

# THE INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MARKETING AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

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## ABSTRACT

*In recent decades, tourism has been an ever-growing industry that attracts millions of tourists who travel around the world with different motivations and needs. Tourism is considered as one of the fastest and largest growing global economic sectors. Marketing is a concept that defines, identifies, produces, and measures services, and goods to satisfy the needs and desires of customers (Kotler, 1999). On the other hand, customer satisfaction is of particular importance for the concept of marketing, with elements of strategic links between satisfaction and overall service delivery (Truch, 2006). This research aims to analyze the linkage between customer satisfaction and marketing in the tourism industry. The special focus on the literature review emphasizes critically analyses the literature on tourist products, marketing, marketing mix, and customer satisfaction in the tourism industry.*

**Keywords:** Tourism Industry, Marketing, Customer Satisfaction.

**JEL Classification:** L83, M31

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years the issue of the tourism industry has been particularly exciting around the world. Tourism is one of the fastest-growing markets and one of the most important economic activities for most countries in the world. (UNWTO, 2015). Growth rates in the tourism industry were higher than in the overall global economy (E-Business Watch, 2006). The development of tourism brings important economic and social advantages to countries, communities, and individuals.

Tourism “is a composite of activities, services, and industries that delivers a travel experience: transportation, accommodation, eating and drinking establishments, shops, entertainment, activity facilities, and other hospitality services are available for individuals or groups who travel away from home” (Drosos & Tsotsolas, 2015). Applying marketing within the tourism industry is becoming increasingly important, not only because tourists are far more sophisticated than in the past, but also considering that competition within the tourism market is becoming intense, thus reflecting the importance of marketing evolution to the past and today of almost all business sectors (Kyriakopoulos, 2011; Kyriakopoulos, 2012).

Modern organizations emphasize feedback based on issues related to customer satisfaction and service quality. All service organizations around the world recognize the importance of customer satisfaction as a strategic tool and determinant of long-term

sustainability and economic growth (Drosos et al., 2019). Thus, the main objective of this research is to theoretically examine the relationship between marketing and customer satisfaction in the tourism market.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Defining Tourism

The World Trade Organization describes tourists as “people traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes” (UNWTO, 1995). Tourism is stated as “the temporary movement to destinations outside the normal home and workplace, the activities undertaken during the stay and the facilities created to cater for the needs of tourists” (Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert & Wanhill, 1993). It includes all types of travel - day trips, short breaks or long vacations, visits to friends and relatives, leisure or business trips, in this country or abroad.

In 1976, the Institute of Tourism suggested that “tourism is the temporary short-term movement of people to destinations outside the places where they normally live and work”. According to Mathieson and Wall (1982), tourism is “the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal usual places of work and residence, the activities undertaken during their stay in those destinations, and the facilities created to cater to their needs.” Besides, tourism is considered “as the sum of tourist expenditures within the borders of a nation or a political subdivision or conveying a transportation-centered economic area of contiguous states or nations” (McIntosh & Goeldner 1995).

### Tourism Contribution to the Economy

Tourism refers to the international industry of traveling, accommodation, transportation, and also promotion, that serves the needs and desires of travelers (Khanal, Gan & Becken, 2014; Kronenberg, Fuchs & Lexhagen, 2018; Stabler, Papatheodorou & Sinclair 2010). However, the quality management approach in tourism services discloses important particularities, creating a symbiosis between prospects, theoretical concepts, and the necessity of fundamental decisions undertaken towards the quality management of tourism services. Regarding this functionality of tourism services, modern marketing can support exceeding the desired efficiency on consumers' requests and perceptions (Teodorescu, Standoiu & Mitu, 2009).

### Components of Tourism Product

Tourism is a specific type of product and it needs to be analyzed into two dimensions (Witt & Moutinho, 1995). First, in the total tourism product, the combination of all the services that the guests consume from the moment they leave the house, until the moment they return. And secondly, the commercial products, which are components of the total tourist product, such as accommodation, transport, attractions, etc. Tourism products may include the following categories: business, medical, religious, cultural, sports, educational, urban, seaside, rural, ecotourism, wine, and culinary and others (Camilleri, 2018; Kouthouris & Alexandris, 2005; Lee, Lee & Kang, 2012).

According to Witt and Moutinho (1994), the overall tourism product consists of five main parts; “destination attractions, destination facilities, accessibility, images, and price”.

