



The Relationship Between Sales Success and Soft Success Factors in Travel Agencies*

Zennübe Işık¹ , Ahmet Çavuş² 

Abstract

The fact that travel agencies, one of the intermediaries of the distribution channel in the tourism sector, were seen as a business line dating to the nineteenth century. The main aim of the study is to investigate whether there is a relationship between the soft success factors (competence, reliability, empathy, communication, and responsiveness) of the type of travel agency employees and product sales success. Another aim of the study is to determine whether these two factors differ according to demographic variables. For this purpose, frequency, correlation, independent t-test, and one-way variance is used in the analysis of the data. In addition, Structural Equation analysis is used to create a model because of the correlation analysis. It is concluded that there is a positive and significant relationship between the soft success factors of travel agency employees and their product sales success. It is determined that there is no significant difference between the gender of the employees and the soft success factors and product sales success. It has been observed that employees with soft success factors are more effective in sales success. No study has been found that addresses the relationship between soft success factors and sales success in travel agencies, therefore it is thought to be an original paper that will contribute to the literature in this regard.

Keywords

Travel Agencies, Soft Success Factors, Product Sales Success, Istanbul

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1 **Correspondence to:** Zennübe Işık (Res. Asst. Dr.), Ataturk University, Faculty of Tourism, Department of Tourism Guidance, Erzurum, Türkiye. E-mail: zennubeyalcin@hotmail.com ORCID: 0000-0002-4240-878X

2 Ahmet Çavuş (Assoc. Prof. Dr.), Ataturk University, Faculty of Tourism, Department of Tourism Guidance, Erzurum, Türkiye. E-mail: ahmetcavus@atauni.edu.tr ORCID: 0000-0002-7359-1273

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Introduction

The phenomenon of travel has fascinated people throughout history. In the past, there was traveling, but no tourism. This is because in ancient times people did not travel for pleasure. Tourism only began when people learned to distinguish between work and pleasure, and later when the travel business flourished. As tourism evolved and became sophisticated, travel businesses have emerged that operate in an economic activity related to the permanent and regular trading of travel to meet people's demands and expectations. In tourism, a unique area where a product cannot be directly observed without purchasing, attractive travel destinations have always been considered a success factor. Today, travel agencies associated with travel organizations of the tourism industry play the role of intermediaries and consultants between suppliers and customers through attractive offers and sales of travel destinations (Elhaj & Borakeh, 2015). Service quality in travel agencies is of a great importance in gaining a competitive advantage in tourism and diversifying service products. (Ghanda Abd-Aila, 2006).

In career, employees with soft success factors are attributed great importance in recent years (Beer, 2009; Breene & Nunes, 2011). In this sense, factors such as response, competence, empathy, reliability, and communication that influence product sales success can be considered the main topics of the current study. In any job, technical knowledge, skills, and equipment are not enough for an employee to do his/her job. In addition, strong human relations should be handled for issues such as understanding the person, producing solutions to their problems, and ensuring customer satisfaction. This is related to the soft success factors that the employees have. During the relevant literature review, it is seen that studies on travel agencies were carried out (Dolnicar & Laesser, 2007; Elhaj & Borakeh, 2015; Kurtulay, 2016). However, no study is found that associates soft success factors of travel agency employees with product sales success. Therefore, this study will fill the gap in the literature and contribute to the research.

Literature Review

Travel Agency

Consumers who demand a touristic product in the tourism industry must go to the destination where that touristic product is located. This nature of the tourism industry directs consumers who want to go to tourism regions to find an intermediary. The primary intermediary firm in the tourism distribution system is travel agencies (Fuentes, 2011). A travel agency as a subcontractor is an intermediary between travelers, tourists, tourism services, and tourist products. A travel agent, as a person,

is an experienced professional and travel counselor providing public travel-related consultancy services ranging from planning and providing advice to coordinating travel arrangements within the budget of travelers (Yarcan & Çetin, 2021). It is always time-consuming and expensive process for consumers to reach information about the alternatives found in a travel agency and reach it on their effort. Besides, when consumers decide to purchase a product, this situation also causes a loss of time and effort for routine processes such as making a reservation and getting a visa (Lane & Dupre, 1997). However, customers who decide to buy a product through travel agencies do not face this kind of difficulty because travel agencies do all the work on behalf of them.

