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Non-Price Competitiveness Factors in a Value Chain of a Tourism Product

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Abstract:

The paper addresses the detection and hierarchical composition of non-price factors influencing the quality of a tourism product in the environment of its value chain components from the viewpoint of the way the customers of travel companies understand these factors. The competitiveness dimensions are outlined for micro- and nanolevels, and the scheme to develop the competitive strategy based on the change of external environment factors is offered. The tourism product value chain scheme is generalized from the viewpoint of a travel company. The paper proves that the customers' desire to maximize the value of a tourism product is based not only on the understanding of the acceptability of respective costs but also the level of awareness about the exclusiveness and quality of the infrastructural framework of the offer. The authors reveal that the components of the customers' understanding of the tourism product value chain are related to the integral understanding of tourism service. The components of non-price factors are outlined chronologically and non-price factors of impact on the competitiveness in various links of the value chain are identified. The priority of inclusion was estimated by the rapid test method. The suggested hierarchy can foster the more qualitative ranging and updating of certain components of a tourism product to improve its understanding by customers, which will impact the competitive positions of the travel companies.

Keywords: travel company; customer; quality of services; infrastructural framework; management.

JEL Classification: L83; O13; O33; D20.

Introduction

The growing competitiveness on the market, along with the aggravated problem of restricted resources, urges the travel companies to continuously search for methods to improve competitiveness, namely through innovative development of tourism offers. In this case, the tourists are the final verifiers of the companies' competitive positions because the way they understand the exclusive quality of the tourism product is the major factor of decision-making regarding its purchase. Numerous available offers supplemented by the demanding approach of customers to the tourism product leads to the need for quick reaction to the changes in consumer attitudes to offer the product on the market that will be able to meet the expectations regarding the quality, cost, and exclusiveness the most. Therefore, competitiveness serves as a rather changing characteristics that is largely dependent on the stochastic development of the factors of the external and internal environment. Instead, it defines the capacity of the travel company to function successfully and take leading positions against other companies in the industry. Monetary valuation of the cost of a tourism product allows customers to compare various offers on the market in terms of price–quality and price–exclusiveness relationships. The situation with non-price factors of influence on the tourism services is more complicated, namely regarding the description of the components of impact on the understanding of a tourism offer as a whole, which requires addressing the mechanisms of the tourism products value chains to logically systematize the detected factors.

1. Literature Review

The issue of competitive advantages in the activity of the companies in the tourism industry is largely addressed in scientific sources. For instance, O. Roik (2018), H. Zelinska *et al.* (2021) and O. Olshanska *et al.* (2021) substantiate theoretical and methodological foundations of determining the competitive advantages of travel companies. M. Kryvoberets (2020), V. Yakubiv *et al.* (2019), O. Karyy *et al.* (2021) devotes his research to the evaluation of the tourism infrastructure as a factor of the tourism service's competitiveness. H. llytska-Hykavchuk (2018) and R. Sodoma *et al.* (2018) examine the opportunities to improve the competitiveness of the travel companies by more efficient use of financial, production, personnel, and marketing capacities and suggest the use of marketing, material-technological, financial, socio-psychological, and organizational tools. Yu. Kyrlov *et al.* (2020), I. P. Kinash *et al.* (2019), and O. Kovalova (2022), substantiate the economic mechanism of developing the competitive advantages of travel companies as the component of their strategic development. Meanwhile, the issue of managing the tourism product value chain remains unnoticed by domestic researchers. Thus, D. Mamotenko and O. Lozova (2016) addressed the issue back in 2016, making the conclusion that the efficient functioning of travel companies requires interaction between the value chains of all contracting parties. In 2020, the issue was examined indirectly by H. Kopets (2020) and T. Shmatkovska *et al.* (2022) in the context of substantiating the innovation-investment strategies and applying the modern management concepts in the development of travel companies.

A. Yakymchuk *et al.* (2021), Y. Danko (2018) and I. Koshkalda *et al.* (2020), pay their attention to researching the way the demand for green tourism is generated and to its development trends in conditions of authorities' decentralization. Yu. Kovalchuk *et al.* (2020) focus on estimation of capacity and opportunities to develop the tourism activity in Ukrainian regions in modern conditions based on the analysis of the functioning environment and determine 12 Ukrainian oblasts with high tourism development capacity and another 13 with insufficient revenues from tourism services to cover labor force and exploitation costs. Meanwhile, H. Horban *et al.* (2020) estimate the efficiency of functioning of tourism entities in Ukrainian regions by the analysis of the functioning environment and argue that in 2018, from the point of view of economic efficiency, the activity of tour operators in Kyiv, Lviv, Volynska, and Chernihivska oblasts was technically efficient and inefficient in the other regions. They also reveal that travel agents in Kyivska, Cherkaska, Lvivska, and Poltavaska oblasts were the leaders by the technical efficiency of operating costs and calculate the level of realization of available opportunities and losses from tourism activity in Ukrainian regions. T. Skrypko *et al.* (2020) research the development of the hotel industry in the country and carry out the correlation-regression analysis to determine that it depends on the tourism industry the most. The same study was conducted by a range of researchers, who prove the direct relationship between the development of the hotel business and tourism industry and its competitiveness (Yakubiv and Boryshkevych 2020; Hryhoruk, *et al.* 2021).

