
THE IMPACT OF EXTERNAL FACTORS ON CHINESE TOURISTS' TOUR SATISFACTION - EVIDENCE FROM LISTED TRAVEL AGENCIES IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

The Chinese tourist market is one of the prominent markets in the Sri Lankan tourism industry. But there is a decline in the Chinese tourist arrivals through travel agencies. This study focusing on the impact of external factors that could affect the tour satisfaction of Chinese tourists who visited Sri Lanka through travel agencies. To achieve the objectives of the study researchers selected 100 Chinese tourists who travel to Sri Lanka in 2018 through four Sri Lanka tourism development authority (SLTDA) registered travel agencies. Ample selected according to the simple random sampling method. Data collected by distributing structured questioners and analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences SPSS. Descriptive and correlation analysis methods employed on data analysis. The study results visualized that, Chinese tourists were satisfied with the cleanliness of the hotels, quality of the guide, service of the hotel, quality of transportation, quality of the driver and they were dissatisfied with the foods of the hotels. Moreover, there were moderate positive relationship on cleanliness of the hotel, service of the hotel, food of the hotels, quality of transportation and quality of the driver with Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour. Also, it identified that there was a fairly strong positive relationship between the quality of the guide and Chinese tourists' satisfaction on the tour. Most of the Chinese tourists are dissatisfied with the available foods in Sri Lanka. Researcher suggests that the suppliers in the Chinese market need to be more focus towards the requirements of Chinese tourists such as providing necessary set of equipment, preferred foods and reliable guides.

Keywords: Chinese tourists, external factors, service quality, tour satisfaction

1.Introduction

Tourism is widely regarded as one of the world's largest and fastest-growing sectors, accounting for about 10% of global GDP, and employing a growing workforce of 283.5 million, as illustrated by the World Travel and Tourism Council. Given the growth in Sri Lanka's tourism industry since 2009, fuelled by growing tourist arrivals from China (Deyshappriya, 2018).

In 1957 Sri Lanka was among the first countries to recognize China and formally establish diplomatic relations. Since then, relations with Sino Sri Lanka have kept rising at a rapid rate. More recently, China has emerged as one of Sri Lanka's most important external relations nations. Compared to the other countries in the region, it is obvious that Sri Lanka has maintained strong relations with China, which in many ways has helped Sri Lanka especially in the field of tourism to increase the number of tourists' arrivals from China.

The tourism industry is also Sri Lanka's third-largest foreign revenue earner. According to the central bank of Sri Lanka the tourism sector's overall contribution (both direct and indirect) to the economy of Sri Lanka is substantial and increasing, at 11.1 percent of GDP in 2014. In 2015, this was equivalent to LKR1093.6 billion, an amount expected to rise to LKR 1979.2 billion by 2025. The greater contribution of the tourism sector to the Sri Lankan economy, especially after 2009, political stability highly influences on this matter (Deyshappriya, 2018).

Travel agencies provide services that largely consist of information exchange and information processing activities. Promotional information and information that should support the customer in their travel decision-making is generally provided in pre-transaction services (Mubarak, 2020). In transaction services, the customers' personal information and payments are collected, verified, and processed, and information is relayed to third party transportation and hospitality providers. Finally, in post-transaction services travel agents communicate last-minute information to the customer and provide after-sales assistance. As the travel industry is largely information-driven, the World Wide Web is considered ideally suited as a medium for these activities (Adamic, Huberman, Barabási, Albert, Jeong, & Bianconi, 2000; Morgan, Pritchard, & Abbott, 2001; Peterson, Balasubramanian, & Bronnenberg, 1997), and it is hardly surprising that Online travel services have developed into one of the largest e-commerce domains (Bowen, & Clarke, 2002).

The Chinese tourists are one of the highest arriving tourist categories in Sri Lanka. It is visible that there is the highest potential to develop Sri Lankan tourism market for Chinese tourists. Therefore, it should identify the factors that influence attracting more Chinese tourists to Sri Lanka. Satisfying a guest will create customer loyalty for a destination (Ali & Kaldeen, 2017). Moreover, it enables marketers to increase their market share. There can be an identified a number of factors which influence Chinese tourists and in this research study, the researchers focused on the external factors which influence the satisfaction of the Chinese tourists.

