Research on the Travel Agency Service Quality System

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Abstract: With the development of China's economy, the travel agency industry has also expanded rapidly. Whether a travel agency excels or lags behind depends, to a large extent, on its service quality system. Research on the standardization of travel agencies in China has mainly focused on three areas: grade rating and evaluation, tour guide services, and quality management.

Keywords: grade rating and evaluation | tour guide services | quality management

(1) Grade Rating and Evaluation

According to the Classification and Evaluation of Travel Agencies, travel agencies in China are classified from the bottom up into three levels: 3A, 4A, and 5A. The full score is 650 points. A 3A-level travel agency is required to score above 270 points, a 4A-level agency above 400 points, and a 5A-level agency needs to reach 540 points or more. Scoring is based mainly on six aspects: basic conditions, business performance, operating status, service items, management mechanisms, and commercial credit. The final conclusion is drawn from investigations into the software and hardware of the travel agency, unannounced (spot) visits by the evaluation committee, and service quality surveys on tourists issued by the evaluation committee.

The number of travel agencies in China is enormous, so establishing standardized criteria for identifying large, medium, and small travel agencies is of great importance. Accelerating the reform of the corporate property rights system is of great significance for promoting the development of travel agency enterprises. At present, all provinces and municipalities in China have formulated local classification and evaluation standards for travel agencies. Figure 1-1 shows the Service Quality Gap Model. Based on this model, the key factors influencing the standardization of travel agencies can be inferred, so that the standards can be better refined and a better grade evaluation system can be established.

