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Recreational Factors Influencing the Choice of Destination of Hungarian Tourists in the Case of Bulgaria

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Abstract: In 1990, the countries of the V4 were the dominant sending countries to Bulgaria, which is why Bulgarians thought of targeting the sending market from these countries, not only with the product of mass tourism, but with a unique, four-season offer. In 1990, Hungary was Bulgaria's third largest sending market; therefore, leisure trend studies are important as they can help to satisfy the needs of Hungarian tourists and attract them to the destination and increase their visitor satisfaction. The aim of our study is to examine the leisure time patterns and leisure preference system of Hungarian tourists, which is evident during their travels. This study examines the willingness of Hungarian tourists to travel to Bulgaria. According to the results of the secondary and primary research, the vast majority of Hungarian tourists travel to Bulgaria mainly for beach holidays, but, in addition to mass tourism, the country's culture, history, ecotourism, health tourism, wine and gastronomy may represent further travel potential for Hungarian tourists. Having examined the attitudes of Hungarian tourists (n = 952), the study offers useful recommendations for Bulgarian tourism organizations and Bulgarian and Hungarian tour operators, as factor analysis is used to create groups belonging to factors that can be included as key target groups in publications promoting Bulgaria. Another aim of our study is to add new content to the traditional Bulgarian–Hungarian tourism relations.

Keywords: tourism in Bulgaria; motivation of Hungarian tourists; tourist destination

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1. Introduction

Mapping the market potential of the V4 countries (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary) plays an increasingly important role in Bulgarian tourism development, as there is not a large number of paying demand from Scandinavia and Germany, and tourists coming from Romania mainly participate in mass tourism and have a low willingness to spend. Thus, in search of new markets, Bulgaria looks to the countries of the V4, including Hungary, as an opportunity for market expansion, since the growing Hungarian demand in recent years proves the popularity of Bulgaria as a tourist destination. Bulgarians also targeted Hungarian tourists because, in 1990, Hungary was the third largest sending country, after Turkey and Romania [1]. Among the V4 countries, 263,000 tourists arrived from Czechoslovakia in 1990, while 830,798 tourists arrived from Poland, so Bulgaria reaches back to the former important sending market countries in order to increase the number of tourists coming from there. Because of this, the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism focused on a strategy of creating a destination offering four-season services instead of mass tourism. In order to satisfy the needs of tourists, and to understand touristic motivations, studies that measure consumer habits are necessary. In our study, on the one hand, we focused on which Bulgarian tourist attractions the Hungarians traveling to Bulgaria like to visit, which would indicate popular tourist products. We were also interested in the leisure downloading patterns of the respondents, since these leisure activities and their preferences also appear during trips; consumers demand the usual activities, which can determine their choice of destination and their visitor satisfaction.

Bulgaria is located in Southeast Europe in the eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula, on the coast of the Black Sea—a European, Balkan, Black Sea and Danubian country. This geographical location and crossroads between Europe and Asia determines its strategic location on the political map of Europe and the Balkan Peninsula in terms of international tourist flows [2,3]. Bulgaria has been a member of NATO since 2004 and of the European Union since 2007, and is a member of the Schengen area and the euro area [4]. As a country in the Balkans, it was characterized by political and economic instability; during and after the Second World War, Bulgaria was in the Soviet occupation zone, which is why the tourism sector began to develop significantly only in the 1950s [5]. In 1956, only 8000 tourists visited Bulgaria, and the number of tourist arrivals gained momentum from the 1970s. In 1970, the number of foreign tourists already exceeded 2.5 million. In the Eastern Bloc, Bulgaria was the only country where beach holidays were possible, so many tourists came from the former socialist countries (Romania, GDR, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, the Soviet Union). Tourists came from the German territory (GDR, FRG), as East and West German relatives met here [4].

After the regime change, the South Slavic war isolated the country from Europe, and the subsequent period of 1990–2007 was characterized by dynamic changes and the restructuring of the sector, primarily through privatization and the appearance of foreign capital, and the documents containing the first regulations regarding tourism were then created. These changes had a positive effect on the tourism industry as the number of tourists arriving in Bulgaria was 4,922,119 in 2000, and increased to 7,282,455 in 2005 [4,5]. The announcement of the date of EU accession and the appearance of discount airlines in Bulgaria gave new impetus to the development of domestic tourism at the threshold of the new millennium. The accession to the EU in 2007 brought about a radical change for Bulgarian tourism. The foreign markets were reorganized, and the old sending markets, such as the Russian one, fell into the background. As a result of the global financial crisis in 2008, the number of foreign nationals traveling to Bulgaria decreased by 7.7%. It was only in 2011 that the level of 2008 was surpassed. In 2008, 8,932,972 tourists arrived. This had decreased to 7,873,805 in 2009, but, already in 2010, there was an increase in demand (8,374,034 people) [4].

Nowadays, the COVID-19 epidemic, which has had a negative effect on tourism revenues around the world, has reduced the level of Bulgarian tourism. Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, in March 2020 in Bulgaria, the government decided to take over the payment of 60% of wages in order to preserve the jobs that were endangered by the coronavirus epidemic. The measure was for three months, which also included employees of the tourism sector [5]. In July 2021, 3058 accommodation facilities with a capacity of more than 10 beds were operating in Bulgaria. In the same period in 2019, there were 3391. The rate of closed accommodation was approximately 10% [6]. The Bulgarian state supported those tour operators who use air carriers with an operational license, who have chartered flights for tourism purposes and have a capacity of at least 100 reserved seats. The amount of the subsidy was 35 euros for each seat and for the periods 1 January–31 December 2020, and 1 January–31 December 2021. State subsidies for the tourism sector helped to protect the tourism sector against the negative effects of COVID [7].

