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| **I would like to thank both of the reviewers for their extremely valuable and constructive feedback. I truly believe that your comments significantly improved the quality and the contribution of this paper. Thank you!!** | |
| **REVIEWER A COMMENTS** | **RESPONSE TO REVIEWER’S COMMENT** |
| The abstract leaves the reader wondering why the study focused specifically on SANParks.  In addition, one of the explicit objectives of the study was to “ascertain the needs of customers”, but no mention is made of the needs of SANPark visitors.  Lastly, is the conclusion that **tourism suppliers** should become more customer-focused justified given the narrow focus of the study?  INTRODUCTION   * It might help the reader (not familiar with the meaning of distribution within a tourism context) better follow the arguments if the concept is briefly explained in the Introduction (without repeating what is said in the Literature review sections). Perhaps a diagram of some sorts might be useful in the literature review section. * In addition, the reviews and arguments regarding the need for a customer focus can be integrated and condensed as the message becomes somewhat repetitive. * An explanation of the focus on SANParks can be added, supported by relevant literature. Why SANPArks? What makes their situation unique enough to warrant research?   CHANNEL PERFORMANCE   * Table 1 provides a lot of information, but how much of this is directly relevant to the study at hand? * Some of the paragraphs are vague, e.g. paragraph preceding the table: “… **a number of service dimensions are important** to customers, regardless of the distribution channel that they use. There are however **specific dimensions applicable to specific channels** ….. The service dimensions that are of importance to customers when measuring the performance of **various distribution channels** are summarised in the table below.” These sentences add little value. Which service dimensions apply to which channels and why? * Is there evidence of recent research findings of studies done elsewhere in the world and in South Africa that can provide more clarity, within the context of the current study? * Which variables are of particular relevance to SANPArks and why? What is the relationship between the needs of customers and the importance of these dimensions? * First sentence, second last paragraph prior to METHODOLOGY. “It is necessary to note that some variables influence the way in which **performance is measured**” – It is not clear how this statement relate to the subsequent report on the difference based on gender as the latter do not report on any measurement issues. Furthermore how does “frequency of travel influences the **measurement** of performance….” * The results of the study focus on satisfaction. The literature review lacks a discussion of satisfaction per se and the different streams of thought on how satisfaction should be measured.   Originality can be improved if a very clear case can be made for the reason of the focus on SANParks and if the contribution of the study, and the conceptual and managerial implications are more clearly spelt out.  In its current form it somehow creates the perception that it was decided up-front that customers still prefer to interact with humans in the distribution channel. The empirical study then served as some sort of confirmation, instead of posing the issue as a question and using the empirical study to find the answer. It is largely a matter of rewriting and rephrasing sections of the article.  While literature on the topic has been provided, the article lacks a rigorous review of earlier studies relevant to similar types of tourism businesses elsewhere in the world, South African tourists in other contexts, etc. The inclusion of more recent publications will also enhance the literature review.  The following questions are unanswered:   * How did the researcher(s) go about selecting “past visitors who made use of the distribution channels”? What screening questions, if any, have been used? * What methods and instruments were used to determine the **distribution needs** of SANParks visitors? This has been stated as one of the objectives of the research, but has not been addressed. * Much more detail about the measuring instrument is required. The researcher(s) states: “In this paper, the results of only five channels of distribution.... will be discussed”. Were there more channels? What motivated the choice of the five channels used? * What was the reason for choosing “gender, choice of preferred channel, level of skill of using internet and frequency of use” as variables? While two of these have been briefly mentioned in the literature review, the others have not been discussed. Are there other relevant variables such as previous experience, situational factors, country of residence, etc, that might play a role? Why were these not selected? International visitors might have little choice than using on-line channels. * What is the source of the items used to measure satisfaction? Why were these specific items selected, while many more have been listed in Table 1? The relevance of some items is also not clear, e.g. how does “Price of accommodation charged” and “Availability of accommodation” play a role in deciding which channel option to use? * Reasons were presented for respondents’ not using the website for booking but it is not clear where these fit into the objective and aim of the study.   Are the conclusions in the last paragraph of this section justified based on the results of the study at hand? Where does customer relationships fit into the study?  A section has to be added that clearly shows the contribution of the research, its theoretical and managerial implications (the final paragraph of the article does not achieve this), acknowledges the limitations of the study and suggests avenues for further research. | A sentence was added to the abstract to justify why National Parks, and specifically SANParks was the focus of the study.  The wording of the abstract was changed. Although the study did not explicitly ascertain the needs – in general – of SANParks visitors, the distribution requirements of visitors were tested in terms of their level of satisfaction with the various channels. This was stated as such in the abstract.  The conclusions were drawn more circumspectly.  The concept was briefly explained in the first paragraph of the introduction, and a diagram included in the literature review.  Reviews and arguments were integrated and condensed.  Explanation of the focus on National Parks and specifically SANParks was included in the final paragraph of the introduction.  Table 1 was simplified, and a lot of unnecessary detail removed. Three columns were also added to indicate the item in the questionnaire that corresponds with the requirement in the table.  The wording and terms used in this section and paragraph were confusing, and the author simplified it extensively.  The service dimensions (now called customer requirements) that apply to each channel were highlighted.  Unfortunately no recent (2005+) research could be found in SA, in the context of the current study. The only paper conducted on e-commerce adoption of travel and tourism organisations in SA, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Uganda, was conducted in 2008, and focused on the supply side, and not from a consumer’s perspective. This lack of research, in my opinion, increases the contribution of this paper.  