Research on Travel Agency Service Quality Review and Scale Development

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Abstract: Due to the intangibility and inseparability of services, service quality cannot be measured objectively. Travel agencies mainly provide service-type products. Therefore, when measuring the service quality of a travel agency, the tangible environment, the service interaction process, and the service outcome should all be taken into consideration, so as to identify problems in the service, think about solutions, and improve the service quality of the travel agency.

Keywords: travel agency service quality review | SERVQUAL model | service quality improvement

1. The Service Quality of Travel Agencies

1.1 The Connotation of Service Quality

Service quality is one of the characteristics of the service industry, which means satisfying customers' requirements in the product. Characteristics can distinguish products or services of different categories. For example, tourism has the characteristic of relaxing people's minds, while hotels have the characteristic of providing convenient rest and sleep. This function is used to distinguish different specifications of similar services. The most important aspects of service quality should include the general requirements of service safety, applicability, effectiveness, and economy.

1.2 The Composition of Travel Agency Service Quality

The service quality perceived by customers includes multiple dimensions, and the service quality of a travel agency can be determined through the product quality of the travel agency, the interaction quality of travel agency services, and the environmental quality of the travel agency enterprise. See the figure below for details.

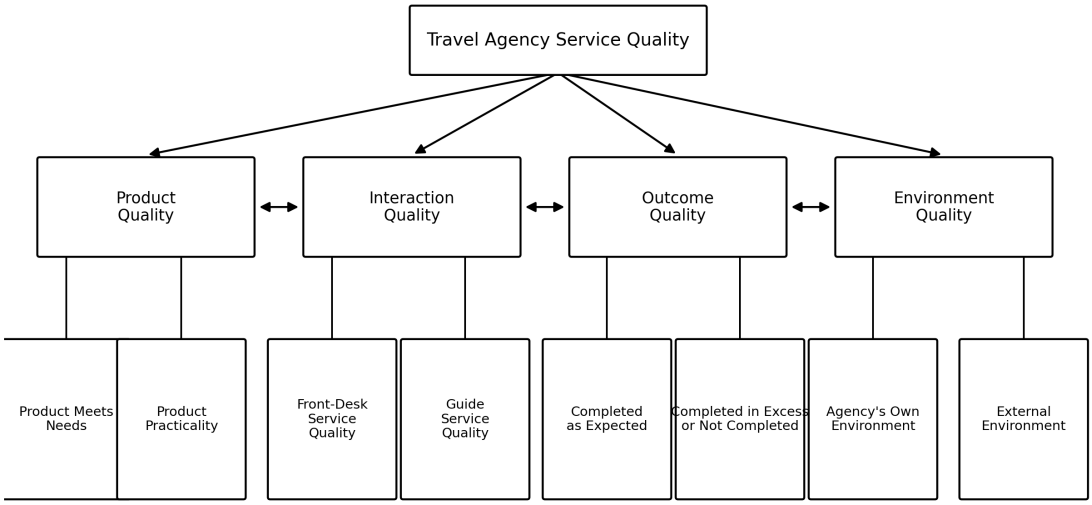


Figure Composition of Travel Agency Service Quality

It can be seen that, for tourists, the criterion influencing their judgment of a travel agency's service quality is product quality. This includes the quality of the products provided by the travel agency, the quality of the services provided by the front desk and tour guides, and the final outcome of the trip. Product quality includes two aspects: whether the travel routes designed by the travel agency meet the needs of groups and individuals, and whether the content provided is consistent with the promised quality and can be realized without obstacles and in its entirety. Interaction quality refers to the quality of services during the contact process between tourism practitioners and tourists, including the quality of the travel agency's reception and consulting services and the quality of the tour guide's services during the trip. When visitors evaluate the quality of a travel agency's services, interaction quality is the main source of perception. Outcome quality is an important basis for evaluating service quality. For a single travel experience, no matter how perfect the process is, if the travel experience cannot be completed at the final stage, it will greatly change the tourist's perception; conversely, successful completion will greatly enhance the perceived service quality. Environmental quality includes the environment of the travel agency itself and the environment of the external destination. The better the environmental factors, the better the tourists' experience of the entire trip, and the more likely they are to give the travel agency's service quality a favorable judgment — the two are directly proportional.

2. SERVQUAL Scale Development

The SERVQUAL model is a tool for measuring service quality. A travel agency's evaluation of its own services can be assessed and analyzed through the following SERVQUAL scale.

