

Tourism Industry and Standardisation: Possibilities and Opportunities

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Abstract: *This is the second part of a research project. The first one that was published examined the views of the managers from different segments of tourism industry, therefore suppliers of a tourism industry product. This paper will outline the observations of the end user of a tourism industry product. In doing so, it will allow the reader and the follower of the research project to compare both findings. That is the views of the suppliers (managers) and the users (customers) of a tourism industry product on the issue of standardisation. The first section of this article will review previous studies on the topic. The second section of this article will examine findings of the questionnaires that were conducted on the end users of a tourism industry product.*

Keywords: *Standardisation, service product, tourism industry.*

Turizm Endüstrisi ve Standardizasyon: Uygunluklar ve Fırsatlar

Özet: *Bu bir araştırma projesinin ikinci kısmıdır. Yayınlanmış olan ilk kısım turizm endüstrisinin farklı sektörlerinden yöneticilerin, dolayısı ile bir turizm endüstrisi ürününün arzını sağlayan kesimin görüşlerini incelemiştir. Bu makale ise bir turizm endüstrisi ürününün nihai (son) kullanıcılarının gözlemlerini inceleme altına alacaktır. Bunu yaparken okuyucuya bir turizm ürününün standardizasyonu konusunda ürünü arz edenlerle (yöneticiler) ürünü kullananların (müşteriler) konu hakkındaki görüşlerini karşılaştırma fırsatı verilecektir. Bu makalenin ilk kısmı konu hakkında daha önce yapılmış çalışmaları gözden geçirecektir. Makalenin ikinci kısmı turizm endüstrisi ürünlerinden birinin nihai kullanıcılarına uygulanmış olan anket sonuçlarını inceleyecektir.*

Anahtar kelimeler: *Standardizasyon, hizmet ürünü, turizm endüstrisi.*

1. Introduction

Standardisation of a service product is not a new concept to the marketers. Numerous articles were written on the topic (see Brotherton, 1996; Rice, 2004; Toner, 2006; Bozkurt, 2010), along with a number of unpublished dissertations (see Bouba, 1988; Bozkurt, 1999). Despite these attempts, one could argue that the notion of a standardised service product requires further attention. This is because the previous studies on the topic not only failed to clear the scepticism on a service product's possibility of standardisation, but they also did not provide clear guidelines to practitioners

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in terms of how to standardise a service product. In addition, previous studies did not explore enough standardisation of a service product by concentrating on specific industries (such as tourism industry).

This article aims to explore these gaps in the literature. First section will provide definitions and benefits of standardisation. Second section will move into the tourism industry as being the research focus. Final sections will outline the research findings, limitations, conclusions and implications of the study.

2. Literature Review

Jain explains standardisation as:

“Standardisation means offering a common product on a national, regional or worldwide basis” (Jain, 1990, p.422)

Clow on the other hand makes the following statement:

“Standardisation means presenting a unified theme across nations and cultures” (Clow, 2005, p.162)

Standardisation has its benefits to the companies. Paliwoda (1995, p.45) names two of these as avoiding modification costs of the product for the local market's needs and capturing the advantage of economies of scale in production. Joining the argument, Toner (2006, p.10) adds that standardisation “makes life easier”. Being more specific than Toner, White (2005, p.12) indicates that standardisation minimises operational costs and risks, also allows the company to offer a better service to its customers. Based on their research on US hospitals Barton and Bieker (2007) also contribute greatly to the list of these benefits by specifically naming 13 of these benefits.

2.1. Service Product versus Goods Product

A service product has always been different than its goods counterpart. There are four main characteristics of a service product that presents its difference. These are: intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability and perishability (Cowell, 1990, p.23; Payne, 1993, p.7; Hoffman and Bateson, 1997, pp.24-45; Lovelock, 2000, p.9). Heterogeneity characteristic supports the idea most for the difficulty of standardising a service offering. Leaving other characteristics aside, the definition of the term “heterogenic” alone makes a service product almost impossible to be standardised (Woodruffe, 1995, p.19). As a contrast, a goods product could be standardised in its packaging, features and styling. Consisting the “core product”, these three components of a goods product are easier to standardise than components of “augmented product”, such as delivery and after-sales

services (Kotler and Armstrong, 1991, p.253). Despite the difficulty, augmented product offerings are also possible to standardise, as opposed to the both (core and augmented) components of a service product.

