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AN INTRODUCTION TO 5-STEP BRAND MANAGEMENT CONDITIONS FOR THE NYÍRERDŐ ZRT. “GÚTH HUNTING AREA”

Анотація. Зараз «полювання» стало помітною туристичною мотивацією, і стала зрозумілою роль «мисливського туризму» в розвитку іміджу країни та дестинації. Мисливський туризм можна вважати формою «нішевого» туризму, яка є формою туризму, що відбувається в своєрідному автентичному середовищі та мотивується особливим інтересом, що зачіпає лише більш вузький сегмент споживачів. Кількість іноземних гостей-мисливців, які відвідують Угорщину, демонструє постійну тенденцію до зростання, у 2022 році їх кількість становила 29 тис. Іноземні мисливці, які приїжджають до нашої країни, отримують свій досвід, долучаючись до процесу обслуговування, розробленого мисливцями за сприяння постачальників послуг. На основі досвіду їхніх відносин з кожним елементом послуги формується їхнє задоволення чи незадоволення даним постачальником послуг, але на їхній досвід фундаментально впливають і формуються місце та обставини падіння; тобто імідж даного пункту призначення чи країни також. У рішенні гостей, окрім видів дичини, яку вони хочуть убити, також важливим аспектом є імідж, переконання та досвід, пов'язані з територією полювання, тому брендинг, тобто передача цінності та унікальності пропонованого досвіду в автентичній і переконливій формі, тепер набуває першочергового значення для гравців у секторі мисливського туризму, чітко відрізняючи себе від своїх конкурентів. Організація, яка обробляє 60 тис. га, що досі вважається світовим рекордом трофея лані, двічі отримувала нагороду «Едмонд Блан» Міжнародної ради з полювання та охорони дикої природи. Лісове господарство Гут приймає близько 500 гостей-мисливців, середній термін перебування яких – 3 дні. Мета цього тематичного дослідження полягає в тому, щоб продемонструвати, як 5-ступеневу піраміду бренду можна використовувати для визначення характерних рис, що виступатимуть основою для покращення позиціонування мисливського району на основі інтеграції об'єктивних характеристик і сприйняття гостей.

Ключові слова: мисливський туризм, задоволеність споживачів, туристичний бренд, 5-ступенева піраміда бренду.

JEL Classification: Z31

Absztrakt. A „vadászat” mára markáns turisztikai motiváció lett, és egyértelművé vált a „vadászati turizmus” ország-és desztinációimázs alakulásában játszott szerepe. A vadászati turizmus a „niche” turizmus egyik formájának tekinthető, ami egyfajta autentikus környezetben megvalósuló, speciális érdeklődési kör által motivált turisztikai forma, ennek megfelelően a fogyasztóknak csak egy szűkebb rétegét érinti. A Magyarországra látogató külföldi vendégvadászok száma folyamatosan növekvő tendenciát mutat, 2022-ben számuk 29.000 fő volt. A hazánkba érkező külföldi vadászok a vadásztatók által kidolgozott szolgáltatásfolyamatba bekapcsolódva, a – szolgáltatók asszisztenciájával – élik át élményeiket. Az egyes szolgáltatáselemekkel való kapcsolatuk tapasztalata alapján kialakul elégedettségük vagy elégedetlenségük az adott szolgáltatóval kapcsolatban, de átélt élményük alapjaiban befolyásolja, alakítja az elejtés helyéről, körülményeiről; vagyis az adott desztinációról,



illetve az országról kialakuló képet, az imázst is. A vendégek döntésében az elejteni kívánt vadfaj mellett fontos szempont a vadászterülethez kapcsolódó imázsjellemzők, hiedelmek, tapasztalatok is, ezért mára a vadászturisztikai szektor szereplő számára is kiemelt fontosságúvá vált a márkázás, vagyis a kínált élmények értékének és egyediségének hiteles és meggyőző módon való kommunikálása, ezáltal pedig maguk versenytársaiktól való egyértelmű megkülönböztetése. A – jelenleg is világrekordnak számító dámszarvas trófeát produkáló – 60.000 ha-on gazdálkodó szervezet a világon egyedülállóként 2 alkalommal kapta meg a Nemzetközi Vadászati és Vadvédelmi Tanács „Edmond Blanc” díját. A Gúthi erdészet évente kb. 500 vendégvadászt fogad, az átlagos tartózkodási idő 3 nap.

