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## Wellness Tourism: Exploratory Analysis of Portuguese Consumers' Profile

Karen VILLARROEL  
Instituto Politécnico de Bragança (IPB), Bragança, Portugal  
a37879@alunos.ipb.pt

Alcina NUNES  
UNIAG (Unidade de Investigação em Gestão), Instituto Politécnico de Bragança (IPB), Bragança, Portugal  
alcina@ipb.pt

### Abstract

Wellness tourism is a recent and fast-growing trend globally that plays a significant role in the economic development of many tourism destinations around the world. Portugal already possesses a range of wellbeing activities to offer, for instance, the thermal springs that can constitute a more authentic tourism regional/local destination. This type of tourism offer can boost regional economies, improving both tourists' and residents' quality of life. In such a context, this research work intends to understand how the Portuguese residents understand the wellness tourism activities, particularly the thermal offer and to identify a customer profile. A questionnaire was conducted, to guide businesses into the comprehension of market needs and expectations according to the customers' profile, and an exploratory statistical descriptive analysis has been applied. The results allow designing a set of strategies according to the profile defined.

**Keywords:** Wellness tourism, thermalism, consumer profile, Portugal.

### Introduction

According to the United Nations (2010, p.1), tourism can be defined as "a social, cultural and economic phenomenon related to people's movement to places outside their usual place of residence, pleasure being the regular motivation". By this definition, it is possible to comprehend that movement is the basis of tourism. A reason why the pandemic situation generated by the COVID-19 is having a massive impact on this sector of the economy since it has been leading countries to close its borders, implementing quarantine procedures and lockdowns to reduce movement as measures to lower the containment curve. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the UNWTO registered a 22% global decrease in the international tourist arrivals, only in the first quarter of 2020, with a possible reduction between 60% to 80% for the year (World Tourism Organization, 2020). Although the borders have been reopened, and travelling is allowed again, the sector's damage will probably be even more significant.

The current scenario demands tourism destinations to re-evaluate its strategies and adapt them to the current circumstances and market demand, to be able to overcome the negative impact of the pandemic. A proof of this trend is that some countries are studying the virus's influence in the consumer's behaviour, for instance, Portugal (Turismo de Portugal, 2020). This type of stimulation to the tourism comes from the fact that this sector represents a critical economic development source due to its impact on the economy, the environment, the local population of the tourism offer and the visitors themselves (United Nations, 2010). A fact that occurs due to tourism influence on the region/country's GDP, the increase in the employment rate, and the rise in tax revenues related to the tourist's spending in the destination (Romanova et al., 2015).

However, the formulation of special programs and action plans to support, stimulate and strategically invest in tourism is not something that emerges from the current crisis. It has been an international concern since globalisation has facilitated travelling. For instance, Portugal has designed a strategic plan named *Turismo 2020*, which is based on

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several trends related to economy, demography, culture, transportation, technology and environment, to increase its tourism revenue (Turismo Portugal, 2014).

From many different types of tourism, this research work discusses a modality related to an idea that has become a flourishing and profitable movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the wellness tourism Global Wellness Institute (2019). With roots on ancient civilisations, wellness is a modern concept defined as the individual active chase of activities, choices, and lifestyle that lead to a state of health and wellbeing (Global Wellness Institute, 2019). Seen by some authors as a niche to be explored (Stara, Jana & Peterson, 2017) or as a product that evolved from a niche demand to a more mainstream holistic appreciation (Pyke et al., 2016), the fact is that wellness can lead to relevant economic developments in smaller tourism destinations.

The increased interest in wellbeing and a healthy lifestyle can be used by Portuguese businesses as an opportunity to boost demand on cities that have a wellness offer, such as thermal springs and resorts, and are located mainly in the central and northern regions of the country. However, before making investments to profit from this favourable market circumstances, private firms and public authorities must understand the wellness consumers' profile, needs, and expectations. By this understanding, it can be possible to formulate marketing strategies, increase awareness related to the concept of wellness tourism and then invest in innovative and differentiate products and experiences to enhance competitiveness (Fyall et al., 2013).