Today's business world no longer sees it as adequate for employees to have just professional and technical skills. In addition to today's business, they prefer employees who can reach their business goals effectively in the short term by using soft success factors (competence, reliability, empathy, communication, and response) equally. Therefore, travel agencies focus on whether employees have soft success factors besides their technical knowledge and skills to increase service quality and ensure customer satisfaction and loyalty. A travel agency provides consultancy on travel services, makes suggestions to prospective clients in line with their interests and within their budget, it disseminates information on accommodation units, transportation systems, tours, tariffs, product prices, and service provision clauses, it sells the product or service such as tours, air tickets, meals, etc., when demanded. The travel agency mediates the provision of travel services, obtains visas, arranges travel insurance if authorized, acts as an intermediary between consumers and suppliers, and markets and sells the products of service to providers on a retail basis with an agency agreement (Yarcan & Çetin, 2021).

Soft Success Factors

A staff member working in a business must have certain characteristics and skills to use. These skills are divided into hard skills and soft skills (Bona & Lippert, 2015). Hard skills refer to the graduation, technical knowledge, and field knowledge required to continue the work, while employee characteristics and interpersonal interaction skills refer to soft factors. The soft success factors of individuals have a significant impact on their job performance and careers, therefore they have a direct impact on the success of the business. Soft success factors play a vital role, especially in a demanding industry such as tourism that involves face-to-face communication with customers. Many studies in the literature support this idea (Bona & Lippert, 2015; Cserhati & Szabo, 2014; Spitzer, 2007). It may be helpful to explain the concepts of soft success factors such as competence, empathy, reliability, communication, and response to better understand the current research.

Competence

Depending on the latest technological developments, human resources have begun to see as a key element of competition in the business world. Employees with a high sense of belonging, the maximum contribution to the business, and most importantly the highly skilled reflection of the golden workforce profile of employers. The main feature of competencies is that they are related to what one does at work rather than one's knowledge or general personal characteristics (López-Bonilla, 2014). Individuals who are reliable, resistant to limitations, and open to change and development are seen as talented by a business. Under Klemp's definition, competence is an important characteristic that can help individuals achieve superior and efficient performance (Tang, Zhang, Ying, Wang & Tsai, 2020). Baum (2006) states that although the services in the tourism sector rely heavily on technical skills, social skills gain more importance over time.

Empathy

Empathy has a critical role in understanding the communication and relationships between people. Empathy is defined as the effort to understand and be sensitive to someone else's feelings, thoughts, and experiences. To have empathy, the first thing to do is to know the value judgment and beliefs of others and accept them. From this point of view, it is necessary to try to understand the condition but not judge the people you interact with as right/wrong or good/bad (Sparks & Callan, 1992). Having strong empathy is a crucial factor for tourism employees to establish practical face-to-face communication.

Reliability

Reliability is defined as the quality of being believed and trusted by others. Meeting consumers' demands ultimately and gaining their trust ensure tourism enterprises have a long-term competitive advantage. The employees of the tourism sector are responsible for providing practical information about the activities and services such as travel, transportation, accommodation, catering, and offering these services efficiently and on time (Stanciu & Hapenciuc, 2009).

Communication

Various knowledge and skills are required to form social groups and develop them culturally. Such knowledge and skills are created through communication. Accordingly, it is only possible for tourism businesses to provide the best quality service with the practical and healthy communication among employees (Xiao & Smith, 2010). Through healthy, empathetic, and effective communication between the employee and the customer, conflicts are minimized, issues are resolved, and customers' demands, needs, and expectations are maximized.

Response

Customer satisfaction plays a vital role in every service provider, and it is a key focus for tourism organizations. As it is common across all businesses, customers of the tourism industry want to be satisfied with their services. Customer satisfaction is a type of insurance and declaration: “Investing in customer satisfaction is like getting an insurance policy. (Zehrer & Pechlaner, 2006). In this sense, the response is defined as the rapid and timely delivery of services to improve the quality of businesses. The quality of the response includes not only responding quickly but also giving the correct answer to the questions asked.

Sales Success

The existence of man has brought along the coexistence of certain needs. As a result of these needs, the term “sales” was born. A sale is a transaction between the buyer and the seller where the buyer receives tangible or intangible goods and services for a specified price (Pearson, Barker & Elliott, 1957). It is not always necessary to need a sales action. Sometimes consumers will be able to buy with a strong persuasion to use them later, even if they do not need the goods they purchase in the short term. Therefore, persuasion techniques are widely used in the tourism industry, especially in touristic product sales and services provided to customers. In this respect, sales development seems to be important as the sum of all activities that represent the rapid distribution of tourism products and services. Seeking to increase sales and marketing shares, travel agencies implement sales development methods to encourage training programs in product and service marketing. At the same time, they apply sales development methods to be affected by seasonal fluctuations at a minimum level. The sales development methods implemented by travel agencies are for customers, agents, and the sales force.

