The role of tourism businesses to promote local destinations in Japan to attract international tourists

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Abstract

Japan has a privileged geographical location, unique landscape, abundant marine resources, and extensive social, historical and cultural resources. The country has a distinctive customer service based on welcoming hospitality known in Japanese as "*omotenashi*", outstanding kindness and friendly service staff who work hard to satisfy the needs and demands of domestic and international tourists. However, international tourists have expressed concerns and frustrations with Japanese staff working at hotels, hostels and restaurants during their travels in the country due to their inability to communicate and cross-cultural sensibility. Tourism businesses would be able to maximize the opportunity of promoting and marketing local communities to increase the number of international tourists and to advertise the tourism destination and its branding. These efforts will increase economic development and the livelihood of local residents in the tourists' destination while providing sustainability to the cultural and natural resources of the local communities. Japanese tourism businesses also need to invest in the human resources development by providing appropriate English and intercultural communication training to bridge the language and cross-cultural communication barriers with the international tourists for a satisfying tourists experience.

Keywords: Tourism, Businesses, Promote, Communities, Intercultural, Communication.

Introduction

This research paper analyzes international tourists' feedback on English proficiency and international communication of Japanese staff working at hotels, hostels and restaurants. International tourists have expressed their frustrations and challenges at the time of communication with the tourism service staff because of this language and cultural barrier.

The general objective of this research is to determine the challenges of international tourists traveling in Japan.

The specific research objectives consist of:

1. To describe the challenges of foreigners communicating with managers and staff working at hotels, hostels and restaurants;

2. To analyze how the managers and staff need to improve the tourists' services to satisfy the needs of international tourists;

3. To find out the need of English and Intercultural Communication training for managers and staff in the tourist businesses.

A survey conducted in the Hakone area was aimed to determine the experience of international tourist traveling to diverse regions in Japan and communicating with Japanese managers and staff in the tourism industry specially hotels, hostels, and restaurants. A total of fifty-six (56) international tourists were interviewed regarding their experience.

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The respondents revealed that their most commonly visited places during their travel to Japan were: Hakone, Nikko, Tokyo, Kamakura, Kyoto, Osaka and Nara. Other destinations of key interests for international tourists are Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Meanwhile, other local destinations were not visited because of the lack of information on these places.

According to Kotler, Bowen, and Makens (2014) for businesses and marketing organization understanding customer behavior can be challenging and difficult within a single market. Consumers from different countries can have similarities in terms of values, attitudes, and behavior. Therefore, international businesses need to be able to adapt their services to meet the international tourists needs.

The questionnaire consisted of five questions to find out the tourists' perceptions, behavior and experiences of traveling in several locations in Japan and their first encounters communicating with Japanese staff and managers at hotels, hostels, and restaurants.

The results could be summarized into intercultural communication and misunderstanding with Japanese managers and staff in the tourism industry. International travelers to Japan expressed their concerns and communication challenges with Japanese staff working at hotels, hostels and tourists' venues because they were not able to communicate and express their opinions, comments and feedback.

Therefore, Japanese employees and managers in the tourism industry could invest in English and intercultural communication training to be able to meet international communication service standards expected by tourists.

Literature Review

Intercultural Communication and Tourism

Described by Ting-Toomey & Chung (2005), intercultural communication is the study of diverse communication styles among cultural groups. It is important to take into considerations these differences because it contributes to the understanding of cultural behavior, patterns, and traditions of the host country. It also helps business executives and staff to improve second language acquisition by imitation of cultural patterns of behavior and understand the relationship that exist with language and culture. Another aspect to take into consideration is body language because staff in tourism can learn to read what the customer is trying to express.

Business executives, managers and staff working in the tourism industry can create cultural awareness and expectations in Japanese tourism organizations like hotels, hostels and restaurants by finding out how their staff perceive the cultural protocol of the organization, the expectations and business promise as an organization in the service industry. Then, they can learn the foreign cultural perspectives, customs, and traditions as well as the international protocol and behavior expected in cross-cultural communication interactions. Culture and personality are two aspects to be taken into consideration in intercultural communication, because it cannot be generalized that all people of the same culture behave similarly, even if they have a homogeneous cultural patterns and behaviors like Japanese people do (Delgado, 2015).

Understanding direct and indirect communication.

According to Ting-Toomey & Chung (2005), individualism takes into consideration the individual identity compared to the group identity, individualism values over collectivism values, self-efficiency over the group dynamics. Collectivism considers the group members interdependence, harmony and collaborative mind-set. Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov (2010), describes Canada, United States, Great Britain, New Zealand and Australia as individualistic countries and Japan, Costa Rica, Philippines, South Korea and Indonesia as collectivistic societies.

