

KEYNOTE SPEECH: Understanding Chinese Tourists: The Effects of Tourist Complaining Constraints on their Intentions

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PRESENTER: Dr. Erdogan Ekiz

Receiving complaints is important for service companies in general and for tourism companies in particular. However, the majority of dissatisfied tourists are ready to just walk away and never come back. To prevent this from happening, it is imperative for tourism industry managers to understand the factors that discourage tourists from complaining, in other words, the factors that constrain them from voicing their complaints.

An extensive review of tourism literature reveals that most studies directly applied general consumer behavior theories without considering the unique features of the tourism industry. Tourism presents the characteristics of services very much in general but is also intrinsically a non-ordinary and non-routine experience. Tourists have a different mindset and perceive, behave and react 'differently' when taking their holidays. Ekiz (2011) argued that the unique features of tourism call for a tailor-made tourist complaint constraints - TCC - scale and recommended replication of the TCC scale in other settings to test its robustness. Therefore, this study aims to assess the effects of TCC on perceptions of justice ('justice perceptions' in the model) and commitment to loyalty ('loyalty intention') of Chinese tourists in Istanbul, Turkey. To do so, this paper replicates Ekiz, Au and Hsu's (2012) methodology in general and tourist complaining constraints (TCC) scale in particular. In this methodology, "limited time, unfamiliarity, limited communication, limited involvement and positive holiday mood" (Ekiz, 2011, p. 125) are used as independent variables. Justice perceptions (interactional, procedural and distributive) from the recovery and loyalty to the organization were interviewing and dependent variables respectively.

In order to test this model, 700 questionnaires were printed in Mandarin and distributed in Istanbul's historic tourist attractions through convenience sampling between June and August 2015. Respondents were requested to provide answers in a self-administrative manner. 597 questionnaires were found complete, giving a response rate of 85.3 percent. The collected data were subjected to comprehensive analyses following the guidelines of Churchill (1979), Jöreskog and Sörbom (1996) and Babbie (2004). The Structural Equation Modelling analyses indicated that the proposed seven-factor theoretical model fitted the data equitably well.

Path analysis suggested that the data supported the majority of the relationships that had been hypothesized. More specifically, 'limited communication' on 'interactional justice', and 'unfamiliarity' on 'procedural and distributive justice' dimensions were found to be the most significant constraints. These results are consistent with Ekiz's (2011) findings, 'distributive justice' was found to have the strongest effect on 'loyalty'.

This study has several managerial and theoretical implications. For instance, given the increasing importance of Chinese tourists to the economy, tourism officials in Turkey (and in similar destinations) need to understand Chinese tourists' behavior if they are to increase their share of the tourism market (Ekiz, Au & Hsu, 2012). On the practical side, understanding tourist complaint constraints has several implications. Given that limited communication is a barrier, tourism officials and managers should pay extra attention to hiring people who can speak Chinese and/or provide Chinese language education. This will improve the communication skills

of their frontline employees, which in turn will motivate Chinese tourists to voice their complaints. Tourism officials should also provide detailed information to familiarize Chinese tourists with relevant procedures. If they know how and where to voice their dissatisfaction, this will encourage them to do so. Managers cannot change the amount of time their guests have allocated for their holiday, but they can and should find ways to handle complaints efficiently within the limited time available. In this respect, managers may consider extending their guest relations services to the Internet, allowing complaints to be made after the holiday is over, so that the effects of these constraints can be lessened. Moreover, they should inform their guests that their hotel has a well-functioning and efficient complaint-handling system. This message would motivate guests to register complaints that otherwise would go unvoiced.

The findings of both the literature review and primary data collection suggest that the involvement levels of consumers are related to their responses. In other words, whether they voice their complaint or just walk away depends on how involved they feel. Managers should therefore focus on increasing guests' involvement in their holidays by offering them more interaction and continuous feedback. For instance, Saarinen (2003) stressed that large amounts of public money are being spent in Finland to involve guests in service design as well as in service recovery. Finally, managers should be more proactive in identifying potential problems even when their guests are in a holiday mood and do not feel like raising their voices: silent guests are not always satisfied guests. Managers should therefore try to make complaining as convenient as possible to avoid ruining guests' holiday moods. All in all, knowing about these constraints will help managers minimize the effect of service failures and modify their way their companies' procedures for handling complaints, in ways that do not deter guests from voicing their grievances. Consistent with this, Hjalager et al. (2008) stressed those innovation systems in Nordic countries should also include research on tourist behavior, and complaint behavior in particular, if they are to be successful. Once companies can lessen the constraints, they will be one step closer to remedying the problem and thus retaining their guests, avoiding negative WOM and reducing customer turnover (Kotler et al., 2002; Tax et al., 1998).

As for the theoretical implications, first and most importantly, this paper argues that tourist complaining is different from overall customer complaining (Ekiz & Au, 2009; Yagi & Pearce, 2007). Second, there has been no scale available to measure TCC previously, so the newly developed TCC scale has filled this gap, providing a tailor-made and industry-specific measurement scale for future use.

A number of limitations should be borne in mind when interpreting this study. First, it focused only on developing the TCC scale and did not consider any possible causal relationships between the dimensions of TCC and other constructs. Therefore, including constructs such as organizational responses (Gursoy et al., 2007), justice perceptions (Chebat & Slusarczyk, 2005), overall satisfaction (Zeithaml et al., 2006), repurchase intention (Hirschman, 1970), and WOM intention (Swanson & Kelly, 2001) would likely provide further insight. The second limitation is the use of convenience sampling. The use of probabilistic sampling would give more confidence in being able to generalize the results. Finally, it would be useful to test the extent to which the TCC scale is generalizable by conducting similar studies in other contexts and with larger samples.

Key Words: Tourist Complaining Constraints, Justice Perceptions, Loyalty intention, Chinese Tourists, SEM, Turkey.

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