

**UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS - VARNA**  
**FACULTY OF "MANAGEMENT"**  
**DEPARTMENT OF "ECONOMICS AND**  
**ORGANIZATION OF TOURISM"**

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**LE THI THU HIEN**

**"POSITIONING OF THE DESTINATION**  
**VIETNAM ON THE BULGARIAN TOURIST**  
**MARKET"**

**A B S T R A C T**

of a dissertation

for acquiring of an educational and scientific degree "doctor"  
in a professional direction 3.9. Tourism,  
scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)"

**SCIENTIFIC SUPERVISOR:**  
**Prof. Stoyan Marinov, PhD**

**VARNA**  
**2025**

The dissertation consists of an introduction (13 pages), an exposition in three chapters (167 pages), a conclusion (5 pages), a list of references (13 pages). The main text contains 7 tables, 11 figures and 37 graphs. The list of sources used consists of 185 information sources, including 87 scientific publications and 98 institutional sources and Internet sites. There are 2 appendices to the dissertation.

The defense of the dissertation will take place on ..... at ..... o'clock in hall .... of the University of Economics-Varna at a meeting of the scientific jury, appointed by Order ..... of the Rector of the University of Economics-Varna.

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**SCIENTIFIC JURY:**

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# I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISSERTATION

## 1. Relevance of the researched topic

### I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISSERTATION

#### 1. Relevance of the topic

This dissertation examines the strategic positioning of Vietnam as a tourist destination on the Bulgarian emissive market - an issue of increasing importance in the context of globalization, digitalization and regional economic integration. The Bulgarian tourism market is small, but with opportunities for expansion to destinations outside Europe, especially among tourists seeking cultural enrichment, exoticism and authentic experiences. Vietnam, for its part, is a country with a rich cultural heritage, natural diversity and a stable tourism infrastructure. The topic is also relevant in view of the sustainable recovery of international tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to diversify tourist flows.

#### 2. Subject and object of the Research

The object of this study is a national tourist destination in relation to a national emissive tourist market and specifically the destination Vietnam in relation to the Bulgarian emissive tourist market. This includes its tourist offer, image, level of recognition, competitiveness and development opportunities.

The subject of the study is the positioning of a tourist destination in a foreign source market.

The study focuses on the process of market positioning itself, including strategic approaches, marketing decisions and communication tools applicable when a new destination enters a foreign source market.

#### 3. Purpose and tasks of the study

The main purpose of the dissertation is to propose a solution for optimizing the attraction and use of the Bulgarian tourist market to Vietnam as a tourist destination.

To achieve this purpose, the following research objectives have been formulated:

Based on theoretical foundations and scientific practice, the research purpose of the thesis is proposing a solution to optimize the exploitation and attraction of the Bulgarian tourist market to Vietnam as a tourist destination.

Task 1: Systematization of the theoretical foundations of the positioning of a tourist destination on an emissive market.

Task 2: Determination, analysis and assessment of the market positions of Vietnam on the Bulgarian emissive tourist market.

Task 3: Outline guidelines for improving Vietnam's strategic marketing mix to improve its positioning in the Bulgarian outbound tourism market.

#### 4. Research thesis and hypotheses

The thesis defended in the dissertation is: effective market positioning of a tourist destination in a new source market requires in-depth knowledge of consumer attitudes, competitive offerings and implementation of appropriate marketing strategies. This thesis is supported by three main hypotheses:

1. Bulgarian tourists have a positive attitude towards Vietnam as a tourist destination

2. Vietnam is not well presented as a tourist destination on the Bulgarian outbound market.

3. Vietnam as a tourist destination has great potential in the Bulgarian outbound market

## **5. Research Methodology**

The dissertation uses a combined approach – both quantitative and qualitative methods are used.

First, a theoretical and applied literature review is conducted.

Secondly, a survey was conducted among Bulgarian tourists staying in hotels in Vietnam and representatives of the tourism business, using structured questionnaires.

Third, a SWOT analysis and strategic analysis of Vietnam's competitive advantage were conducted. Descriptive statistics, comparative analysis, and expert assessment methods were used. The collected data were processed using Microsoft Excel and visualized in tables and graphs.

## **6. Scientific novelty and contributions**

The dissertation has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, the understanding of the process of market positioning of destinations in the context of emerging markets is enriched. The practical contribution is in the preparation of an applicable strategy for positioning Vietnam on the Bulgarian market, based on real research.

## **7. Scope, duration and limitations of the study**

**Scope of content:** the dissertation focuses on the study of theoretical issues regarding the market positioning of tourist destinations and specifically of Vietnam as a tourist destination in relation to the Bulgarian outbound tourist market.

**Spatial scope:** the thesis examines the positioning of Vietnam as a tourist country on the tourism market within the borders of the Republic of Bulgaria.

**Time scope:** the thesis examines the state of the Bulgarian tourist market towards Vietnam in the period from the beginning of the 2020s to the beginning of 2025.

The main limitations are related to:

- lack of previous, in-depth scientific and practical-applied research on the issue of tourism market relations between Vietnam and Bulgaria;
- due to lack of funds, territorial limitation of the survey of Bulgarian tourists residing in Vietnam in hotels in the capital Hanoi.

The main problems in writing the dissertation mainly relate to the gaps and incompleteness in the statistical data, the incomplete and inaccurate information about the tourist demand of Bulgarian tourists for the destination Vietnam.

## **8. Information provision**

The information provision of the study was carried out through a systematic study of specialized scientific publications by Bulgarian and foreign authors. A total of 185 information sources were used, including 11 sources in Cyrillic, 116 sources in Latin and 58 specialized Internet sites.

## II. STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE DISSERTATION

### 1. Structure of the dissertation

The structure of the dissertation is determined by the combination of the subject, object, goals and objectives and reflects the author's approach to the research.

The dissertation consists of an introduction (13 pages), an exposition in three chapters (167 pages), a conclusion (5 pages), a list of references (13 pages). The main text contains 7 tables, 11 figures and 37 graphs. The list of sources used consists of 185 literary sources, including 11 sources in Cyrillic, 116 sources in Latin and 58 specialized Internet sites. There are 2 appendices to the dissertation.