Az esettanulmány jellegű tanulmány célja bemutatni, hogy hogyan határozhatóak meg az 5 lépcsős márkapiramis segítségével – az objektív jellemzők és a vendégek percepcióinak integrálása alapján – a pozicionáláshoz alapot szolgáltató markáns karakterjellemzők egy nemzetközi vonzerővel is rendelkező vadászterület esetében.

Kulcsszavak: vadászati turizmus, fogyasztói elégedettség, turisztikai márka, 5 lépcsős márkapiramis.

Abstract "Hunting" has now become a prominent tourism motive and the role of "hunting tourism" in shaping the image of the country and destination has become clear. Hunting tourism can be considered as a form of niche tourism, a form of tourism in an authentic environment, motivated by special interests and therefore only reaching a limited group of consumers. The number of foreign guest hunters visiting Hungary is steadily increasing, reaching 29,000 in 2022. Foreign hunters visiting our country are involved in the service process developed by the hunters, with the assistance of the service providers. Their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a particular service provider is based on their experience of each service element, but their experience also fundamentally influences and shapes the image of the destination and the country. In addition to the species of game to be hunted, the image characteristics, beliefs and experiences associated with the hunting area are also an important factor in the decision of guests, which is why branding, i.e. communicating the value and uniqueness of the experiences offered in a credible and convincing way, and thus clearly distinguishing themselves from their competitors, has become a priority for players in the hunting tourism sector. The organisation is the only one in the world to have been awarded the "Edmond Blanc" award by the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation on 2 occasions, with 60,000 hectares of land, which currently produces a world record number of fallow deer trophies. The Gúth Forestry welcomes around 500 guest hunters a year, with an average stay of 3 days. The aim of this case study is to show how the 5-step brand pyramid - based on the integration of objective characteristics and guest perceptions - can be used to identify the distinctive character traits that provide the basis for positioning in a hunting area with international appeal.

Keywords: hunting tourism, customer satisfaction, tourism brand, 5-step brand pyramid

Problem description. "Hunting" has now become a prominent tourism motive and the role of "hunting tourism" in shaping the image of the country and destination has become clear. The number of foreign guest hunters visiting Hungary is steadily increasing, reaching 29,000 in 2022. In addition to the species of game to be hunted, the image characteristics, beliefs and experiences associated with the hunting area are also an important factor in the decision of guests, which is why branding, i.e. communicating the value and uniqueness of the experiences offered in a credible and convincing way, and thus clearly distinguishing themselves from their competitors, has become a priority for players in the hunting tourism sector. The aim of this study is to demonstrate the content of the character attributes of a hunting area with international appeal and how

they can be integrated into the elements of a 5-step brand pyramid. Another objective is to identify the service elements that have the greatest impact on guest satisfaction, based on the case studies.

A literature review. Hunting as a tourist activity falls into the alternative category of 'active tourism' and can therefore be considered as a form of tourism where the tourist's motivation for travelling is to engage in some form of leisure or sport activity requiring physical activity. According to Seilmeier [1997], hunting tourism is 'foreign travel for hunting purposes'. According to Higginbottom [2004]), 'hunting tourism is a form of tourism that is linked to or can be carried out in nature, with the main motivation being the observation and/or shooting of game'. According to Trauer [2006], hunting tourism is a type of special interest tourism (SIT), where the traveller is primarily motivated by a special interest that influences the choice of destination. I use the term "hunting tourism" with the following meaning: The experience of hunting as a service provider and the guest hunter as a client, whereby the service provider, with the special skills and technical and natural resources available, organises and coordinates hunting as a service process, taking into account the habitat and seasonal conditions [Magyar, 2020].

