
E-TOURISM AND ROLES OF TRAVEL AGENCIES: A CASE STUDY OF PROMOTING JAPANESE INBOUND TOURISM IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

E-Tourism and Travel Agencies play a more and more important role in the tourism and hospitality industry by contributing to a large volume of transactions and revenue. Many studies have evaluated tourism websites through different research methods. Website usability in general has improved dramatically but problems remain. Very few studies focus on the use of e-tourism and roles of travel agencies in Sri Lankan context. This research uses a mixed-methods approach. The results show that e-tourism information search is mostly utilitarian in nature; the complex interface and advertising messages either confuse or were ignored by most users.

1. Introduction

Travel and tourism industry represents one of the most important sectors of the world's economy. Tourism is one of the key sectors of the economy which could make a positive contribution to achieve a sustainable development. For many developing countries, like Sri Lanka, sustainable tourism is a valid development option, with a clear impact on poverty reduction, empowerment of vulnerable population and environmental sustainability. Millions of people travel and seek personal rewards from their experiences; massive development of resources is the consequence. This pervasive tourism growth is a significant part of the global expression of the new services economy.

Tourism can enrich peoples' lives, can expand economy, can be sensitive and protective of environments and can be integrated in to a community with minimum impact. Travel preference remains elusive in spite of much market research on demographics, psychographics, life styles, opportunity, experience and a great many other factors that influence what travelers like for their travels. Modern technology such as computers and the Internet has added to the opportunities and also the complexity of visualizing tourism's future.

The travel agents must always be up-to-date regarding the current trends in the field of functioning. They must also know about the best and the most popular places of tourists' interest. Travel agents have accumulated knowledge, expertise and contacts with providers of services and is a useful and sometimes invaluable intermediary. Even the travel agencies in the tourism industry have to realize it is more competitive and with the use of e-tourism they have to adjust themselves by creating new tourism arenas to build up their image and to be a feature of the tourism sector. Income generated by tourism is tremendously beneficial to the host country and its local communities and this can be used on a national and local level to better education, improve infrastructure, to fund conservation efforts and to promote more responsible tourism.

In many places the introduction and development of tourism allows local people an opportunity for economic and educational growth that would not otherwise be available. In addition, it allows both the tourist and the local community a chance to experience other cultures, which broadens understanding. Internet-related technologies dramatically change transaction costs in communication-based activities and raise both challenges and opportunities for this business sector relating to issues of the nature and value of intermediation.

2. Problems of the Study

In today's hi-tech world, people have access to all kinds of information. As online travel sites continue to grow, it is interesting to notice who books on travel web sites and who calls a travel agency. Both verticals provide unique opportunities. It is a human nature to contact a reliable travel agent before the traveler venture out in search of peace and relaxation. Research question of this study is to examine to what extent the travel agency operations affect the Japanese inbound tourist promotion in Sri Lanka and what are the possible strategies that travel agencies can generate with the use of e-tourism to improve Japanese inbound tourism in Sri Lanka as there is a less tourist arrivals from Japan comparatively?

3. Research Objective

- To examine the present roles of Sri Lankan travel agencies for when they promote specifically Japanese inbound tourism in Sri Lanka.
- To analyze the impact of e-tourism on travel agency operations promoting Japanese inbound tourism in Sri Lanka
- To examine the key challenges prevailing with the travel agency operations in using e-tourism to promote Japanese tourists to Sri Lanka.
- To indicate most suitable strategies to promote Japanese inbound tourism in Sri Lanka with the use of e-tourism.

4. Theoretical background and literature review of the study

Tourism is traveling for predominantly recreational or leisure purpose or the provision of services to support this leisure travel. The World Tourist Organization defines tourism as, "people who travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited."

Tourism is vital for many countries, due to the income generated by consumption of goods & services by tourists, the taxes levied on business in the tourism industry & the opportunity for employment in the service industries associated with tourism. Stynes & Cynthia (1987) stated that the tourism is one of many activities in a community or region that requires planning and coordination.

However, tourists cause environmental damages through forest fires, destruction of sand dunes and pollution. Consequently this serves negatively as increased pollution disturbs local residents and also it may discourage tourists from further entering the country. After this, tourism undermines culture by commercializing it and this is often connected with increasing litter, graffiti, vandalism and noise- tourists do not always respect traditional cultures.

The impacts of tourism are that because of its nature, tourism may exert both positive and negative impacts on the socio-cultural, natural and economic environment of Sri Lanka. Because the development of international tourism has been relatively modest and based on visitors with a similar culture, the socio-cultural impacts have to date been limited. More significantly however, is the adverse impact of large volumes of domestic tourism upon the cultural and natural heritage sites all of which are suffering various forms of degradation.

Tourism has been identified as capable of effectively driving country's socio – economic development. The vision for the tourism sector is to make Sri Lanka the foremost leisure destination in the South Asia Region. It believes the human resources and natural and cultural endowments value and ethos will be fundamental in transforming Sri Lanka in to a Centre of excellence and offer tourists the highest values of authentic experiences in its unique setting.

