

GSJ JOURNALS SERIE B: ADVANCEMENTS IN BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS

Volume: 2, Issue: 2, p. 1-19, 2020

A NEW STRATEGY TO CREATE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN THE SCOPE OF HEALTH TOURISM: "HIPPO THERAPY APPLICATIONS"

Selda Uca¹

Erdener Balıkçı²

Dilek Dülger Altıner¹

(Received 17.02.2020 Published 09.05.2020)

Abstract

Hippotherapy (equine-assisted therapy) is one of the many applications that have been performed around the world for many years, but its importance and effects are ever-increasing in the health sector in our country. Hippotherapy is a special form of therapy in which the horse's characteristic movements are used to provide motor and sensory inputs in the cases. The main purpose of this study is to introduce Hippotherapy applications as a new strategy to create competitive advantage in the scope of health tourism. The analysis unit of the study constitutes the Hippotherapy applications carried out in the Kartepe Atçılık (Horse Breeding) Vocational High School, which is located in Kocaeli University, Turkey. The promotion and marketing opportunities of the relevant applications have been conceptualized using tourism marketing mixed elements and the application-specific suggestions have been mentioned within the scope of the study.

Key Words: Hippotherapy, Health Tourism, Medical Tourism, Turkey

¹ Kocaeli University, School of Tourism and Hotel Management, Department of Gastronomy and Culinary Arts, Kocaeli/Turkey, selda.uca@kocaeli.edu.tr; dilek.dulger@kocaeli.edu.tr

² Kocaeli University, Faculty of Medicine, Clinical Microbiology & School of Kartepe Atçılık, Kocaeli/Turkey, erdener.balikci@kocaeli.edu.tr

1. INTRODUCTION

There are radical changes in the world that determine the future of tourism from the beginning of the 21st century. One of these changes is the phenomenon of "health tourism" that develops in countries that put emphasis on healthy life and human health. Health tourism, also referred to as "travels for treatment purposes", is considered to be the type of tourism, which includes the maintenance of physical and mental health status of individuals, or medical treatment with their self-renewal. Health Tourism has a wide range of travels to destinations preferred due to the reasons such as baldness, obesity, implant, aesthetics, infertility and similar experiences and material advantages.

Hippotherapy (equine-assisted therapy) is one of the many applications that have been performed around the world for many years, but its importance and effects are ever-increasing in the health sector in our country. Hippotherapy (equine-assisted therapy) method is an ancillary therapy method that is applied as the supportive therapy for the main treatment in people with cerebral palsy, autistic disorder, traumatic brain injury, paralysis and psychological problems in all age groups (2-60 years). The research has shown that Hippotherapy applications have positive effects on gross motor functions and balance reactions in such patients. The records of the health benefits of horses date back to the 5th century BC but it has yet started to be applied Turkey in the 2000s, so has a potential to be assessed as a special topic of the health tourism. As is known, many patients have preferred health packages that contain treatment + accommodation + transportation (transfer) around the world and in Turkey especially in recent years. Thus, Hippotherapy also covers a certain period depending on the main treatments of the patients in Hippotherapy applications and physical therapy and psychological treatment processes need to be performed simultaneously. Considering the structure of the treatment, it is possible to say that the accommodation and similar touristic needs of the patients and their relatives have emerged.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Health Tourism

Health tourism is defined as "travels for treatment purposes" (www.kultur.gov.tr). Health tourism is a type of tourism, which includes the maintenance of physical and mental health status of individuals, or medical treatment with their self-renewal (Percivil and Bridges, 2006). According to another definition, health tourism is the movements arising from the fulfillment of cure, accommodation,

nutrition and entertainment needs for people shifting for a certain period of time for the purpose of health protection and healing while going to a touristic facility based on natural resources.

Health and healthy life, one of the most important economic and social phenomena of our time, is among the most popular tourism products (Costa, Quintela and Mendes, 2015). Health tourism applications, which are considered as an alternative to mass tourism, are carried out by the visitors who are increasingly more interested in improving the quality of life and are regarded as a value for innovative alternatives that create more satisfaction and happiness (Escobar and Villa, 2015).

Health tourism includes a wide range of health-related travels from hair transplantation, dental treatment, plastic surgeries to in vitro fertilization treatment. People can participate in health tourism for the purpose of attaining their health as well as for their desire to maintain healthy living conditions. The applications of health tourism can be listed as aromatherapy, acupuncture, thermalism, cure, spa treatment, balneotherapy, peloidotherapy, climatotherapy, thalassotherapy, hydrotherapy, inhalation applications, drinking cures, physical therapy and rehabilitation, medical treatment and supportive applications (Selvi, 2011). People who participate in health tourism travel to benefit from the indications (healing) properties of hot mineral waters and other supportive treatments and activities.

