

# Health Tourism Industry: Segmentation, Differentiation and Communication

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## Abstract

*The research examines the dynamism of health tourism, with an emphasis on the contribution of segmentation, differentiation, and communication of entrepreneurs. It highlights the convergence of health tourism entrepreneurs' behavior into the best opportunities to gain profit and create a brand in the healthcare market. Organizational culture, worldwide trends and changes, and an open mind for a collaborative relationship entrepreneur-employer are significant driving forces in this field. The necessity for deliberate support in listening to customers' voices is a goal of market researchers in health tourism acknowledgment.*

**Key words:** health tourism, segmentation, differentiation, entrepreneur, leadership, communication  
**J.E.L. classification:** I12, J17, L26, L53, M31, Z32

## 1. Introduction

Entrepreneurs operating in the health tourism market aim to satisfy the modern consumer, adapting their marketing strategies to any external stimulus. Consumers of healthcare services have the highest expectations from entrepreneurs in the health and tourism sector, treating the health tourism package as a product that can be purchased online from any store, demanding transparency, loyalty, and displayed costs. The limit to fully providing this information through digital marketing channels is given by the individuality of the tourist health package, namely its personalization. This article shows the importance of marketing segmentation variables to create an alternative business strategy, the bridge between segmentation of the market, differentiation of products/ services, and communication between employees, company to customers/ patients, communication channels available for reviews or consumption of tourism product/ service.

## 2. Literature review

Segmentation market, as a concept, was first time explained as a collection of smaller, more similar markets viewed as a marketing strategy (Smith, 1956). Market segmentation is an opportunity in marketing management and consists of dividing total demand into segments with the same characteristics, to explain and predict consumer behavior as market stimuli (Tynan, A. C., Drayton, J., 1987). The complexity of tourism as a market product impels the segmentation of tourists into appropriate groups by various variables: trip activities, tourism destination, duration of stay, standard of health unit care, etc. (Dolnicar, S., Grun, B., Leisch, F., 2018); age, gender, lifestyle (Jauhari, 2017). It is the first stage of targeting marketing (market segmentation, marketing targeting, and product positioning) with measurable, accessible, and substantial results (Camilleri, 2018). Information and communication technologies improve consumer empowerment and the marketing strategy cost is down considerably. The literature precise how segmentation techniques and variables help hospitals, healthcare marketers, and researchers to discover, innovate, and develop medical products and services (MacLennan, J., MacKenzie, D., 2000); to analyze every opportunity of the market, to create an ideal service/ product ID depending by patients perceptions and cultural competence of healthcare (Johnson, R. L., Saha, S., Arbelaez, J. J., Beach, M. C., Cooper, L. A., 2004).

The tourism health package is a result of entrepreneurial collaboration, innovation, and multidisciplinary co-creation aims, on the one hand, to satisfy the needs of customers/consumers and, on the other hand, to generate earnings for each market player. Changes in technology, legislation, and consumer expectations, determine entrepreneurs to adapt the management policy and evaluate the potential of their employees by different market variables (Ormanovic, S., Ciric, A., Talovic, M., Alic, H., Jeleskovik, E., Causevik, D., 2017).

In the healthcare industry, what is measured is the patient/tourist experience, explained by what happens during consumption and how it happens, how choice, purchase, and the entire consumption process takes place, all from the consumer's perspective (Friedel, A.L., Siegel, S., Kirstein, C.F., Gerigk, M., Bingel, U., Diehl, A., Steidle, O., Hauptelthofer, S., Andermahr, B., Chmielewski, W., Kreitschmann-Andermahr, I., 2023).

The specialized literature considers that the consumer's / patient's experience is given by his evaluation of the cost paid for the purchased product, actually measuring its value, which is transposed differently from one consumer to another: quality, staff, time spent, personalization of services, empathy, etc. (Marzorati, C., Pravettoni, G., 2017).

The World Health Organization considers the satisfaction of the tourist/patient as a result of the cumulation of the stages taken from purchase to actual consumption, a multidisciplinary team includes experts, researchers, doctors, and other entrepreneurs, as a strong segmentation variable (Zhang, Y., Coello, P.A., Brožek, J. et al, 2017).

