Exploring the Improvement of Travel Agency Service Quality

Author: Liu Pingfei

Abstract: With the rapid development of China's economy, the improvement of people's living standards, and the refinement of the paid-leave system, the tourism industry has also grown rapidly. At the same time, many problems and deficiencies have emerged amid the industry's rapid development and fierce competition.

Keywords: standardization reform | improvement of management measures | improvement of the current situation

Regarding the current state of service quality management of travel agencies in China, the following main points need to be improved.

(1) Vicious competition in the tourism market

Vicious price-cutting competition is a manifestation of the immaturity of the industry's market mechanism, and also a concentrated reflection of the lack of effective regulation in the industry. Travel agency operators compete for customers by cutting prices, reduce service quality without authorization, and fail to fulfill contracts. In addition, tourists' expectations of travel are generally high, yet they prefer to compare prices when traveling and pursue low prices; low prices in turn make it impossible to guarantee product quality, ultimately resulting in the loss of tourists' interests.

(2) Serious problems with tourist complaints

According to complaints from 30 provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities directly under the central government, in the second half of last year the total number of complaints received by consumer organizations nationwide increased by nearly 45% compared with the same period of the previous year. According to the relevant person in charge of the China Consumers' Association, service quality complaints account for the largest proportion of tourism complaints, exceeding 40%. The complaints include: travel agencies arbitrarily lowering service level standards, shortening travel itineraries, increasing shopping time, and tour guides failing to perform their duties. In addition, hidden charges in tourism services, false advertising of tourism services, safety risks, and tourist traps have also become hot spots for complaints.

(3) The quality of travel agency employees needs to be improved

The travel agency is a knowledge-intensive industry whose main investment is in human resources and knowledge, and tourism services are delivered by practitioners. Their cultural quality and skill levels largely determine service quality; in particular, the overall competence of front-line employees who provide face-to-face services should be further strengthened.

In order to conduct a better study of the travel agency service quality system, we conducted the survey shown in the table below to explore ordinary tourists' satisfaction with the services currently provided by travel agencies in China.

No.	Rating Criterion	Expected Service Quality					Perceived Service Quality				
		5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
1	Modern service facilities										
2	Warm and comfortable reception environment										
3	Employees with neat attire and a good image										
4	Attractive tourism promotional materials provided										
5	All promised services fulfilled										
6	Sincere help provided when tourists are in difficulty										
7	The travel agency is dependable and trustworthy										
8	Promised services completed on time										
9	Standardized service practices of the travel agency										
10	Itinerary times announced to tourists in advance										
11	Timely and convenient services provided										
12	Employees are always willing to help tourists										
13	Employees can meet tourists' needs at all times										
14	Employees are trustworthy										
15	Group travel is safe and reassuring										

No.	Rating Criterion	Expected Service Quality					Perceived Service Quality				
		5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
16	Employees behave appropriately and courteously										
17	Employees possess professional knowledge and skills										
18	Personalized services can be provided										
19	Particular care is given to different tourists										
20	Tourists' actual needs are understood										
21	Tourists' interests are given priority										
22	Business hours are convenient for tourists										

Table Tourist Satisfaction Survey Questionnaire on Travel Agency Services (Expected vs. Perceived Service Quality)

