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An empirical study on business travel satisfaction: a case study in Jiangsu

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ABSTRACT

As one important form of urban travel, business travel has played a more and more significant role in economic and social life. Business travel satisfaction can reflect the appeal and services of the tourism destination to a large extent. The paper carries out scientific demarcation on the concepts of business travel and connotation of business travel satisfaction. Through delivering questionnaires among business travelers, the paper conducts assessment on the perceived image of business travel and satisfaction in Jiangsu from the destination of business travel, business hotel, business travel agency and other aspects. Besides, the paper explores into the deficiencies in the development of business travel in Jiangsu and puts forward corresponding suggestions.

KEYWORDS

Customer satisfaction; Tourism destination; Tourism satisfaction.



INTRODUCTION

Business travel has indeed become one global industry, which mainly includes individual business travel, meetings, exhibitions, reward travel, travel management, enterprise business reception, training, cross-regional product launching conference, official business travel among governmental personnel and in cultural, educational and medical organizations, as well as some large-scale sports competitions, commemorations or celebrations, etc. Business travel has also enjoyed rapid development globally, occupying the dominant position in the tourism industry. Domestically, the development of China's business travel is also at the accelerating stage. Besides, business travel is also playing a more and more important role in economic and social life in China. To a large extent, business travel satisfaction can reflect the appeal and services of the tourism destination. Recently, customer satisfaction research has become one hotspot both domestically and abroad. The researches on the operation of business tourism also obtain gradual concerns. In China, a proportion of cities and enterprises have ranked on the list of Top World Business Travel Destinations. However, the researches on business travel satisfaction in China are still inadequate. The paper selects business travel destinations in Jiangsu as example and conducts systematic investigations into general destination satisfaction, hotel satisfaction, tourism agency satisfaction and other aspects, thus providing referential basis and guidance for the healthy development of China's business travel.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Business travel refers to the travel occurring for the purpose of business, employee welfare and so on, mainly including business travel management, meeting travel, exhibition travel, training, business reception, survey, reward travel, etc. The majority of foreign researches on business travel focus on the influences of business travel on the destination, market demands of business travel, operation of business travel, empirical studies of business travel destination. Domestic researches on business travel are mainly problem-oriented, centering on the connotation and development status of business travel as well as corresponding strategies, etc.

Consumer satisfaction (CS for short) is defined as "the consumer's fulfillment response...it is a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment"(Oliver, 1996, p. 87). Customer satisfaction degree (CSD) serves as the extent to which customers who have used products or received services are satisfied with the products or services. It is one function which describes the relationship between the expectations before purchasing and quality perceived by customers after purchasing. Customer satisfaction judgment models mainly include IPA (Important and Performance Analysis) method which focuses more on qualitative analysis as well as 5GAP model. Customer satisfaction degree is sometimes called customer satisfaction index (CSI), which is formulated to analyze customer satisfaction degree through adopting the average value (or other values) of customer satisfaction degree as the basis. In particular, Sweden's SCSB, America's ACSI and Europe's ECSI models for customer satisfaction research are quite representative.

Numerous hospitality and tourism researchers have conducted studies which attempted to introduce theoretical and methodological frameworks for measuring customer satisfaction in entertainment vacation (Petrick, Morais, & Norman, 2001); golf travel (Petrick, 1999); hotel services (Getty & Thompson, 1994a); international travel (Pizam & Milman, 1993); restaurant services (Yuksel & Yuksel, 2002); sporting events (Madrigal, 1995); and tourism destination (Birkan & Eser, 2003). At present, foreign studies on tourist satisfaction degree are mainly about the definition of tourist satisfaction degree, affecting factors, judgment dimensions and so on. Domestic empirical researches are mainly about tourists' perceptions, tourists' overall satisfaction, customer loyalty, tourism spot, destination and hotels. However, the comprehensive and systematic studies pertinent to business travel destinations, overall destination satisfaction, hotel satisfaction, and tourism agency satisfaction and so on are inadequate.

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLING

Jiangsu is located in the most developed Yangtze River Delta area in China, as one province with the most solid comprehensive strength. Besides, With comprehensive infrastructures and highly intensification of tourism resources, it is one sample area in domestic tourism industry. The images of business travel destination and meeting travel destination have formed preliminarily. However, in domestic tourism, business travel merely accounts for 20%, ranking after sightseeing travel and relaxation tourism, which indicates that Jiangsu is not highly identified on the domestic business travel market. As a result, under the context that the development of national economy and tourism industry has entered major strategic adjustment period, the formation mechanism, organization procedure, management method and structural functions of business travel system in Jiangsu will also face reforms.