2.2. Tourism Industry

Definition of “tourism” concept occupied marketing literature for some time, concentrating mainly on which categories of tourists and travellers should be included in the offerings of the industry. This argument has ended when the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) provided a widely accepted list that defined tourist, visitor and traveller (Lumsdon, 1999, p.2,3). Concentrating specifically on the term of tourism, Mill and Morrison came-up with the following definition of tourism:

“Tourism is the term given to the activity that occurs when tourists travel...It includes the activities the traveller undertakes as part of the trip, the purchases made and the interactions that occur between host and guest. In sum, it is all of the activities and impacts that occur when a visitor travels” (Mill and Morrison, 1992, p.9)

As it could be seen from the definition, tourism offerings include a variety of products and activities (or sectors), including but not limited to: accommodation, food and beverage, business services and leisure (Bowie and Buttle, 2004, p.26). This mixture of offerings presents uniqueness and differentiation against goods products, not only because of the general characteristics of a service product that were presented earlier, but for the specifics of a tourism product as described by Lumsdon:

“Tourism activity takes place away from the normal place of residence and work; movement is short term and temporary; it includes day activities; it can involve considerable benefits and disbenefits to society” (Lumsdon, 1999, p.4,5)

On a relatively new publication Beaver also emphasizes a person’s intention of travelling outside of his/her usual living environment, along with the time limit he places on the travel plans:

“Tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than 1 consecutive year, for leisure, business and other purposes” (Beaver, 2002, p.280).

3. Data Collection

There are 55 questionnaires that were used in this research. In total 120 self-addressed, postage-paid envelopes sent to a list of scuba divers. Out of 120 that were sent, 67 replies received. This constituted almost 56% of a return rate, well within the accepted limits that were suggested by the relevant literature (see Remenyi *et al.*, 2000, p.156).

12 of these replies could not be used due to a number of reasons such as missed sections of the questionnaires or replies that contradicted with each other. In the latter cases, the researcher felt he should exclude these questionnaires in order to assure the reliability of the primary research findings.

Participants' list for the questionnaires was obtained through the researcher's personal contacts within the scuba diving industry. At the time of the study, the researcher was actively involved in scuba diving and he was a divemaster from a leading scuba diving organisation, a position signifies experience and confidence in scuba diving. A cover letter, explaining the outline of the research and how much their contribution would be valued, was sent to the participants. Each questionnaire consisted of 20 questions starting with a couple of general/informative questions (Questions 1-4). Moving into more specifics, remaining questions asked participants about their views on standardisation. By using a number of questions as "control questions", questionnaires wanted to explore participants' opinions on possibility of standardisation of the service that they received.

4. Research Findings

30 out of 55 respondents were Open Water Scuba Diver Course students. Open Water Scuba Diver Course is the beginning course to the scuba diving and one of the most time-consuming, both for the instructors and the students.

There were also 10 Rescue Diver Course participants. Rescue Diver Course is the third one on the scuba diving ladder of this particular scuba diving organisation (PADI ©), which the researcher is also a member as an instructor. The remaining 15 questionnaires received from the Divemasters, which is the beginning step for becoming a scuba diving professional. These different levels of scuba diving courses are explained in the Figure 1 and the number of participants presented in the Table 1.

Table 1- The Number of Responses to the Questionnaires, based on the Courses that they completed

	Courses		
	Open Water	Rescue	Divemaster
No of Divers	30	10	15

Following pages will present each question that was asked to the participants. Responses to the each question will be displayed with the help of pie charts, followed by a brief explanation.

