

A study on Cultural effects on Tourism in India

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Abstract - Culture plays an important role in determining how product/service consumption is evaluated and the resulting complaining behavior when dissatisfaction occurs. The purpose of this study is to investigate the cultural impacts on hotel customers. Through content analysis of 964 individual complaint cases reported on Trip Advisor and trip travel review websites for Indian hotels, the implications of the findings are discussed and future cultural e-complaint research for the hospitality industry is suggested. This paper presents the results of an empirical analysis of the cultural differences in Indian populations in a tourism context. The paper argues that the challenge for tourism marketers lies in understanding the cultural make-up of the Indian market, and developing culture-oriented marketing strategies. The paper identifies the major reasons for the decline in India. Further, it briefly compares the Indian and Western cultural orientation. This is followed by a description and interpretation of the cultural dimensions identified by a principal components analysis. The implications of these findings for tourism marketers are discussed.

Keywords: Culture, complaints, , hotels, Cultural differences, Indian tourists, Service providers.

1 INTRODUCTION

India is a fast growing tourism market to international destinations in recent years. Despite the recent outbreak of the financial crisis, the fundamentals still remains healthy for the growth of Chinese economy. As such, business travel is likely to be supported by increasing domestic consumption investments and leisure travel will also increase with the increasing level of disposable income. With a long history of unique Indian culture, to gain an understanding and insights on how Indian tourists respond or interpret service failure events can help firms to develop more effective service recovery strategies to capture this market in the future. The rapid growth of the Internet and the proliferation of review sites have enabled customers to bring their complaints online and to make them transparent to the entire world. Weblogs for example are a very important information source for international travelers for obtaining tourism advice and suggestions at specific destinations (Litvin et al., 2008). In particular, Web 2.0 serves as a channel for disseminating service experiences, being that positive or negative, becomes popular at present due to the fast development and applications of technologies. This rapid

development, together with the result of word-of-mouth communications on experienced services and goods, lead to the emergence of many online feedback/review forums. In the context of India, Internet use has increased substantially since 1997.

In order to be successful in today's highly competitive business environment, it is important for hotels to ensure that guest satisfaction is achieved. As hotels provide products and services that are perceived in different ways by different people, different customers will have varied levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction in responding to the same or similar service and product consumption. Negative word-of-mouth and complaint are the two common post-dissatisfaction behaviors adopted. Consumer complaint behavior has attracted considerable attention in the marketing literature in the past (Singh, 1988). This is not surprising as Kelly and Davis showed that the strong relationship between satisfaction with complaint handling and customer trust and commitment with an organization. Previous studies have also indicated that although demographic characteristics such as age, gender and education level do influence complaint behavior, customers with different cultural background are also likely to have different types of complaint behavior.

To demonstrate, online population in India has skyrocketed from 630,000 in early 1997 to almost 300 million in 2009 (CNNIC, 2009). In spite of the importance of online forums, to date, the issue of online complaint management has received limited attention from both researchers and practitioners (Zaugg, 2006). In particular, only a few studies have focused on cultural differences in complaint behavior in hotel industry (Ngai et al., 2007). To the best knowledge of the authors, no prior studies have ever looked at cultural impacts on complaint behavior in the hotel industry, using online channels. Building on previous study by Au et al. (2009) regarding complaints on the online environment, this paper extends the study to compare how complaint behavior differs for other travelers. Using content analysis of secondary data collected on two popular travel review websites, this research analyzes the types of complaints on e-channels by these two groups of e-consumers. In Asia with many world-class hotel properties, as a case. The study also examines the relationship between the types of complaints and room rates. Today's tourism business environment and multicultural diversity of international tourists points to the importance of developing a better understanding of the

culturally different tourist. Cultural variations in value orientations and social behavior have direct impacts on tourist holiday experiences.

The hosts' ability to respond effectively to a culturally different tourist is an important element determining positive tourist holiday experiences and satisfaction. During the last decade the international tourism industry experienced an increase in Indian outbound traffic. The tourism forecasts show that India will be the main source of international outbound tourism in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Currently, India is the largest and the most important single source of international tourists to Australia representing 21% of all international visitors (BTR, 1996). This market has also increased its visitation to Queensland, the major tourist holiday destination in Australia. The percentage of Indian tourists visiting Queensland has been the highest reaching 77% of total visitors in 1996 (BTR, 1996). In response to this vast influx of Indian tourists, who are culturally different from Western populations, it is imperative that tourism marketers understand the cultural characteristics of the Indian tourist. Cultural traits lead to different holiday expectations and experiences and, consequently, a different degree of holiday satisfaction.