The sustainable development strategy of Bulgarian tourism written in 2014, and its updated 2014–2030 and updated NSFRB, 2014–2030 versions, both indicate cheapness as being Bulgaria's biggest competitive advantage. The strategic document refers to Business Insider, which, in 2016, ranked Sunny Beach first among the 25 cheapest resorts in Europe. According to the Europe Backpacker Index, in 2017, which classified the 56 most popular cities in Europe, Sofia came out as the cheapest city for European tourism. Cheap and accessible tourist services are a competitive advantage for Bulgaria, but also a competitive disadvantage, since this product is not able to attract visitors with a high willingness to spend in the region, which requires the development of quality and unique products. As a Balkan country, Bulgaria's market position in tourism is favorable, and its main competitors in seaside holiday tourism are: Turkey, Greece and Croatia. Its main strength in the tourism market is that it has world-famous resorts, such as Sunny Beach, Aranyhomok, Albena and Neszebar, and it also has favorable conditions for winter tourism, as 30% of the country's territory is mountainous. The most famous ski paradises, such as Borovec, Pamporovo and Bansko, can also attract winter sports enthusiasts. The total length of the ski slopes is 210 km, and they have different levels of difficulty. The main competitors in winter tourism are: Austria, Italy, Switzerland and France [5,8]. It also has good qualities in the field of cultural tourism, as its world heritage sites, historic cities, museum treasures and rich cultural traditions, gastronomy and festivals are tourist attractions. It could improve its competitiveness with a unique tourist offer, branding and expanding the quality on offer and four-season tourist products.

In 1990, Hungary was the third largest sending country for Bulgaria, as 348,172 Hungarian tourists arrived in Bulgaria. Most of them came from Turkey (3,951,158 people), followed by tourists from Romania (1,809,537 people), followed by Hungary as a significant sending country. In the 1990s, Hungarians represented mass tourism and came to seaside resorts. Then, the number of Hungarian tourists began to decrease after the regime change, as Bulgaria was no longer the only accessible coastal country; therefore, with the appearance of competitors, Hungarians visited other Southern European countries with coastlines. In 1991, only 258,603 and, in 1992, only 147,240 Hungarian tourists visited a Bulgarian seaside destination. In 1994, a further significant decrease in demand was seen, as only 39,985 tourists arrived from Hungary, and, in 1995, it was also seen at a very low level, as 32,379 tourists arrived from Hungary. In 1999, the number of Hungarian tourists to Bulgaria increased, as 61,798 people arrived, which decreased to 48,086 in 2000 [1]. In 2005, 34,567 tourists came to Bulgaria from Hungary, in 2010, there were 16,102, and, in 2015, there were 18,824. At the moment, we can also observe a moderate increase in Hungarian demand.

In 2018, Bulgaria recorded 12,368,363 tourist arrivals. This figure increased to 12,552,152 by 2019, but was reduced by the COVID-19 epidemic, so that, in 2020, it only received 4,973,356 arrivals. Its popularity is due to favorable conditions, rising service standards and moderate prices. Bulgaria is also a popular destination among Hungarian tourists, with Hungary ranking 19th in the ranking of sending countries. In 2018, 102,956 Hungarians travelled to Bulgaria, and, by 2019, 111,132 people chose Bulgaria as their destination. In 2020, the number of outbound tourists decreased due to the virus, with 40,549 Hungarian tourists travelling to Bulgaria [9].

Among the attractions, the beach is the most dominant one, with most tourists arriving in the summer months, but the winter season also seems to be getting strong, showing that Bulgaria is becoming more popular for ski tourism among Hungarian visitors. The increase in health-related products in ski tourism [10] is confirmed by previous research, and is emerging as a new trend to which product development needs to adapt. The strengthening of the motivations for health tourism makes it possible to expand the seasons through product development, thereby distributing the inbound tourism more evenly. Several studies have already pointed to product developments that—when integrated into the brand—can strengthen the four-season offer, thus resulting in visitors with a higher willingness to spend and increase the realized business result [11–13].

Romania, as a neighboring country, is one of the most important and largest sending markets for Bulgaria. In 1990, 1,809,537 Romanian tourists arrived, and then there was a decrease, as the number of visitors dropped to 1.5 million in 1995 and to 833,710 in 2000. In 2010, 917,950 Romanian tourists arrived in Bulgaria, while, in 2015, there were 986,596, and, in 2019, there were 1.28 million. In 2021, the decrease after the coronavirus epidemic turned into a slow increase, so 821,856 people arrived this year.

Not only has the number of tourists from Hungary decreased since 1990, but also the number of tourists from the V4 countries. While 830,798 Polish tourists arrived in 1990, there were 37,324 in 1995, 253,962 in 2010, and the rise continued: 420,980 in 2019, but it dropped to 222,407 in 2021 due to the impact of COVID-19. In 1990, 263,275 tourists came from the former Czechoslovakia. Even after the separation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, both countries remained as sending destinations. In 2010, there were 166,396 people from the Czech Republic, while, in 2015, it decreased to 152,082 people. In 2019, there were 189,265 people and, in 2021, there were 116,717. In 2010, 60,351 people arrived in Bulgaria from Slovakia, there were 63,887 in 2015, 77,098 in 2019 and 26,085 in 2021. The data presented above show that the 2009 crisis and coronavirus reduced the number of inbound tourists from the V4 countries.

