

SERVICES MARKETING PRACTICES OF THE TRAVEL AGENTS: INSIGHTS FROM THE KHANNA CITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides insight into alternative strategies for travel agencies such as Web site, Social media, Newsletter, Organic search strategy, Blogging strategy, Advertising, Listings – paid, free and transactional, lastly, and most importantly, use the above tools together, in a cohesive hybrid strategy

Improvement in Service quality is very important to be in competition, it is the key factor in differentiating service products and building a competitive advantage in tourism. The primary objective of the article is to investigate the customer marketing practices of travel agents in Khanna city.

Comprehensive study is required to study the customer behavior and the service quality provided by the players of travel and tourism service sector. The purpose of current research work is to address these concerns by focusing and building upon the concept of service value through empirical investigation.

Keywords: *Travel Agency, Distribution, Information Sourcing, Travel Market*

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the world's largest industry both in terms of size and employment (\$ 5.4 trillion and 8.6 % of global workforce). In last six years it has created 11 million jobs and has the potential to create another 37 million jobs by 2020 (estimated by NSSO, Ministry of Tourism).

Table No. 1: Important Facts About Tourism In India (2013)

S.No:	Subject:	In Millions	Annual Growth Rate (%)
1.	No. of Foreign Tourist Arrivals in India	6.29	8.9
2.	No. of Indian Nationals departure from India	14.21	9.4
3.	No. of Domestic Tourists Visits to all States/UTs	850.86	13.8
4.	Share of India in International Tourist Arrivals	0.64 %	
5.	India's Rank in World Tourist Arrivals	38	

Source: India Tourism Statistics at a Glance, 2013

Travel agents are the engine of this tourism movement. The services offered by travel agencies include organizing, sightseeing tours, package tours, providing travel information, serving as middleman for

accommodation and transportation booking, issuing air tickets and arranging car rental services. As per findings of Soriano, 1999, customers are demanding a quality product that is not always available. Such demand is now driving competitive strategies. India is one of the favorite tourist destinations around the world, according to world travel and tourism council (WTTC). The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report by World Economic Forum, has ranked India at the 6th place in tourism and hospitality.

II. LITERATURE SURVEY

Mohamed Abd Alla (2007), *Service quality of travel agents: The view point of tourists in Egypt*, The main findings of the research is there is a notable gap between customer expectations and perceptions corresponding to the service quality introduced by travel agents, indicating that the customers' expectations of the service quality were not met. He suggested five factors named responsiveness, reliability, empathy, resources and corporate image and tangibility. Parasuraman et al. (1985), Identified ten components of SQ: reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding, tangibles. In their 1988 work these components were collapsed into five dimensions: reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness. Reliability, tangibles and responsiveness remained distinct, but the remaining seven components collapsed into two aggregate dimensions. Assurance and empathy. Ali Faizen (2012), *An assessment of the service quality using Gap analysis: A study conducted at Chitral*, In this study the perceived quality of a given service is the outcome of an evaluation process during which customers compare their prior expectations of the service with that they have actually received. i.e. having perceived service against the expected service. Overall satisfaction will have huge impact on service quality dimensions of agents. Service organizations can achieve a strong reputation for quality service only when they consistently meet or exceed customer service expectations. Shahin Arash (2011), *Estimation of customer dissatisfaction based on service quality gaps by correlation and regression analyses in a travel agency*, this paper includes five major categories of service quality dimensions and is further subdivided in 15 dimensions and an additional question for measuring the overall dissatisfaction. The findings imply that maximum value gap is related to 'appealing accommodation facilities', which is a part of the dimension of tangibles. The minimum value gaps are also related to 'on time delivery' and 'reputation of service. Regression analysis has proved and estimated liner correlation between the gaps of empathy and tangibles and the overall customer satisfaction. Audu Ahmed (2011), *Determinants of customer behavioral intension in Nigerian retail banks*, This study aims at investigating the influence of perceived service quality, perceived value, corporate image and switching cost on the consumer behavioral intension in the contest of banks. Service quality has a significant influence on consumer behavior. The corporate image plays a significant role in the formation of behavior intension. The customer perceived value associated with the behavior intension. Gulid Nak (2010), *Tourist consumer behavior and destination positioning for Chainat Province*, By this study it can be concluded that tourist consumer is mainly driven by behavioral intension, attitude towards destination, and destination equity. Concerning that tourism category, religious tourism and man-made attractions are the strongest categories of Chainat province. Tourism consumer behavior = behavioral intension + attitude towards destinations + destination equity. Zehrer Anita (2009), *Service design in tourism: Customer experience driven destination management*, this paper reports the development of software for mobile phones, which enables customers to add and modify touch points on their

