

EXPLORATORY STUDY ON SERVICE QUALITY OF PRIVATE TOUR OPERATORS AMONG THE TOURISTS IN UDHAGAMANDALAM DISTRICT

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Abstract

In this paper, we conduct a micro level study which aimed to assess the various factors of service quality that influence the tourists of private tourism operators has revealed that tourist amenities, choices of tourist packages and relaxation places are major areas of service quality. The area of amenities is vital for the tourists to enjoy in the destination and has significant impact on the tourist. The tourists are looking for various choices to make their trip memorable and service quality is dependent on the choices in the package. The relaxation places of the tourism package are vital to make them satisfied with the private tourism operators. The problematic areas that affect the tourists while opting for private tour operators are lack of prior information, cost and misrepresentation and time constraints. The tourists are facing significant problem in the areas of prior information about the pickup, prices, time, etc. These are the areas of prior information that affects tourists in accessing the private operators. The cost of the packages has to be fair and high costs along with misrepresentation of facts are significant problems for the tourists. The time constraints that are involved in completion of the tourism packages is vital and they have to be given fair time breaks to enjoy the destination and it also proves to be problem in the study area. The problems can be solved with the modification to the tourism packages offered by the private tour operators. The government can also set up monitoring of private tour operators to safeguard the interest of the tourists. The tourist's perception towards the service quality has helped to understand the significance of quality service that has to be rendered by the private tour operators to make the destination tourists friendly.

Keywords:

Tourist, Government, District, Quality

1. INTRODUCTION

Service quality is vital for making the service extended to survive over a long period of time and also build goodwill among the people. The tourism services are dealing with the recreation of visitors which depends on destination service operators. The services offered has to be precise to meet the demands of the tourist which will help to create a demand for the services offered. The service quality of the tourism services is hinged more on tour operators and their services for the tourist destination. The destination-oriented packages along with the cost friendly operations will help to improve the perception level of the tourists.

The role of tourism operators is vital for attracting the tourist in various parts of the state. The tourists have to be given knowledge about the various destination sites that are not popularly known. There are numerous tourism destinations that are available in the state which needs large scale promotion to make it attractive for the tourists.

The private tour operators are having significant role to play in promoting the tourism destinations with the quality of service extended by them. The state operated tourism packages are limited and it is operated by single operating agency. The state

government has significant role to play in promotion of the tourism destination sites.

The tourism destination in the state is playing significant role in the economic development of region. The flow of tourists helps in the improvement of infrastructural development of tourism destination sites. The popularity among the tourists and their opinions towards the tourism destination sites makes the government to think strategies to maintain the attractions of those sites. The service quality of the tourism operators are also under scrutiny from time to time in those places to safeguard the tourists from fleecing operators. The tourism operators are vital link for the promotion of the tourism destination sites and re-visits of the tourists. The rates and packages are designed based on the availability of the destination sites and their nature.

The tourism operators take various variables into account for making a significant package that attracts the tourists towards their agency. The service quality is vital for making the tourists stick to the destination visited and make them suggest for their friends and peers. The role of service quality is vital for promoting the destination and tourism operation at particular sites. This is largely dependent on the private tourism operators to create a sustainable tourism package that meets the demands of the tourists at fair costs. The tourism operators are vital making the tourists to be attracted towards a site based on the service quality that is extended by them. The following are some of the research studies that are related to the broad theme of this research which were surveyed to identify the research gap.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Udhayakumar [1] identified the genuine challenges encountered by tourists who visited the Nilgiris in this study. The study involved both primary and secondary data. Primary data were acquired using a structured questionnaire and interview schedule method from 440 respondents (tourists) who visited various regions of the Nilgiris. Secondary data were gathered from a variety of publications, magazines, and papers, among others. The study discovered a lack of services, insufficient transportation, and a high price associated with low-quality food, substandard housing/accommodation, and safety. The study recommended that tourists be supplied with appropriate transportation, high-quality food at a fair price, high-quality lodging, and security to satisfy the tourist and to increase the number of visitors to the destination.

Chauhan et al. [2] analyzed the weight domestic tourists place on various information sources and their effect on the perceived destination image. Cluster analysis was used to identify distinct categories of tourists based on a survey done to 178 respondents from Ooty, India. The findings reveal that travelers can be categorised according to their relevance to information sources. Additionally, customer segments have varying perceptions of the

destination image on a variety of parameters. Additionally, the demographic profiles of the various tourist categories were analyzed, as well as tourist judgments on the cognitive and emotive elements of the destination image.

