**Improving the trust in the services of the** **tourist agencies of R. of Macedonia by the** **Macedonian tourists**

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Abstract

The appearance and development of the tourist agency makes the preparations for vacation significantly easy. Still, part of the tourists makes decisions these actions to be done by themselves. That is why the topic of this paper is focused on the satisfaction that comes from the services used and the trust that the Macedonian tourists have in the Macedonian tour agencies.  
The attention is stressed on discovering the level of trust and which aspects of the gained service have appeared to be inappropriate, what is the satisfaction of the services that the agencies are offering before starting the tour and what is the experience after being part of a tour, and to find out the probability of joining an organized trip by a domestic tour agency depending on  
the service that the tourists got while using a tour. These questions are made with a goal to find the weak points of the services that the tourist agencies are giving, with a main goal to propose measures that need to be taken so that improvement of the trust in the Macedonian tourist agencies can be established, as well as a return customer to be achieved. To reach these goals a research on the opinion of 220 tourists was made, or more precisely Macedonians that have  
used the services of a domestic tour agency.  
*Key words:* tourist agency, tour, service, tourists, consumer behavior.

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The need of the people to go out of their residential place and be part of a tourist activity has become more important with the dynamic way of living. Whether it is vacation, recreation, fun, socializing, improving the knowledge, discovering new cultures or some other tourist activity, touristic traveling requires free time and money. The planning itself takes a lot of time. That is why, to make the planning and preparing shorter and more easy, people are turning to the tour agencies. The tour agencies can make their choice, decisions and planning more easy for the individuals by offering prepared tourist arrangements. This way the choice is reduced to the previously prepared tourist arrangements, and to specific destinations that the agencies are offering, while the care for tickets for transportation, reservations, as well as the planning of the activities during the stay. One wanting to go on vacation can minimize ones worries by deciding on a specific tour, and let the tourist agency to do the rest. While these advantages do exist some people are not always prepared to let their trust fully in the hands of a tourist agency. They may be skeptic about the services that they offer, to show they don’t trust the agency, and they may even not try to go to more than one tourist agency. Some people, although they don’t have enough time to arrange their trip, they would rather do it alone than to trust a tourist agency. That can be part of own or someone else’s bad experience, or simply not having trust in the tourist agencies with no specific reason. Because of this the trust in the tourist agencies, as well as the satisfaction of the services used by one are the main topic of this paper.

**Subject and goals**

The main research subject of this paper is the trust that the users of tourist agency services have, as well as their level of satisfaction of previously used services. While doing so the focus is on the experiences of the Macedonian tourists which have used a tour arranged by a tourist agency in Republic of Macedonia.

This being said the main goal of the research is to determine the level of trust and satisfaction of the tourist with the arrangements that are being offered by the tourist agencies in Macedonia, with a goal to find the ways how these categories can be improved and increased.

* to determine what is the level of trust of the users and potential users in services that the tourist agencies are offering;
* if there is distrust, than to determine which aspects of the tourist arrangements are being distrusted and what are the reasons for this distrust;
* to figure out why the potential tourist would become part of a tour and which are the services that will most probable be used;
* to see the satisfaction levels at the users of the services of the tourist agencies before they become part of the tour;
* to make visible the areas (services) of the tour that are satisfactory and those that are marked as unsatisfactory, compared to what the user have expected of the tour (because the satisfaction is correlated to the expectation); and
* to determine if the users of a tour arrangement would become a repeat user of the same services of the tour agencies.

**Data analysis**

Because there are no previous researches on the topic of trust of the Macedonian tourists in the services offered by the domestic tour agencies, the approach of collecting data by questionnaires was taken. The questionnaire was consisted of 15 questions of closed type, systematically divided in two parts. The anonymity of the subjects was guaranteed so that more honest answers can be achieved. The main problem of the research includes the territory of whole R. of Macedonia, and therefore the field research was done by accidental choice of tourists in the city Ohrid (40% of the respondents) and by distributing the questionnaire through e-mail (60% of the analyzed questionnaires). A total of 108 persons answered the survey. The first part of the questionnaire is about finding out the trust in the tourist agencies, which was meant for respondents that have doubts in the quality of the services that the agencies are offering. So 93% of the total respondents don’t have complete trust in the tourist agencies, by which they qualified themselves to answer the following 2 questions. The first question is about which of the offered services by the tourist agency have they found suspicious in means of their quality. Largest part of the responders, almost 60%, are in fear that they won’t be given all of the promised services in the tour (31%) and have doubts in the quality of the accommodation facilities that are offered (27%). The distrust is relatively small when it comes to the other aspects, with their individual participation of around 10%.

