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THE IMPORTANCE OF PROMOTION AND SALES MANAGEMENT OF HOTEL SERVICES IN SERBIA

ABSTRACT: The subject of this research is the management of the promotion and sales of hotel services as significant factors in the business success of hotel enterprises and the development of tourism in the Republic of Serbia. Given that the fact that the modern hotel industry operates in conditions of intense competition and rapid digitalization, special attention is paid to the analysis of promotional activities and sales channels that influence the market position of hotel establishments.

The aim of this paper is to determine the importance of effective promotion and sales management of hotel services, as well as their contribution to increasing tourist flows in Serbia. The research employs content analysis of relevant domestic and international literature, the descriptive method, and statistical analysis of data on tourist arrivals and overnight stays in the Republic of Serbia during the observed period.

The research results indicate that modern promotional tools, particularly digital marketing, social media, and online

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reservation systems, have a significant impact on increasing the visibility of hotel enterprises and attracting guests. Furthermore, effective management of sales channels contributes to higher occupancy rates of accommodation facilities and improved business performance. It can be concluded that promotion and sales represent key functions of hotel management, whose continuous improvement contributes to enhancing the competitiveness of the hotel sector and increasing tourist flows in the Republic of Serbia.

Key words: hotel industry, promotion of hotel services, sales of hotel services, digital marketing, tourist flows, tourist overnight stays, Republic of Serbia.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades, the service sector has experienced significant growth and has assumed an increasingly important role in the structure of modern economies. Its development has been particularly pronounced in economically advanced countries, where service industries represent one of the key drivers of economic and social progress. At the same time, the strengthening of the tertiary sector is also evident in developing countries, although at a slower pace and with considerable differences among individual nations. These changes highlight the growing importance of services as a driver of economic activity and the enhancement of competitiveness in the modern marketplace (Čačić, 2013).

Tourism represents one of the most significant contemporary socio-economic phenomena, encompassing a wide range of participants and activities. Its importance is reflected in the impact it has on various spheres of society, including the economy, culture, politics, and overall social development. Owing to the numerous direct and indirect effects generated by tourism activities, tourism plays an important role in stimulating economic growth, improving living standards, and fostering the development of local communities. As a result, it occupies a prominent place in contemporary development processes worldwide (Thommandru et al., 2023). Among service industries, the hotel sector occupies a special position due to its contribution to tourism development, economic growth, and value creation. Therefore, the management of the promotion and sales of hotel services has become one of the key factors for the successful operation of hotel enterprises (Evans, 2024).

As one of the key components of the tourism industry, the hotel sector plays a significant role in tourism development and in generating its

economic benefits. The quality and availability of hotel services directly influence tourist satisfaction, the length of their stay, and the competitiveness of a tourist destination. In an environment of increasing competition in the tourism market, the successful operation of hotel enterprises increasingly depends on the effective management of service promotion and sales, which enables the attraction of new guests, higher occupancy rates, and improved business performance (Morrison, 2022).

One of the key characteristics of the modern hotel industry is the intensive internationalization of business operations and the expansion of hotel companies into new markets. A particularly important role in this process is played by large international hotel groups, which operate in numerous countries around the world. When entering a new market, these companies adapt their service offerings to the needs of their target customer groups, which already constitute their core clientele. Business travelers represent a particularly significant segment, as their requirements regarding the quality and range of hotel services influence the design of service offerings. Consequently, international hotel chains implement market segmentation strategies and develop different brands in order to respond more effectively to the needs of specific market segments (Baker, Magnini, 2016; Gursoy, 2018).

Contemporary trends in international hospitality are also reflected in the development of the hotel sector in the Republic of Serbia. In recent years, Serbia has recorded growth in tourist flows, an increase in accommodation capacity, and the arrival of renowned international hotel chains, which have contributed to improving service quality and strengthening the competitiveness of domestic hospitality. In such conditions, the successful operation of hotel enterprises increasingly depends on their ability to effectively manage promotional activities and sales processes, while adapting their offerings to the needs of different tourist segments (Dovgal, 2019; Morhulets et al., 2024). Therefore, the management of the promotion and sales of hotel services represents one of the key factors in the development of the hotel industry and the increase of tourist flows in the Republic of Serbia, which is also the subject of analysis in this paper.