Marketers should understand the way Indian tourists select tourist destinations and evaluate them. Several models of buyer behavior have been developed for marketing purposes. Although these models form the base for contemporary marketing, they cannot be easily adopted to explain the purchasing behavior and satisfaction of the international tourist. These models ignore the influence of cultural variables on the purchase experiences of the culturally different buyer. A new marketing approach allowing for logical deductions about international tourist behavior and providing a potential framework for the development of appropriate marketing strategies for international tourists is needed. Thus, this paper attempts to develop such an approach by exploring the influence of cultural variables on Indian buyer behavior in a tourism context.

The traditional model of buyer behavior consists of three stages: pre-purchase, consumption and post consumption. The first pre-purchase stage begins with problem or need recognition, and is followed by a search for information, arrival at a set of solutions and selection of the option. In the consumption stage buyers seek benefits which are delivered through an interactive process between themselves and service providers. At this stage buyers evaluate the services while interacting with the providers. At the post consumption stage buyers evaluate services by comparing the service they perceived they had received with their expectations about what they should have received. At the pre-purchase stage of buyer behavior Indian tourists realize their need to travel overseas and consider the available holiday destinations.

The main reason why the Indian travel overseas, is their desire to experience Western civilization (Hendry, 1987; Leiper, 1985, 1987; Zimmerman, 1985). The main reason for their visitation to Australia is the concept of a safe and clean destination, with unique nature, beautiful beaches, warm climate, and modern facilities. The Indian desire to visit Australia was recently greatly enhanced by heavy publicity and aggressive marketing of Australia as a tourist destination in India. In addition, a favorable exchange rate has made travel to Australia cheap for Indian tourists. As with a general tourism definition, wellness tourism too is generally seen as a minimum of one night stay. Research has further suggested that the location of a wellness tourism destination matters, as tourists seek places that are invoking transcendence, nature and healing (DeBotton, 2002; Frost, 2004; Hoyez, 2007). Hence, natural and indigenous wellness resources could give a destination the competitive advantage needed (Sheldon & Park, 2009). Further studies have shown that more women than men partake in wellness tourism and that most wellness tourists also engage in wellness oriented holistic lifestyles at home (Voigt et al., 2010).

2. METHODOLOGY

This online study employed a survey sampling method to gather data from key interest groups including current travelers, travel professionals and people in the travel planning process. In order to reach travelers interested in wellness travel, a wide variety of databases were used, including list serves of academics in tourism studies, an e mail distribution list that includes consumers interested in work/life balance, a membership list of yoga studio, and university students. Participants were enticed to complete the survey by a chance to win one of the prizes given out through a drawing. A total of 515 respondents completed the survey, of which 70% were current travelers, 16% were college students and 14% were travel professionals.

2.1 MOTIVATIONS OF TRAVEL

The top motives for these travelers were "to spend time with family and friends," and "to take a break from work." Furthermore, 73% of the participants stated that it helped recharge their batteries, and another 53% stated that it reawakens their senses. Results further showed meaningful gender differences, with men being far more likely to travel for solitude. Looking at differences in age, spending time with friends was most important for the youngest group, while spending time with loved ones was more important for the older travelers. When asked why respondents would travel to distant destinations, the top motives were fun, adventure or something new, exotic location and better quality. Medical procedures and travel for services not available were the least important motivators for distant travel, which further seems to validate the distinctly different nature of wellness tourism. An overwhelming 94% stated that vacations made them more productive by feeling

more rested and having a new perspective. Similarly, 88% of the respondents felt vacations made them healthier. As has been observed by previous studies, money (66%) and lack of time (40%) were the two biggest constraints to travel. When asked about the length and frequency of their vacation, only 12% stated they took a ten day vacation twice a year, with another 29% taking a ten day vacation once a year. Over half of the respondents (74%) stated they took a four day vacation more than three times a year. These statistics closely mirror trends in American travel, where more short vacations or extended weekends have replaced the traditional three week vacation. These results could also explain why most vacationers stay closer to home. In terms of trip planning, 64% used online tools for research. Most respondents spent surprisingly little time planning their trips, with 40% spending a week or less and another 36% spending less than a month.

Negative emotions, recovery strategies and satisfaction with the service recovery Satisfaction with the service recovery is defined as customers 'satisfaction with a specific service encounter, which includes a service failure and recovery. Traditionally, marketing researchers have studied customer satisfaction's cognitive antecedents. However, the negative emotions caused by a service failure and the recovery actions carried out by the service provider have an impact on this satisfaction with the service recovery. In conclusion, we suggest that satisfaction is influenced by both affective and cognitive components. 57 In fact, the idea that affective as well as cognitive elements can be complementary antecedents of satisfaction is more and more accepted. 58,59 Negative emotions after the failure and satisfaction with the recovery The affective perspective of satisfaction argues that emotions are a basic antecedent of satisfaction. 60 – 63 However, only a few relatively recent studies on service failure and recovery examine this relationship. 7,10,12,13,55 This lack of attention on emotions in a service failure and recovery context is somewhat surprising, as the ' study of consumers 'emotional responses seems particularly relevant to negative service encounters '.