Tourism in Sri Lanka is forecast to be the 4th highest revenue earner by 2010. Given the high returns estimate and its importance to the country's economic growth, a focused plan to develop this lucrative market has been

implemented by the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau (SLTPB). The SLTPB will pursue a major public relations drive that will strive to promote and build the country's image. With the added expertise of a local advertising agency, the SLTPB is committed to building Sri Lanka's brand image and market reach.

Tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka reached a new high in 2010 registering a growth of 46.15% to 654,477 arrivals from the previous year's figures of 447,890. In absolute terms, this amounted to an increase of 206,587 tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka during one single year, which is again unprecedented in the history of tourism in Sri Lanka. Japanese tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka in 2009 have a slight growth from 10,578 in 2008 to 10,931.

The Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) is committed to develop the current and potential new markets. Together with the Sri Lankan Government and the local and international media partners, the SLTDA offers investors various attractive and feasible trade support schemes and business opportunities.

According to the newly launched Tourism Development Strategy, the main target of the tourism sector in the next five years is to achieve a target number of 2.5 million tourists by 2016 being in line with the January 2010. The expectations set for the development of tourism industry in the said time period covering all aspects of infrastructure development, standardization of products and services, improving the brand awareness and finally gearing all efforts towards achieving sustainability in the long run as booming sector directly contributing a large share to Sri Lanka's Economic Development.

The initiatives and policies of the newly launched publication will act as a benchmark for tourism sector for the next five years to come with the stretched goal of preparing the industry to move forward to achieve targets specified up to year 2020.

With a tag line "Refreshingly Sri Lanka: The Wonder of Asia" and as world's most treasured island the specific strategies related to the five year plan are, creating an environment conducive for tourism; attracting the right type of tourists; ensuring that departing tourists are happy; improving domestic tourism and contributing towards improving the global image of Sri Lanka. The unique selling propositions of destination Sri Lanka are authenticity, compactness and diversity.

As competition within the tourism environment is growing globally, the SLTPB is committed to see more foreign tourists visiting Sri Lanka and also develop new initiatives that would keep the domestic market on an upward trend. The SLTPB's goal is to see its innovative and ambitious strategy materialize, even as potential travelers visit Sri Lanka, thus converting a global fondness for the country into actual visitation and increased spending and dispersal.

It is evident that e-business is an essential prerequisites for successful organizations in the emerging, globally networked, internet empowered business environment, especially for tourism industry. Many tourism-related organizations had to go through a major processes re-engineering to take advantage of the emerging technologies in order to transform their processes and data handling as well as their ability to operate and to compete in emerging global market place (Loudan.K, 2007).

E-tourism determines the competitiveness of the organization by taking advantage of intranets for reorganizing internal processes, extranets for developing transactions with trusted partners and the Internet for interacting with all its stakeholders and customers. The e-tourism concept includes all business functions (i.e., e-commerce, e-marketing, e-finance and e-accounting, e-human resource management, e-procurement, e-research and development, e-production) as well as e-strategy, e-planning and e-management for all sectors of the tourism industry, including tourism, travel, transport, leisure, hospitality, principals, intermediaries and public sector organizations. Hence, e-tourism bundles together three distinctive disciplines: business management, information systems and management, and tourism (Buhalis & O'Connor, 2005).

Travel agents come as a blessing to use in such times as these, as they handle all the travel arrangements – right from booking the airfare to reserving hotel rooms (Bantwal, 2009). Travel agents are professionals that can help the traveler arrange for all their traveling needs. Despite the massive use of the internet for travel related services there are still instances when hiring travel agents are necessary. For years ago, when the internet has not yet reached its present state and condition, people who have plans on traveling hired travel agencies or travel agents to help them prepare for their planned tour (Eleazar, 2010). A travel agency sells travel arrangements directly to

the public. More specifically, an agency sells air, land and sea transportation, accommodation, cruise trips, package tours, travel insurance and other related products (Foster, 1990).

Most people who go on vacation like to book trips through a travel agent in order to take some of the stress out of the planning process. Travel agents can also help travelers to save money on flight, hotel rooms, cruises, and more (Bradley, 2009). Travel agents are the persons who organize and plan the trips for their clients. They are very helpful to the travelers. A lot of tours and travels companies are offering lucrative packages to the travelers these days. Travel agents are the persons who arrange all kinds of transportation and accommodation facilities for tourists. The sale and purchase of travel and other related services are arranged by a tours and travels agency (Max, 2010).

Travel agent is pivotal in making traveler's vacation the most hassle-free and pleasurable one. For deciding which travel package is the best for the traveler to planning the entire holiday, travel agents will do all the necessary home work on behalf of the traveler and will find out what are best deals available. Because they are so knowledgeable, their importance can never be ignored or ridiculed (Bantwal, 2009). Travel agents have quicker access to the deals many travel sites offer and can save time researching if traveler provides a few basics like travel preferences and departure cities (School, 2010).

Good travel agents have an edge over almost any other seller of travel. They know what a traveler wants. They speak traveler's language and they are there when a traveler runs in to trouble. In other words, travel agents are not obsolete (Raza, 2010). The use of travel agencies is indeed associated with specific services related to package holidays, transport services, beach or city holidays, as well as destinations travelers are not familiar with. In contrast, no clear association between travel agent use and socio-demographic characteristics of travelers exists (Dolnicar & Laesser, 2007).