MANAGEMENT OF HOTEL SERVICE PROMOTION IN MODERN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

Promotion, or marketing communication, represents one of the most important instruments of the marketing mix in tourism and hospitality. Its primary role is to establish and maintain communication between service providers and potential customers, with the aim of informing, persuading,

and encouraging consumers to purchase tourism and hotel services. Through promotional activities, a positive image of products and services is created, their market recognition is increased, and demand is stimulated. In this way, promotion becomes an important factor in the successful completion of the exchange process between service providers and users. (Bateson, Hoffman, 2013; Lamb et al., 2013).

The particular importance of promotion in tourism and hospitality stems from the fact that tourism and hotel services are intangible and cannot be fully evaluated by consumers prior to consumption. Therefore, promotional activities aim to bring the characteristics of the service closer to potential guests, reduce uncertainty in the purchasing decision-making process, and shape their expectations. At the same time, promotion represents a two-way communication process that enables tourism and hotel enterprises to monitor the needs, desires, and expectations of consumers and to adapt their offerings accordingly (Popesku, Gajić, 2020). The importance of promotion is further emphasized by the specific characteristics of the tourism market, where supply and demand are spatially separated and consumers travel to the place where the service is provided. In such conditions, promotion plays a key role in connecting the tourism offer with potential customers and represents one of the most important instruments for attracting guests and enhancing the competitiveness of hotel enterprises (Kotler et al., 2010).

Promotional activities in tourism and hospitality encompass various forms of communication between service providers and target consumer groups, with the aim of presenting the tourism offer and stimulating interest in its use. Through the marketing communication process, the characteristics of tourism and hotel services are brought closer to potential guests, thereby reducing uncertainty in the purchasing decision-making process and increasing the likelihood of choosing a specific destination or accommodation facility (Hudson, S., Hudson, L., 2017).

Picture 1: Hotel Promotion on Social Media



Source: https://www.milanstojkovic.com/promocija-hotela-na-drustvenim-mrezama/

In addition to formal forms of promotion, word-of-mouth (WOM) communication holds particular importance in tourism and hospitality, as it is based on the exchange of experiences and recommendations among consumers themselves. Although hotel and tourism enterprises do not have full control over this form of communication, they can influence its development by providing high-quality services and creating positive guest experiences. The importance of word-of-mouth promotion has further increased with the development of the internet and social media, which enable the rapid spread of impressions, comments, and recommendations to a large number of potential customers, making it a key factor in the decision-making process regarding travel and hotel accommodation choices (Pourfakhimi et al., 2020).

The importance of promotion in tourism and hospitality is particularly evident during the decision-making process regarding travel and the selection of a tourism product. Consumers go through several stages before, during, and after travel, starting from recognizing the need to travel, through gathering information and selecting a specific destination or service, to evaluating the experience after the trip has ended. In each of these stages, promotion plays an important role in informing, guiding, and shaping the attitudes of potential consumers (Kryukova, Khetagurova, 2020).

In contemporary market conditions, an increasing number of enterprises apply the concept of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), which implies the coordinated use of different forms of promotional activities in order to deliver a clear, consistent, and persuasive message about the company and its offer to target markets. The essence of this approach is reflected in improving the quality of communication between the company and consumers, as well as in achieving a more efficient long-term market exchange within a given time period (Ņikadimovs, 2019).