Basic characteristics of hunting tourism services:

- It can be considered as an alternative form of tourism (smaller number of participants in the same place or programme, individual or small group activities, greater role for the development of individual, tailor-made service packages) [Michalkó, 2016].
- There is a strong seasonality.
- Hunting tourists spend much more than the 'average' mass tourism tourist.
- The number of women among hunting tourists is relatively low.
- The average length of stay of hunting tourists is also short, averaging 2-3 days, and therefore the length of service is short.
- The choice of hunting packages is characterised by a strong emotional or irrational content of the customer's decisions (the hunting of a desired species or the visit to a hunting area is directly influenced by the motives and motivations arising from the passion for hunting.)
- The role of prestige and image associated with certain game species, hunting areas and hunters is strong (e.g. hunting the big five, i.e. lion, buffalo, leopard, rhino, elephant, can be physically challenging for a hunter, but can also be recognised for their dangerousness).

• The choice of a hunting package provider or the organiser of the package is largely based on trust, with a very strong WOM (word of mouth) effect [Magyar, 2022].

Hunting tourism can therefore also be considered as "niche" tourism, which is a form of tourism in an authentic environment, motivated by special interests, and therefore only a narrow group of consumers [Robinson-Novelli, 2005].

Hunting tourism products fall into the category of 'activity-specific' tourism products because 'hunting as a motivation is directly related to hunting as an activity'. It is also 'space-specific', because in many cases (e.g. mountain hunting, safari) the characteristics of the geographical space provide a specific framework and



organisational force for the character of hunting tourism services, which can be considered as the basis of their attractiveness.

In the case of hunting tourism, we work with value packages consisting of hard and soft elements that can satisfy the expectations and needs of hunting guests as an overall experience.

Hard elements:

- The quantity of game species that can be shot (nature of game abundance)

Quality;

- the infrastructure, cleanliness, accessibility and comfort level of the hunting lodge;

- the level and variety of the gastronomic experience provided (quality, origin, freshness, preparation, presentation, etc. of the ingredients used);

- appropriate design of the hunting area;

- the knowledge of the area, language skills, courtesy and motivation of the professional hunting staff.

Soft elements:

- the reputation and prestige of the hunting area;

- the organisation of the hunt, the best possible management of the time available, the dynamism of the programme;

- the courtesy, empathy, attentiveness and hard work of the staff working in the hunting lodge;

- the ability of the service provider to meet individual, specific and special requests;

- discretion.

It is these elements, and the characteristics of the hunting area as a destination, that embody the 'attraction' that underpins any image and branding process. Attractiveness is therefore the 'something' that triggers the interest of the demand, i.e. the characters that encourage the (hunting) tourist to visit the place because it is perceived as meeting his or her needs [Michalkó, 2016].

With regard to the image-building "ability" of "hunting" as an experience-generating tourism activity, I think it is important to clarify the concept of tourism image. According to Sulyok [2006], the tourist image is the image built up in the mind of potential tourists on the basis of a few impressions selected from the set of all impressions. In other words, the few impressions that stand out from the total range of experiences of a given destination - in our case, the few impressions that fit the motivations and personal characteristics of the hunting guest as the person evaluating the destination - will form the tourist image. In his work, Papp-Váry [2007] notes that, in addition to the perceived external environment, the internal factors (individual motivations, attitudes, preferences, expectations, experiences) of the evaluator also play a role in the formation of the image. The existence of a 'hunt' as a motivation and the quality of the attitudes associated with it are therefore fundamental.

Jenes [2012] describes the cognitive, evaluative and conative components of the destination image. All three components play an important role in the selection of

hunting tourism and the destination associated with it. Among the cognitive components, we can mention the conditions under which the visiting hunters hunt the game they want to hunt or have hunted, including the natural and artificial environment and its quality. These elements include the accessibility of the hunting lodge provided by the hunter, its infrastructure, comfort, the quality of the gastronomic and dining facilities, the equipment of the hunting area, the quality of the vehicles used for hunting, and the technological means for the professional and safe handling of the meat and trophies of the game taken. The human factor, the professional staff involved in the organisation and management of the hunt, is also an element of this kind. Their training, motivation, empathy and culture of communication are essential for the satisfaction with the service and the image of the destination. The role of the evaluative component is developed and expressed through the intensity of the experience of hunting and the emotional state associated with the trophy of the game taken. The trophy is a sign of hunting success, a tangible form of the hunting experience, which preserves all the circumstances of the hunted game's capture [Békés, 2017]. The conative component is manifested in the loyalty of the satisfied guest hunter as a customer, his willingness to return, and in his experience as an alternative source of reference for others, even as word of mouth. These components not only play a role in the choice of a destination and the image it conveys, but also 'surround' hunters as perceptible, tangible and influential realities in the course of the hunt, as elements of the experience of value cocreation.