### 2. Content of the dissertation

The content of the dissertation is in accordance with the set tasks and is presented in the following sequence:

#### INTRODUCTION

#### CHAPTER ONE. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MARKET POSITIONING OF A TOURIST DESTINATION

##### *1.1. Essence of a Tourist Destination*

1.1.1. Definition of a Tourist Destination

1.1.2. Elements and Features of a Tourist Destination

##### *1.2. Theoretical Aspects of Market Positioning*

1.2.1. Concept of Market Positioning

1.2.2. Levels, Factors and Tools of Market Positioning

##### *1.3. Tourist destination positioning*

1.3.1. Concept of tourist destination positioning

1.3.2. Tourist destination positioning process

1.3.3. Tourist destination positioning methods

#### CHAPTER TWO. ANALYSIS OF VIETNAM'S POSITIONS ON THE BULGARIAN TOURIST MARKET

##### *2.1. Characteristics of Vietnam as a tourist destination*

2.1.1. Tourist supply of destination Vietnam

2.1.2. Tourist demand for destination Vietnam

##### *2.2. Features of the Bulgarian emissive market*

2.2.1. Volume and structure of the Bulgarian emissive market

2.2.2. Profile of Bulgarian tourists

2.2.3. Characteristics of the personality and psychology of communication of the Bulgarian

##### *2.3. Assessment of Vietnam's competitive position on the Bulgarian emissive market*

2.3.1. Assessment of Vietnam's supply according to Bulgarian tourists

2.3.2. Vietnam's market position according to Bulgarian and Vietnamese tourism companies

#### CHAPTER THREE. GUIDELINES FOR IMPROVING VIETNAM'S MARKET POSITION ON THE BULGARIAN TOURISM MARKET

##### *3.1. Strategic SWOT analysis of tourism in Vietnam with a focus on the Bulgarian market (2020–2025)*

##### *3.2. Guidelines for the development of tourism supply in Vietnam*

##### *3.3. Target segments of Vietnam in the Bulgarian outbound tourism market*

### **3.4. Strategic marketing mix for positioning Vietnam in the Bulgarian market**

3.4.1. Product strategy of Vietnam for the Bulgarian outbound tourism market

3.4.2. Pricing strategy of Vietnam for the Bulgarian outbound tourism market

3.4.3. Strategy for distribution of Vietnam's tourism products for the Bulgarian market

3.4.4. Communication strategy for positioning Vietnam on the Bulgarian tourism market

**CONCLUSION**

**REFERENCES**

**APPENDICES**

## **III. BRIEF PRESENTATION OF THE DISSERTATION PAPER**

### **CHAPTER ONE.**

#### **THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MARKET POSITIONING OF A TOURIST DESTINATION**

The first chapter of the dissertation develops and justifies the theoretical and methodological framework of the strategic positioning of a tourist destination, with a focus on source markets. An interdisciplinary review of the literature on the topic is presented.

The first paragraph, "*Essence of the tourist destination*", presents the conceptual framework of the concept of "tourist destination", which occupies a central place in this study. Classical and contemporary definitions are analyzed, emphasizing the multidisciplinary nature of the destination – uniting geographical, economic, cultural and social components. (Marinov, 2015; Marinov, S., Kazandzhieva, V., Yancheva, K., Dyankov, T., Doneva, Y., Filipova, H., Popova, K., Veleva, M., Alexandrova, M., Santana, H., 2023). It is emphasized that the destination is an integrated tourism product in which supply, infrastructure, services and symbolic values interact. In this context, the importance of the destination is justified not only as a physical space, but also as a socially constructed concept, an object of marketing communication and brand identity.

The second paragraph, "*Theoretical Aspects of Market Positioning*," clarifies the essence of strategic positioning as a process of creating and communicating a unique perception of the destination in the minds of target tourist segments. Positioning is presented as a key element in tourism marketing management, which combines analysis of the competitive environment, understanding consumer attitudes and formulating a value proposition. The leading schools of positioning are discussed - classical (Al Ries, & Trout, J., 1981), competitive (M. Porter) and consumer-oriented (Kotler, Philip, John R. Bowen, & James Makens, 2013). The role of emotional and rational components in the positioning and image of the destination as a central asset in strategic communication is indicated.

*The third paragraph is dedicated to the positioning of a tourist destination.* The concept of positioning a tourist destination is presented, according to which it is the creation of a distinctive place in the minds of tourists, which motivates them to prefer a given destination over competing alternatives. Positioning is achieved by identifying and communicating unique attributes that bring significant value to the target audience. Effective positioning is based on assessing the destination's image,

differentiating it from the competition, and consistently building the desired brand identity. The PIB (Positioning–Image–Branding) model of Alastair M. Morrisson (1998) emphasizes the relationship between positioning, image and brand.

Special attention is paid to the process of positioning the tourist destination. Its six key steps are discussed (Rakadziyska et al., 2005):

- Market segmentation, competitive analysis and identification of target customers – through demographic, geographic, behavioral and psychological criteria.
- Assessment of the current market position of the destination – based on revenue, customer interest and digital presence.
- Creating distinctive features – defining the uniqueness of the destination and its competitive advantages.
- Defining approaches for interacting with customers – through appropriate communication channels and building trust.
- Formulation of a marketing strategy and positioning statement – includes creating a positioning map and clearly defining the brand message.
- Testing and evaluating effectiveness – through quantitative and qualitative research, with the ability to adapt the strategy in a dynamic environment.

The appropriate approaches and methods for positioning a tourist destination are presented, depending on the characteristics of the destination and the market:

- Positioning by target audience – through objective (real attributes) and subjective (emotional perceptions) positioning.
- Positioning according to products and services offered – focus on quality, value and customer satisfaction.
- Geographic positioning – focus on the advantages of the specific location.
- Problem–solution approach – the destination is presented as a solution to specific consumer needs.
- Celebrity association – using endorsements from celebrities to increase prestige.
- Competitive positioning and repositioning – adapting the brand to changing conditions and perceptions.

The chapter concludes with a summary of the main theoretical emphases, emphasizing the need for a systematic, integrated approach to the positioning of a tourist destination. The author offers a working definition of the concept of "destination positioning", understood as "a consciously managed process of building, communicating and maintaining a clearly differentiated and desirable image of the tourist destination in the minds of specific target markets". Theoretical foundations are formulated for developing an own analytical model to be applied in the empirical part of the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO.**

### **ANALYSIS OF VIETNAM'S POSITIONS ON THE BULGARIAN TOURIST MARKET**

**The second chapter** of the study contains an analysis of Vietnam's positions on the Bulgarian tourist market.

The first *paragraph 2.1.* characterizes Vietnam as a tourist destination in terms of tourist supply and tourist demand.

**Subparagraph 2.1.1** assesses the country's natural tourism resources, anthropogenic resources, transport infrastructure, and hotel and restaurant superstructure.