The promotional mix within Integrated Marketing Communications includes several instruments that complement each other and jointly contribute to the achievement of marketing objectives (Čerović, Knežević, 2021):

- Advertising is one of the most widely used forms of promotion, enabling rapid and mass reach to target groups through various media, but with the limitation of lacking direct feedback.
- Personal selling is based on direct contact between the seller and the buyer, enabling interactive communication and more precise adaptation of the offer to consumer needs.
- Direct marketing is focused on individualized communication with consumers, with the possibility of personalizing messages and measuring effectiveness.

- Internet promotion enables global visibility at relatively low costs and supports developed two-way communication with users.
- Sales promotion involves short-term incentive measures aimed at increasing sales, while it is important to consider their impact on the long-term image of the service.
- Publicity and public relations play an important role in shaping market perception through the publication of information in the media and the creation of a positive image.
  Sponsorship represents an additional promotional tool that enhances the recognition and image of a company through support of various events and activities.

Promotional activities enable hotel enterprises to establish communication with their target market and influence the consumer decision-making process. Through various forms of marketing communication, consumers receive information about available alternatives, their characteristics, and advantages, which facilitates their choice. The ultimate goal of promotion is to influence consumer perception, attitudes, and behavior, increasing the likelihood that they will choose a particular hotel service.

MANAGEMENT OF HOTEL SERVICE SALES AND DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS

The sale of hotel services differs from the sale of most tangible products in that it is often completed well before the actual consumption of the service. Guests most commonly book accommodation in advance, either directly through reservation systems or via travel agencies, tour operators, and other intermediaries. Therefore, there may be a shorter or longer time period between the moment of sale and the moment the service is delivered. This specificity arises from the fact that in hospitality, the processes of service delivery and consumption occur simultaneously, which makes sales planning and management extremely important. Timely sales enable hotels to reduce business risk, improve occupancy rates of accommodation capacities, and more efficiently plan their business activities (Anderson, Xie, 2010).

When planning sales activities, an important role is played by the choice of sales intensity, that is, the way in which hotel services will be placed on the market. This decision directly affects market coverage and the achievement of business objectives. Intensive sales involve presence on a broad market with cooperation with a large number of sales intermediaries.

On the other hand, selective sales are focused on specific market segments and a limited number of partners, while exclusive sales involve cooperation with a single selected intermediary in a specific market or territory. The choice of an appropriate approach depends on the business strategy of the hotel enterprise, the characteristics of the target market, and the desired level of market presence (Chang, 2017; Lin et al., 2022).

Hotel enterprises can distribute their services through direct and indirect sales channels, as well as a combination of these two approaches (Đurašević, 2008). In practice, the combined model is most commonly applied, as it enables more efficient achievement of sales objectives and broader market access. In the second half of the 20th century, intermediaries played a dominant role in selling hotel capacities, primarily travel agencies and tour operators, which significantly influenced occupancy rates and the distribution of hotel services. However, the development of information and communication technologies, particularly the internet, has brought significant changes to the way hotel services are sold. Modern hotels today have the ability to establish direct communication with guests through their own reservation systems and independently manage the booking process. In addition, hotel enterprises can be included in joint reservation networks and global distribution systems, thereby increasing the availability of their offer on the international tourism market (Weilbaker, Crocker, 2001).

The advancement of information and communication technologies has significantly influenced the transformation of sales in hotel and tourism services. Modern technological tools have enabled more efficient management of accommodation capacities, improved revenue performance, better communication with guests, and the development of various forms of business cooperation among participants in the tourism market. As a result of these changes, traditional sales models have been gradually replaced by modern digital solutions that enable faster and more efficient distribution of tourism products and services. Of particular importance are electronic intermediaries and various information systems that support the reservation and sales process. Among them, computerized reservation systems of hotel, transport, and tourism companies stand out, as well as global distribution systems that connect a large number of service providers and sales partners, and destination management systems that contribute to more efficient management of the tourism offer of a particular destination (Dzhandzhugazova et al., 2016).