When analyzing the latest foreign studies on the selected subject, we conclude that there are many relevant publications. Y. Li *et al.* (2019) suggest the modeling of tourist behavior based on spatial-temporal analysis. A. Fernández-Villarán *et al.* (2020) analyze the consequences of the use of the value chain in tourism intermediation having examined its current configuration with focus on the emergence of new agents in the network. A. Rojas Bueno *et al.* (2020) offer the conceptual basis and analyze the disintermediation in conference

tourism. Y. Wang (2017) holds the methodological research of optimizing the value chain in the tourism industry based on big data.

Overall, the literature analysis shows the narrow specialization of represented research and its insufficiency for determining the non-price competitiveness factors in the value chain.

The paper aims to detect and provide a hierarchical layout for the non-price factors of impact on the quality of a tourism product in the environment of its value chain components from the viewpoint of understanding of these factors by the customers of travel companies.

2. Materials and Methods

To estimate the way the customers understand the priority of non-price competitiveness factors in the value chain of the tourism product, the express testing of 100 randomly selected clients of five travel companies operating in Lviv (Travel Company "Lemberg Travel", Enjoy Tour, PP "Halitsiya-Tur", Travel Company "Poyihaly z Namy", and Travel Company "Sam") is carried out. The sample comprises 68% female and 32% male aged 18-71, of them 22% are single, 78% are in relationships, 26% are without children, 42% are with one child, 26% are with two children, and 6% are with three and more children. The respondents were offered to select five factors they deemed the most important in the context of competitiveness of the tourism product and crucial for the selection of the travel company. Table 1 shows the factor distribution of responses.

Table 1. Importance of non-price factors according to opinions of travel companies' customers

Value chain link	Non-price factors	Number of respondents' indications
Transport service	travel time and comfort	54
	punctuality of transport operator	11
	trip safety level	18
Accommodation	exterior of accommodation and interior design	31
	quality of service at the reception	48
	apartment comfortability	52
	accommodation safety	24
	accessibility of additional services	14
Catering	exterior of catering establishment	13
	differentiation of offers	8
	flavor profile and quality of dishes	69
	service atmosphere	61
Educational travel services and entertainment attractions	diversity of geographical, natural, historical attractions	13
	accessibility of entertainment attractions	29
	rental opportunities (transport, sport equipment, etc.)	11
	service safety level	17
Availability of information on a tourism product	accessibility, reliability, and relevancy of information	19
	knowledge of foreign languages by staff on trip and in the destination	8

Source: developed by authors.

3. Results and Discussion

The factors able to provide advantages regarding the attraction of customers to the increase of profitability and improvement of capital turnover are the basis for competitiveness of travel companies. The competitiveness shows itself on a micro level (achievement of management goals) and nano level (meeting the interests of owners, staff, and customers), encompassing the interrelated economic and social dimensions on various hierarchical levels (Table 2).

The competitive strategy of the travel company is considered by us as a crucially important element in the structured organization of economic factors of impact on the tourism product value chain that reflects economic and social relationships with stakeholders and takes into account the impact of changing external environment factors (Fig. 1).

According to M. Porter (1985) interpretation, value chain means consequent interrelated processes directed at creating added value of a product by improving the customers' satisfaction and creating competitive advantages for a company. The features of value chains for travel companies are determined by the specifics of the tourism product that combines the goods and services components (Ustian 2017). The customers' desire to