To guide the type of market profiling business could develop to study their consumers, this paper has created an online questionnaire to collect data about the tourism habits of the residents of Portugal. It was designed to analyse the participants' particular characteristics and evaluate the role they may play concerning the degree of familiarity with the concept of wellness tourism. The data collected through the questionnaire has been the object of exploratory descriptive analysis that allowed to start to understand the profile, needs and expectations of potential Portuguese consumers and therefore to begin reasoning about possible marketing strategies that boost the activity. The comprehension of the customers' market profiling allowed the development of a set of marketing strategies applicable to each particular demand and expressed the importance of collective work among private business and public authorities to create a complementary and unique offer in each wellness destination. A collaboration that can build a business opportunity and generate benefits for all parties involved, bringing economic development to the tourism destinations and increasing the quality of life of both tourists and locals.

The paper is divided as follows. Next section presents a brief literature review on wellness tourism for a better understanding of the topic. The section of literature revision is followed by a section that describes the methodology applied to obtain and treat the data. The results are presented in section 3. The paper ends with a section devoted to conclusions.

## Literature Review

It is not only the nature of the trip that defines tourism, but it is also related to the journey's objective (Lickorish & Jenkins, 1997). As already mentioned, this study's object is focused on wellness tourism, which is a type of travel related to the seeking of maintenance or increase of personal wellbeing (Global Wellness Institute, 2018). For some scholars, this type of tourism can be understood as a subgroup of health tourism; however, this category emphasises medical-treatment-oriented activities (Lehto & Lehto, 2019), that travel to seek treatment for some medical condition. By contrast, as defined by Romanova et al. (2015), wellness tourists are generally formed by people on the pursuit of preserve or increase their health. The Global Wellness Institute (2018) explains that there are two types of travellers included in this tourism market. Primary wellness travellers motivated by wellness to travel or choose their destination based on its wellness offer. Secondary wellness travellers seek to maintain wellness or engage in wellness activities during any travel, representing the most significant part of the wellness travellers.

Wellness tourism is a type of travel that deserves attention for many different reasons, not only because it has become a health-conscious international trend (Stara, Jana and Peterson, 2017) that influences a person's wellbeing and due to its economic representativity. Even though the wellness tourism does not represent a leading type of tourism if measured in the number of tourists, it has a tremendous positive economic relevance on the segment due to the high costs usually attributed to this service (Romanova et al., 2015). According to the Global Wellness Institute (2018), this tourism segment represented a growth twice faster than general tourism in 2017, generating a \$639 billion revenue among many elements of the global tourism industry in the same year. Moreover, the average expenditure of wellness travellers per trip is 53% higher than the typical international tourists and 178% more than domestic tourists.

Understanding the concept, the benefits and the demands of the market concerned with wellness tourism can help develop or strategically enhance products to fulfil this need. Being aware of this prosperous industry allows

companies, regions and countries to promote wellness activities and design a new market positioning related to this type of tourism (Stara, Jana, & Peterson, 2017). It is also an opportunity for business and tourism destinations to invest in creating a strategic advantage based on wellness orientation (Lehto & Lehto, 2019).

Based on the knowledge acquired about elements that contribute to traveller's wellness (Lehto & Lehto, 2019), marketers can detect a set of competitive advantages among location, quality of service, image, price (Romanova et al., 2015). To that end, it is necessary to establish an objective destination plan that should consider all factors of the internal and external environment, especially the human resources, which help to identify the uniqueness of the destination (Borseková et al., 2015). Moreover, the tourism staff, usually highly qualified labour, can be considered one of the essential sources for shaping the tourism offer's competitive advantage (Panasiuk, 2018).

