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Preference for Travel Agencies over Independent Travelling in Lagos state, Nigeria

Abstract

Attractive packages and quality services provided by a travel agency may not only determine travelers' preference but also encourage satisfaction and improves the reuse of travel agency. This study thus was aimed at determining the factors motivating preference, travelers' awareness and perception regarding travelling independently and using travel agent services. A total number of 300 samples of questionnaire were administered purposively to travelers. The data obtained was analysed through the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 21) while result presentation was done descriptively and inferentially. Result indicated that equal number of male and female respondents participated in the study. Also, this study revealed most respondents were aware of travel agencies and they chose travel agencies because it saves their time. The respondents claimed they are satisfied with travel agency services and are willing to use their services. However, they opined that Increased rate of fraudsters on the internet is a major challenge in using travel agency services. Furthermore, there is a significant relationship in the age, occupation, gender, marital status, religion, income of the respondents and their willingness to use travel agencies ($P < 0.05$). Thus, travel agencies should improve their services and awareness among travellers to ease the burden of having to travel independently.

Keywords: Traveller, Awareness, Tourism, Motivation, Satisfaction

JEL Classifications: Z32

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ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER

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1. Introduction

Travel agents have garnered a lot of attention from consumers as consumers who travel source for relevant pieces of information from consulting personnel and they also purchase tourism service or products mainly by utilizing travel agents or firms (Sabiote-Ortiz et al., 2016). Furthermore, travel agencies get their profits from consumers by helping the consumers plan and manage their travel and this will take burden of travel off the consumers (Aguiar-Quintana et al., 2016).

Travel agencies have been striving to survive in the market today as competition in the travel market continues to be on the rise (CNN, 2013). In recent years, travelers are arranging their travel on their own and not by travel agencies (Aceron et al., 2018). Therefore, understanding consumer choice is critical for effective tourism marketing. Majority of behavioural researches have examined travelers' choices as a uniform process, failing to consider the potential for travelers' preferences for certain characteristics, such as the choice of travel agents, to vary at different points during their time in making decisions (Li et al., 2017).

There are a lot of travel agencies, and this has stemmed up competition among them. These travel agencies offer high degree of similarities in their services, and this poses a challenge as consumer expectations keep rising. Consequentially, travelers' preferences and methods in selecting their tour packages has become a critical aspect of consideration for travel agencies in designing and promoting their tour packages so as to meet their consumers' demand (Pai & Ananthakumar, 2017). Zhou (2016) in his study showed detailed and extensive description of travel agencies and tour operations in his bid to shed more light on the operations of this important innovation in the travel industry. Also, Kanagaraj and Bindu (2013) investigated the motivation for travelers in terms of the features or services that attract them to a destination and the attributes that push them from their places to visit a destination while Hyde (2008) reported the factors that motivate independent traveler's decision-making.

Furthermore, there have been various studies in time past on tourists and tourism such as; Dynamic destinations: evolutionary change in tourism areas (Brouder et al., 2016), Is competition among tourism organizations influenced by varying factors? (Camison & Fores, 2015), Relationship between backpacking and tourism development Highland Scotland (Hindle et al., 2015). There have also been many studies on travel agencies and traveling in time past such as; Ways to improve travel agencies' competition and survival (Aguiar-Quintana et al., 2016), The decline of the traditional travel agent model (Castillo-Manzano & López-Valpuesta, 2010), The travel agent is dying, but it's not yet dead (CNN, 2013), Travel agents vs. internet: what influences travel consumer choices? (Cheyne et. al., 2006). All these studies have proven the importance and impact of travel agency in the tourism sector. In spite of all these studies, there has been a dearth of information on the preference for travel agencies over independent travelling in Lagos State, Nigeria and this research's contribution to knowledge is targeted at filling this gap. This study therefore is aimed at assessing the travelers' awareness of travel agencies, their motivation for travel agencies as well as their satisfaction with travel agencies and independent traveling, while considering the challenges involved in utilizing travel agencies and independent travel.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Tourism and Travel Agency*

The tourism industry is an industry that supports local regions' development both economically and socially (Brouder et al., 2016). Many tourists' destinations are losing value due to increase in competition among destinations and this has placed demand on destinations to be flexible in their operations in order to continuously make the destinations relevant (Mussalam and Tajeddini, 2016). The destinations that are well-managed will continue to attract tourists all over the world (Camison & Fores, 2015).