- Destination attractions “serve as the main incentive for tourist visits” and include natural attractions such as the Greek sandy beaches, cultural attractions such as the Acropolis in Athens or the well-preserved ancient amphitheater of Epidaurus, and social attractions such as the immersion of visitors into the easy-going, unhurried way of life in Greece.
- The destination facilities are defined as “the elements within a destination which make it possible for visitors to stay and enjoy the destinations” and include accommodation, restaurants, cafes and bars, transportation to and from the destination along with any type of retailing.
- Accessibility is concerned with the transportation infrastructure of a destination such as airports, ports and motorways and the transportation technology “which can alter the cost of travel as well as the travelling time”.
- Images include “the ideas and beliefs which people hold about all forms of tourism products they purchase or contemplate”. Even though destination images are usually based on preconceptions they can negatively or positively influence visitors’ tourism decisions.
- Ultimately, price “is the sum of what it costs for a visitor’s choice of the components of travel, accommodation, and participation in a range of selected services at the destination”.

## Marketing in Tourism

The past few decades have been characterized by an ongoing debate about what marketing theory is. According to Kotler, Armstrong, Wong, and Saunders (2008), the importance of marketing is becoming increasingly significant in promoting products. The Chartered Institute of Marketing (2003) designates marketing as “the management process for identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customer requirements profitably”.

According to Wilson (1988), marketing is being used, first of all, to identify consumers’ needs, covering questions regarding what goods and services are bought; Who buys them; and how and why they are bought. Secondly, marketing may help to define the target market segments, through grouping customers according to some common characteristics such as geographic, demographic, psychological, etc. And finally, it can create a differential advantage to establish a distinct competitive position, about the competition, and ultimately to generate profits. Another definition of marketing is “A customer focus that permeates organizational functions and processes and is geared towards making promises through value proposition, enabling the fulfillment of individual expectations created by such promises and fulfilling such expectations through support to customers’ value-generating processes, thereby supporting value creation in the firm’s as well as its customers’ and other stakeholders’ processes” (Grönroos, 2006).

Using marketing within the tourism industry is becoming increasingly important. Not only because tourists are far more sophisticated than in the past but also because competition within the tourism market is becoming intense. (Hudson, 2008; Tsiotsou & Ratten, 2010). Marketing applied in tourism can prove to be extremely complicated. As with any other service, tourism possesses several characteristics, which often have a significant impact on developing a marketing program. The most important features that services possess are intangibility, inseparability, perishability, and inconsistency (Moutinho, 1991).

The more distinctive difference between a product and a service is that the products have physical attributes that services do not possess, as they are intangible. Services are performances (Dibb Simkin, Pride & Ferrell, 1994). They cannot be seen, touched, tasted or smelled. Because of this intangibility, consumers may misunderstand the exact nature of a service. It could be argued that customers purchasing a service purchase promises of satisfaction (Zikmund & D’Amico, 1996).

A product is a holistic concept of objects or processes that provide some value to customers. It can be an economic good, a service, an idea, or even a combination of those

three. To help consumers, understand and evaluate the nature of a service, marketers often employ a marketing strategy that can convert the intangible to tangible. That could be achieved by providing the customers with a plethora of information and documentation. Effective marketing of services, therefore, heavily relies on “developing a symbolic appearance of competency and credibility of the provider of the service” (Zikmund & D’Amico, 1995).

Inseparability is another generic characteristic of services, meaning that the producer and the consumer of a service have to be present at the same place and at the same time for the service transaction to occur (Zikmund & D’Amico, 1995). Thus, most service distribution channels are direct channels where the service provider offers the product directly to the consumer. According to Zikmund & D’Amico (1995) “Services, unlike goods, cannot be stored for future use”. Lastly, as the production and delivery of a service heavily depend on different providers, fluctuations in the quality of the service will be evident. Equally important is the fact that services cannot be “checked for conformance with quality standards before reaching the customer as they are usually produced and consumed under real-time conditions” (Lovelock, 1991). Inconsistency of services, therefore, can only be penetrated through standardization and training Bao, (2018).

## Marketing Mix in Tourism

For a tourism organization, to achieve and sustain a competitive advantage against its rivals, the use of the marketing mix (e.g. Teviana, Ginting, Lubis & Gultom, 2017) consists of Pricing, Product, Promotion, Place and also Process, and People (Kotler et al., 2008; Langeard Bateson, Lovelock & Eiglier, 1981; Middleton, 2001,).