Distribution channels represent one of the most important instruments of the marketing mix in tourism and hospitality, as they enable the connection between service providers and end users. In modern business conditions, their importance is continuously increasing, as they play a key role in achieving competitive advantage and improving the business

performance of tourism and hotel enterprises. The primary task of distribution channels is to make hotel services accessible to consumers in a way that best meets their needs and expectations, thereby facilitating the purchasing process and the realization of market exchange (Taylor, 2012).

In addition to their sales function, distribution channels also have an important informational role. They enable the transfer of information between service providers, intermediaries, and potential tourists, thereby contributing to better market awareness. At the same time, modern distribution systems provide the technical and organizational conditions for the reservation, confirmation, and payment of tourism and hotel services, which significantly simplifies the purchasing process and increases the accessibility of the offer (Middleton, 1994).

Distribution channels can be viewed as a link between providers of tourism services and their users. In practice, distribution systems most often include several different channels that operate simultaneously, complement and, at the same time, compete with one another. In this process, intermediaries such as travel agencies, tour operators, and online booking platforms play a significant role, as their function is to connect supply and demand, improve market efficiency, and create new opportunities for the placement of tourism and hotel services. In this way, distribution channels contribute to market expansion and increase the accessibility of the tourism offer to different consumer segments (Čerović, 2009).

Based on the above, it can be concluded that the success of hotel service sales does not depend solely on the selection of appropriate sales channels, but also on their alignment with promotional activities. Regardless of whether a hotel uses direct, indirect, or combined sales, it is necessary to continuously develop effective promotional strategies that contribute to the recognition of the offer and the attraction of target guest segments. Of particular importance are creatively designed promotional messages that enable differentiation from the competition, as well as regular monitoring of promotion costs and effects in order to achieve optimal business results. Integrated management of sales and promotion represents one of the key conditions for increasing the competitiveness of hotel enterprises and achieving successful performance in the modern tourism market.

THE IMPACT OF PROMOTION AND SALES OF HOTEL SERVICES ON TOURIST FLOWS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

The contemporary development of tourism is characterized by numerous changes that go beyond traditional factors of tourism supply and

demand. Driven by scientific and technological progress, digitalization, and globalization processes, tourism flows are becoming increasingly intense and widespread, contributing to the growing importance of tourism in the economic and social development of many countries. These changes are present both in developed and developing countries, regardless of whether they have a predominantly receptive or outbound tourism function (Čerović, 2002).

In such conditions, hotel enterprises face increasingly strong competition and the need to implement modern marketing activities. Effective management of the promotion and sales of hotel services has become one of the key factors for attracting tourists, increasing accommodation occupancy rates, and improving the competitiveness of a destination. Through various promotional activities, digital communication channels, and modern sales systems, hotels are able to increase their visibility on the market and influence the decisions of potential guests (Dalgiç et al., 2017).

The importance of these activities is particularly evident in the Republic of Serbia, where tourism development in recent years has been accompanied by an increase in tourist arrivals and overnight stays. An analysis of tourist flows can provide insight into the relationship between the improvement of promotional and sales activities of hotel enterprises and the results achieved in the tourism sector. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the extent to which the promotion and sale of hotel services contribute to the increase in tourist flows and the further development of the hospitality industry in Serbia (Ilić, Stefanović, 2019).

Tabel 1: Tourist flows in Serbia for the 10-Year Period (2015-2024)

Year	Tourists			Overnights stays of tourists			Average number overnight stays of tourists	
	in total	domestic	foreign	in total	domestic	foreign	domestic	foreign
2024	4.432.751	2.048.016	2.384.735	12.662.151	6.564.402	6.097.749	3,2	2,6
2023	4.192.797	2.058.492	2.134.305	12.440.935	6.858.331	5.582.604	3,3	2,6
2022	3.869.235	2.096.472	1.772.763	12.245.613	7.306.219	4.939.394	3,5	2,8
2021	2.591.293	1.720.054	871.239	8.162.430	5.732.833	2.429.597	3,3	2,8
2020	1.820.021	1.374.310	445.711	6.201.290	4.936.732	1.264.558	3,6	2,8
2019	3.689.983	1.843.432	1.846.551	10.073.299	6.062.921	4.010.378	3,3	2,2
2018	3.430.522	1.720.008	1.710.514	9.336.103	5.678.235	3.657.868	3,3	2,1
2017	3.085.866	1.588.693	1.497.173	8.325.144	5.150.017	3.175.127	3,2	2,1
2016	2.753.591	1.472.165	1.281.426	7.533.739	4.794.741	2.738.998	3,3	2,1
2015	2.437.165	1.304.944	1.132.221	6.651.852	4.242.172	2.409.680	3,3	2,1