Travel agencies provide information about activities and events at travelers' destination and offer them an advance booking services. Not having to do all the pre-travel preparations travelers can take the stress out of the vacation and can be sure that the services have reserved are valid and of good quality (Sosa, 2009). Travel agents are needed to market, promote and represent travel products so that travelers have the opportunity to view the myriad travel choices around the world. Travel agents are experts in helping tourists with how to move within the country, where to stay and what to do are held to a high standard of care and are relied upon by consumers (Farina, 2010).

A rapidly changing business environment, largely brought about by the Internet, will require companies to quickly develop new affiliations and alliances, have access to new products and be creative in their marketing. It is suggested that an awareness of the range of organizational forms, together with an appreciation of their potential for application, will aid successful adaptation by travel companies within a changing business environment (Barnett & Standing, 2001).

If a traveler really does research and bookings on his own traveler might be able to save a little money instead of using a travel agent. However, the traveler will have less assurance of the quality and dependability of what are getting. And if something goes wrong, traveler has to make it own (Sosa, 2009). When customer account detail is available to an agent, the agent is more likely to feel more empowered and satisfied that they are helping the customer to resolve an issue. In a culture of open communication, agents will trust management and send out a positive impression to customers when they are motivated and understand the strategic vision (Loring, 2008).

Ultimately, both services have pros and of course cons, but it comes down to what kind of traveler you are, how accountable you want to be for your vacation decision, what you are willing to risk and what you would like to gain from your entire experience. Travel agents are excellent reference for advice and provide a variety of unique options they can personalize to your interests, while online travel sites lay out the best resort and cruise deals right in front of you for you to analyze and choose from your own (School, 2010).

The Internet enables travelers to access reliable and accurate information as well as to undertake reservations in a fraction of the time, cost and inconvenience required by conventional methods. Thus, they improve the service quality and contribute to a higher tourist satisfaction. Additionally, the Internet provides access to transparent and easy to compare information on destinations, holiday packages, travel, lodging and leisure services, as well as about their real-time prices and availability.

The use of ICTs is therefore driven by the development of complex demand requests, as well as by the rapid expansion and sophistication of new products, which tend to address niche market segments. There is evidence that e-tourism has already taken off in several countries.

Therefore, E-tourism and the Internet in particular support the interactivity between travel agencies and customers and as a result they re-engineer the entire process of developing, managing and marketing tourism and hospitality, therefore, gradually see their role being changed and new opportunities and challenges emerging. Only those organizations that appreciate the opportunities which ICTs bring and manage their resources successfully will be able to enhance their innovation and competitiveness in the future.

5. Methodology

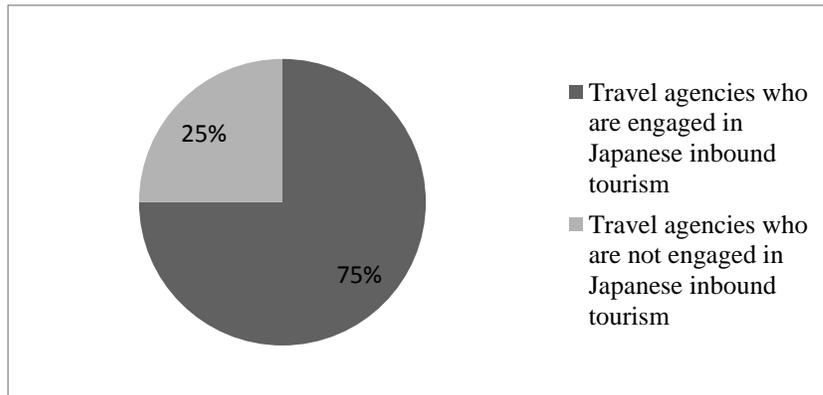
With a mixed-methodology approach, this study combined interview, observations, and surveys. Further, pre- and post-experiment surveys asked about the subjects' demographic information and travel and Internet use experience. The researchers selected one of the top four e-tourism agencies as the testing site. In total, Out of the sample of 40 travel agencies, 10 travel agencies did not engage in the Japanese inbound tourism. In other words, these travel agencies were not yet initiated tour packages for Japanese tourists. Few travel agencies are intending to commence Japanese Inbound tourism in the near future. During the experiment, the researcher sat behind the subjects to answer any possible questions. The researcher did not instruct the participants on how to book their reservations; instead, they were told to budget within their actual financial situation. After the completion of the study, they completed an online post-survey. The post-survey probed to find out more about their awareness of features on the e-tourism and travel agencies and suggested for the demographic information. Then the participants were debriefed and allowed to ask any remaining questions about the experiment.

6. Analysis

According to Yin (1994) data analysis involves examining, categorizing, tabulating or otherwise recombining the data. Every investigation should have a general analytical strategy, which treat evidence fairly, produce compelling analytic conclusions and rule out alternative interpretations. This analytical strategy should help the researcher to choose a technique that completes analysis of the research. This chapter analyses all the primary data collected from the questionnaire given to Senior Managers, interviews conducted with Senior Managers and findings gathered round from the survey.