When a product differentiation and positioning strategy is selected aiming to increase travellers' wellness by improving their personal experiences and expectations, an intangible tourism product is created (Lehto & Lehto, 2019; Romanova et al., 2015). Furthermore, positioning must consider target-consumers and attributes and the organisation's ability to communicate its offer to effectively create relevant differentiation aspects for their tourism destination brand (Brito & Pratas, 2013). Moreover, Brito and Pratas (2013) argue that tourism destination brands must have its concept well defined to meet the needs and desires of the tourist segments to target, using marketing concepts and tools to promote the tourism destinations. Another thing to remember is that wellness tourism offers have to be well advertised and diversified to avoid one of its main challenges: seasonality.

The travel process starts before the trip, while travellers are searching for information related to tourism destinations, mostly gathered online (Lehto & Lehto, 2019). A distribution channel that can also be an advantage when well-managed due its convenience, ease and comfort of purchase methods (Nizioł & Żeglen, 2017). A reason why the promotion of tourism destinations can make use of traditional and mobile websites (Romanova et al., 2015), offering the possibility of online booking and interactive communication (Lopes et al., 2013). It can also happen through partnerships with the destination's tourism authorities (Pongwat, 2017), and social media applications, which can provide a variety of multimedia information (Roque & Raposo, 2013). Digital brochures, printed media and television could also be considered (Brito & Pratas, 2013) if it suits the business purposes and size.

Another attractive option could be the design of "tourism packages" offering a variety of goods and services provided by the region around the main attraction that could serve many different purposes, expanding sales and increasing the economic development of that destination (Nizioł & Żeglen, 2017). Innovative strategies that can give wellness tourism providers a more effective method of reaching consumers create favourable conditions to provide complementary services and generate opportunities to cooperate with other stakeholders of the tourism area (Panasiuk et al., 2016). In the opinion of Pyke et al. (2016), the concept of wellness as a product has moved from a niche market to a more fundamental type of demand, representing an opportunity that offers potential economic growth for the tourism destination that includes it in their business strategies. Innovative and marketing orientated approach can promote wellness tourism destinations to develop healthy lifestyles and increase wellbeing to attract visitors who are willing to have this type of experience (Pyke et al., 2016).

Wellness tourism consumption is a business that brings benefits for all its stakeholders. Firstly, to the traveller through their worthwhile personal experiences. Secondly, it offers new possibilities for creating new job positions, increasing employment, attracting tourists and inhabitants, developing tourism orientated entrepreneurs, and stimulating the social-economic of the destination (Borseková et al., 2015). According to Romanova et al. (2015), health and wellness tourism are strongly influenced by social, national and cultural traditions and peculiarities related to geographic locations and local features. In addition to this fact, understanding the demands of the wellness market can lead its tourism sector to develop services and products to address the current trends of this market (Stara, Jana and Peterson, 2017). Furthermore, it allows business and countries to design and promote wellness tourism to attract tourists even out typical tourism high seasons.

Portugal is a country in the top ten wellness tourism market in Europe (Global Wellness Institute, 2018). The thermalism is one of the seven subproducts of health and wellness tourism that Portugal can provide, including Thalassotherapy, SPAS, Medical Tourism, Aesthetics Tourism, Holistic Tourism and Climatism (Silva & Carvalho, 2011). Significantly, the country is known for its vast and varied range of thermal resources, with a thermalism based mostly in the medicinal, therapeutic, and social aspects of this offer and SPAs and wellness facilities (Cavaco et al., 2008). The country's Northern region has the most significant quantity of thermal resorts and SPAs, 21 in the total, which represents 40% of the national offer (Porto e Norte Termas, 2016). Still, other areas in the country also provide a thermal offer, for instance, the Center region and Açores.

