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MODERN APPROACHES TO DEFINITION ESSENCE AND CONTENT OF POSITIONING AS ELEMENT OF THE COMPLEX OF TOURIST MARKETING

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This article, based on the analysis of Russian and foreign authors' work, specifies and analyzes the most important approaches to understanding the contents and substance of positioning as an element of the tourist marketing mix; gives advantages and disadvantages for each of the specified approaches. Based on the shown analysis the author makes up the «positioning» notion definition in relation to tourist spots, as well as tourism agencies, products that they have, and services they provide, and make conclusions on further directions of developing positioning research within tourism marketing.

Key words: tourist marketing, marketing complex, positioning, positioning levels, positioning strategies, positioning stages, positioning system, image, brand.

The most mistakes occurring in modern travel operator and travel agent practice is related to implementing marketing mix. The contents of marketing mix, based on various authors' opinion, creates quite a few elements. The first concept of 4P marketing mix was expanded to 7P, then 9P, 13P, and now marketing researchers are speaking about two dozens of marketing mix elements. One of the traditional elements of the mix is positioning, that goes between market segmentation and tourism service promotion.

Positioning is one of the most complicated notions of modern marketing, and there is a plethora of scientific research as well as practical approaches to developing and implementing positioning strategies for tourist products, services, locations and companies. This article will specify the main approaches to defining the notion of «positioning», offer its own definition of positioning, consider its contents, main goals and principles taking into account specifications of the tourist industry.

Consumer approach for positioning understanding

The majority of modern domestic and foreign definitions of positioning can be generalized by specifying several approaches:

Positioning is defined based on consumer approach by G. D. Krylova, A. P. Durovich, E. P. Golubkov, N. K. Moiseeva, E. A. Dzhandzhugazova, G. A. Papiryan, G. D. Leonova, V. S. Yankevich, N. L. Bezrukova, A. E. Saak, U. A. Pshenichnyh, M. Kozak, I. L. Akulich. In the noted authors' definitions the main role in the process of positioning is given to

potential consumers, because their wishes and needs determine what characteristics will be given to the developed product (service), or how to change the product (improve the service) already sold in the market. As R. Tonge and D. Myott wisely noted, «positioning is what the marketer wants the target market to think about product, therefore positioning of the product must be consumer oriented» [30].

Therefore, G. D. Krylova notes that positioning is «determining the placement of a product in the market in the line with other similar products from the customer viewpoint» [14]. E. P. Golubkov shows us at the same time the need to choose such product parameters and elements of the marketing mix that from target consumers point of view will provide the product with competitive advantages [10]. E. A. Dzhandzhugazova in her defining the positioning process gives the leading role to service consumers, who, in accordance with her definition of the studied notion, «evaluate the place and position that travel companies take up in relation to their competitors» themselves [8].

As S. Horner and J. Swarbrooke note, positioning is «the position in the market which a product is perceived to have, in the minds of consumers, in relation to variables such as quality, value for money, and level of service» [27]. At the same time positioning has to help consumers realize that a product takes up a unique place in relation to its competitors. Product positioning is based on differentiation, cost and uniqueness. Positioning has to be done in accordance with market tendencies, consumer preferences, needed balance between price and quality, purchase convenience, new technologies and demographic tendencies and has to take into account all available opportunities and company resources in order to fulfill the promises [6].

Consumer approach can be implemented in two forms. In the first case positioning is done based on already available and formed consumer preferences. Therefore, A. E. Saak and U. A. Pshenichnykh suppose that positioning in tourism is «finding differences of company products from competitor products to attract special clients and more fully satisfy certain market segment needs» [26]. G.A. Papiryan also notes the need to account for target market needs when positioning travel product and travel services [24].

V. S. Yankevich and N. L. Bezrukova consider the main task of positioning as «determining different tourist product features among other similar products and making sure it is memorable and recognizable», which doesn't obviously take into account consumer preferences, but argues that a consumer is the main link of the noted process [29]. G. D. Leonova understands positioning as «determining the product placement in the market among similar products from the consumer point of view, which also points at the need of accounting for the target tourist market needs [16].

A. P. Durovich generally defines positioning as «fundamental marketing concept designed to implement its main goal – attract specific clientele and more fully satisfy the needs of a certain market segment» [7]. This definition clearly doesn't correspond to specialist needs and interests, because both the content-related part and the reference to the main needs list, necessary to achieve the aforementioned goals, are missing in it.