## Product

The service product includes the services provided as well as the quality and level of services provided (Cowell, 1993). The tourist product comprises many components. Among others are Access, Attractions, Amenities, and Ancillary services. Access refers to transportation networks. Attractions can be natural or manmade, sites or events, urban, rural, or coastal (Kotler et al., 2008). Amenities include facilities ranging from accommodation to food, from serviced and non-serviced facilities to hospitals, banks, exchange bureaux, and shopping facilities. Ancillary services could include things like tourist boards, sports associations, tourist information Centres (TICs), police, traffic warnings, guides, lifeguards, advisory bureaux, and many more (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2009).

The efficacy of planning the marketing mix depends on the ability to devise a product, which will lead to high levels of tourist demand and satisfaction. The tourist has to believe that the products offered add value (Middleton, Fyall, Morgan & Ranchhod, 2009). Having in mind all the components included in the tourist product, it is easy to understand that to attract as many tourists as possible from the target markets, we must diversify the product Chen et al., (2011). It must offer a wide variety of choices, capable of satisfying the needs of any potential customer. Food quality food image and food satisfaction are factors consisting of tourists’ decision to revisit (Gkika, 2023). It therefore makes sense to include different features in the products, which will help to differentiate it from competitors (Kotler et al., 2009).

## Price

The price estimates include price levels, discounts available, payment terms, etc., (Cowell, 1993). The prices of tourism products must take into account the complexity created by the seasonality of demand and the inherent perishability of the product. This makes pricing decisions the most difficult to make in the marketing mix. For instance, price is associated with the psychological aspects of both quality and prestige (Sherbini et al., 2017). It is consequently, always important to measure the way prices or their change will be perceived by the different target segments (Cooper et.al., 1993, Sousa & Alves, 2019).

## Place

The place is concerned with the location of the service providers as well as with their accessibility. The special characteristics of the tourist product lead to specific forms of distribution. A tourist product is a product where no transfer of ownership takes place and the service is simply rented or consumed. A distribution system can be defined as the channel used or through which a travel supplier gains access to potential buyers of the product (Cooper et.al., 1993; Kotler et al., 2009).

Prayag & Ryan, (2012) showed that destination image, personal involvement, and place attachment were proven antecedents of visitors' loyalty but this relationship was mediated by satisfaction levels. Also, Gkika (2017) explored the factors influencing tourists' satisfaction from visiting different tourist destinations as a mountain destination or an island, and concluded that the cost of staying and the quality of the products and the services provided in both destinations were among the top factors that contributed the most at tourist decision.

## Promotion

Promotion involves the combination of a range of communication tools known as the promotions mix or the communication mix. According to the Cowell (1993) and Middleton et al., (2009) the promotion mix "includes selling, advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, publicity and public relations, sponsorship, exhibitions, corporate identity, packaging, point-of-sale and merchandising, and word of mouth". Communication plays a key role in positioning a service in the market (Lovelock, 1991). Communication carries messages, that could persuade customers to purchase and use a particular service or product (Kotler et al., 2010; Lovelock, 1991). Exciting new opportunities exist through new types of paid advertising media as the Internet and the World Wide Web, also, direct marketing, like mail and telemarketing, has the potential to reach highly targeted micro-segments (Lovelock, 1991).

In the relevant literature important elements of marketing communications for tourism services are that of corporate identity (or corporate design), customers' trust, and tourism factories. In particular:

- Corporate identity refers to "the consistent use of distinctive colors, symbols, lettering, and layout on such tangible elements as signage to provide a unifying and recognizable theme linking all the operations of a firm" (Lovelock, 1991).
- Customers' trust is "the support of the tourism industry, as it satisfies the basic demands for travel guarantee and safety" (Xu & Shieh, 2014). In supporting the promotion of consumer awareness, consumers are prone to purchase products or accept services from trusted tourism businesses, which have to present an excellent corporate image. In this concept, reputation plays a decisive role in the management of a tourism industry, enabling a company to build up a favorable corporate image, enhance the trust of the customers, and further induce the

purchase intention and behaviors to enhance the sustainable management of tourism businesses (Xu & Shieh, 2014).

- Tourism factories are “tourist attractions with values of manufacturing, culture, history, tourism, and recreation, providing a series of activities for tourists to experience the products and the manufacturing process in the mode of experiential marketing to enhance their cognition for the products and the corporate image” (Yeh, Chen & Chen, 2019).

## People

People involved in the production and delivery of services are becoming a remarkably important asset for organizations to gain a competitive advantage (Payne, 1993). Tourism is a service industry, and the customer has direct contact with people during the consumption of the service (Eid, 2015).

