

Factors Influencing Customer Satisfaction at Tours and Travel Agencies in India

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Abstract: Customer Satisfaction is the key factor to measure the effectiveness of the business performance. The rate at which customers do business again and the increase in the new customers determines the effect of customer relationship at any firm. The importance of customer satisfaction in the service industry like Travel & Tourism industry is unarguably admitted worldwide. Service quality formulates the customer satisfaction in the Travel agency. The more benefits customer receives from the service, the more they are happy about the organization. This study looks on to 25 different variables that determine customer satisfaction at travel agencies by the statistical technique of Factor Analysis, the variables are reduced into 4 important factors; Customer Service, Customer Centricity, Customer Convenience and Service Quality.

This study will help to determine the satisfaction levels of customers of all various tourism services and to know what factors customer look forward when they plan for a travel. This understanding of customer satisfaction and service quality is also vital to craft successful and effective marketing efforts.

Keywords: Customer satisfaction, Customer service, Customer centricity, Customer Convenience, Service Quality, Exploratory factor analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

In order to excel amidst the fierce competition in today's world, organizations have to stress upon retaining their existing customers by ensuring their high satisfaction. Customer oriented work culture is now a necessity and customer satisfaction is the best indicator to measure the effectiveness of the organization. To reinforce customer orientation on a day-to-day basis, a growing number of companies choose customer satisfaction as their main performance indicator. The rate of Customer Satisfaction is the elixir of the life for many companies especially in the service sector. The importance of customer satisfaction in a service industry like travel and tourism is a principle interest of researchers.

Travel and tourism industry has evolved as rapid growing sector whose contribution to the world economy is worthwhile significant. India being a potential tourist place attracts many travel agencies around the world.

Customer Satisfaction

According to Peter Drucker, "customer satisfaction is the key to success in a business. It is the only way to determine whether the business has achieved its goal. It is the mission and purpose of the business" Customer satisfaction may include such factors as the quality of the product, the quality of the service provided, the atmosphere of the location where the product or service is purchased, and the price of the product or service.

Customer satisfaction helps to understand the extent to which the performance of the product or service met the customer expectations. If the performance is below the expected levels of the customer, he/she is dissatisfied. If the performance is at par with the expectations, the customer is satisfied and if the performance is above the expectations of the customer, he/she is delighted. The probability of repurchase and customer loyalty is high if the customer is delighted with your service. Philip Kotler (2000) defined satisfaction as: "a person's feelings of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product's perceived performance (or outcome) in relation to his or her expectations".

According to Hansemark and Albinsson (2004), "satisfaction is an overall customer attitude towards a service provider, or an emotional reaction to the difference between what customers anticipate and what they receive, regarding the fulfillment of some need, goal or desire." Hoyer and MacInnis (2001) said that satisfaction can be associated with feelings of acceptance, happiness, relief, excitement, and delight. There are many factors that affect customer satisfaction.

According to Hokanson (1995), these factors include friendly employees, courteous employees, knowledgeable employees, helpful employees, accuracy of billing, billing timeliness, competitive pricing, service quality, good value, billing clarity and quick service.

A.K. Rai (2008) gives the basic formula of customer satisfaction as:

$$\boxed{\text{Customer Satisfaction}} = \boxed{\text{Perception of service received}} - \boxed{\text{Customer Expectation of Customer Service}}$$

It helps to cogitate if the perception of the service received has exceeded the expectations of the service customer satisfaction resulting in positive; on the other hand, if the perception of the service received is less than the level of expectation of the service it would lead to customer dissatisfaction.

Yi (1989) mentions confirmation/disconfirmation framework when discussing the issues of customer satisfaction. According to the framework, customers have a set of pre-established standards in their mind when they are about to purchase a product or a service. The level of customer satisfaction is a result of comparison of this standard to the perception of the product bought or the service received. If the level of perception of product or service bought does match the established customer standards this will result in customer satisfaction, and if it fails to meet customer standards customers will be left dissatisfied.

