

Online Travel Agent Service and Customer Satisfaction Based on Correlation Analysis: A Marketing Perspective in China

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Abstract

With the cooperation of Internet and travel industries, online travel market has been booming, the expected number of online travel users will be a larger growth in the future and service quality will also become an important part of the tourism industry chain. It is a question of travel companies to think about how to improve the online travel service quality and customer satisfaction, to obtain the profits greatly. To scientifically prioritize the key driving factors of online travel agent service is of vital importance for travel service provider to improve the customer satisfaction. So this paper adopts PZB gap model and SERVQUAL questionnaire as a reference, builds six service quality dimensions of online travel booking which based on data analysis and research, namely, "tangible", "reliability", "guarantee", "responsiveness", "empathy" and "user friendliness", with 18 specific measurements, the online travel booking service quality measurement instrument is eventually established. Through the statistical analysis, the authors test the hypotheses with reaching the following conclusions: (1) There is significant difference between customer perceived service quality standards and customer expectations of service quality level of online travel booking. (2) The online travel booking service quality dimensions positively correlated with overall satisfaction. Finally, the conclusions of this paper provides a reference to improve the quality of service and overall customer satisfaction of online travel booking.

Keywords: Online Travel; Service Quality; Customer Satisfaction; Marketing

1. Introduction

China witnesses a rapid growth in online travel booking with strong sustainability and optimistic prospect. According to the latest statistics of CNNIC, There are 0.133 billion person times with the experience on-line booking in flight, hotel, train and itinerary till June 2014, which is 22.4% of netizen population. While at the end of December 2014, there were 0.112 billion person times with the experience on-line booking in flight, hotel, train and itinerary which is 19.8% of the all population of netizen (CNNIC, 2014). So the fact proves that it increases by 2.6%, 21 million person times in 6 months. It is concluded that rapid-growing market and huge potential space has become the engine to encourage the growth of online travel agent market. While in terms of online-booking users, the usage ratio is far lower than the internet developed countries. With upgrading of people's consumption structure, the development of leisure travel idea, improvement of transportation, and guidance from service suppliers to citizen, it is predicted that more travel demands will be cultivated to encourage more people to use on-line booking service. According to the statistics of Ireasearch consultancy, online travel transaction of China in 2015 has reached to RMB 218.12 billion, in which on-line flight ticket and hotel reservation is the major part.

As internet development in China is on the way of commercial era from entertainment Tencent, Taobao, Baidu have directly participated or indirectly financially supported on-line booking sector. Involvement of capital market will undoubtedly promote the boom of travel booking service, and a great increase number of user is predicted. Therefore, on-line booking service will grow to be an important part along travel industry chain. It has become an urgent issue for on-line travel companies to think about how to improve on-line booking service and customer satisfaction. At present, the research on on-line booking majorly focuses on satisfaction evaluation with few on relationship between online travel agent l service with customer satisfaction. Hence, the authors do the research with the model of PZB service quality Gap model which was founded by three professors of Cambridge university, Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry in 1985. They think there is a gap between customer perceived and expected service which results in the establishment of a conceptional model of service quality based on this gap named gap to form PZB (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry) model. Hence, the authors first designed questionnaire by SERVQUAL scale with PZB Gap model, they secondly assess the key element of online travel agent by IPA model (Importance-Performance Analysis), and thirdly they try to prove the hypothesis of this study by SPSS to supply theoretical ground for study and improve online travel agent service and customer satisfaction.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Service quality and On-line service quality

Service quality is evolving from the conception of product quality with the shared ground that it composed of expected service and perceived service, which is a customer's subjective conclusion about expected service and perceived one (Peng, 2007). With the boom of internet, the researchers will study on the network service quality with SERVQUAL. As for the past study proves that the standard of internet service quality consists of correctness and promptness, and it is a vital element whether travel information quality supplied by booking website could meet visitor's demand and expectation. This study bases on SERVQUAL scale by keeping five dimensions, that is tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, guarantee, empathy. While they adjust the intonation of various dimensions to propose the dimension of "user friendliness" by referring to the past research of travel websites.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry had a deep interview on the management in bank, credit card company, equity agent, maintenance sector, they found there is a gap between customer's perceived and expected service level and the size and direction of the gap will effect service quality. Hence, they set us a service quality gap model, in brief, PZB model which is composed of five service quality gap:

Gap One: perception gap between customer's expectation on service and service supplier for customer's expectation;

Gap Two: the gap between service supplier's awareness of customer's expectation and transferring the awareness into service quality standard;

Gap Three: the Gap between service quality standard and the available service;

Gap Four: The Gap between the available service and external communication for false information from advertisement and other marketing approaches;

Gap Five: the gap between customer expected service level and experienced service level.

Gap five will be affected by former four gaps, so it can be regarded as the function of gap one-gap four. Model PZB defines customers perception of various service quality (Q) as the gap between perceived service level (P) and expected service (E). Therefore, in order to better service quality, service supplier should start from knowing customer expected service to narrow the gap by improving various service quality.

2.2 The relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction

Scholars have started the study of the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction since early 1970s. But there exists divergence on their order. Woodside, Ferry & Daly (1989) think customer satisfaction on single event can be regarded as function of service in single event while overall customer satisfaction is the function of overall service quality. Mitra also thinks satisfactions is decided by service quality while satisfaction plays direct impact on purchase and re-purchasing willingness. Whlist Zeithaml & Bitner (1996) concludes and describe the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. Oliver (1980) think the attitude at the first stage is the function of expectation, the attitude at the second stage is the function made by the attitude at the first stage and the satisfaction level at present stage, that is, customer will base on the expectation to form the first stage attitude towards some object, and then they will adjust their attitude according to purchase experience, while service quality is a long-term overall evaluation on service. Therefore, Oliver takes satisfaction as antecedent variable of satisfaction. Bolton & Drew (1991) hold the same viewpoint that customer's satisfaction results from measurable difference between expectation and perception, and it might further influence service quality. It can be concluded that though there are difference viewpoints between service quality and customer satisfaction, they are still visibly relevant with mutual supplement.

2.3 online travel agent service

In general, there are few number of literature review on online travel agent service quality and customer satisfaction, and previous studies focuses on service quality of travel agency. In 2000, Kaynama & Black proposed on-line travel agency service quality evaluation model which was based on five dimensions of SERVQUAL scale to design seven measurement dimensions for on-line travel agency service; Law and Leung

(2000) studied on decisive factors for network service quality by investigating on-line booking service in airlines. In 2004, Mills & Morrison did the research on potential factors of customer satisfaction of travel websites, they also discovered that perceived service quality was composed of several dimensions which played a vital role on customer satisfaction. Kim & Lee (2004) designed a network service quality evaluation model to have comparison study between on-line travel agency and on-line tourism suppliers, they then found that they shared something in common in network service quality dimension and can be used to explain overall level of customer satisfaction.

There are increasing number of Chinese scholars started to study on customer satisfaction about online travel agent market, such as Lu Zi, Guo Laixi, Bai Cuiling (2004) designed a assessment system on user

satisfaction on travel websites to discuss adjustment of travel network in China; Li Yanli (2006) proposed judgment criterion of user satisfaction of travel websites to discover the elements to constrain user's satisfaction(demand and supply contradiction) and inner discipline (virtual distance declining rule);Guan Hua, Yin Min (2007) chose Ctrip as the object to have quantitative analysis on influential elements of user satisfaction on travel websites by factor analysis; Zhang Weiwei(2010) discussed the influential factors and assessment model of electronic travel service quality by empirical research and then the influential scheme of user's satisfaction and loyalty of electronic travel service quality had been further studied. Qin Baoli (2011) systematically addressed the intonation of customer perceived value, involvement and loyalty and their relationship under the settings of online travel agent service.

To sum up, the present researches mainly involve assessment system of satisfaction, but few about relationship of on-line booking service quality and customer satisfaction. Hence, the author base on PZB Gap model and apply SERVQUAL scale questionnaire to evaluate crucial factor of online travel agent by IPA model.

