

A STUDY ON RELIGIOUS TOURISM SERVICE QUALITY IN NAVAGRAHA TEMPLES, ERSTWHILE TANJORE DISTRICT

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the travel and tourism industry, people purchase travel and tour packages for different purposes: enjoyment, relaxation, education, sport, adventure, medical, pilgrimage, cultural, and social interaction, among others. When a trip does not meet the traveler's expectations for the intended purpose, it certainly affects their satisfaction. Frequently, tourists' dissatisfaction is a failure that can be attributed to the tourism service provider. Safety and Security, Hygiene, Accessibility, Transparency, Authenticity, Harmony, Tour operator, travel agents, or attraction managers, as providers of Religious Tourism Services, may fail to deliver on their promises. In relation to heritage tourism, the quality of services seem to be more intangible, sensitive, and more difficult to evaluate.

As such, marketing in Religious, heritage and cultural tourism is becoming more crucial (Rojas & Camerero, 2008). Tourism product providers recognize the importance of satisfying their customers as a way to survive and grow in an environment increasingly characterized by business competition. Understanding, achieving, and maintaining the quality of customer experiences is the successful link between organizations and their customers. Those who offer Heritage and Religious

tourism services seem to be less concerned with studying and measuring the quality of the service experience, perhaps because many practitioners in this specialty still do not consider their field to be a tourism business. It thus becomes more important for practitioners and managers to examine the variables that influence tourists to visit and revisit their destinations. Indeed, the need to evaluate the quality of delivered services and their impact on the tourists' entire experience is ever present for ensuring a level of gained satisfaction (Rojas & Camerero, 2008).

2. TOURISM QUALITY STANDARDS

World Tourism Organization (WTO, 2003) has designed six standards for tourist product or service that have to be put into consideration when tourism enterprise/destination management is taking decision related to tourism product design and marketing. These standards could be summarized as follows:

2.1. Safety and security

A tourism product or service cannot represent danger to life, damage to health and other vital interests and integrity of the consumer (even if we talk about "adventure tourism"). Safety and security standards are normally established by law (e.g. by fire prevention regulations) and should be considered as quality standards per se.

2.2. Hygiene

For example, an accommodation facility just has to be safe and clean, one cannot pretend that such requirements are more important to high-class establishments. Food safety standards (often also established by law) must be met and be common to all types of food outlets, from street vendors to luxury gourmet restaurants to airline catering.

2.3. Accessibility

This determinant requires that physical, communication and service barriers must be done away with to allow, without discrimination, the use of mainstream tourism products and services by all people irrespective of their natural and acquired differences, including people with disabilities.

2.4. Transparency

It is a key element to provide for legitimacy of expectations and consumer protection. It relates to providing and effectively communicating truthful information on the characteristics and coverage of the product and its total price. It includes stating what is covered by the price and what is not in the product on supply.

2.5. Authenticity

In a commercial world, authenticity is the hardest and most subjective quality determinant to attain. It also has marketing and competition dimensions. Authenticity is culturally determined and one of its results is making the product markedly distinct from other similar products. Authenticity must meet consumer expectations. It diminishes and eventually terminates when the product loses its links with its cultural and natural background. In this sense, a "genuine" ethnic restaurant can never be entirely authentic in a place distinct from its original setting. This does not mean that such an establishment cannot be an attraction and that it cannot be assessed from the viewpoint of quality with respect to production (content and design), marketing,

distribution, sale and delivery of the service concerned. A theme park representing other lands and far away cultures is a good example of an initially artificial tourism product which may create an authenticity and a quality image of its own. On the other hand, an authentic product can also develop and adapt to needs and expectations.

2.6. Harmony

Harmony with the human and natural environment pertains to sustainability which is a medium- and long-term concept. “Maintaining the sustainability of tourism requires managing environmental and socio-economic impacts, establishing environmental indicators and maintaining the quality of the tourism products and tourist markets” (WTO Guide for Local Authorities on Developing Sustainable Tourism (WTO, 2003)). There can be no sustainability without quality.

