



## The Diversification of Marketing Strategies for Different Categories of Hotels in Samarkand

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### Abstract

**Purpose.** This thesis analyzed the marketing strategies that are used by the hotels in Samarkand and the way strategies have been diversified to meet the needs of the market. It also focuses on the effects of COVID-19 on hotels and the hotel industry and the strategies that can bring more visitors to the hotels in Samarkand. Marketing strategies for hotels have been discussed by many researchers and the significance of the new and diversified strategies during the pandemic grew stronger.

**Design.** The questionnaire and analysis of the secondary data have been chosen as the main methods of conducting research.

**Results.** Results of the questionnaire and the literature review showed that there is strong need for creating new marketing strategies that aim at the locals and the safety measures that prevent the spread of COVID-19.

**Findings.** The issue of diminishing number of tourists and visitors to the hotels have affected the hospitality industry in the worst possible way, however, this situation also creates opportunities for the hotels who have new marketing strategy that is focused on safety measures.

**Keywords:** Hotel, marketing strategies, diversification, tourism, category.

### Introduction

Customer satisfaction is the main goal of any company in the modern era, and this also fully applies to tourism and hospitality. As Professor Philip R. Kotler stated: "Today's successful companies at all levels have one thing in common: they are strongly customer focused" (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016). In the hotel industry, marketing is becoming common, identified mostly with the sales of hotel services. The activities of the sales department are transparent so that the functions of the marketing functions of that department are obvious. Peter Drucker, one of the management theorists, put it this way: "The goal of marketing is to make sales super strong. The aim is to know and understand the needs of the buyer to the extent that the goods or services produced are perfectly adapted to him and are sold as if they were themselves" (Drucker, 1954).

Further elements of marketing activities are the product itself, its price and its distribution, what create a concept of Marketing Mix. The model of marketing mix ("Four P" and "Seven P") will be used in this work to assess the practice of marketing by the hotels in City of Samarkand, one of the most important tourist cities in Uzbekistan.



Bearing in mind the principles developed by marketing theoreticians and practitioners over the last several decades, it is necessary to take into account the new market conditions in which current companies have to operate.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the changes in the global hotel tourism industry made it necessary to urgently diversify hotel marketing strategies (Kanwal, 2021). The marketing strategy must be tailored to the needs and requirements of the customers, including the need to demonstrate safety and take precautions to stop the spread of COVID-19 in hotel facilities. The lack of diversification of the marketing strategy may be the main reason for the decline in the number of visitors to the hotel as well as the hotels in Samarkand, the diversified and up-to-date marketing strategies and the effective use of marketing components while attracting and attracting new visitors. The aim of the work is to develop a series of scientific, methodological and practical recommendations aimed at gaining competitive advantages in the hotel services market using diversified elements of marketing activities.

This paper deals with the issue of differentiating target groups by hotels of different categories. The theory of marketing has developed in this respect the concepts of STP: Segmentation - Targeting - Positioning; (Kotler, 1994, p. 93).

Therefore, the question was raised whether the marketing strategies of hotels in Samarkand are properly diversified and whether they are adapted to the current market conditions.

Specific questions relate to methods of attracting tourists, the use of a variable pricing policy, the use of amenities and Unique Selling Points (USP) to build the competitive advantage.

The results showed that there are different types of marketing strategies used by Samarkand hotels. As can be seen from the results, most of the hotels use the location (place) as the main marketing tool, as the location of the hotel, especially the proximity to the historical hotel, places, attractions and entertainment are considered important. Price and affordability are also the key components of Samarkand's hotel marketing strategy. One of the most important realizations is the lack of diversified marketing strategies in Samarkand hotels and they just copy their competitors' strategies. Hotels do not promote the special amenities they offer, the security measures they take during the pandemic, the uniqueness of the hotel and the quality of its services. Predominantly foreigners, which is another problem, especially during the pandemic when the number of foreign tourists has decreased significantly. The current situation calls for new marketing strategies that are adjusted to prioritize guest safety and strategies that focus on tourists and local residents. Discussion hotel marketing strategies in Samarkand Hotels are undersized and out of date. For example, most hotels highlight location and price as key factors in attracting tourists, so they promote location and the lowest prices and discounts more than other amenities and advantages over other competitors. They fail to realize the importance of good value for money and believe that the best location and lowest prices can be the competitive advantages that are sustainable. While budget and mid-range hotels see these two strategies as important, upper-class hotels, in addition to these strategies, focus on business travelers, conferences, and the booking of conference rooms by business guests. They often promote the luxury of their room and their services to target audiences who are financially able, business, diplomatic and political visitors. The COVID-19 has impacted on business travel and events. Samarkand hotels do not promote



safety as their main message and still use traditional marketing strategies that are not very effective during the pandemic. Disinfection of visitors is carried out, but there is no mention of social distance, staff vaccination, safety and hygiene of premises and premises. Even if they took such action, they did not promote the message through social media, websites, and phone bookings.