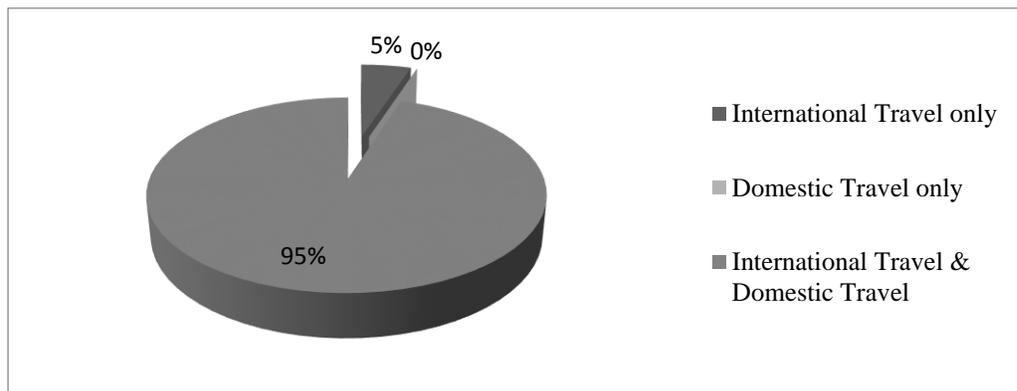
Out of the sample of 40 travel agencies, 10 travel agencies did not engage in the Japanese inbound tourism. In other words, these travel agencies were not yet initiated tour packages for Japanese tourists. Few travel agencies are intending to commence Japanese Inbound tourism in the near future. According to this survey it was measured that 75% of travel agencies are engaged with the Japanese inbound tourism and they work with the use of e-tourism in many ways.

Figure 1 Travel Agencies who are engaged in Japanese Inbound Tourism



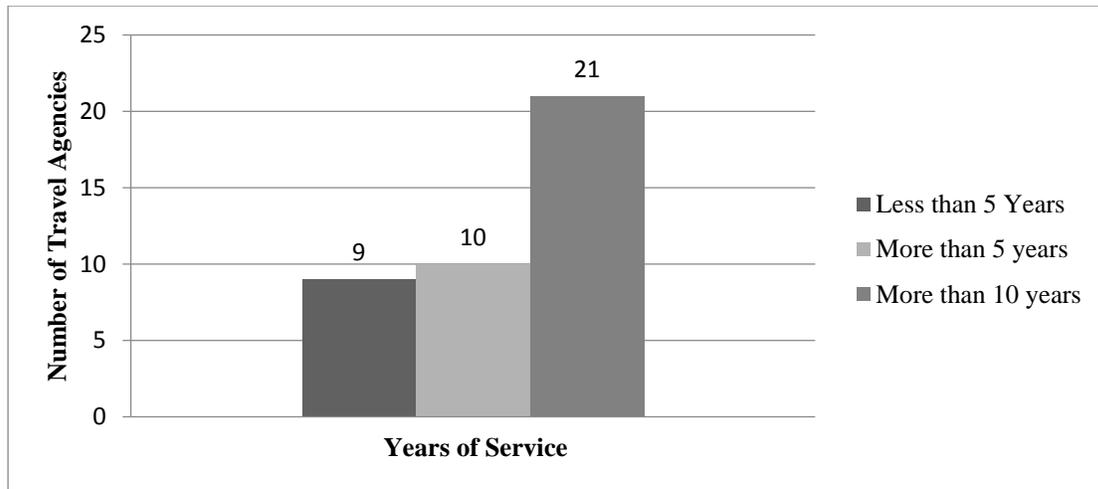
All most all the travel agencies conduct international as well as domestic travel functions in Sri Lanka. According to the survey done by the researcher, it was found that two travel agencies are conducting only international travel functions. Out of the total sample, 95% of travel agencies are employing both international travel as well as domestic travel and every travel agency has launched a web site then they are be able to attract more tourists, as many travelers are addicted to the Internet to decide on their own travel destinations.

Figure 6.2 Nature of Travel Agencies



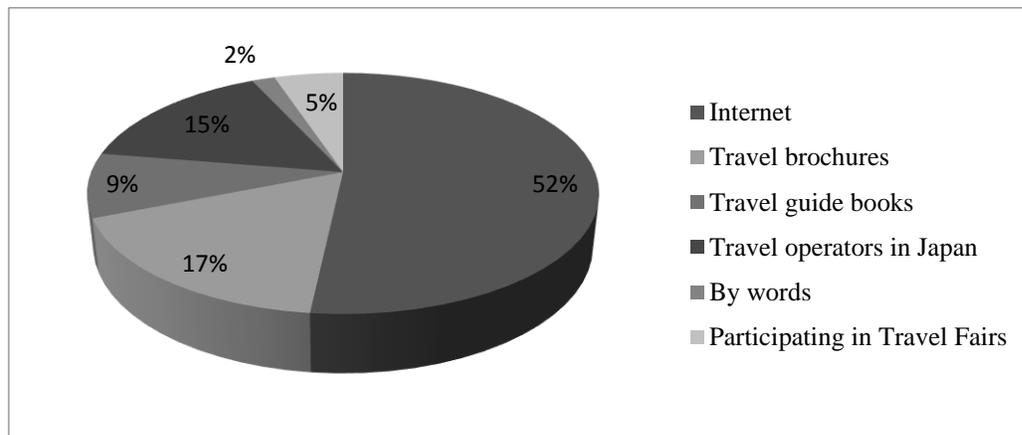
21 travel agencies were involved in the travel industry for more than 10 years and they are the pioneers in the tourism industry in Sri Lanka with their experience and knowledge they have understood types of tourists, the needs and perception of tourists and the behavioral patterns of tourists especially with Japanese tourists and these travel agencies use e-tourism with the materialization of information and communication technology. The other 19 travel agencies are newly emerged and through the experience they would perform an extremely perfect work in the future. 75% of travel agencies in Sri Lanka are in the travel industry for more than 10 years.