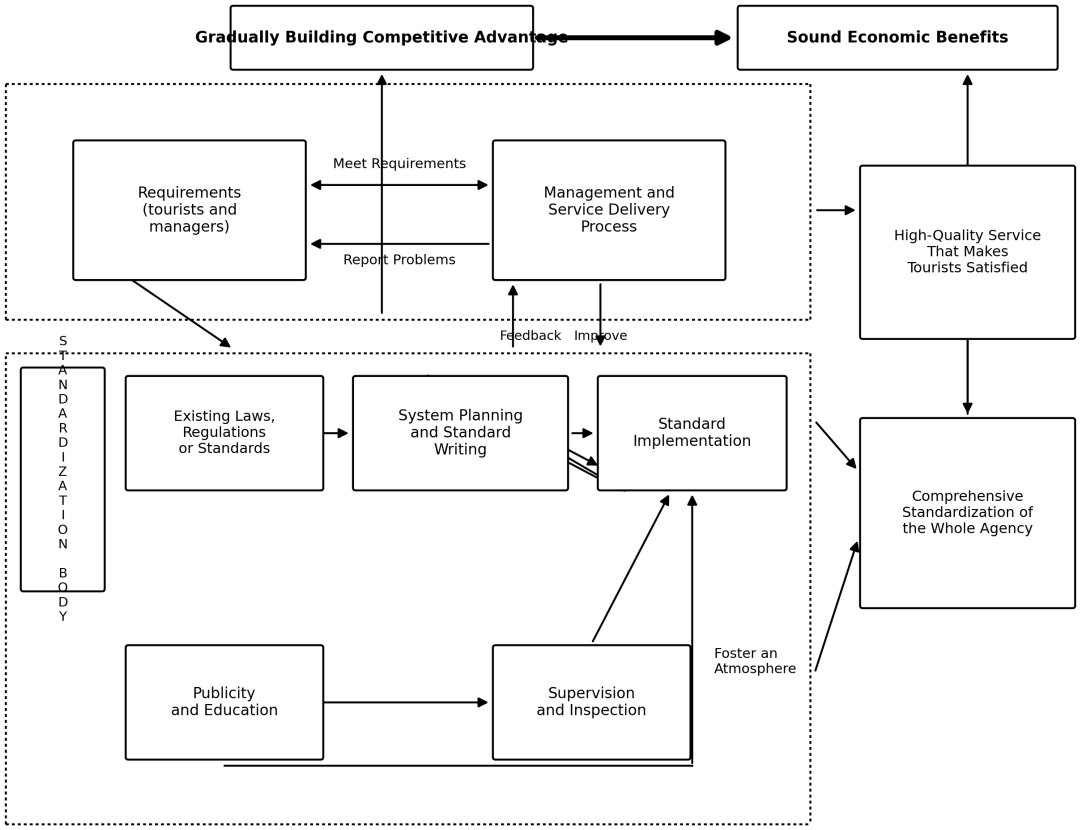


Figure The Standardization System of a Travel Agency

Through this investigation and research, we preliminarily conclude that, in order to improve the service quality of travel agencies, standardization reform must be carried out.

Measures to Improve Service Quality Management of Travel Agencies

1. Tourism product design

In design, we must fully consider the needs of tourists and introduce distinctive tourism products with unique features, covering time arrangements, transportation use, and tourist attractions, so as to meet their needs at different levels; tourism routes and services should be more targeted. On the basis of the existing tourism routes, we will expand and develop some new tourism routes and attractions. We believe in the principle of "offering what others do not have, being distinctive where others offer the same, and being innovative where others are distinctive."

2. Strengthening tourism service marketing

Tourism service marketing comprises three aspects: internal marketing, external marketing, and interactive marketing. Internal marketing treats employees as the organization's internal customers and strives to provide them with high-quality internal services. Its purpose is to equip service personnel with service awareness, service skills, and the willingness to serve, so that they can deliver services in accordance with, or even beyond, the organization's commitments. Specific tasks include job design and recruitment, appropriate training, providing a good working environment, and effective incentives and communication, ultimately enabling the organization to retain excellent employees and deliver high-quality services. External marketing involves customer-oriented market research and forecasting, service development and design, pricing, advertising and sales channels for tourism products, building and maintaining markets, as well as tracking and feedback. In addition, interactive marketing is also an important component of service marketing. The so-called interactive marketing means communicating with external customers through tourism service institutions, presenting tourism products to customers, making commitments to them, and building good relationships with customers. Therefore, a travel agency must complete all three of these tasks before providing services to customers.

3. Providing customers with courteous, accurate, and efficient consulting and booking services

By making full use of modern information technology, travel agencies can greatly reduce corporate costs and provide customers with courteous, accurate, and efficient online consulting and online booking services. Therefore, we must continuously break new ground in service methods in order to meet the ever-increasing demands of new customer service.

4. Customer-centered service processes

Tourists long for honest, sincere, and genuine service. This requires travel agencies to treat tourists honestly. In the service process, we must honor these commitments through the quality service of our staff; if accidents do occur along the way, we must sincerely apologize to them and take effective remedial measures.

5. Effectively managing the service quality of partner organizations

Throughout the entire travel process, a travel agency cannot directly control every link of dining, shopping, and entertainment. Therefore, how to manage the service quality of these partners is the key to ensuring and improving the overall quality of the entire tourism industry. I believe a travel agency can ensure the service quality of its partners through the following "three-step" approach: the first step is to carry out the necessary inspection before confirming cooperation; the second step is to determine the cooperative relationship between the two parties in legal form and clarify the rights and obligations of both parties, or to implement a "service quality assurance system" and establish a "service pact" among partner units to clarify the service quality responsibilities of each; the third step is to track and investigate the specific service work of the partners.

6. Focusing on the service quality of tour guides

Tour guides are the people who directly provide face-to-face services to tourists, and their service level directly affects the quality of the entire service. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the service quality of tour guides. On the one hand, the service attitude, methods, items, language, tools, and professional ethics of tour guides should be standardized; it is also necessary to provide personalized services according to the specific circumstances of tourists, so that tourists can perceive the travel agency's high quality through the guide's service. Overall, the tour guide is the soul and core of a tour group. The quality of guide service is crucial and can even directly affect travelers'

perception of the travel agency's credibility. Therefore, the guide department must select the most suitable guides according to the different needs of different tourists and different individuals. In addition, travel agencies should make use of an effective quality management network to collect feedback from tour groups on the quality of guide services in a timely manner, and monitor, adjust, and improve it at any time.

7. Handling tourists' complaints in a timely manner

Travel agencies should pay attention to the supervisory role of tourists, respond to them promptly, patiently explain issues to them so that they understand the root cause of the problem, minimize tourists' dissatisfaction during the trip, and provide remedial measures in time, so as to eliminate tourists' dissatisfaction and prevent them from spreading negative publicity about the travel agency.

In general, as domestic tourists' demands for travel experiences continue to rise, the management system of travel agencies is being continuously refined, and the service quality of travel agencies is improving accordingly. This is a process of development, improvement, and perfection for the tourism industry.