customer journey. From the supply perspective, the constant and effective improvement of the service quality provides an opportunity in particular for small and medium sized structure tourism industry to compete with larger competitors. The adoption of 'service orientation' by tourism business has thus become of increasing interest in recent years as a crucial factor in the enhancement of profit growth, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and satisfaction. Kouthouris Charilaos (2005), *Can service quality predict customer satisfaction and behavioral intensions in sport tourism industry? An application of the SERVQUAL model in outdoors settings*, in this paper two sets of data were collected, the first one before customers participation in the programs in order to measure their quality expectations and second one after customers participation in the program, in order to measure their quality perceptions. The results of the study did not provide support for the applicability of SERVQUAL in outdoor services. Shahin Arash (2000), *SERVQUAL and Model of Service Quality Gaps: a Framework for Determining and Prioritizing Critical Factors in Delivering Quality Services*, in this paper, service quality and its model of gaps were reviewed. SERVQUAL methodology as an analytical approach for evaluating the difference between customers expectations and perceptions of quality was also studied. Demographic factors like gender, age, income, occupation have a significant impact on overall service quality provided by service provider.

III. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESIS OF RESEARCH

a) To determine activities travel agents ideally prefer to include when building long-term relationships with customers, as well as the extent to which they currently include these activities.

H₀: Travel agents currently perform the activities required to build long-term relationships with customers.

H₁: Travel agents do not currently perform the activities required to build long-term relationships with customers

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There are number of other industry specific studies that have been conducted using SERVQUAL Model like car retailing (Carman, 1990), travel and tourism (Fick, 1991), health tourism (Jyothis, 2009), hospitality (Saleh, 1991). Structured questionnaire will be designed and used to collect evidences. This study made use of a quantitative research approach and a descriptive research design. The study was also cross-sectional since the respondents were only interviewed once. Personal interviews were conducted with the managers and/or owners of travel agents in the Khanna City. A time frame of forty days was used to complete the interviews. To ensure the participation of the maximum number of population elements, interviews were arranged on the premises of the travel agents

Table.1: Reliability Statistics:

Measurement Set	Cronbach Alpha
Activities for the building of long-term relationships with customers	0.842

Activities to build customer loyalty and commitment	0.799
Activities required to conduct customer research to improve customer satisfaction	0.791

Table.2: Activities for the building of long-term relationships with customers:

Item	N	Mean (a)	σ	Mean (b)	σ	Standard marginal homogeneity test statistic	P- value
We provide individual attention to the service needs of our customers	30	4.32	0.46	4.44	0.16	-5.009	0.000
We provide products and services designed according to the needs of our customers	30	4.23	0.43	4.76	0.13	-5.100	0.001
We create a desire in our customers to establish a long-term relationship with us	30	4.45	0.48	4.23	0.19	-5.111	0.001
We improve our service delivery to customers by increasing our knowledge about them	30	4.65	0.41	4.22	0.12	-5.033	0.004

All the statements in the measurement set “Activities for the building of long-term relationships with customers” illustrate a significant difference in the extent to which travel agents in Khanna city currently and should ideally include the activities required to build long-term relationships with customers for a p-value less than 0.005. , it can be inferred that travel agents currently perform the activities required to build long-term relationships with customers.

V. CONCLUSION

Globally, customers are increasingly becoming more refined in their expectations towards a business, emphasizing the need amongst customers to establish a more intimate and enduring relationship with a business. Such a relationship must be characterized by the involvement and commitment of both parties to the relationship, the creativeness of the business regarding the management and resolution of customer queries and complaints, as well as the ability of the business to pay individual attention to customers (Clark, 2000).

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