No.	Item	Perception–Expectation Gap Score	Five-Dimension Score
Q1	Degree of modernization of service facilities		**Tangibles**
Q2	Comfortable reception environment		
Q3	Employees have a good image		
Q4	Sufficient tourism materials are provided		
Q5	Services are timely and fast		**Reliability**
Q6	Tourism emergencies are effectively resolved		
Q7	Itinerary arrangements meet requirements		
Q8	The itinerary is completed according to the tourism contract		
Q9	Traveling with this agency feels secure and assured		
Q10	Itinerary times can be announced to tourists		**Responsiveness**
Q11	Timely services are provided to tourists		
Q12	Services are provided proactively		
Q13	Service is enthusiastic		
Q14	Employees are trustworthy		**Assurance**
Q15	Thorough preparation throughout the trip		
Q16	Employees are courteous		

No.	Item	Perception–Expectation Gap Score	Five-Dimension Score
Q17	The agency supports the work of tour guides		
Q18	The agency treats tourists fairly		**Empathy**
Q19	Tour guides treat tourists fairly		
Q20	Genuine consideration for customers' interests		
Q21	Customers are put first		
Q22	Business hours are appropriate		

Table Travel Agency Service Quality Evaluation Scale

Tangibles refer to the travel agency's own hardware facilities and the service quality of its employees. If the agency's service facilities are relatively modern, the reception environment provided to tourists is comfortable and superior, the employees providing consulting services are enthusiastic and present a good image, and the materials provided in the introduction are sufficiently rich, tourists' favorability will be greatly enhanced.

Reliability means providing services promptly and quickly, and responding to emergencies quickly and effectively during the trip. The itinerary should conform to the requirements and be completed according to the tourism contract, so that tourists feel that traveling with this agency is secure and guaranteed.

Responsiveness refers to the speed of reaction to events. If the agency's service is enthusiastic, the itinerary arrangements are announced to tourists in advance, and services are provided proactively, then the agency is demonstrating fast responsiveness, and tourists will enjoy the entire trip.

Assurance means that the agency gives tourists a strong sense of reliability: both employees and guides are trustworthy, preparations throughout the trip are meticulous and thoughtful, and the agency also supports the work of the guides.

Empathy means that the relationship between the agency and tourists is fair: the agency can treat tourists fairly, and tourists can treat the agency fairly. The agency should consider customers' interests and make visitors the top priority. Applying the above five points is very important for analyzing the service quality of travel agencies.

3. Analysis of Improving the Service Quality of Travel Agencies

The analysis concerns the interaction process between tourism practitioners and visitors within the service process. Visitors usually judge the service quality of a travel agency based on their perceived experience during the trip. Travel agencies need to develop products from customers' needs and standardize the services of tourism practitioners. Only by providing products that meet the market and appropriate services can the service quality of a travel agency be improved.

(1) Segment the market and expand distinctive services

Most travel agencies in China are not large in scale. In market development, they must combine their own characteristics, seize market demand, avoid blind development and blindly following trends, and capture market share with novel and unique service methods. The development of traditional tourism routes should emphasize speed, novelty, and change; at the same time, new tourism products should be actively explored.

(2) Manage employees scientifically to ensure service quality

Travel agencies mainly provide service-type products, and employees' attitudes and actions directly affect product quality and visitor satisfaction. Therefore, travel agencies should improve their management systems and enhance the quality of their employees: clarify the division of labor with responsibilities assigned to specific persons, establish reasonable salary systems and incentive mechanisms, and emphasize career planning for tourism practitioners.

(3) Put people first and pay attention to detail in services

Travel agencies should put people first, treat tourists fairly, and take into account tourists' interests, because these have a great impact on service quality. When completing services, agencies need to pay attention to details from the customer's perspective. Detailed services can bring unexpected surprises to customers and greatly improve service quality — especially smiling service, proactive service, and surprise service.

(4) Standardize travel contracts and manage visitors' expectations

The SERVQUAL evaluation method shows that service quality evaluation is based on customers' subjective evaluation consciousness, and is calculated as the difference

between customers' service expectations and service perceptions. Therefore, improving service quality requires taking customers' expectations into account. Customers' expectations gradually take shape during the process of signing the travel contract with the agency. The travel contract is a benchmark: it should specify the six elements of food, accommodation, transportation, sightseeing, shopping, and entertainment provided during the trip, as well as service standards and the purchase of travel insurance. While providing services to customers, it also provides a basis for future tourism disputes, complaints, or travel accidents. Strengthening change management and supplementary contracts can make itineraries flexible and avoid risks.

(5) Pay attention to complaint handling and improve follow-up services

At present, there is a great deal of foreign research on complaint handling. However, China has no relevant laws or regulations to standardize the handling of travel complaints. As a result, evasion or excessive compensation claims often occur when complaints are handled. The standardization of complaint handling requires further research.

Therefore, based on the above evaluation of travel agency service quality, the author believes that to improve service quality, travel agencies themselves can, in accordance with the five-dimension division of the SERVQUAL scale, actively adjust their services and enhance service quality from every angle, thereby providing tourists with better-quality services and also enhancing the overall reputation of the travel agency — a win-win outcome.