Study on the Evaluation and Promotion of the Service Quality of Travel Agencies in Harbin

Jing SUN\textsuperscript{1,a} and Yi-xin ZHANG\textsuperscript{2,b,*}

\textsuperscript{1,2}Tourism and Cuisine College of Harbin University of Commerce, Heilongjiang, China

\textsuperscript{a}sunjing1230@sohu.com, \textsuperscript{b}532893102@qq.com

*Corresponding author

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Abstract. In this paper, the measures of improvement to the service quality of the travel agencies in Harbin are proposed. Through the survey of tourist satisfaction rate, the questionnaire data were collected to obtain the quantitative analysis of the service satisfaction provided by tourists. Then the data is statistically analyzed using SPSS21.0 software to give the mean satisfaction rate of each aspect in regard to the service of the travel agencies. From which, the final improvement strategies for the service quality of the agencies in Harbin City are derived.

1. Introduction

In 1965, Cardozo initially described the concept of Customer Satisfaction. After that, people had done volumes of researches about this topic [1]. Parasuraman, Zeithmal and Berry constructed a multi-item scale measuring perceived service quality. This scale is SERVQUAL [2]. Berry (1995) suggested that service played an important role in enhancing value, and could positively influence a firm’s success [3]. In 1995, this concept was introduced into China by Zhao Ping, a professor from Tsinghua University. Since then, many researchers have put most efforts on the Chinese Customer Satisfaction Barometer [4]. The concept of tourist satisfaction discussed in this paper is literally customer satisfaction. More specifically, tourist satisfaction is a significant theory about the customer behavior of the tourists and the management of the service quality of tourism destinations. The research and application of tourist satisfaction theories can improve the overall service quality and the comprehensive competitiveness of the travel agencies.

2. The Development of Travel Agencies in Harbin

With the rapid development of China’s economy, both the transformation of people’s consumption habits and the continuous improvement of paid leave system have made vast contribution to the boost of the tourism industry of China. In favor of the prosperity of the tourism market, the travel agencies, who play the leading role in the tourism industry, have also been rapidly developed over years. However, during the years of rapid development, many problems also emerged. Negative reports about the travel agencies are frequently revealed by the domestic media: forced shopping, arranging majority tour time for shopping, contract discrepancy and so on. Additionally, with the rapid development of e-commerce in China during the latest years, the major OTA giants have made efforts to expand market share, which has made the challenges facing traditional travel agencies even more tense.

According to the record on the website of Harbin Municipal Bureau of Tourism Administration, up till 2017, there are a total of 333 travel agencies in Harbin City. The vast majority of these travel agencies are marked as having issues like uniformed, small-scaled, unregulated, poor service, etc. In 2016, Harbin Tourism Quality Supervision and Management Bureau received a total of 356 tourism complaint cases, which involved two major issues about the travel agencies: firstly, tourists were not satisfied with the vehicles, dining, accommodation and the arrangements of schedule. Secondly, tourists are not satisfied with the attitude and capability of service crew of the travel agencies. All above problems could be resolved by improving the average service quality of the travel agencies.
3. Harbin Travel Agency Satisfaction Survey

3.1 Design and distribution of the questionnaire

The questionnaire is divided into two parts: the first part includes the tourist personal information, gender, age, occupation, education level, monthly income, travel experience with the number of times; the second part uses the SERVPERF (Service Performance) scale, based on the tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. By comparing the basic situation of travel agents and travel experts to Harbin, 25 problems are studied, designed and presented. The question options are based on the Richter scale, from very satisfactory to very unsatisfactory. In order to make the representation and authenticity of the questionnaire, the questionnaire is for the visitor who is participating in the Harbin travel agency. The questionnaire was issued from January 2016 to March 2017, and lasted two months. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed and 183 questionnaires were collected. 171 valid questionnaires were valid and 85.5% effective.

3.2 Data analysis

Of the 171 valid questionnaires, female tourists accounted for 46.52%, while male tourists accounted for 53.48%. The majority of the survey samples are male tourists. The fact that middle-aged tourists accounted for 67.56%, to a certain extent, indicated that middle-aged tourists tend to have more leisure time, fair travel budget and desire; tourists with income of more than 4000 accounted for the majority, with proportion of 33.73%, indicating that the tourism market in Harbin is capable to support some high-end tourism projects. Tourists who have more than four experiences travelling with travel agencies accounted for 72.5%, indicating that tourists travelling to Harbin City at that time of year have abundant travel experiences, and hence might hold higher expectation to service quality of the travel agencies.

SPSS21.0 statistical software was utilized to evaluate the satisfaction rate from the SERVPERF data collected from tourists. The results are shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Tangibility</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1. Impression to the accommodation, dinning and vehicle arranged by the travel agencies</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2. The appearance and dressing of the crew of travel agencies is decent and appropriate.</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3. The brochure of the travel agencies is gorgeous and rich in content.</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4. The offices of the travel agencies have modern office equipment.</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5. The information of the travel agencies is accessible from internet.</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6. The vehicle is safe and in accordance with the contract.</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7. The accommodation is safe and in accordance with the contract.</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8. The food is hygeian and in accordance with the contract.</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9. The schedule is in accordance with the contract.</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10. The travel agencies have afforded the insurance for the tourist.</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11. The tour guides are capable to deliver speech and explain things clearly.</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q12. The staff is interactively responding to the inquiries from the tourist in time.</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q13. The tour guides do not ignore requests from tourists.</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q14. The tour guides are capable to respond to emergencies.</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q15. The working hours of the travel agencies are thoughtful and convenient to tourists. 171 1 5 3.90
Q16. The staff has a nice and friendly service attitude. 171 1 5 4.02
Q17. Travel staff has a good business and smooth service process. 171 1 5 3.71
Q18. The tour guides have strong sense of responsibility, willing to help visitors 171 1 5 3.66
Q19. The guides have specificational service, and do not change the schedule at will. 171 1 5 3.19
Q20. The entertain activities are various and safe. 171 1 5 3.70
Q21. The travel agency can provide services which can satisfy tourists. 171 1 5 3.64
Q22. Visitors are able to be taken full care while traveling with the tour group. 171 1 5 3.80
Q23. Provide the appropriate traveling advice for tourists. 171 1 5 3.67
Q24. Travel staff initiative to provide personalized service for visitors. 171 1 5 3.61
Q25. Travel agency survey and feedback on visitors’ opinions. 171 1 5 3.42