**Vietnam has diverse natural tourism resources.** *Geographically*, the country is located in Southeast Asia on the Indochina Peninsula, has an S-shape and borders seven countries and territories. This geographical configuration determines the country's climatic and ecological diversity, making it accessible by land and sea. *The relief* is dominated by mountainous terrain (75% of the area), but most elevations are below 1000 m above sea level, making them accessible for hiking. The highest peak is Fansipan (3143 m), often called the "Roof of Indochina". The karst areas (Ha Long, Phong Nha-Ke Bang, Chang An) are unique in their geology and are included in the UNESCO list. The 3260 km coastline and over 200 beaches provide opportunities for sea, sports and spa tourism. Ha Long and Nha Trang bays are recognized as among the most beautiful in the world. *The climate* in Vietnam is tropical monsoon, which allows for year-round tourist activity. Average annual temperatures range between 21–27°C, with the southern part being warmer and wetter, while the northern part can experience snowfall during the winter months. This climatic diversity provides opportunities for the development of various types of tourism – from beach and mountain to cultural and eco-tourism. *Water resources* - Vietnam's river network includes over 2,860 rivers, which play a significant role in agriculture and tourism. The Mekong and Red River Deltas are not only agricultural centers, but also attractive tourist areas with boat tours, cultural festivals, and traditional craft villages. Over 400 thermal springs offer opportunities for balneotourism and SPA treatments. Biodiversity - with nearly 14,600 plant species and 16% of the world's animal species, Vietnam ranks among the countries with the highest biodiversity. Protected areas include 34 national parks and 11 biosphere reserves, which offer opportunities for eco- and scientific tourism.

**Vietnam's man-made tourism resources are diverse and valuable from a tourism perspective.** Vietnam is home to 54 ethnic groups, with ethnic and cultural diversity forming a colorful social landscape. *The population* is young, but there is a trend towards aging. The country has a rich intangible cultural heritage recognized by UNESCO, including rites, rituals, music and folklore. *Archaeology and history* - with its 917 archaeological sites, Vietnam represents the full historical spectrum from the Bronze Age to the present day. Sites such as Thang Long and My Son are important cultural and educational destinations. *Vietnamese architecture* is a blend of Chinese and Indian influences, adapted to the local environment. Traditional temples, pagodas, and public buildings are enriched with symbols and motifs. The museums (188 in number) house over 4 million artifacts. *In the field of cultural events and spiritual culture*, nearly 8,000 festivals are held annually, reflecting various aspects of Vietnamese culture. The art of water puppetry is a unique performing art, and traditional costumes and music represent a living cultural heritage. Regarding culinary culture, Vietnam's cuisine is an expression of the country's cultural identity. Dishes such as "pho" and "banh mi" are internationally recognized. *Culinary tourism is growing* and the country has been awarded international awards in the field of gastronomy.

**Transport infrastructure:** Vietnam has a well-developed transport system, essential for tourism: 34 seaports serving cruise ships and commercial vessels; 23 airports (12 international) providing air connectivity to major global markets; a

developed railway network with a main North-South line covering 21 provinces. The road network includes 570,448 km of roads, including over 2,000 km of expressways.

**Vietnam's hotel and restaurant** base is relatively well developed. The country has over 43,000 accommodation facilities and 780,000 rooms by 2024, providing capacity for mass and high-end tourism. There are over 550,000 dining establishments, offering a variety of local and international cuisine. There are 4,623 international tour operators and 42,739 tour guides operating in the country, reflecting the increased professionalism in the sector.

**Subsection 2.1.2** analyzes tourism demand for the destination Vietnam. A retrospective of the volume and structure of tourist visits to Vietnam for the period 2019-2025 is made.

After a record 2019 with 18 million international tourists, the pandemic caused a sharp decline in 2020–2021. Recovery began in 2022, and in 2024, Vietnam reached 17.6 million international visitors, approaching pre-pandemic levels. Domestic tourism remains strong, with over 110 million trips in 2024 (*Tourism Information Center, 2024*).

Major markets include South Korea, China, Taiwan, the United States, Japan, India and Australia. India is the country with the highest growth. Most tourists arrive by air (84%), highlighting the importance of aviation infrastructure. During the period under review, Vietnam has received international recognition and awards as a tourist destination. Vietnam is a 6-time winner of the "Leading Destination in Asia" award. Sites such as Ha Long, Hoi An and Phong Nha are on the UNESCO list. International press and travel media regularly rank Vietnam among the top destinations. (*Vietnam National Authority of Tourism (VNAT)*)

The conclusion is that Vietnam is establishing itself as a highly competitive and sustainable tourist destination with a rich natural and cultural heritage, preferred by millions of tourists.

The second **paragraph 2.2.** of the second chapter is dedicated to the characteristics of the Bulgarian emissive market.

**Subparagraph 2.2.1.** "Volume and structure of the Bulgarian outbound market" presents market trends in the period 2019-2025.

In 2019, Bulgarian outbound tourism reached 7 million trips, with the main motives being leisure, business purposes and cultural or social activities. Greece and Turkey are the most visited destinations. With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, the number of trips decreased by almost 45% and international tourism spending fell dramatically. The sector suffered severe economic losses, including a significant reduction in its contribution to GDP and a reduction in employment. (*National Statistical Institute (NSI), 2019-2025*).

The post-pandemic period 2021–2024 has seen a sustained recovery in outbound tourism. By 2024, trips abroad will exceed 8.8 million, with rising spending on services such as transport and food. Greece and Turkey once again dominate as preferred destinations. In 2024, an increase in travel for all purposes was observed, confirming the restored mobility of Bulgarian citizens. (*National Statistical Institute (NSI), 2019-2025*).

**Subparagraph 2.2.2.** "Profile of Bulgarian tourists" is dedicated to the systematization of the main characteristics of Bulgarian tourism consumers, which are important for the development of tourism market relations between Vietnam and

Bulgaria. The analysis focuses on the social and cultural life of Bulgarians, language and writing, the demographic situation with the fastest decreasing population in the world according to the UN, ethnicity and religion. Special emphasis is placed on the analysis of the economic aspects of tourist behavior. The main expenses of Bulgarian tourists are for food, accommodation and transport. The average cost of international travel in 2024 exceeds 846 BGN. Tourists prefer independent travel organization, with tour operator services being used to a lesser extent, especially for domestic tourism. The age distribution shows a dominance of young people (15–24 years) and middle-aged people (45–64 years).

**In subparagraph 2.2.3.** "Characteristics of the personality and psychology of communication of the Bulgarian" specific personality and psychological traits of the Bulgarian consumer are discussed regarding: collectivism and interpersonal ethics; non-verbal communication and etiquette; hobbies, habits and values. It is found that Bulgarians demonstrate a high degree of cultural sensitivity, patriotism and love for nature. Education, literature, theatre and discussion clubs are among the preferred activities. Behavior is direct but measured, and personal appearance and etiquette are seen as an expression of respect for oneself and others.