The following question is to determine the reasons why there is a distrust in the tourist agencies, or more precisely to determine the source of that distrust. 89% of the distrust comes from experiences, of which 50% comes from own bad experiences and 39% from others’. While the rest 11% are having doubt because they think that the agency is trying to cheat the customers by overcharging them. The wish for someone else to take care of the total organization of the journey, while one will only pay is the most important motive for becoming part of a tourist arrangement with 45%. Two also very important motives that were discovered are the low prices of the tours (20%) and that the worry before and during the tourist stay is low (23%). The other four motives influence is insignificant with only 12%. When discussing the services that one consumer would use from a tourist agency, a conclusion can be made that almost all of the services that the agencies are offering are equally important: tickets (24%), reservations for accommodation (30%) and complete tour arrangement (32%), with the exception of transportation. When it comes to the choice of tourist destinations half of the respondents think that the choice is limited, while the rest of them think that there is a big choice (26%), or that the choice is very low (22%). Most of the respondents (75%) think that the employees in the tourist agencies have partial knowledge of the services that they are offering. While 14% think that they have good knowledge, and 11% that think that they don’t have enough knowledge of the services they offer. The second part of the questionnaire was dedicated to discovering the satisfaction levels of the services that have been already used. This part was answered only by respondents that have been part of tourist trip organized by a tourist agency -78% of the respondents. Partial satisfaction of the services used dominates the general opinion within ¾ of the respondents that were part of a tour. The participants were asked to give opinion on which aspects of the tour they were satisfied, and which weren’t. The tour guide and the hotels in which the guests were accommodated, as well as the transport vehicle and the meals that they got were mentioned as aspects which produced most pleasure. While the displeasure came from not complying the itinerary and the additional services, followed by the tour guide, hotel, meals and transport vehicle. The tour guide in 55% of the tourist arrangements has known the language of the visited country. When it comes to comparing the expected and service received the tour wasn’t able to fill the expectations in 62% of the respondents. What was of a specific interest at the end was whether the participants, considering the quality of the services that they got while using the services of the tour agencies, would become part of a similar trip and vacation. Largest part of 52% would use a tour arrangement again, of which 19% would ask service from another tour agency, not from the one that they have bought their previous service. The rest, 48% are not sure if they would use this service again from a domestic tour agency

**Conclusion**

The fact that only three percent of the respondents have absolute and full trust in what the tourist agencies are offering and promising is very concerning. To add to this is the fact that most of this distrust comes from previous experiences, whether they are own or from other people, which also means that the distrust isn’t ungrounded but it comes from something that did or did not happen, which produce this dissatisfaction at the users of the tourist agency services. This is very important because when the dissatisfaction comes from experience, but not a usual doubt, than the reasons for a distrust can be precisely identified and also can be removed, which will increase the level of trust in the tourist agencies. Therefore the first thing to do is to find out which aspects of the tourist supply the potential users of a service don’t trust. The critical services with less trust are the quality of the accommodation facilities that the tourist agencies are presenting and the doubt that the tourist won’t get all the services that are stated in the tour. the first step toward overcoming this situation can be the tourist propaganda. The touristic propaganda is one of the main activities that attracts the potential tourists to use the services of one agency. That is why the tourist agencies should put lot of attention to the truthfulness of their propaganda messages and the standards that they are creating in front of them. Messages that include services that the tourist agency can’t include in their arrangement, who are presented as part of the tour, should be avoided. In this case the disappointed of the tourist is inevitable even before booking the tour with the agency. This also means that he will try the services of another agency. That is why it is much better that in the propaganda messages not to introduce services that the agency considers its weak sides, rather than introducing it as a main attraction just because it is believed that that attraction will sell the tour.

It should also be considered that the tour agencies may not be aware of  
the quality of the services they are offering (for example a hotel with 4\*  
according to the foreign standards is offered while in reality this hotel has 2\*).  
Because of this the tour agency should check the quality of the services  
that they are offering before putting the tour on the market. This means that the  
tourist agency should test their tour arrangement by sending a team of  
employees, by which they can confirm the real quality of the services that are  
offered by the collaborators of the agency on the spot. If this is done the agency  
can firmly stand behind the quality of the offered service, simultaneously  
improving the trust of the potential user. Also the more conventional methods  
shouldn’t be forgotten, like having a book of impressions in which the users of  
their services can describe their satisfaction level. This method can also be made  
by e-mail.

It is very important for the tour agencies to be aware of which of their services are more likely to be demanded. This is important so that the offer of the other services can be improve, and that the interest for them starts growing as well. In this research that kind of services are the transportation services. That is why the agencies should include this services more often in their offer and to pay bigger attention when they are giving this services, especially while planning and implementation. The tour agencies should have knowledge of what attracts their users of services to be part of a tour arrangement. The basic reason that attracts them is the fact that some else is organizing their vacation. This is in correlation with the third most important reason, the organized traveling (from tickets to arriving). That is why it is significant to be very careful and thorough when planning and organizing a tour. The agencies should be aware that the user of their tour who will notice disorganization during the realization of the tourist arrangement, will,  
most probably, not use other services of that agency. The big importance of a good planed itinerary comes from this need, as well as the obligation to respect it. The prices are another very important factor for being part of a tour arrangement and using other services of a tour agency.  
The potential tourists are expecting the total price of the services of the tour agency to be less than the total sum of the individual services that they would get if they organized the same arrangement by themselves. This is why the tour agencies should take care that the price of the tour is lower than the one that the tourist would get if they went on the trip by oneself.