Source: Statistical Offce of the Republic of Serbia, Municipalities and Regions in the Republic of Serbia

Based on the presented data from Table 1, several clearly identifiable trends in tourist flows in the Republic of Serbia can be observed during the period from 2015 to 2024.

First of all, the period from 2015 to 2019 is characterized by continuous growth in tourist flows. The total number of tourists increased from 2,437,165 in 2015 to 3,689,983 in 2019, representing an increase of over 50%. At the same time, the number of overnight stays rose from 6,651,852 to 10,073,299. A particularly significant increase is observed in the number of foreign tourists, which grew from 1,132,221 to 1,846,551 during the observed period, indicating the strengthening of Serbia's international competitiveness as a tourist destination. These results can be linked to the improvement of the tourism offer, more intensive promotional activities, and the development of modern sales channels for tourism and hotel services.

The year 2020 represents a turning point due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused a significant decline in tourism activities at the global level. The number of tourists in Serbia decreased to 1,820,021, representing a drop of approximately 51% compared to 2019. A particularly pronounced decline was recorded in the number of foreign tourists, from 1,846,551 to only 445,711, or more than 75%. A similar trend was observed in the number of overnight stays, which fell from 10,073,299 to 6,201,290. During this period, domestic tourists became the dominant driver of tourism demand, as evidenced by the fact that they accounted for almost four times more overnight stays than foreign tourists.

During 2021, a gradual recovery of the tourism sector occurred. The number of tourists increased to 2,591,293, while the number of overnight stays reached 8,162,430. The recovery was primarily driven by the domestic market, whereas the number of foreign tourists was still significantly below the pre-pandemic level.

In the period from 2022 to 2024, intensive growth in tourist flows continued. Already in 2022, the total number of overnight stays exceeded the level recorded in 2019, while 2024 marked the highest tourist flows in the observed period. The total number of tourists reached 4,432,751, while 12,662,151 overnight stays were recorded. It is particularly significant that the number of foreign tourists in 2024 amounted to 2,384,735, substantially surpassing the pre-pandemic record from 2019. These indicators confirm the successful recovery of Serbia's tourism sector and the growing attractiveness of the country on the international market.

By analyzing the average number of overnight stays, it can be observed that domestic tourists consistently recorded longer average stays than foreign tourists throughout the entire observed period. For domestic tourists, the average number of overnight stays ranged between 3.2 and 3.6

nights, while for foreign tourists it ranged between 2.1 and 2.8 nights. During the pandemic, a slight increase in the average length of stay was recorded, which can be explained by a reduced number of trips and longer stays of tourists at destinations.

Viewed as a whole, the data indicate that tourist flows in Serbia recorded steady growth until 2019, followed by a sharp decline caused by the pandemic. However, thanks to the gradual recovery of tourism demand, the improvement of promotional activities, the development of digital sales channels, and the growing international recognition of Serbia as a tourist destination, tourist flows has been on an upward trajectory again since 2022. In 2024, the best results of the observed ten-year period were achieved.

The growth of tourist flows in the Republic of Serbia during the observed period can be linked to the improvement of promotional and sales activities in the hotel industry, as well as to significant investments in the development of hotel infrastructure. The increasing application of digital marketing, online reservation systems, and global distribution networks has enabled greater visibility of Serbia on the international tourism market and easier access for potential guests. At the same time, the growth in the number of foreign tourists indicates a more successful positioning of Serbia as an attractive tourist destination, which has been supported both by national promotional activities and the marketing campaigns of hotel enterprises (Marjanović, Djordjević, 2016).