The chapter concludes by summarizing that the Bulgarian emissive market has demonstrated resilience and resilience after the global challenges of the pandemic. A strong cultural heritage, a stable economic framework and increasing mobility create conditions for expanding tourist horizons. In this context, Vietnam represents a potential high-value destination, building on long-standing diplomatic, educational and cultural ties with Bulgaria. The development of bilateral tourism exchange can serve as a platform for deepening the strategic partnership between the two countries.

The last **paragraph 2.3** of the second chapter assesses Vietnam's competitive positions on the Bulgarian emissive market through the prism of Bulgarian tourists and representatives of the tourism business.

**Subparagraph 2.3.1.** "Assessment of Vietnam's offer according to Bulgarian tourists" contains an analysis of the results of a survey conducted among Bulgarian tourists staying in hotels in the capital Hanoi. Over 120 tourists were surveyed using the respondent method.

The survey data reveal clearly expressed consumer attitudes. Most Bulgarians are informed about tourist destinations through travel agencies (58,3%) and social networks (29,2%). Preferences for organized trips (62,5%) prevail over independent trips (37,5%). Family trips prevail (69,2%), and the optimal duration is less than one week (62.5%). (Table 1)

**Table 1. Summary of questions about the habits and hobbies of Bulgarians when choosing a trip**

Questions	Answers	Unit %	Quantity
<b>1: Through what sources of information do you often learn about tourist destinations?</b>	A. Mass media	12.5	15
	B. Social networks	29.2	35
	C. Travel companies	58.3	70
<b>2: How do you like to travel?</b>	A. Travel according to itinerary from travel agent.	62.5	75

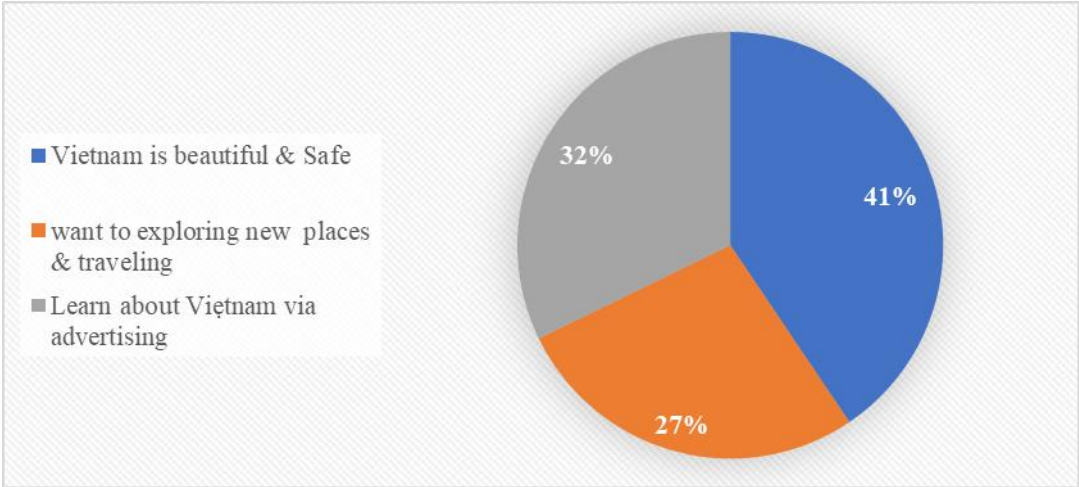
	B. Travel independently with your own schedule.	37.5	45
	C. Impromptu, without planning	-	-
<b>3: Who do you like to travel with?</b>	A. Family	69.2	83
	B. Friends	19.2	23
	D. Alone	11.7	14
<b>4: How long do you want a trip to last?</b>	A. Less than 1 week.	62.5	75
	B. 1 -2 weeks.	34.2	41
	C. > 2 weeks	3.3	4
<b>5. How do you go to tourist destinations?</b>	A. Country with the same national borders	15.8	19
	B. Countries in the same continent.	25.0	30
	C. Countries on other continents	59.2	71
<b>6: For what purpose do you usually travel?</b>	A. Fun and entertainment	50.0	60
	B. Work, Scientific Research	12.5	15
	C. Vacation	37.5	45
<b>7: What tourist destinations do you like to visit? (You can choose multiple answers)</b>	A. Mountainous areas/ difficult terrain /River areas or eco-tourism areas	50.0	60
	B. Places with cold, temperate, cool climates	45.8	55
	C. Historical and cultural sites/ Traditional craft villages	35.0	42
<b>8: What are you most interested in when traveling to a tourist destination?</b>	A. Cost of accommodation/food services.	36.7	44
	B. Services with separate fees when visiting/staying/experiencing...	13.3	16
	C. Scenery, beautiful scenery, famous places in the destination.	50.0	60
<b>9: What type of accommodation do you like best when traveling?</b>	A. Hotel	31.7	38
	B. Resort	40.0	48
	C. Accommodation at a local house (Homestay)	28.3	34
<b>10. How much money are you reading to pay per day on a trip?</b>	A. 50-99USD	69.2	83
	B. 100-149USD	25.0	30
	C. >150USD	12.5	7

*Source: the table was compiled by the author.*

Regarding the demographic structure of Bulgarian visitors to Vietnam, the dominant share belongs to the age group between 35 and 59 years, which covers 65.5% of all tourists. The share of younger people under 35 years of age is also significant (28.1%). Women represent over half of all Bulgarian tourists (>50%). The majority of trips are made for the main purpose of tourism and recreation, with this segment exceeding 70% of the total volume of visits.

Visitors highly appreciate the country's natural beauty, with the picturesque natural landscapes and unique cultural values characteristic of Vietnamese territory being particularly attractive to them. There is a special interest in sustainable natural resources, the authentic environment, as well as historical and cultural landmarks – including ancient temples, pagodas and archaeological sites.

