

The Difference of Travel Service Quality Attributes of Travel Service Provider According to Information Search Channel

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Abstract

The Purpose of this study is to understand the important service quality attributes of travel service providers according to information sources. It is important to understand the difference of service quality attributes which is important when consumers make a decision to purchase travel service. The three major channels using for information gathering to purchase travel service are known as interpersonal channel, service provider channel, and internet. Six core components of service quality are identified, namely, personal service, convenience system, customer relationship, reputation, responsiveness, and accessibility. We confirm that the important service quality attributes of tourism service providers are significantly different according to the level of information search efforts in every three information search channel.

Keywords: *Information Channel, Service Quality Attribute, Travel Service Provider*

1. Introduction

The Internet has emerged as a huge information complexity of travel business, especially in the process of information search of travel service. The Internet makes information search behavior easier than any other information search methods. In case of travel business, the costs of travel products depend heavily on the element suppliers of tourism like hotels, restaurants, attractions, and airlines. This cost condition of tourism products created low-margin model of travel service providers. These low-margin conditions eventually make low promotional and advertising budget allotment in their business. Small and medium-sized travel business also have little budget and experts for market research and communication strategy. But the newly emerged technologies of information and communication such as Internet, mobile communication technology including smartphone had a significant influence on the decision-making process of consumers and those smart gear could be a successful source of communication between small and medium-sized travel business and consumers [1]. The Internet have changed the manner of information search and business advertising and now travelers use search engine on their desktop computer at home or use mobile phone to log in the internet homepage to find useful information. Some consumers prefer to call on the travel agency directly to gather and confirm the relevant information. At last, some of them love to communicate with people who have same interest and expert-level knowledge and information [2]. Customers want to choose any information channel which suitable for his any circumstances or use multi-channel at once for best information. Thus to understand customer's favorite or accustomed information contexts according to various information channels are important for small and medium-sized travel enterprises' success on this fierce competition era. Many of travel related service providers having both website and offline physical office and even they have employees to help customers problems. What

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the customers want to have information primarily in a sense of information channels the customers applied to get needed information. In travel service business there is a slim chance to exist as an internet only company because the nature of travel service. Therefore, many travel related service providers have website for transactional means with their valuable and curious customers. This study tries to explore the difference of service quality attribute of tourism service provider when consumers use different information search channels. To understand the differences of service quality attribute (SQA) according to information search channel will improve its service to its customers.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Information Search Behavior and Channel for Travel Related Service

The purpose of information search behavior is to reduce the risk of purchase and particularly in case of service products; high degree of uncertainty, information search behavior is more sophisticate. Products with strong service attributes make us search information especially through interpersonal information source [3]. Touristic behavior was correlated with high involvement and high involvement situation also required more information regarding service quality attribute [4]. The construct of opinion leadership was adapted to find out the impact of interpersonal communication in the context of small products and fashions [5]. According to studies, the personal influence on the decision making process was much powerful in case of service products like travel service, food, wine, and movies. From a reliability point of view, personal information source was important and have more influence. Word-of-mouth known as one of the interpersonal influence communication methods also has more credibility than advertising messages. Nowadays travelers use the interpersonal information channel through friends, colleagues and family members who had enough experience and knowledge. Travel agency also played important role in the field of information distribution channel for a long times and it was one of the traditional and popular source of tourism information [2]. However, not only the information technology but the professional knowledge and attitude of employees in travel business also have a significant influence on the discussion of customers. In case of complicated routs, multi-destinations, a reputable travel agent can save time, money, and uncertainty. Internet based on-line information search channel is currently the most widely used information channel for tourism products. Internet has changed the whole environment of information search method and made it much easier and faster for customers. The Internet had changed the manner of information search and business advertising. Recently, information is not provided by travel agents exclusively but the traveler himself is often and influential a tourism information provider. Many SNS websites provide travel blogs and social networks for travel service on the Internet [6]. Many studies examined the information search behavior based on the time of trip planning, type of service products, the cost of information search and found that travelers used multiple information sources with different purposes under different reasons [7].