It is possible to understand that the concept of wellness provides various related products to be explored by the tourism sector, promoting a healthier lifestyle to visitors and an economic development to the destination as a whole. However, Portugal's thermal springs and resorts should understand the new expectations of tourists and follow recent international trends in wellness tourism, providing unique and creative experiences to visitors. Moreover, the atmosphere linked to structure, staff, and activities must be attractive and match the new market requirements for this sector. Another key to remember when rebranding the country's thermal facilities is to establish network connections and partnerships between the resorts and other tourism offers and products in the region where the company is based. Each area of the country has a different set of tourism particularities in its geography, variety of products and services, that make the place unique serving as a complement to the thermalism present in the same region can provide exclusive trips to customers. This one-of-a-kind services and goods package can help the destination to gain a competitive advantage in the market, which will increase the economic development of that particular place, and in a further instance, also improving the Portuguese income.

Above all, this joint effort must have the Portuguese national and regional tourism organisations' participation through policies and investments in the sector. Their central role should be the support of opportunities to businesses overcome financial constraints, design new national marketing strategies that can attract investors and create a diversified operational structure of networking, which may increase the chance of companies succeed in the market (Nizioł & Żeglén, 2017). Furthermore, the government plan strategies must increase investments in the education of tourism-related courses to provide better prepared and highly qualified labour force to the market, which would raise the quality of a significant part of production factors in the tourism economy (Panasiuk, 2018). As a wellness activity, the thermalism in Portugal has to meet new demands to change its image, innovate and conquer new markets, and survive and prosper. To be more competitive and attract more tourists, Portuguese companies must follow international trends in online access to information, quality and innovative infrastructure, plus propose an extensive and original range of programs, treatments and activities (Gonçalves & Guerra, 2019).

## Methodology

In order to achieve the objective of this research work was necessary to collect primary data. The data collection relied on a questionnaire that was promoted online due to the limitations generated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The safety measures adopted to lower the contamination numbers lead to the temporary closure of many SPAs and thermal springs, making it almost impossible to apply the questionnaire with their customers. Furthermore, due to the social distancing required and mobility reduction during the pandemic, travels to question people in person had to be avoided. The questionnaire has been formulated with quantitative and qualitative questions, based on two questionnaires already tested and present in the literature review. The first is a questionnaire made by the Turismo de Portugal (2006) to analyse the profile of the consumer of health and wellness tourism in Portugal. This paper also selected some questions from Luo et al. (2018) that aimed to correlate the quality of life and the wellness tourism experience. Moreover, some items of those questionnaires were added, excluded, or adapted to fit this study's purpose.

The questionnaire was distributed randomly online, and it was asked to Portuguese residents answer it between September and October 2020. During two months was possible to collect 121 valid answers from all over the country.

The questionnaire's variables proportionate a better understanding of the tourist profile related to its gender, age, educational level, occupation, marital status, household income, nationality, and residence local. Furthermore, this research also aimed to gather information about their tourism habits, such as the motivation to travel, media used to find information related to the destination place, methods used to reserve and acquire activities and accommodation. Plus, for how long, when, and how many times the respondents prefer to travel, also answering if they are more inclined to do a solo or an accompanied trip. The last part of the inquire was designed to comprehend if the tourists know or would like to discover the concept of wellness tourism.

The data is analysed using descriptive statistics for the explanatory variable and the logistic regression method to define the Portuguese residents' profile statistically.

## Results and Discussion

As explained, the questionnaire was divided into three different categories. The first two are general questions for all respondents. The last part leads to a particular set of items displayed accordingly to a positive or negative answer about being familiar with the concept of Wellness tourism.

The first stage of the questionnaire (Table 1) is related to the personal profile of the 121 participants.

It is possible to identify some peculiarities at this stage, starting with the difference related to gender in interest in answering a questionnaire associated with Wellness tourism. The number of female participants is almost double of the male respondents, representing 80 members (66,9%), which can illustrate that women are more sensitive to the appeal of this type of tourism. At the same time, 77 of the answers are coming from people that are more than 36 years old (63,6%). Concerning the level of education, 81 persons do not have an academic degree, which may connect with the oldest part of the mature participants. Regarding occupation, 66 people were employed (54,5%), while the rest were students, retirees or unemployed. A slightly most significant part of the answers received was from single or widowers participants, characterising 67 people (55,4%). The majority of the respondents earn less than 2.000€ per month (63,6%). Almost all participants were Portuguese, responsible for 106 observations (87,6%), while 70 responses (57,9%) came from the North of Portugal.