Czepiel et al (1974) maintain the validity of two factor theory in relation to analyzing customer satisfaction. Two factor theory states that customers can be satisfied and dissatisfied with a product or a service at the same time, because satisfaction and dissatisfaction will be about different aspects of the product or service, thus, they will be unrelated.

The dual factor theory was further developed by Swan and Combs (1976) to change the names of the factors to instrumental performance and expressive performance. According to this theory instrumental performance relates to physical aspects of the product or service, whereas expressive performance refers to psychological aspects. The theory specifies expressive performance as a necessary component of customer satisfaction. Customers will be left unsatisfied if they are not satisfied with expressive performance of products and services, regardless of the fact that their instrumental performance have been satisfactory or not.

The various parameters that were considered to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of its service are Brand Image, Location of outlets, Physical facilities at the outlets, Safety & Security of payments, Speed of service, Value Added Services, Lead time Issue Control, Efficiency of the process, Credibility in communication, Service orientation, Customer Relationship, Documentations, Personalized Services, Service charge & other fees, Guidance for all services offered, Assurance of the service offered, Reliability in services, Technological Integration at the outlets, User friendly website, Competence of the employees, Appealing Nature of the employees, Complaint Handling & Queries and concerns handled.

This study will help to determine the satisfaction levels of customers who avail various kind of services from the travel agencies of the aggregators. The two objectives of the study are as below a) To measure customer satisfaction of the travelers who travel across India and b) To study on factors influencing the customer satisfaction in travel and tourism industry.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study enables to have a definite insight on customer satisfaction in the tourism and foreign exchange industry. The study helps to measure the satisfaction of the travelers with the service quality and to detect deficits in the services provided by the various travel and tour services in India.

Although the last decades' specialized literature revealed and crystallized the concept of Customer satisfaction the term has been and still is approached in several manners in the specialized Literature.

Customer satisfaction is a marketing term that measures how products or services supplied by a company meet or surpass a customer's expectation. Customer satisfaction is important because it provides marketers and business owners with a metric that they can use to manage and improve their businesses. The brand having more retained customers always has an upper edge on those which have either less or no customer loyalty in the market.

When a consumer/customer is contented with either the product or services it is termed satisfaction. Satisfaction can also be a person's feelings of pleasure or disappointment that results from comparing a product's perceived performance or outcome with their expectations (Kotler & Keller, 2009). Client happiness, which is a sign of customer satisfaction, is and has always been the most essential thing for any organization. Customer satisfaction is defined by one author as "the consumer's response to the evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectations and the actual performance of the product or service as perceived after its consumption" (Tse & Wilton, 1988). In Harvard Business Review, Rawson, Duncan & Jones (2013) described the "Myopic" managerial decision often taken undertaken by organizations to narrow focus to maximize customer satisfaction would often result in customer dissatisfaction. The company at certain conditions forgets to maintain their product quality standards when they concentrate to facilitate their customers. But it is unfruitful as they cannot fulfill the actual need of the customer.

A study was conducted by Maddern, Kumar & Maull (2008) to investigate the linkages between the Business Process Management (BPM) and Customer Satisfaction. It advocates the importance of having systematic focus on the totality of service design. The result confirms that process management is a crucial driver of technical service quality.

The study was formulated to SERVQUAL measurement tool which helped to identify the factors affecting service quality and they differentiated the required service quality into Functional Service Quality (FSQ) and Technical Service Quality (TSQ).

Fruchter and Gerstner (1999) elaborate on the necessity of the reimbursed confidence that a seller can give to his customer. The thesis stresses on creating a long lasting relationship with the customers by ensuring the credibility of the product and services offered by the seller.