The significance of the thesis is undeniable since every hotel in any country is struggling to survive and be competitive during the pandemic. Thus, it is high time for hotels to utilize new marketing strategies and be sustainable during and after the pandemic.

### **1.1. Importance of marketing strategy for a hotel company**

In the hotel business, marketing is often identified with the sale of hotel services, and the activities of the sales department are transparent so the marketing functions of this department are obvious, while similar functions of other departments are performed behind closed doors. Advertising and sales are integral parts of the promotion policy, as well as the promotion of goods and services in the system of marketing measures to influence the market. Other elements are the product itself, its price, and distribution. Peter Drucker (1954), one of the management theorists, put it this way: “The goal of marketing is to make the sale super-strong. This goal is to know and understand the needs of the buyer to the extent that the goods or services produced are ideally suited to him and are sold as if by themselves”.

Marketing is a customer-oriented method of running a business. This customer orientation should lead the entire organization (Hienerth, 2011). The main goal of marketing in the hospitality industry is to meet the needs of the client, leading to an increase in the company's income (Hienerth, 2011). The customer is the main determinant of the nature of the business. The organizations put lots of effort to forecast the client's requests and take appropriate measures to ensure their timely satisfaction, this is ensured by creating customer-oriented business models (Kotler, 1994). Defined marketing as a societal and managerial procedure through which a person and establishments get what they need and want by making and exchanging value between each other. This goes on to describe in-depth marketing as a method by which companies create value for customers and construct reinforced customer relationships to gain value from customers in return (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010, p. 3).

### **1.2. Significance of the study**

COVID-19 pandemic and the changes in the hotel industry created the urgent need for diversifying hotel marketing strategies (Kanwal, 2021). Marketing strategy needs to adjust according to the needs and demands of the customers. These needs include the necessity of proving safety and taking precautions to stop the spread of the COVID-19 in the premises of the hotel (Kanwal, 2021).

The lack of diversification in the marketing strategy one of the main reason for the decline in the number of visitors to the hotel. This also true about hotels in Samarkand that require diversified and up to date marketing strategies and effective usage of the marketing components during the promotion and attracting new visitors.



The purpose of the dissertation is to develop a set of scientific, methodological, and practical recommendations aimed at using diversified elements of marketing activities to achieve competitive advantages in the hotel services market.

Following this goal, the following tasks were set and implemented in the dissertation work:

1. Determine the main indicators of effective marketing strategies for hotels;
2. To highlight the current changes in the hotel market as a result of pandemic COVID- 19;
3. Propose a simplified hotel classification to conduct market research in Samarkand;
4. Surveying hotels in Samarkand to obtain information about the conducted marketing activities;
5. Formulating recommendations for the selection of marketing strategies by the hotels of different categories;

This research addresses several questions which include (but are not limited to):

1. What is a marketing strategy for a hotel? When a strategy is effective?
2. What changes have occurred in the market important for hotels in Samarkand?
3. How can hotels in Samarkand be grouped?
4. Are there differences in market activities conducted by particular groups of hotels?
5. What recommendations can be made for a different group of hotels in Samarkand?

### **1.3. The difference between the hotel industry and the hospitality industry**

One common area of confusion relates to the difference between the hotel industry and the hospitality industry, with many people mistakenly believing the two terms refer to the same thing. However, while there is a cross-over, the difference is that the hospitality industry is broader in scope and includes multiple different sectors (Jovovich, 2009, pp. 114-119).

The hotel business is exclusively worried about the arrangement of visitor convenience and related administrations. Conversely, the hospitality business is worried about relaxation in a broader sense (Nabin, 2019, pp. 56-68). Thus, it covers convenience, eateries, bars, bistros, night-life, travel, and the travel industry administrations.

### **2.1. The main indicators of effective marketing strategies for hotels**

According to the American Marketing Association (AMA) Board of Directors: marketing is the action, set of teaching, and forms for creating, communicating, conveying, and trading offerings that have value for customers, clients, accomplices, and society at large (American Marketing Association, 2020).