2.2. Service Quality Attributes in Travel Related Service Provider

Studies on service quality dimensions on touristic contexts are strongly related with re-visitation and satisfaction of consumers and many studies on tourism e-service quality are also associated with customer satisfaction and repurchase [8]. In this study, we tried to explore the difference of service quality dimensions according to multiple information channels which the consumers use. Online SERVQUAL studies found out dominant service quality dimensions including reliability, efficiency, privacy, and customer service [9]. We have previewed several papers not only from e-service quality dimension of tourism contexts but from service quality of e-travel service. Regarding e-travel service quality, many studies tried to construct the measurement scale or develop the reliable

measurement instrument. One of these studies using the data from online travel service purchasers who was mainly college students reported five factors extracted from initial 44 scale items are information quality, security, website functionality, customer relationships, and responsiveness [10]. A study on the comparison of perception of service quality between internet purchasers and non-internet purchasers, they suggest that the most significant differences between them are security and responsiveness, second. Internet non-purchasers doubt about the use of credit card in website, the risk of sensitive personal information [11]. With another approach, we had also reviewed the tradition studies on service quality attributes of travel related service providers for off-line information channel like visiting the physical offices. The fierce Internet competitions in travel service business, some travel agent in China had focused on the target customers' perception of overall satisfaction and tried to find out service quality dimension for offline travel agent. This research found core five factors from 25 scale items, namely, responsiveness, empathy, corporate image, tangibility, and customer relationships [12]. One of early studies using SERVQUAL model for the evaluation of travel agent service quality produced six factors, namely, corporate image, responsiveness, competitiveness, kind employee, accessibility, and reliability. These six service factors explained 63.5 percent of the total variance [13]. A research tried to develop the measurement instrument for service quality of travel agents in Turkey, this research using 217 questionnaires and found that the core 6 factors, namely, nice employees, prompt service, employee responsiveness, convenience system, image & reputation, and safe in transaction [14]. Finally, we taking into account the common factors of service quality attributes including many scale items. In this research, we had adopted common factors of service quality attributes from the both offline and online service quality attributes.

Table 1. Previous Research for Service Quality Dimension

Dimension of SQA	Studies on On-line Service Quality				Dimension of SQA	Studies on Off-line Service Quality			
	[8]	[9]	[10]	[11]		[3]	[12]	[13]	[14]
Customer service	O			O	Personal service	O		O	O
Personalization			O	O	Convenience system		O	O	O
Ease of use			O	O	Empathy	O		O	O
Reliability	O	O	O		Customer relationships		O	O	O
Access	O	O			Accessibility		O	O	
Security		O	O	O	Safety	O	O		
Responsiveness	O		O		Responsiveness		O	O	
Information quality	O		O		Corporate Image	O	O		
Website functionality		O	O	O	Reputation			O	O
Efficiency	O	O		O	Atmosphere	O	O		O

Table 1 presents the previous studies on service quality of on-line and off-line contexts. The selected service quality dimensions for this survey were personal service, convenience system, reputations, customer relationship, accessibility, and responsiveness (refer to Table 2). The questionnaire includes 20 items of on & off-line service quality attributes (SQA) from the six service quality dimensions. Respondents were asked to

check the importance of service quality attributes when they are in search of travel-related service through their preferred type of information search channel (refer to Table 3).

Table 2. Selected Dimension for Research

	Online service quality attribute	Offline service quality attribute	Dimensions in this research
Dimension of SQA	Customer service	Personal service	Personal service Convenience-system Reputation Customer-relationship Accessibility Responsiveness
	Information quality	Corporate image	
	Ease of use	Convenience system	
	Website functionality	Reputation	
	Efficiency	Atmosphere	
	Reliability	Customer relationships	
	Personalization	Empathy	
	Access	Accessibility	
	Responsiveness	Responsiveness	

3. Research Methods

3.1. Collecting and Analyzing the Data

The survey was conducted in major tour operators and travel-related service providers in Seoul city for two weeks during January of 2017. The sample was made up of 300 respondents. Respondents visited travel agency to consult travel-related service for their vacation. The interviews were administrated by the assistants. They distributed the questionnaires and explained when respondents had questions at on-site. Finally, 288 questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 96 percent. The survey questions to measure the influence of information channels on service quality attribute of travel service provider were based on the previous major studies (refer to the Table 1, Table 2). The collected data was analyzed using ‘Statistical Package for Social Science’: PASW Statistics 18. And Statistical techniques such as factor analysis and multivariate analysis of variance were used to achieve the objectives of this study.