Positive trends in tourist flows have also been accompanied by significant investments in the hotel sector. In recent years, renowned international hotel brands have been present on the Serbian market, while new high-category projects are simultaneously being implemented (Gligorijević, Kostadinović, 2023). The opening of the luxury St. Regis hotel in Belgrade in 2024, as well as the announced arrival of the InterContinental and Ritz-Carlton brands and new Hyatt properties, confirm the growing confidence of international investors in the development of Serbia’s tourism potential.

Tabel 2: Number of Tourists in Serbia by Categorized Hotels for the 10-Year Period (2015–2024)

Year	Tourists - in total					
	Hotels - all	5* hotels	4* hotels	3* hotels	2* hotels	1* hotels
2024	2.111.557	199.913	1.289.443	515.404	103.203	3.594
2023	1.955.389	187.556	1.167.839	480.397	115.029	4.568
2022	1.789.112	190.781	1.011.514	464.524	117.696	4.597
2021	1.314.105	164.505	700.264	320.743	103.843	24.750
2020	836.951	92.297	427.354	218.912	79.718	18.670
2019	1.947.924	169.847	976.889	561.715	172.184	67.289
2018	1.832.432	142.164	858.521	574.449	179.408	77.890
2017	1.670.821	140.328	779.521	522.413	170.824	57.735
2016	1.517.243	118.141	704.354	461.996	168.037	64.715
2015	1.336.203	105.778	568.999	439.746	153.613	68.067

Source: Statistical Offce of the Republic of Serbia, Statistical yearbook

The data from Table 2 indicate a continuous increase in the number of tourists in hotels in Serbia during the observed ten-year period, with the exception of 2020 and 2021, when the COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant decline in tourist flows. The total number of tourists increased from 1,336,203 in 2015 to 2,111,557 in 2024, representing a growth of approximately 58%. After the pandemic minimum in 2020, when only 836,951 tourists were recorded, a gradual recovery followed, and 2024 recorded the highest number of tourists in the observed period. These trends follow the overall growth of tourist flows in Serbia and the development of the hotel industry over the last decade.

Viewed by hotel categories, four-star hotels hold the most significant share throughout the entire period. The number of tourists in this category increased from 568,999 in 2015 to 1,289,443 in 2024, representing more than a twofold increase. In 2024, approximately 61% of all hotel tourists stayed in four-star hotels, confirming the dominant position of this category on the market. At the same time, five-star hotels also recorded significant growth, with the number of tourists increasing from 105,778 to 199,913, or by almost 89%. These data indicate a growing demand for higher-quality accommodation capacities and an increasing presence of higher-category hotel offerings in Serbia.

On the other hand, mid-range hotels, i.e., three-star hotels, also recorded an increase in the number of tourists, but at a significantly slower pace. Their number increased from 439,746 tourists in 2015 to 515,404 in 2024. The share of this category in total tourist flows has been gradually decreasing, indicating that part of the demand is shifting toward higher-

category hotels. A particularly pronounced decline is observed in the importance of one- and two-star hotels. The number of tourists in two-star hotels decreased from 153,613 in 2015 to 103,203 in 2024, while one-star hotels recorded a drop from 68,067 to only 3,594 tourists. These trends indicate changes in tourist preferences, with an increasing tendency to choose higher-quality accommodation, as well as a reduction in the supply or market relevance of lower-category facilities.

Based on the presented data, it can be concluded that the structure of tourism demand in Serbia has significantly changed over the last decade in favor of higher-category hotels. The dominance of four-star hotels, the continuous growth of five-star hotels, and the simultaneous decline in the importance of one- and two-star hotels confirm the trend of improving the quality of hotel offerings and rising tourist expectations. These developments represent a positive indicator of the growth of Serbia's hotel industry and its adaptation to the modern requirements of both domestic and international tourists.