3. RELIGIOUS TOURISM

Religious tourism is considered as the oldest form of tourism (Rinschede, 1992). It is a type of heritage tourism that is motivated exclusively or strongly by religious reasons (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). Religious tourism has great potential as a growing phenomenon that would benefit from academic advances and applied improvements (Aleen, 2010; Collins-Kreiner & Gatrell, 2006). As Timothy and Olsen (2006) noted, “Religiously motivated travel including pilgrimage has grown tremendously during the past fifty years”. About 240 million people travel every year to several major pilgrimage destinations, particularly Christians, Muslims, and Hindus (Jachowski, 2000).

Despite the high number of individuals interested in religious tourism, it remains among the least explored tourist activities in the world of modern tourism (Vukonis, 1998). Little information exists in the literature about pilgrims in terms of their motivations and behaviors that might help destination managers design effective pilgrimage packages for this growing niche market (Digance, 2003; Triantafillidou, Koritos, Chatzipanagiotou, & Vassilikopoulou, 2010). Marketers need to identify the attributes of such travel packages to reflect needs and wants of pilgrims and provide benefits, perceived value, and satisfaction that correspond with tourists’ desired experiences (Joppe, Martin, & Waalen, 2001; Stone, 1990). Furthermore, the profitability of service providers relies on how well destination managers and marketers meet the customers’ expectations of the tourism product (McKercher, Packer, Yauc, & Lam, 2003).

Given the importance of tourism services in religious tourism and its potential impact on pilgrims’ satisfaction with a tourism experience as a whole, challenges are emerging for tourism service providers and Temple Management to subjectively and objectively understand the various dimensions of the niche. Attempting to address this need, the present study is designed to search for the subjective and objective aspects of tourism services as a part of an overall pilgrimage experience.

4. WHY NAVAGRAHA TEMPLES (NINE PLANETS)

Navagraha or the Nine Planets has great importance in Hinduism, Hindu Astrology and Hindu rituals. Navagrahas are considered to play a major role in deciding the destiny of man. The Navagrahas are Surya (Sun), Chandra (Moon), Mangal (Mars), Budha (Mercury), Brihaspati (Jupiter), Shukra (Venus), Shani (Saturn), Rahu (North Lunar Node) and Ketu (South Lunar Node). It is believed that these nine planetary deities influence human lives and is responsible for all good or bad times, one faces in

life. Thus majority of the Hindus visit Navagraha Temples in and around Tanjore District. Thus to ensure the Pilgrims Service Quality in Religious tourist setting Navargaha temples was considered in this study

5. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Service Quality attained many new dimensions in its long journey, but the literature related to Religious Service Quality is very little. The lack of information about pilgrims visiting Navagraha Temples in erstwhile Tanjore district of Tamilnadu in terms of their expectations and perceptions of services delivered in Temple and during their journey. Majority of the pilgrims visits maximum 8 to 10 Navagraha temples in a day, typically through tour package provided by a public or private transport. This research makes an attempt to find tools to investigate the problems faced by the Pilgrims, and to evaluate Religious Service Quality in erstwhile Tanjore District.

6. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the dimensions related to Religious Tourism Service Quality.
2. To prioritize the dimensions of religious tourism service quality based on pilgrims perception in Navagraha Temples, Erstwhile Tanjore district.
3. To identify the relationship between the dimensions of religious tourism service quality.
4. To examine the impact of religious service quality towards pilgrims satisfaction.