4. Harbin Travel Agency Service Quality Problems

In order to analyze the actual situation of Harbin travel agency service quality, the average of each single dimension is calculated first, and the descending order is given by score as shown in the Figure 1. Secondly, the mean of each problem in each dimension is compared with the average of this dimension, and the most unsatisfactory items in the dimension are analyzed.

Figure 1. Average degree of satisfaction.

4.1 Responsiveness

As shown in the figure, the visitor is most satisfied with the five questions raised in responsiveness, and the average of the dimensions of responsiveness is 3.7. Questions which are below the average are Q12, Q13, and Q14. It shows that the presence of the tour guides cannot answer the visitors in time, because they are too busy to ignore the tourists’ requirements and the tour guides do not have good reaction problems. This dimension mainly shows that the adaptability of tour guides still needs to be improved.

4.2 Tangibility

The mean of the tangible dimension is 3.69. The questions which are below the average value are Q1 and Q5, reflecting that the tourists are not satisfied with the overall impression of the traveler’s arrangement of the car, and the need to improve the convenience of getting travel agency information from the Internet.
4.3 Assurance

The mean value of the guaranteed dimension is 3.66. The question which is below the average value is Q19. The visitors reflected that the time to visit the scenery has been shortened to stay in the shops and there are too much self-funded projects.

4.4 Empathy

The mean of the empathetic dimension is 3.63. The questions which are below the average value are Q24 and Q25. Visitors generally reflected the tour guides lack the ability of personalized service. Otherwise, the travel agencies do not focus on the feedback.

4.5 Reliability

The average of the reliability dimension is 3.54, which is the lowest score in the five dimensions. Q7, Q8 and Q9 are below the average. It shows that the tourists are generally dissatisfied with accommodation, meals and travel arrangements.

5. The Countermeasures to Improve the Service Quality of Harbin Travel Agency

5.1 Strengthen staff training

When the staff provides services for visitors, unexpected events may happen. It requires a calm attitude and timeliness to deal with. Travel agency should strengthen staff training about dealing with the trouble.

On the one hand, the managers need to scientifically manage the travel agency. Strengthen the management to the staff, and promote team collaboration, make the employees feel the sense of belonging in work. Travel agencies should train the staff with foreign languages, tourism expertise and marketing knowledge to meet the individual needs of consumers, improve the added value of the product through services to.

On the other hand, the travel agency should focus on cultivating the resilience of employees. So that employees recognize the importance of adaptability. Make sure that they can solve the trouble timely.

5.2 Enhance network marketing

Harbin travel agencies have lots of problems in network marketing, and visitors can not obtain information on travel agencies from the website. In Harbin, some of the travel agencies have their own websites, but the information updating is not timely, generally.

Travel agency staff should promptly enrich and update the site information, the plate in the site should be comprehensive, and include travel agency introduction, travel products, online consultation, online booking and user feedback at least.

5.3 Improve the wage system

At present, wage systems in the Harbin travel agencies are generally imperfect, especially the tour guides and team leaders’ wage systems have big flaw. Some travel agencies have “zero fare” and “negative fare” phenomenon, the tour guide can only increase their own income through the self-funded project. Therefore, improving the wage system, signing the legal contract and protecting the salary of the tour guides are the prerequisite to guarantee the arrangement of the travel and the arrangement of the tour.

5.4 Concerned about the needs of tourists

Harbin travel agencies generally do not care about and investigate tourists’ needs, and many travel agencies develop their service standards and characteristics according to their own subjective desire. When the travel agency provides service to the tourists, they should put the interests of tourists at the first place and pay more attention to the details in the service process.

Harbin travel agencies generally do not do good feedback from tourists, travel agencies should focus on feedback. After the end of the trip, the travel agency’s feedback sheet can be sent
electronically to the visitors, avoiding the embarrassment of visitors filling in the views of the tour guide.

5.5 Improve the quality of service

Visitors reflected that they are not satisfied with the rooms and meals during the travel. Winter is Harbin’s tourist season, travel agencies will not arrange high standard hotels and restaurants in general. Otherwise, tourism in Harbin is seasonal, whether it is a hotel or restaurant will have a large number of temporary staff whose service awareness is weak. It will affect the tourists on the evaluation to the service quality. Therefore, the travel agency should have to establish a stable intermediary business team, the selection of high-quality partners, to provide visitors with high quality housing, dining services. In the course of cooperation, they should sign a valid contract, once the quality problems appear, they can promptly negotiate or lift the relationship.

6. Conclusion

The gradual maturity of domestic tourists, the constant changing of consumption custom and the rapid development of OTA have a great impact on traditional travel agencies. Nowadays, travel agencies must face their own problems in order to survive fierce competition. The travel agencies should treat the tourist satisfaction as the most important point of development. They make the travel business in Harbin develop with a steady pace through paying attention to the travel agencies’ quality of service, increasing the tourist satisfaction.

References