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QUALITY MARKET ORIENTATION
Tourist Agencies' Perceived Effects

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the effects of market orientation from two perspectives. First, its direct influences on tourist agencies' perceived performance, and its indirect ones on performance through the perceived value of market information. Second, direct effects on the perceived service quality offered by the firm and indirect influences derived from the utilization of quality measurement systems are analyzed. Hypothesized relationships are tested in an empirical study of tourist managers. Research findings confirm the proposed relationships, except the influence of using quality measurement systems on service. A positive direct influence between perceived service quality and performance is also analyzed and confirmed. **Keywords:** market orientation, quality, performance, tourist agencies. © 2005 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Résumé: Orientation marché et qualité: effets perçus et agences de voyages. Cet article analyse les effets d'une orientation marché de deux points de vue. D'une part, on discute des influences directes de l'orientation marché sur la performance perçue des agences de voyage et des influences indirectes sur la performance à travers la valeur perçue de l'information du marché. D'autre part, on analyse les effets directs sur la qualité de services perçue fournis par les influences définitives et indirectes qui sont dérivées de l'utilisation des systèmes de mesurage de qualité. Les relations proposées ont été testées dans une étude empirique des directeurs de tourisme. Les résultats confirment les relations proposées à l'exception de l'influence d'utiliser des systèmes de mesurage de qualité sur les services. On analyse et confirme également une influence directe positive entre la perception de la qualité des services et la performance. **Mots-clés:** orientation marché, qualité, performance, agences de tourisme. © 2005 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Changes in tourists' behavior define a horizon where customer satisfaction and the continued improvement of services are critical factors in maintaining a competitive market position and achieving business success (Camisón, Flor, Cruz and Küster 1996; Ritchie and Ritchie

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2002). The quality of the service offered, the skill of employees in performing the task, the use of new technologies, the capacity to innovate, and continued training of personnel, among others, form a platform of action for agencies to achieve a competitive position (López and Veciana 2004) and, implicitly, to generate customer value. In general terms, the tourism industry is immersed in a highly competitive environment as a result of consumers' direct access to the purchase of its products and services through the Internet, the fragmentation of the industry, and other factors threatening tourism firms (Bigné and Andreu 1999; Hjalager 2002). In this context, agencies' efforts to improve their performance relative to their competitors must be channeled into improving their service quality and being more effective in the commercialization of their products.

Both quality and the marketing of products and services offered by tourist agencies have received considerable attention in recent decades (Bigné and Andreu 1999; Millán and Esteban 2002). Even so, there are still gaps in the research being carried out into the effects of market orientation (MO) on quality. There is currently a growing interest in studying the relationships among quality systems, market orientation, and organizational efficiency (Raju and Lonial 2002; Santos and Escanciano 2002). To date, service quality and market orientation have been studied separately within the context of the results of an organization, resulting in a lack of research that simultaneously analyzes the relationships between them (Lai 2003). Taking previous studies as a base, this paper aims: to contribute to the study of the effects of MO on perceived service quality and the utilization of quality measurement systems, and to analyze the direct effects of MO on perceived performance, and indirect influences through the perceived value of market information.

MARKET ORIENTATION, QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE

Previous research on market orientation can be divided into two major categories. The first approaches the relationship between MO and the benefits of information. The second highlights an emerging field of research oriented towards analyzing the relationship among MO, quality, and results. These two aspects of research will be reviewed herein, suggesting a series of hypotheses that together form an integrated model (Figure 1).

MO can be defined as the interfunctional coordination inherent to a market-driven business aimed at seeking and gathering information on consumers, competitors, and the environment; disseminating this information throughout the organization; and designing and implementing a response in accordance with the information obtained, with the aim of satisfying consumers by providing higher value (Kohli and Jaworski 1990; Narver and Slater 1990; Tuominen and Möller 1996). Taking as reference the study by López and Veciana (2004), the generation of market intelligence, its dissemination, and its utilization by the organization are key elements for the success of tourist agencies. These

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