Kalaivani et al. [3] studied more and more metropolitan regions presented themselves as the loveliest, glittering, or touching place on Earth, urban tourism has been a major focus of tourist study. Tourism is becoming increasingly important for economic growth, which has resulted in significant scientific advancements in a variety of sectors of the business. The study's primary objective is to identify, design, and implement urban tourism policies and strategies in Tamil Nadu.

Williams and Soutar [4] studied that the customer value has historically been considered as a trade-off between quality and price, which is a significant predictor of purchase intentions and recurrent buy behavior for many products. However, due to the intangibility, variety, and complexity of services, this trade-off paradigm, with its emphasis on functional value and utility, is oversimplified. Other socio-psychological dimensions of value are anticipated to play a significant effect in consumer behavior and decision-making in service experiences such as tourism. Using Sheth, Newman, and Gross consumption value model, this study found a number of value characteristics associated with a tourism consumer experience. The research identifies various areas for future research in the functional, emotional, social, and epistemic value dimensions.

Kapiki [5] demonstrated that tourist stakeholders define a hotel's great service as value for money, a comfortable room, courteous staff, and delectable cuisine. Additionally, the poll demonstrates that there is always potential for improvement in the hospitality industry. Additionally, the survey's findings indicate that the most critical aspects affecting a hotel's future success are guest happiness, guest retention, and word of mouth advertising. To achieve excellence and profitability, the survey's findings suggest a focus on quality service; retention of existing guests through exceeding their expectations; continuous quality improvement; employment, regular training, and empowerment of service-oriented staff; benchmarking for best practices; and, finally, pursuit of quality accreditation through various schemes.

Mason et al. [6] claims that while conducting a tourist research study using mixed methodologies, an initial exploratory stage undertaken as part of a sequential research process requires a systematic approach in order to establish a trustworthy foundation for subsequent examination. Three stages are described in the design process of exploratory qualitative research: preparation, development, and refinement. We provide criteria for evaluating the usefulness of qualitative data collection approaches. It is stated that paying close attention to the process of constructing the initial exploratory qualitative stage is a critical requirement for obtaining results that serve as a solid foundation for the subsequent quantitative research sequence.

Kao et al. [7] examined the motives of Taiwanese travelers to Australia and the level of pleasure they experienced throughout their visit. The study employs a push-pull approach to identify 17 push incentives for travel and 18 pull motivations. The majority of motivational variables were supplied before to and following the appointment. Taiwanese visitors expressed dissatisfaction with the high cost of goods, the destination's lack of value for money, and the lack of variety in the meals. Numerous

recommendations were made to tourism managers and authorities in both Australia and Taiwan.

Mariutti et al. [8] assessed the Brazil's image as a tourism destination as viewed by US travel agencies and tourism specialists. The research was qualitative and exploratory in nature, involving a review of the literature followed by in-depth interviews with travel agents and tourism specialists in New York, Miami, Orlando, and Atlanta. The findings indicate that, in terms of diversity and ambiguity, images of Brazil have been converging. It is critical to review the study's negative and good characteristics in order to reduce the bad aspects and emphasize the positive or attractive ones.

2.1 RESEARCH GAP

The research gap explains the scope where there is opportunity for extending research which does not exist in the literature. The studies in the field of service quality of the tourism sector are very scarcely found in the literature. The tourism operators in the various areas have different set of rules and regulations which have impact on the tourists in visiting a destination. The research is hardly found in the literature which aims to assess the various factors that are influencing the tourists in selection of the tourism packages and tourism operators. The problems faced by the tourists while operating with the private tour operators is unexplored. The above two dimensions of the private tour operators in the study area of Udhagamandalam tourism destination acts as the research gap.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The tourists are facing numerous problems in having tourism plan going according to their plan. The tourism destinations have significant infrastructural problems which makes the tourists to avoid those places. The tourism destinations that have better infrastructure facilities are having problems with the transportation and boarding facilities. The public transportation and tourism packages are very scarce in the tourism destination where the pressure falls on the private tourism operators. The private tourism operators are making use of these opportunities and majority of them have to meet service quality based on the needs of tourists. The lack of service quality on the areas of cost, facilities, boarding services, transportation services etc., will affect the flow of tourists to particular destination. The destination value and image promoted by the state tourism corporation of Tamil Nadu will get affected based on the service quality of the private tourism operators. The tourism operators' service quality has been a major area that has significant problems which affects the tourists' opinion towards the destinations. The diverse problems created by the private tourists' operators have the potential to destroy the future of the tourism spots. The tourist problems have to be assessed that are results of opting for private tour operators will give an idea about the quality of the service extended by the private tour operators in Udhagamandalam tourism destination. The study focuses on the above applied problems which aim to assess the potential problems that can affect the service quality based on tourists' perception.