While one of the most effective ways to attract and retain customers in the business is to produce quality goods and services, the other way is to employ fully equipped, competent, empathetic, and reliable sales representatives with practical communication skills (Evanschitzky, Sharma & Prykop, 2012). In addition, the better the sales representatives, who are the most important elements of the business, are trained, the more successful they will be in representing the business and the more qualified the information they will receive from the market.

Methodology

Aim and Scope

The study aims to determine whether there is a relationship between soft success factors (competence, reliability, empathy, communication, and response) and product

sales success, and whether product sales success levels vary according to demographic characteristics.

It is determined that many studies have been conducted on travel agencies in the literature. These studies are about the topics such as customer satisfaction (Evanschitzky, H., Sharma, A. & Prykop, C., 2012; Zehrer & Pechlaner, 2006), marketing strategy (Dolnicar & Laesser, 2007), sales development techniques (Baltacı, 2015; Kurtulay, 2016), e-trade usage in travel agencies (Elhaj & Borakeh, 2015), sustainability (Marin-Pantelescu, Tăchiciu, Căpușneanu and Topor, 2019), service quality (Ghanda Abd-Aıla, 2006; Jones & Hoven-Tang, 2005) and employees' job satisfaction (Pearson, J. B., Barker, H. H. & Elliott, R. D., 1957).

As it is understood from above, no study has been found in travel agencies that address the relationship between soft success factors and sales success. Therefore, this study is thought to be an original paper that will contribute to the literature in this regard.

Research Hypotheses

H₁. There is a meaningful relationship between the soft success factors (competence, reliability, empathy, communication, and response) of travel agency employees and product sales success.

H₂. The soft success factors of travel agency employees vary significantly by gender.

H₃. The product sales success of travel agency employees differs significantly by gender.

H₄. Soft success factors of travel agency employees vary significantly according to tourism education.

The survey was conducted for employees at type A travel agencies in Istanbul. According to TÜRSAB (The Association of Turkish Travel Agency) data in 2019, there were a total of 6716 travel agencies in Turkey, excluding Istanbul. 6607 of them were type A. There were 3524 travel agencies in total in Istanbul. 3455 of them were type A. (Istanbul Tourism Statistics Report, 2019). In summary, 34.4% of the travel agencies in Turkey were in Istanbul and according to figure 1, 98% of these agencies were type A. Therefore, Istanbul was selected as the research field. Travel agencies selected in Istanbul were in the neighborhoods of Beşiktaş (Harbiye), Fatih (Sultanahmet Square), Beyoğlu, Şişli, Kadıköy, Bakırköy, Üsküdar and Ümraniye.

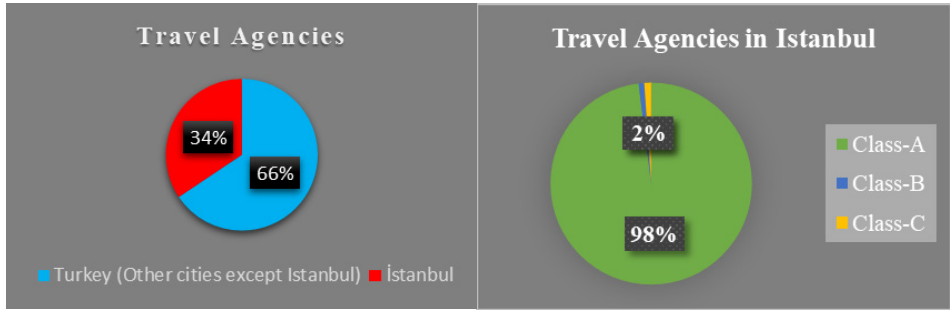


Figure 1. Distributions of Travel Agencies in Istanbul (%)

Source: Istanbul Tourism Statistics, 2019

In terms of employment, travel agencies may be said to be an indispensable source of income for people, and during the fieldwork, it was shown that a significant number of people worked in travel agencies.

To reach the total number of employees, an official letter was written to the Association of Turkish Travel Agency. However, they stated that they do not have information about the number of employees in the agencies in their system, but that at least one IT personnel should be employed in each agency. Therefore, the approximate total number of employees was calculated by multiplying the total number of type A travel agencies; and the population of the research is 51,825 employees.

