56	30	460	2.65	1.09
unprestigious (5)	15.70%	28.90%	36.70%	12.20%	6.50%	100%		

Table 1: Frequencies, means and standard deviations of the affective tourist image of SPA and wellness destination Bulgaria on the basis of eleven bipolar dimensions

The data from analysis of the frequencies, means and standard deviations of these eleven bipolar scales for the affective tourist image of Bulgaria, show that tourists perceive Bulgaria as a famous and familiar destination, SPA and wellness destination, respectively 38.70 % and 37.40

%. Naturally, because these are SPA and wellness tourists, more than half of them accept it as a relaxing destination – 257 people (55.80%) and pleasant destination – 258 people (56.10%). Most of the respondents accept Bulgaria as neither exciting nor gloomy (average = 2.5), but it is interesting that to most of them it is more exciting than relaxing and sleepy (average = 2.63 or 46.3 percent). This probably is due to the fact that the SPA and wellness tourism is combined with other types of tourism in most of the cases.

The notorious fact that Bulgaria is a hospitable and cheap destination even for SPA and wellness tourism is confirmed by the values of these dimensions – respectively with means 2.34 and 2.3. However, for a significant number of the respondents (40.00%), it emerged as a destination neither with the so high quality nor with low quality of these services.

As a whole Bulgaria seems to be more like a prestigious and authentic destination for SPA and wellness tourism, respectively with means 2.65 (standard deviation = 1.09) and 2.54 (standard deviation = 1.2).

The diagram of the semantic differential of Bulgaria as a SPA and wellness destination clearly demonstrates that means for all tested bipolar pairs attributes are between 2.3 and 2.8, which proves that tourists have more positive affect to it. That fact, however, highlights Bulgaria's great potential which has to transform it into a fully recognizable destination for SPA and wellness tourism.

Motives for choosing Bulgaria as a SPA and wellness destination	Total number N / %	Answers on a five-point Likert-type scale					Mean	Standard deviation (б)	Dimensions
		1	2	3	4	5			
The oldest processed gold in the world	460	27	58	90	145	140	3.68	1.2	Unknown-famous
	100%	5.90%	12.60%	19.60%	31.50%	30.40%			
Thracian gold treasures	460	14	45	96	166	139	3.61	1.09	unfamiliar-familiar
	100%	3.00%	9.80%	20.90%	36.10%	30.20%			
Traditional Bulgarian cuisine	460	20	39	84	155	162	3.87	1.12	unauthentic-authentic
	100%	4.00%	8.50%	18.30%	33.70%	35.20%			
Traditions in balneology and SPA procedures dating from Roman times	460	13	37	110	167	133	3.8	1.03	distressing-relaxing
	100%	3.00%	8.00%	24.00%	36.30%	28.90%			

Table 2: Unknown-famous, unfamiliar-familiar, distressing-relaxing, unauthentic-authentic dimensions of the affective image according to the main motives for choosing SPA and wellness destination Bulgaria (on a five-point Likert-type scale)
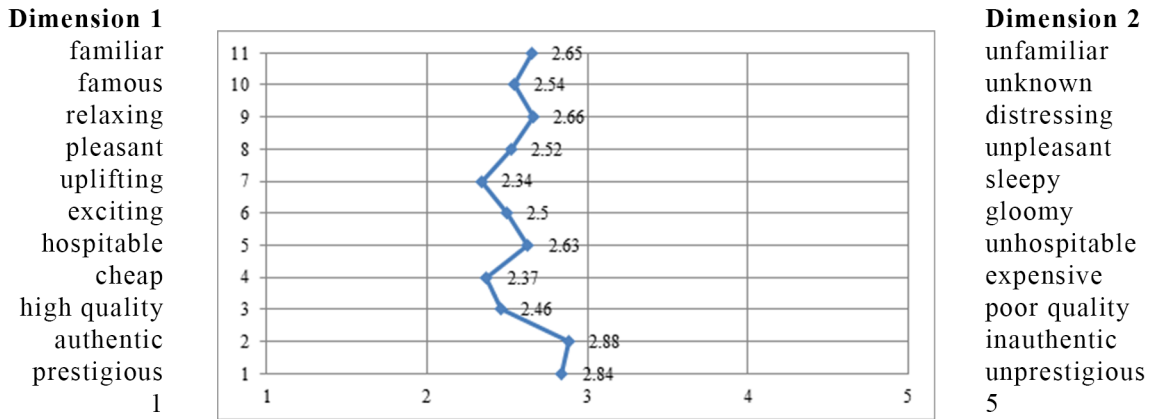
Dimension 1		Dimension 2
familiar	11 — 2.65	unfamiliar
famous	10 — 2.54	unknown
relaxing	9 — 2.66	distressing
pleasant	8 — 2.52	unpleasant
uplifting	7 — 2.34	sleepy
exciting	6 — 2.5	gloomy
hospitable	5 — 2.63	unhospitable
cheap	4 — 2.37	expensive
high quality	3 — 2.46	poor quality
authentic	2 — 2.88	inauthentic
prestigious	1 — 2.84	unprestigious
1	1 2 3 4 5	5