In the tourism service industry is important to understand the difference between direct and indirect communication styles because Japanese, other Asian nations people, may have distinctive intercultural communication styles and patterns of behavior. Westerners may show their emotions directly, while, Japanese could find this way of communication a little bit too direct and aggressive (Delgado, 2015).

Open-Mindedness and a flexible attitude

Open-Mindedness in intercultural interactions with foreigners is highly recommended for the Japanese tourism organizations because welcomes the recommendations of travelers to improve the quality of the service and increase customer satisfaction and repeat business (Delgado, 2015). International tourists may not understand Japanese management core values based on their business rules and policies. Therefore, they may face some challenges regarding the interaction with Japanese staff at hotels and tourist businesses, and they behavior may be rigid because they are following the business rules and policies of the organization. The managers can motivate the staff to have an open-mind about cultural values and behavior abroad, to be able to understand the different perspectives and have a more internationalized perspective of doing business. (Delgado, 2015).

Managers and staff in international business need to have a flexible attitude to understand interactions with foreigners because there is a lot of ambiguity in intercultural communication (World Economic Forum, 2017). Managers need to help their staff to become international citizens and more globalized to be able to cope with the changing demands of the international tourists at local and global scale and their future working environment (Delgado, 2015).

Destination Management and Marketing

Tourism management

Recent information of the business, environment, and sustainability of tourists' destinations is key for its development and continue preservation. Technological innovation is another aspect that contributes to the rapid change of our economies, the increase of consumption and competition. The present world conditions and increasing social environment has predicted the growth of tourism and emerging destinations in the next decade. Senior citizens for example, is a segment of the market that will continue to growth (Moutinho, 2018).

Porter (2011) described the nations' competitive advantages as depend on the know-how of organizations and businesses to innovate in technology, products and services. If this theory is applied to the tourism industry, businesses in this field will continue to growth if they listen to the international tourists and adapt to the rapid demand of the

tourism products and services. It is key that businesses will be specialized on certain products and services because it will boost the competitive advantage of the region. Therefore, developing niche markets in the tourism industry is important to diversify the future economic growth of local destinations, not only with one but several attractions.

Building a Brand Value

Tybout (2005) describes a brand as a group of associations to a name, concept, or symbol related to a product or service. Leaders in the tourism industry oversee building relationships with organizations, companies that help promoting the tourist products and service to boost the brand value and the positioning of the destinations. Boosting the branding strategies will increase recognition of the tourist destination.

Developing new tourists' destinations

Travel agents and operators can organize tours' packages to meet the needs, demands, and interests of international tourists. These initiatives will contribute to develop new travel attractions in local communities, creating value added for the products and services will increase the benefits of the services, solve the problem of overcrowded tourists' destinations, and improve the socio-economic, and cultural development of the region.

As mentioned by Delgado (2017) the government, companies and non-for-profit organizations can add value to the branding and positioning of the new destination by specializing on niche tourists' experiences.

In the development of tourists destinations "Dredge (1999) identified three characteristics: (i) that tourists generating markets and destination regions are separated geographical entities; (ii) that the complex and multi-scale nature of destinations means that their conceptualization must be a flexible hierarchical structure adapted to suit different sales, locations and market characteristics; and (iii) that destinations can be single locations or 'chained' in that they can be a set of geographically separate locations linked through travel patterns or touring routes" (Wang, 2011).

Destination management and marketing must be developed taking into consideration the values and needs of domestic and international tourists. Therefore, businesses in the tourism industry play a protagonist role in finding out the behavior of travelers to their businesses and destinations. Governmental organizations, companies and non-for-profit organizations must join efforts to promote the marketing of the destination because businesses are not the only responsible to creating value to the tourists' experiences. International tourists can share their experiences with family members and friends to persuade them to visit local communities in Japan and travelers' feedback will contribute to organizational improvement, destination development and innovation to continue growth as sustainable develop destinations (Delgado, 2017).

Carrying capacity (CC) is defined by the number of people that can visit a destination without compromising the natural, cultural, and social sustainability of the resources for future generations. Carrying capacity contributes to the environmental management and preservation of the tourist destination also the well-being of the communities depending of the economic development of these resources. Determining the number of people entering national parks, art galleries and museums will contribute to make decision on the number of people that will be rotated in a specific place in a given time (Chougule, 2011).