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In a bid to make the tourism industry more flexible and up to date, travel agencies' operations in the industry have been brought into limelight due to their impact in making choice of travel easy for clients as travel agencies have served as intermediaries between tourism service providers and consumers (Zhou, 2016). Recently, travel agents have continued to play a crucial role globally, facilitating easier and more efficient travel planning. Their understanding of travel services is of immense value and this attribute makes them accurate information gatekeepers for travelers during decision-making for destinations (Adeyefa et al., 2018). By packaging and showcasing a wide array of tourist attractions and services to travelers, their experience greatly enhances the growth and promotion of tourism. Travel agencies manage a number of tasks, such as purchasing tickets, obtaining travel documents (such as passports and visas), arranging lodging among other roles (Oluyemi & Olasoju, 2023).

Travel agencies play the intermediary part in the dynamic tourism sector. They serve as connections between several travel service providers and travelers. Also, these agencies serve in advisory capacities, acting in the best interests of travelers, with a core value to provide satisfaction for travelers (Oluyemi & Olasoju, 2023). The preference of choosing a travel agent over another is as a result of varying levels of satisfaction provided by travel agencies. To mitigate the negative impact of poor services, travel agencies should infuse management practices that are sustainable into their business operations (Hazarhun et al., 2022). Questions have risen over the operation and major part of travel agencies in sustainability aspect of tourism (Kıvılcım, 2020; Russell et al., 2008). Therefore, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of travel agencies is crucial improving the competitive market.

Independent travelling can be complicated and the role of agencies, their activities and services can contribute greatly to the satisfaction of tourists (Đorđević & Marinković, 2017). Literatures have identified various reasons why people prefer travel agencies.

- Convenience: Utilizing a travel agent aids in making the entire travel arrangements including booking tickets, accommodations, transportation or car hire, reservation, information and organizing tours easy (Hassanli et al., 2013)
- Safety and Security: Safe and secure travelling is a major concern and having proper information about the destination issues like terrorism, climatic issues or any other political and health-related challenges makes the journey safer. Utilizing travel agents will enhance obtaining recent and accurate information about the travel destination and this adds up to ensuring a safe and secure travel experience (Zargayouna et al., 2005).
- Cost and Timesaving: Selecting the most effective travel agent opens up opportunity for special incentives which could help save lots of money.
- Value-added Services: Travel agencies provide a wide array of value-added services to their travelers in order to ensure their satisfaction (Heung and Zhu, 2005). Their accessibility to wide range of travel options and possibilities typically unknown to a consumer, proves their importance. Hiring an effective travel agency can ensure that you have a great vacation without having to think twice about getting a better seat on a flight, event tickets, lodging upgrades, more amenities, or any other activities (Đorđević & Marinković, 2017).

In a world of constant change, tourist services providers including travel agencies, need to systematically track the trends in travelers' expectations in order to establish efficient marketing strategies conforms to the current expectations of travelers (Walters, 2018). Operations of travel agencies as well as their behavior towards travelers, influences travelers' behaviors and preferences too (Xu & Yan, 2015). Therefore, based on different experiences of travelers, this study aims to show their preference for either travel agency or independent travelling.

2.2 Tourism and Independent Travelling

The trend in international tourism indicates a rising preference for traveling independently rather than buying a tour package (Chesshyre, 2002). Independent travelers are individuals

who take charge of organizing their own movement and lodging arrangements, rather than opting for prearranged packages or guided tours. It is important to note that the description of independent travel is dependent on the traveler's behavior, and not the purchasing channel through which their vacation was obtained. Independent travelers enjoy the flexibility to plan their itinerary and select destinations within a specific region (Hyde, 2003).