Table 3. Composition of Questionnaire

Classification	Theoretical Background	No. of Question
Service quality attribute (SQA)	Zeynep Filiz(2010), Chaang-Iuan Ho, et el, (2007) Zeithaml, et el(2002), Fodness, et el(1999) Carey, et el(1997), LeBlanc(1992) Parasuraman, et el (1988)	20
Information search channel	Angel Diaz-Chao, et el., (2015) Carmen M. Sabiote-Ortiz, et el.,(2014) Zheng Xiang et, el., (2014)	6
Demographic Characteristics		4

3.2. Research Model and Hypotheses

The purpose of this research was to find the difference of important service quality attributes of travel service provider when consumers approach information search behavior through three different kinds of information channels including interpersonal source, travel service provider, and Internet source. Based on the model (Figure 1) this

study proposes following hypotheses to explore the difference of service quality attribute of travel service provider according to three different information search channels.

H1: Service quality attribute of travel-related service provider show significant difference according to information search channel.

H-1: Interpersonal information search will show significant difference on service quality attribute.

H-2: On-the office premise information search will show significant difference on service quality attribute.

H-3: Internet information search will show significant difference on service quality attribute.

H2: Service quality attribute of travel-related service provider show significant difference between the two groups; high level information search group and low level information search group.

H2a. The level of interpersonal information search efforts will show significant difference on service quality attribute.

H2b. The level of office information search efforts will show significant difference on service quality attribute.

H2c. The level of Internet information search will show significant difference on service quality attribute.

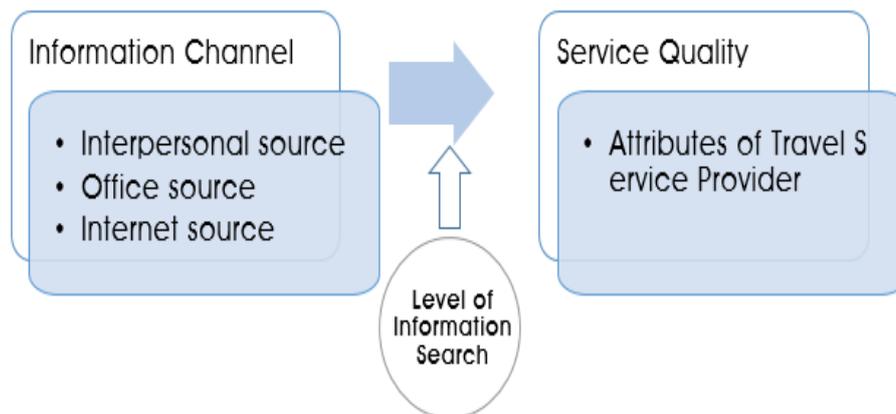


Figure 1. General Framework of Research

3.3. Participants

The demographic characteristics of respondents are summarized below in Table 4. The sample was made up of 288 customers who have experienced the overseas travel through travel agents for vacation. Approximately 58 percent (167) were female and remaining 42 percent (121) represented male. As for the age group, 35.4 percent of the respondents were in the range of 40-49; 22.5 percent, 30-39; 20.1 percent, 50-59. In terms of information channel they had used for gathering the information of travel related service providers like travel agent, credit card companies, they had asked to select just one of three information channel. Respondents replied internet; 44.1 percent, travel service provider; 31.6 percent, opinion leader; 24.3 percent.