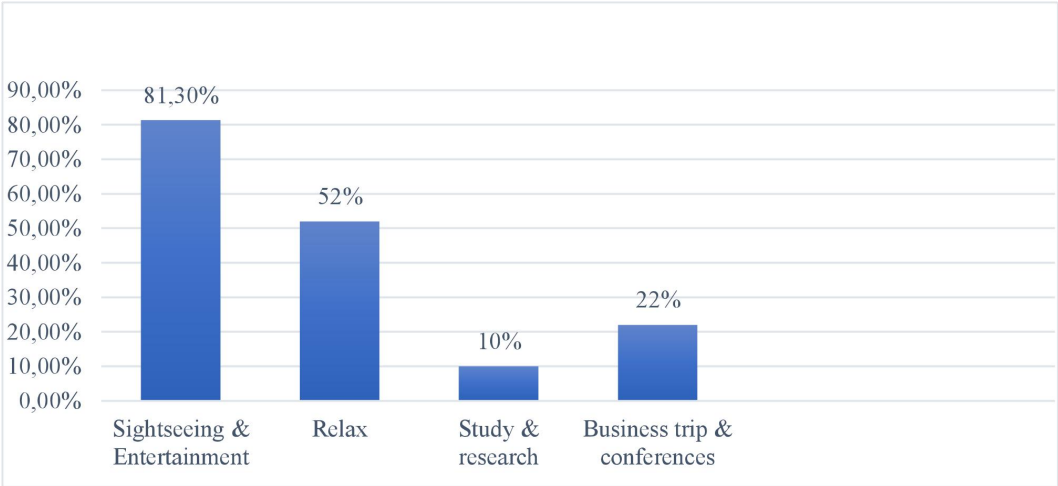
Tourist participation in traditional local festivals also constitutes a significant component of the experience, thus deepening understanding and respect for the rich cultural heritage of Vietnam – a country with a strategic location in Southeast Asia. In addition, the exceptional hospitality and warm attitude of the Vietnamese population stand out as a key factor contributing to the positive emotional attitude of international visitors, including tourists from Bulgaria (Chart 1).



**Chart 1. Reasons for choosing Vietnam for travel**

*Source: the chart was compiled by the author*

Among the most favorite activities of Bulgarian visitors to Vietnam are participation in tours to visit villages with local crafts and in tours to get acquainted with the lifestyle, traditions and culture of the local population. (Chart 2). Vietnamese destinations such as Hanoi, Nha Trang, Mui Ne, Ho Chi Minh City and Phu Quoc are particularly popular.



**Chart 2. Purpose of travel to Vietnam by Bulgarian tourists**

*Source: the chart was compiled by the author*

According to the assessments obtained from the survey, Bulgarian tourists also attach importance to additional factors such as environmental sustainability, quality of services and tourist infrastructure and superstructure. Vietnam is perceived as an economical destination, but with a need for improvements, mainly in infrastructure, the quality of the hotel product and digitalization.

In conclusion, we can summarize that the image of Vietnam and the Vietnamese people in the minds of Bulgarian tourists is extremely positive. A significant portion of Bulgarian citizens, especially representatives of the older generations, feel deep sympathy for the country, formed both by the historical relations between the two countries and by direct impressions of the cultural and natural features of Vietnam.

Over 80% of the surveyed respondents stated that after their trip they intend to actively promote Vietnam among their relatives and friends, and are also considering the possibility of returning to the country in the foreseeable future. As a result of the above opinions, Vietnam is seen as an attractive tourist destination by the majority of surveyed Bulgarian visitors. The data from the survey confirm the hypothesis that: *"Bulgarian tourists have a positive attitude towards Vietnam as a tourist destination."*

At the same time, the Bulgarian tourism market is characterized by clearly formulated expectations regarding the quality of tourism services. Although Bulgarian tourists are not distinguished by excessive demandingness, they demonstrate high standards in terms of several key aspects: quality of food offered, accommodation conditions, transport accessibility, environmental hygiene and professionalism of service personnel in the tourism sector. Respondents tend to openly point out existing weaknesses in the tourism infrastructure, especially with regard to travel security and safety, modern technological support, as well as visa issuance procedures and visa facilitation options.

A large majority of respondents express the opinion that Vietnam is not present with sufficient information on the Bulgarian emissive market and could increase the visibility of its tourist destinations through modern marketing approaches, including the use of public figures and influencers in advertising campaigns. The hypothesis is confirmed that: "Vietnam is not well represented as a tourist destination on the Bulgarian outbound market".

The online visa issuance system is perceived positively and is evaluated as part of the proactive policy of the Vietnamese government to promote inbound tourism. This facilitates access to the country and increases its competitiveness in the global tourism market.

The last **Subparagraph 2.3.2.** of the second chapter "The market position of Vietnam according to Bulgarian and Vietnamese tourism companies" presents an expert assessment of the tourism potential of Vietnam. Experts, representatives of tourism companies offering Vietnam as a destination on the Bulgarian market, identify key advantages such as natural resources, cultural diversity and affordable prices. The main weaknesses include underdeveloped transport infrastructure, language barriers, lack of direct flights and limited marketing activities.

Experts discuss Vietnam's geopolitical opportunities and regional competition. The reduced flow of Russian tourists due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict creates opportunities to attract Bulgarian tourists. Regional competition with Thailand and

Singapore necessitates the need to adapt strategies and improve the quality of the tourism product.

Along with the challenges, expert interviews confirm the hypothesis that: "*Vietnam as a tourist destination has great potential in the Bulgarian outbound market.*"

Regarding opportunities for expanding cooperation with Bulgaria, experts recommend expanding partnerships with Bulgarian tour operators, strengthening marketing activities with public figures, improving the language training of staff, and visa facilitation. The historical relations between Bulgaria and Vietnam are cited as an important intangible asset for the development of tourism between the two countries.

### **CHAPTER THREE. GUIDELINES FOR IMPROVING VIETNAM'S MARKET POSITION ON THE BULGARIAN TOURISM MARKET**

Chapter three systematizes the opportunities and guidelines for effective positioning of the tourist destination Vietnam on the Bulgarian emissive market.

Vietnam is establishing itself as a key tourist destination in Southeast Asia, marking stable growth in recent decades. In the context of increased international integration and placing tourism among national priorities, the need for a targeted analysis of the potential and challenges facing the country in attracting new tourism segments is highlighted.

In **paragraph 3.1**, an analysis is made that focuses on the Bulgarian market (2020–2025), applying a strategic SWOT framework and formulating specific recommendations for sustainable development.

***The following are highlighted as strengths of Vietnam:***

- *Political stability:* Vietnam offers a safe and predictable travel environment – a key factor for Bulgarian tourists.
- *Demographic potential:* Over 100 million inhabitants, a large part of whom are of working age – creates opportunities for the development of qualified tourism personnel.
- *Natural and cultural diversity:* A combination of natural resources, Buddhist architecture, French colonial heritage and culinary tradition.
- *Geographical connectivity:* A suitable location for transnational routes and combined tourist packages.
- *Competitive prices:* Affordable packages compared to other destinations in the region – important for the price-sensitive Bulgarian tourist.
- *Historical ties with Bulgaria:* The Vietnamese diaspora and the shared socialist history form a cultural and trust bridge.