In the second case positioning is directed towards forming and correcting consumer preferences when they have clearly not been formed yet. Therefore, I. L. Akulich sees the main goal of positioning in «setting up one or several characteristics product (properties) or its brand, using which in the process of corresponding communications allows to

provide product competitive advantages in consumer brains» [26]. P. Kotler, J. Bowen and J. Makens are also talking about tourist products forming a competitive position in order to satisfy needs of consumer.

M. Kozak, talking about the positioning of tourist destinations, suggests that «a destination positioning strategy could aim to make customers perceive one destination as in some ways unique. If a destination is to be competitive it needs to focus on those factors that can help it to be distinctive. Therefore, the questions of how to sell the experience of a vacation at a particular destination rather than the sale of the resource itself might be of great concern in maintaining competitive advantage» [13].

Thus, it is possible to speak about true essence of consumer approach to concept «positioning» definition. On the one hand, the positioning task is bringing the benefits of new tourist products and services to consumers, representing primarily target market. On the other hand, it is possible to position modernized products, mainly taking into account available consumer preferences, products and services. And, at last, the third form of positioning is achievement of a stage of recognition of the tourist enterprise through tourist products and services offered them. At the head of a corner there is a consumer-tourist from the standpoint of which are held all estimates.

Process approach for positioning understanding

Process approach developed by such authors as M. Baker, C. Lovelock, G. L. Bagiyev, H. Anne, V. M. Tarasevich, comes to the positioning analysis as consecutive set of procedures implemented by sellers and vendors, whose main goal is achievement of certain competitive advantages, search of a suitable market niche. For example, in M. Baker's works the basis of positioning is the process of searching of such a market position for the company, a product or a service which will favorably sort it out from the position of its competitors [3]. Thus less attention is paid to bringing information about competitive advantages of a tourist product to a potential consumer.

C. Lovelock, defines essence and the content of positioning within procedural approach, and as its basis distinguishes «formation and support of accurate differences of goods and services which are notable and valuable for those clients with whom the company would like to develop long-term relations most of all» [20]. G. L. Bagiyev, H. Anne, V. M. Tarasevich place emphasis on developing an appropriate marketing complex to let the goods or services occupy competitive position in the market [2]. And all that makes their position closely related with P. Kotler's viewpoint. Also some elements of implementation the process approach in the concept of «positioning» determination we find in works of D. S. Ushakov, A. P. Pankrukhin, O. A. Bunakov, R. A. Fatkhutdinov, P. Kotler, A. P. Durovich and some other authors.

D. Bowie and F. Buttle, on the contrary, don't agree with the interpretation of positioning within process approach. Authors specify that the process can only be implementation of positioning strategy [4]. Thereby, positioning strategy is the process when the companies of the tourist industry try to develop special and favorable position in consciousness of the target markets in comparison with competitors, and the positioning itself should be understood as an element of the marketing complex which provides bringing the distinguishing features of tourist enterprises and their offers to the consciousness of the customers aiming the subsequent sorting them and their products out from their competitors.

Advantages of process approach allow to catch up the essence of positioning as an activity, as a set of actions directed to achieve competitive advantages and to form consumers' distinct associations of offered tourist products and services with specific territories and the tourist enterprises. Process approach allows to define positioning more precisely as one of the stages of the activity produced by tour operator and tourist's agency. At the same time process approach loses a personal (consumer) component from attention, considers specific features of tourist business as branches of the service industry insufficiently.

Image approach for positioning understanding

Image approach is presented by works of such authors as R. A. Fatkhutdinov, A. P. Pankrukhin, O. A. Bunakov, D. S. Ushakov, N. Morgan, A. Pritchard, L. J. Likorish, C. L. Jenkins, B. Ritchie, G. Crouch and is characterized by achievement of competitive advantages of travel agencies, and also tourist products and services offered by them through forming a positive and favorable image (and brand in the future) with potential customers' opinion. If in the previous two approaches the target basis of all definitions of positioning were accordingly consumer preferences, certain actions and processes, in this case the central element that is the purpose of the positioning is image formation.

According to R. A. Fatkhutdinov positioning is «developing and creating the image of the goods in such a way that it takes in consciousness of the buyer the worthy place different from position of rival goods» [9]. Here we can see the author's attempts to implement an integrated approach that is however doubtful as the declared purpose in determination is creating the image of the goods, and then its positioning through consciousness of buyers, sorting it out from competitors. A. P. Pankrukhin specifies quite the opposite sequence of actions – first determination of a line item of goods among competitors, and only then giving it a certain image on the target segment [23].