The study adopted the method of questionnaire survey. It totally delivered 600 questionnaires. The investigated area mainly included Shanghai, Suzhou, Nanjing and Wuxi where business travel took up a large proportion. 200 questionnaires were delivered on the Internet in Shanghai. In Suzhou, Nanjing and Wuxi, Jiangsu Province, 200 questionnaires were delivered to business hotels and business travel agencies in each city respectively. The percentage of questionnaire deliver

was 35% in Suzhou and Nanjing respectively and 30% in Wuxi. 461 questionnaires were withdrawn validly, constituting 76.8% validity rate. 165 valid questionnaires were from business hotels, 158 from business travel agencies and 138 from the Internet.

The dimensions were based on four survey items. First, the respondents' background, including their demographic characteristics and social attributes; second, the respondents' perception and satisfaction measuring on business travel destination in Jiangsu; third, the respondents' satisfaction measuring on business hotels in Jiangsu; fourth, the respondents' satisfaction measuring on business travel agencies in Jiangsu. The questionnaire adopted Likert Scale in measuring (Variables in each construct were coded on 5-point scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)). Then, the paper used SPSS11.0 to handle the data.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

The percentage of males and females among the respondents was respectively 51.8% and 48.2%. In terms of age distribution, the respondents aging from 20-29 years old and 30-34 years old accounted for 39.63% and 37.8%, indicating that male business tourists were a little more than females taking business travels to Jiangsu. Besides, the tourists were mainly young and middle-aged people. The respondents were generally well-educated. Among them, those who obtained bachelor degree accounted for 60%; and those whose salary was more than RMB 8,000 Yuan occupied 30%. In terms of career distribution, professional technicians and service providers/salespeople took up for about 40%. The result of demographic statistics indicated that the samples were randomly distributed, which was quite consistent with the business tourists' characteristics. As a result, the data were quite representative.

TABLE 1 : General profile of the respondents

Gender	Male	Female	≤20 years old	20-29 years old	30-44 years old	45-60 years old	≥60 years old
Age %	51.8	48.2	7.9	39.6	37.8	12.8	1.8
Career %	Government officials	Business trade personnel	Professional technicians	Service providers/salespeople	Employees	Others	
	10.6	15.6	21.9	17.5	16.3	18.1	
Monthly salary (RMB) %	≤3000 Yuan		3000-5000 Yuan	5001-8000 Yuan	≥8000 Yuan		
	17.7		28.1	20.7	33.5		
Education background %	Higher than bachelor degree		Junior college	High school or vocational school	Lower than higher school		
	60.8		24.7	10.1	4.4		

Due to the respondents' different cognitions, the results demonstrate great variations. The degree of liability is one important indicator for measuring the quality of the questionnaire. The paper adopts SPSS to detect the homogeneity reliability of Cronbach's α coefficient. The result shows that the α coefficient is 0.820 (>0.7). Through 0.05 significance test, it indicates that the questionnaire has achieved good effects and that the subsequent analysis can be carried out.

The paper selected 17 words to describe the images of travel destinations. The respondents were required to choose the words for business travel destinations in Jiangsu, Shanghai and Hong Kong as well as the three major business travel destination cities in Jiangsu (TABLE 2). Next, the paper analyzed the image perception of the travel destinations with the frequency of selected words. The respondents chose the words "comfortable" (58.11%), "beautiful scenery" (55.41%) and "rich cultural heritage" (51.35%) for their image perception of business travel in Jiangsu. In terms of the image perception of business travel in Nanjing, "rich cultural heritage" occupied an absolute advantage with the percentage of 67.57%. Besides, the respondents who chose "comfortable", "delicacy" and "beautiful scenery" accounted for 39.19% respectively. 35.41% chose "unrestricted". Suzhou's image of business travel was quite distinctive. 62.16% respondents deemed it "comfortable"; 60.81% chose "beautiful scenery"; 54.05% chose "rich cultural heritage"; and 39.19% and 31.08% chose "comfortable" and "relaxing" respectively to describe this city. In Shanghai and Hong Kong, the outstanding features of business travel in these two cities were "convenient", "delicacy", "fashionable & shopping" and "diverse culture". Compared with Shanghai and Hong Kong, Jiangsu had the advantages in "comfortable", "beautiful scenery" and "rich cultural heritage". In particular, "comfortable" was the most distinctive feature. Among the cities in Jiangsu, the image perception of Nanjing was mainly "rich cultural heritage"; the image perception of Suzhou and Wuxi was mainly "beautiful scenery". Nevertheless, as the destinations of business travel, Jiangsu is still backward in terms of "convenient", "delicacy", "fashionable & shopping" and "diverse culture" that businessmen are pursuing for. In particular, when compared with Hong Kong's "brand" and Shanghai's "service quality", Jiangsu's backwardness is even more serious. Therefore, it is of great necessity to conduct in-depth