Tabel 3: Number of Overnight Stays in Serbia by Categorized Hotels for the 10-Year Period (2015–2024)

Year	Overnights stays of tourists					
	Hotels - all	5* hotels	4* hotels	3* hotels	2* hotels	1* hotels
2024	4.869.863	454.784	2.864.391	1.230.737	283.761	36.190
2023	4.594.865	436.227	2.631.563	1.201.612	305.070	20.393
2022	4.508.357	453.277	2.396.856	1.299.030	341.976	17.218
2021	3.656.021	398.929	1.714.088	1.063.171	353.029	126.804
2020	2.510.335	226.094	1.129.593	748.767	285.377	120.504
2019	4.613.396	362.580	2.033.563	1.433.998	544.165	239.090
2018	4.273.488	308.198	1.792.040	1.410.638	534.223	228.389
2017	3.938.449	308.524	1.625.263	1.267.507	565.645	171.510
2016	3.593.999	265.800	1.471.545	1.132.668	549.169	174.817
2015	3.150.931	215.370	1.233.908	1.084.011	431.715	185.927

Source: Statistical Offce of the Republic of Serbia, Statistical yearbook

The data from Table 3 show that the total number of overnight stays in hotels in Serbia recorded a significant increase during the observed ten-year period. The number of overnight stays rose from 3,150,931 in 2015 to 4,869,863 in 2024, representing a growth of approximately 55%. As with the number of tourists, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a sharp decline in tourism activity in 2020, when only 2,510,335 overnight stays were recorded; however, a gradual recovery began already in 2021. The highest number of overnight stays was achieved in 2024, confirming the continuation of positive trends in the development of Serbia's tourism and

hotel sectors. These developments are in line with national tourism indicators, which show that 2024 brought an increase in total overnight stays and the continuation of post-pandemic tourism recovery.

Viewed by hotel categories, the highest number of overnight stays throughout the entire period was recorded in four-star hotels. The number of overnight stays in this category increased from 1,233,908 in 2015 to 2,864,391 in 2024, representing a growth of over 130%. The share of this category in the total number of overnight stays has been continuously increasing, so that in 2024 nearly 59% of all hotel overnight stays were realized in four-star hotels. Five-star hotels also recorded significant growth, with the number of overnight stays rising from 215,370 in 2015 to 454,784 in 2024, or by more than 110%. These data indicate a growing demand for higher-quality and more comprehensive accommodation facilities, as well as an improvement in Serbia's hotel offer in the higher-category segment.

Three-star hotels also recorded an increase in the number of overnight stays, but at a slower pace. Their number of overnight stays increased from 1,084,011 in 2015 to 1,230,737 in 2024. However, their relative importance in the overall structure of hotel overnight stays has been gradually declining due to the faster development of higher-category hotels. At the same time, two- and one-star hotels have recorded a pronounced decline in market share. The number of overnight stays in two-star hotels decreased from 431,715 to 283,761, while one-star hotels recorded a drop from 185,927 to only 36,190 overnight stays. These results indicate a shift in tourist preferences, with tourists increasingly choosing higher-quality accommodation facilities and a higher level of service.

Based on the presented data, it can be concluded that during the period 2015–2024, a significant transformation of the hotel accommodation structure in Serbia took place. The dominance of four-star hotels, the growth in overnight stays in five-star hotels, and the simultaneous decline in the importance of lower categories confirm the trend of modernizing the hotel offer and improving service quality. At the same time, the increase in the number of overnight stays indicates not only a higher number of tourists, but also longer stays in higher-quality hotel facilities, which represents a positive indicator of the competitiveness and development of Serbia's hotel industry.