***Identified weaknesses of the destination are:***

- *Lack of direct flights:* Extends travel time and increases costs.
- *Human resource deficits:* Insufficient training of personnel with knowledge of Bulgarian language and culture.
- *Infrastructure deficiencies:* Especially outside the big cities – road, sanitary and communication infrastructure.
- *Cultural distance:* Differences in social behavior and communication styles.
- *Low marketing visibility:* Low presence in Bulgarian media, tourist forums and digital platforms.

***Vietnam's opportunities as a tourist destination come down to:***

- *Interest in ecotourism:* Vietnam's natural resources meet the demand for sustainable travel.
- *Digitalization of search:* Opportunity to enter online platforms popular among Bulgarian users.
- *Electronic visa:* Facilitates access for Bulgarian citizens.
- *Geopolitical turmoil in the region:* Vietnam can position itself as a stable alternative to Thailand and Indonesia.

***The following threats also exist for Vietnam as a tourist destination:***

- *Global economic uncertainty:* Reduces the propensity for long and expensive trips.
- *Environmental pollution:* Especially in urban areas – a threat to Vietnam's image as a "green destination".
- *Low tourist loyalty:* Low share of repeat visits.
- *Intense competition:* Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia have better infrastructure and marketing capacity.

Based on the prepared AWOT analysis, a matrix of strategies is proposed, combining strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SO, WO, ST, WT)

• ***SO strategy: Mobilization of strengths to exploit opportunities:***

- ✓ *Cultural diplomacy:* Organization of events in Bulgaria (festivals, exhibitions, gastronomy).
- ✓ *Promotional e-visa packages:* Partnerships with tour operators to compensate for the lack of direct flights.
- ✓ *Diaspora marketing:* Social media and blogs to raise awareness.

• ***WO strategy: Using external opportunities to overcome internal weaknesses***

- ✓ *Digital transformation:* Bulgarian language website, social media, video content.
- ✓ *Human resources strategy:* Language courses, university partnerships, tour guide training.
- ✓ *Differentiated tours:* SPA, spiritual, gastronomic, cultural itineraries.

• ***ST strategy: Leveraging advantages to address threats***

- ✓ *Price positioning:* Vietnam as a safer and more affordable alternative to competitors.
- ✓ *Expansion of the tourism product:* More cultural, historical and spiritual content.
- ✓ *Cooperation with airlines:* Combined routes with a stopover in Istanbul, Doha or Dubai.

• ***WT strategy: Overcoming weaknesses and managing threats***

- ✓ *Cultural marketing tools:* Videos, virtual tours, webinars with Bulgarian subtitles.
- ✓ *Partnerships with agencies:* Joint offers and campaigns in Bulgarian media.
- ✓ *Combined regional tours:* Vietnam in a package with Thailand, Cambodia or Singapore.
- ✓ *Greening:* Plastic reduction, eco-certification, recycling infrastructure.
- ✓ Based on the formulated strategies, a recommended three-stage development program is proposed

- **Short-term plan (0–12 months)**

- ✓ *Digital marketing*: Website, social networks, influencers.
- ✓ *Diaspora activation*: Events, translations, videos with authentic stories.
- ✓ *Pilot tours*: Groups with preferential prices and test packages.

- **Medium-term plan (1–3 years)**

- ✓ *Staffing*: Training and certification of guides.
- ✓ *Creation of specialized products*: Cultural, eco, gastronomic, SPA tours.
- ✓ *Partnerships with tour operators*: Inclusion of Vietnam in the catalogs of leading agencies.

- **Long-term plan (3–5 years)**

- ✓ *Transport connectivity*: Direct flights or optimized routes.
- ✓ *Intergovernmental agreements*: For visa, administrative and infrastructure facilitation.
- ✓ *Sustainable tourism brand*: Focus on authenticity, tranquility and value.

**The conclusion** of the paragraph summarizes that the SWOT analysis outlines a real potential for sustainable development of Vietnamese tourism with a targeted focus on the Bulgarian market. The successful implementation of the proposals requires coordinated efforts between institutions, tourism operators, digital platforms and civil society. The combined approach - based on cultural diplomacy, digital marketing, human resource training and strategic partnerships - can establish Vietnam as a preferred and competitive destination for Bulgarian tourists in the period 2025 and beyond.

In **paragraph 3.2.** "Guidelines for the development of tourism supply in Vietnam" ideas for improving Vietnam's tourism offer for the Bulgarian tourism market are shared.

The development of tourism supply in Vietnam in the period 2025–2030 follows clearly formulated strategic priorities set by state policy and the tourism industry. The main goal is to establish Vietnam as a competitive and attractive destination in a regional and global context. Within this vision, multi-faceted efforts are being undertaken to diversify tourism products, introduce innovations, improve infrastructure and develop human resources. The paragraph summarizes the leading four directions and approaches for strategic development of the tourism sector.

**Firstly, diversification of tourism products and development of specialized offers.** The direction proposes:

*Regionalization and seasonal adaptation of products*

Vietnam places emphasis on developing products that are tailored to regional specificities, seasonality, and target markets. The approach assumes balanced development of the territory by exploiting local competitive advantages.

*Support for key forms of tourism*

Resort, cultural, health, MICE, golf and nightlife tourism are established as priorities. They generate high added value and meet the demand of middle and high-end tourists.

*Offering regionally specific experiences:*

- ✓ Northwest Vietnam – experiencing ethnic cultures;
- ✓ Central region – focusing on cultural and historical heritage and coastal islands;
- ✓ Mekong Delta – developing river and eco-tourism.

### *Developing specialized niches*

Attention is being paid to niches such as eco-, rural, agro-, island, educational, medical, industrial, adventure and sports tourism. The product portfolio is expanding to meet a wider range of interests and needs.

### *Luxury and Cultural Tourism*

Vietnam has significant potential in luxury tourism, where guests seek a combination of prestige and authentic experiences. An example of such an offering is the Capella Hanoi hotel with its Michelin-starred restaurant Hibana by Koki.

### *Family and leisure travel*

According to a report by Agoda (2025), there is a growing interest in family-oriented travel experiences. This creates opportunities to expand offers suitable for all ages.

**Secondly, Digital transformation and innovation in tourism.** The proposals in this direction are:

### *Technology Integration*

Vietnam's tourism industry should accelerate its digitalization by using virtual reality, artificial intelligence, mobile applications, cashless payments, digital cards and smart systems.