O. A. Bunakov in his researches represents positioning as a complex of actions on development of a tourist product offer and its image, directed to occupy the special, attractive position in consciousness of potential clients (tourists) that makes its line item related with the viewpoint of D. S. Ushakov [5]. However the author doesn't pay attention one of important levels of positioning that is the level of the tourist enterprise which makes the above line item one-sided and insufficient for its reference to an integrated approach.

Image approach develops as well in a number of foreign works. So, N. Morgan and A. Pritchard write that «the process in which a company communicates with consumers to establish a distinctive place for its brand in their mind... Positioning has been described as the essence of the marketing mix. It conveys the concept or the meaning of the product – how the product meets a consumer need – and different consumer meanings, or product images can be assigned to the same product» [21]. L. J. Lickorish and C. L. Jenkins believe that positioning is «where the organization seeks to be, in terms of customers' and retailers' perceptions of its products and its corporate image» [17].

B. Ritchie and G. Crouch write that «positioning seeks to define how a tourism firm or destination is viewed by the tourism market in terms of the benefits it is likely to provide vis-a-vis the many competitive firms or destinations from which the tourist may choose. On the basis of the positioning chosen, the firm (e.g. hotel) or destinations seeks to project this position to the marketplace through the development of a distinctive and strong brand» [25]. Therefore in foreign researches the problem of positioning products, destinations and

travel companies solved through the lens of brand-building, which is not always consistent with the realities of the Russian tourist business.

It is possible to state arguments both to protect, and to criticize the mentioned approach. So, in recent years in lots of publications on the theory and practice of tourism and tourist marketing there have appeared a great number of publications on problems of territorial and tourist branding and imaging. The analysis carried out by us showed that formation of image of a territory, a tourist enterprise, a separate product or a service is a complicated and in most cases purposeful process that is oriented on needs of the target market, instead of the needs of an indefinite people.

Thus, we agree with A. P. Pankrukhin's point of view that positioning is primary in relation to imaging and branding and that image formation and especially brand formation are the main goal of any marketing strategy. When authors using image approach for positioning definition as an element of tourist marketing, a lot of them admit a certain terminological confusion, because they separate such concepts as «image», «image», «brand» not enough distinctly. It is necessary to use of the concept «image» concerning a tourist product, tourist service, a tourist enterprise or tourist territory in case of its positioning on the market.

Integrated approach for positioning understanding

Integrated approach implemented in works of P. Kotler, J. Bowen, J. Makens, N. A. Kopylova, D. S. Ushakov, is based on emphasizing the special system status of the positioning concept in a complex of marketing activities of a company. This approach considers in a complex the impacts on consciousness of consumers, image component improving, detecting of competitive advantages, processes of bringing them to the customers, etc. Within this approach the positioning analysis is supposed as a systematic and integral marketing concept that doesn't allow to concretize the essence and the content of positioning is supposed, to make the practice of positioning usage in business address-oriented.

The well-known expert in the field of the theory and practice of tourism D. S. Ushakov treats positioning in tourism as «actions on development tour operator's offers and its image, directed on occupying the special favorable position in the consciousness of focus group consumers» [28]. He also implements an integrated approach, indicates to us the need of positioning not only at the level of tourist products and services, but also at the level of the tourist enterprise. This opinion can be extended to tourist destination and specialized tourist territories.

N. A. Kopylova treats positioning as «the direction of marketing activities to choose target markets, which implies analysis of elements of the marketing complex and line items of products on the selected market segments for the purpose of detection those parameters which promote to gain competitive advantages» [11]. This line item is coordinated with the definition of positioning given in P. Kotler, J. Makens and J. Bowen's works as «formation of a competitive line item for a tourist product and carefully developed marketing complex» [12].

The integrated approach introducing the greatest interest for system research of the essence and the content of positioning as an element of a tourist marketing complex, is based, in our opinion on the following three postulates:

First, in case of defining the term «positioning» within the integrated approach the trinity of its contents is imperatively emphasized:

1) sorting out the signs and characteristics of tourist services, territories, enterprises necessary for their identification on the market, subsequent assimilation and fixing in the consumers' memory;

2) achievement of competitive advantages via images created on the basis of the signs and characteristics mentioned above;

3) achievement of specific consumer segment of the target market, fixing in consumers' consciousness as an image (at the higher stage – as an image and a brand).

