

The Effects of In-Service Training Seminars on the Tourism Marketing Role of Professional Tour Guides

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Introduction

Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large (American Marketing Association, 2008). Tourism industry displays a structure which has distinctive features. Despite it is in touch with other sectors, in general tourism is evaluated in the area of service sector. "People", as one of the marketing mix elements has been observed in three situations: as staff, tourist and local community. Human resources issue gains vital importance on service quality of tourism industry because of the fact that tourism is labor intensive and production and consumption are inseparable. Moreover, as they are in touch and communicate with customers, it has been remarked that selection and education of frontline staff have great importance. The qualified manpower which is needed for tourism establishments can be brought up only by qualified tourism training and education.

As one of the most responsible front line staff of tourism, tour guides are playing variety of roles which are vital for the tourism marketing. The significant part of missions of correcting the wrong knowledge about destinations stemming from books and notes of wanders written in the middle age world full of fairy mystic tales and superstitions, erasing prejudices and creating a positive image is carried out by tourist guides contacting with foreigners and playing variety of roles like teacher, representative, member and leader of group. Tourist guides are perceived as a group leader exerting effort to satisfy the needs and wants of tourists. In addition, tour guides are essential interface between the host destination and its visitors. It is assumed that the lessons of marketing make contributions to their marketing related roles. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the tour guides in Turkey have taken the marketing seminars in the compulsory in-service training. This study has focused to investigate that how the compulsory in-service training seminars have affected the attitudes which are composing marketing function of guides.

Methodology

The study was conducted in two steps. The first step of the research was the secondary data collection by literature and web sites of state run and public organizations as Turkish Ministry of Tourism, Turkish State Planning Organization (DPT), Association of Turkish Travel Agencies (TURSAB), Federation of Turkish Tourist Guides Associations (TUREB) review. Selected data have been used to develop of survey questionnaire. In the second step, primary data has collected by questionnaire.

As one of the strongest problems, tour guides are mobile workers and to reach and make them to fill the questionnaire is not possible while they are working. Turkish professional tourist guides must attend the in-service training seminars biannually. These seminars are being organized every year in low season (winter) period by tourist guides associations which are scattered in to tourism destinations and big cities of Turkiye.

The sample of this study is professional tourist guides who have take part in compulsory in-service training in 2008. The population has been stratified in to specific seminar centers in the country. Therefore stratified random sampling method has been used. As they are also professional tourist guides the principal investigators have attended the mentioned seminars and have conducted questionnaires face to face by random sampling in seminar centers. Mean, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and t-test have been used as statistical tests to reveal whether there are meaningful differences between answers of groups of guides.

Conclusion and Recommendation

It is sure that professional tour guides have deep, actual and multi dimensional knowledge and opinion about the issues related with their own country and tourism destination. As a frontline and more intellectual staff of tourism industry, tour guides are playing a vital role in the each of the stages of tourist experience in a destination and tourism marketing. Additionally, they have been in 7 P's of marketing mix simultaneously. Therefore, tourist guides, as representatives of the country, should be selected and equipped carefully. Compulsory in-service training seminars are an opportunity for the guides to improve their knowledge and practice on the marketing issue. Marketing related seminars should be included in seminar program. Thus, they can contribute to tour guides marketing role.

There are meaningful differences between the attitudes which are constructing marketing function of guides who are not attended and attended to marketing related seminars. Therefore, it is mentionable that if tour guides have attended in marketing related seminar, they have been expected to display more efficiency in their marketing related attitudes. Briefly, in spite of the fact that there is displeasure and dissatisfaction from the in- service training in general, It is seen that marketing related seminars have positive effects on guides' marketing related attitudes. It should be ensured that all of the seminar participant guides must attend at least one marketing related seminar in a compulsory in-service training seminar season.