Today, we can see that, based on the 2021 data, Romania is in first place in the ranking of sending countries with more than 800,000 tourist arrivals, Turkey is in second place with more than 400,000 people, and Germany in third place with more than 288,000 people. Poland is in sixth place (222,407), the Czech Republic is in 10th place (116,717 people) and Hungary is in 20th place (30,597 people). The development of the number of tourist arrivals proves that Romania and the countries of the V4 are important sending countries for Bulgaria and the potential opportunities inherent in them are indicated by the high tourist numbers in the past.

Our study examines a new area, such as the leisure time patterns of tourists, which can help the specialist areas involved in the development and promotion of Bulgarian tourism to meet the needs of Hungarian tourists and increase visitor satisfaction. It is important to follow the changes in leisure habits and their trends, since, knowing this, it is possible to create tourist service packages that are an important element of competitiveness. At the same time, in addition to the creation of the offer, it also helps in the formulation of specific messages for the target group in marketing communication.

During our study, we are looking for the answer to what thoughts and word associations arise in connection with the word Bulgaria among Hungarians, which also affects tourist travel. Which destinations do Hungarian tourists prefer when traveling to Bulgaria, and what can be used in tourism product development, image building, and marketing communication to help attract Hungarian tourists to the region, increase visitor satisfaction, and improve Bulgaria's tourism competitiveness?

We assume that, among Hungarians traveling to Bulgaria, the dominance of the Mediterranean coastal area and mass tourism will continue to prevail; however, in accordance with new types of tourism and leisure trends, there will be a demand for mountains, countryside, cultural values and entertainment, as well as an active tourism demand for products. We assume that, in the leisure patterns of Hungarians, they are active during their trip, passive during their trip and have a party during their trip, and those needs are met by what Bulgarian tourism has to offer. In the development of Bulgarian tourism, these research results characterizing the leisure patterns can be usefully incorporated into the branding and marketing communication.

2. Literature Review

Tourism is becoming a part of our lifestyle and a vital element of our way of life, since, nowadays, we can talk about it as a useful and meaningful leisure activity that serves to recharge, relax and unwind [14,15]. It has also become a very important factor in shaping the quality of life as it has become a social phenomenon [16]. We distinguish between non-tourist and tourist travel according to the purpose of the trip. Within tourist travel, we distinguish between business tourism or MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions) tourism and leisure tourism, in terms of the relationship between work and leisure [17–19]. The difference between the two can be identified in terms of who covers the expenses of the trip, who decides whether to travel and what the main motivation is.

Arguments in favor of tourism involving positive aspects may include its positive impact on quality of life, its ability to improve and maintain health and its positive effects on mental freshness and fitness. It provides the individual with impulses that are a source of pleasure, in addition to contributing to the individual's spiritual enrichment and self-esteem [19]. During travel, tourists' thoughts, feelings and desires are brought into splendid harmony, thus achieving feelings of happiness and improved well-being [16,20–22]. The fact that travel experiences enhance subjective feelings of happiness is particularly true for people with disabilities, as tourism often provides them with an escape from a difficult and trying everyday life and helps them to connect and integrate [23,24].

The demand for seeking experiences in active leisure is increasing, for which tourism/travel is a great solution, since tourism is an experience that also brings about environmental change [25]. It can be said that Hungarians are also travelling more often, either for one-day or multi-day trips. In a survey of 5002 randomly selected respondents, conducted between 31 May and 15 June 2019, Rácz [26] found that 73.9% of the Hungarian adult population made a one-day or multi-day trip between May 2018 and June 2019. Its results show that the most common activities and the most frequently mentioned primary motivation for travelling are relaxation and recreation, but also active leisure activities, such as swimming and sightseeing.

The global tourism market has undergone major changes over the years, both in terms of space and time, and in terms of quantitative and qualitative components [27]. Safety and risk minimization are important aspects during travel [28,29]. During the period of the pandemic, COVID-19 is presented as a global crisis in studies related to tourism and, during this period, the aforementioned aspects are even more predominant [30–34]. During COVID-19, Hungarian tourists have preferred domestic destinations [35,36] but a study by Ernszt and Marton [36] regarding the travel habits of 500 Hungarian tourists shows that foreign destinations will become more popular as the pandemic subsides.

2.1. Bulgarian-Hungarian Tourism Relations

In 2018–2019, the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism amended its tourism strategy for the period until 2030, and developed a new national brand strategy, which aims to create a sustainable four-season tourism destination, strengthen the positive image and create a distinctive and competitive tourism product for Bulgarian and international tourists. (Annual Monitoring report) [37]. The Bulgarian government has defined the Visegrád Four countries, including Hungary, as a priority source market for foreign visitors, alongside Germany, the UK and Russia [38].

Considering the political factors of Bulgarian–Hungarian tourism relations, it is worth mentioning that, in September 2016, the Hungarian and Bulgarian parliaments declared 19 October as the Day of Hungarian–Bulgarian Friendship [39]. Hungary has only previously signed such a treaty with Poland. In terms of bilateral tourism relations, there is further potential in the twinning connections, which number close to 20, between the two countries. According to the Hungarian Embassy in Sofia, Hungary is considered as one of the countries classified as orange, according to the health regulations in force from 10 March 2022. A document certifying vaccination against COVID-19, or a document confirming recovery from infection, or a negative PCR test issued by an official body, is required to enter the country [40].

2.2. Image of Bulgaria

A brand's image is an element of its tourism competitiveness, and, at the same time, it results in an identifiable destination that determines its success, since it can influence the consumer habits of tourists, so its role is indispensable in attracting tourists to a destination. Thus, the brand, image, competitiveness and consumer behavior show a correlation in tourism, which is focused on in the literature of several special studies. In tourism, uniqueness, a unique image and tourism brand are, nowadays, one of the most decisive elements of competitiveness.