**Table 1: Socio-demographic profile**

Variable	n	%	Total (n)
<b>Sex</b>			
Female	80	66.1	
Male	41	33.9	121
<b>Age</b>			
Young (18-35)	44	36.4	
Mature (36+)	77	63.6	121
<b>Education</b>			
Basic education	81	66.9	
Graduation	40	33.1	121
<b>Occupation</b>			
Employed	66	54.5	
Other	55	45.5	121
<b>Marital State</b>			
Married	54	44.6	
Other	67	55.4	121
<b>Income</b>			
<2.000€ month	77	63.6	
>2.000€ month	44	36.4	121
<b>Nationality</b>			
Portuguese	106	87.6	
Other	15	12.4	121
<b>Region - NUTS II</b>			
North of Portugal	70	57.9	
Other regions	42	34.7	121

The next table (Table 2) also represents universal questions concerning the participants' tourism habits, a part of the questionnaire that aimed to understand, for instance, the respondents' motivation to travel, among other tendencies.

It was possible to identify that the seeking of wellness is not the first desire when travelling, corresponding to only 25 of the answers (20,7%), almost one-third of the first position related to discovering new places. Amongst the variety of information sources, with the technology advances, the internet is the top option of search by being the primary source of 61 people (50,4%) using the offers and destinies websites, plus 17 answers (14%) of people that use social media as a research tool.

Their acquisition or reservation of tourism attractions is also mostly done online, using the attraction's websites, related to 67 answers (55,4%). The first two positions among the participants' favourite options are nearly tied in which concerns accommodation since hotels with 4 or 5 stars have received 32 of the choices (26,4%) and hotels with 1 to 3 stars were the most used accommodation of 31 people (25,6%). Associated with the travel itself, 45 respondents (37,2%) do not have a preferred time to travel, the average length of 3 days to one week was the choice of 94 participants (77,7%) and half of the inquired people travel two times per year, representing 61 of the answers (50,4%). Moreover, their last habit questioned was related to travelling company, to which 90 people (74,4%) have answered that family is with whom they are used to travel.

Table 2: Tourism habits

Variable	n	%	Total
<b>Which is your motivation to travel?</b>			
Seeking of Wellness	25	20.7	
To discover new places and people	69	57.0	
To escape the routine	3	25.0	
Entertainment	24	19.8	121
<b>How do you search for tourism offers and destinies? (Select the primary source of information)</b>			
Travel agencies	13	10.7	
Brochures and/ or catalogues	1	0.8	
Specialised press	5	4.1	
Family and friends	20	16.5	
Social media	17	14.0	
Tourism offer/destiny website	61	50.4	
Other	4	3.3	121
<b>Where do you acquire or reserve a tourism attraction? (Select the main option or the one that is used the most)</b>			
Travel agencies	27	22.3	
At the place/at the tourism attraction	17	14.0	
Tourism attraction website	67	55.4	
Other	10	8.3	121
<b>Which type of accommodation are you used to reserve?</b>			
Local accommodation	23	19.0	
Apartments or tourist villages	16	13.2	
Family's or friends' house	3	2.5	
Hostel	8	6.6	
Hotels (1-3 stars)	31	25.6	
Hotels (4 or 5 stars)	32	26.4	
Camping parks	2	1.7	
Guesthouses or inns	1	0.8	
Housing tourism or in the countryside	4	3.3	
Other	1	0.8	121
<b>Which is your favourite period to travel?</b>			
Throughout the year, regardless of the week	45	37.2	
During scholar vacations	39	32.2	
Long holidays	12	9.9	
Weekends	17	14.0	
Other	8	6.6	121
<b>Which is the medium length of your stay when you travel?</b>			
From 1 to 2 days	13	10.7	
From 3 days to one week	94	77.7	
From 2 weeks to one month	14	11.6	121
<b>How many times do you travel along the year?</b>			
One time	18	14.9	
Two times	61	50.4	
Three times	27	22.3	
Four times or more	15	12.4	121
<b>You usually travel with...</b>			
Friends	21	17.4	
Family	90	74.4	
Alone	10	8.3	121