The territorial approach to brands associated with hunting tourism service providers is justified if only because the destination hosting the service as a tourist destination is always a geographically well-defined "area". (e.g. *hunting of fallow deer in Guth, deer hunting in Gemenc, mouflon hunting in Bakony, pheasant hunting in Belemegyer, or grouse hunting in Scotland, safari in Namibia*) A territorial brand is closely linked to the natural, cultural and social environment of the place and its endowments [Lorenzini et.al. 2011. in: Sulyok 2014]. A destination brand is the set of perceptions that live in someone's mind (based on personal experiences, narratives or prejudices) and that influence that person's attitudes towards a destination, or the essence of a place that distinguishes it from all other places and from competitors [Sulyok 2014]. The objectives of destination branding are to differentiate, increase awareness and recognition, create a positive image and a strong brand identity.

A possible model for destination branding is the so-called "5-step brand pyramid", which defines the uniqueness of a destination through its assets and strengths.

The 5-step brand pyramid offers a framework of the following points:

- Rational attributes: these are the main characteristics of a destination.
- Emotional benefits: the potential consumer perceptions and opinions about a destination.
- Brand personality: what makes a destination unique and different from what competitors offer.
- Positioning statement: summarises the strongest, most distinctive characteristics of the destination.
- Brand essence: the core value proposition of the destination.

Goals of the article. The aim of this case study is to identify the specific characteristics and distinctive features of the destination's hunting services, which can form the basis for positioning. A further aim is to integrate the results into a 5-step brand pyramid, showing the potential for establishing a tourism brand for a hunting destination with international appeal.

Presentation of the example company and methodology. The Nyírerdő Zrt. manages about 60,000 hectares of state-owned forest land in the north-eastern part of Hungary, in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Hajdú-Bihar counties [source: www.nyirerdo.hu]. The Gúth Forestry has been managing state-owned forests on 8,267 hectares, northeast of Debrecen, on the borders of eight villages since 1957. The cardinal unit of the area is the 5175-hectare Gúth forest block, which includes one of the largest contiguous, closed stands of pearl oak and acacia in the Great Plain. Two thirds of the forest area managed by the forestry is part of the NATURA 2000 nature conservation network. It became world famous when the fallow deer herd was introduced in 1972; two world record trophy fallow deer bulls have been taken in this hunting area, the first in 1991 and the second in 2002, both times by German hunters. In 1992 and 2004, it became the only two world-wide recipients of the Edmond Blanc Award of the International Association for Hunting and Game Conservation (the award is considered the "Oscar of the hunting industry" and has played a major role in developing and maintaining a positive national and international image for the hunting area). In a season, 500 hunting guests are received, of whom about 230 are foreigners. In a season, there are about 1500 overnight stays, 50% of which are returning guests.

The aim of the case study was to draw out relevant information, in an interpretative way typical of qualitative research, to reveal the service character of the organisation and to develop the basis for a brand (questions 3.4.7.8.9.11). In Mitev's [2015] interpretation, qualitative research aims to understand certain situations, events or interactions based on situational and detailed data, in such a way that the researcher attempts to uncover the main drivers of the phenomenon under study in its natural context.

1. How do you perceive the supply side of the domestic hunting tourism "sector"?
What trends and developments (positive or negative) are taking place in the market?

1. How do you perceive the demand side of the domestic hunting tourism sector?
What trends and developments are taking place in the market (positive, negative)?

2. How could you describe the main groups of consumers coming to your country for hunting (age, gender, sending country, place of residence, etc.)? How many main visiting hunters arrive in a year? When is the peak season? What is the average length of stay?

3. What are the main motivations of the guests, what experiences do they want?

4. Are there any returning guests? What are the main communication channels?

5. Do they require a special programme between hunts? What kind of programmes?

6. What are the production factors (natural, game, infrastructure) that are essential for successful hunting tourism services?