The specialized literature shows the link between the behavior of the health tourist and his motivation, his intention to travel for medical procedures or recovery or beauty treatments, the experience of talking about the perceived value of the tourist package and recommending the circuit to family and friends (Gan, T., Zheng, J., Li, W., Li, J., Shen, J., 2023). The routine of activities in nature, walks, and the joy of the moment bring satisfaction from stressful days during the occupational, busy period, and reducing stress or even removing generates typical consumer behavior characterized by the concept *slow tourism* (Schumann, 2017). Escape motivation and cost motivation encompass the motivation that pushes the tourist to choose health tourism manifesting the intention to travel (Gan, T., Zheng, J., Li, W., Li, J., Shen, J., 2023). Consumer perception is vital for any organization, so analyzing positive or negative reviews as a result of the consumer process, given the digitization of information content, is one of the activities that can determine the performance of a product or service (Chatterjee, S., Goyal, D., Prakash, A., Sharma, J., 2021). A recent study shows the attributes of medical hotels in choosing accommodation locations for international tourists, offering their comfort in response to the tourist's motivation (Lee, J., Kim, J.J., 2023). For example, in addition to basic hospitality services such as valet parking, concierge, and airport shuttle room service, patients can receive postoperative services and care such as dressings, medical supervision, special diets, and physical therapy in a comfortable hotel atmosphere (Chaulagain, S., Jahromi, M.F., Hua, N., Wnag, Y., 2023).

Differentiation is the creation of entrepreneurs to develop health tourism products/ services to retain customers different from competitors based on various factors (price, quality, consumption process), to attract and obtain a unique position in the market, mission of Social Entrepreneurship Organisation (SEO) (Lückenbach, F., Baumgarth, C., Schmidt, H. J., Henseler, J., Wright, L. T., 2019). The highest level of differentiation is shown in marketing management/ organization culture (Kiaos, 2023), internationalization degree, and knowledge integration (Azari, M. J., Aspelund, A., Eide, A. E., Wright, L. T., 2020). In business research differentiation is shown in index content validity, technology diversification, diversity properties, and variable data used for marketing research (Kim, K., Hwang, J., Jung, S., Kim, E., Ardito, L., 2019).

Marketing communication is a full concept for the foundation of other concept series: positioning, client message, word/electronic-of-mouth message (Chatterjee, S., Kulkarni, P., 2021), is a benefit segmentation approach and a premise for marketing segmentation (Russell, 1985), is a puzzle piece of cost segmentation strategy (Cahill, 2006). Segmentation criteria describe correctly customer segments, to create diverse health tourism products/ services advertised and promoted by the most effective communication channel (Dolnicar, S., Grun, B., Leisch, F., 2018). Communication is a key variable for interpersonal intelligence near motivation, persuasion, team aims, collaboration, and cooperation (Jauhari, 2017). Communication in digital healthcare is an opportunity to increase entrepreneurial efficacy (Kotler, Ph., Bowen, J.T., Baloglu, S., 2022)

(Kotler, Ph., Bowen, H., Makens, J.C., Baloglu, S., 2017), and promote entrepreneurship by practitioners and policymakers (Anwar, A., Zafar, A.U., Papa, A., Pham, T.T.T., Apostolidis, C., 2024). Marketing communication is a mix of tools and techniques used by an entrepreneur to communicate their market value to clients and attract customers/ patients, including differentiation of products, advertising, events, public relationships, sales policies, and internal marketing (Kotler, Ph., Stevens, R.J., Shalowitz, J., 2021).

### 3. Research methodology

The article is a descriptive analysis of the literature about marketing strategies applied in the health tourism industry, the lines between marketing segmentation, differentiation of tourism products/services, and marketing communication, and how these concepts influence entrepreneurial management to innovate healthcare products/ services, branding process and generate highlights.