Health tourism has emerged as a global phenomenon thanks to the convergence of sectors and traditional treatment practices. In fact, health tourism applications are applications that have existed from the past times in many different forms reflecting the cultural, social and political environment. Nowadays, these applications are rediscovered, integrated and branded to create a new global sector. Therefore, the services have been diversified to include thermal, SPA, beauty, massage, hospitality, tourism, architecture, land development, landscape design, fashion, food and beverage, fitness and relaxation, personal development as well as complementary and conventional medicine applications (Cohen, 2008).

Medical tourism services are among the most important application areas of health tourism. Medical tourism requires a vertical perspective to medical diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation applications as well as hotel management, agency, promotion, environment, architecture and economy. The growing demand and interest for medical tourism services has also increased the importance of marketing activities in businesses offering these services.

Today, the demand for medical tourism services, which are applied in different forms both in health institutions, in accommodation facilities and in different therapy centers are increasing rapidly. The medical tourism industry has exhibited an

unprecedented financial development (Kimes and Singh, 2009). Medical tourism can be said to be the travels that people make for obtaining medical treatment that they cannot obtain for various reasons by getting away from the place where they have lived for a maximum of one year with the purpose of recovering their health and/or reaching to the point where they want about their health.

2.2. Hippotherapy

Hippotherapy (equine-assisted therapy) is used as a supportive treatment to improve vital results in physically and mentally disabled individuals (Giagazoglou, Arabatzi, Dipla, Liga and Kellis, 2012). In other words, Hippotherapy as a therapy with horse is an ancillary therapy method that is applied as the supportive therapy for the main treatment in people with cerebral palsy, autistic disorder, traumatic brain injury, paralysis and psychological problems in all age groups (2-60 years). Hippotherapy is a special form of therapy in which the horse's characteristic movements are used to provide motor and sensory inputs (Koca and Ataseven, 2015). The American Hippotherapy Association defines Hippotherapy as "a therapy application in which the horse's movements are used to treat patients with various neuromuscular disorders" (American Hippotherapy Association). Hippotherapy is used as part of a mixed treatment program to achieve functional results (Elmaci, 2017).

Hippotherapy comes from the word "Hippos" which means horse in ancient Greek. The specially-trained expert physical and speech therapists use this treatment method for patients with limited mobility. Riding skills are not taught in this treatment. Instead, training programs are implemented to develop patients' neural functions and sensory inputs. Today, there are more than 600 equine-assisted centers only in the USA. The treatment aims to improve the balance and coordination of the disabled individuals, balance low or high muscle tone, strengthen upright posture, and provide the mobilization of pelvis bone and upper body. Hippotherapy provides efficacy on confidence, self-esteem and improvement in quality of life as well as mental retard and mental malformation correction (Koseman and Seker, 2015).

Hippotherapy uses rhythmic and three dimensional oscillations of horses to trigger neuromuscular responses resulting from the stimulation of the postural reflex mechanisms of the rider. Since this type of physical activity requires the use of the whole body, the horse's movements improve muscle strength, balance and coordination. It has also been acknowledged by many researchers that Hippotherapy is a method which has positive effects on motor performance in disabled individuals (Araujo, Oliveira, Martins, Pereira, Copetti and Safons, 2013).

The controlled Hippotherapy environment provides a basis for improved neurological function and sensory processing. This can be generalized to a wide variety of daily activities, making the horse a valuable therapeutic tool for rehabilitation (El-Meniawy and Thabet, 2012). Hippotherapy (equine-assisted therapy) is also preferred because of the benefits that it provides for the social integration of the cases with perception, speech, communication and social behavior and psychomotor problems. This method is implemented by taking advantage of the curative effects of the body temperature and rhythmic movements of the horse on the locomotor and central nervous system of the patient (Koseman and Seker, 2015). Hippotherapy uses the motion impulse of the horse radiating from its back when it is in motion. These impulses provide balance and coordination by activating the postural reflex mechanisms of the rider (Janura, Peham, Dvorakova and Elfmark, 2009). In the Hippotherapy applications, the horse walk provides the rider with a precise, smooth, rhythmic and repetitive motion pattern similar to the mechanics of the human walk. The rhythmic movements of the horse help to increase the flexibility, posture, balance and mobility of the rider (Ribeiro, Espindula, Lage, Bevilacqua, Diniz, Mello, Ferreira, Ferraz and Teixeira, 2017). When these rhythmic movements are combined with the body temperature of the horse, deep proprioceptions (inner perception) are activated as well as other sensory inputs. Thus, the horse allows the patient to move by changing both their sense of disability and actual motor capacity. The benefits of Hippotherapy include balance, gross motor skills, sensory integration and coordination, muscle tone regulation, and physical strength improvements (Giagazolou et al., 2012).