1.1 Problem statement

The following table indicates the number of tourists' arrivals of two consecutive years through the selected 04 travel agencies and Chinese arrivals to Sri Lanka.

Table 1: Tourists Arrivals

	Via Travel Agencies	Chinese Arrivals to Sri Lanka
Number of Chinese Arrivals from 1 st November 2015 to 31 st October 2016	2,847	214,783
Number of Chinese Arrivals from 1 st November 2016 to 31 October 2017	1,932	271,577

(Source: Tourist Board Annual Report and primary data from travel agencies)

By referring to the above table it is very clear that there is a significant drop down in the Chinese arrivals to Sri Lanka via travel agencies. When considering the Chinese arrivals to Sri Lanka there is no such decline. This significant drop down is only affected by the Chinese market of travel agencies. This is the major issue that leads the researchers to do a study on this area.

Therefore, this problem will be analyzed by taking the external factors that could influence the overall tour satisfaction. According to Bowen & Clarke, 2002, the external factors or the uncontrollable factors by the travel agency are the cleanliness of the hotel, Service of the hotel, quality of the guide, foods of the hotel, quality of transportation, and quality of the driver. Moreover, these external factors could be influenced by the overall service quality of the travel agency as all these external factors have a direct influence on tour satisfaction.

1.2 Research objectives

- To identify the Chinese tourists' satisfactory level on the external factors of travel agencies in Sri Lanka.
- To identify the relationship between the external factors of travel agencies in Sri Lanka on tour satisfaction of Chinese tourists.

1.3 Significance of the study

This research helps to identify what are the factors that need to be considered more, to improve the service quality of the organization. Moreover, the organization can make decisions on changing the service providers. Also, this may help to identify the tourists' expectations from the travel agency. Moreover, this study helps to improve the quality of the overall tourism-related services in Sri Lanka and Finally, this will help to increase the number and the quality of the tourist's arrivals to Sri Lanka.

2. Literature review

The internet has considerably increased competition among travel agents. Also, where price only plays a secondary role in online services (Reichheld & Schefter, 2000), the knowledge efficiency of the internet remains a major challenge, as all online travel agencies provide similar services. Quality of service can create a distinction between providers and thus ease market competition (Clemons et al., 2002), and may, therefore, be among the most important success factors of any Internet business (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Malhotra, 2002). Excellent online service will satisfy or even delight customers and increase their patronage (Rust & Oliver, 2000), this leads to favorable activities such as word-of-mouth marketing (Mubarak & Hilal, 2019), willingness to pay a price premium and buying back (Reichheld & Schefter, 2000). Nonetheless, few sites are reported to appeal to their customers and even fewer create significant value (Grönroos, 2000).

Positive and reciprocal relationships are often assumed to exist between customer loyalty, service quality, and customer satisfaction in offline and online contexts (Bowen & Clarke, 2002), although the precise existence of these relations and the validity of the theories of offline loyalty in an online world are still under discussion (Jeong, Oh, & Gregoire, 2003). In reality, loyal customers are typically happy customers, but satisfaction does not translate universally into loyalty (Oliver, 1999). Service quality and customer satisfaction have been used interchangeably as antecedents of loyalty, but a feeling of consensus is growing that

they are fundamentally different in terms of antecedents and outcomes (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000). Causal relations are thought to exist between quality of service, satisfaction and loyalty, while design, direction and intensity of the relations depend on the type of service (Dabholkar, 1996) and the position in the customer-provider relationship lifecycle. Consistency of transactions and post-transaction activities are seen as key to overall loyalty (Reibstein, 2002), while in the case of online travel services, satisfaction with pre-transaction services will be important, as it leads to return and favorable word-of-mouth behavior. It is believed that optimistic expectations of service quality contribute to enhanced satisfaction, "perception of pleasurable fulfilment" (Oliver, 1999) and value attributions (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000). Conversely, Dabholkar (1996) found that satisfaction with the use of technology has a substantial effect on service quality evaluations. It appears very difficult, if not impossible, to influence satisfaction, loyalty or patronizing the behavior of customers directly.