Due to factors such as time, budget limitations (Hsieh, Bloch & Larsen, 1998), and the difficulty of reaching 51,825 travel agency employees, it was determined that the sample size should be 383, considering the sampling studies of Yazıcıoğlu and Erdoğan (2004). The convenience sampling method has been preferred for reasons such as being relatively easy to reach the sample and not being stuck in any place or any time constraint.

Data Collection Instruments

After determining the topic, population, and sample of the study, data collection instruments (Sajjad Kabir, 2016) were selected. It was decided to use a questionnaire consisting of three sections, which are explained below. Before conducting the questionnaire, participants were assured of the confidentiality of the data. In the first part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to complete a section including demographic factors such as gender, age, marital status, education, tourism education level, position, and tenure. In the second section, the questions aiming to measure travel agency employees' attitudes toward soft success factors were asked using the scale prepared by Regina Baumgartner. On this scale, there were 22 statements for measuring the soft success factors of travel agency employees.

These statements were categorized under five dimensions: reliability, competence, empathy, communication, and response. In the third section of the questionnaire, employees' product sales successes were measured on a scale that (Bağcı, 1999) were designed. This scale is composed of 21 statements, and those 21 statements cover seven dimensions of discovering potential customers, preparation, communication, presentation of sale, taking objections and solving them, closing the sale and after-sale follow-up.

Findings Related to Normal Distribution of Data

Sometimes in social sciences, normality tests can give problematic results. Therefore, checking the skewness coefficient and kurtosis can help avoid such problems and give more reliable results (Cisar & Cisar, 2010). The values for skewness and kurtosis between -2 and +2 are considered acceptable to prove normal univariate distribution (George & Mallery, 2010), and the acceptable range for skewness or kurtosis below +1.5 and above -1.5 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2015). In this context, Skewness and Kurtosis values were checked to identify whether the analysis methods were to be either parametric or non-parametric by testing their availability for normal distribution (Işık, 2019).

The values obtained because of the test are given in parentheses. (Discovering Potential Customers Skewness -.086; Kurtosis .480; Preparation S=.456, K= -.329; Communication S=-.472, K=.107; Sale Presentation S=.129, K=-.515; Objections And Solving S=.416, K=-.886; Sale Closing S=.140, K=-.694; After-Sale Follow Up S=-.785, K=1.056; Reliability S=-1.387, K=1.732; Competence S=-1.222, K=1.125; Empathy S=-2.000, K=2.000; Communication S=-1.500, K=2.000; Response S=1.439, K=1.890). Accordingly, since the Skewness and Kurtosis values between -2 and +2 are acceptable, the data conformity to the normal distribution has been proven (Kunnan, 1998).

Data Analysis

After a thorough analysis of the questionnaires conducted on travel agency employees, those that can be used scientifically were transferred into SPSS 20.0 for Windows software. Following the deletion of useless questionnaire forms, the analysis was conducted on 417 questionnaire forms. To prepare a table of demographic variables, frequency analysis (percentage), central tendency measures (mean), and variability measures (standard deviation) were carried out to determine the level of each dimension. Moreover, demographic profiles of the employees and reliability test results for each scale were given.

The researchers used SPSS 20.0 for Windows software to empirically test the research problems by employing correlation analysis, independent sample t-tests,

and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Besides, structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted to test the constructs' relationships by using LISREL Software.

Results

As an indicator of internal consistency reliability and homogeneity (George & Mallery, 2010) in measuring travel agency employees' soft success factors, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were measured. The results obtained from this measurement are demonstrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Descriptive and Reliability Analysis of the Soft Success Factors and Product Sales Success Scale

SOFT SUCCESS FACTORS SCALE						
Factor Name	N	Max.	Min.	S.D	\bar{X}	(α)
Reliability	417	1.38	5.00	.54195	4.3861	.852
Competence	417	1.57	5.00	.51930	4.3015	.852
Empathy	417	1.33	5.00	.63638	4.1639	.852
Communication	417	1.50	5.00	.75751	4.1367	.852
Response	417	1.00	5.00	.74755	4.1151	.852
PRODUCT SALES SUCCESS SCALE						
Factor Name	N	Min.	Max.	S.D	\bar{X}	(α)
Discovering Potential Customer	417	1.33	5.00	.65861	3.5867	.821
Preparation	417	1.33	5.00	.67846	3.3957	.821
Communication	417	1.00	5.00	.66248	3.8825	.821
Sale Presentation	417	1.67	5.00	.65244	3.6747	.821
Objections And solving	417	1.00	5.00	.94294	3.1071	.821
Sale Closing	417	1.00	5.00	.72750	3.4652	.821
After-Sale Follow Up	417	1.33	5.00	.63751	3.8753	.821