The American Hippotherapy Association defines the horse-assisted rehabilitation in two basic forms: 1) Hippotherapy: treatment performed by a rehabilitation team under the guidance of horse trainer, 2) Recreational Horseback Riding Therapy (RHRT): recreational horseback riding lessons adapted for disabled people. Hippotherapy sessions are one-to-one session between the therapist and the patient, but recreational horseback riding therapy is provided with a maximum of 5-6 patients per group (Antunes, 2016). Hippotherapy involves four general facilitations: the integration of motor skills, a muscle activation that allows other muscles to move in a particular locomotion chain, the activation of the lumbar system as a basic exercise on its own, and the activation of the responsible muscle groups on the other side of the body. Hippotherapy uses locomotion stimuli that radiate from the horse back as it walks and has a therapeutic effect. The patient is positioned on the horse according to the degree of his or her kinetic development from the most stable lying positions to the sitting position (Janura et al. 2009).

When Hippotherapy applications are performed in a natural environment, the motivation and attendance of disabled people who are in constant interaction with a

living being are generally positive (Yildirim Sik, Cekmece, Dursun, Dursun, Balıkci, Altunkanat and Gulcu, 2012).

3. METHOD

This study is based on the introduction of Hippotherapy applications as a new strategy to create competitive advantage in the scope of health tourism. The starting point of the study is the needs and requirements of the patient and their relatives for healthcare packages that include treatment + accommodation + transportation (transfer) in Hippotherapy applications. Thus, Hippotherapy covers a certain period depending on the main treatments of the patients in Hippotherapy applications and physical therapy and psychological treatment processes need to be performed simultaneously. Considering the structure of the treatment, the accommodation and similar touristic needs of the patients and their relatives have emerged. These demands and needs indicate that there is also a need for supportive tourist services as well as treatment, which is the main service in Hippotherapy applications. For all these reasons, it is thought that Hippotherapy can be regarded as a medical tourism product.

The analysis unit of the study constitutes the Hippotherapy applications carried out in the Kartepe Atçılık (Horse Breeding) Vocational High School, which is located in Kocaeli University, Turkey. The promotion and marketing opportunities have been conceptualized as medical tourism product in the Hippotherapy using tourism marketing mixed elements and the application-specific suggestions have been mentioned within the scope of the study.

The Hippotherapy applications carried out in Kartepe Atçılık (Horse Breeding) Vocational High School in Kocaeli University, which is a public institution, do not make any profit. Therefore, the conceptualizations and suggestions made for the marketing elements of Hippotherapy applications within the scope of the study were taken into account for the purpose of creating social benefit. However, it has been believed that the proposals presented may constitute a basis for the profit-oriented private Hippotherapy centers.

4. STUDY FINDINGS

4.1. Marketing Mixed Elements Suggested for Hippotherapy

As is known, the main purpose of the marketing is to persuade the customer

to purchase our service rather than from many companies and products and to create a certain consumer group. The customer does not only pay for the product but also wants to satisfy their needs and demands (Shanker, 2008). However, the main objectives of the centers offering Hippotherapy services are not profitability, but this brings with some differences in marketing efforts. The centers, which implement Hippotherapy as a healthcare service, strive for providing an experience to the patient with peace, comfort and improvement in their health status. Patients and their relatives have the desire to receive quality, reliable and comfortable therapy.

The marketing mix, called 7P for service marketing, represents the total marketing efforts and supply of a service business (Icoz, 2001). Marketing mix is the most powerful weapon any service business can use against competitor businesses. Any marketing effort towards Hippotherapy services can also be addressed within the marketing mix. The marketing mix consists of controllable variables that Hippotherapy centers use to reach the target market. The controllable variables are known as 7P. These are product, price, distribution, publicity, human, physical evidence and processes. The elements of the marketing mix constitute the focus point of the marketing system and interact with many variables in achieving marketing success. When it comes to Hippotherapy services, there are a number of changes required for the elements of the marketing mix are required because of the nature of service.