These aspects were clarified in text.  Sentence was unclear. Clarity provided in text.  The focus of the study is on measuring the performance of SANParks distribution channels in terms of the extent to which they satisfy the customers’ distribution requirements. As such the focus of the literature review was on the performance of distribution channels, as well as the customers’ distribution requirements and not on satisfaction per se.  A case was built for the selection of SANParks in the introduction, while the contribution and implications were made clear in the conclusion section.  The issue was posed as a question in the introduction and the empirical study used to find an answer to the question. Sections of the article were rewritten and rephrased.  Where possible this has been adhered to. Unfortunately research into the area of distribution in the context of National Parks, South African tourists and SANParks is non-existent, as highlighted in the paper. Also, when looking at traditional distribution channels, as this paper does, there are no recent publications. Where possible, more recent publications were included in the discussion on electronic channels.  No screening question was used. One of the first questions did ask respondents about their experience with the SANParks website, assuming that if the link to the questionnaire was distributed on the website, they would have used it before to access and complete the questionnaire. Also, the paper questionnaires were distributed at the SANParks reservation office, and satellite offices, making a screening question unnecessary.  I agree that this was confusing, the objective has now been restated to examine how the various distribution channels used by SANParks perform toward satisfying customers’ distribution channel requirements.  Again, thank you for the valuable suggestion, as this was unclear. Yes, the questionnaire also included questions on the mobi website, as well as what customers’ opinions are regarding mobile apps – should SANParks decide to introduce this in the future. The results from the mobile channels were published in a conference paper, and were thus left out of this paper. But for the purpose of this paper, and to avoid confusion, this sentence was changed in text.  The findings only reported on those variables that showed a significant relationship. For the author, previous experience also related to experience in using the internet – and that was measured with the level of skill in using the internet. In addition, experience also relates to the number of times that the respondent has visited the Parks, and thus made bookings before, which was also tested, but showed no significant relationship. Country of resident was also used as a variable, but unfortunately the survey did not attract enough attention from international visitors, and so no significant relationship was evident. Other variables were also used for example, race, age, marital status and income.  The items used to measure satisfaction were taken from the literature and should correspond with table 1. Obviously the wording would not be exactly the same. Table 1 was expanded to include a column showing the item in the questionnaire that was used to measure the user requirement as stated in the literature and given in table 1.  Price of accommodation charged corresponds with the user requirement “perceived price” as given in table 1. As is widely accepted in the accommodation sector, different prices are charged by different channels. With SANParks, this is not the case, and the same rate is consistently charged across all the channels. The perception in the market would possibly still be that some channels would offer cheaper prices, and that is what was tested with this item. Availability of accommodation corresponds with “timely availability of information” and tested respondents’ level of satisfaction that they experienced in booking their preferred accommodation whenever they wanted and finding availability.  The focus of the study was to examine customers’ use of the various channels of SANParks. With use, we refer to which channels they use, why they use it, why they don’t use certain channels etc. That is why the reasons for not booking on the website were included. The results section was broken down into sections to clarify where results fit into the objectives.  Last paragraph was rewritten and the reference to customer relationships removed.  Section was added to elude to the contribution of the research, managerial implications, limitations and possible future research. |
| **REVIEWER B COMMENTS** | **RESPONSE TO REVIEWER’S COMMENT** |
| This is potentially a very interesting study that addresses a specific tourism provider in South Africa. The importance of distribution in this context is argued, specifically as it relates to this provider. The theoretical foundation is adequate for the purpose of the study, though it is not an easy story to follow due to the layout of the section.  The methodology is acceptable to attain the goals of the study. The findings are also presented in an acceptable way. The discussion and analysis are quite weak and the conclusions that have been suggested are debatable. No limitations of the study have been presented.  Some technical errors are in the paper, and as mentioned earlier, the literature review is not as clear and coherent story as it could be.  I have also made comments in the document highlighting specific aspects.  Is “PROVING” the correct word to use? To what extent is this relevant to SANParks (v/s to other organisations)? On what basis is this conclusion drawn? Can this conclusion be conclusively drawn from a study of SANParks? To what extent is this conclusion valid?  This section “**TOURISM DISTRIBUTION: A CUSTOMER-FOCUSED APPROACH”**  needs attention as it does not flow clearly and goes on far too long as 1 section.  Rather refer to a section?  The heading has separated from the table. How is this used later in the study?  But it is actually on the next page?  Again this got separated from the table?  These are inconsistently written – and both can’t be correct!  You could use the heading “conclusion” rather?  I am not convinced that you can draw this conclusion about all tourism suppliers – you only investigated one that uses a specific distribution strategy.  I am missing a discussion on the limitations of the research. | The layout of the section, and the paper in general was improved.  The conclusions were drawn more circumspectly, and limitations were added.  The literature review was restructured to form a more coherent story.  Valuable comments, thank you.  The focus of the abstract was changed to focus more on SANParks and to be more circumspect in the conclusions drawn.  Attention was given to this section. The section was broken down into sub-sections.  Noted, and changed. For me, section implies the introduction. I literally mean the paragraph before this paragraph…  Rectified. An explanation provided on how this table was used later in the study.  Reference to “below” was removed.  Rectified  Rectified, thank you! ANOVAs  Heading: conclusion was used  Rewritten  Section added |