assessment and measuring on every aspect of brand composition in destinations and the service quality in hotels and tourism agencies, the major carriers of business travel.

TABLE 2 : Analysis on image perception of business travel destinations

Words	Shanghai	Hong Kong	Jiangsu	Nanjing	Suzhou	Wuxi
comfortable	37.50%	23.44%	58.11%	39.19%	62.16%	39.19%
unrestricted	26.56%	21.88%	31.08%	35.14%	33.78%	28.38%
convenient	45.31%	43.75%	45.95%	32.43%	27.03%	20.27%
enthusiastic	17.19%	25%	25.68%	18%	11%	14.86%
smile	15.63%	14.06%	10.81%	10.81%	9.46%	6.76%
relaxing	20.31%	12.50%	33.78%	16.22%	44.59%	31.08%
exciting	4.69%	3.13%	2.70%	2.70%	1.35%	2.70%
fashionable & shopping	39.06%	46.88%	17.57%	14.86%	6.76%	5.41%
delicacy	42.19%	57.81%	32.43%	39.19%	41.89%	25.68%
creativity	14.06%	7.81%	8.11%	10.81%	13.51%	12.16%
unique living style	21.88%	23.44%	16.22%	12.16%	16.22%	8.11%
diverse culture	43.75%	39.06%	32.43%	33.78%	25.68%	24.32%
rich performance activities	10.94%	6.25%	5.41%	4.05%	10.81%	16.22%
beautiful scenery	14.06%	12.50%	55.41%	39.19%	60.81%	58.11%
rich cultural heritage	3.13%	3.13%	51.35%	67.57%	54.05%	29.73%
brand	21.88%	43.75%	20.27%	14.86%	25.68%	17.57%
service quality	31.25%	25%	24.32%	14%	18.92%	13.51%

The results of the assessment and measuring on brand image of business travel destinations in Jiangsu, natural culture of brand design, relaxation & recreation, tourism distinctiveness, service quality, information consulting, tourism environment and overall satisfaction degree are shown in TABLE 3. Except tourism environment, the average score was above 4, i.e., between satisfied (high) and strongly satisfied (high). The assessment on natural culture was 4.21 scores on average; the evaluation on brand image, tourism distinctiveness and service quality was higher than 4.1 scores. However, the score of tourism environment was 3.99, a little lower than “satisfied”. The overall satisfaction degree concerning business travel in Jiangsu reached 4.12. The standard deviation of each indicator was quite small, indicating that the data were quite centralized with small variation and that the respondents’ opinions were comparatively unified.

TABLE 3 : Assessment on satisfaction degree of business travel in Jiangsu

Satisfaction degree	Brand image	Natural culture	Relaxation & recreation	Tourism distinctiveness	Service quality	Information consulting	Tourism environment	Overall satisfaction degree
Mean	4.13	4.21	4.05	4.12	4.11	4.02	3.99	4.12
Std Dev.	0.70	0.70	0.71	0.73	0.65	0.68	0.71	0.73

In the assessment of brand image, natural culture, relaxation & recreation, overall satisfaction degree and other items in the three major business travel destinations in Jiangsu, data showed that the overall satisfaction degree for Suzhou was the highest with the mean value reaching 4.43 (In particular, the assessment value on tourism distinctiveness was the most highest, reaching 4.49). In Wuxi and Nanjing, the satisfaction degree of natural culture was the highest, reaching 4.08 and 4.27 respectively (Refer to TABLE 4), indicating that for the businessmen who came to Jiangsu, Suzhou had the most remarkable tourism distinctiveness, highest service quality and superior brand image. It was closely related to propaganda on business meeting and travel destination launched by Suzhou all the time. Except the historically endowed scenery, Nanjing and Wuxi still had some gaps in terms of their business travel environment.