Japanese Tourists Destinations

Japanese tourists' destinations in local communities have a lot to offer in terms of leisure and travel activities, companies and government organizations need to continue to attract international tourists to its cultural and ecological attractions. "Local communities have the opportunity to brand, market and advertise the local tourism attractions among these tourist attractions are hot springs, temples and shrines, ecotourism or nature travel, cultural tourism, national parks, staying at Japanese hotels: *Ryokan* and animation in Japan" (Delgado, 2016).

The number of international tourists continue to increase, "According to Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), the estimated number of international travelers to Japan in December 2018 was about 2.6 million (+4.4% from the previous year, increased by 110 thousand), recording the highest figure so far. The total number of 2018 reached to 31 million (+8.7% from the previous year)" (JNTO, 2018).

Hot springs

Japan has many hot springs all over the country and local communities like Beppu in Oita Prefecture and Atami in Kanagawa Prefecture have organized themselves to attract international and domestic tourist to their infrastructure. Other prefectures like Nagano, Hiroshima, Yamanashi and Gunman are not far behind and continue to attract many tourists (Delgado, 2016).

Temple and Shrines

"Japan has a wealth of religious architecture - Kyoto alone is estimated to have well over 2,000 temples and shrines. But it is not just in the large cities where the visitor will find Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines - nearly every village in Japan will have a local shrine or temple. Many temples and shrines in Japan are set in well-tended garden spaces and are often connected with local festivals and other events." (JV, 2019).

Meanwhile, the city of Kyoto is facing problems of over-tourism and it is presently looking for alternatives to better manage the number of tourists visiting the city and distribute the number of international tourists to different cultural sides within the city.

Ecotourism or nature tourism

Japan has rich natural resources like mountains, rivers, and oceans that tourists can enjoy all year around. In the summer travelers can enjoy hiking and, in the winter, they can go skiing and snowboarding. (Delgado, 2016).

"Ecotourism aims to activate local economies by providing tourists with opportunities to experience local attractions accompanied by competent interpreters while preserving local resources such as the natural environment, culture and historical heritages sites. The concept of ecotourism is based on conservation and preservation of unique local resources. The keywords are environmental conservation, originality of the locals, and excitement." (JES, 2017)

Cultural tourism

There is also a huge potential to develop cultural heritage tours and visits. Japan has fifteen world cultural heritage sites which represents a lot of opportunities to market cultural tourism in Japan and invite domestic and international tourists to discover the

beauty and the essence of these world heritage sites and many other cultural attractions that Japan has to offer (Delgado, 2016).

Niche markets

There are opportunities to increase the demand of inbound tourism in Japan by promoting local communities' tourist services to specific niche markets. For example, the elderly population whom represent an important market visiting Japan and has the income and time to explore diverse local destinations. "When the Visit Japan Campaign started in 2003 in order to increase the number of foreign visitors to Japan, promotion projects overseas focused on the five prioritized markets. In 2011, they cover 15 prioritized markets. By carrying out promotions targeted at markets where the number of travelers to Japan is large at present and markets where the number of travelers to Japan is expected to grow in the future" (JG, 2012).

Authentic visit

Tochigi and many other prefectures have started a program to welcome foreigners at Japanese residents' houses at local communities. Visitors have the opportunity of experiencing Japanese local cultural, traditions, life style, cultural aspect of the region and enjoy delicious Japanese homemade food (JT, 2019).

Methodology

The methodology for this manuscript was based on qualitative research. A qualitative-survey was conducted to collect the data of this research project (Silverman, 2011).

This research included a literature review and exploratory research about intercultural communication, destination management and marketing and tourism. The participants in this research were international tourists, males and females between the ages of 20 and 59 years old. They were international tourists from Asia, North America, and European countries.

The hypothesis stated that international travelers to Japan are having English communications challenges, cultural misunderstanding and issues with Japanese staff and management at tourism businesses like: hotels, hostels, and restaurants due to the lack of English and Intercultural Communication understanding in the organizations visited by the international tourists

The theoretical framework in this study is based on intercultural communication, destination management and marketing of tourism. Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov (2010), explained the importance of understanding intercultural communication among diverse groups to create synergies across cultures and build harmonious relationships. According to Kotler, Bowen, and Makens (2014) discuss the importance of developing growth strategies as an essential aspect of the corporate culture and making profitable growth an objective of the company is key for continue success. Marketing the benefits of the travel experience will maximize the positioning and branding of the experience because the products and services have value-added and meet the demand of local and international customers.