The view of the customer about service recovery activities based on fairness principle and their effect on customer satisfaction in the sense of Chinese travel agency. The current research has shown that the expectations of the fairness of customers about service recovery are positively related to customer satisfaction. In particular, the perception of the customer about distributive fairness is the most significant predictor of customer satisfaction among the three fairness elements in the context of travel agencies (He, Li & Lai, 2011).

Johann, 2014 states: attractiveness of the program, organization (tour company), hotels (accommodation), Restaurants and meals, Standard of the bus, Tour escort (guide), Price/quality relationship has positive impact on tourists' tour satisfaction. Cleanliness of the hotel and service staff are influencing on tourists' tour satisfaction (Perera & Vlosky, 2013).

Conceptual framework

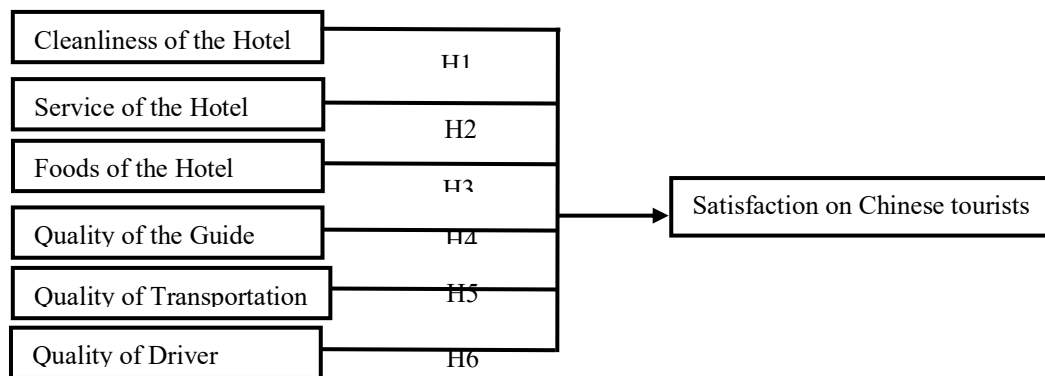


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

According to this study, the population is the total number of Chinese tourists who have visited Sri Lanka through selected SLTDA registered travel agencies. The sample of the study was 100 Chinese tourists who traveled to Sri Lanka through selected SLTDA registered travel agencies. The sample size was 100 Chinese tourists. The sample selected by using simple random sampling techniques. In selecting a sample to the study researchers followed

several steps: first created the list of travel agencies which were registered under SLTDA in 2017; then selected all the travel agencies who handle inbound Chinese tours in Sri Lanka; by using simple random sampling method the researchers selected four travel agencies from the created list; then researchers created a list of Chinese visitors by contacting the travel agencies and collected email addresses of Chinese tourists who have traveled in Sri Lanka in 2018; then from the developed list randomly selected 100 Chinese tourists and contacted them via emails; after one-week researchers collected 60 questionnaires and then selected other 40 Chinese travelers and emailed the questionnaires and after one week collected 30 questioners again; in the final stage send 10 questioners to randomly selected Chinese visitors and collected all 100 data sets. To grant equal opportunities to be selected by each unit in the population researchers selected one traveler from each group of travelers when creating the Chinese traveler's list. Therefore, the sample used in this research was not biased.

To collect quantitative data for this research the researchers prepared a questionnaire that includes two sections which included structured questions. Five-point Likert scale questions applied to the questioner. Collected data were analyzed by using Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPASS) and descriptive and Karl Pearson's coefficient of correlation analysis methods employed in data analysis. The descriptive analysis used to identify the guest satisfactory level of the external factors and correlation analysis used to identify the relationship between the external factors and tour satisfaction of Chinese tourists.