3. Research Design

The author firstly refers to SERVQUAL scale to design measurement dimension of online travel agent service quality and then to set specific measurement item for every dimension and finally to make measurement scale of online travel agent service quality to design questionnaire. Based on the statistics of questionnaire, the authors will discuss online travel agent service quality on the gap between expected service and perceived service.(Gap 5 of PZB Model)to prove visible difference between two.According to the research from Cronim and Taylor, the authors try to evaluate service quality from customer's perception on service to discuss the causality between customer's perceived service quality and satisfaction to further address the difference of service quality and overall satisfaction affected by population statistical variables.

3.1 Defining variables

3.1.1 Service quality

Parasuraman, Zeithaml & BerryParasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry think service quality results from customer's perception which is from the comparison between the service expected by customer and the real service experienced by them. Therefore, service quality can be defined as the gap between experienced and expected service level after customer used online travel agent service.

3.1.2 Customer satisfaction

Since 1981, Oliver viewed customer satisfaction in the angle of transaction behavior which is after-sale immediate assessment or an effect reaction with transaction experience.According to the study of Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1985) customer satisfaction ranges from the factors such as product quality, service quality, price, personal and situation and so on. That is the overall evaluation on tangible and intangible product and service. Therefore, customer satisfaction is defined as the assessment of online travel agent service when people experience the service.

3.2 Hypothesis

The authors put forward the following hypothesis for the solutions:

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between customer's expectation and perception about online travel agent service quality

Hypothesis 2: Various service quality dimensions indicate no significant relevance on overall satisfaction.

3.3 Design of questionnaire

The design of this questionnaire is based on PZD Model and SERVQUAL scale with referring to literature review and character of network service. The authors will adjust the item by pretest, and all the questions will adopt positive narration. There are three parts in questionnaire, the first part is investigation user's demographic variable; the second part involves their expected and perceived service quality; the third is user's satisfaction. Six dimensions of this research include "tangibility", "reliability", "guarantee", "responsiveness", "empathy" and "user friendliness". The selection of dimension measurement and questionnaire content is as show in table 1. In terms of service quality measurement, the authors will adopt five point scale. The user will evaluate the service content according to their own expected and perceived service. Measurement level is divided as follows: least significant, 1 point; not significant, 2 points; medium, 3 points; significant, 4 points; very significant, 5 points; least satisfaction, 1 point; dissatisfaction, 2 points; medium, 3 points; satisfaction, 4 points; great satisfaction, 5 points.

3.4 Sampling design

As this study aims to discuss the relationship between online travel agent service quality and customer satisfaction, the sampling object should bear the following traits: the on-line visitors who have ever booked or

purchased relevant on-line travel product from any on-line travel website. Network questionnaire is the main data collection method of this article. This study adopts on-line questionnaire platform named “Wenjuan.com” to collect the data. The questionnaire and data collection is done by data bank automatically which guarantees the accuracy and efficiency of data with saving efforts and energy.

4. Empirical Analysis

4.1 Analysis on sample information

The author choose visitors who have used online travel agent website as the objects to send to on-line questionnaire 335 articles with collecting 324, the collection ratio is 91.3%, According to the survey, as for gender, male is the main part, 56.2%, for more men surf on internet than women, what’s more, there are larger number of male visitors or business travelers. In terms of age, the people in 18-24 is the majority, 34.3%, because this group is mainly students with a high demand of ticket; In terms of education