Therefore, to make the tourist experience more pleasant, the people engaged in the industry should be educated and committed to satisfying tourists' needs. In the case of employees of the tourism industry, appropriate training should be given, along with incentives and empowerment, to develop an interpersonal behavior that will be pleasant to the customers. Customer satisfaction should impact customer retention (Barusman et al., 2019). Specifically, relationship management has a significant impact on customer satisfaction, service quality and customer retention. Specific strategies for local governments should include “training local people to behave more friendly in welcoming domestic or international tourists, fixing all lodging facilities, creating more souvenirs with locally traditional ornaments and developing management system adopting global changes in technology, communication and trend” (Barusman, et al., 2019).

## Process

Processes are about all “the procedures, mechanisms and routines by which a service is created and delivered to customers” (Payne, 1993). Processes in tourism are about the correct schedule and always giving customers the promised experience.

Thus, quality customer service is a necessity for the satisfaction of increasingly demanding customers and the build-up of closer and more enduring relationships with them. Moreover, customer service can be used as “a competitive weapon to differentiate a service and gain competitive advantage” (Payne, 1993). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that there are tourism businesses that neglect marketing ethics in the development of the market economy because of over-pursuing economic interests. Specifically, whenever consumer sovereignty is infringed, consumer satisfaction is reduced, resulting in declining customer loyalty (Xu & Shieh, 2014). The study concluded that “marketing ethics” were partially and positively affecting “service process” and “service structure” in “customer satisfaction”. Besides, “marketing ethics” showed a significant and positive effect on “service outcome” in “customer satisfaction”. More importantly, it was proven that “customer satisfaction” and “marketing ethics” were remarkably affected by “individual attributes” (Xu & Shieh, 2014).

## Customer Satisfaction in Tourism

Concerning customer satisfaction, several scientific papers try to define it, quantify it and measure its impact (Letcher & Neves, 2010). According to Oliver, 91989), “customer satisfaction is related to their customers' subjective judgment on experiences from their educational context”. Oliver (1980) argued that satisfaction is based on experience and is influenced by the constantly changing experiences in an educational context. Customer satisfaction rating is a reliable indicator of performance. So, while many travel agencies focus

on customer satisfaction, achieving and maintaining customers through customer loyalty is the ultimate goal (Asgarpour et al., 2015; Drosos Skordoulis, Arabatzis, Tsotsolas & Galatsidas, 2019b; Yusof et al., 2017). Loyal customers buy more and are willing to spend more money, it is easier for them to reach out to the tour operator, and act as excited “representatives” of the tour operator. Satisfaction is a prerequisite for business finances and customer loyalty.

Customer satisfaction means that customer needs are met, services are considered satisfactory and therefore the consumer experience is positive. It is especially important to denote that the management of a business should have a clear image of the customers it is targeting and use measuring tools for satisfaction, loyalty and profit generated by them to ensure its finances and, as far as it is concerned, its sustainability (Chen, Chen & Lee, 2011; Kaplan & Norton, 1996;). From customer satisfaction metrics, it has often been found that the relationship between customer satisfaction and financial stability is robust. Aggressive pricing policies by competitors can lure customers with a high level of loyalty, so they can change their preferences and turn to the cheapest supplier to meet their needs (Drosos et al, 2018; Drosos, et al, 2019a; Heskett, et al, 1994). The quality of tourism business services provided is determined indirectly but also essentially by the nature of the services provided.

Customer satisfaction is judged overall and not based on the final result (De Nisco et al., 2015; Sousa et al., 2019). Especially for those tourist services that customers are occasionally on vacation, it is really difficult for a tourist to set accurate expectations about the features of the destination. Thus, it is much more difficult for this tourist to assess the quality of the services provided and express a level of satisfaction (Kozak, 2001).

In addition, tourists are likely to come into contact with a large number of other tourists. For this reason, feedback from other tourists can affect their views about a service provider or even about a destination. In modern reality, the view of tourists can be influenced by other tourists not only through personal contact but also through website applications such as “TripAdvisor”.

Yet, another particular feature that can identify the satisfaction of tourists has to do with cultural differences. Therefore, what most probably can be measured is not a valid assessment of the travel destination based on personally expressed views but rather a mix of individual and local perceptions (De Nisco et al., 2015; Weiermair & Fuchs, 2000).

## **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CUSTOMER SATISFACTION and MARKETING IN TOURISM**

The subject of hospitality and travel is very dynamic and is constantly experiencing changes both internal and external. Long-term planning is required to ensure success. The term used to describe the process of developing long-term marketing plans is strategic marketing planning. Strategic marketing planning implies choosing a range of actions for long-term survival and growth. Its use is the first fundamental principle of the system.