According to Haywood (1988) the aim of providing quality services is to satisfy customers. Measuring service quality is a better way to dictate whether the services are good or bad and whether the customers will or are satisfied with it. A researcher listed in his study: “three components of service quality, called the 3 “Ps” of service quality.” In the study, service quality was described as comprising of three elements: “Physical facilities, processes and procedures, Personal behavior on the part of serving staff, and Professional judgments on the part of serving staff but to get good quality service. He stated that “an appropriate, carefully balanced mix of these three elements must be achieved.” What constitutes an appropriate mix, according to him will, in part, be determined by the relative degrees of labor intensity, service process customization, and contact and interaction between the customer and the service process.

“Tourist Satisfaction: A View from a Mixed International Guided Package Tour” by Bowie and Chang (2005) solicits to identify the variables relating to customer satisfaction during a guided package tour service encounter. The factors looks upon includes the role of the tour leader and the service performance by suppliers – itinerary arrangements, auxiliary support and service delivery.

Unethical seller practice is a neglected issue in consumer satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The research by A. R. Andreasen, University of Connecticut (1993) is an eye opener to various organizations on their unethical selling practices which in turn yields the customer as well as supplier retentions. The research literature on dissatisfaction and complaining behavior has largely ignored instances of unethical behavior on the part of marketers.

Measuring customer engagement is more meaningful and strategically relevant as it measures not only customer satisfaction and willingness to recommend, but also the emotional connection between the customer and your brand. The article reveals the importance of maintain the service quality and ensuring of customer delight in all the services of the company (Muller, 2010). An interesting article about the Brand Experience and its relationship with Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty by Walter and Cleff (2013) describes that Brand experience has attracted a lot of attention in the marketing practice.

A research paper “customer satisfaction at Tourist Destinations” investigates the main elements that can influence customer satisfaction in tourist services, with specific reference to tourism industry. The importance of this topic resides in the fact that tourists’ positive experiences of service, products, and other resources provided by tourism destinations can produce customer retention as well as positive word-of-mouth (Valentina, Mauro, Clelia & Giovanna, 2015).

According to Anderson, Fornell and Rust (1997) in their article “Difference in Productivity And Profitability: Products And Services” describes about the differences between of productivity and profitability of customer satisfaction of products and services. The model predicts that customer satisfaction and productivity are less likely to be compatible when customer satisfaction is relatively more dependent on customization, the degree to which the firm's offering is customized to meet heterogeneous customers' needs as opposed to standardization the degree to which the firm's offering is reliable and free from deficiencies; and when it is difficult to provide high levels of both customization and standardization simultaneously.

Bitner & Hubbert (1994) explored the three interrelated constructs such as service encounter satisfaction, overall satisfaction, and perceived service quality and established the customer's impression about the strengths or weakness of the organization on its service performance.

Since the beginning of the consumption era in marketing, the focus on customers/consumers has increased more as the consumption era also shifts to post-consumption; where organizations are obliged to render more services in addition to what they provide as offers to their customers. What are the qualities of these services provided to customers? Are the customers satisfied with these services? Thus, this research originated from the fact that customer/consumer is the key to business focusing on the prominent travel agency in India. Measuring their satisfaction is the most important tool that helps to increase sales and generate profits in the business environment. Moreover, the importance of customer satisfaction and service quality has been proven relevant to help improve the overall performance of organizations.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research study is designed in the Descriptive Model as it includes survey and fact finding telephonic enquiries methodology to collect the data of survey. The variables are dynamic and subjective in nature. The customers preferences and satisfaction tend to be different to each variables included in the survey. The study attempts to compare and correlate the considered variables.

Sources of Data

For conducting research, both primary and secondary sources were utilized to collect data. Structured questionnaire was administered and telephonic enquiries were made to collect the primary data. Secondary data

were collected from the research data bases such as EBSCO and Emerald to collect the research papers and articles. The questionnaire prepared was in structured format containing questions relating to demographic and satisfaction levels of customers. A convenient tabular form of measurable variables of Customer Satisfaction gave the questionnaire an appealing look.