Table 1 Service quality measurement dimension and measurement item

Dimension	content in questionnaire
Tangibility	1.The interface and art design of this website is visually appealing 2.This website conveys the message in various way with words and pictures displayed
Reliability	3.The website can offer in-time and accurate product information 4.This website’s online transaction system is working smoothly 5.This website could offer relevant service promptly
Responsiveness	6.The staff is ready to offer service 7.The website can immediately solve problem on-line 8.The website can quickly confirm your on-line transaction request
Guarantee	9. This website can safeguard your personal information and privacy security 10.This website can safeguard on-line transaction security 11. This website guarantees professional after-sale service 12.The website offers favorable price of product
Empathy	13.This website will concern about your unique demand 14.This website can offer your personalized product and service 15.This website actively inquire your needs 16.This website is able to know your needs
User friendliness	17.This website can help your find the product and service information easily 18.This website can supply friendly guidance and assistant system to make sure convenient on-line purchase

background, undergraduates, 68.5%, is the major part, for people with good education absorb new knowledge easily, and they are the drive to encourage on-line travel at the initial stage. What’s more, university students share a large market in on-line travel with attracting more users with good-education background. As for monthly income, most people earn RMB 3000-5000 per month, the ratio is 42.3%; In recent one year, most users will book the travel on-line in 3-5 times, 51.5%, and the website most frequently visited is Qunar.com, 46.3%, the second is Ctrip.com in 31.2%, which is fundamentally identified with the data issued in “the Report of Chinese Netizen travel and reservation behavior” by Internet information center of China.

Secondly, it is reliability coefficient test for questionnaire for this study adopts widely used reliability coefficient Cronbach’s α coefficient. Most scholars think 0.70-0.98 is in high reliability for Cronbach’s α coefficient.It can be accepted when it is above 0.5, while it will be rejected if it is below 0.35.The statistics show that the measurement variable Cronbach’s α is always above 0.6 which proves favorable performance of the questionnaire scale. Thirdly, it is the validity test for adopting content validity analysis.As the questionnaire’s content is designed on the base of PZB gap model and SERVQUAL scale, and authors will refer to literature review and traits of online travel agent to attain the contents with pre-investigation and modification by some users, so it remains relatively content validity.

4.2 Analysis and Discussion

4.2.1The difference analysis on expected and perceived service quality

The research adopts paired T test and IPA analysis to study the difference of expectation and perception towards overall service quality, the outcome is shown as follows:

Table 2. Comparison of online travel agent service quality evaluation

Service quality dimension	Importance		Performance		Gap		
	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	T Value	Significance
Interface design is visually appealing	4.00	.683	3.47	.540	.525	8.488	.000
Information display is various	4.21	.519	3.48	.643	.727	11.836	.000
1.In-time and accurate information	4.46	.539	3.43	.749	1.025	17.435	.000
2.Reliable on-line transaction system	4.48	.674	3.54	.618	.939	14.986	.000
3.Prompt service	4.60	.522	3.34	.616	1.253	20.805	.000
4.Staff is ready to offer service	4.40	.696	3.33	.740	1.066	14.952	.000
5.Immediate and efficient solution of on-line problem	4.54	.548	3.35	.744	1.192	17.913	.000
6.Quick confirmation of on-line trade request	4.68	.490	3.53	.549	1.152	22.359	.000
7.Safeguarding personal information and privacy	4.87	.394	3.40	.785	1.470	22.713	.000
8.Guarantee the safety of on-line transaction	4.88	.357	3.56	.656	1.323	27.349	.000
9.Warranty of professional after-sales service	4.56	.671	3.43	.599	1.126	16.144	.000
10.Promise of favorable price	4.20	.683	3.32	.602	.879	13.508	.000
11.Cares about customer's particular need	4.49	.550	3.23	.679	1.268	21.725	.000
12.Personalized product and service	4.47	.650	3.24	.595	1.232	18.595	.000
13. Initially know customer's need	4.04	.694	3.20	.861	.833	12.424	.000
14.Understand what customer wants	4.23	.666	3.08	.756	1.152	13.414	.000
15.Accessibility of product and information	4.57	.554	3.44	.716	1.126	18.946	.000
16.Convenience of on-line purchase and operation	4.48	.559	3.46	.593	1.020	15.367	.000
Total	4.45	.581	3.38	.669	1.073	17.165	.000

(1) Paired T test

In terms of analysis (See Table 2), generally, there exists significant difference between practical performance of online travel agent service quality and customer's attention degree, the difference value reaches 1.073; 18 measuring objects involving customer's perceived service performance level is lower than attention degree, that is, there exists gap 5 of PZB model.