Marketing has now been transformed into a field of client relationship management that is the springboard for the need to tailor the marketing culture. In the modern economy, the levels of competition are very high. Thus, more than ever, businesses want and need to create a lasting competitive edge to secure the long-term success of the business. Today’s conditions require the business to have the potential and knowledge to understand the purchasing behavior, motivations and even the personality of its customers. Customer relationship management in tourism is a difficult piece of research for the business, but it gives it very significant advantages if done in the right way (Gray & Byun, 2001).

Relationship marketing is not just an application of marketing, sales and customer service but a multifunctional, customer-centric, strategically defined business process that maximizes the performance of customer relationships and therefore the overall performance of the business (Anderson & Mittal, 2000). Customer satisfaction is a central philosophy in marketing on account of its role in creating the organization's competitive advantages (Mittal et al., 2005).

Last decades years, at the level of business practice, it is common knowledge that customer satisfaction is the basis of marketing thinking, which has been the ideological platform of modern organizations, internationally (Kotler, 1991). The long-term goal of relationship marketing in tourism, as in all other service industries, is customer satisfaction.

As already mentioned, customer satisfaction is linked to the function of its expectations of a product or service and the product's or service's performance. In particular, when the customer feels that the performance of the product or service is equal to the expectations, he had or above, then he feels satisfied. But when he feels that his performance is lower than his expectations, he feels dissatisfied. Over time, customer satisfaction has, for various reasons, replaced the previous terms.

Several times, customer satisfaction rating is not a reliable indicator of the performance or quality level of a business, especially in conditions of strong competition. So, while many organizations focus on customer satisfaction, achieving and maintaining customer loyalty should be the ultimate goal, especially for service companies such as those in the tourism industry. Loyalty refers to customers' attitude relative to their evaluation of a product or a service and further their future attitude (Gkika, 2016). Satisfaction is a prerequisite for the dedication of a set of clients but is not a sufficient condition (Heskett et al., 1994).

Satisfaction and disposal for the purchase of the product or service are positively correlated. The value of loyalty comes from customer complaints, from anticipating a change in consumer behavior, and from a full understanding of why customers are turning to competitors. Customers remain loyal due to the value they receive. Customer retention requires a continuous and lively relationship with the customer.

Quality of services provided and customer satisfaction have a positive impact on customer behavior. Customers satisfied with the services provided express the highest levels of loyalty. However, their intention to pay more is not significantly higher than customers who have service problems that are solved satisfactorily. Thus, businesses aiming to improve their services, especially above the desired level, can do so by calculating some costs. Businesses that aim at customer loyalty constantly adjust their offerings to meet the ever more sophisticated needs of their customers. Products and services are offered to consumers at competitive prices. Meeting customer requirements may be expensive, but tourist service providers should usually look to the customer's worth in life (Dabholkar & Abston, 2008).

## CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Given the foregoing analysis, we may conclude that the satisfaction of tourists is essential for tourists' next destination decision. The provision of high-quality services is ultimately to be understood as being a priority that is of the utmost importance for the sustainability of a competitive business. The tourist product is by nature a composite product in production and offer which involves many different sectors of the economy. The physical resources contribute to its shaping, human resources, means of communication and transport, accommodation, restaurants, public information offices, car rental agencies, guides, interpreters, cruise ships and boat rental companies can be different pieces of the tourism



product puzzle. As far as it is concerned, customer satisfaction with tourism is very composite and is influenced by many constructs.

Thus, the provision of top-quality services over time is a kind of investment in the linkage between the customer of the service, but also the provider so that the relationship between them is founded on strong fundamental values such as trust and faith. There are quality systems assurances that are based on the features that are essential for a service to be considered of high quality.

In the light of the foregoing theoretical analysis, there are several roads for further study. As mentioned above, tourism satisfaction can be affected by various factors. Further studies could be carried out to measure the quality of services provided and customer satisfaction with tourism service providers using demographic and social characteristics and their impact on quality dimensions. Furthermore, the marketing strategies that could be designed to meet expectations for the provided services and the importance of predicting customer requirements could be analyzed for the case of tourism. Last, an in-depth survey concerning customer satisfaction and marketing strategies for all types of tourism (e.g. agrotourism, touring tourism, religious tourism, etc.) would be useful to point out the differences between the different tourism products and the areas for special attention.

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