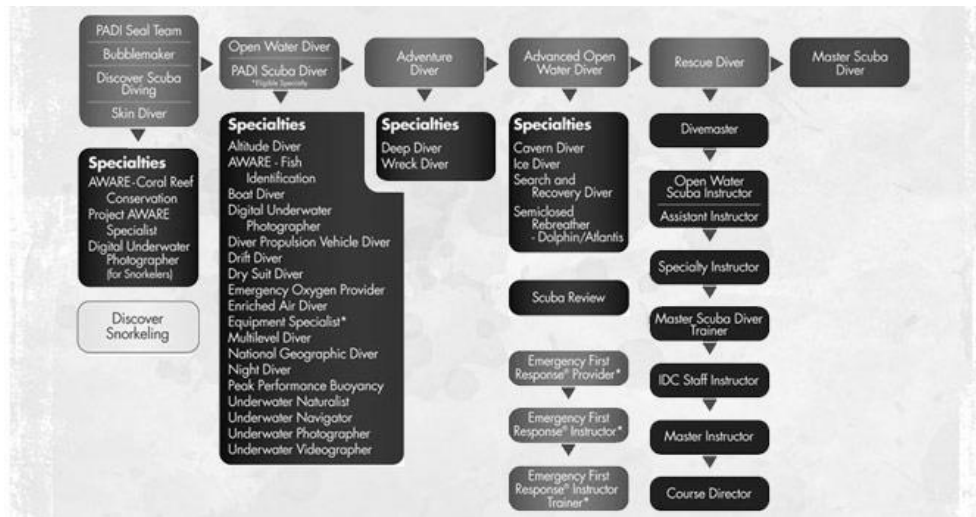


Figure 1- PADI © Courses, downloaded from www.padi.com

Questions 1, 2 and 3 asked the participants' names (if they wanted to provide), which course they were completed and the city/country that the course was conducted in.

Question 4 asked participants' views on the standardisation of the service (in this example scuba diving lessons) that they received.

69% of the respondents believe that the course they have taken is same as other PADI © diving centres around the globe. 23% of them think there could be differences between two courses and only 8% of answers claim courses are different. The profile of this question may show us that there is a strong belief among PADI © divers that the courses they are offer are standardised.

Table 2- Answers to Question 4 “Do you believe that the PADI © course you have completed is given same in another PADI © centre all around the world?”

	Answers (1-5)				
	Yes, I do	There could be some minor differences	It is hard to predict	No, I do not believe it is same	Other
Percentages (%)	69	23	0	8	0

Questions 5, 8, 9 10 and 11 pursued the standardisation of a service product matter by checking the responses of the questionnaire participants from different perspectives.

Question 5, for example, wanted to find out whether the participants believe that the certificate they get at the end of their course is accepted globally or not.

Table 3- Answers to Question 5 “Can you use your PADI © certificate / diver card in any country?”

	Answers (1-3)		
	Yes, I can	In some countries, not all	No, I cannot
Percentages (%)	92	8	0

92 % of the respondents believe that their PADI © diver card gives them a worldwide recognition. Only 8 % of them thinking that they may not able to use their diver cards in all countries. Question 8 tried to establish whether the participants believe that a same level PADI © course (see Figure 1) that were given by different schools/dive centres were performed in the same way or not.

Table 4- Answers to Question 8 “Do you believe that the PADI © course that you completed is conducted in the same way that other person’s course?”

	Answers (1-4)			
	Yes, I do	Most parts were same, but not all of them	There was little similarity	I believe the courses were given different way
Percentages (%)	80	20	0	0

80 % of the divers who compared their scuba course with another from a different dive centre but within the same organisation, believe that both courses were given in a same way. 20 % of them indicate there are some differences.

Perhaps being one of the most fundamental questions of the study, Question 9 asked participants opinion about the possibility of a standardised PADI © course.

Table 5- Answers to Question 9 “Do you think that standardisation of a PADI © course is possible?”

	Answers (1-4)			
	Yes, I do	It is possible in most parts, not all	Only some sections could be standardised	I think it is impossible
Percentages (%)	77	23	0	0

77 % of the respondents to the postal survey think that standardisation of a PADI © course is possible. 23 % believe standardisation is possible, but not completely.

Moving from the PADI © courses to the advertisements, Question 11 asked the participants opinion about the standardised format of a PADI © advertisement in more than one country. In order to achieve this, the preparing question (Question 10) asked if the participants had a chance to view a PADI © advertisement in more than one country.

Table 6- Answers to Question 11 “Were those advertisements (the ones you have seen in another language – Question 10) looked same to you, apart from language difference?”

	Answers (1-5)				
	Yes, they were	They looked mostly same	They were slightly same looking	No, they were not looked same	Other
Percentages (%)	83	17	0	0	0

83 % of the respondents who have seen a PADI © advertisement in more than one country, believe that they looked same to them. 17 % of them think those advertisements were mostly same not exactly. Postal survey that conducted among PADI© divers for this research in Turkey presented following results

Majority of the divers (54%) who were responded to the questionnaires were Open Water Divers, which is the entry level of PADI© diver education chart (see Table 1, Figure 1). A great number of these divers (69%) believe that the course they finished was exactly same in another PADI© centre across the world. Thus, they think that PADI© courses are standardised. Furthermore, this study revealed that standardisation of the PADI© courses assures divers that their certification has worldwide

recognition. It could be claimed that this belief developed among PADI© divers by comparing the same course with another PADI© dive centre. Another reason for this conclusion can be PADI©'s influence on divers that their courses are standardised around the world. The supporting evidence for this assumption could be driven from the postal survey. Only half of the respondents had seen a PADI© advertisement in more than one language. In addition, just 25% of the divers who returned questionnaires for this study had travelled abroad for the scuba diving. Therefore, only alternative left for those divers who believed that PADI© courses were standardised, was either comparing their course with another PADI© dive centre's course or being under the influence of PADI©, which claims their courses are standardised (see Bozkurt, A, 2010 for this conclusion).