Nowadays, the Mediterranean's sandy beach destinations and exotic places are not the only attractive factor for tourists, but the demand for those destinations that can offer something new or innovative with their uniqueness is also increasing more and more. Bulgaria has a unique natural and cultural background, and this uniqueness makes it suitable for further brand development, which can be one of the defining elements of its competitiveness. At the international conference of the WTO in Krakow in 1998, the role of quality in the development of tourism services and products was highlighted. Quality tourist offers and realistic prices, which refer to the price–value or price–service ratio, were mentioned as elements of tourism competitiveness [41]. Among the means of achieving quality, several studies highlighted authenticity, originality, the development of standards and the sustainable development of tourism [42–44].

Due to the changes in tourism, the competition between products and destinations and the evolution of tourists' expectations and habits, tourist destinations must be treated as commercial brands. The image of the brand is of enormous importance in the success of the tourist destination, which has a significant impact on the behavior of consumers. Tourists who visit a destination for the first time and usually have limited information about the place are more likely to choose "new" destinations that have a strong, unique and recognizable and positive image [45]. Thus, the brand and unique image significantly influence tourists' choice of destination.

"A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, design or a combination of these. Its purpose is to identify and differentiate the products or services of a seller or a group of sellers from their competitors." [46]. Nowadays, it is important that, in the intensifying and competitive marketplace, Bulgaria is able to create a strong brand based on its uniqueness, which is suitable for distinguishing the destination from its competitors. According to one definition of branded goods, they are products or services that offer unique performances designed for the benefit of the customer, are standardized and always of similar quality [47]. This definition focuses on the customer, the satisfaction of the customer's needs and the quality parameters of the products and services. Thus, this study proves the raison d'être of the examination of consumer habits and the application of the results in tourism development, which we also focus on in our primary research.

In many cases, the consumer buys a brand rather than a product or service. A consumer or visitor always associates an assumed and an expected quality with a brand, the quality of which determines the purchase decision. Thus, the quality aspects of tourism form the central element of the branding and, at the same time, of competitiveness. In the tourist market, the most successful destinations will be those that are most able to satisfy the needs and expectations of the visitors, for which it is necessary to know their consumer habits and their changes and trends. The customer does not always choose the highest quality service provider, rather he considers and takes into account the favorable price–service ratio when making his decision [48]. A destination as a brand is not just a name, an expression, sign, symbol, design, but a combination of these.

A well-branded destination, therefore, offers special and unmistakable tourist products and/or services based on visitors' preferences, the quality of which is always similar and standardized. Its purpose is to identify the products of a tourist destination and differentiate them from competing destinations, so that they become recognizable again in a destination-specific manner [47]. The competitiveness model formulated by Go and Govers [49] includes seven factors, in which image also plays an important role. According to the authors, the following factors determine the competitiveness of destinations: facilities, accessibility, range of services, climate and environmental characteristics, general attractiveness, image and economy. The most widely used method for assessing brand strength is the one used by the advertising agency Young and Rubicam, which identifies four components: uniqueness, relevance, recognition and appreciation [46,50,51]. When we technically project branding onto countries to improve their national reputation and competitiveness, we are talking about country branding. Branding and brand building can be useful for small and large, developed and less developed countries alike [52]. In the field of country branding, the most cited brand ranking is the Anholt Nation Brands Ranking, which is based on the country brand hexagon developed by Simon Anholt and examines and summarizes each of its dimensions. These are: tourism, exports, government, settlement and investment, culture and people. Bulgaria is 66th and Hungary is 51st on this list of 101 countries.

In 2014, Simon Anholt created the Good Country Index [53], which ranks the 163 countries on the list on the basis of indicators such as contributions to science and technology, contributions to culture, contributions to international peace and security, contributions to the world order, contributions to the planet and climate, contributions to prosperity and equality and contributions to health and well-being. His team uses data from 35 global institutions, including the UN, the World Bank and others, to calculate contributions to the well-being of the world and humanity, taking into account the countries' potential in terms of GDP and population to produce the Good Country Index (Table 1).

Table 1. Bulgaria and Hungary's aggregate score in the Good Country Index 2016–2019.

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Bulgaria	30	22	12	21
Hungary	22	12	39	30

Bulgaria was ranked 45th in the World Economic Forum's [54] annual competitiveness report in 2017; in 2018, it was calculated differently but the result was similar to the previous year, while, in 2019, the country was also ranked 45th. For more than a decade, the World Economic Forum has been producing a ranking of 140 economies, taking an in-depth look at the factors and policies that affect the sustainable development of the travel and tourism sector, and the development and competitiveness of a country.

3. Materials and Methods

The purpose of this study was to analyze the different aspects of Hungarian tourists' destination choice, their experience and preferences for travelling to Bulgaria and the leisure preference system, which may affect travel conditions, such as destination selection, use of tourist products and service packages, etc. In the operational part of our study, we used those respondents who specified the criterion for why they had participated in a trip for tourism purposes in the last three years. In order to assess the relevant experiences, we have limited our respondents to those who have relevant travel experiences. In order to do this, we filtered our respondents with a filter question and only those who have participated in a tourist trip in the last three years were included in the sample. Since the survey was conducted at the beginning of 2022, the travel experience affected the years of the COVID pandemic of 2020 and 2021, which posed a significant risk to health and travel safety. This had a different effect on the travel willingness of different social groups, which is confirmed by Hungarian research. The sampling took place over a three-month period between January and March of 2022. The participatory criterion mentioned above ensured that we would later evaluate and examine credible and relevant responses. Respondents who met the criterion and were, thus, included in the study material were further divided into two groups according to whether they were travelling to a Bulgarian destination or not for an experience.