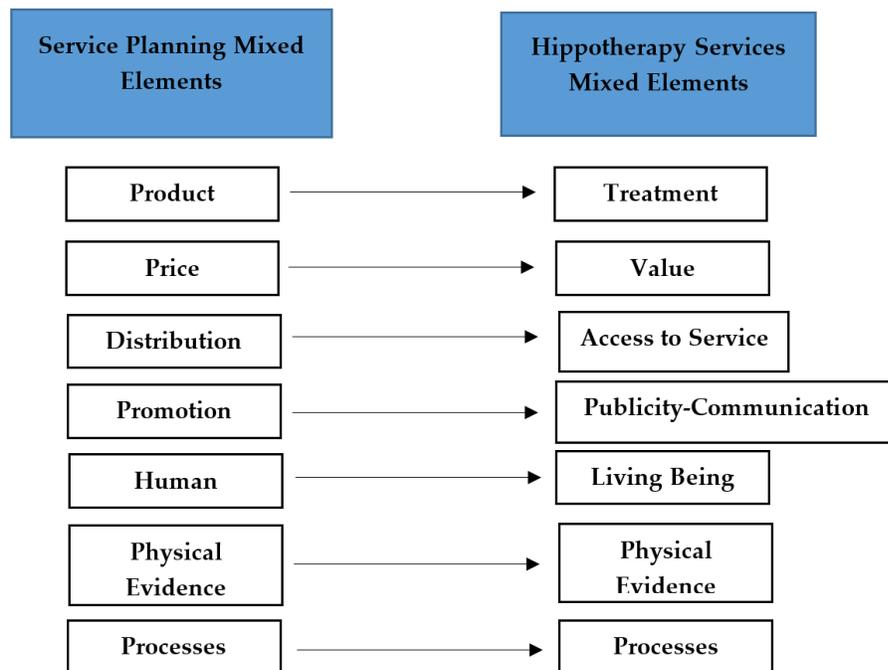


Figure 1. Marketing Mixed Elements Suggested for Hippotherapy

4.1.1. Treatment

The dimensions and characteristics of the service product differ prominently from commodities. The main task of the marketing-oriented service businesses is to plan and develop appropriate services for the market. In health services, the main objective of service providers is to provide appropriate healthcare products in accordance with the characteristics, demands and treatment purposes of the target market. Accordingly, it is crucial for Hippotherapy centers to plan and offer appropriate services in line with the treatment needs, demands and expectations of the patients and their relatives. The most important element for the appropriate service design is to accurately identify the characteristics of the target market and the treatment objectives and to align them with the resources of the treatment center.

The main product is "the horse-assisted ancillary therapy service" in Hippotherapy applications carried out at Kartepe Atçılık (Horse Breeding) Vocational High School. This treatment is included in the category of services for the rehabilitation of physical and mental skills that have been lost as a result of illness and accident. It is intended to strengthen the psycho-social development, physical functions, skills and self-confidence of the disabled people with emotional, behavioral, physical and learning difficulties, to facilitate their adaptation to life and improve their quality of life by using methods that will benefit from the healing properties of horses in a restful natural atmosphere away from the classical hospital environment.

Hippotherapy applications are organized in cooperation with Kocaeli University Faculty of Medicine, Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Kocaeli University Atçılık (Horse Breeding) Vocational High School and Kocaeli University IREM Business and Occupational Therapy Vocational High School. The physical medicine and rehabilitation specialist physician, who is from KOU Faculty of Medicine Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation department, has the authority to organize equine-assisted therapy program for people with disabilities. Patients (e.g. cerebral palsy type and hemiplegic type) are included in the equine-assisted therapy applications for people with disabilities, because these patients are assessed by the physical therapy expert, medical treatment and rehabilitation program are organized for them and they are expected to be able to benefit from the addition of the equine-assisted therapy program for people with disabilities to the rehabilitation therapy. The duration of therapy is determined by the physical medicine and rehabilitation specialist depending on the physical, functional and psychosocial status of the individual with cerebral palsy. The equine-assisted therapy program is held once a week in 10-day sessions consisting of 15 minutes each day.

The requirement for a minimum of 10 days of Hippotherapy brings with the need for auxiliary/complementary tourism services such as accommodation, food and

beverage, etc. during the provision of the relevant main service. This is the reason for the necessity of marketing the relevant basic and auxiliary services within a package.

4.1.2. Value

Hippotherapy applications are offered free of charge as a supportive treatment in Kartepe Atçılık (Horse Breeding) Vocational High School. The main purpose of the institution is not profitability, and this feature distinguishes it from other treatment centers. The main purpose is to provide the patients with an improvement in their health status and an experience with peace and comfort. However, other expenses such as accommodation, food and beverage, etc. are incurred for the patients and their relatives coming from the city and abroad for Hippotherapy.

Within the scope of the proposed marketing model, it is aimed to minimize the necessary expenses of the patients and their relatives in their treatment process. Collaborations are important for the groups that are materially disadvantaged within the scope of social responsibility in order to provide them to take advantage from Hippotherapy services.

4.1.3. Access to Service

The relationship between the center providing services in Hippotherapy services and the patient-their relatives can be considered as "distribution system". A distribution that occurs when patients directly benefit from Hippotherapy services refers to a "*direct distribution*" system". For example, the patient/their relatives can directly communicate with Hippotherapy center. In the case of direct distribution in Hippotherapy services, accessibility and availability are of great importance in distribution. The distribution system in which Hippotherapy services are carried out by agents will mean "*indirect distribution*". The businesses which fulfill the indirect distribution function will be intermediary enterprises operating in the health sector such as physical therapy centers. There is indirect distribution in Hippotherapy services offered at Kartepe Atçılık (Horse Breeding) Vocational High School. The treatment program is not applied without the approval of the physical medicine and rehabilitation physician and there is no different and arbitrary treatment other than the program that physical medicine and rehabilitation specialist physician determines and recommends in accordance with his/her diagnosis. Determining the start and end times of the program is also under the authority of the physician in physiotherapy and rehabilitation.

4.1.4. Publicity-Communication

As is known, promotional efforts represent communication efforts to persuade consumers to ensure that products and services are demanded (Bozok, 2009). Promotion is the communication with the customer for the businesses. Once the market has been identified to meet the market needs of the products offered by healthcare services and various motivations are analyzed, then the promotional activities are started to implement as methods of attracting patients/their relatives in the target market (Usta, 2008).