(2) IPA analysis

Shown as figure 1, the author will regard 4.45, the average of overall recognition degree of on-line booking service quality dimension, and 3.38, average of practical performance level, as the datum line for quadrant segmentation, and IPA will define the relevant position of service quality dimension. Every figure in the graph represents one item in questionnaire, 8 service quality dimensions in quadrant A are critical strengths which should be maintained in online travel agent; while 4 service quality dimensions in quadrant B are the service in great deficiency which should be initially improved; 4 service qualities in quadrant C are potential threats which is in the secondary priority can be neglected if short of resource; while 2 service quality dimensions in quadrant D represent secondary advantageous source which is of no importance for operation.

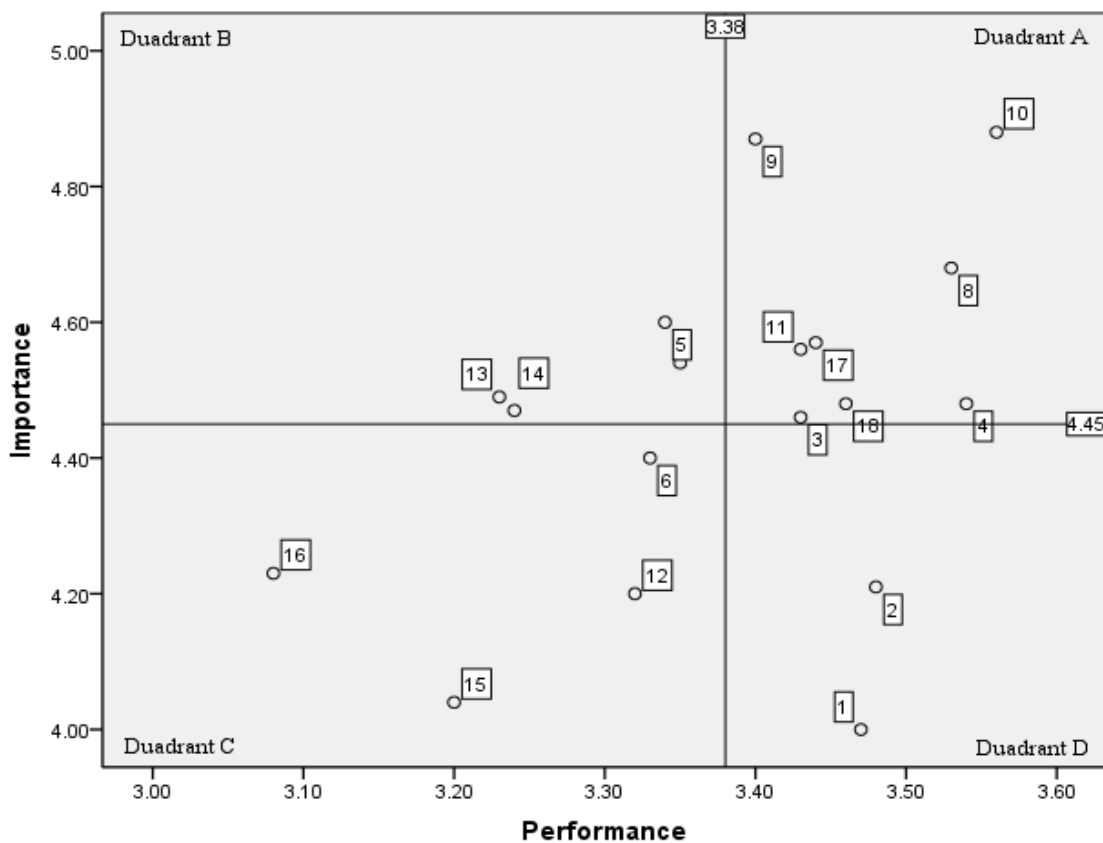


Figure 1. IPA for online travel agent service quality

4.2.2 Difference Analysis on performance level of various service quality dimension towards overall satisfaction
 In order to discuss the relationship between performance level of various service quality dimension towards overall satisfaction, the author adopted Pearson relevance analysis and regression analysis acknowledged by system.