### 4. Findings

#### 4.1. Segmentation variables

The structuring of the health tourism market is due to global influences of diversification of services, innovation in the health system, and advanced technologies that require investment funds and entail financial and human capital investments through their implementation, the success of an organization is determined by a correct market segmentation through consumer behavioral analysis, by continuously monitoring behavior changes through research, by benchmarking competitors and establishing the right marketing strategies (Akbar, M. B., Garnelo-Gomez, I., Ndupu, L., Barnes, E., Foster, C., 2022).

*Tabel no. 1 Segmentation variables*

Segmentation of the health tourism market			
Segmentation variables		Segmentation profile	
Wellness indicators	Psycho-graphic profile	Behavior	Demographic profile
Destination characteristics	Motivation; psychological factors; healthcare attitude.	Lifestyle; type of consumers; frequency of healthcare service.	Founds for healthcare
Benefits and trust in quality			
Type of services			
Service distribution			

*Source:* (Torkzadeh, L., Jalilian, H., Zolfagharian, H., Torkzadeh, H., Bakshi, M., Khodayari-Zarnaq, R., 2021)

Each entrepreneur is a member behavioral group with the same marketing goals and market strategies. Identified variables are segmentation factors of the health tourism industry (Morrison, A., Rimmington, M., Williams, C., 2006):

*Table no. 2 Health tourism market segmentation variables*

Category	Characteristics
determination	the tenacity and decision-making power, discipline, persistence in solving problems, and elimination of personal sacrifice
leadership	the individual decision about high-quality standards, but not perfectionism; team organizing and spirit of creativity for it; treating others about their expectations; sharing feedback with all participants, building trust; continuous learning and persuasion
obsessive opportunity	pieces of knowledge and skills to identify the consumer's needs; the trend of the health tourism industry; and obsession with novelty products and services, turning needs into an opportunity
tolerance of risk, ambiguous and uncertain conflict situations	risk analysis and risk sharing in decision-making; analysis of risk forecasts; resolution of conflict situations in decision-making; ability to reduce stress and role responsibility

creativity, personal resilience, and ability to adapt	non-conventional behavior with multilateral thinking, without making hasty decisions; the ability to develop concepts based on principles, and not on the decisions of others.
motivation for excellence	setting realistic, long-term performance objectives pursued through policies and strategies implemented at the team level, macroeconomic orientation, with the division of tasks between team members in a motivational spirit capitalizing on the skills of each member.

*Source:* (Morrison, A., Rimmington, M., Williams, C., 2006)

The identification of market segmentation variables shall also entail the evaluation of this segmentation by analysing the following criteria (Torkzadeh, L., Jalilian, H., Zolfagharian, H., Torkzadeh, H., Bakshi, M., Khodayari-Zarnaq, R., 2021):

- the size of the market and its potential: investments and resources allocated will be reflected in the profit recorded in the next period
- segment stability: a market segment should qualify as relatively stable
- accessibility: each identified segment must be targeted and targeted through distinctive strategies aimed at improving its quality of life
- action: the implementation strategy must be easily implementable
- compatibility: identifying the consumer's needs in the organizational culture and marketing strategies of the service provider

#### 4.2. Differentiation in the health tourism industry

Differentiation in the health tourism industry fulfills the tourism product distribution system, creating a clear view, for a short time, in the mind of the consumer, helped by the communication system (Morrison, A., Rimmington, M., Williams, C., 2006). The specialized literature supports the theory of adapting the tourist product to the consumer's behavior, based on continuous changes in other sectors of activity, and the differentiation of a product according to market segmentation is the result of entrepreneurial creation (GrandViewResearch, 2021) (GrandViewResearch, 2023).

*Table no. 3 Differentiation practices*

Nr.	Differentiation practices	Characteristics
1	specialization in a particular medical field	specialization in cancer surgery of the esophagus at the University Hospital of Cluj
2	specialization in specific wellness treatments	specializing in effective procedures that find your certainty in scientific reports
3	create a modern tourism package	the tourism package must offer comprehensive services and convincing information on consumption
4	personalization of services	the tourist package must provide complex services and convincing information regarding consumption; the integrated services offer distance consumption, monitoring, and response techniques to the consumption of purchased services, adapting the package of tourist services at the individual level, using BIO / natural products in the consumption process of the tourist package, obtaining positive reviews viewed as a recommendation
5	promoting a trained team with a minimum of experience	communicating a professional experience through a minimum of activity, number of consumers
6	specialization for a certain/nonconformist category of consumers	specialization of a Kyiv hospital in orthopedic surgeries for cardiac patients
7	inclusion in the team of a high-class expert in the field of activity	the experience of a name within the team gives confidence to customers
8	medical activity based on a business model	offering a personalized tariff to consumers for the entire package of services: accommodation, meals, medication, imaging, laboratory tests