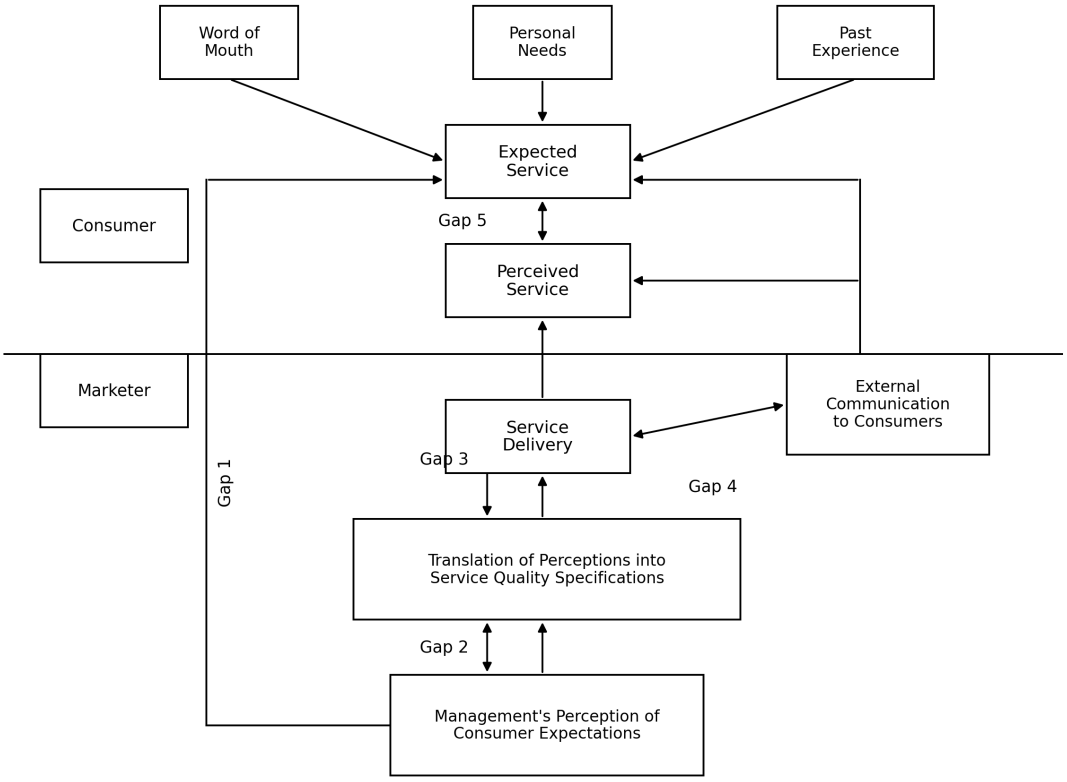


Figure 1-1 The Service Quality Gap Model

(2) Tour Guide Services

Facing problems such as uneven tour guide quality, the ease with which excellent tour guide resources are lost, generally low tour guide salaries, low service quality levels, and numerous tourist complaints, Chinese scholars have realized that standardized methods must be relied upon to implement tour guide service standards. Management of tour guides should be strengthened to improve the quality of their services; the establishment of a standardization system for tour guide services should be accelerated, the standardization of tour guide services deepened, and the construction of new types of tour guide services standardized. At the same time, a tourism service management institution should be established to promote flexible management of tour guide services; a tour guide service rating system should be set up to clarify the classification and evaluation mechanisms for tour guides; and reform of the salary grading system for tourism services should be actively advanced, so as to enhance tour guides' service quality and their capacity for proactive innovation. The figure below shows tourists' standardized requirements for the services provided by tour guides.

Table Tourists' Standardized Requirements for Tour Guide Services (SERVQUAL Dimensions)

Dimension	Items
Tangibles	1. The appearance of physical facilities is visually appealing 2. Up-to-date and complete equipment is available 3. Employees have a clean and neat appearance 4. The company's facilities are consistent with the services provided
Reliability	5. Commitments made to customers are fulfilled 6. A sincere willingness to help is shown when customers have difficulties 7. The company is dependable and trustworthy 8. Promised services are provided on time 9. Records related to the service are kept accurately
Responsiveness	10. Customers are told exactly when services will be performed 11. The services provided meet customers' expectations 12. Employees are always willing to help customers 13. Employees are never too busy to respond to customers' requests
Assurance	14. Employees can be trusted by customers 15. Services make customers feel safe and secure 16. Employees are consistently courteous and polite 17. Employees support one another to provide better service
Empathy	18. Individual attention and care are given to different customers 19. Employees show genuine concern for customers 20. Customers' special needs are understood 21. Customers' interests are valued and prioritized 22. Business hours are convenient for customers

(3) Quality Management

Quality is the lifeline of an enterprise. If an enterprise is to grow big and strong and remain invincible in the market, the first thing it must do is to guarantee product quality and service quality. Eden Van (transliterated) proposed six connotations of quality:

1. Error-free execution and error-free sales;

2. Safe activities and services;
3. Prompt service and standardized arrangements;
4. Efficient service performance;
5. Solving problems in the correct way;
6. Honest and trustworthy conduct.

Since the 1990s, with the development of tourism and the continuous increase in the number of travel agencies, Chinese scholars have also proposed that tourism products should be subject to quality management. Tourism service quality comprises six basic components:

1. **Service attitude:** when providing services to tourists, travel agency staff should demonstrate a good service attitude.
2. **Service language:** when serving tourists, the language used by travel agency staff should be civilized, humorous, knowledgeable, standardized, and artistic.
3. **Service items:** the quantity and quality of service items directly reflect the operating capability of a travel agency.
4. **Service skills:** the flexibility and thoroughness of travel agency staff in their work, as well as their ability and methods to solve problems.
5. **Service personnel's appearance:** the mental outlook, image and manner, and neat and dignified dress of travel agency staff.
6. **Service timing:** the flexibility, timeliness, and accuracy of travel agency staff when providing services to tourists.

In general, tourism service quality management runs through the entire travel process: before, during, and after the trip. The service personnel assigned by a travel agency to tourists need to be cultured and competent, with a good service attitude and awareness. The travel agency is a people-oriented industry; therefore, the key to quality management lies in the active participation and cooperation of all staff.