The growing Hungarian tourist demand for Bulgaria justifies mapping the consumption habits of Hungarian tourists. For this purpose, our choice was the survey method, as it is the most common form of research used to analyze opinions and study a social phenomenon. The Hungarian-language questionnaires were published online on social media platforms that bring together members related to travel and leisure, where participants were assured of anonymity and the voluntary nature of the survey. In addition, we asked parents to fill out a questionnaire reflecting the views of their children with their consent, which, thus, also provided parental consent. To test the questions, completeness and comprehensibility, we prepared a pilot questionnaire, which was tested by being filled out by students from the tourism catering department.

The questionnaire consisted of four main parts. After assuring the participants regarding anonymity and the voluntary nature of the survey, as well as clearly stating that their answers were only available and used for educational and research purposes, in the first part, questions were asked in order to collect the basic sociometric information of the participants. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of different statements regarding the general experience of the traveling habits of Hungarian tourists with a focus on frequency and destinations. In the third part of the questionnaire, the aim was to map out the opinion of the participants about Bulgaria, and whether they have visited the popular destinations of Bulgaria. This was necessary, as the main goal of the survey was to analyze the preferences of Hungarian inbound tourism to Bulgaria. In the second group, consisting of those who have never been to Bulgaria, questions were asked about what they would like to see. The fourth part of the survey was conducted to answer specific questions about the spending of leisure time, since these preferences affect destination choices, which services they use while they are in demand and visitor satisfaction of those. It is important to disclose that, because of the length and complexity of the study, not every question and result was discussed and presented in this paper.

For the statistical analysis of the research, IBM SPSS statistical software was used. The operational part of our study was dominated by descriptive statistics, frequencies, mean, standard deviation, which allowed us to gain an insight into consumers' travel and leisure habits, preferences and data of emerging patterns. In addition, to map the data structure of the factors examining the leisure preferences of tourists, we used exploratory factor analysis, and, within that, main component analysis.

We chose factor analysis with principal component analysis to prove our study questions. In factor analysis, it is not necessary to take a position on the nature of the variables, i.e., to decide whether they are dependent or independent variables. To start factor analysis, some basic conditions must be met:

- Numerical, metric data (due to the 4-point Likert scale);
- The number of data is at least three times the number of variables examined (7 variables, 952 pieces of data).

We study the relationships of the variables based on interdependence [55]. In order to test the suitability for the factor analysis, KMO and Bartlett tests were carried out. For the exploration of connecting factors, we used principal component analysis with Varimax rotation [55,56], with the primary objective of identifying the smallest number of factors explaining the most variance.

The study was approved and supported by the Research Ethical Committee of the principal researcher's institution, the University of Debrecen Faculty of Economics and Business Ethic Committee. The participants of the study provided participatory consent to the data collection. All data were treated confidentially. The basic statistics of the sample are summarized in Table 2 below.

In our sample, mainly younger and highly educated people were represented from the capital of Hungary, because these strata showed a higher willingness for travelling and were less deterred by the health risk of the COVID pandemic (Table 2). This fact is also supported by several representative domestic studies [29,57–59]. In a nationally representative survey conducted by Csapó–Törőcsik [29] in Hungary (n = 2001), it was found that, in connection with the travel habits of Hungarians, safety is one of the most important factors in choosing a destination and making a travel decision. It has also been shown that people with lower levels of education, people living in villages, small settlements and older people are more in need of security. Among the sociodemographic variables, they found that safety and the avoidance of health risks are much more important for people with a lower education, the role of which decreased with education. In terms of age, it was proven that young Hungarians are less affected by health risks, while the middle-aged and older generation are affected to a significantly greater extent. Based on the type of location, people living in large communities are most likely to want to travel to a safe place (68%), while those living in the capital (53%) and those living in cities and cities with county rights (58%) are less likely to do so. The same results were confirmed in the travel decisions of Hungarian tourists due to COVID, which was confirmed by several Hungarian studies [58,59].

Table 2. Monthly breakdown of the number of Hungarians travelling to Bulgaria in 2018–2020 (persons).

No	Criteria		Frequency	Percentage
1	Sex	Male	373	39.20
		Female	579	60.80
	Total		952	100.00
2	Age based Group	Under 18 y	12	1.30
		19–34	502	52.70
		35–49	161	16.90
		50–64	217	22.80
		Over 65 y	60	6.30
	Total		952	100.00
3	Residence	Capital city (Budapest)	425	44.60
		County seat	96	10.10
		City	300	31.50 *
		Village	102	10.70
		Village under 1000 inhabitant	29	3.00
	Total		952	100.00
4	Education	Elementary school	16	1.70
		Vocational school	92	9.70 **
		Graduation	470	49.40
		High school, university	363	38.10
		Doctoral school (PhD)	11	1.20
	Total		952	
5	Marital Status	Married or lives in a relationship	593	62.30
		Single (single, divorced, widow)	359	37.70
	Total		952	100.00

* Cumulative percentage value is 31.20, thus making up 100%. ** Cumulative percentage value is 9.60, thus making up 100%.

Due to the low average age of the people in the sample, the majority do not yet have children (56.4%, n = 537), and those who do have children are mainly people with two children or one child (35.9% in total, n = 342). The number of persons living in the same household was 2 (37.7%, n = 359 persons) or 3 (23.7%, n = 226 persons) for the majority of the sample.

Looking at the travel habits of the respondents, the vast majority of the sample travels most often within Europe, with 876 (92%) indicating a preference for travel within the EU and 266 (27.9%) for travel outside the EU but still within Europe. A total of 130 (13.7%) have travelled to the America, 123 (12.9%) to Asia and 101 (10.6%) to Africa. On average, respondents may organize a trip abroad with their family or partner once a year.