Figure 2: Semantic differential of the affective image of SPA and wellness destination Bulgaria

According to [11] there is a relationship between the motives for choosing a destination and the main affective dimensions of its image. For that purpose, it has been also used the five-point Likert scale, where 1 means "at least" and 5 "the most", through which the respondents assess the main motives for choosing SPA and wellness destination Bulgaria, and those questions are connected to the main bipolar dimensions of the affective image of destinations.
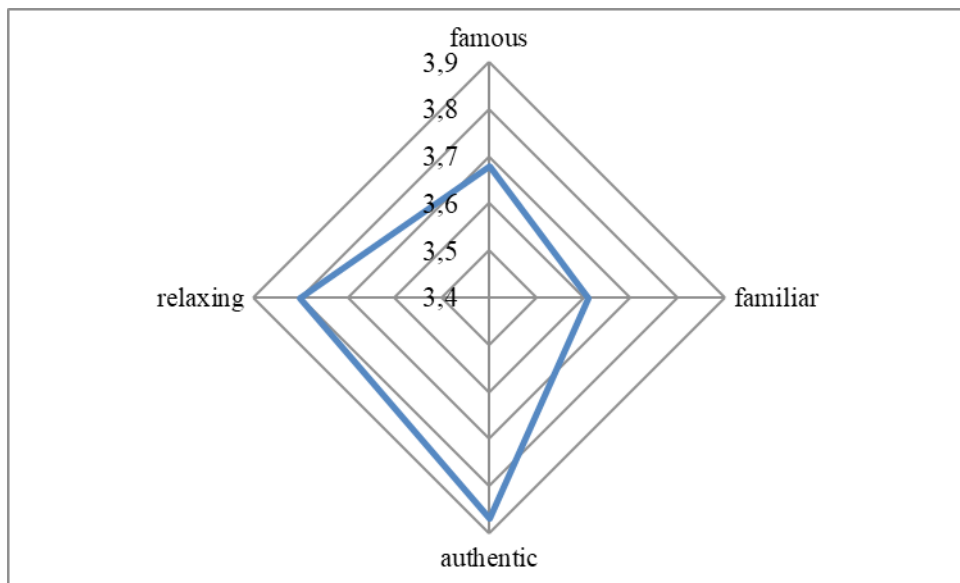

Figure 3: A polar graph for the affective tourist image of SPA and wellness destination Bulgaria (semantic differential scales unknown-famous, unfamiliar-familiar, distressing-relaxing, unauthentic-authentic dimensions)

Data show that more than a half of tourists evaluate with 4 and 5 grades, which indicates that they choose Bulgaria for SPA and wellness because it is famous (61.90 %), they know it (66.30%) and find it as an authentic (68.90%) and relaxing (65.20%).

Motives for choosing Bulgaria as a SPA and wellness destination	Total number N / %	Answers on a five-point Likert-type scale					Mean	Standard deviation	Dimensions
		1	2	3	4	5			
The inclusion of tourists as participants in the typical customs and rituals during the SPA and wellness therapies	460	24	45	115	185	91	3.51	1.08	Inhospitable-hospitable
	100%	5.20%	9.80%	25.00%	40.20%	19.80%			
The inclusion of programs and scenarios of cultural heritage during the SPA and wellness therapies	460	18	36	121	190	95	3.67	1.02	gloomy-exciting
	100%	3.90%	7.80%	26.30%	41.30%	20.70%			
An opportunity for participation of tourists in traditional Bulgarian industries (rose oil, wine, milk, honey, etc.) as a part of SPA and wellness experience	460	12	38	106	153	151	3.85	1.05	sleepy-uplifting
	100%	2.60%	8.30%	23.00%	33.30%	32.80%			
Organic products in culinary	460	11	44	91	176	138	3.84	1.03	
	100%	2.40%	9.60%	19.80%	38.30%	30.00%			
Superfoods (yogurt, honey, etc.)	460	9	28	81	143	199	4.08	0.81	poor quality-high quality
	100%	2.00%	6.10%	17.60%	31.10%	43.30%			
Gourmet culture	460	27	40	100	141	152	3.61	1.18	
	100%	5.90%	8.70%	21.70%	30.70%	33.00%			
Developed enological culture	460	11	37	98	178	136	3.85	1.02	
	100%	2.40%	8.00%	21.30%	38.70%	29.60%			

