

Optimizing Service Quality Through A People, Process, And Technology Approach For Freelance Tour Guides (Case Study Of Timotravel)

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Abstract.

This study examines the factors that contribute to inconsistent service quality among freelance tour guides at Timotravel, a newly established Indonesian SME operating in the outbound travel industry. As the company relies heavily on freelancers due to financial constraints and fluctuating demand, variations in guide competence, destination knowledge, time management, and professionalism have resulted in lower customer satisfaction and reputational risks. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with customers and freelance tour guides who participated in recent tours. The research applies the People, Process, and Technology (PPT) framework combined with Business Process Management (BPM) to analyze root causes and identify improvement pathways. Findings reveal three major sources of service variability: (1) people-related issues, including insufficient soft skills, limited destination knowledge, and lack of standardized competency requirements; (2) process-related weaknesses, such as incomplete or non-contextual SOPs that fail to guide real-time decision-making; and (3) technology-related gaps, including the absence of integrated systems for briefing, feedback collection, and knowledge sharing. The analysis highlights that inconsistencies are not solely the result of individual shortcomings but stem from systemic misalignment within Timotravel's service design. Based on these findings, this research proposes an integrated improvement model consisting of enhanced competency training, redesigned SOPs aligned with BPM Level 1–3 process mapping, and the implementation of basic technological support tools such as CRM-driven feedback tracking and digital guide briefings. These recommendations are expected to improve service consistency, optimize operational performance, and strengthen customer satisfaction. The study contributes to service science literature by demonstrating how a PPT-driven approach can be applied to SMEs with limited resources to standardize service delivery while leveraging freelance-based human resources.

Keywords: People; Process; Technology; Service Quality; Business Process Management; Freelance Tour Guides and Customer Satisfaction.

I. INTRODUCTION

State the objectives of the work and provide an adequate background from literature. The travel and tourism industry is one of the global economic sectors that was heavily affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, several years after international borders reopened, this sector has shown strong recovery driven by pent-up demand and the removal of travel restrictions. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (2025), the contribution of this industry to global GDP is expected to reach USD 11.7 trillion in 2025, surpassing its pre-pandemic level. The recovery trend is also supported by the growth of international tourist movements, which reached 97% of the 2019 level in early 2024 (UNWTO, 2023). A similar pattern can be seen in Indonesia. Outbound travel continues to increase, supported by easier access to flights and the rising interest of Indonesian travelers to explore international destinations. Based on BPS (2024), the number of Indonesian citizens traveling abroad increased by 13.74% compared to the previous year. This positive trend opens opportunities for new travel agencies, including small and medium enterprises that offer more customized and flexible travel services. Timotravel is one of the newly established travel companies that aims to capture this opportunity. Founded in 2023, the company focuses on overseas tour packages and tailor-made itineraries designed according to customer preferences. Due to financial limitations as a new SME, Timotravel relies heavily on freelance tour guides instead of full-time staff. While this approach provides flexibility, it also creates challenges related to service quality consistency.

Customer feedback received by the company highlights varying experiences, especially in time management, destination knowledge, and tour guide attitude during the trip. These issues show that Timotravel is facing service inconsistency that can affect customer satisfaction and potentially harm the company's reputation. Since tour guides act as the frontliners who represent the company during a trip, their performance becomes a crucial factor. Therefore, an in-depth analysis is required to understand the root causes of these problems and to identify improvement areas that can support the company's service delivery. This research focuses on exploring the factors that contribute to service quality variability among Timotravel's freelance tour guides. The study also assesses how far the current Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) can support tour guides when dealing with real-time conditions during a tour. By applying the People, Process, and Technology (PPT) framework together with the Business Process Management (BPM) approach, this research aims to identify solutions that are realistic and suitable for a small travel company like Timotravel. Using a qualitative case study approach supported by customer feedback and tour guide interviews, this study provides insights into the root causes of service inconsistency and recommends improvements related to human competencies, process clarity, and basic technological support. The outcome of this research is expected to help Timotravel enhance its service consistency and strengthen customer satisfaction, while also offering practical references for other SMEs that rely on freelance service providers.

II. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative case study approach to understand the service quality issues experienced by Timotravel. Since the problems faced by the company are related to operational experiences and customer perceptions that cannot be measured numerically, a qualitative approach is considered the most suitable. The aim is to explore what actually happens in the field, especially from the perspective of customers and freelance tour guides who were directly involved in recent tours. Case study method on the research allows this research to examine Timotravel in its real context, including how its operational system works and how tour guides interact with customers during the trip. This approach also supports a more detailed exploration of the causes behind service inconsistency and the gaps in the company's current SOPs. The overall analysis focuses on three main issues that were identified in the earlier chapter: time management and flexibility, destination knowledge, and attitude or professionalism.

1. Research Design

The research design follows a simple flow that starts from identifying the business issues based on customer feedback, followed by collecting data from customers and tour guides, and then analyzing this data using the People, Process, and Technology (PPT) framework together with Business Process Management (BPM). The qualitative nature of this research makes it possible to capture detailed experiences and personal explanations, which are important to uncover the root causes of service inconsistency. This study also refers to the main theories used in the thesis, such as the PPT framework, which helps categorize problems into people, process, and technology aspects, and the BPM approach, which helps understand how the current operational flow affects the tour guide's performance. The final output of this research design is a set of solution recommendations that are relevant and realistic for Timotravel as an SME.

2. Data Collection Methods

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with two groups: customers who had submitted complaints or negative feedback, and freelance tour guides who led those specific tours. This method was chosen because it allows respondents to share their experiences more freely while still keeping the conversation focused on the key issues. Interviews were conducted online, lasted around 30–60 minutes, and were recorded with the respondents' permission. Customers were selected based on their recent travel experience with Timotravel within the last two years. Their input helped explain how they perceived the service quality, especially related to time management, destination knowledge, and the attitude of the tour guide during the trip. On the other hand, the freelance tour guides were selected because they were the ones who had handled the tours where complaints were reported. Their perspectives helped explain the challenges they faced in the field and how they understood or applied Timotravel's SOP. The interview questions were

open-ended and adjusted to each group. Customers were mainly asked about their overall experience, specific problems they found during the trip, and what they expected from a tour guide. Meanwhile, the tour guides were asked about their preparation, their understanding of the itinerary, the difficulties they faced, and whether the SOPs were clear enough to help them handle different situations. This approach ensured that the collected data was directly connected to the research questions.

3. Data Analysis Method

Data that gathered from interviews and customer feedback was analyzed using qualitative content analysis. This method focuses on identifying patterns, themes, and key points that repeatedly appear in the data. The analysis process followed three general steps. First step is to do data reduction, that all interview transcripts and feedback were reviewed to identify statements related to the research questions. Information that explained problems in time management, knowledge gaps, and tour guide attitude was highlighted. Irrelevant information was removed so the analysis stayed focused.

Second step is making data display, the reduced data was then organized into simple tables to compare the perspectives of customers and tour guides. This helped identify overlapping themes, such as unclear SOP instructions, lack of preparation materials, or misunderstanding about the customer group characteristics. And the third step is to draw the conclusion, that final step was to interpret the displayed data to identify the root causes. The findings were then aligned with the PPT framework to categorize whether each issue belonged to people, process, or technology aspects. The BPM approach also helped determine which part of the business process contributed the most to the inconsistency. This step led to clearer conclusions regarding which areas Timotravel needs to improve.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results of the data collected from customers and freelance tour guides, followed by the discussion to understand the root causes behind the service quality inconsistency at Timotravel. The analysis focuses on three main problems that were identified earlier, namely time management and flexibility, destination knowledge, and attitude or professionalism. The results combine customer feedback and tour guide explanations to give a clearer picture of what actually happened during the trips.

1. Analysis

First issue that encountered is related to flexibility and time management. Customer feedback from a Bangkok tour showed that the tour guide was rated only “mediocre,” mainly because the shopping time in the itinerary felt rushed. Customers mentioned they were asked to return to the meeting point while they were still enjoying their shopping. When this feedback was compared with the tour guide’s explanation, he admitted feeling overwhelmed in the field. He also said that Timotravel’s SOP for shopping sessions was “too loose,” with no clear instructions about maximum duration or how to adjust the schedule when customers wanted extra time. This indicates that the problem did not come only from the tour guide, but also from the lack of detailed process guidance. The second issue is about destination knowledge. In the Taiwan tour, a young family group gave a low score to the tour guide because he seemed unfamiliar with some local stories and important spots. From the interview, the tour guide explained that it was his first time guiding a tour in Taiwan, and he did not receive enough preparation materials from the company. He also stated that he did not know what kind of storytelling was expected. This shows that there was no clear learning material or knowledge guideline prepared for freelance guides who were assigned to new destinations.