According to Table 1, Cronbach's alpha of the scale of soft success factors was found to be 0.852 exceeding the threshold of 0.7, which indicates that statements are internally consistent with each other. On the other hand, as an indicator of internal consistency reliability and, homogeneity in measuring travel agency employees' product sales success, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were measured. Cronbach's alpha of the scale of product sales success was found to be 0.821, which is above the minimum value for reliability (0.70), indicating that statements were internally consistent with one another. When checking the validity of a measurement model, in addition to the goodness-of-fit indices, it is important to find specific evidence of construct validity (Hair et al., 2009). Thus, the convergent validity of soft success factors was assessed by checking factor loadings and significance level shown in figure 2. Nearly all standardized factor loadings were above 0.5 and statistically significant.

Demographic Profiles of the Respondents

In this research, frequency analysis was used to determine the respondents' demographic information, namely their gender, age, marital status, education level, years of service in the sector and the enterprise, and having a tourism education.

Among the 417 respondents, there was nearly an equal distribution of male (42.2%) and female (57%) respondents. Considering the respondents' age interval, 18% of the sample, were in the age group of 39–45 years; the 32-38 age group accounted for 17.7% of participants and 16.8% of respondents were aged between 46 and 52. Therefore, it can be indicated from the questionnaire that the younger age groups constitute the majority of respondents. Among those respondents, 56.8% were married, and 43.2% were single.

It was found that nearly 37 and 32.4% of the respondents were university and high school graduates, whereas 10.1% of the participants had MA degrees. As for tourism education, 40.8% of respondents replied “never” to the question “Did you have a tourism education background?” It is alarming that the majority of employees did not have a tourism education background. Nearly 33% of the respondents had worked less than six years in this industry, and 23.5% had six to ten years of work experience. Respondents who had 11 to 15 years of experience accounted for 13.9% and 8.9% of them had worked for 16 to 20 years.

On the other hand, the respondents' rate with experience longer than 25 years accounted for 11.0% of all participants. Therefore, it can be interpreted that those whose years of service exceeded five constituted most respondents. 42% of respondents uttered that they worked in the same enterprise for between 1 and 5 years. The rate of those with work experience in the same enterprise for between 6 and 10 years accounted for 47.6%. Also, 6.2% of respondents indicated working in the same enterprise for over 25 years, and these were mostly the owners of agencies.

Testing Hypotheses

H₁: There is a significant relationship between soft success factors (competence, reliability, empathy, communication, and response) of travel agency employees and product sales success.

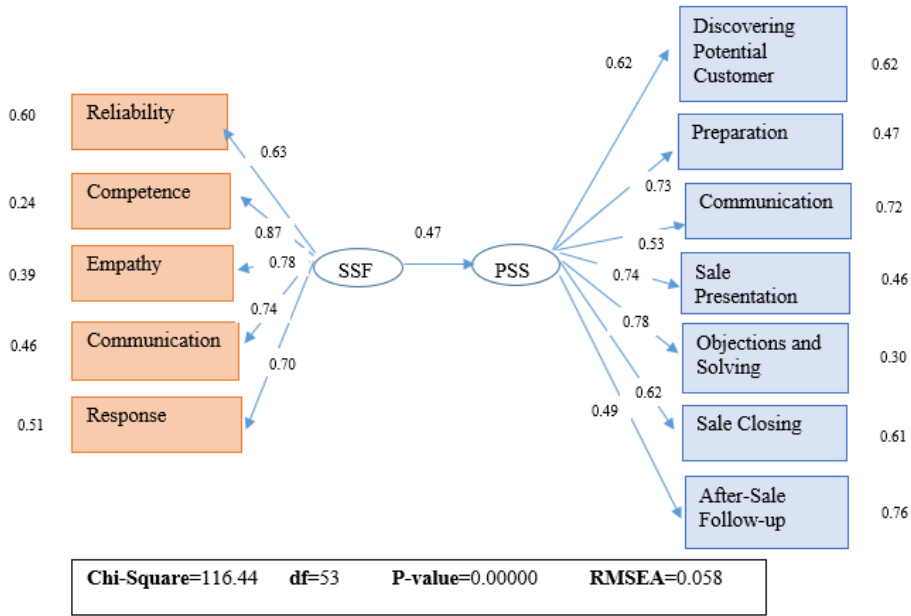
To test this research question, a correlation analysis was conducted. The findings are demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 2
Inter-Correlations among Study Variables