3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the various factors that are influencing the tourists in assessing the service quality of private tour operators in Udhagamandalam?
2. What are the diverse problems faced by the tourists based on touring with private tour operators?

3.2 IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The Udhagamandalam tourism destination has significant importance in the state tourism as well as national tourism agenda. This tourism destination is well known all across the national level and it also possesses significant foreign tourists' arrivals. The area possesses several tourism places that creates the interest among the tourists to visit. This acts as one of the major recreational spots for the tourists at the state level. The domestic and foreign tourists' arrival in the past three decade has given a major facelift for the tourism destination with various infrastructural facilities. The potential of the tourism place has been recognized by state government of Tamil Nadu which organizes traditional flower festival and other promotional measures to improve the flow of tourists. The flow of tourists has given major fillip to the economic development of the region. This region also provides direct and indirect employment opportunities for the local people generating income and improving the standard of living of the people. The various measures and benefits can be void if the private tour operators are not providing quality service. The public transportation and other tourism facilities by the government are limited and private operators play a huge role in maintaining the image of the destination. The lack of service quality in this destination by private tour operators will lead to significant decline in all these benefits. Therefore, a study that focus on the service quality of the private tour operators play a vital role in standardizing the image of the destination and if lacks quality government can also regulate these private operators based on monitoring which serves as significance of study.

3.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To identify the various factors those are influencing the tourists in assessing the service quality of private tour operators in Udhagamandalam.
- To examine the diverse problems faced by the tourists based on touring with private tour operators.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is conducted based primary data which is collected from the tourists who are touring the place based on the private tour operators. The study is collected based on the opinions and observations of tourists who have visited the study area of Udhagamandalam. The primary data is acquired using the interview schedule consisting of various dimensions of service quality. The sample size of the study is fixed to be 180 tourists who have toured place of Udhagamandalam. The sample was selected using the non-probability sampling technique of Judgement Sampling which is due to vastness of the population. This sampling was adopted to bring some scientific reason for selecting the sample in study place of Udhagamandalam. The data collected from the study is analysed using the Statistical Package

for Social Sciences (SPSS 20). The factor analysis and structural modeling was used to assess the dimensions of the study.

4.1 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The collected data were analysed based on the objectives of study which examines the service quality of private tour operators in study area of Udhagamandalam and following gives the results of analysis.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

Table.1. Demographic Classification

Demographics	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	126	70.00
	Female	54	30.00
	Total	180	100.00
Age group	Below 25 Years	31	17.23
	26 Years – 40 years	115	63.88
	41 Years – 55 Years	12	6.67
	Above 56 Years	22	12.22
	Total	180	100.00
Status of Education	Illiterate	16	8.89
	School Level	59	32.78
	College Level	95	52.77
	Others	10	5.56
	Total	180	100.00
Monthly Income	Below Rs. 25,000	25	13.88
	Rs. 25,001-50,000	98	54.44
	Rs. 50,001-75,000	39	21.68
	Above Rs. 75,001	18	10.00
	Total	180	100.00
Marital Status	Married	147	81.67
	Unmarried	33	18.33
	Total	180	100.00
Number of Family Members	1-3 Members	85	47.22
	4- 6 Members	59	32.78
	Above 7 Members	36	20.00
	Total	180	100.00
Touring Members	Family and Relatives	104	57.78
	Peers	35	19.44
	Others	41	22.78
	Total	180	100.00
Toured with Private Tourism Operators	Yes	172	95.56
	No	8	4.44
	Total	180	100.00

(Source: Primary Data)

The Table.1 explains the demographic classification of the respondents which reveals that male is higher in the number of tourists visiting the Udhagamandalam. The age group of majorities

of respondents falls in the category of 26 years – 40 years. The educational status of the respondents reveals that majority of tourists have completed college education. The monthly income of the respondents reveals that Rs. 25,000 – Rs. 50, 000 has majority of responses which is 54.44%. The married visitors to this destination are higher which is revealed by 81.67% of responses in that category. The tourists travelling to this destination are travelling with the family and relatives which has 57.78% of responses. There are 95.56% of tourists involved in the study who have used tourism operation from the private tourism operators. The demographic classification will be useful for generalization of the results to other similar groups that are visiting Udhagamandalam.