Kotler portrays advertising as the science and craft of investigating, making, and conveying worth to fulfil the necessities of an objective market at a benefit. Advertising distinguishes



unfulfilled necessities and wants. It characterizes gauges and measures the size of the recognized market and the benefit potential. It pinpoints which portions the organization is equipped for serving best and it plans and advances the suitable items and administrations (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016, p. 101).

According to (Leslie, 2008) marketing changes with time, technology at hand and the requirements of the visitors (Keefe, 2008, p. 26) so it reminds that not only is the description of marketing change, but also marketing itself. Digitalization, the availability of new technology, the increased focus on transparency, and the evolution of statistical analysis and marketing feedback are key concepts that distinguish modern from traditional marketing (Moorman & Day, 2016, pp. 6-24).

McCarthy (1981) introduced the concept of the marketing mix, commonly known as the 4Ps of marketing – price, product, place, and promotion, in 1964. However, the concept of the 4Ps did not become part of the American Marketing Association's formal definition of marketing until 1985. This became the foundation of marketing for decades to come and has impacted how marketing strategy is developed (Wilkie & Moore, 2007, pp. 269–276).

The old way of observing the components of marketing is through the four Ps:

1. Product. Goods and services (creating offerings);
2. Promotion. Communication with the customers;
3. Place. Getting the product to a point at which the customer can purchase it (placement);
4. Price. The financial quantity charged for the merchandise (exchanging);

In the late 70's it was extensively recognized by marketers that the Marketing Mix should be modernized. This ran to the formation of the Extended Marketing Mix by Booms & Bitner (1981) which added 3 new rudiments to the 4 Principles. This now allowed the stretched Marketing Mix to contain products that are services and not just corporal possessions.

In marketing, segmentation, targeting and positioning (STP) represents a comprehensive framework that shortens and simplifies the market segmentation process (Moutinho, 2000). Market segmentation is a process by which groups of buyers within a market are separated and profiled according to a number of variables that determine the characteristics and trends of the market (Bowen, 1998). The segmentation, targeting and positioning processes are part of a sequential guideline for market segmentation. It is a distinctive consumer motif, an alternative to image and entertainment advertising. The USP is part of the competitive advantage on the basis of which the customer selects a company or a product (based on the properties of a product or service) (Drobo, 2005).

The unique selling proposition According to the initial theory, it consists of three parts (Rosser, 1983) (it implies the simultaneous application of all points of the statement): Every advertising message contains a call to the buyer with the promise of concrete services. The proposal is designed in such a way that the participant cannot submit it or did not have time to



present it beforehand. The proposal must be strong enough to attract as many consumers as possible.

Every hotel has to discover the uniqueness of its brand and then advertise its marketing efforts intensively on the Internet. That statement is simple. This applies to independent hotels, hotel chains, individual hotels within a chain and even for a hotel as a customer, doing a comprehensive study of the property to determine its uniqueness (Ansoff, 1957). Various factors are used for this, but to the astonishment of many of our guests, they often look outside the actual hotel first. Three factors determine the USP of a hotel: Location, Comfort, and Value.

A good USP integrates all three elements into a clear concept of the hotel. If a hotel is unique (and positive) in all three respects, the number of visitors will be large. A customer will often find that one of these points is completely unique and the other two are passable. It can often happen that only one is great and the other two are not good at all, so it is better for a hotel to focus on the positives as it may actually be enough to get people to the hotel (Ansoff, 1957).

## **2.2. Samarkand's hotels and their marketing strategy**

Samarkand is one of the antique metropolises of Uzbekistan, it is 2750 years old. Because of its rich past and attractive Middle-Ages constructions, thousands of explorers arrive in the city. The majority of tourists visiting Uzbekistan, also, pass by Samarkand (Boulnois, 2005, pp. 50-65). The opening of the Khanabad-Muynak high-way by 2025, which also will be connected to Samarkand, is supposed to increase the flow of tourists by several times (Khamidov, 2019). Clearly, in this situation of increasing demand, hotels of Samarkand will have a chance to enlarge their commerce. Nevertheless, to stay competitive in the tourism market it is significant to propose competitive prices for tourists in hotels. Consequently, the previous research by other scholars can be useful for policy makers in determining the influence of marketing strategy and component such as location, on price offerings since these are one of the main factors for successful marketing strategy (Janizakov, 2020, pp. 10-15).