The purpose of the promotional activities of Hippotherapy centers is (as opposed to other services and not income- or profit-oriented) to increase the level of knowledge, consciousness and awareness. Therefore, Hippotherapy centers must inform, convince and remind the patients/their relatives in the target market.

It is observed that the introduction of Hippotherapy applications offered as a supportive treatment in Kartepe Atçılık (Horse Breeding) Vocational High School does not reach the required level in the national and international field on the basis of health tourism. The promotions made by the specialist physician's references, the university website, local and national media are under the target. Thus, effective promotion and communication efforts are needed within the framework of patient ethical rules in order to increase the number of people who can benefit from such services.

4.1.5. Living Being

In the case of Hippotherapy services, the "human" element, which is one of the mixed elements of service marketing, is different. Because only people do not interact in Hippotherapy applications. Since one of the most important factors affecting the success of therapy is "horse", this mixed element is conceptualized as "living being".

The presence of a fit-for-purpose and qualified Hippotherapy horse is of utmost importance as well as a trained and knowledgeable team in the equine-assisted therapy of individuals with physical and mental disabilities. The fit-for-purpose Hippotherapy horses are included in the application considering the body structure and mental-behavioral characteristics (Koseman and Seker, 2015). In particular, the properties of the horse are very important in terms of temperament and mechanical strength (conformation). Careful choice and appropriate training, using an appropriate therapy horse fit for the work in terms of physical and temperament, are crucial for patient communication and application (Heine, 1997).

The human elements that interact in Hippotherapy applications are as follows (Koseman and Seker, 2015; Elmaci, 2017):

1. *Physician*: It is very important that you regularly communicate with the physician who follows the patient about the changes or progress of the medical condition of the patient.
2. *Patient and Their relatives/caregivers*: The expectation and hopes of the patient or their families about Hippotherapy play an important role in the planning of the treatment.
3. *Professional colleagues*: All professionals working with patients, including physiotherapists, child and adult psychologists, horse trainer, riding instructor, side holders, should be in constant communication in the direction of the patient's appropriate therapy. For example, in the course of therapy, therapists constantly communicate with patients who are being treated by being lied next to the horse or face downwards or back on the horse, being sitting sideways, being got on it forwards or backwards, and constantly analyze the reactions and responses of the patient. The therapist is in constant communication with the horse trainer and side holders, which is an important element of the team, for adjusting the horse's movements appropriately or changing the horse's tempo or direction.

Intensive personal and experiential relationships create important responsibilities for managers in Hippotherapy centers. Because the motivation, communication and disciplined working behavior of the personnel influence the guest experience more than the employee in many other service businesses. In a restaurant, the executive chef manages the personnel, but the food is the final product experienced by the guest. If the chef is having a bad day, the customers will probably not notice it. On the contrary, if a guest is being served by a therapist who is conflicting with his/her boss, not motivated or dissatisfied with his/her job, it will be felt during this service. Happy, attentive, well-balanced and experienced therapists will create a valuable experience for their clients. When the therapists are unhappy, stressful or careless, the experience of the guest (the patient - their relatives) will be negative. Considering the talent and experience of the therapist; good management and leadership require hiring, training and retaining happy and attentive personnel who love their jobs (Bjurstam and Cohen, 2008). Managers should know the personnel needs, analyze their behavior, and be aware that not all personnel have a similar structure. Thus, while managers are motivating their personnel, they create a work environment in which they will become productive and contribute to the business goals. Thus, it is firstly necessary for the manager to have knowledge about human behaviors (Sener, 2007).

4.1.6. Physical Evidence

Having the abstractness of services is the most fundamental influence that makes service evaluations difficult. Participants who benefit from the service need material indicators to make service evaluations, because these indicators have a positive impact on the participants' impressions. These material indications are called "physical evidence".

The physical resources of Hippotherapy service consist of the area where the therapy is applied (together with the architecture) and the instruments used in therapy. These physical resources are the most important determinants of the image of a Hippotherapy center. If the closed paddock where Hippotherapy services are presented is clean and bright, the used technology is new and modern and the clothes of the personnel who offer the service, etc., they will help to gain the participants' trust.

An important factor of patient satisfaction in Hippotherapy services is the atmosphere where the therapy is presented. Atmosphere is a set of arrangements that are performed to consciously influence the patient/their relatives or improve the effect on them. It is desirable that the patients feel good, safe, close and peaceful with these arrangements. The concept of atmosphere includes heat, noise, lighting, decor, comfort, cleaning, odour and music.