4.3 DIMENSIONS FOR ASSESSMENT OF SERVICE QUALITY OF PRIVATE TOURISM OPERATORS

The KMO and Barlett’s test reveals that normality of the variables that is used for determining the dimensions of the service quality for tourism services in Udhgamandalam and the p-value is statistically significant which reveals the normality of the factors formed.

Table.2. KMO and Barlett’s Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.775
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1144.371
	df	105
	Sig.	<0.000**

The communalities table in Table.3 explains the initial and extraction values of the variables that are involved in the factor

analysis and it signifies the role played in the formation of the factor.

Table.3. Communalities

Communalities	Initial	Extraction
Tastier Food	1.000	0.369
Highly Safe Accommodation	1.000	0.400
Adventure Places	1.000	0.441
Good quality of Vehicles	1.000	0.694
Passenger Friendly	1.000	0.579
Appropriate Waste Disposal	1.000	0.634
Maintenance of Time	1.000	0.627
Trips to Unknown Places	1.000	0.544
Excellent Guide Services	1.000	0.779
High Level of Utility towards Packages	1.000	0.697
Good Resting Time	1.000	0.550
Information Availability about trips	1.000	0.610
Reflects the places of relaxation	1.000	0.659
Variety of Packages	1.000	0.564
Adequate stops in a programme	1.000	0.688

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

The variance table in Table.4 reveals the number of factors formed in the factor analysis which can be determined using the eigen values. The eigen values reveals that four factors were formed and only three were used for the study. The three factors extracted explains 58.91% of tourist opinions towards the service quality of private tourism operators in Udhagamandalam.

Table.4. Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.228	28.186	28.186	4.228	28.186	28.186	3.600	23.997	23.997
2	3.290	21.936	50.122	3.290	21.936	50.122	3.547	23.646	47.643
3	1.318	8.784	58.905	1.318	8.784	58.905	1.689	11.262	58.905
4	1.030	6.868	65.774	-	-	-	-	-	-
5	0.850	5.665	71.438	-	-	-	-	-	-
6	0.700	4.664	76.102	-	-	-	-	-	-
7	0.655	4.368	80.470	-	-	-	-	-	-
8	0.588	3.918	84.388	-	-	-	-	-	-
9	0.486	3.240	87.628	-	-	-	-	-	-
10	0.446	2.976	90.604	-	-	-	-	-	-
11	0.424	2.828	93.433	-	-	-	-	-	-
12	0.305	2.034	95.467	-	-	-	-	-	-
13	0.260	1.735	97.202	-	-	-	-	-	-
14	0.246	1.643	98.845	-	-	-	-	-	-
15	0.173	1.155	100.000	-	-	-	-	-	-

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table.5. Rotated Component Matrix

Factors	Component		
	1	2	3
Good quality of Vehicles	0.812		
Appropriate Waste Disposal	0.787		
Maintenance of Time	0.762		
Passenger Friendly	0.736		
Adventure Places	0.651		
Tastier Food	0.569		
Highly Safe Accommodation	0.567		
Excellent Guide Services		0.852	
High Level of Utility towards Packages		0.806	
Information Availability about trips		0.776	
Trips to Unknown Places		0.737	
Good Resting Time		0.702	
Variety of Packages		0.562	
Adequate stops in a programme			0.816
Reflects the places of relaxation			0.792
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.			

The rotated component matrix explains that three factors were formed in determining the service quality of private tourism operators which is extracted from the perception of tourists. The three factors formed are named based on their nature of variables involved in the study. The following explains the factors formed along with the variables.

4.4 FACTOR I: TOURIST AMENITIES

This first dimension was formed with the variables that have factor loadings that is above 0.05 and those variables are good quality of vehicles (0.812), appropriate waste disposal (0.787), maintenance of time (0.762), passenger friendly (0.736), adventure places (0.651), tastier food (0.569) and highly safe accommodation (0.567).

4.5 FACTOR II: CHOICES OF TOURIST PACKAGES

The second dimensions is extracted with the variables of excellent guide services (0.852), high level of utility towards packages (0.806), information availability about trips (0.776), trips to unknown places (0.737), good resting time (0.702) and variety of packages (0.562).

4.6 FACTOR III: RELAXATION PLACES

The third dimension was formed based on the factor loadings of adequate stops in a programme (0.816) and reflects the places of relaxation (0.792).

The dimensions that determine the service quality of the tourism services in Udhamandalam is determined by Tourist Amenities, Choices of Tourist Packages and Relaxation Places.