Factors	Discovering potential customers	Preparation	Communication	Sale Presentation	Objections And solving	Sale Closing	After-Sale Follow Up
Reliability	.232*	.226*	.278*	.360*	.243*	.170*	.423*
Competence	.342*	.274*	.342*	.437*	.285*	.123*	.505*
Empathy	.296*	.110*	.222*	.248*	.139*	.054*	.319*
Communication	.249*	.166*	.226*	.200*	.113*	.014*	.290*
Response	.347*	.284*	.173*	.268*	.237*	.101*	.295*

Sig 2 – Tailed = 0,000

The correlations among the variables are presented in Table 2; the figures show no negative correlation. All the factors were loaded significantly ($p < .005$) onto theoretically relevant factors under investigation in this study (Schober & Boer, 2018). In this sense, it was inferred that soft success factors and product sales success factors were positively, significantly, and weakly related. To specify the relationships between the soft success factors and product sales success and their posited underlying factors, the confirmatory factor analysis was used. Findings according to the measurement model are given in Figure 2 and Table 3 below.



**SSF: Soft Success Factors, PSS: Product Sales Success

Figure 2. Structural model with path results

From the confirmation of model fit, it can be understood that model shows that soft success factors are positively and significantly related to product sales success variables with adequate model-fit statistics. Thus, factor loadings, the path coefficient value, and significance level together indicate that the model is thriving at a satisfactory level.

Table 3

Model Fit Indices of the Relationship between Soft Success Factors and Product Sales Success

X ² /df	CFI	RMSEA	RMR	NFI	RFI	GFI	IFI	AGFI	R ²	R
116,44/53	.96	.058	.041	.95	.95	.090	.95	.87	.47	.22

As seen in the proposal of model fit indices given in Table 3, the confirmatory factor analysis was conducted, and soft success factors fit was empirically investigated as a predictor of product sale success. According to the number of indexes gathered through the model fit, soft success factors positively and significantly affect the product sales success (R = .22, p < 0.05). (*H₁ accepted*).

H₂: Soft success factors of travel agency employees differ significantly by gender.

To find responses to this question, an Independence Samples t-test was conducted. The results of the test are shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Significance Levels of the Variance in Soft Success Factors by Gender Based on T-Test Results

Factor	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	P Value (Sig. 2-Tailed)
Reliability	Female	176	4.3963	.55588	.743
	Male	241	4.3786	.53258	
Competence	Female	176	4.2670	.63061	.248
	Male	241	4.3266	.41947	
Empathy	Female	176	4.1458	.73520	.621
	Male	241	4.1770	.55445	
Communication	Female	176	4.1960	.84680	.172
	Male	241	4.0934	.68359	
Response	Female	176	4.1449	.74087	.488
	Male	241	4.0934	.75319	

In t-test analysis, the effect of binary variables on the dependent variable is checked, and predictions are made, taking it criterion for the p-value to be lower than 0.05 (Ugoni & Walker, 1995). When the t-test results were analyzed, every factor was seen to have p values greater than 0.05. Therefore, it can be said that there was not any significant relationship between soft success factors of the respondents by their gender. (H_2 rejected).

H_3 : The product sales success of travel agency employees shows a significant difference according to gender.

To test the scale factors of the second problem by gender, Independent Samples t-test was conducted. The results are demonstrated in Table 5.

Table 5
Significance Levels of the Variance in Product Sales Success by Gender Based on T-Test Results

Factors	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	P Value (Sig. 2-Tailed)
Discovering Potential Customers	Female	176	3.6023	.65583	.681
	Male	241	3.5754	.66176	
Preparation	Female	176	3.3693	.68496	.498
	Male	241	3.4149	.67445	
Communication	Female	176	3.8902	.68308	.840
	Male	241	3.8769	.64841	
Sale Presentation	Female	176	3.6875	.66204	.732
	Male	241	3.4653	.64657	
Objections And solving	Female	176	3.1515	.95140	.412
	Male	241	3.0747	.93737	
Sale Closing	Female	176	3.4375	.75585	.507
	Male	241	3.4855	.70769	
After-Sale Follow Up	Female	176	3.9015	.64470	.474
	Male	241	3.8562	.63287	

As the t-test results were investigated, every factor was seen to have p values greater than 0.05. Accordingly, it can be said that there was not any significant relationship among product sale success levels in terms of the gender variable. (H_3

rejected.). Kurtulay (2018) concluded in his study on travel agencies that gender has no effect on product sales. In this direction, the literature was supported.

H₄: Soft success factors of travel agency employees show a significant difference according to tourism education.