4. Results

When people hear the word Bulgaria, the Bulgarian coast is the first thing that comes to their mind (56% of respondents mentioned this), which is not surprising, as the Golden Coast with its fine sand is one of the most popular tourist destinations for Hungarian tourists, as confirmed by the Bulgarian Statistical Institute (2020). A total of 25% of the respondents think of it as a Balkan country, where the adjective Balkan can, of course, often be used as a negative adjective, as pointed out by several authors [51,59]. More than 6% of respondents think of Bulgaria as the poorest country in the European Union, but some can also think of its famous products, such as yoghurt or rose oil.

Bulgaria's logo which illustrates the dominance of seaside tourism with the logo above the Bulgaria inscription showing the sea and the sun. However, in catalogues and advertisements, culture and local values are also increasingly represented. Several studies have shown that cultural values, visiting World Heritage sites or learning about local culture are prominent in travel motivations [60–66]. The UNWTO [67] recently reaffirmed that cultural tourism is a major component of international tourism consumption, estimated to account for over 39% of all international tourist arrivals, resulting in 516 million international trips in 2017.

Of the sample, 284 respondents (29.8%) had already been to Bulgaria and 70.2% said they had not yet visited the country; of those, 263 (27.6%) said they would like to go. Of the Hungarians who had already been to Bulgaria, 13.6% had not yet been to Sofia. Only 11.7% had not been to Nesebar and 11.5% to the Sunny Beach, 16.6% to the Golden Sands, 13.2% to Burgas and 15.5% to Varna. These destinations are, therefore, the most popular among Hungarian tourists, with more than 80% of respondents having visited these places once or more. The most popular Bulgarian destinations for the respondents in the sample are Nesebar and Sofia. The sunny, sandy beach is, therefore, still the most important tourist motivation for Hungarians in choosing a destination in Bulgaria, as well as for tourists of other nationalities [66–69]. Water-based tourism services combine the sun-based tourism product with religious [70] or wine tourism products [71]. Several international studies confirm that accessibility [72], digitalization developments, sustainability [73–75] and innovation should be prioritized, which can also increase competitiveness.

The survey shows that, out of those who had not yet been to Bulgaria (70.2%), 27.6% of respondents would be willing to travel to Bulgaria. To answer the question about how they could be targeted, and what products and marketing communication messages could be used to reach them, we looked at the main reasons for their travels over the last five years. Table 3 shows that the beach is still the most important motivation (79.6%) for Hungarian tourists. Visiting cities and cultural sites is also important, with 60% of respondents stating this. Health-related trips (wellness, thermal baths) also feature prominently among the motivations. After these, the mountains and natural values appear, followed by active leisure activities and gastronomy.

Table 3. Travel destinations of the sample in the last 5 years.

Destination	Number of Respondents	Respondent %
Beach, lakeside, waterfront holidays	758	79.6
City tours	571	60
Wellness	359	37.7
Visiting relatives for several days	264	27.7
Thermal experience baths	254	26.7
Mountains	212	22.3
Nature	204	21.4
Active tourism	160	16.8
Business	140	14.7
Winter sports (ski, snowboard, etc.)	139	14.6
Wine route, wine region	138	14.5
Village tourism	98	10.3

In order to investigate what tourists do, we provided several statements, and we asked respondents to rate answers to them on a Likert scale from 1 to 4, where answer 1 was ‘not at all true’, answer 2 ‘was less true’, answer 3 was ‘mostly true’ and answer 4 was ‘completely true’ (Table 4). Relaxation and recreation received the highest mean score (mean = 4.48, sd = 0.716), which is most typical during holidays, with one of the lowest standard deviation values, indicating that this was the most consistent among respondents. This was followed by trying and consuming local gastronomy products (mean = 3.46, sd = 0.709), which suggests that this is also a popular activity for Hungarian tourists during their stay. The third most popular statement is visiting attractions and sights (mean = 3.01, sd = 0.73). Getting to know natural values through excursions in nature and getting to know others through community activities are also typical activities for respondents during their holiday. For the measurement of the reliability of the statistics, Cronbach’s Alpha was calculated, which presented a 0.546 score. Although this can be considered relatively low, Pallant [76] states that, with scales with fewer than 10 items, the Cronbach's Alpha values are lower.

Table 4. How much does the following statement describe you?

Statement	Mean	Deviation
During holidays, I try to relax and unwind first and foremost	3.48	0.716
I like to try local foods and drinks	3.46	0.709
I see all the sights during my trips	3.01	0.734
I like hiking in nature	2.96	0.855
I like meeting people, making friends	2.87	0.914
I prefer individual discoveries	2.58	1.014
I like to live in the destination like the locals	2.53	0.998
I give preference to party places	1.91	1.019
I like wandering alone	1.86	0.974

5. Factor Analysis Results

Leisure time activity is a relatively important field of research, as the ways in which individuals spend their free time (actively, passively, with cultural activities or by partying) can influence their leisure time needs during their travels and the choice of destination as well. Thus, the following statements were analyzed with factor analysis, to create factor groups based on activities during the trip that could appear as the main target groups for publications promoting Bulgaria. As we discussed before, we chose factor analysis with principal component analysis to prove our research question.

The KMO Test is adequate (value 0.652, KMO $\geq$ 0.6 medium), i.e., the variables are suitable for factor analysis [77]. The Bartlett's test also showed a significant result, which also confirms that the variables are suitable for analysis. The findings of the test are presented in the following table (Table 5).

Table 5. KMO and Bartlett's Test results.

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.652
Bartlett's Test	Approx. Chi-Square	661.553
	df	21
	Sig.	000

Varimax rotation was performed to make the factor matrix easier to understand. The analysis resulted in three factors (Figure 1). The variance of this factor is 62.428% (Table 6) which is above the expected threshold of 60% [77]. Figure 1, below, provides information on the resulting values.