Secondly, positioning within the integrated approach should be understood with taking into account its hierarchical levels – functional, territorial, stadial about which we will speak later. In the most general option we should speak about different positioning – positioning at the enterprise level, positioning at the level of the territory (destination, locality), positioning at the level of products and services offered by tourism enterprises (offer positioning), positioning at the level of consumers (demand positioning), etc.

Thirdly, implementation of the integrated approach in relation with determination of the essence and the content of positioning allows to say that positioning is not only a process, an activity, a set of actions and events, but also the scientific and practical fundamental marketing concept, a peculiar base for development a strategy complex of positioning which make an essential impact on increase of marketing mix implementation efficiency as a whole, and also this or that development strategy of the enterprise, specific territory, or region.

The review of definitions of the concept «positioning» carried out by us within four basic approaches allows to claim that regardless of used approach to determination of tourist positioning, its purpose thus remains invariable that is an increase of competitiveness of tourist products and services, their sorting out from products and services of competitors. It is also obvious that positioning has specific focus on a certain consumer segment, and it allows itself to be considered as one of elements of a marketing complex which follows the stage of market segmentation.

In foreign marketing practice in case of positioning defining as an element of a marketing complex the priority part is assigned to tourist products and services, accurate distinguishing their characteristics and differences, which allows to attract potential consumers. That is the concept of positioning appears in its trinity and is based on three foundations, namely on the principle of 3P – the Product, the Price, the Position (concerning competitors). This approach should be considered as the most justified and that allows us to apply it further on.

Thus, positioning is carried out with taking into account specific target group of consumers for whom these advantages of tourist services which define their uniqueness and competitive positions are created and offered. It should be emphasized that when positioning a tourist product the considerable attention has to be focused on its psychological perception and its value for a consumer, but not so much on practical profit from using this product.

For more accurate and methodologically correct understanding of the essence and the content of positioning, execution of four principal conditions is required [5]:

– there should be a clear idea of the target market and buyers whom the company strives for. It is recorded that the same line item in the market can be considered differently by different buyers therefore it is important that impact of positioning on all target audiences is clear and impact on inappropriate segments is to be foreseen;

– advantages on which positioning is based, should be important for target buyers. Undoubtedly, the positioning of low prices offered to an insensitive segment to the prices doesn't make sense. Advantages or properties on which positioning is built should be attractive for target customers;

– positioning should be built on the valid force of the company and/or its trademark. In ideal the strengths or their combination are supposed to be unique for the company. The aiming at the most effective use of assets by the company creates a competitive position which guarantees the greatest stability and security against dangerous attacks of competitors;

– positions should possess the skill of communication, give the chance of contact with the target market. It usually means that they have to be simple and plain, be transferred by means of interesting image advertising or other means of communications.

A. M. Morrison offers its own model of effective positioning, including the five elements (model «5D») [22]:

1) Documenting – identifying the benefits that are most important to your customers;

2) Deciding – selecting the image that you want your customers to have within your chosen target markets;

3) Differentiating – identifying the competitors from which you want to appear different and the things that will make you different;

4) Designing – providing product or service differences and communicating these in positioning statements and via the marketing mix;

5) Delivering – making good on your promises.

Everything said above allows us to distinguish five fundamental signs that need to be put into the definition of positioning and be taken into account when evaluating its effectiveness in relation to tourism companies and tourism areas as well as in relation to tourist resources, products and services that those offer:

– stability – effectiveness of positioning is determined not only by a correct target market choice and competitor strategy, but also the activity, targeted work, financial stability, flexibility, competitiveness and other advantages and abilities of the tourist company or area itself;

– profitability – positioning has to bring profit to the tourist company; trying to catch the competitive position, your own market niche, satisfaction of the main mass of consumers for the target market, it's important not to forget your main goal – getting the profit without which company work loses any point;

– competitiveness – providing the most optimal market situation for a tourist company or tourism area by: a) separating from competitors; b) giving tourist products and services distinguishing characteristics; c) reflecting these distinguishing characteristics by different means (advertising, promotions, PR, etc);