4.1.7. Processes

The process is, in its simplest form, the flow of activities that enable inputs to be converted into outputs. Process management consists of flow control, techniques and methods of business programs and activities. Therefore, Hippotherapy compliance is given by specialist doctors in these clinics in cases where the clinic (physical therapy, child, child psychiatry, adolescent psychiatry) is applied during Hippotherapy. Thus, the therapy process has begun. There are two different ways, including physical and mental, in this process. For physical cases, the process of getting the patients' movement functions exercised, warmed and making them ready for the therapy is done in the physical therapy clinic before the therapy. For psychological cases, the psychological behaviors of the patients are carefully observed and primarily the contact with horses and then communication and movement activity are regulated in a controlled way. When all this process takes place, plans and programs should be made to evaluate the workloads of the units and to provide harmony and cooperation between the units and personnel. Moreover, employees, who provide Hippotherapy services, should coordinate the activities of the patients, their relatives, horses and equipment and provide team work.

The most important part of the treatment experience is the "healthcare service" that is presented as the main benefit. The provision of the healthcare service without any delay and the high level perceptions of quality, comfort and convenience of people in the therapy process will be the main determinants of the image of the Hippotherapy center. The combination of experience, product and service in Hippotherapy services further increases the importance of marketing.

4.2. Hippotherapy Service Package and Marketing Process as Medical Tourism Product

The elements of marketing mix constituting Hippotherapy services are individually introduced through the case of Kocaeli University Kartepe Atçılık(Horse Breeding) Vocational High School in the above section. This section includes tasks and suggestions for marketability of Hippotherapy services as a medical tourism product.

The elements that will constitute the suggested Hippotherapy service package are:

- 1- Treatment service
- 2- Accommodation service
- 3- Transportation service
- 4- Horse, horse equipment and team employment service

When a patient wants to receive a Hippotherapy service, touristic needs such as accommodation and transportation services also arise. Thus, the main objective will be to facilitate the accessibility of patients and their relatives to the ancillary services beyond treatment and to ensure the availability of these services at the lowest cost. Therefore, the proposed marketing process and tasks for raising the awareness of Hippotherapy applications should be defined. The main objective of such marketing efforts is to raise the awareness of Hippotherapy services and to increase the number of patients who can benefit from this service. It can be achieved through the creation of cooperative conditions between the businesses producing the service.

Within the context of promoting and marketing Hippotherapy services as a package, the tasks required to be fulfilled by the therapy centers and the stages of the marketing process that will ensure the successful completion of these tasks are included in the following table.

Table 2. Tasks and Marketing Process for the Introduction of Hippotherapy Services

Task	Marketing Process
1. Identification of patient needs for Hippotherapy	1. Marketing research and database analysis
2. Determining the current market structure and potential	2. Analysis and selection of target market segments; understanding of patient/therapy center relationships
3. Putting needs in the services offered	3. Service planning and formulation
4. Making the service accessible	4. Distribution policy
5. Informing and motivating the patient/their relatives	5. Promotion (communication, advertising, personal selling effort, relational marketing)
6. Assessment of marketing efforts	6. Analysis

The marketing process for Hippotherapy applications should begin with "*marketing research and database analysis*". The aim of this stage is to identify existing and potential patients who benefit/will benefit from the Hippotherapy services. The treatment needs, treatment processes and outcomes of patients receiving treatment services in Hippotherapy centers, and the expectations, satisfaction and needs of their relatives should be analyzed. Such data should be recorded and a strong database for service improvements should be established. At the same time, an analysis of other centers offering Hippotherapy services should be conducted at this stage. Collaboration should be done for service improvements by evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the other centers.

After analyzing the current market structure and potential, a group of potential patients who may benefit from Hippotherapy applications should be selected as the "*target market*" segment. Given the characteristics of the service offered, the target audience is children and adults with moderate and severe mental and physical disabilities. Not only on a regional basis, but also on a national and international basis, a wide range of people who can benefit from Hippotherapy treatment should be selected as the target market. It is very important to extend the geographical boundaries in order to increase the number of participants that can benefit from the treatment.

The third stage of "*service planning and formulation*" is critical in the marketing of Hippotherapy services. At this stage, Hippotherapy applications as a service should be developed to meet the needs of patients and their relatives. This stage is actually the phase in which the proposed treatment and other tourist services are integrated within the package. The harmony and cooperation between service providers are very important at this stage. Therefore, patients and their relatives coming from outside the region should be interviewed with accommodation facilities, transport businesses and agents in the region. The necessary information and guidance should be provided about the inclusion of the Hippotherapy product in tour programs of travel agencies that are especially specialized in health tourism, with the support of the public institutions and organizations. The main objective should be to increase the number of participants at the lowest cost by providing appropriate fees, discounts and incentives. Since Hippotherapy practices performed by public institutions are marketed for the good of patients and without any financial expectation, collaborations that will "create value" are of utmost importance.

The next step concerns the "*distribution*" function, which will enable the patient to benefit from Hippotherapy services. Thus, the therapy center should establish a suitable distribution network that can deliver its services to the target group directly or indirectly. Different types of intermediary enterprises such as National and international physical therapy centers between the Hippotherapy center and the patient, other healthcare institutions, agents, etc. should be involved in the indirect distribution system. These intermediary enterprises should enable the patients to reach to the healthcare services by fulfilling the functions such as providing information the patients/their relatives need to know about Hippotherapy applications, guiding them as necessary.