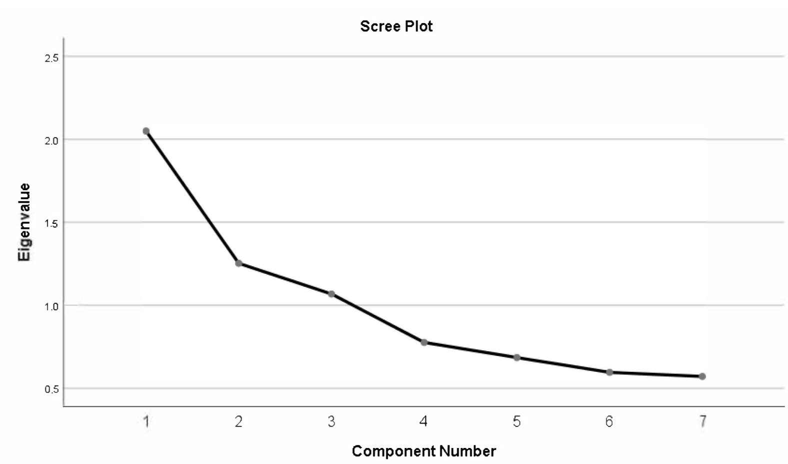

Figure 1. Scree plot for PCA for 7 variables.

Table 6. Total Variance Explained.

	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	**% of Var.**	**Cum. %**	**Total**	**% of Var.**	**Cum. %**	**Total**	**% of Var.**	**Cum. %**
1	2.049	29.274	29.274	2.049	29.274	29.274	1.748	24.968	24.968
2	1.253	17.896	47.170	1.253	17.896	47.170	1.336	19.084	44.052
3	1.068	15.258	62.428	1.068	15.258	62.428	1.286	18.376	62.428
4	0.776	11.091	73.519						
5	0.685	9.792	83.311						
6	0.596	8.521	91.832						
7	0.572	8.168	100.000						

The following components were included in the three factors after the Varimax rotation, in decreasing order of variance (Table 7).

Table 7. How much does the following statement describe you?

Statement	Component		
	1	**2**	**3**
I like wandering alone	0.802		
I prefer individual discoveries	0.773		
I like hiking in nature	0.599		
I see all the sights during my trips		0.855	
I like living in the destination like the locals		0.648	
I prefer party places			0.825
I like meeting people, making friends			0.743

The three factors based on these statements—after interpreting their content—were named as follows (Table 7; Figures 1 and 2).

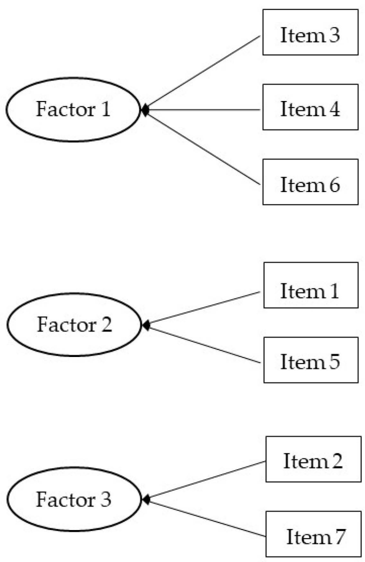

Figure 2. Path diagram of the factors and the items.

Factor 1—People who are active, who are explorers during their travels. What can be said about this category is that they all share a desire to explore and discover, mainly in natural environments. They like to spend as much time as possible in nature and preferably alone or outside of the urbanized areas. Factor 2—People who prefer cultural opportunities and to discover the cultural background of the local communities. Factor 3—People who are partying during their travels, and those of highly social individuals. This factor contains the people who are mainly young, party-oriented respondents, and these activities will also be the most important during the trip. Separate "packages" could be developed for each of the three target groups belonging to the factors and presented in marketing communication messages sent out to them.

6. Discussion

In our opinion, all three types (explorers, culture vultures who like relaxation and passive recreation, and partygoers) should be given special attention and offered targeted programs. For example, for explorer tourists, it is advisable to operate up-to-date portals where all kinds of providers of active recreation are listed, and, as they prefer individual exploration, it is important to ensure that tourists can decide for themselves what to see and when. It may also be useful to create different apps to help them find information, e.g., TripAdvisor recommendations, which are often rated based on the opinions of local people. As this type of tourist has a need to be integrated into the local community, it may be beneficial to keep platforms updated with information about the destination.

For those who prefer relaxation and passive recreation, it is worth offering organized cultural or wellness programs. There is great potential in the cultural tourism of small towns in Bulgaria to fully benefit from the potential of their creative and cultural heritage. Research also shows how creative tourism can bring sustainable and profitable development to small communities in the country [78]. For the partygoers, it would also be worthwhile to create and update portals where entertainment-related service providers could offer information. Bulgaria's festival tourism and its inclusion in marketing messages may be attractive to this segment. According to Stankova [79] and Yancheva [80], Bulgaria could be an attractive and competitive destination for festival tourism.

Bulgaria's tourism has been under severe stress since November 1989. Travel habits in the former Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc have changed fundamentally and tourism demand in this region has declined dramatically [81]. Paying attention to new generations, changing and constantly evolving consumer habits and new demands in the field of tourism products are the only way to increase and maintain tourism demand.