Figure 3 Number of Years of Service



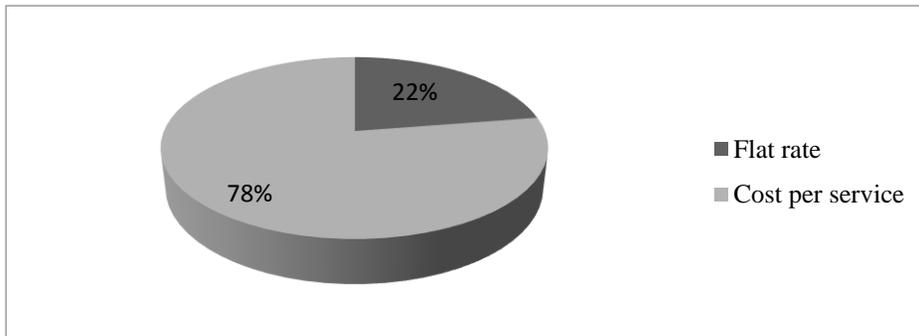
52% of the total sample of 30 travel agencies, Japanese tourists obtain information about travel agencies by browsing internet because these travel agencies have been created web sites in the internet and the rest of the travel agencies promote their travel agencies through travel brochures, travel guide books, tour operators in Japan, by words of other tourists who have visited Sri Lanka previously through the same travel agency and by participating in trade fairs in Japan, Japanese tourists be aware of that particular travel agency. As a whole, travel agencies promote their agencies with the use of numerous sources of information and they have not stuck to one particular source of information.

Figure 4 Sources of Information



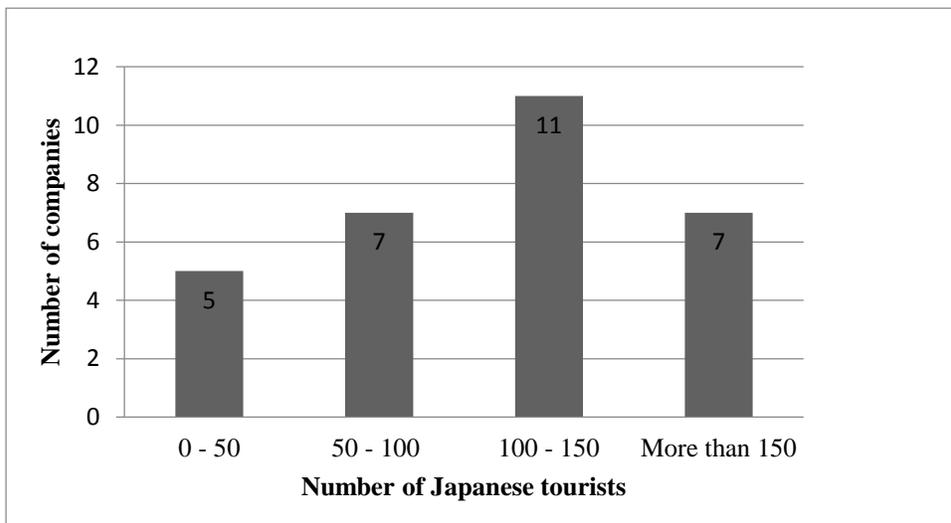
In general, travel agencies can charge rates in two ways for their services. That is flat rate and cost per service. Flat rate means without considering the services that tourists asked for or travel agency provides, as a whole travel agencies charge a common amount. Cost per service is charging an amount for each and every service that travel agencies provide for what Japanese tourists asked. Out of the total sample 78% of travel agencies charge cost per service. In other words, tour package which is provided by travel agencies includes all charges discretely. Many travel agencies have stated on their web sites, the services that they provide and travelers could select the whole lot through the Internet.