Sampling plan

The sampling method followed is Convenience Sampling technique as the customers who stepped into the various departments of the travel agencies in and around Hyderabad city. The size of the sample extends to 125 respondents. The sample included the Walk-ins who came to avail service from Leisure department and FOREX department of various travel and tour agencies. The personal data and purchase record of customers collected were availed to conduct the follow up telephonic enquires for the survey.

Data analysis method

The data is analyzed in statistical method of exploratory factor analysis in the IBM SPSS 20.0 software. Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted considering correlation coefficient matrix of each measurement item. The data collected on 25 variables was deducted into four factors in the software and analyzed accordingly. The technique of Varimax rotation was used to maximize the sum of the variances of the squared loadings.

The data collected were analyzed through the statistical tool for factor analysis. It is a general name denoting a class of procedures primarily used for data reduction and summarization. Out of the various variables considered in the market research, there may be significant number of correlated variables which clustered into Factors which influence Customer Satisfaction.

Factor analysis is a method of data reduction. It reduces the data collected by seeking underlying unobservable variables that are reflected in the observed variables. There are many different methods that can be used to conduct a factor analysis (such as principal axis factor, maximum likelihood, generalized least squares, unweighted least squares). There are different types of rotations that can be done after the initial extraction of factors, including orthogonal rotations, such as varimax and equimax, which impose the restriction that the factors cannot be correlated, and Oblique rotations, such as promax, which allow the factors to be correlated with one another.

Factor analysis is a technique that requires a large sample size. Factor analysis is based on the correlation matrix of the variables involved, and correlations usually need a large sample size before they stabilize. Factor analysis is an interdependence technique in which the entire set of inter dependent relationship is examined.

Varimax rotation is the most common of the rotations that are available. Varimax rotation is used to simplify the expression of a particular sub-space in terms of just a few major items each. The actual coordinate system is unchanged, it is the orthogonal basis that is being rotated to align with those coordinates.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Factor Analysis Model

If the variables are standardized, the factor model can be represented as:

$$X_i = A_{i1}F_1 + A_{i2}F_2 + A_{i3}F_3 + \dots + A_{im}F_m + V_iU_i$$

Where,

X_i = ith standardized variable

A_{ij} = standardized multiple regression coefficient of variable i on common factor j

F = common factor

V_i = standardized regression coefficient of variable I on unique factor i

U_i = the unique factor for variable i

m= number of common factors

The unique factors are uncorrelated with each other and with the common factors. The common factors themselves can be expressed as linear combinations of the observed variables

$$F_i = W_{i1}X_1 + W_{i2}X_2 + W_{i3}X_3 + \dots + W_{ik}X_k$$

Where,

F_i = estimate of ith factor

W_i = weight or factor score coefficient

k = number of variables

The data analyzed 25 different variables contributing to Customer Satisfaction at various travel and tours agencies and aggregators. The table following are the variables included during the survey.

- 1) Brand image
- 2) Location
- 3) Physical facilities
- 4) Safety and security
- 5) Speed of service
- 6) Value added service
- 7) Lead time control

- 8) Efficiency of process
- 9) Credibility in communication
- 10) Service orientation
- 11) Customer relationship
- 12) Documentations
- 13) Personalized service
- 14) Service charges
- 15) Guidance for services
- 16) Assurance of service
- 17) Reliability in service
- 18) Technological integration
- 19) User friendly website
- 20) Competency of employees
- 21) Courtesy of employees
- 22) Appealing nature of the employees
- 23) Ability to understand customer problems
- 24) Complaint handling
- 25) Queries handling

Table1: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.890
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1781.213
	Df	300
	Sig.	.000

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy: It examines the appropriateness of factoranalysis. This measure varies between 0 and 1, and values closer to 1 are better. A value of .6 is a suggested minimum.