It is difficult to market this service, because Hippotherapy services offer intangible benefits such as experience, comfort, quality, etc. Therefore, the "*promotion*" process will be very important for the formed service package. The basic communication efforts should be planned to increase the attractiveness of the therapy services, to convince the patients/their relatives to use the service, to influence them, and to facilitate their experience at the same time. During the stage of promotion, it is of strategic importance to create an introduction plan using different methods including not only regional but also national and international advertising, public relations, especially internet - social media etc. One of the most important activities to be carried out in this context is to provide materials, which describe and introduce Hippotherapy practices in cooperation with physical therapy centers and other health institutions abroad. Intensive promotional activities should be continued in order to direct people with disabilities, who receive treatment in such centers, to the Hippotherapy centers. In particular, promotional activities are of great importance in

terms of providing preliminary information about therapy to the patients/their relatives, who are motivated with rational and emotional impulses. For an effective marketing, an image and brand for the Hippotherapy center must be developed and transmitted to the patients/their relatives. This positioning will help to identify benefits that Hippotherapy provides in the minds of the patients' relatives/decision makers.

Finally, the results of identifying the success of the process or making a set of arrangements should be "*analyzed*". When the results are analyzed, the numerical success of the marketing process, the satisfaction level of patients/their relatives, the size of market share, reasons for success and/or failure, etc. should be examined and evaluated in detail.

Given the marketing process and stages of Hippotherapy applications, the sensitivity and importance of the service are better understood. Hippotherapy centers have to fulfill the marketing steps in a meticulous and very good manner to provide more people in need to be able to take advantage of the treatment facilities and the services they offer. It should advantageously use all the attractiveness and quality experience of a Hippotherapy center.

5. CONCLUSION

Personal health affects all patterns of consumer behaviors, including travel and tourism services. In spite of its importance, however, travels for treatment purposes is still niche and special interest market, but significantly and increasingly contribute to the economy in many countries (Costa, Quintela and Mendes, 2015). One of the applications that can be addressed in the context of medical tourism, which is one of the most important dimensions of health tourism today, is the Hippotherapy applications, whose importance has recently been understood. This treatment model, which is being implemented in many European countries, the United States and Canada, is not yet fully known in our country. It is not sufficiently recognized, which leads to restrict the number of patients who benefit from this treatment.

This study is designed to raise recognition and awareness of Hippotherapy practices and to provide a different point of view how therapy can be marketed as a touristic product at the national and international level. The elements of marketing mix have been conceptualized through the case of Kocaeli University Kartepe Atçılık (Horse Breeding) Vocational High School, which is selected as the sample unit of the study, and the suggestions have been mentioned for the promotion and marketing opportunities as medical tourism product of Hippotherapy applications. With the increasing awareness of Hippotherapy application, it has been considered that it may

increase the number of patient/patient relatives who can benefit from the positive outcome of treatment. Moreover, the increase in the number of Hippotherapy centers due to the demands of the patient/patient relatives is also one of the most important anticipations that can lead to social benefit.

It has focused on how to increase the number of patients who benefit from the proposed marketing studies and treatment within the scope of social responsibility, because the Hippotherapy center, which is chosen as the analysis unit of the study, is a non-profit public institution, Although the Hippotherapy services (main service), which are presented in the institution, are not profit-oriented, several positive effects emerge in tourism businesses such as accommodation, food-beverage, etc. In other words, the treatment provided as a main service is free of charge; the increase in the number of participants will cause social and economic effects in a regional sense. Indirect and stimulated (or multiplier) effects create positive effects on regional development as well as direct income and employment on the general economy by the Hippotherapy centers and other related sectors. Besides, the proposed marketing activities will result in positive regional economic and social effects as well as enriching the quality of life of the local people.

REFERENCES

- Antunesa, F. N.; Pinho, A. S.; Kleinerd, A. F. R.; Salazar, A. P.; Eltza, G. D.; Juniora, A. A. O.; Cechettia, F.; Galli, M. and Pagnussata, A. S. (2016). Different horse's paces during Hippotherapy on spatio-temporal parameters of gait in children with bilateral spastic cerebral palsy: a feasibility study. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 59, 65-72.
- Araujo, T. B.; Oliveira, R. J.; Martins, W. R.; Pereira, M. M.; Copetti, F. and Safons, M. P. (2013). Effects of Hippotherapy on mobility, strength and balance in elderly. *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, 56, 478-481.
- Bjurstam, A. and Cohen, M. (2008). Spas and the future leadership climate. M. Cohen and G. Bodeker (Eds.), *Understanding the Global Spa Industry – Spa Management*, (pp. 363-376). Oxford: Elsevier Publishing.
- Bozok, D. (2009). Turizm işletmelerinin pazarlamasında tutundurma. C. Avcıkurt, S. Demirkol and B. Zengin (Eds.). *Turizm işletmelerinin pazarlamasında 7p ve 7c içinde* (pp. 129-159), Istanbul: Degisim Publishing.
- Costa, C.; Quintela, J. and Mendes, J. (2015). Health and wellness tourism: a strategic plan for tourism and thermalism valorization of são pedro do sul. M. Peris-Ortiz and J. Alvarez-Garcia (Eds.), *Health and Wellness Tourism*, (pp. 21-31). Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