9	differentiation based on geographical, and cultural criteria	specialization for certain categories of tourists who speak only their native language, who are of color, who need assistance with entry or stay formalities in the country of destination
10	differentiating services assisted by an exclusive team whose work is not present elsewhere	exclusive partnerships for specific treatments
11	differentiation based on the level/category/nomenclature of customers served	the promotion of the consumer package to a certain market segment will be done with the agreement of the customers who determined the differentiation phenomenon
12	differentiation from the competition by displaying a notorious recommendation	promoting a notorious review encouraging increased customer interest
13	specialization in services that highlight the inactive human condition	specialization in surgery for people who have lost locomotor function
14	differentiating activity as opposed to competitive activity	taking risks pushes services ahead of competitors

*Source:* Adapted after (Hamdan, 2017) (McKinsey&Company, 2024) (MercuryAdvisoryGroup, 2021) (Mueller, H., Kaufmann, E., 2001)

The differentiation of entrepreneurial activity is viewed in consumer behavior, by using techniques and means of communication characteristic of the market segment to which it is addressed (Morrison, A., Rimmington, M., Williams, C., 2006). Taking into account the quality of the consumer in health tourism (patient in medical tourism, client/patient in wellness and spa tourism) (Gilligan, C., Lowe, R., 2016), communication is the means of creating the consumer-entrepreneur, entrepreneur-entrepreneur collaborative relationship. The most important questions for entrepreneurs are: how well does the communication technique work within the department/ between departments/ from management to departments; does the information reach the recipient; what are the obstacles that hinder the flow of information; what communication problems exist in the process of creating, supplying, consuming the tourist package within the entrepreneurial team (Nabi, 2021).

#### 4.3. Communication marketing through segmentation and differentiation in the health tourism industry

*Table no. 4 Communication Strategy Plan*

Target audience	Determine objectives	Design communication	Select channels to send message
Manage conclusions	Measure results	Media mix	Budget

*Source:* Author's contribution

*Tabel no. 5 Communications Aspects through Segmentation and Differentiation*

Corporate communication aspects	Team activities and productivity are a result of communication management; choosing communication channels for the level of the employee; appreciating and involving by communication strategies the employees to innovate a diverse offer of product/ services is a key to market success; content and emotional voice are an opportunity to create a cooperation team and increase productivity.
Consumer communication aspects	Clients pay attention addressed by the entrepreneurial team; important and expensive for one is nothing and cheaper for someone else; communication means the assumption of persuasion and competitiveness; the transmission of the message will show the entrepreneurial objectives; online and offline presence on the market is viewed as profit and looser for competitors.

*Source:* Adapted after (Parsons, 2013), (Huete-Alcocer, 2017), (Sousa, B.M., Alves. G.M., 2019), (Vukotic, M., Tinaj, S., 2020)

## 5. Conclusions

The global health tourism business growth has dramatically increased competition among nations to take market share. The proper market segmentation and selection of target segments are keys to this industry's success. There are several methods for segmenting the market, and each has positive and negative aspects. The thesis that tourism products should be tailored to consumer behavior is supported by specialized literature. This theory is based on ongoing changes in other industries, and it holds that product differentiation based on differentiation in the market is the result of entrepreneurial invention. Every answer to a correct question is an opportunity to take a target position for the same group of customers with the same needs and expectations. Relationship entrepreneur-customers face marketing strategies published to clients with simple, personalized words. Marketing researchers report faced the entrepreneurial interest for free available data on the online market, correct communication strategies into adapted groups of customers, and differentiation of communication messages for each small market of the healthcare tourism industry.

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