7. To what extent does the service provider play a role as a "human factor"? What competencies does he/she need to have?

8. What are the service elements that have the greatest impact on guest satisfaction?

9. How and according to what principles are prices set? Can cost elements be identified?

10. What are the main image-building elements for hunting tourism services? What are the distinguishing features?

11. Are there strategic partners for the success of the business/service? What are their activities?

12. Can a foreign hunting visitor draw conclusions about Hungary based on the services and experiences they have had in your company?

Results and discussions. In presenting the results of the case study, due to space limitations, I will focus on those responses that directly provide meaningful information for the compilation of the content of the brand pyramid.

3. How could the main groups of consumers coming to Guth for hunting (age, gender, sending country, place of residence, etc.) be characterised? How many main visiting hunters arrive in a year? When is the peak season? What is the average length of stay?

Age is a key characteristic of our guests. Older hunters are generally more experienced, have hunted several species, know and are confident with their guns, and, even if they are nervous, are not in a hurry or nervous. Some go back 2-3 years after their first visit, others even longer. The average length of stay has now fallen to 3 days. The younger members of the target group are basically characterised by an "appreciation of the time factor", i.e. they are less willing or able to spend less time hunting. 20 years ago, a guest could spend up to 10 days here. About 10 years ago, the length of stay was reduced to 7 days, and 5 years ago to 4-5 days, the amount of time guests spent hunting. The guests need a well-organised programme, excellent services, no "empty runs", no waiting. They want to know exactly what will happen, how it will happen, what to expect during the hunt.

4. What are the main motivations for guests, what kind of experiences do they want?

Basically, guests come for the hunting experience, but increasingly they also see hunting as an activity that fits in with their social status. The trophy (e.g. antlers) of the game taken is a visible reflection of the passion and financial, or social, status of the owner. However, most of the hunters who come to Guth are hunters who have hunted in other areas, have shot fallow deer, but would like to see a "Guth fallow deer" among their trophies; that is, they come here consciously because they want to shoot a bull from the same hunting ground as the current world record trophy. He is willing to pay for this 'feature' and, of course, the services that go with it.

7. What are the production factors (natural, wildlife, infrastructure) that essential for successful hunting tourism services?

Without adequate quality and quantity of game, there can be no successful hunting tourism services. The natural environment as a habitat is essential for this game stock



and can also provide additional services for non-hunting guides in the case of hunting for hire. The built environment can also be important for the reasons mentioned above, as well as for other additional services, such as the spas that are very common in Hungary. The demand for infrastructure is also beginning to shift away from the classic hunting lodge to all-inclusive accommodation. It is also important to mention adequate staffing, as the specific time schedule of hunting can require extra energy and patience.

8. To what extent does the service provider play a role as a "human factor"? How competencies must he/she have?

The human factor is very important, patience and empathy are important. In general, a successful escort hunter has good eyesight, good hearing, persistence, speed, strength. Unfortunately, those who are accompanied are often lacking in these skills, they are not familiar with the area, and the excitement, the hunting fever, often changes our skills. Nowadays, multilingual communication is a basic requirement.

9. What are the service elements that have the greatest impact on guest satisfaction?

It should be known that the "deer of Gúth" is the most expensive in the world. There are several places in Hungary and Europe where you can shoot dámbi cheaper. Therefore we think that the price has a kind of "filter function" in our country. It is not our aim to change the price list of premium bulls so that more people can hunt them. However, our future goal is to provide an opportunity for the segment who want to shoot smaller trophy bulls with more modest antlers, for example because of financial constraints. We see the guest as a customer at heart, with a smile and a kindness to provide the best - sometimes personalised - service throughout their stay. The satisfaction of our guests is essentially based on the experience of a well-organised and successful hunt. We strive to provide our guests with the most and best service. If the desired bull is taken successfully, if there are no mistakes or wounds, the guests are very happy, even with an outburst of joy, depending on their temperament. But you have to see that this is the result of a combination of very many factors. A highly qualified, foreign-language-speaking professional staff - usually forestry or wildlife engineers - who look after the wildlife habitat, know the area and accompany the guest hunter during the hunt, is essential. He first judges the selected bull to see if it meets the guest's size requirements. Knowledge of foreign languages, good communication skills, punctuality, courtesy, and a well-groomed appearance and appearance are very important. During a hunt, friendly relationships are often formed between a guest and the guide who is helping him or her to have the experience of a lifetime. Just as important is the work of the staff in the hunting lodges, who must also be able to relate to and communicate with the guests, and do everything to make the guest feel that everything during the hunt - from arrival to departure - is about him, everything is for him, for his comfort (e.g. from catering for individual culinary needs to the use of his own bed linen, etc.).