Table 4. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Classification		Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender (n=288)	Male	121	42.0
	Female	167	58.0
Age (n=288)	10-19	20	7.0
	20-29	42	15.0
	30-39	65	22.5
	40-49	102	35.4
	50-59	59	20.1
Education (n=288)	High school or lower	26	9.0
	2-year College	88	30.5
	University	125	43.4
	Graduate or higher	49	17.1
Occupation (n=288)	Company employee	98	34.0
	Public servant	47	16.3
	Student	48	16.6
	Self-employed	33	11.4
	Professional	17	5.9
	Housewife	18	6.2
	Unemployed	27	9.6
Information Channel (n=288)	Opinion leader	70	24.3
	Travel agent	91	31.6
	Internet	127	44.1

4. Results

4.1. Factor Analysis

To assess the reliability and unidimensionality of each scale, factor analysis was performed. Table 5 presents the results of factor analysis of independent variables regarding the important service quality attributes. A total of 20 scale items abstracted from the former researches focusing on both on line and off line service quality. The 20 items all have enough loading more than 0.6 and 20 scale items were adopted for final factor analysis.

Table 5. Factor Analysis of Service Quality Attribute (SQA)

Factor and Items	No. of items	Eigen Value	Variance	Alpha
Personal service	4	6.	30.4	0.842
Convenience system	4	2.	15.1	0.804
Customer relationship	4	2.	9.0	0.762
Reputation	3	1.	6.3	0.724
Responsiveness	3	1.	5.2	0.713
Accessibility	2	1.	3.2	0.652

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = 0.865, Sig. = 0.000

Bartlett Test of Sphericity = 3562.537, Total Percent of Variance Explained = 69.2%

The six factors (personal service, convenience system, customer relationship, reputation, responsiveness, and accessibility) which were rotated by Varimax and extracted by Principal Component Analysis (PCA) had eigenvalues greater than 1 respectively. The six factors explained 69.2 percent of total explained variance. As measured by Cronbach alpha, the results of reliability test for the six extracted factors

were obtained at 0.842, 0.804, 0.762, 0.724, 0.713, and 0.652, respectively. The results demonstrated that all the scales had relatively high reliability and suitable for further analysis. The six derived factors were named as personal service, convenience system, customer relationship, reputation, responsiveness and accessibility.

4.2. Analysis of Variance

The first hypothesis of the study is to find the significantly different service quality attributes according to the three major information channels. And Hypothesis 2 is to find the significant service quality attribute according to the level of information search efforts. To verify this question ANOVA analysis was adopted. The six factors previously identified through factor analysis and interpersonal information search were entered. The overall model fit for ANOVA analysis was assessed by F statistics and model was statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. Table 6 showed the four factors, namely, personal service, convenience system, customer relationship, and responsiveness had significant importance when people searching travel related service quality information through interpersonal source. The implication of this result is customers want to get information mostly about personal service ($F=51.967$, $p<0.01$), customer relationship ($F=43.973$, $p<0.01$) through interpersonal information source. To assess the hypothesis 2, we had divided the data into two groups with high level of information search group and low level of information search group by the means of respondents' reply on each information channel items. To find the most significant service quality factors for those who have high level of information search efforts, we use multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). Table 6 presents the results of MANOVA and we find that four factors of service quality showed significantly more important to the high level of information search group. With high level of information search group put more importance on personal service, customer relationship, and convenience system. But the service quality information for responsiveness showed negative value to interpersonal source. This means that responsiveness is not the important service quality for whom using interpersonal source as an information channel. Finally, we can conclude that the determinant service quality factor to decide the level of information search efforts is personal service.