7. METHODOLOGY

The research frame is based on Pilgrims visited more than 5 Navagraha Temples in erstwhile Tanjore District. The pilgrims who visited more than 5 Navagraha temples and accepted to participate in the survey were considered as the population. The structured questionnaire was distributed to 398 pilgrims, out of which 390 were fully usable. Likert Scale has been used to measure the indicators of Pilgrims perceptions towards Religious Service Quality. The scale involves a series of questions or statements related to the attitude in question. The Pilgrims (Respondents) is required to indicate degree of agreement or disagreement with each of these statements, and responses are give numerical score that will consistently reflect the direction of the pilgrims attitudes on each question/ statements. The respondent's total score is computed by summing scores for all statement and final measure depends on the percentage of each indicator. Based on Likerts Scale it has been suggested five options (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) for each statement / questions to measure the religious service quality in erstwhile Tanjore District.

The questionnaire consists of Nine Dimensions. The dimensions are Amenities (Source Adopted from Kozak (2001), Food (Source adopted from Yuksel and Yuksel (2001) and Alampay (2003), Logistics (Source Adopted from (Panton, 1999; Yuksel and Yuksel, 2001; Kozak, 2001), Security (Source adopted from Poon and Low, 2005), Personal Information (Source adopted from Kozak and Rimmington (2000), Distractions (Source Adopted from Kozak and Rimmington (2000), Information Center (Burns (2003), Hygiene and Pilgrims Satisfaction (Source Adopted from Yuksel and Yuksel, 2001; Kozak, 2001).

8. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

8.1. Reliability and Validity

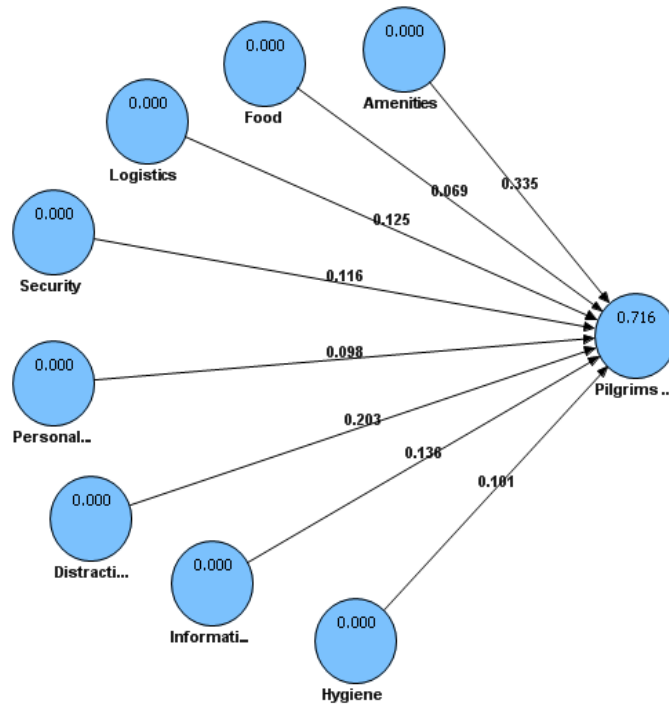
The validity and Reliability of the process were check as per the required criteria and the inter-items statistical correlation indicators. The inter-items correlations, according to the results using SPSS Ver. 21 range from 0.428 to 0.725 for all the indicators considered in the study. The value (Cronbach's Coefficient) for the scale Amenities (0.757852), Food (0.737469), Logistics (0.772949), Security (0.777923), Personal Information (0.762854), Distractions (0.745951), Information Center (0.780593), Hygiene (0.843620) and Pilgrims Satisfaction (0.722904). For the scale of religious Tourism Service quality indicators all the values were above 0.7000 and the range of corrected item – total correlation is greater than 0.3000. So the dimensions to predict the religious service quality were considered reliable with the chosen samples.