Table 3: Inhospitable-hospitable, gloomy-exciting, sleepy-uplifting, poor quality-high quality dimensions of the affective image according to the main motives for choosing SPA and wellness destination Bulgaria (on a five-point Likert-type scale)

Data about the other four bipolar dimensions show that SPA and wellness tourist choose Bulgaria because of the high quality of superfoods (342 or 74.40 %), organic products in culinary (314 or 68.30 %) and enological culture of destination (314 or 68.30 %), which is connected to the

nature of the SPA and wellness and to the striving for „well-being". They reaffirm that the majority of respondents (60.00%) like hospitality in the destination, but uncharacteristically SPA and wellness tourists find it more exciting (66.10%) and uplifting (62.00%), which emphasizes again that they are looking for opportunities to use the programs and scenarios of the cultural heritage of Bulgaria in SPA and wellness therapies and for practicing at the same time other activities, as well as other types of tourism.
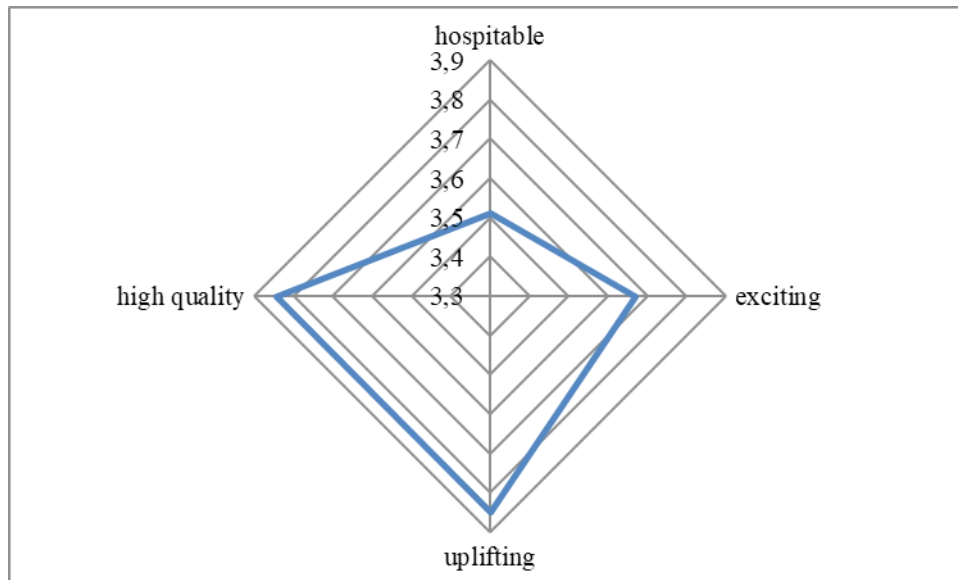

Figure 4: A polar graph for the affective tourist image of SPA and wellness destination Bulgaria (semantic differential scales inhospitable-hospitable, gloomy-exciting, sleepy-uplifting, poor quality-high quality)

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study attempts to provide empirical evidence of the affective image of SPA and wellness destination Bulgaria among foreign tourists. The identification of affective image is derived from using descriptive statistics. Consequently, by using Kotler's classification of destination image, it can be concluded that Bulgaria has a positive affective tourist image. By comparing the results with those from other studies, it can be summarized that SPA and wellness tourists perceive destination Bulgaria better than other types of tourists. This can help tourism marketers and ongoing tourism policy of the destination for better understanding the significance of the components of tourist image of Bulgaria.

Further efforts are needed to create and promote products that enhance both cognitive and affective image of Bulgaria towards the high quality, authenticity, tradition and relax. And in turn, the rise of both aspects will improve the overall image of the destination and its repositioning on the penetrating and potential tourist markets.

Among the conclusions that necessitates a new understanding of the positioning of Bulgaria as a distinctive SPA and wellness tourist destination are:
- Positioning based on the strategic management of the messages that are tailored to specific target groups of consumers;

- Creating a comprehensive image strategy of Bulgaria coordinated and realized with all stakeholders (state institutions, civil, cultural and educational organizations, society, private organizations, etc.); and
- Effective monitoring and public assessment of the achieved results.

The image of the state is not static but is constantly changing under the influence of a number of external and internal factors, that directly or indirectly influence on the affective and cognitive component of the image.

Therefore, building the image implies actively constructing conducted by PRs, and taking into account the expectations and preferences of tourists. Due to the dynamic nature of target groups, maintaining the image of SPA and wellness destination Bulgaria and enriching it with new, desirable elements is an intensive process that is the purpose of further research.

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