Before checking the satisfaction from using a tour arrangement, the potential visitors are coming in the tourist agency where in contact with the employees they are getting the first impressions of the agency and its services. This contact and the capability of the employees can be crucial in the process of decision making to use the services of that particular tour agency.  
The results of the research show that the managers of the agencies should take care for additional training and informing their employees. This way, and by improving the first impression that the employees are creating, the quality level and the trust as well can be increased. The employees of the agencies that are in direct contact with the potential tourists should know the most important thing about the services that the agency is offering, and if they are asked something that they may not know, than they should ask the guest to wait till they check for the information. If the tour agencies are willing to increase the sale, they should take care of increasing they offer. The limitation of the offered choice probably is part of the previous experiences from already realized tours, but the date from the research shows that the tourists are ready to try something else if it is included in the tours that the agency is offering. That is why the agencies should put new touristic arrangements that will include some unusual or unconventional destinations (for the Macedonian market), by what the attention of the potential tourist will be held and the chances of becoming an actual tourist increase. The following part of the questionnaire was meant for those respondents who have previously been part of a tour arrangement organized by a tour agency from the R. of Macedonia. The goal of these questions was to determine the level of satisfaction, to find the areas that are causing this satisfaction, as well as the main reasons of dissatisfaction. The general conclusion is that the respondents were partly satisfied with the service during the tour arrangement, while only two individuals were fully satisfied. The domination of the satisfaction caused by the hotel in which the tourists were accommodated is very important, because the accommodation (besides the food and the traveling) is one of the main services in a tourist activity. This positive trend should be kept, and the same should be pointed out because like that the distrust in the quality of the accommodation facilities can be avoided (this was pointed as the second most distrusted service before buying and using a tour arrangement). Therefore this data, from this research, if made public or being transferred to the potential tourists can be an important reason for increasing the trust in the tour agencies. The low level of distrust in the tour guide, shown in the answers of the second question, is confirmed with the high level of trust shown by the participants in a touristic arrangement organized by a domestic tour agency. The situation is worst when it comes to respecting the itinerary, that is supported both by this being a low level satisfaction factor and high level of dissatisfaction. Once again this proves that the travelers would like everything to go according to the given itinerary, which confirms the main reason of buying a tour arrangement –organization. Even the smallest change in the itinerary can produce dissatisfaction with the whole tour. The tour agencies should try to make the itinerary as precisely as possible, stating the time of departure, breaks and living a specific touristic destination, event, manifestation etc. Of course absolute following and preciseness of the itinerary is impossible because of the many factors that are out of reach of the tourist agency. That is why this should be predicted, and give an empty space by adding time to the length of each activity, more than their precise calculations. The equal number of satisfied and dissatisfied participants with the meal quality can be classified as a negative trend, because the food is a fundamental tourist need. Therefore the tour agencies, although can not directly influence the quality of a meal, they can choose the restaurant or the hotel in which the tourist will consume it, as well as make the decision of the food that will be served. To increase the satisfaction the tourist agencies should pay more attention to this activity. The satisfaction of a person depend a lot of one’s expectations. The more the product or service is complying his expectations the more the level of satisfaction will be. This is proven by our research when comparing the 62% of respondents whose expectations were not met by the tour, with the 72% of partially satisfied customers with the quality of the service gained while on the tour. This points out that the largest part of dissatisfaction comes from the high expectations. To increase the trust and satisfaction, the tour agencies should present their service as it is. Before make a reservation for the tour, the potential tourist should be inform about all the aspects of the tourist arrangement, all of the services included, as well as the quality that can be expect from them, the personal that will be accompanying them, as well as their knowledge and capabilities, the characteristics of the transport vehicle etc. This way the tourist can place his expectations at a more achievable level, and these real expectations can be achieved during the tour. The dissatisfaction determined so far results in a low probability of being part of a tourist arrangement, especially a tour organized by an agency whose services has been used. This conclusion proves that the suggested measures so far need to be implemented as fast as possible, so that the trust in the tour agencies will be increased. That would also mean an increase at the pleasure within the users of the tour arrangements. As a general conclusion it can be said that the trust of the Macedonian tourists in the domestic tour agencies is on a low level. Although this is a bad situation, it can be easily improved by following the measures described in this paper. These measures will also contribute to the satisfaction of those who are using the services of the agency, eventually leading to a return customer and increased trust.

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