H_{4a}: Finding potential customers differs according to tourism education.

H_{4b}: The preparation stage differs according to the tourism education.

H_{4c}: Communication differs according to tourism education.

H_{4d}: The sales presentation differs according to the tourism education.

H_{4e}: Receiving and resolving objections differs according to tourism education.

H_{4f}: Closing sales differs according to tourism education.

H_{4g}: After-sales follow-up differs according to tourism education.

One-way ANOVA was used to test these question statements to fulfill the research purpose; the results obtained are shown in Table 6.

Table 6
Significance Levels of Variance in Product Sales Success of The Participants in Respect to Their Tourism Education Levels

Factors	Education Level	Mean	Standard Deviation	Degree Of Freedom	Chi Square	F	P Value Sig.
Discovering Potential Customers	Never	3.5784	.70365	3	.172	.396	.756
	High School Level	3.5263	.61058				
	Graduate Level	3.5857	.61060				
	Certificate	3.6466	.66126				
Preparation	Never	3.4314	.70468	3	.467	.014	.386
	High School Level	3.3860	.65402				
	Graduate Level	3.3022	.65801				
	Certificate	3.4498	.66551				
Communication	Never	3.9000	.66454	3	1.771	4.127	.007
	High School Level	3.6433	.61676				
	Graduate Level	3.8629	.72678				
	Certificate	4.0361	.55586				
Sale Presentation	Never	3.7667	.64036	3	.965	2.288	.078
	High School Level	3.6140	.59023				
	Graduate Level	3.5670	.70871				
	Certificate	3.6667	.62686				

	Never	3.2451	.88344				
Objections And Solving	High School Level	3.1170	.90740	3	.053	3.495	.016
	Graduate Level	2.8723	.98905				
	Certificate	3.1205	.98164				
	Never	3.5588	.68284				
Sale Closing	High School Level	3.5731	.74736	3	1.772	3.403	.018
	Graduate Level	3.3988	.69052				
	Certificate	3.2851	.81506				
	Never	4.0039	.62069				
After-Sale Follow Up	High School Level	3.8421	.53491	3	2.816	7.241	.000
	Graduate Level	3.6511	.65937				
	Certificate	3.9237	.63827				

When looking at Table 6, it is seen that level of tourism education has a partial effect on product sales success. Table 11 indicates that the p values of the factors “discovering potential customers,” “preparation,” and “sale presentation” are respectively 0.756, 0.386, and 0.078. These are all higher than the critical value of 0.05. This means that the differences in the scores for these factors regarding the respondents’ education level are not significant. The p values for the differences in “communication,” “objections and solving,” “sale closing “and” after-sale follow-up” scores with respect to the level of tourism education are below the critical value of 0.05, indicating that the scores of the participants for these four factors are significantly different by their tourism education levels.

Table 7

TUKEY Post Hoc test for Communication Factor, Objections and Solving Factor, Sale Closing Factor and After-sale Follow up Factor

Factor	Education Level	Standard Deviation	Sig.
Communication	High School- Never	.10027	.053
	High School- Graduate	.10743	.173
	High School- Certificate	.11270	.003
Factor	Education Level	Standard Deviation	Sig.
Objections And solving	High school- Never	.14304	.807
	High School- Graduate	.11533	.007
	High School- Certificate	.12514	.752
Factor	Education Level	Standard Deviation	Sig.
Sale Closing	High school- Never	.11046	.999
	High School- Graduate	.08906	.276
	High School- Certificate	.09664	.025
Factor	Education Level	Standard Deviation	Sig.
After-Sale Follow Up	High school- Never	.09545	.327
	High School- Graduate	.07696	.000
	High School- Certificate	.08351	.772

Table 7 shows the variance in travel agency employees’ communication factor, objections and solving factor, sale closing factor, and after-sale follow-up factor success concerning their education levels in tourism. The figures show that there is a significant variance in their communication success scores according to whether they have a high school or certificate levels of tourism education (Sig. 0,003). According to the values, the success of travel agency employees in objections and solving factor vary at a significant level to whether they have high school and graduate level tourism education (Sig. 0,007). According to the findings given sale closing success levels have significant variance among travel agency employees according to whether they have a high school or certificate education (Sig. 0,025). As shown in the table, participants’ scores for after-sale follow-up factors, one of the sales success scale factors, significantly vary by being a high school or university graduate (Sig. 0.000). In this context,

Q4_a: X	Q4_c: ✓
Q4_b: X	Q4_f: ✓
Q4_c: ✓	Q4_g: ✓
Q4_d: X	

Discussion

Consideration of travel agencies, one of the intermediaries of the distribution channel in the tourism sector, as a business line dates to the nineteenth century. These travel agencies, which offered simple travel services initially, serve millions of domestic and foreign tourists and provide thousands of people with various employment opportunities today. Moreover, the travel agencies introducing tourists to the best service and high quality have been regarded as the intermediary agencies which bring tourist product producers and the people who consume these products together by establishing strong bonds between these two parties (Ghada Abd- Alla, 2006).