The Survey

The survey was conducted in the Hakone area, Kanagawa Prefecture during the Spring, Summer and Fall of 2017. The questionnaire given to international tourists had the purpose of understanding their critical thinking and experiences of English and intercultural communication interactions with Japanese people in the service industry. International tourists were approached in hotels, hostels, restaurants and train stations. They were asked to provide information regarding their experience traveling in Japan consisted of the following questions:

1. Where do you travel?
2. Did you have opportunity to communicate with Japanese people at hotels and restaurants?
3. Did you have any communication problems and/or misunderstandings with Japanese people? How did you solve the communication problem?
4. Regarding communication, what measures and/or improvements can be adopted to make your visit to Japan more pleasant?
5. Where are you from?

Research and Discussions

The major challenge expressed by the international tourists during their travel experience in Japan was the lack of English communication skills of the Japanese staff at hotels, hostels, and restaurants.

Fifty-six of the international tourists interviewed mentioned the need to have more English information about tourist destinations where the tourists will find smooth transitions and reach destinations. The international tourists interviewed expressed the lack of promotion available of new tourists' destinations in Japan. They mentioned getting lost in the train stations and platforms because of the lack of English and the challenges and opportunities to improve tourism in the local communities if more information in English is available:

Ten percent of the international tourists mentioned the challenges of ordering food because the lack of English menus.

Five percent of the international tourists showed concerns about not being able to communicate in Japanese and fear of traveling to local areas and getting lost because of the language barrier.

Two percent of the international tourists expressed their challenges and complexity of finding information regarding bullet trains schedules and buying tickets. Japan rail companies can provide better information online regarding the booking of bullet train seats for traveling in the country.

Two percent of the international tourists expressed their experience as a back in time journey where they were able to experience the history of the country, nature and harmony of Japan.

Two percent of the international tourists showed concerned about the usage of public WIFI and rental of pocket WIFI before arriving at the airport in Japan.

Two percent of the international tourists expressed the lack of vegan food in restaurants.

Global skills, Creativity, Staff training and development on language and culture

Japanese managers and service staff should receive training to understand peculiarities of global citizens. They should explore creative and innovative ideas to implement and accelerate business growth and find new ways of doing things instead of what Japanese service are used to doing.

Businesses need to be able to have English culture and language understanding and knowledge to be able to serve international markets. Having a diverse work force will contribute to innovate the organization operations locally and internationally. Having employees with diverse cultural backgrounds will contribute to facilitate the promotion of the business to international markets. Businesses owners will need to learn how to market their products and services to international markets and maintain business sensibility of the cultural differences of international markets and find out new ways to reach their international customers by either email, phone calls, and social media.

Japanese executives, managers and staff should be able to improve their English communication skills to satisfy the needs of the international tourists. They should also be able to learn intercultural communications competence skills, for example:

Watching international news

Reading international news will help to build understanding of the economic, political and social environment of countries around the world. Tourism service staff should be informed about the international economy and how it affects international businesses.

Making foreign friends will be a competitive advantage for employees in the service industry because it will contribute to expand their networks and international understanding.

Understanding the international mission of the tourism organization where the employees work, will help boost understanding of the partnerships, perspectives, mission and vision of the organization.

International travel for either business or pleasure will contribute to communicate with foreign people and gain international perspectives, opinions and knowledge of cultural differences.

Hiring international staff will improve the competitive advantages of companies that would like to globalize its local operations because they have the expertise and know-how of dealing with international travelers, can speak several languages and understand intercultural communication.

Flexibility, Open-mindedness and Willingness to understand international cultures

Japanese managers and staff can learn about the importance of flexibility when dealing with international tourists in businesses and intercultural communication by better understanding the needs of the international tourists and provide services that meet the needs of the visitors. Employees in the service industry must think about costumers first and meet the end needs of the international travelers. Japanese organizational culture needs to adapt to international standards to accommodate the needs and wants of international tourists.

Employees in the tourism industry can become more open-minded by understanding and adapting to the needs of the foreign tourists and meet their expectations. For example, if some international travelers in Japan would like to have extra pillows in their rooms,

the staff at the front desk of the hotel should not be asking questions of the reason of the request, and the pillows should be provided as soon as possible.

Willingness to understand foreign travelers' needs. For example, Japanese employees in the travel industry may prioritized customer needs before the rules of the organization. It is not about the rules, it is about the customers' needs and willingness to provide customer satisfaction. The Japanese staff at hotels and restaurants need to understand the needs of the customer to improve the quality of the services. However, cross-cultural communication and understanding is lacking, therefore, employees in the tourism industry may feel like having a disadvantage in terms of international communication and cultural understanding because international tourists mentioned their concerns about not being able to communicate in Japanese and uncertain avoidance of traveling in Japan because of fear of been lost in a foreign country.