When traveling with an agency, travelers may encounter constraints on their choice of places to visit within a destination region after booking the vacation. In contrast, independent travelers are likely to have significant freedom in choosing the places they wish to visit, even after finalizing their vacation plans (Hyde, 2008). Independent travelers are enthusiastic about exploring new things (Hindle et al., 2015). They utilize opportunities to experience various locations, attractions, and activities that they may not have consciously researched or made prior plans for. Their decisions are often impulsively made in response to their emotions and curiosity (Madhuhansi & Chandralal, 2023). In comparison to travelers on a tour package, independent travelers usually make more on-site decisions and are equipped with liberty to choose their experience which includes the travel itinerary, places, and lodgings (Adongo et al., 2017).

2.3 Tourism in Lagos

According to The Lagos Tourism Master plan (2021), the foundation and pillar of Lagos State's growth strategy is tourism with a particular emphasis on T.H.E.M.E.S. (Traffic Management and Transportation; Health and Environment, Education and Technology; Making Lagos a 21st Century State; Entertainment and Tourism; Security and Governance). Several efforts have been directed towards the development of tourism activities in Lagos State but as high and admirable those efforts were, the unavailability of a blueprint that guides the efforts over the years has inadvertently created challenges for implementing the policies for the state government, including the stakeholders with the tourism sector. The vision of Lagos state as regards tourism is to be a top urban tourism destination in Africa, offering her rich culture and heritage, art, entertainment, location as a coastal city and her position as the center for economic activity in Nigeria. The state also engages her local communities in order to harness her tourism potentials.

There are various tourism destinations in Lagos state, such as the coastal region which was identified as attractive riverine areas. Lagos has diverse array of tourism destinations in many regions of the state. Some of these destinations are Bar Beach, Lekki Beach, Alpha Beach, Eleko beach, Akodo Beach and Lighthouse beach among others (Ajani et al., 2016). Solanke and Dawodu (2023), mentioned some attraction centers in Lagos state which include the National Museum, Lekki Conservation Centre, Freedom Park and The Palms Mall. There are several other tourist attraction sites in Lagos state such as the Tafawa Balewa Square, Portugues and Brazilian Style Building, the National Theatre. In Lagos state, tourism is a significant source of foreign currency, it creates employment opportunities for other industries that are attached to it. Tourism has been identified as a fast-developing sector in the state and it is the leading earner of foreign exchange for the state. Tourism's association with other sectors such as agriculture, wildlife, entertainment, handicrafts, further enhances the generation of employment and wealth in the state (Obonna et al., 2018).

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Area

The study was carried out in Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos State, Nigeria. Murtala Muhammed International Airport (MMIA) (IATA: LOS, ICAO: DNMM) is an international airport that is situated in Ikeja, Lagos State and is the key airport serving the all the regions of the state. It is located just north of the 6° 34' 22.79" N latitude and slightly west of the 3° 19' 9.60" E longitude.

3.2 Data Collection and Research Sampling

Primary data was collected through a well-structured questionnaire purposively directed at 300 respondents who were either arriving or departing from the country. An extensive review of literatures was initially carried out to gather information variables used for travelers' motivations, preference, awareness, satisfaction, challenges in using travel agent and traveling independently. The information obtained was used in the questionnaire construct to obtain data on travelers' demographic profile, travel characteristics, the traveler's awareness of travel agency, the motivation on travel agency and independent travelers, traveler's satisfaction with travel agency services and independent travel, the challenges with using travel agency and independent travel.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data was retrieved and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 21) and results were presented descriptively using tables and charts. Results were also presented inferentially using Chi-square and Pearson correlation.

4. Results

4.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are shown in table 1. There is an equal distribution of gender at the site (50% male and 50% female). Highest percentage of the respondents was within the age range of 31-40 years (51.3%). Also, highest percentage of the respondents were married (71.7%) and with tertiary education (92.7%). Majority of the respondents were self-employed (33.3%), Christians (84%) and were earning above 150,000 (41.7%).