Among Uzbek researchers B. Safarov, I. Tukhliev, and others led researches on numerous features of the tourism sphere of Uzbekistan. For example, Tukhliev and Safarov gave a thorough summary of the local tourism market, where they pointed out numerous factors including place swaying prices in hotels (Tuxliev & Safarov, 2018, p. 123). Alimova (2016, p. 18) also established in her works that location was a critical factor in price offerings for minor sized hotels in Uzbekistan.

However, so far, no research has been conducted to analyze the factors affecting hotel prices in Samarkand using data from the Google Maps application. Zhang et al (Zhang, Ye, & Law, 2011) conducted a typical study to identify the strong factors affecting hotel prices in New York, but they used data from Tripadvisor.com. According to the SEM knowledge base (seatribunal.com), 90.46% of the global search engine market share belongs to Google, which means that Google is one of the most common types of promotion. Therefore, it is appropriate to assume that most travelers look for information about touristic infrastructure and attraction on Google services, in particular, Google Maps (Janizakov, 2020, pp. 1-5).





After analyzing and searching for data about hotels of Samarkand it was found that there is lack of research and data about the hotels. In addition, the strategies they are using to promote the hotel seem generic and hotels tend to follow what other hotels are doing. This takes away the uniqueness of the hotel and so the number of visitors dwindle each year, especially, during the pandemic.

While searching the web it was found out that hotels use the third-party websites to post about their facilities and they lack their own means of communication with customers. It is a serious issue since the hotels won't have the creative freedom to make the hotel unique among competitors.

The major types of touristic residence in Samarkand are (Worldwide travel guide, 2020):

1. Bed and Breakfast. In this type of stay, tourists can have their breakfast every morning and it is included in the total cost of the stay. However, private bathrooms are not available in such places.

2. Guesthouses. The guesthouses offer a private bathroom and they will give the chance to meet the house residents and learn more about the culture. Some private houses in Samarkand are turned into guesthouses.

3. Hotels. Hotels are easily available to tourists and they offer a conservative environment and they are built in old soviet style.

4. Hostels. They offer a cheaper place to stay and the rooms are shared and there are many beds in one room. The toilet is shared so is the living room and kitchen.

The previous research by Janizakov (2020, pp. 1-5), shows that the larger part of visitors going to Samarkand lean toward remaining in hotels with lower costs and with the location close to the city center and other attractions. The more "uncomfortable" was the area of the hotel (far off from essential touristic places), the lesser the costs per night for staying there.

In any case, hotels that are located far from the city center usually offered lower costs, because of the intensive competition within the neighboring range. However, hotel owners seldom utilized developments in conveying marketing campaigns, despite solid competition (Tuxliev & Safarov, 2018, p. 123). Most managers didn't have their marketing strategy of price offerings, instead, they fairly replicated the activities of their competitors. In addition, since of regular variances in traveler appearance, it was best to run smaller sized hotels to maintain a strategic distance from bigger maintenance cost. The current circumstance reflects that there are still numerous issues in marketing the hotels in Samarkand (Alimova, 2016).

The main issue is that numerous tourism entrepreneurs have no thought about long term strategic planning, especially diversified marketing strategy. Instead, they prefer to duplicate their competitors and keep their volume small. It is obvious that even though changes are being carried out, for now, hotels in Samarkand stay small, ineffectively managed and without the desire to develop (Alimova, 2016).



### 2.3. Process of the study

In this chapter, the methods of collecting the primary and secondary data are deliberated. The collecting of primary data is by the distribution of questionnaires and by reading journals and articles for secondary data. This chapter will further discuss the research design, data collection methods, sampling design, research instruments, data processing as well as data analysis. In this research, quantitative design is applied for data measurement. Quantitative methods emphasize objective measurements and the statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis of data collected through polls, questionnaires, and surveys, or by deploying pre-existing statistical data using computational techniques. Quantitative research focuses on gathering numerical data and generalizing it across groups of people or explaining a particular phenomenon (Babbie, 2010, p. 25). In this research, causal-research design is applied to determine the most effective marketing strategies for hotels of different categories in Samarkand. Causal research, also recognized as explanatory research is conducted to spot the degree and nature of cause-and-effect relations. Causal research can be conducted to review the impacts of definite changes on existing norms and several processes (Zikmund, 2000).