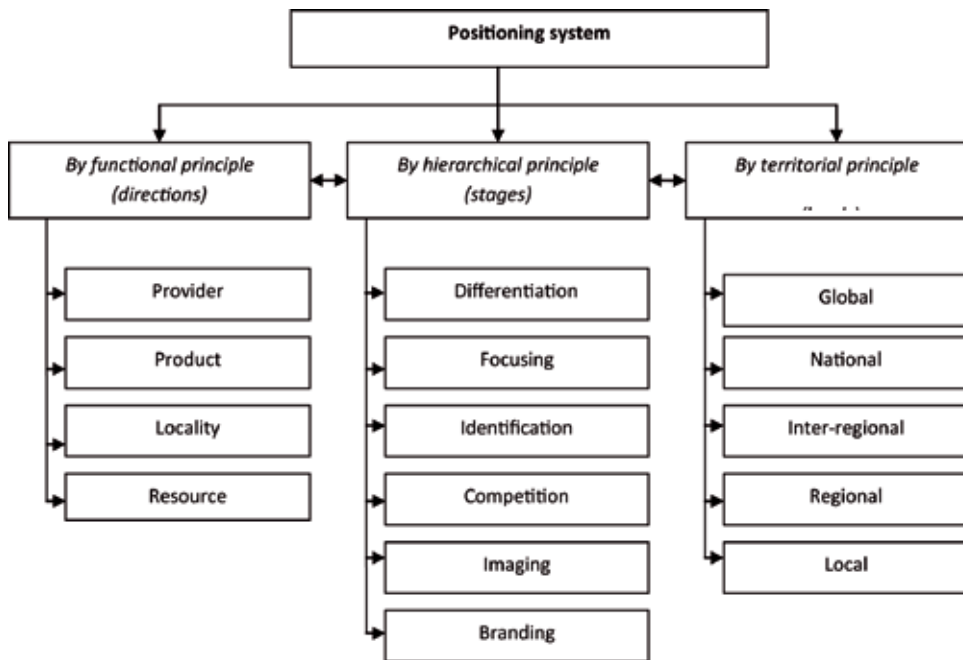
– brand orientation – the final result of any positioning strategy is forming at least a positive image about the offered products and services, positioning tourism companies and

areas and at least a clear and long-lasting brand, reflected in very different forms;
 – client orientation – in the center of any positioning strategy should be clients.

A certain disadvantage of the definitions shown for the «positioning» notion is the fact that the main attention is placed on positioning of producers and providers of tourist products and services while not any less important part of a tourist marketing mix is positioning of tourist areas as well as some opportunities (infrastructural, resource, service ones).

Based on the definition analysis done, we will imply by positioning a set of actions to create the most effective image of the region and its tourist opportunities, tourist product or service, tourist company that have to create a positive impression in consumers' minds that will be positively different from the impression of tourist opportunities in other regions, tourist products or services of competitive tourist companies, as well as the impression about the company-competitors.

Implementing the main principles for the systematic approach to positioning in tourism definition, let's imagine it as a system including the stages, levels and forms in it (picture 1).



Picture 1. The positioning system in the tourist marketing mix [18]

Based on the functional principle we can specify four key positioning directions, existing usually within the mix:

1) provider direction supposes positioning tourist companies for the region like tour operators, travel agents, subagents, as well as associated and complimentary companies and organizations for the tourism industry;

2) product direction, as the most important one, supposes positioning tourist products and services, planned and offered for sale in this or that region;

3) locality direction, connecting the area approach to promoting regional opportunities in tourism, giving the most attention to forming specialized tourist localities with subsequent development of tourism within these borders;

4) resource direction that is represented by positioning of the tourist potential for the specific area, that is, its infrastructural tourist opportunities (socio-economic resources), as well as the opportunities to develop tourism based on the available natural, historical and cultural, financial, labor and other resources.

This differentiation is determined by the existence of various marketing industries, including tourism marketing, area marketing, destination marketing, goods and services marketing, travel agency marketing, etc. However, the sphere of classical marketing influence includes mostly only goods, products and services positioning, while the destination positioning and positioning of tourist companies receives less attention.

For example, when looking at positioning within the destination marketing it's also important to distinguish together with the functional, the territorial positioning levels as well [19]:

- the global one, encompassing the world tourism market (for example, Eurasian market, American market, etc);

- the national, limited by the separate country and corresponding to the tourism market (for example, positioning of the tourism product for Russians, French, Americans, etc);

- the inter-regional, uniting several regions, that are within the macro region (for example, the «Large Volga» cluster, the tourism route «Big Baikal path», etc);

- the regional, separated by the borders of each region (for example, tourism markets of the Vologda Region, the Krasnoyarsk region, the Republic of Tatarstan, etc);

- the local, formed by the rural regions, localities and even separate companies and their complexes (for example, tourist regions of Saransk, the Tikhvin region of the Leningrad region, tour operator «Primavera» in the Saratov Region, etc).