There is a mutually dependent relationship between the development of the hotel industry and the growth of tourist flows. A higher number of tourists stimulates the construction of new accommodation capacities and the entry of international hotel chains into the domestic market, while at the same time the development of modern hotels, improved service quality, and more efficient promotional and sales activities further increase Serbia's attractiveness as a tourist destination. The results achieved in 2024, when record tourism indicators were recorded, confirm that promotion, sales, and

the development of the hotel offer are important factors in the further growth of the tourism sector in the Republic of Serbia (Vujadinović, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Modern hospitality operates under conditions of intense competition, rapid technological development, and increasingly demanding tourists, which is why the promotion and sales of hotel services play a key role in achieving the business objectives of hotel enterprises. The study indicates that effective management of these marketing instruments represents an important factor in attracting guests, improving the market position of hotels, and increasing competitiveness in the tourism market. Of particular importance are modern forms of marketing communication, digital marketing, social media, and online reservation systems, which enable direct communication with potential customers and increase the accessibility of hotel offerings in both domestic and international markets. At the same time, proper management of sales channels contributes to better occupancy rates and more efficient use of available resources.

The analysis of tourist flows in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2015–2024 showed that the number of tourists and overnight stays recorded continuous growth until 2019, followed by a significant decline caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, already from 2021, the tourism sector began to recover, while in 2024 the best results of the observed period were achieved in terms of both the number of tourists and overnight stays. A particularly significant increase was recorded in the number of foreign tourists, indicating the growing international recognition of Serbia as a tourist destination. These results can be linked to the improvement of promotional activities, the development of digital sales channels, as well as continuous investments in hotel infrastructure and the enhancement of service quality.

Based on the conducted research, it can be concluded that the promotion and sales of hotel services represent indispensable elements of successful hotel business operations and a significant factor in the development of tourism in the Republic of Serbia. The growth of tourist flows, the increase in the number of foreign guests, and the development of the hotel sector confirm the need for continuous improvement of marketing activities and adaptation to modern trends in the tourism market. In the future period, further development of digital technologies, innovative promotional tools, and modern sales channels will represent an important prerequisite for strengthening the competitiveness of domestic hospitality and ensuring the sustainable development of tourism in Serbia.

REZIME
ZNAČAJ PROMOCIJE I UPRAVLJANJA PRODAJOM HOTELSKIH USLUGA U SRBIJI

Predmet ovog istraživanja je upravljanje promocijom i prodajom hotelskih usluga kao značajnim faktorima poslovnog uspeha hotelskih preduzeća i razvoja turizma u Republici Srbiji. S obzirom na činjenicu da savremena hotelska industrija posluje u uslovima intenzivne konkurencije i brze digitalizacije, posebna pažnja je posvećena analizi promotivnih aktivnosti i kanala prodaje koji utiču na tržišnu poziciju hotelskih objekata.
Cilj ovog rada je da se utvrdi značaj efikasnog upravljanja promocijom i prodajom hotelskih usluga, kao i njihov doprinos povećanju turističkih tokova u Srbiji. Istraživanje koristi analizu sadržaja relevantne domaće i međunarodne literature, deskriptivnu metodu i statističku analizu podataka o dolascima i noćenjima turista u Republici Srbiji tokom posmatranog perioda. Rezultati istraživanja ukazuju da savremeni promotivni alati, posebno digitalni marketing, društvene mreže i sistemi za onlajn rezervacije, imaju značajan uticaj na povećanje vidljivosti hotelskih preduzeća i privlačenje gostiju. Štaviše, efikasno upravljanje kanalima prodaje doprinosi većoj popunjenosti smeštajnih kapaciteta i poboljšanju poslovnih performansi. Može se zaključiti da promocija i prodaja predstavljaju ključne funkcije hotelskog menadžmenta, čije kontinuirano unapređenje doprinosi jačanju konkurentnosti hotelskog sektora i povećanju turističkih tokova u Republici Srbiji.

Ključne reči: hotelska industrija, promocija hotelskih usluga, prodaja hotelskih usluga, digitalni marketing, turistički tokovi, noćenja turista, Republika Srbija.

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