Acknowledging Cultural differences

The Japanese rules can be a little bit rigid to understand for international tourists. For example, if tourists would like to have extra towels in the room, (additional towels are provided in Western hotels without cost) Japanese hotels may charge an additional fee to lend more towels and this extra charge may be a surprise for the international tourists at the time of checking out of the rooms. Therefore, the cost of providing extra amenities should be included in the total cost of the room. Japanese service industry needs to become more "foreign" friendly in terms of providing a Japanese service nationally and locally with an international feel that matches the foreign service expectations.

Intercultural communication is essential to improve the skills of the service staff independently of the nationality of origin. The service industry employees should be exposed to intercultural communication competences that meet international standards to serve travelers visiting Japan.

Marketing tourism niche markets

During the research process, it was observed the need of creating and developing more tourists' destinations or niche marketing tourism for specialized tourist destinations because international tourists were traveling to the same destinations, none of the tourists interviewed mentioned the Shonan area and places like Hadano, Odawara, Fujisawa, Yokohama, Yokosuka and Miura peninsula. 2% percent of the international tourists mentioned Kamakura. Therefore, the niche of community-based tourism can be developed and attract international tourists that would like to have a close encounter with Japanese local communities. For example, creating home-stay programs for international tourists can be a growing segment of tourism in the Japanese market because international tourism curiosity to discover Japanese local culture.

Internationalization

It is important to take into consideration the economic environment and the global competition that local organizations face and are strongly looking to internationalize their operations in the local communities. Innovation of services play an important role to promote an image of internationalization of small hotels, hostels and restaurants. Small businesses looking to internationalize must take into consideration several aspects in our global economy environment and how it impacts society. International competition has a direct effect on local competition to attract international travelers, business security for future operations become a priority to business owners.

Contribution to the local communities

It represents an important aspect to promote the hotels and restaurants' services in terms of promoting its contribution to sustainable development and environmental efficiency in the local communities. Businesses can promote and market its services in terms of providing low impact to the environment and contributing to sustainable development by recycling materials to market its operations locally and internationally. Taking into consideration the quality of service, the infrastructure of the business and human capacity building are important aspects to continue growing as an organization that have ethics and corporate social responsibility.

Technology and communication should help companies to facilitate the business operations and logistics. It represents essential aspects for organizations to continue to growth and innovate in the market place. Computer networks should be able to share data and communications with each other; therefore, organizations will require to update its technology and communication systems to remain competitive in the market place.

Conclusion

Objective 1 stated: To describe the challenges of foreigners communicating with managers and staff working at hotel, hostels and restaurants. In conclusion, intercultural communication is essential to improve the quality of the service that Japanese staff provide to international tourists in the Japanese tourism market. International travelers to Japan expressed their concerns and communication challenges with Japanese staff and managers working at hotels, hostels, restaurants and tourists' venues because they were not able to communicate and expressed their opinions, comments and feedback.

There is a need for more English signs on the train stations, platforms, and buses terminals because several tourists' expressed concerns and frustration when getting lost in the platforms, train and buses terminals.

Japan is perceived as an expensive place to travel. Therefore, it should be marketed and position with an image of a country were travelers of all budget ranges are going to be able to travel.

More information about new destinations and existing destinations should be provided because many of the international tourists interviewed mentioned the lack of brochures in English.

Objective 2 mentioned: To analyze how the managers and staff need to improve the tourists' services to satisfy the needs of international tourists. In conclusion, marketing and branding represent an important aspect for hotels, hostels and restaurants' services in terms of promoting its contribution to sustainable development and environmental efficiency in the local communities. Businesses can promote and market its services in terms of generating low impact to the environment, contributing to sustainable development, and well-being and economic development of the local communities. Taking into consideration the quality of service, the infrastructure of the business and human capacity building are important aspects to continue growing businesses that have ethics and corporate social responsibility in the tourism industry.

Objective 3 was defined: To find out the need of English and Intercultural Communication training for managers and staff in the tourist businesses. In conclusion, Japanese managers and staff should be able to improve their English communication

skills to satisfy the needs of international tourists. They should also be able to learn intercultural communications competence skills to become global citizens in their local communities and improve the levels of communication with guests. Traveling in Japan should be an easy transition were travelers can easily communicate with Japanese locals, at hotels, hostels, and restaurants and have access to English information about local destinations.

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