Figure 5 Charges for Services



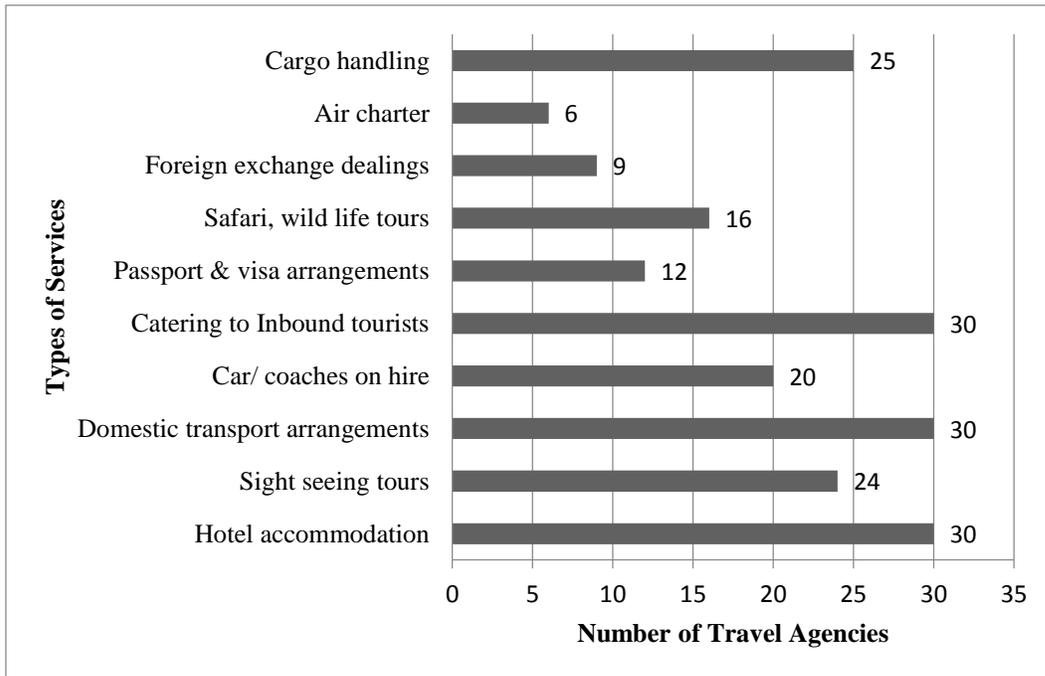
Out of the 30 travel agencies who are working with Japanese tourists, the following figure shows the numbers of Japanese tourists who arrived to Sri Lanka during the last year for both peak season and off season with the use of e-tourism. Most of these tourists have taken information through travel agents' web sites and fulfilled all necessary requirements online with the travel agency as it is the easiest way to arrange their vacations in most successfully.

Figure 6 Number of Japanese tourists arrived in both peak and off season



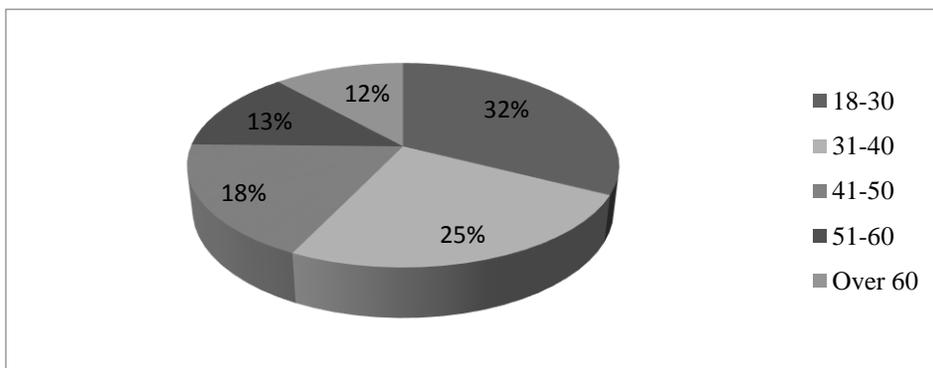
All travel agencies who are engaged in Japanese inbound tourism provide hotel accommodation and domestic transport arrangements. 83% of travel agencies arrange sightseeing tours and cargo handling. Least number of travel agencies works on foreign exchange dealings and air charter. This is because every day those charges are changing and with the lack of technology, travel agencies are unable to gather information on these aspects. All these services are declared in their web sites and therefore, travelers get an idea about travel agencies with the use of e-tourism.

Figure 7 Services rendered by Travel Agencies



From this survey, it was found that most of Japanese tourists arrive to Sri Lanka is in the age range of 18- 40 years. These middle age tourists are arriving to Sri Lanka in their vacations or as volunteers to serve in many projects. As Japanese people, they are working hard in their work places and to get some kind of a relaxation they have arrived to Sri Lanka. With the use of E-tourism it is easy to address different age group travelers as their expectations are different to each other.

Figure 4 Age Groups of Japanese Tourists



All travel agencies who are engaged in the Japanese inbound tourism provide airport transfers to tourists. 40% of travel agencies include air fares when they charge for a tour package. Least number of travel agencies includes excursion/ guide fees and levies and taxes for their tour package because with the increase in cost of living in Sri Lanka, travel agencies are unable to calculate the exact price to be charge by tourists as its changing all the time.