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variables	Frequency (N=300)	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	150	50.0
Female	150	50.0
Age		
Less than 20 years	19	6.3
21-30 years	59	19.7
31-40 years	154	51.3
41-50 years	39	13.0
Above 50 years	29	9.7
Marital status		
Single	78	26.0
Married	215	71.7
Widowed	7	2.3
Education		
Primary	0	0.0
Secondary	22	7.3
Tertiary	278	92.7
Occupation		
Civil servant	96	32.0
Self-employed	100	33.3
Professional	56	18.7
Student	9	3.0
Others	39	13.0
Religion		

Christianity	252	84.0
Islamic	48	16.0
Income		
Below 50,000	28	9.3
50,000- 100,000	66	22.0
101,000-150,000	81	27.0
Above 150,000	125	41.7

Source: Field survey, 2021

4.2 Travel Characteristics

As revealed in table 2, highest percentage of the respondents travel once in a year (56.3%) and they mostly travel internationally (70%). Also, majority of the respondents travel independently (50.3%) and they mostly travel with their families (60.7%).

Table 2: Travel characteristics of the respondents

Variables	Frequency (300)	Percentage (%)
Travel frequency		
Once in a year	169	56.3
Once in 6 months	87	29.0
Once in 3 months	44	14.7
Type of Travel		
International	210	70.0
Domestic	90	30.0
Mode of travel		
Through travel agency	149	49.7
Independently	151	50.3
Travel companion		
Alone	103	34.3
Family	182	60.7
Friends	1	0.3
Colleagues	14	4.7

Source: Field survey, 2021

4.3 Awareness of Travel agencies

As revealed in figure 1, majority of the respondents are aware of travel agencies (79%) and figure 2 shows that majority of the respondents are very aware of travel agencies (58%).