11. What are the main image-building elements of hunting tourism services in Gouti? What are the distinguishing features?

The most important image-building functional elements are the "Guth dame game stock" itself and the world record character; the high quality hunting lodge

infrastructure, the traditional Hungarian cuisine based gastronomy including game dishes; "the "soft", i.e. a kind of emotional element of politeness, our hunting lodge staff are often welcomed like family by returning guests; the level of service, well-organised, well-scheduled hunting, good accessibility from Debrecen, Budapest, and the image of the hunting area.

Evaluating the responses received, Figure 1 illustrates the contents of each level of the brand pyramid, showing that the uniqueness and complexity that are fundamental to tourism products are also present in the case of hunting tourism products, but that unique characters are also clearly identifiable.

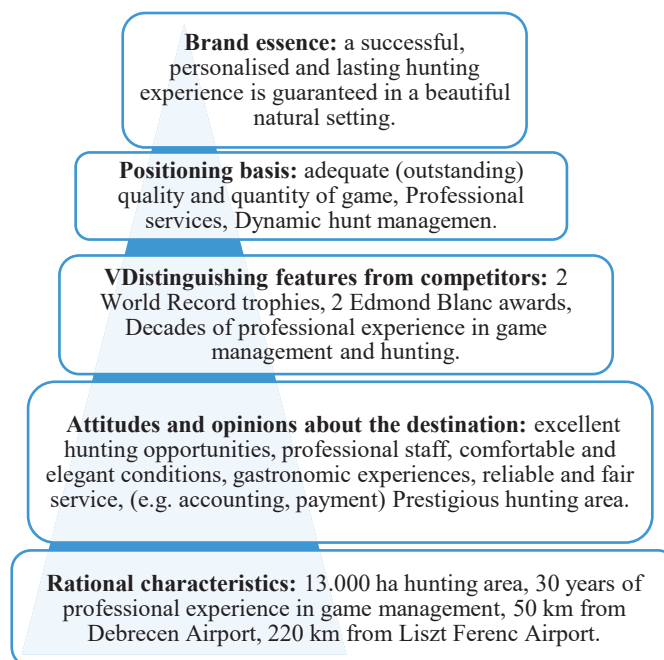


Fig. 1. The elements of the 5-step brand pyramid of Nyírerdő Zrt. Gúth hunting area

Source: Authors illustration

Conclusion and proposals for further research. The Nyírerdő Zrt. is one of the flagship companies of the Hungarian hunting tourism sector, with decades of experience and a recognised track record. It is highly market- and customer-oriented, well aware of the dynamics of its customers' consumption habits and of the demand and supply trends in the hunting tourism sector. It has the resources, infrastructure, front and back office staff to ensure a high level of service and customer satisfaction and returning customers. By identifying the objective values and other attributes of the service, it is possible to identify the characteristic features that provide a good basis for the creation of a brand concept that can be consciously positioned. The ability to 'follow up' with the hunter-gatherer, i.e. to be present during the recall of memories, provides an additional



opportunity for the service provider to build a conscious and effective brand. During this phase of the tourist purchase, the customer reflects on the experience, spontaneously or by design, and presents it to his or her environment, thus generating memories. During this phase, it is important for the service provider to generate further positive word of mouth associated with the destination by transmitting messages that recall the experiences the customer has had in the destination. Branding, defining your uniqueness in relation to your competitors and communicating it clearly and creatively in a convincing way, has become one of the most important tasks for all tourism operators today. The brand, i.e. the 'value and experience promise', which is a symbol of both the identity of the organisation and its performance in the tourism product, can only be guaranteed if a balanced quality of service is developed and maintained in line with the expectations of the target group. In order to develop the desired and expected services and the authentic brand, it is important to clarify clearly what customer advantage the service provider and the brand are aiming to provide and sell to, and for which target customer group(s), compared to competitors. With this information, it is now possible to identify the unique characters that can differentiate the provider and drive the travel decision.

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