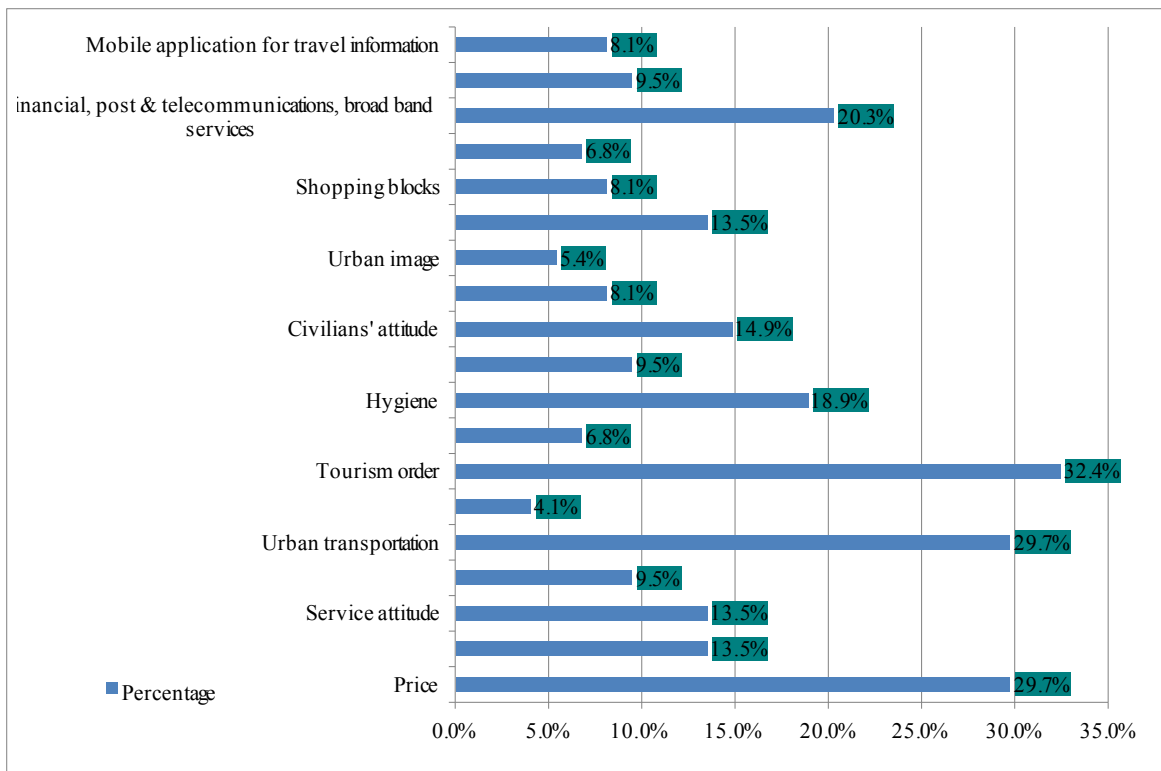


Figure 1 : Choice of three aspects that business travelers were most unsatisfied with in terms of tourism environment in Jiangsu

In terms of the assessment on the satisfaction degree on business hotels’ facilities, tourism products, price, service, security, traffic accessibility degree and surrounding matching facilities (TABLE 5), the mean value of tourists’ satisfaction degree was all above 4 scores, between satisfied and strongly satisfied. The mean value of hotel services was 4.24, ranking top one among the items obtaining tourist satisfaction. The assessment on hotel security and facilities also reached 4.19 and 4.12. The satisfaction degree on hotels’ products, price, traffic and matching facilities was a little lower, indicating that Jiangsu still had a lot of deficiencies in terms of hotel products developed for business tourists, price package and urban matching services. Among the cities in Jiangsu, Suzhou and Nanjing obtained the most business tourists’ satisfaction (4.35 and 4.41 respectively). The standard deviation of each data was smaller than 1, proving that the discrete of respondents’ choice was not remarkable without great disagreement.