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: This test checks whether the considered variables are correlated. This tests the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix. An identity matrix is matrix in which all of the diagonal elements are 1 and all off diagonal elements are 0.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was 0.890 and significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity strongly supported the use of factor analysis in order to extract independent variables associated with an exploratory principle component factor analysis was done using IBM SPSS 20.0. The Initial and Extraction variance of the 25 interdependent variables are listed in the table below. The extraction method used is Principal Component Analysis.

Table 2: Table of communalities

	Initial	Extraction
BRANDIMAGE	1	0.363
LOCATION	1	0.655
PHYSICAL FACILITIES	1	0.68
SAFETY AND SECURITY	1	0.374
SPEED OF SERVICE	1	0.642
VALUEADDED SERVICE	1	0.551
LEADTIME CONTROL	1	0.678
EFFECIENCYOF PROCESS	1	0.611
CREDIBILITY IN COM	1	0.583
SERVICE ORIENTATION	1	0.633
CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP	1	0.669
DOCUMENTATIONS	1	0.665
PERSONALISED SERVICE	1	0.585
SERVICE CHARGES	1	0.647
GUIDANCE FOR SERVICES	1	0.738
ASSURANCE OF SERVICE	1	0.651

RELIABILITY IN SERVICE	1	0.613
TECHNOLOGICAL INTEGRATION	1	0.613
USERFREIENDLY WEBSITE	1	0.475
COMPETENCY	1	0.585
COURTESY	1	0.696
APPEALING NATURE	1	0.668
ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND CUSTOMER PROBLEMS	1	0.769
COMPLAINT HANDLING	1	0.673
QUERIES HANDLING	1	0.633

Communalities denotes the proportion of each variable's variance that can be explained by the factors. It is also defined as the sum of squared factor loadings for the variables. Extraction column indicate the proportion of each variable's variance that can be explained by the retained factors. Variables with high values are well represented in the common factor space, while variables with low values are not well represented. The table of Communalities tells about how much of the variance in each of the original variables is explained by the extracted factors. Higher communalities are desirable. If the communality for a variable is less than 50%, it is a candidate for exclusion from the analysis because the factor solution contains less than half of the variance in the original variable, and the explanatory power of that variable might be better represented by the individual variable.

From the above table of communalities, it can be inferred that the highest variance is for the guidance for service and the ability of employees to understand the problems of customers. A variance of 0.738 and 0.769 was found for these two variables.

Varimax rotation was used to identify the underlying factors for measuring customer satisfaction and factor loading 0.4 or above on the items was taken into consideration. All 25 items related to Customer Satisfaction were used for the factor analysis, which yielded four factors explaining 61.79 percent of variance as shown in the table below.

Table3: Total Variance

Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
9.321	37.285	37.285	4.174	16.695	16.695
2.993	11.974	49.259	4.067	16.267	32.961
1.981	7.925	57.185	3.742	14.967	47.929
1.153	4.613	61.798	3.467	13.869	61.798

From the above table information, it is evident that out of the total extraction value of 61.79, the significant variability is found in the factors Customer Service and Customer Centric Orientation. The value of rotated variance for Customer service is 16.69 and the rotated variance for customer centric orientation is 16.26.