Finally, one could argue that almost all divers who participated in this research were satisfied with the service that they received from the PADI©. This is because 92% the participants stated that they wish to continue their training with the PADI©.

5. Research Limitations

The number of questionnaires (67) received from the participants was one of the limitations for this research. Due to the "Data Protection Act" the researcher could not be able to obtain a wider list of scuba divers. This was despite the fact he was also actively involved in the scuba diving and used his personal connections. A list with more names on it could have generated more returns, hence improving the quality of the research finds. One could argue, however, this is a dilemma almost any research that uses postal surveys encounters.

Another limitation could be stated with the method that was used to obtain a list of participants. It could be argued that using personal contacts (which is almost unavoidable in some industries) may cause participants "avoiding negative comments" in order to please the researcher. To prevent this potential problem, postal surveys used for this research tried to ask same questions in a different way in the different sections of the questionnaires.

6. Conclusions

Postal survey findings of this study showed that standardisation of a service; particularly a tourism product is possible. Customers believe that there are some service products (for this research, they were scuba diving courses) which are already standardised. Furthermore as the study outlined,

customers believe that standardisation of a service product is even beneficial for them i.e. worldwide recognition of a scuba course certification.

On the other hand, reviewing the literature that was written on the topic showed that some authors believe standardisation of a service product is very difficult, if not impossible. Therefore, when compare these claims to the postal survey findings of this study, it is clear that some of the ideas of the authors who are against standardisation may need to be revised.

One could argue that, a company's influence on their customers is more important than real standardisation of their service product. If customers satisfy with the product by its quality, then it may be easier for the company to claim that their product is standardised. Once customer satisfaction achieved, standardisation would follow it. The biggest clue for this assumption lies in the postal survey findings that conducted for this research. Nearly all of the PADI© divers (92%) that contacted stated in the Q.19 that they wished to continue their diver training with PADI©. This indicates that they were happy with PADI©'s services. When they were asked about the possibility of standardisation of a PADI© course in the Q.9, 77% answered they believe it is possible. In addition, 69% of them that replied to the Q.4 believed that PADI© courses are same around the world.

As a contrast, only 25% of the respondents travelled to abroad for scuba diving (Q.16) and all of them (100%) used a service or a product that provided by a local PADI© dive centre (Q.17). Therefore, majority of the PADI© divers who contacted for this research claimed that a PADI© product is globally standardised without comparing any of these products themselves.

7. Recommendations

There are two sections for the recommendations. First section is for future researchers who wish to pursue the findings of this research further. Second section is for tourism industry practitioners who wish to apply the findings of this research into their own businesses.

7.1. Future Research Recommendations

It could be argued that some of the findings of this study such as possibility of a particular service product's standardisation are controversial of the common belief in the relevant literature. It is, therefore, crucial that further research under similar circumstances should test such claims. Exploring this area in more detail will not only help to validate (or this validate) this research findings, it will also present the reasons for such a cause. A research using same data collection methods like this one but on a perhaps less well known brand than PADI© (for example a country's national scuba diving federation) could also shed a light on one issue:

Whether a customer's perception of standardisation of a service product is shaped by the reputation of the brand that supplies it. Outcome of such a study could improve our understanding of service standardisation greatly.

7.2. Practical Recommendations

As the findings of this study presented, companies should understand the value of the advertisements. Supported with the superior service quality, a positive brand image could be developed through specific adverts. Perhaps being modified by the needs of each market (or the country, if it is an international advert), it is possible to build a perception of a brand. This could even be relatively easier if a customer already experienced the product and did not have any negative outcome from such an experience. Adding a valuable point to this claim, Wei and Jiang (2005, pp.841-843) propose that a globally standardised policy such as using an exact replica of an advertisement may not work, due to cultural differences in each country.

At the end of this research if an advice should be given to the marketers about the standardisation is, it should be used with caution. Although degree of standardisation or customisation of a service and a tourism product is unclear to the marketers, there is one certain issue should be considered carefully by them as Zeithaml and Bitner (1996) underline, understanding customer needs (p.21). Companies who change their classical marketing approach and become more "client oriented" in service industry may have a better chance against their competitors.

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