3 RESEARCH METHOD

In this research, the dataset for hotel reviews posted by the Indian travelers was collected from Ctrip.com in the period January to June 2009; whereas for hotel reviews posted by non-Chinese travelers were collected from TripAdvisor.com in the period February to July, 2008. Ctrip.com is a leading travel service provider of hotel accommodation, airline tickets and packaged tours in India.

The website has experienced substantial growth and is one of the best known and leading travel brands in India in hotel room and air ticket reservation business. In 2006, trip had an astonishing figure of 5.45 million hotel stay days booked, while the next highest site named eLong had just 2.53 million days booked (Zhang and Zhang, 2008). Unlike Trip Advisor, reviews posted on the Ctrip site are from Indian

travelers for two reasons. First, almost all complaints were written in simplified Chinese. Second, only members with a local (India) area mobile phone number are allowed to post reviews on the site. In contrast, Trip Advisor was setup in early 2000 by the same company operating Expedia. Tripadvisor.com was chosen in this research because of its large scale of coverage on travel destinations and accommodation reviews. In each year, more than 20 million of potential hotel consumers use review sites prior to making their decisions on hotel selection. Trip Advisor has a primary goal of providing unbiased recommendations to users for travel-related information.

The website indexes hotels from cities in most cities worldwide, together with reviews posted by travelers. As stated, hotels, a special administrative region of India, were selected in this research. The hotels as retrieved on both websites can be listed according to popularity, price, or class. During the data collection, the reviews were sorted in ascending order on the basis of members' rating. To ensure the sufficiency of data for analysis and to maintain the operational efficiency, a maximum of 10 reviews (with complaints) in each hotel were extracted for further analysis. In total, 911 individual reviews on 110 different hotels were collected and analyzed from the trip; whereas the corresponding number for Trip Advisor is 453. This study adopted content analysis for the collected data. On the basis of the complaints reported from customers on both websites using the grounded theory approach and keyword analysis, the complaints were classified into nine different categories, including: space, bedding, décor, cleanliness, utilities/amenities, provision of amenities, service, price, and miscellaneous (others). Additionally, information regarding room rate or class of a hotel was collected for further analysis with a two-way contingency table analysis.

3.1 MEASURING INSTRUMENT AND ITS DESIGN

A structured interview questionnaire was used to collect the data. The questionnaire was divided into six parts: the first part measured cultural values. The Rokeach Values Survey was chosen as the most appropriate for measuring human values. The second part measured rules of social behavior and the items were adapted from Argyle's et al. (1986) study on cross-cultural variations in relationship rules. However, the original instrument was modified so that rules of conforming to social etiquette, having a sense of shame, avoiding embarrassment and many other questions were included to make the instrument more applicable to the Indian culture. The third part of the questionnaire measured perceptions of service. Many items were adapted from Parasuraman et al.'s (1986) study on service quality dimensions as they covered the most important criteria of service quality. However, additional variables such as knowledge of Indian culture and customs, knowledge of Australian history and culture, and ability to speak the

Indian and English language were added to the questionnaire. These variables had been found to be useful in measuring Indian tourist perceptions of Australian service providers' attributes (Reisinger and Waryszak, 1994a,b,c,d). The fourth part of the questionnaire measured tourist-host social interaction. The measuring items were adapted from the direct and indirect measures of social contact identified by Feather (1980) and Kamal and Maruyama (1990). The fifth part of the questionnaire measured seven components of satisfaction with tourist-host contact. Additional socio-demographic information was also collected. All questions were identical for both the Australian and Indian samples to permit comparison of answers. The tourist questionnaire was translated into the Indian language and back translated from Indian into English to achieve equivalence of concepts.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Indian tourist market by offering services tailored to Indian cultural characteristics. The focus should be on delivering a significantly higher level of service quality and adopting the mentality of Indian tourists. The emphasis should be on service punctuality, professional competence and apologetic attitude by service providers, social etiquette, customer differentiation based on social status and age, sense of order, politeness and respect, accuracy and adequacy of information, concern about the collectivistic needs of the Indian tourists, and binding personal relations. This study has offered better understanding and useful insights of the impact of culture on complaints based on a study about hotels. Apparently, culture plays an important role in determining how customers expect services to be delivered as well as their complaint behavior. Today's service managers in the hotel industry should be aware of the cost of ignoring cultural norms. The classification of e-complaints into nine categories should provide more detailed information on what causes customer dissatisfaction and make customers to subsequently express their negative comments online.

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