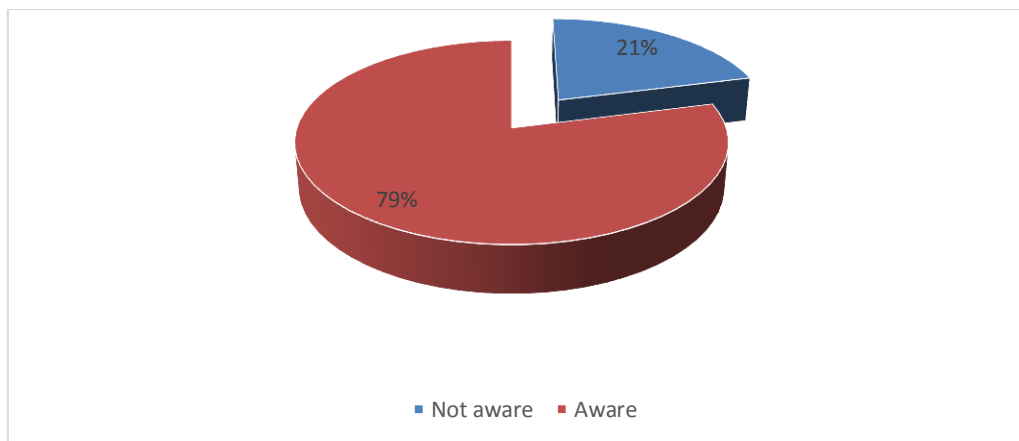


Figure 1: Awareness of travel agencies

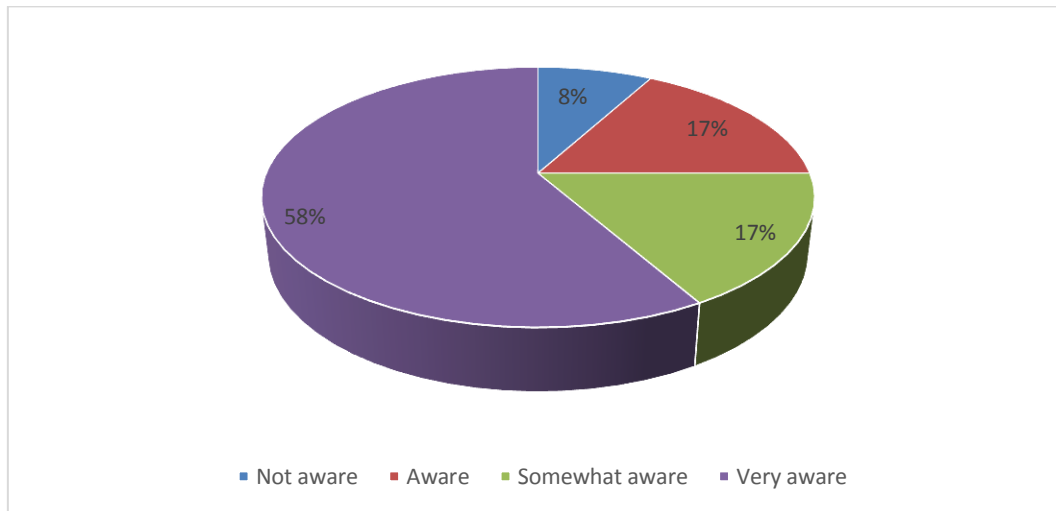


Figure 2: Level of awareness of travel agencies

4.4 Motivation on Travel Agencies and Independent Travelers

Table 3 reveals the motivation of the respondents in choosing whether to travel independently or use a travel agency. The statement “Using travel agency saves my time” had the highest mean (3.91) followed by “Using travel agency is more secured” with a mean value of 3.83. However, “Using travel agency is less expensive” has the lowest mean (2.80).

Table 3: Motivation on travel agencies and independent travelers

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Using travel agency is more secured	3.83	1.05
Using travel agency saves my time	3.91	0.99
Using travel agency is less expensive	2.80	1.10
Travelling agencies offer some special packages more than what I can offer myself	3.60	1.00
Travelling independently is more secured	3.47	0.99
Travelling independently saves my time	3.23	1.02
Travelling independently is less expensive	3.50	1.03
I can offer myself special packages that travel agencies cannot offer	3.24	0.93

Source: Field survey, 2021

4.5 Satisfaction with Travel Agencies and Independent Travelling

As revealed in table 4, the respondents are willing to use the services of travel agencies (Mean-3.90). The respondents are also satisfied with using travel agencies for their travelling (Mean- 3.88).

Table 4: Satisfaction with travel agencies and independent travelling

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
I am satisfied with using travel agencies for my travelling	3.88	1.00
I am satisfied when I organize travel myself	3.73	0.84
I can recommend the use of travel agencies to friends	3.83	0.89

I am willing to use the services of travel agencies	3.90	0.86
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Source: Field survey, 2021

4.6 Challenges with the use of travel agencies and independent travel

Table 5 shows the various challenges encountered by independent travelers and people who use travel agencies. The statement “Independent traveler is responsible for any error while travelling” had the highest mean (4.00) followed by “Increased rate of fraudsters on the internet” with a mean value of 3.84

Table 5: Challenges with the use of travel agencies and independent travel

Variables	MEAN	Standard Deviation
Travel agencies are more expensive than travelling independently	3.78	1.00
Increased rate of fraudsters on the internet	3.84	1.24
I do not have full control over what the travel agencies will offer me	3.56	1.13
Difficult terms and condition	3.47	0.95
Independent travel is time consuming	3.39	1.01
Independent travel is prone to mistake	3.40	1.05
Independent traveler is responsible for any error while travelling	4.00	0.71

Source: Field survey, 2021

4.7 Relationship between Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Willingness to Use Travel Agencies

Table 6 reveals that there is a significant relationship between willingness to use travel agencies and the respondents’ age (P<0.01), gender (P<0.01), occupation (P<0.01), marital status (P<0.01), religion (P<0.05) and income (P<0.01).

Table 6: Difference of socio-demographic characteristics in the respondents’ mode of travel

Variables	Chi-square value (χ^2)	Sig.	Decision
Age	71.750	0.000**	Significant
Gender	46.066	0.000**	Significant
Education	8.313	0.081	Not Significant
Occupation	61.160	0.000**	Significant
Marital status	141.365	0.000**	Significant
Religion	12.979	0.011*	Significant
Income	45.415	0.000**	Significant

*P<0.05, **P<0.01

4.8 Relationship between Use of Travel Agency and Satisfaction with Travel Agency

Table 7 shows that there is a significant relationship between the respondents’ use of travel agency and their satisfaction with the travel agencies (P<0.01).