Figure 5 Items included in Tour Packages for Japanese Tourists

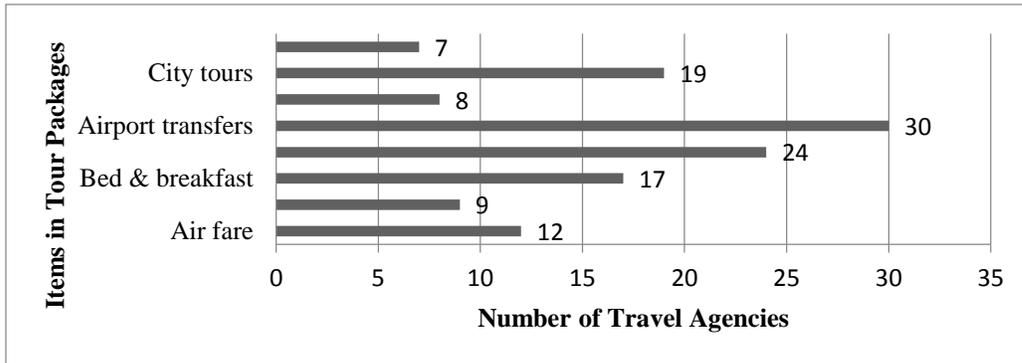
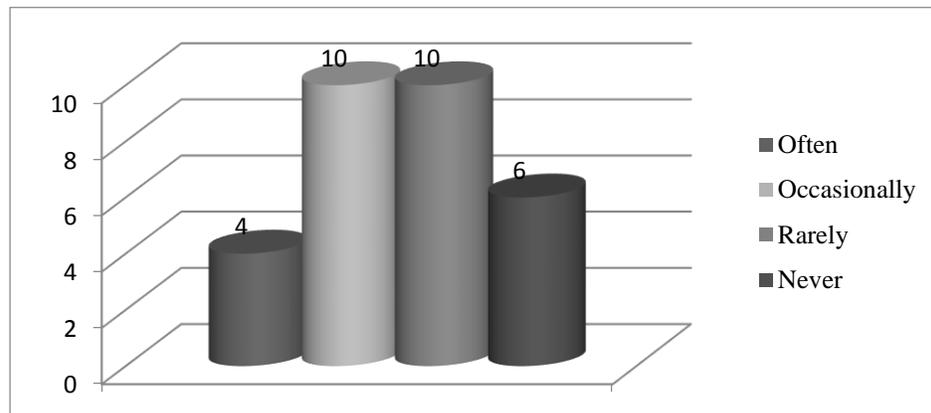
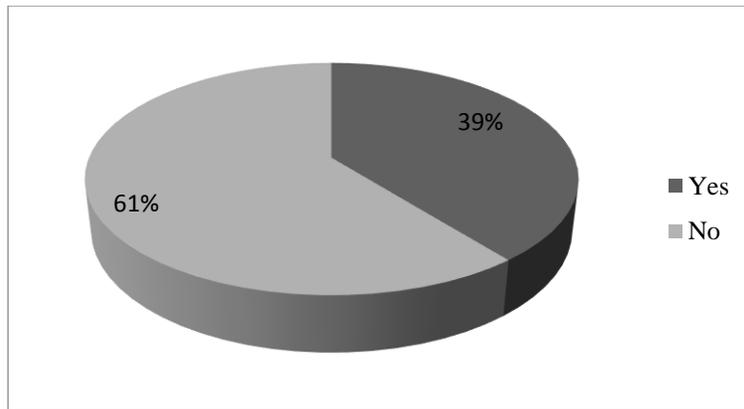


Figure 10 Participation in Trade Fairs



53% of travel agencies out-source Japanese translators to communicate with Japanese tourists. All most all Japanese tourists are reluctant to use any other language other than their mother language; Japanese. Therefore, travel agencies either hire translators or recruit them which are more advantage for them to promote their services to Japanese tourists. At present, according to this survey, travel agencies use Japanese language to communicate with them. As a percentage it was 67%. But still there are travel agencies, about 33%, use English and therefore Japanese tourists might not acquire the proper information from those travel agencies. Out of the total sample, 13% travel agencies had been made documentary TV programs in Sri Lanka but those are mostly telecasted using English. Majority of 87% had not been tried even to promote Sri Lanka in Japan by making a documentary TV programs.

Figure 6 Joint Promotions with Air Lines

Many travel agencies were neutral on that they have many awareness programs for Japanese tourists and it was about 66%. 37% of them agreed on that tailor made programs are available for Japanese tourists and 75% of travel agencies could not guarantee on the hotel facilities and food are up to the standard of Japanese tourists. The entire sample of travel agencies agreed that Japanese tourists who arrived through them were delighted with their services. And finally 93% of travel agencies disagree that their major drawback issue was not lack of Japanese speaking guides because by some means they manage to present a guide who knows Japanese.

From travel agents in Japan, through internet, newsletters, tour operators, competitors, by word of mouth, general media information, Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), Japanese land operators, researches done by Sri Lanka Tourism Promotional Bureau (SLTPB) and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Sri Lankan travel agents acquire up-to-date information on the Japan market.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, driven by the increasing wealth of Asian countries as a paradigm of shift in global trade and economy, the tourism industry is growing all over Asia. One of the most significant changes in tourism in recent years has been the concept of interconnection, which is evident at various levels of tourism planning. Strategic alliances between contender enterprises, vertical integration between and across firms, collaboration between public and private sectors and partnerships between countries and regions have become common practice in contemporary tourism.