### *Improving customer experience*

The use of AI chatbots and mobile solutions increases the quality of service and the competitiveness of suppliers.

### *Offering new digital products*

Virtual tours, homestays, cultural exploration experiences stand out among the proposed innovations.

**Third, Infrastructure, international connectivity and market expansion.** The proposals in this area are:

### *Strengthening international promotion*

Vietnam should implement active marketing tools – roadshows, fam trips and digital advertising – with priority to markets with high stay value (including Bulgaria, Western Europe, USA, India, Middle East).

### *Infrastructure priorities*

It is proposed to strengthen investments in the destination's tourism, which should include: modernization of hotels and resorts, development of yacht and tourist ports, improvement of intercity roads and air connectivity, expansion of key airports: Noi Bai, Tan Son Nhat and the new Long Thanh.

**Fourth, human resource development and improving the quality of services.** The following actions are proposed for this purpose:

### *Training and professionalization of tourism personnel*

Preparing qualified personnel with language skills and cultural sensitivity is a key factor. It is necessary to introduce international service standards.

### *Support for SMEs*

Institutional support for small and medium-sized enterprises is needed through access to finance and technology, in order to raise standards, quality of products offered and sustainable development.

In summary, the paragraph discusses the strategic initiatives of the tourist destination Vietnam until 2030. They are specified in the following tasks:

- Development of transport infrastructure: modernization of highways (Bien Hoa – Vung Tau, Ring Road 4); expansion of Con Dao airport; introduction of an intelligent transport system for tourism purposes.

- Development of tourist superstructure: creation of nightlife areas in Hanoi, Da Nang and Ho Chi Minh City; investment in cultural institutions accessible also at night.

- Development of new destinations: emphasis on premium products and interregional routes with rich content and unique experiences.

**The conclusion** of the paragraph is that Vietnam should define a clear and multi-layered vision for the development of its tourism offering, aimed at quality, sustainability and global competitiveness. The combination of product diversification, technological innovation, infrastructure development and increased human resource capacity creates conditions for establishing the country as a leading destination in Asia. The Bulgarian market is emerging as promising and should be addressed with targeted marketing initiatives and strategic partnerships.

**The third paragraph** of the third chapter deals with the *differentiation and selection of target segments of Vietnam in the Bulgarian outbound tourism market*.

The modern Vietnamese tourism industry communicates its identity through the official slogan *Vietnam – Timeless Charm*, emphasizing the richness of nature, culture, hospitality, and unique experiences that the country offers. This communication approach plays an important role in enhancing Vietnam's international competitiveness, especially in the context of the Asian region.

To successfully establish itself in the Bulgarian outbound tourism market, Vietnam must strategically identify and target market segments with high potential. Market positioning should be based on a clearly formulated tourist image, differentiated competitive advantages and targeted marketing messages, tailored to the specifics of Bulgarian tourists - preference for warm destinations, accessibility, exoticism and cultural uniqueness.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increased interest in international travel, especially during the winter and spring months. In this context, market segmentation is becoming increasingly important for the development of bilateral tourism exchanges and increasing the market relevance of Vietnam among Bulgarian consumers.

Based on media, social media and empirical research analyses, four key target groups for Vietnam on the Bulgarian market can be identified:

***First group, tourists interested in culturally exploring Vietnam.***

- Profile: age 30–55; medium/high income; 1–2 trips per year; interest in destinations outside Europe.

- Suggestions: round trips (North–Center–South), cultural and historical programs, visits to UNESCO sites, tastings of local cuisine and markets.

***Second group, tourists for long-term holidays.***

- Profile: age 50+; seasonal travel; seeking peace and health services.

- Suggestions: seaside resorts (Nha Trang, Phu Quoc, Mui Ne), wellness tourism, participation in holidays and rural tourism.

***Third group, tourists combining business and travel.***

- Profile: businessmen, investors, professionals visiting Southeast Asia.

- Suggestions: MICE tourism (Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh, Da Nang), short excursions after events, business contacts with local industries.

***Fourth group, young travelers on a limited budget.***

- Profile: Age 20–35; students, freelancers; independent travel; high digital activity.

- Suggestions: Homestay, hostels, trekking in Sa Pa and Ha Giang, street food, motorcycle tours, volunteering and cultural exchange.

The systematic market segmentation of the Bulgarian outbound tourist market provides an opportunity for destination Vietnam to better understand the behavioral and consumer characteristics of different tourist groups. Based on properly selected target market segments, precise targeting and personalized communication strategies can be achieved, increasing marketing efficiency by minimizing advertising costs and creating specific products for Bulgarian tourists in Vietnam - cultural, resort, culinary and ecotourism.

The conclusion is that optimizing Vietnam's marketing efforts towards the Bulgarian outbound tourism market is possible by focusing on the most promising market niches. In relation to them, Vietnam can develop competitive tourism products, establish long-term partnerships with Bulgarian tour operators, and increase the number of tourists from Bulgaria in order to support the sustainable development of its tourism sector.

The last **fourth paragraph** of the third chapter contains *a formulation of a strategic marketing mix for positioning Vietnam on the Bulgarian tourism market.*

The basis of the programming is the classic 4P model (product, price, distribution, communication), adapted to the specific characteristics of Bulgarian consumers and tourism habits. The goal of the strategic marketing mix is to build a sustainable, differentiated and competitive tourism image of Vietnam, supported by effective market positioning and integrated communication.

Regarding the **product strategy**, the proposals include:

*First*, differentiation through sustainable and authentic tourism products. Integration in the offer of ecotourism, cultural and educational tourism, adventure and wellness experiences. It is necessary to improve the quality of service through intercultural training, language adaptation and publications in Bulgarian.

*Second*, creating unique experiences. Emphasis should be placed on maritime tourism, festival and cultural routes. Development of gastronomic and artisan tours, honeymoon visits and MICE tourism is recommended. Product offers need to be supported by digital tools: for example, a mobile application "one-stop-shop" for tourist packages.

Vietnam's **pricing strategy** for the Bulgarian tourism market should include:

*First*, competitive pricing. Package deals between 800–1300 euros for 7–10 days, with all basic services included, are suitable. Options for installment payments, early bookings and last-minute offers should be provided

*Second*, added value. Companies should offer free bonuses (massage, transfer, SIM card, souvenirs) to increase the satisfaction of Bulgarian visitors to Vietnam.

*Third*, seasonal price differentiation. A flexible pricing policy should be applied - increase in peak season, discounts off season.

*Fourth*, personalized pricing packages. It is recommended that pricing be based on budget segmentation (basic, standard, premium). In this case, special offers for families, retirees, and honeymooners are effective.