Based on the secondary research, the questionnaire survey, the strategic documents of Bulgarian tourism and the interviews with tourism professionals involved in Bulgarian–Hungarian tourism, we make the following recommendations:

- Bulgarian tourism should engage in country-targeted marketing to attract Hungarian tourists. This could be facilitated by the Bulgarian–Hungarian Friendship Day (19 October), which is commemorated alternately in Sofia or Budapest every year at government level. The joint promotion of the almost 2000 years of common historical traditions, the Hungarian memorial sites in Bulgaria and the Bulgarian memorial sites in Hungary should be included in the work of the Hungarian–Bulgarian Intergovernmental Committee for Economic Cooperation and the Danube Commission.
- The problems of transport between the two countries should be addressed at government level and require solutions at EU level.
- The expansion of bilateral tourism relations could involve Bulgarian–Hungarian twin town relations and Bulgarian nationalities in Hungary.
- The representatives of Generation Y and Generation Z could be targeted through targeted marketing on social networking sites via Hungarian-language video films. Experiences in Hungary and our study confirm that young adults with the ability to pay have a significant potential for travel. The Cacao Beach in Sunny Beach is an iconic entertainment venue that has been attracting the younger generation since 2003 and has gained international fame. In addition to party tourism, Bulgaria offers plenty of opportunities for young people, such as concerts, music festivals, gastronomy events and sports programs.
- Bulgaria should speed up the digitalization of its tourism offer, encouraging individual travel. Special attention should be paid to so-called "generation marketing".

In order to attract Hungarian tourists to Bulgaria, in addition to mass beach tourism, you can appeal with packages that include winter tourism packages and offer different elements, as the statistics of recent years have proven the interest in the winter months. Activity and active leisure activities appear in the leisure patterns and preference systems, for which the transformation and promotion of Bulgaria's sports tourism products into a package can help to satisfy the needs of Hungarian tourists. Cultural and entertainment programs are prominently present in the leisure trends, to which Bulgaria's rich historical traditions, cultural values and World Heritage sites can be well associated. Thus, with the development of Bulgaria's four-season tourism offer, it is suitable for postponing the season and these packages, which offer active leisure time in the name of culture, health preservation and meaningful rest, can even extend the length of stay and improve the utilization capacity of hotels.

At the same time, beach and water-based services are strongly present in the motivation of Hungarian tourists, which was confirmed by the research, so the development of the beach tourism offer, combined with the wellness and health-preserving elements, should also become part of the promotion. By rethinking the country's image and brand values, and by repositioning tourism, it is possible to change previous associations (Balkan, cheap and other) related to Bulgaria [11]. It is essential to examine consumer trends and their changes and incorporate their results into a tourism product and attraction development, as well as displaying them in marketing messages intended for the target group; therefore, research not only in Hungary, but also in the V4 countries or Romania is indispensable for Bulgarian tourism professionals, which, at the same time, designates the future directions of research.

7. Conclusions

In the factor analysis of Hungarians travelling to Bulgaria and being interested in Bulgaria, three groups of Hungarians were outlined from the research. In the case of the explorer-type tourists, not only beach destinations can be promoted, but the segment can be targeted with adventure and sports tourism and mountain attractions. For those interested in culture, with a passion for relaxing and passive recreation, cultural values and programs offered by festivals and small towns could represent a new product diversification in addition to passive beach tourism. People belonging to the group of partygoers are mainly attracted by music festivals and the community experience provided by events [12].

These product developments are also supported by other studies, as Bánhidi et al. [82] examined the travel motivations of 2210 Hungarian and 2965 Slovak adults and concluded: "82.8% of the Slovaks and 74.3% of the Hungarians think that doing physical activity during the holiday is very important". This study proves that, instead of passive holidays by the water, active leisure activities during holidays come to the fore. Other authors have also confirmed the active leisure needs of Hungarian tourists for sports, healthcare and culture [83–85]. Health is becoming more and more valued, the locations of which can not only be spa and wellness providers, but also tourism providers offering sports, recreation and activities, which are part of the branding to show that the Balkan region can also play a significant role [11,13].

The Bulgarian National Board of Tourism [86] concludes that Bulgarian coastal tourism continues to play a significant role in the country's tourism, but the industry faces challenges such as outdated, overburdened infrastructure, excessive administration and overregulation in the sector. Mass tourism often results in negative effects such as over-tourism, as the population increases by 20% in the summer in non-coastal areas, but population increases by 320% in coastal areas. [87]. At the same time, it mentions the presence in new markets enhanced by new tourism products and improved products and services as a strength. Another strength is digitalization, which provides a competitive advantage, not only in terms of better control and detailed traceability, but also as an added value for Bulgarian tourism products.

The report and other studies [88,89] also note that Bulgaria has a very good potential for mountain tourism, adventure and sports tourism and rural tourism with Bulgarian folk traditions, and has a huge potential for so-called "camping tourism", which should be strengthened in the Bulgarians' international marketing communication to tourists from source destinations. On the other hand, it is also important to strengthen and communicate the country's image and brand values. The Branding Bulgaria Project [66] states that the country's image should be oriented towards the 21st century, focusing on novelty and modernity, and a positive image that sells is definitely needed. The needs of tourists must be met, with an entertaining and lively image that goes beyond beach or winter ski tourism products. Quality product development is also an important area for Bulgaria, which can result in the consolidation of brand values by increasing market competitiveness and visitor satisfaction. Thus, it is important not to emphasize the cheap, but the good, favorable price–value ratio destination [13].

The Limitation of the Research

The coronavirus has changed travel habits, which has affected the willingness of different social groups to travel, to varying degrees. The trips of younger, higher educated and capital city residents were less affected by the health risks; thus, in our sample, these groups represented themselves. Tourism demand is rapidly forming and changing almost constantly, to which research needs to respond. A good example is COVID, which has resulted in an unequal change in the willingness of consumer groups to travel. The relevance and usability of our results may change over time.

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