4.Result and discussion

4.1 Descriptive analysis

The descriptive analysis applied to identify the existing guest satisfactory level of both service quality variables and the external factors. The study used descriptive techniques such as mean and standard deviation, for the interpretation of data. Following criteria have been used to analyze the statistical output of descriptive statistics,

$1 < = X < 2.5$ Dissatisfied, $2.5 < = X < 3.5$ Moderate, $3.5 < = X < 5$ Satisfied

Table 2: descriptive Analysis of Selected Dimensions and Tourists' Satisfaction on Tour

Dimensions	N	Mean	St. d
Cleanliness of the hotel	100	3.87	0.321
Service of the Hotel	100	3.00	0.545
Foods of the Hotel	100	1.93	0.991
Quality of the Guide	100	3.70	0.455
Quality of Transportation	100	3.21	0.621
Quality of the Driver	100	3.33	0.526

Source: SPSS output from Field Survey (2019)

When considering on descriptive analysis mean values of the cleanliness of the hotel and quality of the guide took more than 3.5. It concludes that the Chinese guests were satisfied with the cleanliness of the hotel and the quality of the guide. The mean value of service of the hotel, quality of transportation, quality of the driver fallen in between 2.5 and 3.5, it visualizes that Chinese tourists are moderately satisfied with service of the hotel, quality of transportation, quality of the driver. Moreover, the mean value of foods of the hotel was 1.99 and it stated that the Chinese tourists are dissatisfied with the foods of the hotels where they had stayed and had meals. Finally, it can conclude that all the selected factors other than the food of the hotels has impact on the tour satisfaction of Chinese tourists.

4.2 Correlation analysis

Reliability test

Table 2 : Reliability analysis

Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha
Cleanliness of the Hotel	0.783
Service of the Hotel	0.753
Foods of the Hotel	0.750
Quality of Guide	0.791
Quality of Transportation	0.842
Quality of Driver	0.708
Service on Arrival	0.776
Service of Tour Executive	0.738

Source: SPSS outcome of field survey – 2019

According to the results of reliability test all Cronbach's Alpha values were above 0.7 for all the dimensions in the research. Therefore, the reliability of the questions was high.

Table 4: Correlation analysis of cleanliness of the hotel and Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour

		Tourists' satisfaction	Cleanliness of the Hotel
Tourists' satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1	0.621
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	100	100
Cleanliness of the Hotel	Pearson Correlation	0.621	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	100	100

Source: SPSS outcome of field survey – 2019

Pearson correlation statistic method was employed to identify the correlation of the research findings. According to table 4, the value of the correlation between the cleanliness of the hotel and the Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour was 0.621 correlation ($r=0.621$). This correlation value is positive and the significant value was 0.000. Based on the results it can identify that there is a moderate positive relationship between the cleanliness of the hotel and the Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour. Therefore, the H1 is accepted and H0 is rejected.

Table 5: Correlation analysis of service of the hotel and Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour

		Tourists' satisfaction	Service of the Hotel
Tourists' satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1	0.652
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	100	100
Service of the Hotel	Pearson Correlation	0.652	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	100	100

Source: SPSS outcome of field survey – 2019

According to table 5 the value of the correlation between service of the hotel and Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour was 0.652. ($r = 0.652$), which means service of the hotel is moderately correlated with the Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour. Since the significant value (0.000), it can state that "the relationship is highly accepted". It can identify as a

moderate positive relationship between service of the hotel and Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour.

Table 6: Correlation analysis of food of the hotels and Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour

		Tourists' satisfaction	Foods of the Hotel
Tourists' satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1	0.632
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	100	100
Foods of the Hotel	Pearson Correlation	0.632	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	100	100

Source: SPSS outcome of field survey – 2019

As per above table 6, the value of the correlation between the food of the hotels and Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour was 0.632. ($r = 0.632$), this correlation value is moderately positive. That means food of the hotels is moderately correlated with the Chinese tourists' satisfaction on their tour. The significant value is 0.000 and it confirmed that "The relationship is highly accepted". Therefore, it can conclude that there is a significant, moderate positive relationship between the food of the hotels with the Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour.

Table 7: Correlation analysis of quality of the guide and Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour

		Tourists' satisfaction	Quality of the Guide
Tourists' satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1	0.802
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	100	100
Quality of the Guide	Pearson Correlation	0.802	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	100	100

Source: SPSS outcome of field survey – 2019

According to table 7 the value of the correlation between quality of the guide and Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour was 0.802, ($r = 0.802$), quality of the guide who assist the Chinese tourist while they engage a tour in Sri Lanka was positively correlated with the Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour. Since the significant value is 0.000 the relationship is accepted. Therefore, it can be identified that there is a significant a fairly strong positive relationship between the quality of the guide and Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour.