8.2. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Rank
Information Center	390	1.00	5.00	2.2282	8
Personal Information	390	1.00	5.00	2.4598	7
Logistics	390	1.00	5.00	2.8263	6
Hygiene	390	1.17	4.67	2.8538	5
Security	390	1.33	5.00	2.9658	4
Food	390	1.00	5.00	3.1265	3
Amenities	390	1.78	4.78	3.1282	2
Distractions	390	1.00	5.00	3.3492	1

The above table shows the descriptive analysis. In this study eight dimensions were considered to identify the satisfaction level of pilgrims Religious Tourism Service Quality. The dimensions are Amenities, Food, Logistics, Security, Personal Information, Distractions Information Center and Hygiene in the Navagraha Temples. Based on the perception of pilgrims (Mean Value) the dimensions were ranked. Information center in the Navagraha Temples attained the lowest mean value and takes place the last place, Rank 8. The dimension Personal information takes the 7th place, the dimension takes 6th place. Hygiene founds to me in the middle position, based on the mean value it takes 5th place. The dimension Security and Food takes place 4th and 3rd place respectively. The second position was taken by the dimension Amenities and the first place taken by Distractions. The average mean value of the above mentioned dimensions is 2.867225. Out of the eight dimensions security, Food, Amenities, and distraction were above the average mean value. The dimensions Information Center, Personal Information, Logistics and Hygiene were below the average mean value.

8.3. Modeling Religious Tourism Service Quality Dimensions with Pilgrims Satisfaction



The above diagrams shows that dimensions Amenities, Food, Logistics, Security, Personal Information, Distractions Information Center and Hygiene were considered to identify its direct impact towards prediction of pilgrim’s satisfaction. The dimensions considered for the study predicts 18.7 %. The cut off criteria for the predictions is above 15 %. The path considered in the above model is formative. No reflective dimensions were considered in the model. The path value should be above .10, which is the required cut off criteria.

8.4. Path Loadings

Sl.No	Dimensions	Pilgrims Satisfaction
01.	Amenities	0.335287
02.	Food	0.068602
03.	Logistics	0.125136
04.	Security	0.116189
05.	Personal Information	0.097827
06.	Distractions	0.202817
07.	Information Center	0.135739
08.	Hygiene	0.101123

The above table shows the path loadings of the respective dimensions. The path loading of amenities towards Pilgrims Satisfaction is found to be (0.116189) and it is significant at (0.01) level. The path loading between Food and Pilgrims Satisfaction is (0.068602), and it's not significant. The Logistics path loading towards Pilgrims Satisfaction is (0.125136), which is significant at (0.05) level. The path loading between Security and Pilgrims Satisfaction is (0.116189) and it is significant at (.05) level. The Personal information path loading towards Pilgrims Satisfaction is (0.097827), which is not significant at (0.05) level. The path between distractions and Pilgrims Satisfaction is (0.202817) which is significant at (0.05) level. The path between Information Center and Pilgrims Satisfaction is (0.35739), which is significant at (0.05) level. The path between Hygiene and Pilgrims Satisfaction is (0.101123), which is not significant at (0.05) level.

The dimension Amenities found to have the highest path loading and its significant at (0.01) level. Food is found to have lowest path loading. Among the eight dimensions five paths were strong and significant, the remaining three dimensions paths found to be weak and it's not significant.

9. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The questionnaire (Instrument for Data Collection) developed for the study can be used by Managers, Practitioners, Temple Management and Designation Managers to objectively measure the Religious Service Quality perceptions of the Pilgrims. The study will be helpful for tour operators in different part of the country and world, who manage travel to Navagraha Temples. It will help them to evaluate how their customers perceive the Religious Tourism Service Quality in the Navagraha Temples and also how the dimensions identified impact Pilgrims satisfaction.

An interesting finding of the study identified is that Amenities and Distractions, which have a high significant with Pilgrims Satisfaction in Navagraha Temples in Erstwhile Tanjore District. In this study Food, Personal Information, Hygiene and Security found to have low path loadings. Thus the Government, Temple Management, Policy Makers should take necessary steps to identify ways to give quality food with reasonable and affordable cost. The local municipal or corporation should ensure the cleanness and hygiene inside and outside the temple.

A destination with good logistics, with assured Security, Hygiene and offers impressive Food, Amenities, Information Center without any distractions inside and outside the temple, can satisfy a Pilgrim, resulting in repeat visits and recommendation.

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