The third issue concerns attitude and professionalism. In one of the Korea tours, a family group reported that the tour guide was “less enthusiastic” and “not very warm,” which made them feel uncomfortable asking for help. The tour guide, however, said that handling a large family group was stressful because many of them were often late. She also felt that she did not have enough soft skills to manage group dynamics and that the current SOP did not provide practical guidance on how to adjust communication for different types of customers. This finding again shows a mismatch between what customers expect and what freelance tour guides are prepared to deliver. From all three issues, it can be seen that customers expect consistency and a certain level of professionalism, while tour guides face unclear instructions, lack of

destination preparation, and challenges in managing customer behavior. These differences in expectations also affect the service quality perceived by customers.

2. Business Solution

Based on the analysis, the main solutions should be aligned with the People, Process, and Technology (PPT) framework. From the people aspect, freelance tour guides need better preparation before leading a tour. This includes soft skills training, especially for handling different customer groups, and basic knowledge reinforcement for new destinations. Tour guides also need a clearer explanation of what Timotravel expects from them in terms of communication, behavior, and customer interaction. From the process aspect, Timotravel's SOP needs improvement because the current version is too general and does not help tour guides handle real-time situations. A more detailed SOP is needed, especially for time management, itinerary flexibility, customer handling scenarios, and what steps to follow when unexpected delays occur. Process mapping using BPM levels will help identify which activities need clearer instructions and which require standard procedures. From the technology aspect, Timotravel can introduce simple supporting tools to help both the company and tour guides. This can include a basic CRM system to collect and organize customer feedback, a digital briefing document that tour guides can access before every trip, and a shared information folder for destination knowledge. These tools do not need to be advanced, but they can help improve communication and consistency.

3. Discussion

Results analysis indicate that service inconsistency at Timotravel does not come from one single factor but is a combination of people, process, and technology gaps. Freelance tour guides, who work on a short-term basis, do not have enough structured guidance from the company. Meanwhile, Timotravel relies heavily on them to represent the company's brand during the tour. This creates a situation where customer expectations are high, but the operational support provided to tour guides is still limited. The lack of detailed SOPs makes tour guides unsure about how to respond to different customer behaviors or unexpected conditions. At the same time, insufficient preparation materials for new destinations make it difficult for guides to provide the experience customers expect. Without proper tools to manage these issues, the gaps become more visible and result in customer dissatisfaction. By improving the PPT components, Timotravel can create a stronger service system even with limited resources. Strengthening human competencies, redesigning SOPs based on actual field conditions, and adding simple technology support can help reduce service variability. These improvements are expected to align customer expectations with the performance of freelance tour guides, leading to better customer satisfaction and more consistent service.

IV. CONCLUSION

This research was conducted to understand why Timotravel experiences service inconsistency when using freelance tour guides and how these issues affect customer satisfaction. Based on customer feedback and interviews with tour guides, three main problems were identified: time management and flexibility during the trip, lack of destination knowledge, and attitude or professionalism when dealing with customers. These issues show that the performance of freelance tour guides varies depending on their experience, preparation, and personal approach, while customers expect a more consistent standard from the company. Research findings also show that these problems are not only caused by the tour guides themselves, but also by the limitations in Timotravel's current operational system. The SOPs used by the company are still general and do not provide detailed instructions that can help guides handle unexpected situations in the field. In addition, there is no structured preparation material for new destinations, and communication between the company and tour guides is mostly informal. This situation makes it difficult for freelance guides to meet customer expectations, especially in trips that require knowledge, flexibility, and proper handling of group dynamics.

By using the People, Process, and Technology (PPT) framework, this study concludes that improvements need to be made in all three areas. From the people aspect, tour guides need clearer expectations, additional soft skills, and destination preparation before leading a tour. From the process aspect, the SOPs must be revised to be more detailed, practical, and aligned with real conditions in the field.

Meanwhile, from the technology aspect, basic tools such as CRM, digital briefing documents, and updated information sharing systems can help guides prepare better and respond more consistently during the trip. Overall, the study concludes that service inconsistency at Timotravel can be reduced by aligning human competencies, clearer processes, and simple technology support. These improvements are expected to help the company deliver more stable service quality, increase customer satisfaction, and strengthen Timotravel's position as a small but growing player in the travel industry.

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