This study is relevant because it can guide marketing strategies to stimulate the interest on weak points revealed by the survey. For instance, the seeking of wellness can be better promoted by companies that work in this field, such as SPAs, Thermals, meditations camps, etc. The approach also can be designed using this research as it has shown that most of the tourists search on the internet for information and acquisition purposes. It can help a business to understand where to concentrate the marketing investments. The preferred type of accommodation, the period for

travelling, the length of the travel, periodicity of the trips and favourite company can be used as a guideline to create promotions and tourism packages specially designed for each group of tourists.

Among the overall participants of this questionnaire, 74 have responded that they are aware of the concept of Wellness tourism (61,2%). The Thermals is responsible for 24 answers (19,8%) related to which wellness tourism attraction they have already done. Moreover, the primary reason for 47 people (38,8%) to choose a wellness activity was due to their personal initiative, and 61 respondents would like to repeat the experience. Furthermore, 41 participants (33,9%) answered that they had acquired the wellness activity with a tourism package. This information is pertinent to stimulate the collaborative work amongst tourism destinations that can create partnerships in that region, making the offer in that region a unique and exceptional experience for the tourist. This type of package can increase the income of that region, as shown in the literature, by being a win-win opportunity for locals, business and travellers.

From the initial 121 participants, 47 (38,8%) were not familiar with the concept of Wellness Tourism. However, 42 (34,7%) of them said they were interested in discovering this type of experience. Among the respondents, 35 people (28,9%) affirmed that they knew that thermals are a wellness activity even though they could not fully understand wellness tourism. Moreover, 28 participants (23,1%) have visited before a thermal facility and would like to repeat the experience. The number of negative answers can give to wellness activities business, especially thermals SPAs, the notion of how this type of tourism offer lacks promotion, proportionating to companies the necessary knowledge related to the formulation of new marketing strategies.

The profile of the participants that know what wellness tourism is is mostly formed by women (74,3%), mature people (60,8%), with an academic degree (71,6%), employed (56,8%), not married (60,8%), having an income lower than 2.000€ per month (56,8%) and predominantly from the Northern region of Portugal (51,5%). The group of the ones that know the concept and enjoy repeating the experience is composed generally by women (77%), mature participants (57,4%), that pursue an academic degree (72,1%), employed (55,7%), single or widowers (60,8%), who earn less than 2.000€ per month (62,3%) and are residents of the North of Portugal (51,7%).

The data clarifies that people that are familiar with this type of tourism and tourists that know the wellness concept and would appreciate repeating the experience is very similar. This characterisation can provide to business an idea of which type of approach to use with those consumers that already know and enjoy wellness activities, that could be more related to the reinforcement of customers' loyalty. By contrast, companies can develop strategies to captivate tourists that are unfamiliar with wellness offers or that for some reason do not wish to repeat a wellness experience.

People who ignore the meaning of wellness tourism but are interested in discovering are constituted by women (54,8%) and mature people (66,7%). Still, this time, tourists with no academic degree are more interested in learning this concept (71,6%). Employed people and not married are tied, each group, respectively, is formed by half of the respondents (50%). Simultaneously, the other variables remain similar to previous cases. Participants having an income lower than 2.000€ per month represent (78,6%) and are predominantly residents of the Northern region of Portugal (80%). Accompanying the negative answers related to the knowledge about the wellness concept, at the beginning of this questionnaire section, a definition of this type of tourism was given to allow the respondents to be familiar with the term. Among the 47 participants unfamiliar with wellness tourism, 42 were interested in trying it for the first time (89,4%). By having this result, companies can understand that a share of the market is willing to experience a wellness activity after learning the meaning of this particular offer. For instance, businesses can create special promotions for tourists with a low income or specific packages designed to people who are not married but would like to travel alone, with friends or family to profit from some time of relaxation.