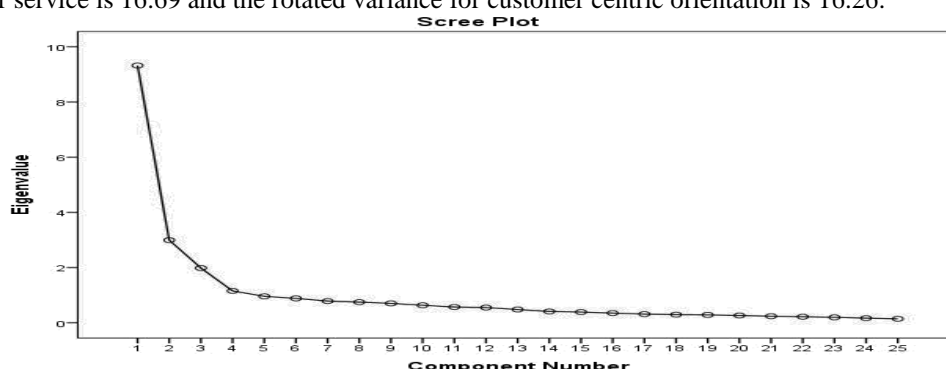


Figure 1: Scree Plot

Scree plot: A Scree Plot is a simple line segment plot that shows the fraction of total variance in the data. It is a plot, in descending order of magnitude, of the eigenvalues of a correlation matrix. In the context of factor analysis or principal components analysis, a scree plot helps the analyst visualize the relative importance of the factors, a sharp drop in the plot signals that subsequent factors are ignorable. The Scree plot graphs the eigen value against the factor number. From the figure, we can infer the first two factors are immediately above and from the

third factor onwards he line is almost flat. It meaning the each successive factor is accounting for smaller and smaller amounts of the total variance.

After the Varimax rotation of the squared sums of loaded variables, Rotated Component Matrix was formulated. Here the evident variance of each variable was loaded separately into related four factors. The four factors in which each variable loaded were carefully studied and derived. The four factors were termed as

- 1) Customer Service
- 2) Customer Centric Orientation
- 3) Service Quality
- 4) Customer Convenience

The effective integration of all the four factors only result in the Customer Satisfaction at any travel agency. The table showing the loading of 25 variables into these four factors that affect customer satisfaction at various travel and tours agents.

Table4: Rotated Component Matrix

Rotated Component Matrix				
	FACTORS			
	CUSTOMER SERVICE	CUSTOMER CENTRIC ORIENTATION	SERVICE QUALITY	CUSTOMER CONVENIENCE
BRANDIMAGE				0.521
LOCATION				0.795
PHYSICAL FACILITIES				0.81
SAFETY AND SECURITY				0.511
SPEED OF SERVICE				0.663
LEAD TIME CONTROL				0.616
VALUEADDED SERVICE		0.544		
EFFECIENCY OF		0.698		
CREDIBILITY IN COM		0.591		
SERVICE ORIENTATION		0.68		
CUSTOMER		0.74		
DOCUMENTATIONS		0.729		
PERSONALISED		0.608	0.448	
SERVICE CHARGES			0.671	
GUIDANCE FOR			0.777	
ASSURANCE OF			0.651	
RELIABILITY IN SERVICE			0.704	
TECHNOLOGICAL INTEGRATION			0.672	
USERFREIENDLY			0.462	
COMPETENCY	0.642			
COURTESY	0.74			
APPEALING NATURE	0.727			
ABILITY TO	0.858			
CUSTOMER PROBLMS				
COMPLAINT HANDLING	0.816			
QUERIES HANDLING	0.785			

The table illustrates that the 25 variables are loaded into 4 independent variables as per variance observed in the survey. The four important factors that determine customer satisfaction are described below:

V. CONCLUSION

Customer satisfaction is addressed as a strategic business development tool. It does have a positive effect on an organization's profitability, satisfied customers form the foundation of any successful business as customer satisfaction leads to repeat purchase, brand loyalty, and positive word of mouth. Satisfied customers are most likely to share their experiences with other people to the order of perhaps five or six people. Equally well, dissatisfied customers are more likely to tell another ten people of their unfortunate experience.

The tours and travel agencies or the travel aggregators should inculcate new improvisations in Customer Service, Customer Centricity, and Service Quality & Customer Convenience to retain the customer satisfaction.

The survey revealed the most important factors affecting Customer Satisfaction at any travel agency are Customer Service, Customer Centricity, Service Quality and Customer Convenience. The overall satisfaction of travelers from the study was 3.52 which is a quite satisfactory score. Therefore, the tours and travel agencies or the travel aggregators should inculcate new improvisations in these factors.

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