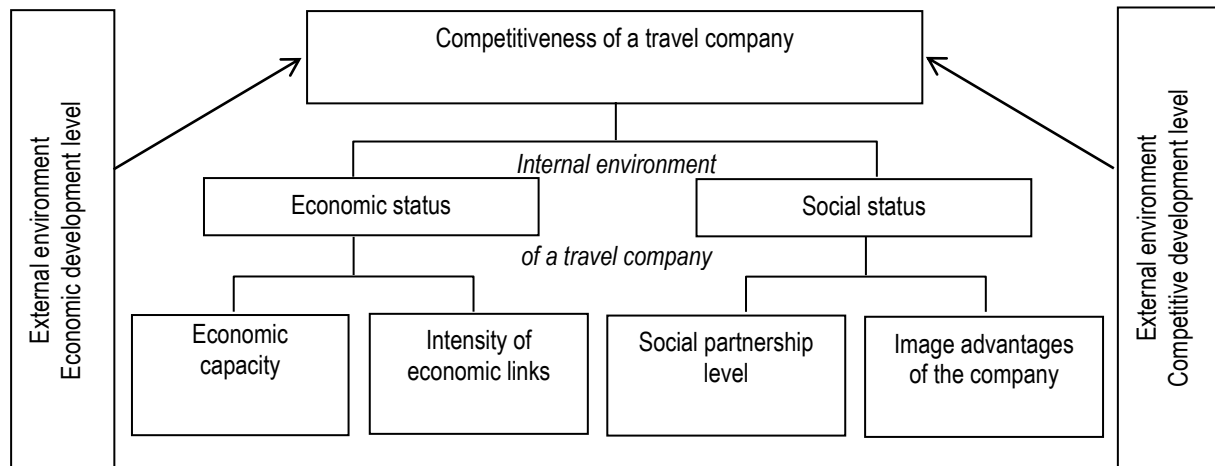
maximize the value of the tourism product is grounded on a set of such factors as acceptability of cost needed to search for it, level of awareness about its exclusiveness and quality of the tourism offer, infrastructural framework of providing the service by the travel company, and the customers' economic capacities.

Table 2. Dimensions of travel companies' competitiveness on micro and nano levels

Hierarchical level	Dimension	Indicators
Micro level	Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - goods turnover - average check - profitability
	Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - acquiring new image advantages - participation in social partnership programs - participation in resources preservation programs - maintenance of high wellbeing level for the staff
Nano level	Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - for owners: profitability of a travel company - for staff: labor remuneration level - for customers: share of expenses in the total income of households
	Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - for owners: personal fulfillment - for staff: labor conditions, social protection - for customers: level of satisfaction with the tourism product

Source: developed by authors.

Figure 1. The competitive strategy layout for a travel company

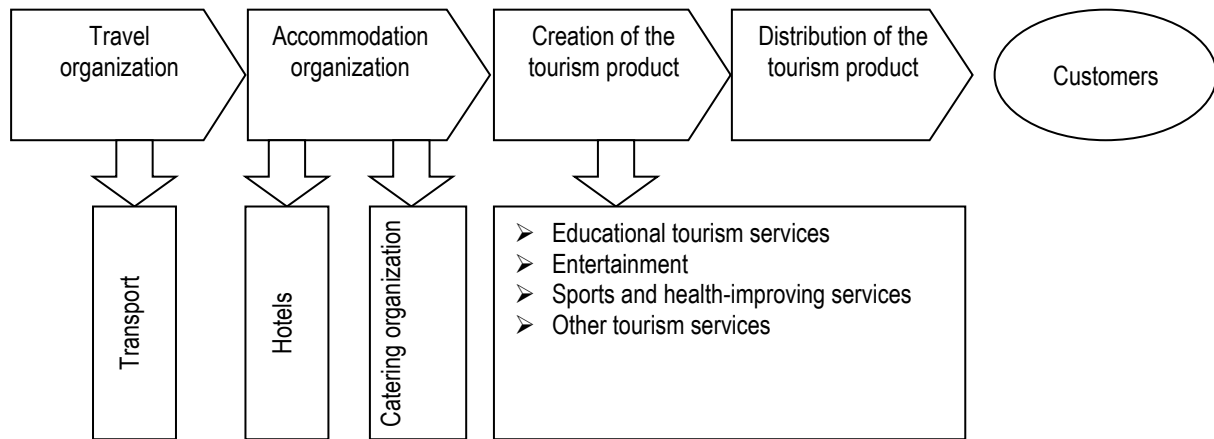


Source: developed by authors.

The described complex of factors generates the initial understanding by the prospective customer of the predicted value, impacts the consumer behavior regarding the purchase of the tourism product, and forms the basis of the travel company's value chain (Fig. 2).

It is obvious that the choice of the tourism product is based on personal preconditions and boundaries of a customer but the concept of the consumer value creation stipulates that the travel company should predict the consumer value of its offer comparing the consumer cost levels with the same or similar offers of competitors (Reznik *et al.* 2022; Korkuna, Korkuna and Kulyk 2020; Tsubov and Shcherban 2020). Speaking about price and non-price factors of impact on the customers' understanding of the quality of the tourism product's value chain components, it is worth outlining chronologically the following components: development of understanding of a destination before the trip → collection of information → planning of opportunities for the trip → booking the tourism product → first impressions (collection of information in the destination regarding accommodation, catering, and tourism attractiveness) → evaluation of infrastructure and environment → comfort of the return trip → memories after the end of the tourism product's consumption.

Figure 2. The competitive strategy layout for a travel company



Source: developed by authors.

The individual understanding of the components of the tourism product value chain by the customers is related to the integral understanding of the tourism service by a client based on price and non-price factors. Meanwhile, the customers have an opportunity to create a random combination of the tourism product components offered by the company that would be the best for them.