Table 8: Correlation analysis of quality of transportation and Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour

		Tourists' satisfaction	Quality of Transportation
Tourists' satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1	0.651
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	100	100
Quality of Transportation	Pearson Correlation	0.651	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	100	100

Source: SPSS outcome of field survey – 2019

According to table 8 the value of the correlation between the quality of transportation and Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour was 0.651. ($r = 0.651$), which means the quality of transportation is moderate correlates with the Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour. The significant value is 0.000 and it concludes that the relationship can highly be accepted. Therefore, there is a significant and moderate positive relationship between the quality of transportation and Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour.

Table 9: Correlation analysis of quality of the driver and Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour

		Tourists' satisfaction	Quality of the Driver
Tourists' satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1	0.512
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	100	100
Quality of the Driver	Pearson Correlation	0.512	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	100	100

Source: SPSS outcome of field survey – 2019

According to table 9, the value of the correlation between the quality of the driver and Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour was 0.512, ($r = 0.512$), quality of the driver also correlated with the Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour. Since the significant value 0.000, the relationship is accepted. Finally, it can conclude that there is a significant and moderate relationship between the quality of the driver and Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

This study conducted based on two objectives: to identify the Chinese tourists' satisfactory level on the external factors of travel agencies in Sri Lanka and to identify the relationship between the external factors of travel agencies in Sri Lanka on tour satisfaction of Chinese tourists. Researchers selected four registered travel agencies based on the simple random sampling technique and then selected 100 Chinese tourists to collect data for the research study. Descriptive analysis and Karl Pearson's coefficient of correlation analysis employees on analyzing data collected by distributing structured questionnaires among Chinese tourists who travel Sri Lanka in 2018.

According to the descriptive analysis of the Chinese guests was satisfied with the cleanliness of the hotel and quality of the guide and they were moderately satisfied with the service of the hotel, quality of transportation, quality of the driver but they were dissatisfied with the foods of the hotels where they had stayed and had meals. The correlation analysis implied that there are moderate positive relationships on the cleanliness of the hotel, service of the hotel, food of the hotels, quality of transportation and quality of the driver with Chinese tourists' satisfaction on tour. Moreover, it identified that there was a fairly strong positive relationship between the quality of the guide and Chinese tourists' satisfaction on the tour.

According to the results of the analysis following recommendations and suggestions are provided by the researchers in order to develop the service quality of the travel agent.

- There should be a proper inspection process when selecting hotels for Chinese tourists by travel agencies. It should include the factors that Chinese tourists pay their highest concern on selecting accommodation and foodservice facilities.

- The people who responsible for menu planning in hotels should consider the diversity of the menu. There are some special food requirements by most of the Chinese guests such as vegetarian, vegan, halal, Jain foods, etc. Since china is multi-religious country the Chinese tourists have various kinds of food habits and requirements. The menu planners should consider it when it comes to menu planning.
- The travel agents should know that whether the hotels or restaurants have required pieces of equipment which needed to do better service to Chinese tourists.
- When selecting guides for Chinese tourist, the quality of the guides and the communication skills should be considered.
- In selecting a vehicle for the tour company, it should ensure the quality of the vehicle and it should be equipped with the modern technology.
- When preparing the tour itineraries tour executive should consider the time allocation for the days' plan. Because if the driver is unable to cover up the schedule then the guest will down rate the driver's service. As there is a strong positive relationship between the quality of the driver and the travel agent service it is very important to consider this factor. Because if the service of the driver down rated then the service of the travel agent also will be downrated.
- The travel agencies should focus on some online marketing strategies to attract some direct clients who are arranging their tours by own without using any tour agent.
- The researchers can do research studies on focusing the factors which effect to the loyalty of Chinese tourists, tour decision making, purchasing patterns of Chinese tourists, perception on Sri Lankan tourism products especially local foods and jewelry.

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