## **Final Remarks**

From the managerial perspective, for wellness tourism businesses established in Portugal, mainly if they are focused on the thermal segment, this type of market study is essential. It allows resorts and SPAs managers to understand customer' profiles, needs and expectations and formulate future strategies to first, increase the awareness about this tourism offer to then, through their satisfaction, motivate customers loyalty.

The knowledge related to the market demands associated with efficient marketing and managerial approaches can result in a better performance for the company, leading to a more remarkable economic development of the region if tourism businesses work in collaboration to proportionate to consumers a unique experience. All factors associated can increase the number of tourists returning to the wellness activities to profit from all offers available in that tourism region, generating a better quality of life for locals and visitors (Fyall et al., 2013). A reason why national and regional governments must invest in strategies and policies to develop public-private partnerships in tourism destinations, which can bring benefits to all wellness tourism stakeholders (Romanova et al., 2015).

Through packages or promotions, this unique product created by an association of regional wellness companies, accommodation and food sectors, can increase the competitiveness of the tourism industry in that place. Among people familiar with wellness tourism, 55% had answered that when they acquired a wellness activity, they have purchased this offer with a tourism package, which illustrates the importance of this collaboration to increase product differentiation. Moreover, the creation of wellness services packages associated with other tourism offers can also increase the awareness of the meaning of this type of experience, boosting the level of interest in this variety and reach different market segments (Gonçalves & Guerra, 2019; Nizioł & Żeglen, 2017; Panasiuk, 2017).

When product differentiation and positioning strategies are adopted, marketers can define a set of competitive advantages, that can be chosen among image, location, quality of service, physical attributes and price (Romanova et al., 2015). For instance, a rebranding of the wellness thermalism could change the impression that this activity is only for the elderly with health problems. By promoting this experience as a source of relaxation and a healthy lifestyle focused on recreation (Boekstein, 2014), young people could be more interested in experiencing this tourism proposal. The wellness industry is also more associated with female public, as proved here - women are more aware of the wellness tourism concept. The diversification of products focused on male consumers, such as men-only SPAs or male-related types of treatments (Tawil, 2011), could work as an image transformer, raising men's interest in this segment. As 74,4% of the participants declared that they usually travel with their families, location and infrastructure can also play a role in promoting wellbeing initiatives (Pyke et al., 2016), when designed to entertain tourists of all ages and genders.

As analysed by this paper, the general perception is that wellbeing related types of tourism are formulated to upper-class consumption (Pyke et al., 2016), that has a better-understood concept among high-income people, as this paper has confirmed with the survey results. However, amid the group not familiar with wellness tourism, the most interested participants were those with income lower than 2.000€. Special promotions developed to target this group, as day-spas or weekend packages, could break the barrier related to the perception of a tourism offer only to elites and stimulate the low and middle classes consumption of wellness activities. Management actions can also help solve another challenge faced - the seasonality (Romanova et al., 2015). This kind of promotion can be offered along the entire year, to attract tourists with different activities even in the low season.

Even though the Northern region of the country is responsible for the second-largest thermal offer, its residents are less familiar with the wellness concept than the rest of Portugal, which illustrates the lack of promotion. Furthermore, the North of Portugal's thermalism lost 19,1% of its customers in 2014 (Turismo de Portugal, 2015), which demands a new approach if this type of tourism aims to be profitable and competitive. Another vital information given by this study is that if put together websites and social media, more than 64% of the respondents have affirmed that they use the internet as a primary source of information related to destinations and tourism activities. The internet, accompanied by word of mouth (the advice of friend or family) and their own experiences, is one of the main channels of communication for wellness businesses (Romanova et al., 2015), a reason why companies and destinations should increase their promotion on this media.

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