- Uca, S., Balıkcı, E., Dülger Altın, D. (2020). A New Strategy to Create Competitive Advantage in the Scope of Health Tourism: "Hippotherapy Applications". *GSI Journals Serie B: Advancements in Business and Economics, (ABE)*, 2 (2): 1-19.
- El-Meniawy, G. H. and Thabet, N. S. (2012). Modulation of back geometry in children with spastic diplegic cerebral palsy via Hippotherapy training. *The Egyptian Journal of Medical Human Genetics*, 13, 63-71.
- Elmaci, F. C. (2017). Hipoterapi ve fizyoterapistin rolü. *Hipokrat E-Bülten*, 1(5), 1-7.
- Escobar, M. A. and Villa, P. F. (2015). Hot springs as an alternative for sustainable wellness tourism in Colombia, *6ièmes journées scientifiques du Tourisme Durable Conciliation*, 10-12th June 2015, Quebec, Canada.
- Giagazoglou, P.; Arabatzi, F.; Dipla, K.; Liga, M. and Kellis, E. (2012). Effect of a Hippotherapy intervention program on static balance and strength in adolescents with intellectual disabilities. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 33, 2265-2270.
- Heine, B. (1997). Hippotherapy: A multisystem approach to the treatment of neuromuscular disorders. *Australian Physiotherapy*, 43(2), 145-149.
- Icoz, O. (2001). *Turizm işletmelerinde pazarlama*. Ankara: Turhan Publishing.
- Janura, M.; Peham, C.; Dvorakova, T. and Elfmark, M. (2009). An assessment of the pressure distribution exerted by a rider on the back of a horse during Hippotherapy. *Human Movement Science*, 28, 387-393.
- Karayagiz Muslu, G. and Conk, Z. (2011). Hayvan destekli uygulamalar ve cocuklarda kullanimi. *Dokuz Eylul Üniversitesi Hemşirelik Yüksekokulu Elektronik Dergisi*, 4(2), 83-88.
- Kimes, S. E. and Singh, S. (2009). Spa revenue management. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 50(1), 82-95.
- Koca, T. T. and Ataseven, H. (2015). What is Hippotherapy? The indications and effectiveness of Hippotherapy. *North Clin Istanbul*, 2(3), 247-252.
- Koseman, A. and Seker, İ. (2015). Hipoterapi ve terapede kullanılan atların özellikleri. *Erciyes Üniv. Vet. Fak. Derg.*, 12(3), 195-201.
- Percivil, C. and Bridges, B. J. (2006). Globalization and healthcare: understanding health care and medical tourism. *Expert rev. Pharmacoecon Outcomes Research*, 6(4), 447-454.
- Ribeiro, M. F.; Espindula, A. P.; Lage, J. B.; Bevilacqua, D. E.; Diniz, L. H.; Mello, M. C.; Ferreira, A. A.; Ferraz, M. L. F. and Teixeira, V. P. A. (2017). Analysis of the electromiographic activity of lower limb and motorfunction in Hippotherapy practitioners with cerebral palsy. *Journal of Bodywork & Movement Therapies*, xxx, 1-9.
- Shanker, R. (2008). *Services marketing – The Indian perspective*. New Delhi: Excel Books.
- Selvi, M. S. (2011). Sağlık turizmi. N. Hacıoğlu and C. Avcıkurt (Eds). *Turistik ürün cesitlendirmesi*, (pp.275-294). Ankara: Nobel Publishing.

Uca, S., Balıkçı, E., Dülger Altın, D. (2020). A New Strategy to Create Competitive Advantage in the Scope of Health Tourism: "Hippotherapy Applications". *GSI Journals Serie B: Advancements in Business and Economics, (ABE)*, 2 (2): 1-19.

Sener, B. (2007). *Modern otel işletmelerinde yönetim ve organizasyon*. Ankara: Detay Publishing.

Usta, O. (2008). *Turizm – genel ve yapısal yaklaşım*. Ankara: Detay Publishing.

Yıldırım Sik, B.; Çekmece, C.; Dursun, N.; Dursun, E., Balıkçı, E.; Altunkanat, Z. and Gülçü, M. A. (2012). Hippoterapi serebral palsili çocukların rehabilitasyonunda yararlı mıdir?", *Türkiye Klinikleri J Med Sci*, 32(3), 601-608.

http://www.americanhippotherapyassociation.org/about-aha/about_aha/, (Accessed: 09.04.2019).

<http://www.kultur.gov.tr> (Accessed: 26.03.2019).