5. PROBLEMS FACED BY TOURISTS AMONG PRIVATE TOUR OPERATORS

The problems faced by the tourists are measured with the help of nine variables and its dimension is reduced based on the usage of factor analysis whose results is presented below.

Table.6. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.852
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	525.437
	df	36
	Sig.	.000

The KMO and Bartlett's test explains that the dimensions arrived from the set of variables used for assessing the tourists' problems while using the private tour are belonging to the normal distribution which adds strength to the factor analysis.

Table.7. Communalities

Communalities	Initial	Extraction
High Cost	1.000	0.554
Reduction of Time	1.000	0.715
Changing of Trips with information	1.000	0.585
Reduction in Destination Spots	1.000	0.585
Lack of adequate promotion	1.000	0.763
Lack of Transparency about trips	1.000	0.661
Lack of information about pick up spots	1.000	0.752
Less Time to Visit Places	1.000	0.658
Misrepresentation in Vehicle Facilities	1.000	0.703
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.		

The communalities explain the initial and extracted values of the problems involved in the analysis that were basis for formation of the factors that helps to understand the tourist perception.

Table.8. Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.051	45.007	45.007	4.051	45.007	45.007	2.140	23.779	23.779
2	1.090	12.113	57.120	1.090	12.113	57.120	2.028	22.533	46.312
3	0.834	9.266	66.386	0.834	9.266	66.386	1.807	20.074	66.386

4	0.675	7.495	73.881	-	-	-	-	-	-
5	0.631	7.009	80.890	-	-	-	-	-	-
6	0.566	6.291	87.180	-	-	-	-	-	-
7	0.431	4.793	91.973	-	-	-	-	-	-
8	0.379	4.212	96.185	-	-	-	-	-	-
9	0.343	3.815	100.000	-	-	-	-	-	-

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

The variance table explains that the tourist perception towards the problems faced by them while travelling with the private tourism operators and 66.37% of the opinions given by the tourists are reflected in the factors extracted based on the study.

Table.9. Rotated Component Matrix

Factors	Component		
	1	2	3
Lack of information about pick up spots	0.833		
Lack of Transparency about trips	0.779		
Changing of Trips with information	0.523		
Misrepresentation in Vehicle Facilities		0.795	
Lack of adequate promotion		0.751	
High Cost		0.618	
Reduction of Time			0.806
Less Time to Visit Places			0.680
Reduction in Destination Spots			0.621

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

5.1 MAJOR PROBLEM I: LACK OF PRIOR INFORMATION

The lack of prior information consists of variable that has significant factor loadings and those variables are lack of information about pick up spots (0.833), lack of transparency about trips (0.779) and changing of trips with information (0.523).

5.2 MAJOR PROBLEM II: COST AND MISREPRESENTATION

The cost and misrepresentation problem of tourists is based on the variables of misrepresentation in vehicle facilities (0.795), lack of adequate promotion (0.751) and high cost (0.618)

5.3 MAJOR PROBLEM III: TIME CONSTRAINTS

The time constraints problem is formed based on reduction of time (0.806), less time to visit places (0.680) and reduction in destination spots (0.621).

The governing problems that affect the private tourism operators in the Udhagamandalam tourism destination are lack of prior information, cost and misrepresentation and time constraints.

6. CONCLUSION

The micro level study which aimed to assess the various factors of service quality that influence the tourists of private tourism operators has revealed that tourist amenities, choices of tourist packages and relaxation places are major areas of service quality. The area of amenities is vital for the tourists to enjoy in the destination and has significant impact on the tourist. The tourists are looking for various choices to make their trip memorable and service quality is dependent on the choices in the package. The relaxation places of the tourism package are vital to make them satisfied with the private tourism operators. The problematic areas that affect the tourists while opting for private tour operators are lack of prior information, cost and misrepresentation and time constraints. The tourists are facing significant problem in the areas of prior information about the pickup, prices, time, etc. These are the areas of prior information that affects tourists in accessing the private operators. The cost of the packages has to be fair and high costs along with misrepresentation of facts are significant problems for the tourists. The time constraints that are involved in completion of the tourism packages is vital and they have to be given fair time breaks to enjoy the destination and it also proves to be problem in the study area. The problems can be solved with the modification to the tourism packages offered by the private tour operators. The government can also set up monitoring of private tour operators to safeguard the interest of the tourists. The tourist's perception towards the service quality has helped to understand the significance of quality service that has to be rendered by the private tour operators to make the destination tourists friendly.

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