(1) Relevance analysis of performance level of various service quality dimension towards overall satisfaction. The statistics indicates that it shows positive relevance between clients overall satisfaction and six dimensions of service quality including tangibility, reliability, guarantee, responsiveness, empathy, user friendliness. (See Table 3)

Table 3. Relevant Analysis on overall satisfaction with various dimensions of service quality performance level

Service quality dimension	Overall Satisfaction	
	Pearson Relevance	Sig.(Bilateral)
Tangibility	.144*	.043
Reliability	.527**	.000
Guarantee	.388**	.000
Responsiveness	.149*	.036
Empathy	.276**	.000
User friendliness	.496**	.000

It shows biggest Pearson relevant coefficient (0.527) between overall satisfaction and reliability dimension of service quality, the second and third is user friendliness (0.496) and guarantee (0.388). These three relevant coefficients are bigger than other three dimensions, which indicates these three dimensions represent stronger relevance with overall satisfaction.

(2) Regression analysis of overall satisfaction and various dimensions of service quality performance level
 As relevance analysis can only judge whether there exists relationship in various dimension, and the degree and direction, regression analysis is able to figure out the direction and relationship and further explains whether

there is causality among various dimensions. Relevance analysis from table 4, there shows positive relevance between client overall satisfaction and six dimensions of service quality, that is, tangibility, reliability, guarantee, responsiveness, empathy and user friendliness. Therefore, given overall satisfaction as dependent variable, six dimensions as independent variables, regression model is set as follows:

$$\text{Overall Satisfaction} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Tangibility} + \beta_2 \text{Reliability} + \beta_3 \text{Guarantee} + \beta_4 \text{Responsiveness} + \beta_5 \text{Empathy} + \beta_6$$

Table 4. ANOVA^b Variance Test

Model	Quadratic Sum	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	22.371	2.773	24.863	.000 ^a
Residual	8.979	.246		
Total	31.350			

a. Predication Variable: (Constant), Reliability, User friendliness, Guarantee, Empathy, Responsiveness, Tangibility

b. Dependent Variable: Overall satisfaction

Variance Test is used to test whether there exists different level from six dimensions towards online tourist's perceived overall satisfaction. Table 5 tells us F is 24.863, Sig. is .000, which indicates this regression model is working with statistical meaning, that is, six dimensions can be explained as overall satisfaction.

Table 5. Analysis Table of Regression coefficient on various dimension of overall satisfaction

Model	Non-standard Coefficient		Standard Coefficient	t	Sig.
	B	Standard Deviation	Trial Version		
β_0	3.863	.365		4.996	.000
Tangibility(β_1)	.057	.102	.051	.468	.677
Reliability(β_2)	.365	.142	.321	2.655	.006
Guarantee(β_3)	.277	.119	.244	1.662	.097
Responsiveness(β_4)	.182	.122	.133	1.227	.152
Empathy(β_5)	.159	.101	.120	1.049	.188
user friendliness(β_6)	.313	.125	.289	2.043	.038

According to table 4-12, the research figures out the regression equation of online travel agent overall satisfaction towards various dimensions of service quality:

$$\text{Overall Satisfaction} = 3.863 + 0.057 * \text{Tangibility} + 0.365 * \text{Reliability} + 0.277 * \text{Guarantee} + 0.182 * \text{Responsiveness} + 0.159 * \text{Empathy} + 0.313 * \text{User friendliness}$$

In terms of equation's regression coefficient, reliability of service quality affect overall satisfaction in greatest degree, user friendliness and guarantee is secondary. It indicates that reliability, user friendliness, guarantee of service quality in travel booking website play great impact on on-line visitor's satisfaction.