Table 7: Relationship between use of travel agency and satisfaction with travel agency

Variables	r value	Sig.	Decision
Use*satisfaction	0.519	0.000**	Significant

*P<0.05, **P<0.01

5. Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

This study shows that both male and females travel at both percentages, in Lagos state. This result support the research carried out by Del Chiappa, (2013) that there is no significant difference in gender between travel-agency users and independent travellers. This result contradicts Singh et al. (2018) that males are the dominant travellers using either travel agency or travelling independent. Majority of the travellers were within the age range of 31-40 years. This finding is against the findings that there is no significant difference in the traveller's attitudes towards online purchase of travel products among different age groups, among travellers at Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi. In terms of age, older age groups have been shown to utilize the Internet mainly to search for information while preferring to make purchases face-to-face at travel agencies (Del Chiappa, 2013). Grønflaten (2009) noted that older adults preferred travel agents to the Internet when they sought travel information and were then inclined to purchase an organized tour program. The marital status of most of the travellers as married would suggest that married people create more time for travelling. Castillo and López-Valpuesta (2010) asserted that married couples traveling with their children have been shown to be more likely to use travel agencies, largely for safety issues.

The high level of literacy implies that a larger percentage of travellers understand the essence of travelling. This is in line with findings from Joseph (2013) and Adelfu et al. (2014) that most travellers are well educated with the majority having a tertiary level of education. It was observed that majority of the travellers had a monthly income of above N100,000. Cheyne et al. (2006) found that individuals with lower incomes made few online reservations. Observed that higher income group of travellers are likely to display more favourable attitude towards online purchase of travel products.

Most of the traveller travel once in a year which is line with Singh et al. (2018) who found out that majority of their respondent travel once a year. Majority of the travellers travel independently and usually with their families. This finding contradicts finding from Money and Crotts (2003) that People traveling with more travel companions prefer to use travel agencies than do people traveling alone, a finding that is especially relevant in the Asian market, where group travel dominates.

Majority of the travellers are aware of travel agencies, his finding is in line with Cheyne et al. (2006) that more people are aware of travel agency services than those provided on the internet.

The travelers were of the opinion that travel agency is more secured. This assertion supports findings observed by Castillo and López-Valpuesta (2010) that people traveling with children are more concerned about security during their travel. Consequently, they tend to purchase air tickets and travel products and services through travel agencies. Also, the travelers claimed they were motivated to use travel agencies because it saves their time. Travel agencies have been known to ease burden off travelers by helping them plan for their travel thereby easing their stress. Travelers agreed that they are willing to use the services of travel agencies. This finding supports Crnojevac et al. (2010) that travellers are willing to book through travel agencies.

A very high percentage of the travelers are of the opinion that the major challenges encountered is having to be responsible for any error while travelling independently and also increased rate of fraudster on the internet as supported by Sharma et al. (2020) that perceived risks and technological issues are challenges for adoption of digital channels in travel industry. Furthermore, this study revealed significant relationship between age, gender, occupation, marital status, religion, income of respondents with their willingness to use travel agencies and is in line with Castillo and López-Valpuesta (2010) who showed that demographic information such as age, gender, marital status, income, and employment are key determinants of the differences delineating travel-agency users.

5.2 Implication

The conclusion of this study is that travelers are very aware of travel agencies and are willing to use them. The findings demonstrate that the main motivation for using travel agencies over independent traveling is as a result of the time-saving quality that travel agency provides and also travel agency is more secured when compared to independent travel as a mode of travelling. The overall satisfaction of travel agent services is very high which illustrates that travelers are always willing to use travel agent services as a mode of travel. According to the study, the results revealed that independent travel faces more challenges when used by travelers. One of the major challenges the independent traveler faces is the sole responsibility of any mistake while travelling and an increased rate of fraudsters on internet, this illustrates that with the use of Travel agency, travel is very safe and secured. This study thus projects the travel agency as a crucial aspect of the tourism industry in connecting destinations to travelers, making their travel experience seamless and promoting a more satisfying travel experience.

5.3 Limitations

This study had few limitations. The first limitation is that the study focused only on travelers who were traveling outside the country and those arriving in the country. The airport is for both international and domestic travelers, but this research focused on international travelers thereby restricting the generalizability of the findings to local travelers. Future research could consider local travelers' preference for travel agencies over travelling independently to have a balanced insight from both international and local travelers.

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