The emergence of the internet altered the structure of the tourism industry as it changed dramatically best operational and strategic practices. There are benefits and disadvantage to both conventional and online travel agencies. Each one offers its own experience and features that make it unique from the other and in favor with different people. When it comes to selecting the best option, it is a must to see which ones have the savings, products, and services that a traveler desires. Travel agents could become more competitive through more effective use of information technology and that the perceived value of the services required can influence consumer choices.

However, a handful of travel agencies have proven that there are still instances where a travel agency can find a traveler an even better one. Many traditional travel agencies now have full-service web sites so that travelers can get the best of both worlds: convenience of self-serve online booking with the benefit of talking to a real person when travelers need it.

One of the major issue in this industry is most Japanese travel agencies operate their tours through intermediary tour operators who liaise with Sri Lanka based operators, while most of the travel trade in other markets operate directly with Sri Lankan operators. The intermediaries based in a third country, most likely in India, support the communication between Japanese travel agencies and Sri Lankan travel agencies, as Japanese travel agencies prefer to work in their own language and business style while few Sri Lankan operators have Japanese speaking staff or sales offices in Japan.

Therefore, a handful of travel agencies have proven that there are still instances where a travel agency can find you an even better one. Many traditional travel agencies now have full-service web sites so that you can get the best of both worlds: convenience of self-serve online booking with the benefit of talking to a real person when you need it. Evidently, the Internet is having a major impact as a source of information for tourism.

This study suggests some recommendations for travel agencies, tour operators and all sectors in the travel industry. These recommendations are made for Sri Lankan tourist market; however, they can probably apply to the tourism industries in other developing countries.

Countries like Sri Lanka, India and Maldives can jointly produce fliers and other promotional materials for the three emerging markets that highlight their cultural attraction, food and shopping opportunities. It is a need for increasing cooperation to jointly promote tourism. Printing travel guides, production of documentary movie on tourism, to make a film allied to Sri Lanka where the country receives a free publicity, more over as an effective public relation method to make Sri Lanka appeal to Japanese tourists such as a documentary TV program which focuses on travel and history improves tourist awareness of Sri Lanka, promotion of sustainable development of ecotourism, cultural tourism and nature tourism, to organize promotional trips for journalists and tour operators from Japan, collaboration in human resource departments in tourism sector by having programs for exchange of students and materials, promoting cooperation on the field of tourism with other relevant regional and international tourism organizations.

Moreover it is necessary to promote more airlines in to the country. A clear open skies policy needs to be in place to link aviation to tourism. Beaches, ayurveda and nature are potential resources with which to attract Japanese tourists to Sri Lanka. A short term ayurveda program tailored to Japanese tourists would appeal to the female market as they habitually have a preference to stay a short period in one country to spend their vacations.

A familiarization trip is effective in improving Japanese tourists' awareness and to motivate Japanese tourists to visit Sri Lanka.

The Internet can greatly facilitate the promotion and distribution of tourist products and potentially enable tourism destinations and enterprises to compete on a level playing field. With the Internet, virtually unlimited amount of information can be stored at a web site an unlimited number of users can retrieve it at anytime from anywhere in the world.

For developing countries to take advantages of the new opportunities offered by information and communication technology to brand or promote their own tourism industry. Unlimited and low cost access to world markets and information and trade networks is essential. To achieve this would require wider involvement of local and medium sized tourism enterprises in global information and communication technology networks as well as innovative national information and communication technology policies for the sector. Apart from the above, the e-tourism could help developing countries exploit the untapped development opportunities tourism offers and could give customers better control of their own tourism industry.

Sri Lankan travel agents must highlight Sri Lankan tourism resources except for Buddhist heritage and tea. Travel agents and the state have to make necessary modifications to reach the satisfaction level of Japanese tourists as there are limited numbers of international brand hotels in Sri Lanka and existing hotel facilities and services are not up to standard of Japanese tourists. Apart from that Japanese tourists are highly apprehensive with infrastructure facilities as they are spending a luxurious life in Japan. As travel agents, they have to produce Japanese speaking guides to feel Japanese tourist comfortable throughout the journey because most Japanese tourists reluctant to speak any other language other than their mother tongue.

As Japanese people, they are very much fond of with new technologies therefore Interactive Digital Television, mobile technologies and internet are carving new faces in customer services for tourism industry. Through a mobile, tourists can be guided through cultural heritage through multi-language voice, text or images.

One of the prominent strategies to attract Japanese tourists to Sri Lanka is to publish a magazine including all tourist resources in Sri Lanka in both languages English and Japanese and provide it to airlines which carry

Japanese tourists. Travel agents and the State sector have to design tentative programs including orientations, guidance and workshops on the current situation in Sri Lanka.

Although the tourism industry structure has been altered dramatically it is evident that both tourism suppliers and online intermediaries should apply constant innovation, in terms of marketing techniques and technological advancements, in order to be able to offer differentiated, personalized, tailored and value added products. The key point for sustaining their competitive advantage is to focus on their core competencies and to exploit the opportunities that technology offers to improve their strategic position in the tourism value system.

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