Table 6. Interpersonal Information Search on SQA

Factor	The level of Information Search via Interpersonal Source		F	Sig.
	Low	High		
Personal service	-0.476	0.246	51.967	0.000
Convenience system	-0.234	0.210	9.723	0.003
Customer relationship	-0.431	0.223	43.973	0.002
Responsiveness	0.201	-0.102	8.325	0.004
Wilk's Lambda = 0.2153 F=23.021				

$p < 0.01$

The six factors previously identified through factor analysis and travel service provider as an information search channel were performed. The overall model fit for ANOVA analysis was assessed by F statistics and model was statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. Table 7 showed that the four factors, namely, accessibility, reputation, customer relationship, and convenience system had significant importance when people searching service quality information through travel service providers. The implication of this result is customers want to get information mostly about accessibility ($F=58.638$, $p<0.01$), reputation ($F=33.726$, $p<0.01$) through travel service providers. To assess the hypothesis

2, we had followed the first procedures and divided the respondents group with two groups; high level of information search efforts group and low level of information search group. Table 7 presents the results of MANOVA and we can conclude that the determinant service quality factor to decide the level of information search efforts using travel related service provider as an information source is accessibility and convenience system is not the important service quality for whom using travel service provider source as an information channel.

Table 7. Office Visitation Information Search on SQA

Factor	The level of Information Search via Office Visit		F	Sig.
	Low	High		
Convenience system	0.108	-0.153	1.877	0.003
Customer relationship	-0.232	0.262	29.481	0.001
Reputation	-0.319	0.236	33.726	0.000
Accessibility	-0.397	0.322	58.638	0.000
Wilk's Lambda = 0.1883 F=28.978				

p<0.01

To find the significantly important service quality attributes when people using internet as an information channel, we adopted ANOVA analysis. Table 8 showed that the four factors, namely, convenience system, customer relationship, personal service, and responsiveness had significant importance when people searching service quality information through internet. To understand the significantly important service quality factor for those who had high level of information search efforts through internet, MANOVA analysis was performed. Table 8 showed that four factors of service quality showed significantly more important to the high level of information search group. With high level of information search efforts group using internet have more importance on convenience system, customer relationship, personal service, and responsiveness. Finally, we can conclude that the determinant service quality factor to decide the level of information search efforts through internet is convenience system.

Table 8. Internet Information Search on SQA

Factor	The level of Information Search via Internet Source		F	Sig.
	Low	High		
Personal service	-0.125	0.158	12.255	0.000*
Convenience system	-0.357	0.291	47.929	0.000*
Customer relationship	-0.252	0.197	25.723	0.033**
Responsiveness	-0.196	0.125	7.561	0.001*
Wilk's Lambda = 0.6518 F=27.408				

p<0.05** p<0.01*

5. Conclusion

The research revealed that there are significant differences on service quality attributes of travel related service providers according to information search channels and also confirmed that the level of information search efforts had significant influence on service quality attributes. Analysis of variance was adopted to find the significantly important

service quality factors according to the three major information search channels. We find that there are significantly different service quality factors according to information channel. According to the findings consumers talk with people like friends, relatives, acquaintances to gain the travel-related service quality information particularly about personal service. The other three service quality dimensions including customer relationship, convenience, and responsiveness were also important factors for those who were engaged in interpersonal information search. People visited travel service providers like travel agents to gain the information regarding accessibility, reputation, customer relationship and convenience. The most important service quality attribute for those who with high level efforts on visiting office was accessibility dimension. With regards to Internet information search, the factors of convenience, customer relationship, personal service, and responsiveness were important service quality factors. The most important information of service quality factors for high level internet users was convenience factor including payment method, detailed products information, safe & easy reservation system, and concierge service for related service. A multivariate analysis of variance was also conducted to find the most significantly important service quality factor for those who have high level of information search efforts. The results showed that the most important service quality factor for those who have high level of information search efforts through interpersonal source is personal service. People using interpersonal source trying to find out the various personal services attributes including professional & kind employees, fast responses, and plenty time for discuss the itinerary. We have also find high level of information search group through travel-related service provider showed that accessibility is the most significant and important factor. People visiting travel agent want to know the information regarding extra working time and convenience of location. Lastly, the high level of information search group through internet showed that convenient system is the most significant and important service quality factor. People access to internet try to find the ease of cancellation and changes of reservation and new and up-dated information of travel service. Understanding the differences of service quality attributes according to various information search channels will be useful and helpful to establish on & off-line communication strategies for travel related service providers.

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