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### CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE MARKETING APPROACH FOR SPA BUSINESSES: SINDIRGI CASE

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#### EXTENSIVE SUMMARY

##### Introduction

Historically, the understanding of marketing has changed over time depending on the practices and problems experienced. In these changes and transformation processes, it is very important for enterprises to adapt to new marketing approaches in order to protect and increase their competitiveness. This makes it essential for the managers to review their marketing understanding and strategies in the spa businesses. In this approach, it is vital to examine how the market conditions affect the marketing activities of the spa businesses, in which areas the competition is intensified, what are sales promotion methods and promises, customer expectations, social responsibility activities and after-sales customer relations.

The study consists of four parts. In the first part of the study, a conceptual evaluation is made for the development of marketing understanding in the historical process. In the second part includes the methodology. Third section includes the research findings and discussion about the marketing practices carried out by the managers in the spa businesses operating in Sındırgı destination. Finally, fourth section includes the conclusion.

##### Methodology

The study aims to determine which marketing approaches are used in the spa businesses operating in Sındırgı/Balıkesir Destination in Turkey. Content analysis was used in the study. In this context, face to face interview was conducted with the marketing authorities of the three businesses operating in the destination. There are three spa businesses operating in Sındırgı destination and the study covers all these samples. One of these spas is a condominium, one is a thermal spa hotel and one is a hot spring hotel. Data were obtained in July 2018. The main question in the study is how the competitive conditions affect the marketing approaches in the spas. The study aims to determine the sales methods applied in the spas, customer expectations, social responsibility activities and customer relations in order to address this fundamental problem. A descriptive, interpretive and evaluative approach was adopted as a case study design. Based on this approach, 7 semi-structured open-ended questions were prepared for the research purposes. The studies of Denison and McDonald (1995), Chambers and McIntosh (2008), Altunısık (2009), Kunz and Hogleve (2011) and Dolnicar and Ring (2014) were used to construct the questions. Interviews were recorded and then analyzed by each researcher for research validity.

### **Findings and Discussions**

Research results indicate that the spa businesses adopt multiple marketing approaches instead of a single marketing approach in the operations. However, instead of marketing approaches that take their unique structure into consideration, the spas adopt competitive counterfeit approaches. In this context, they focus on attracting new customers from competitors and the market in order to increase sales. As Wood (2004) argues, the cost of finding new customers is higher than the cost of retaining existing customers. For this reason, it may be suggested that businesses facing customer shortages should first consider the option of retaining existing customers. On the other hand, there are repressive sales practices in the spas. As Denison and McDonald (1995) stated, the repressive sales approach is not effective today. In addition, findings shows that the low level of personal income of the guests was seen as the most important obstacle to the innovation, service quality, product diversity and fulfillment of the promises made in spa businesses.

The marketing authorities of the spas consider the low purchasing power of domestic customers as a serious problem. This situation, which also affects marketing approaches of the spas as well as forces them to reduce prices. Thus, price reduction strategies result with low quality triggered by cost reduction. As a result, even if innovative products are designed, these projects cannot be implemented due to insufficient cash flows and sales. For this reason, spa managers are distant (even willing) to invest in innovative products. In these conditions, as Denison and McDonald (1995) point out, they prefer to apply sales developing strategies through advertising, promotion, internet and social media for existing products. Although there is a strong willingness to implement the marketing approach based on customer satisfaction in the spas, it is also problematic. Thus, customer expectations are mostly met under existing conditions.

Participation to social responsibility activities among spas is very limited, some do not even participate at all. Within the scope of the relational marketing approach, there are more practices among spas to reduce complaints. On the other hand, they attach great importance to customer experience. In this way, businesses are trying to increase customers by using recommendation to others and to attract more customers at low cost. In addition, the natural attractiveness of the spas and the environment are also used as a means of attracting customers. In the future studies, examining the effects of developments in communication technologies on marketing approaches as well as competition may contribute more to the literature.