(3) Empirical result analysis

Above analysis tells the comparison between hypothesis and real situation. (See Table 6)

Table 6. Testing result of hypothesis

Hypothesis	Testing Result
Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between customers expectation and real perception of online travel agent service quality's traits	False
Hypothesis 2: Various dimensions of service quality presents no significant difference to overall satisfaction	False

It is false to assume no significant difference between clients expectation and real perception on on-line travel service quality. The result indicates there exists significant difference between performance level of booking service quality and clients attention degree for all 18 items on clients' perceptive service quality level is lower than their attention level. It is false for the hypothesis that there is no significant relevance from various service quality dimension towards overall satisfaction. The results indicate, customer's satisfaction represent positive relevance with tangibility, reliability, guarantee, responsiveness, empathy and user friendliness. Moreover, the outcome of regression analysis indicate various service quality dimensions greatly affect overall satisfaction.

5. Discussion and Results

Referring to the statistics of the study, the authors proposed following suggestions with the aim of improving online travel agent service quality and customer satisfaction.

(1) Improving the project which contains big difference between expected and perceived service quality

According to IPA graph of online travel agent service quality, the key improved projects in quadrant B, such as "attaching importance on your particular need", "offer guarantee service promptly", "personalized product and service" and "immediate and efficient solution of on-line problem". It requires online travel agent enterprises attach importance on customer's particular needs by offering personalized product and service and meeting their

different needs. Meanwhile, it should be able to solve customer's problem quickly and efficiently, execute promised service so as to gain people's trust with promoting their satisfaction to greatest extent.

(2) Adopt different improvement for different demographic variables.

The research indicates that there is no significant difference on perceived level of various dimension in service quality towards sex, monthly income of demographic variable. Furthermore, sex and education in demographic variable represents no significant difference towards satisfaction. In addition, online travel agent enterprises should have effective customer group segment, that is, to adopt specific solution and offer differentiate service for customers with different age and monthly income.

(3) Improve customer satisfaction accordance with different service quality dimension

1) Developing tangibility of online travel agent website

It is suggested to take user-oriented as the principle, reasonably arrange the web page layout. What's more, information in website should be sorted to make it more concise. Color allocation and readability of writing should be guaranteed to make it more visually compelling so as to attract customer immediately to convey the message of website effectively. Moreover, it is necessary to create website's particular character to integrate website with enterprise's image.

2) Improve reliability of online travel agent website

As reliability plays a prominent role on affecting satisfaction of on-line travel service quality, the website should firstly make sure the reliability of product information quality, for example, it can try to collect latest reserving product, travel itinerary, new product launch etc. Meanwhile, maintenance for hardware and software should be strengthened to guarantee steadily working of the whole system, the most important, it should keep the commitment, gain customer's trust to increase overall satisfaction.

3) Strengthen the guarantee of online travel agent website

It is recommended that all the websites strengthen network safety technology to strictly protect user's personal register information, keep user's purchase behavior confidentially to safeguard customer's transaction process. What's more, it should offer professional after sales service to establish a regulated after sales service rules to maximally improve customer's satisfaction.

4) Increasing responsiveness of online travel agent network.

It is necessary for website having immediate and effective respond for any problems and any delay might cause to loss customer. Therefore, it is suggested that on-line travel website should store the sorted problems in the way of "data-bank" to set up on-line customer service center to list routine problems by increasing website column which helps customer search easily. If it is a complicated problem involving customer's personalized need, it needs professional staff to offer service for customer to increase their satisfaction.

5) Increasing empathy of online travel agent website

Online travel agent enterprise should actively understand real need and particular problem of user so as to offer personalized tourism product and proper service. The websites can keep the record on user's purchase by data system and to sort them into different categories to offer them personalized service. Furthermore, it can have special greeting at certain occasion to recommend personalized product information to actively cultivate their needs.

6) Enhance user friendliness of online travel agent website

The job of sorting for tour product information index should be more specific and clarified to improve user friendliness of website. What's more, transaction procedure should simplified and illustrations are necessary for support and explanation to help the new user. In order to avoid user registration when user click the page, Cookies technology is recommended to record user's purchase behavior, and when registered user finish the purchase to confirm, it can be done after some simple steps. As the sample of this study is just 324 people, future study needs to cover larger populations with different income, education, demographical, and psychological attributes and more representative sample, and improved the generalizability of the research outcomes.

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