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The tourism companies that develop the package of services for its further promotion on the market should have objective information regarding the customers' expectations. Since price factors are quite comprehensively described in scientific literature, it is very important to identify non-price factors of impact on the competitiveness of the tourism product based on the customer expectations. So, such non-price factors as travel time and comfort, punctuality of transport operator, and trip safety level were included in the transport service link. The accommodation link includes exterior of accommodation and interior design, quality of service at the reception, apartment comfortability, accommodation safety, and accessibility of additional services. The catering organization link covers the exterior of the catering establishment, differentiation of offers, flavor profile and quality of dishes, and service atmosphere. Educational travel services and entertainment attractions quality link of the tourism product value chain combines such non-price factors as the diversity of geographical, natural, historical attractions, accessibility of entertainment attractions, rental opportunities (transport, sports equipment, etc.), and service safety level. Availability of information on a tourism product encompasses the accessibility, reliability, and relevancy of information and knowledge of foreign languages by staff on the trip and in the destination.

Therefore, to make the inclusion of non-price factors of achieving the competitive advantages into the value chain of a tourism product more efficient, we have estimated their priority by analyzing the responses of the travel companies' clients. The respondents largely indicated the accommodation services as the major non-price factor (169 responses out of 500 possible), which is the most relevant for them, while most attention is paid to the comfortability of apartments and service quality. Securing the high level of service in hotels is quite a complex direction of the tourism product development management because its result has the non-material nature of

understanding by customers and often displays itself only after a certain period of time in form of their positive or negative attitude towards the travel company.

Meanwhile, the non-material nature of the hotel service allows certain maneuvering of its quality by adjusting its level according to the needs or purchase power of customers. Nevertheless, the quality of the hotel service cannot be estimated in advance due to the simultaneity of provision and consumption. To improve the level of understanding by customers, the accommodation service quality management should be based on the standards of the TQM concept (total quality management) and oriented on the needs and changes of the consumer preferences.

The catering organization was defined by the respondents as the second most important non-price factor (151 responses out of 500 possible). It turns out that the parameters of quality and flavor profile of dishes and service atmosphere are the most important for the customers. Quality management at restaurant business companies is usually based on the intuitive understanding of the desired level by owners or managers because there are no unified standards of service quality nowadays. Meanwhile, the restaurant service offers should always be oriented on the expectations and needs of clients, and it requires the continuous harmonization of the capacity of the tourism product in terms of catering organization with the changing market conditions.

The respondents indicate the travel time as the third key non-price factor, which is most relevant for them (83 responses out of 500 possible). They prefer such components as trip time and comfort. Timely transfer from the airport and optimal organization of the tourists' travel to the destinations or excursions (attractions) contributes to a considerable reduction of waiting for the consumption of the tourism service and makes the vacation more comfortable.

The respondents pay less attention to the category of educational travel services and entertainment attractions (70 responses out of 500 possible) and prefer their accessibility and safety.

It turns out that the information framework of the tourism product is the least important for customers (27 responses out of 500 possible), including the information the tourists receive before departure and while at the destination.

Therefore, when examining the non-price competitiveness factors, it is worth emphasizing the major trends in changes in consumer preferences regarding the quality and exclusiveness of the tourism product components:

- 1) orientation on receiving emotional impressions from consumption;
- 2) commitment to "convenience" in consumption;
- 3) emergence of fashion for "healthy and safe" consumption.

From the viewpoint of detected trends, they should be taken into account in the value chain of the tourism product.

Conclusion

Efficient creation of the tourism products' value chains should be based on minimized price expenses secured by optimized processes of providing services to consumers and eliminated unproductive services that do not create additional values for consumers. The achievement of economic and social management goals is the measurement for non-price competitiveness of travel companies on the macrolevel, while on the nanolevel – the meeting of expectations of owners, staff, and consumers. The competitive strategy should represent the relationships with stakeholders and take into account the dynamics of the external environment factors. The individual components of understanding the tourism product value chain by consumers are related to the integral understanding of the tourism service by clients, taking into account both price and non-price factors. The foresight estimation of the consumer value of the offer in such links as transport service, accommodation, catering organization, educational tourism services and entertainment attractions, as well as the availability of information on the tourism product, should be included in the value chain scheme of the tourism product. The priority belongs to accommodation services (the service quality management is suggested to be based on the TQM concept standards), catering organization (the organization opportunities are suggested to be harmonized with the changing market requirements), and travel time. The suggested hierarchy of non-price factors can foster more qualitative ranging and enhancement of certain tourism product components to improve its understanding by consumers and considerably impact the travel company's competitive positions. Further, it is worth examining the dependence between the detected non-price competitiveness factors and the quality of the client-oriented service of the travel companies.

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