The dynamic nature, accomplishment of aims, and sustainable competitive capacities of travel agencies are only possible by the competent, emphatic, reliable, and communicative employees but at the same time who can respond to the questions, demands, and objections of customers effectively. The employees can be successful in adaptation and product sales in this way, too.

Evaluation of the findings of the current study about the subsequent studies’ findings from the relevant literature would be useful for better communication and understanding.

Tastan, 2008; In his study on customer complaints and solutions in package tours organized by travel agencies, he stated that customers mostly complain about hotel changes and the fact that the prices in the advertisements do not match the actual prices. It is concluded that the agencies resolved the complaints with courteous behavior. At this point, finding a relationship between soft success factors and sales success in the current study supports the literature.

In the work of Dolnicar & Laesser (2007) titled “Marketing Strategies of Travel Agencies,” it was found that tourism producers benefit from travel agencies on time, knowledge, and reservation when they are unfamiliar with recommended destinations. Also, travel agencies are preferred for vacations extending a week, whereas they are not preferred for shorter vacations. On the other hand, a non-significant weak relationship was found between the selection of destination and accommodation time.

In his work on personal sales in travel agencies, Kurtulay, 2016, concluded that tourism education and pricing policy do not influence motivation. In contrast, gender and education level do not influence presentation performance and ethics, and long-term employment and service time do not influence sales orders. At this point, current study supports the literature.

Baltacı, 2015; In his research on the sales promotion efforts of travel agencies, he found that the importance given to sales promotion activities is not related to tourism education and duration of activity. In the current study, receiving tourism education partially affects sales success.

As the research on travel agencies was investigated, it was found that there has been no research that explores the relationship between travel agency personnel’s behavior towards customers and sales success. Therefore, this research intends to close the research this gap in the travel agency literature.

Conclusion

During the relevant literature review, it was observed that studies were conducted on travel agencies. However, there is no study linking soft success factors of travel agency employees with product sales success. That’s why the article is unique. Likewise, filling the literature gap on this subject and contributing to the literature make this study meaningful. The sub-dimensions of the soft success factors; trustworthiness, competence, empathy, communication, responsiveness, and sub-factors of sales success, finding potential customers, sale closure, and after-sale tracking were analyzed through correlation analysis to uncover the possible relationship. In the correlation analysis, to determine the degree of relationship, a structural equation model was utilized. The hypothetical structural and conformity index data revealed

that the soft success factors are essential predictors of sales success. According to the number of indexes gathered through the model fit soft success factors impact sales success positively, and this impact is significant (22%). With this article, it has been observed that employees with soft success factors are more effective in sales success. In addition to that, the analysis showed that travel agency personnel's soft skills are not dependent on gender demographics. No significant relationship was found between gender and soft skill factors.

Similarly, gender demographics were found to have no significant impact on sales success as well. On the other hand, agency personnel's sales success was partially impacted by potential customer readiness, preparedness, and sales pitch. Besides, sales success was found to be significantly impacted by communication, complaint appraisal and solution, sales closure, and after-sales tracking.

Limitations, Future Research Directions and Practical Implications

When the surveys were implemented, some agencies refused to fill in the questionnaire due to the busy season. Data was lost because some of the participants filled in the questionnaires incompletely or incorrectly.

In this study, the dimensions of reliability, empathy, communication, responsiveness, and competence are emphasized. Academicians who will work on this issue may be interested in different dimensions such as information quality and different perspectives. This research was conducted only in Istanbul, which had the largest A-class travel agency. Future researchers can compare travel agency employees in several different provinces in terms of soft success factors.

With this article, it was observed that employees with soft success factors are more effective in sales success. We think that we have contributed to the literature with this study. Based on this, we recommend that business owners prefer employees with high soft success factors. With research, travel agency staff can shed light on the need to develop soft success factors to increase success in sales performance. Travel agents can develop career management strategies to retain highly successful salespeople. Travel agencies can organize training periods for their employees by analyzing the current personnel profile to increase sales success to provide a competitive advantage.

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