TABLE 4 : Analysis on assessment on satisfaction degree of major business travel cities in Jiangsu

Cities	Brand image		Natural culture		Relaxation & recreation		Assessment value on distinctiveness		Service quality		Information consulting		Tourism environment		Overall satisfaction degree	
	Mean	Std. dev.	Mean	Std. dev.	Mean	Std. dev.	Mean	Std. dev.	Mean	Std. dev.	Mean	Std. dev.	Mean	Std. dev.	Mean	Std. dev.
Suzhou	4.42	0.85	4.42	0.76	4.29	0.69	4.49	0.66	4.22	0.69	4.16	0.69	4.07	0.81	4.43	0.77
Wuxi	4.04	0.41	4.08	0.54	3.98	0.64	3.96	0.62	4.04	0.46	3.92	0.58	3.90	0.59	3.94	0.56
Nanjing	4.00	0.66	4.27	0.67	3.98	0.74	4.02	0.74	4.16	0.76	4.04	0.75	4.06	0.71	4.08	0.74

From the analysis on the image perception in TABLE 2, it can be found that Jiangsu does not have a great gap with business travelers’ expectations in terms of its service quality. However, from the perspective of the destinations’ overall image and comprehensive service quality, Jiangsu still had a lot of deficiencies in terms of the business travel destination cities’ matching services, business convenience services and professional services. According to the respondents’ choice of three aspects that they were not satisfied the most with the business travel environment in Jiangsu (Figure 1), data showed

that tourism order (32.4%), urban traffic (29.7%), price (29.7%) and financial, post & telecommunications, broad band services (20.3%) were the aspect that business tourists were unsatisfied with the most.

TABLE 5 : Assessment on satisfaction degree on business hotels in Jiangsu

Satisfaction degree	Facilities	Products	Price	Services	Security	Traffic	Matching facilities
Mean	4.12	4.02	4.02	4.24	4.19	4.04	4.05
Std. dev.	0.73	0.72	0.72	0.73	0.68	0.74	0.80

The assessment on satisfaction degree of business travel agencies in Jiangsu is shown in TABLE 6. The tourists' satisfaction degree was all above 4 scores, between satisfied and strongly satisfied. In terms of products themselves (mean: 4.33), design (4.31) and services (4.34), the satisfaction was a little higher than that of price (4.25) and purchasing method (4.28). The standard deviation indicates the relative unified opinions. The overall satisfaction degree was quite high. However, the majority of products purchased by business tourists were business travel products (reaching 52.2), second to which were flight ticket (34.4%) and hotel reservation (22.3%). Other products occupied a small percentage in exhibition travel, company meeting, company training and reward travel. It shows that the products provided by travel agencies in Jiangsu are mostly conventional ones with serious lack of distinctive business travel products.

TABLE 6 : Assessment on satisfaction degree of business travel agencies in Jiangsu

Satisfaction degree	Product design	Product price	Product service	Purchasing channel and methods	Overall satisfaction degree
Mean	4.31	4.25	4.34	4.28	4.33
Std. dev.	0.69	0.64	0.62	0.66	0.62

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper carries out assessment on image perception of business travel destinations in Jiangsu, overall satisfaction degree, hotel and travel agency satisfaction degree through questionnaire survey. It is found that the image perception of business travel destinations in Jiangsu mainly demonstrated in "comfortable", "beautiful scenery" and "rich cultural heritage". Jiangsu still had gaps with "convenient", "delicacy", "fashionable & shopping" and "diverse culture" pursued by business tourists. The gap was even greater in terms of brand and service quality. The respondents' overall satisfaction degree of business travel in Jiangsu was high, indicating that perception of Jiangsu tourism industry's services and quality did not stray far from the expectations. Besides, the assessment of satisfaction degree of business travel destinations, hotels and travel agencies was all high. In particular, the overall satisfaction degree on Suzhou was the highest due to its obvious business travel distinctiveness. Except historically endowed scenery, Nanjing and Wuxi still had some deficiencies in terms of travel environment. Despite this, from the perspective of the overall brand image and comprehensive service quality in destinations and combining business tourists' demands, there were still some shortcomings concerning business travel's matching services, convenience services, professionalism and flexible services. As a result, Jiangsu should further improve and renovate specific products for business tourists, price system, tourism order, environment as well as urban matching services.

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