*Fifth*, institutional support and value communication. The proposal requires collaboration with airlines, agencies and national institutions. Compelling messages such as “Vietnam – a first-class experience at a friendly price” should be used.

Vietnam's ***distribution strategy*** towards the Bulgarian outbound tourism market is recommended to integrate various channels for the distribution of tourism products:

*First*, direct channels (B2C). It is necessary to create a multilingual travel portal with online bookings and SEO in Bulgarian. It is necessary to increase activity on social media with targeted content and advertising campaigns, as well as to ensure support for the offer through OTAs (Booking, Expedia) and travel apps.

*Second*, indirect channels (B2B2C). This direction includes effective partnerships with leading Bulgarian agencies and operators. Participation in international tourism exhibitions with sensory experiences (VR, tastings, crafts) can play an important role.

*Third*, diplomatic and cultural channels (G2B). The active role of the Embassy of Vietnam through cultural events and tourism diplomacy is crucial here.

*Fourth*, aviation and logistics channels. It is recommended to improve Sofia-Vietnam connectivity through partnerships with Turkish Airlines, Qatar Airways, etc. The use of promotions of combined “flight + tour” packages is important.

Vietnam's formulated ***communication strategy*** for the Bulgarian tourism market integrates the following steps and elements:

*First*, taking into account the market characteristics and perceptions of Bulgarian tourists when creating information messages. Communication on the destination of Vietnam must be adjusted to the digital maturity of Bulgarian tourists, especially the younger generations, as well as to the established demand for cultural and natural experiences with high emotional value.

*Second*, setting realistic strategic communication goals. These are building a recognizable image, raising awareness, long-term visibility and trust for the Vietnam destination on the Bulgarian tourist market.

*Third*, creating impactful components of communication implementation. Important in this direction are:

a) *Formulating a positioning message*. Successful slogans are such as "Vietnam - the hidden gem of Asia", "Discover Vietnam: culture, nature, soul".

b) *Using effective promotion channels*. Digital platforms (Google Ads, SEO, influencers), media partnerships, cultural diplomacy, organizing events and exhibitions are important for this purpose.

c) *Implementing attractive incentives and promotions*. Free visas, early booking bonuses, group discounts, annual promotional campaigns have a great effect on consumers.

d) *Implementation of monitoring and KPI*. It is necessary to measure the effectiveness of communication activities through search volume, web visits, actual trips, media coverage.

e) *Phases of implementation of the communication campaign of Vietnam on the Bulgarian and Eastern European outbound tourism market*. It is realistic to plan three phases of the communication campaign:

- Phase I: digital introduction of Vietnam destination to the Bulgarian market (0–12 months).
- Phase II: B2B partnerships and exhibitions in Bulgaria (1–3 years).

- Phase III: expansion to similar markets in Eastern Europe (after 3 years).

The *conclusion of the paragraph* summarizes that through the integrated implementation of a product, pricing, distribution and communication strategy, Vietnam can successfully position itself on the Bulgarian tourist market as: *"An Asian destination with a friendly face"; "Sustainable experience with high added value"; "Cultural and natural authenticity at a reasonable price". Sustainable positioning requires strategic coordination, market adaptation, and cultural sensitivity to achieve long-term competitiveness of the Vietnam destination in the minds of Bulgarian tourists.*

## CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the strategic opportunities and challenges facing the positioning of Vietnam as a tourist destination in the Bulgarian outbound market. Based on a synthesis of theoretical propositions, empirical data and strategic analysis, the paper argues that Vietnam has significant, but still underutilized, potential for developing bilateral tourist exchange with Bulgaria.

The study identifies key competitive advantages of Vietnam as a tourist destination – rich natural and cultural heritage, authentic gastronomy and affordable prices. It also highlights structural weaknesses such as limited awareness among Bulgarian tourists, difficult air accessibility and insufficient tourist infrastructure. All three research hypotheses regarding the positive attitude of Bulgarian tourists towards Vietnam, its weak market performance and its high potential have been confirmed.

Through strategic SWOT analysis and marketing recommendations, the study formulates realistic paths for entry and sustainable positioning of Vietnam on the Bulgarian tourist market. Particular attention is paid to the need for culturally adapted marketing strategies, cross-sectoral cooperation and active diplomacy in support of the national tourism brand. Specific proposals for state institutions, the tourism business, and cultural and diplomatic organizations are also presented, including digital transformation, sustainable tourism training, development of thematic tourism products, and promotion of cultural exchange.

As a contribution to the scientific and practical literature, the dissertation proposes a theoretical framework and an applicable model for the strategic positioning of emerging destinations in developing source markets. Prospects for future research are also outlined, including behavioral and comparative analyses that can deepen the understanding of the effectiveness of Vietnam's tourism marketing in Eastern Europe.

In conclusion, this paper affirms the realism and feasibility of Vietnam's strategic positioning in Bulgaria, emphasizing the importance of a coordinated approach between the public and private sectors to achieve sustainable growth, increased recognition and competitiveness of Vietnamese tourism at the international level.

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#### IV. REFERENCES ON THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DISSERTATION

As a result of the research work carried out on the dissertation, the following more important scientific and practical contributions can be highlighted:

*First*, a theoretical framework for the strategic positioning of emerging long-distance destinations in developing source markets has been systematized.

*Secondly*, a comprehensive analysis of the opportunities and challenges facing the positioning of Vietnam as a tourist destination on the Bulgarian emissive market is made. The thesis is argued that Vietnam has a significant, but still underutilized, potential for developing bilateral tourist exchange with Bulgaria. Key competitive advantages of Vietnam as a tourist destination have been identified – rich natural and cultural heritage, authentic gastronomy and affordable prices. Structural weaknesses such as limited awareness among Bulgarian tourists, difficult air accessibility and insufficient tourist infrastructure have been identified.

*Third*, through a strategic SWOT analysis and marketing recommendations, the study formulates realistic guidelines for Vietnam's entry and sustainable positioning in the Bulgarian tourism market. Recommendations are made for improving Vietnam's tourism offering to Bulgarian tourists. Possible target market segments for the destination Vietnam on the Bulgarian outbound market have been identified. Proposals for a strategic marketing mix for positioning Vietnam as a tourist destination on the Bulgarian outbound tourist market have been formulated. Particular attention is paid to the need for culturally adapted marketing strategies, cross-sectoral cooperation and active diplomacy in support of the national tourism brand.

#### V. LIST OF PUBLICATIONS ON THE TOPIC OF THE DISSERTATION

## ARTICLES

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