In this study, both the primary data and secondary data are gathered. The primary data involved in this research are questionnaires taken from hotel managers in Samarkand. Whereas research methods such as online articles, journals as well as other internet sources are applied in gathering the secondary data. Primary data are data that are collected for specific research problem at hand, using procedures that fit the research problem best. On every occasion that primary data are collected, new data are added to the existing store of social knowledge (Cohen & Cohen, 2020). For the research study, questionnaires were used to collect the primary data which were distributed to the respondents to get their response. A sample questionnaire used for the research is presented in the Appendix. Secondary data is the data that was gathered by someone other than the user (Cohen & Cohen, 2020). The usual sources of the secondary data are journals, book, newspapers, internet sources and more (Cohen & Cohen, 2020). It is very useful for research as it saves time, resources and effort. Especially, the quantitative data can be obtained from high-quality sources and helps the researcher to do better research and discoveries.

### Results and discussion

Initially, hotels in Samarkand were asked to label themselves as superior, medium or budget category. Of the 16 hotels, 2 (12.5%) were superior, 8 were medium-sized (50%) and 6 (37.5%) were budget-level hotels. All the hotels replied that they work all year round. However, they do offer seasonal pricing to increase profits and traffic 15 to 16 hotels offer single and double rooms and single rooms have the highest demand (81.3%) and double rooms (18.8%). 50% of the hotels offer breakfast included in the price and 50% do not offer breakfast. The most common service offered in hotels (10 hotels offer it), then catering (5), dinner and lunch are provided by 4 hotels. 43.8% (7) of the hotels do not use stars to advertise the hotel, 12.5% (2) use 4 stars, 37.5% (6) the hotels use 2 stars and 6.3% of them use a star. The non-usage of stars is often due to the lack of knowledge on how to get a star for the hotel and what government agency it is responsible for issuing the stars 16 of the hotels to use social media to post information about hotels and





promotions. The second platform is the websites (75%) and then the flyers and brochures (31.3%). This shows the importance of social networks and websites in promoting hotels. Unfortunately, not many hotels use the service of popular people or bloggers. In the course of the questionnaire, it was revealed that only two budget-level hotels use the advertising services of their famous Instagram bloggers. All the hotels stated that 70-90% of their guests are foreigners. Out of all the visitors, 10% were individuals and 90% in groups. Leisure (89%) is seen as the main destination for hotel stays, followed by business travel (11%). Most of the visitors come from Kazakhstan, 25% from Tajikistan, 15% and 5% from Kyrgyzstan, 5% from European countries and the rest from Uzbekistan (50%). Affordability, comfort and friendliness are seen as indicators of the best hotels according to the answers. Skills and experience as the main driver (93.8%) and the rest are related to skills and education. None of the hotels responded that they were using a famous person's picture to promote the hotel. Most of the hotels replied that the customer can give their opinion directly to the hotel. On the question: "What are you doing to protect your guests from the COVID 19 pandemic?", 60 % of the hotels have written that they give out free masks and hand sanitizer, and the staff cleans the rooms with bleach. 75% (12) of hotels responded that the external appearance of the facilities was consistent with the actual quality of the service.

Table 7 shows the difference between hotel strategies in Samarkand. For hotels, classification is a way to present the information the consumer needs about the quality of service, infrastructure and other capabilities of the enterprise, thus helping potential customers and demonstrating their loyalty to them.

### **Summary of findings**

The findings showed that there are several types of marketing strategies that are utilized by the hotels in Samarkand. As it is clear from the results most of the hotels use location (place) as the main marketing tool, since the location of the hotel, especially, proximity to the historical places, tourist attractions and entertainment is considered to be vital. Price and affordability are also the key components of marketing strategy in the hotels of Samarkand. One of the main findings is the lack of diversified marketing strategies in hotels of Samarkand and they are merely copying the strategies used by their competitors. The hotels are not promoting the special amenities they provide, safety measures they are taking during a pandemic, the uniqueness of the hotel and the quality of their services. The targeted customers of hotels are predominantly foreigners which is another issue, especially, during the pandemic when the number of foreign tourists has decreased significantly. Thus, the current situation requires new marketing strategies that are adjusted to put the safety of guests first and strategies that are focused on local tourists and residents.

In addition, on the course of the study, it was revealed that, in most countries, it is customary to assign a rating to hotels in the form of the number of stars from one to five, and the more stars, the better. Living conditions in residential complexes of different classes differ significantly, first of all, the general improvement of the building, the equipment of the rooms and the service regulations, but, at the same time, the hotel of any category must meet the requirements of safety and hygiene, provide round-the-clock service, emergency medical care, safety of valuables, washing of bed linen, postal services.



The qualification of the staff also plays an important role in determining the status: in hotels with one or two "stars", the reception staff must know one foreign language, in a 4-5-star hotel, they will need to speak at least four languages.

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