It is possible to implement the positioning strategy at each territorial level for both tourism companies and territories, as well as tourist products and services. However, in order to develop both functional and territorial approach for positioning strategies, we will have one mechanism including six sequential and hierarchically subordinate stages [15]:

1) differentiation is based upon accentuation and popularization of a regional tourist product, it's competitive advantages and other tourist possibilities of certain territory with their successive dissemination to potential tourists' minds;

2) focusing is connected with forming in tourists' minds of positive image of a certain touristic product, tourist possibilities of a certain territory and a region in general with an emphasis on its most important peculiarities;

3) identification implies achievement of the free orientation level of potential customers in those tourist opportunities which the region can offer, their knowledge of the main range of products, directions and services offered by the region;

4) competition consists of framing and correction the strategy of competitive behavior of the region and vendors of tourist services in the national and international tourist markets, and also of demonstrating the competitive advantages, selecting themselves from

competitors;

5) imaging is in forming a positive image for the region and its tourist opportunities in the eyes of potential consumers, regional perception as an area that is most suitable to organize vacations;

6) branding is the highest degree of imaging, and it ends with forming and maintaining the brand, allowing to achieve clear and absolute consumer association for the region and its tourism opportunities with the high quality, safe, interesting and inexpensive vacation, as well as long-term competitive advantage.

Conclusion

So, in the presented work, based on the analysis of Russian, Ukrainian and foreign authors' work, we have specified and characterized four main approaches to determining the essence and contents of positioning as an element of a tourism marketing mix – consumer, process, image and complex (systematic). With the system thinking position we form our own definition of positioning that can be used for tourism areas as well as tourism companies, their products and services provided, characterizing its contents, implementation effectiveness, its structural elements and levels.

Further theory development for positioning in tourism marketing will allow, in our opinion, the following: a) to verify the essence of positioning and its strategies; b) to specify the main positioning stages from the process approach point of view; c) to explain authors' specifying ten positioning models; d) to create a system of positioning signs, criteria of its effectiveness as well as the strategies for positioning effectiveness; e) to improve the practice of implementing positioning strategies both at the tourist area level and at the level of travel companies, their products and services provided.

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СУЧАСНІ ПІДХОДИ ДО ВИЗНАЧЕННЯ СУТНОСТІ ТА ЗМІСТУ ПОЗИЦІОНУВАННЯ ЯК ЕЛЕМЕНТА КОМПЛЕКСУ ТУРИСТИЧНОГО МАРКЕТИНГУ

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На основі аналізу праць російських і зарубіжних авторів виокремлено та досліджено найважливіші підходи до розуміння сутності та змісту позиціонування як елемента комплексу туристичного маркетингу; наведено сильні й слабкі сторони кожного з виокремлених підходів. На основі зазначеного аналізу сформульовано авторське визначення поняття «позиціонування» як до туристичних територій, так і до туристичних підприємств, вироблених ними продуктів, що надають послуги; зроблено висновки щодо подальших напрямів розвитку досліджень позиціонування в рамках туристичного маркетингу.

Ключові слова: туристичний маркетинг, комплекс маркетингу, позиціонування, рівні позиціонування, стратегії позиціонування, стадії позиціонування, система позиціонування, імідж, бренд.

СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ПОДХОДЫ К ОПРЕДЕЛЕНИЮ СУЩНОСТИ И СОДЕРЖАНИЯ ПОЗИЦИОНИРОВАНИЯ КАК ЭЛЕМЕНТА КОМПЛЕКСА ТУРИСТСКОГО МАРКЕТИНГА

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На основе анализа работ российских и зарубежных авторов выделены и исследованы важнейшие подходы к пониманию сущности и содержания позиционирования как элемента комплекса туристского маркетинга; приведены сильные и слабые стороны каждого из выделенных подходов. На основе указанного анализа формулируется авторское определение понятия «позиционирование» применительно как к туристским территориям, так и к туристским предприятиям, производимым ими продуктам, оказываемым услугам; сделаны выводы о дальнейших направлениях развития исследований позиционирования в рамках туристского маркетинга.

Ключевые слова: туристский маркетинг, комплекс маркетинга, позиционирование, уровни позиционирования, стратегии позиционирования, стадии позиционирования, система позиционирования, имидж, бренд.