User Experience Evaluation of Online Tourism and Travel Service Providers

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Abstract: Many Chinese cyber users use online tourism and travel services to retrieval tourist information, such as hotel reservations, flight ticketing, package tours, corporate travel management, train ticketing and a destination guide. To evaluate the common online tourism and travel service providers, we select five of the most popular providers, including Ctrip, eLong, Qunar, Kuxun and Taobao Travel. Three-star rating method is adopted in the user experience evaluation process. We summarize some purchasing experience from the users' perspective, such as product variety, price comparison, customer reviews, customer service, service features and mobile app. We also make a statistical analysis according to the total ratings. Some significant chart are demonstrated based on the statistical analysis.

Keywords: Online Tourism Service; Online Travel Service; Service Evaluation; Cyber Tourism

1. Introduction

As a huge population in China are paying for tourism and are being motivated towards the tourism places. Online tourism and travel service has emerged as one of the most booming industry with the global development of e-commerce. Big amount of Chinese Internet users are choosing online tourism & travel services offered by the cyber providers [1]. Among the online travel service providers with their own characteristics, we make a real experience study on the online travel service providers for the users to choose the most suitable business. It is expected to carry on the comprehensive review of the online travel from the users' perspective.

2. Online Tourism and Travel Service Providers

According to the popularity of the tourism and travel service providers, we choose five of the most popular online travel service providers including Ctrip [2], eLong [3], Qunar [4], Kuxun [5] and Taobao Travel [6].

2.1. Ctrip

Ctrip.com International Ltd. (Nasdaq: CTRP), founded in 1999, is headquartered in Shanghai, China. The company has 17 branch offices in Beijing, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and other major cities throughout China, and it currently employs more than 23,000 people. In 2010, Ctrip invested in Taiwan ezTravel and Hong Kong Wing On Travel, expanding its service scope to include Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau, in addition to over 60,000 destinations and attractions throughout Mainland China. As China's leading online travel service enterprise, Ctrip has successfully integrated the high-tech industries with the traditional travel industry, providing over 141 million registered members with comprehensive services, including mobile applications, hotel reservations, flight ticketing, package tours, corporate travel management, train ticketing and a destination guide, each integrated with online and offline resources for a complete travel service chain. The company is honored as the model to achieve the seamless integration of the Internet and traditional tourism. As an essential part of Ctrip's international strategy, a number of multi-language sites have now been launched. Besides the Simplified Chinese and English language sites, Ctrip now has Japanese, Korean, German, French, Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese and Traditional Chinese language sites online. Moreover, the multi-language mobile application and websites also provide flight and hotel reservations for travelers on-the-go.

2.2. eLong

eLong, Inc. (Nasdaq: LONG), a leading mobile and online travel service provider in China. On the strength of the company website, 24-hour booking hotline and mobile platform, eLong provides the customers with the comprehensive tourism package reservation services including hotel reservation, flight ticketing and vocation planning. eLong offers the powerful map search, virtual reality of hotel, the guides of tourist attractions at home and abroad, the user's honest comments and other online services so that the users are capable to make the decision based on the extensive travel information. Till January 2014, there are 20 million registered members while the user's single PV of websites reach up to more than 10 million a month. Throughout the country, eLong has established the partnership with more than 20000 hotels

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and 2000 websites. The available hotels of eLong are going to open to its controlling shareholder of the world famous tourist service brand Expedia in entitling the global guests to make the hotel reservations. eLong's largest shareholders are Expedia, Inc. [7] and Tencent Holdings Ltd. [8] . Expedia, Inc. is the largest online travel company in the world and is eLong's majority shareholder. In addition to eLong, Expedia has an extensive brand portfolio that includes some of the world's leading online travel brands. Founded in November, 1998, Tencent has grown into one of China's largest and most used Internet service portals. On June 16, 2004, Tencent Holdings Limited went public on the main board of the Hong Kong Stock Exchange. In May 2011, Tencent, made a strategic investment in eLong, acquiring approximately 16% of the outstanding shares of eLong for US$84.4 million. Through its various online platforms, including instant messaging QQ, web portal QQ.com, the QQ Game platform under Tencent Games, multi-media social networking service Qzone and wireless portal 3G.QQ.com, Tencent services the largest online community in China and fulfills the user's needs for communication, information, entertainment and e-Commerce on the Internet.

2.3. Qunar

Qunar, founded in May 2005 and headquartered in Beijing, is the world's most popular Chinese travel platform. According to the data released by iUserTracker [9] in January 2013, Qunar ranked top of the travel sites with 74.74 million visits while there were more than 34 million active users in the mobile client. Qunar's mission is to create and maintain a fun and hassle-free one-stop travel information source for Chinese travelers. The company organizes an enormous amount of travel information, providing instant and thorough searches of flights, hotels, travel packages, group-buying deals and other travel-related information via its website and mobile applications. As China's leading travel service enterprise, Ctrip provides over 141 million registered members with comprehensive services, including mobile applications, hotel reservations, flight ticketing, package tours, corporate travel management, train ticketing and a destination guide, each integrated with online and offline resources for a complete travel service chain. With its intelligent and avant-garde technology, Qunar helps travelers find travel products of great value and travel information that best matches their needs. Based on the website and mobile client platforms, Qunar provides the tourists with the deep search function on the domestic and international flights, hotels, holiday, and tourism group and travel information. As an essential part of Ctrip's international strategy, a number of multi-language sites have now been launched. Besides the Simplified Chinese and English language sites, Ctrip now has Japanese, Korean, German, French, Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese and Traditional Chinese language sites online. Moreover, the multi-language mobile application and websites also provide flight and hotel reservations for travelers on-the-go.

2.4. Kuxun

Kuxun, the Chinese subsidiary of TripAdvisor [10] with a business model similar to Qunar came in a distant second, is a leading travel search engine in China as well as the subsidiary of the world's largest online travel service company Expedia. Kuxun was founded in early 2006. As the largest subsidiary of TripAdvisor, the largest online travel media group in the world, Kuxun is the leading online travel media and travel-focused search engine in China. Kuxun is dedicated to providing comprehensive and one-stop travel information and services for Chinese users, including air ticket booking, hotel booking, train ticket information through its advanced data analyses, intelligence recommendation and other technologies. As of September 2011, Kuxun reached page views over 55 million per month. Since its inception, the company has been devoted to utilizing the vertical search technology, providing the majority of users with the accurate and real-time information including "ticket", "hotel", "holiday", and "train tickets" and so on. Kuxun becomes a leading travel search engine in China. Kuxun is geared to the online travel market in majorly offering the travel information search services including "ticket", "hotel", "train tickets", "holiday" and "traveling together". Based on the experiential service, Kuxun covers more than 200 domestic cities with nearly 35 million daily visits.

2.5. Taobao Travel

Taobao Travel is a comprehensive travel service platform in being affiliated with Taobao. Taobao Travel, which was launched in 2010 and positioned as a competitor to online travel service Ctrip, will likely see an expansion of its outbound travel offerings following the Qyer.com investment — which will boost its overall services and could attract more users. Taobao Travel integrates thousands of flight ticket agents, airlines, travel agents and travel agent resources and provides the one-stop solution of information search, purchasing and after-sales service of tourism products including the domestic flight tickets, international flight ticket, hotel, entrance tickets, domestic and international holiday travel, visa(pass), travel card, car rental and cruise. In the whole journey, Alipay [11] is applied to make the deals in a safe, reliable and guaranteed way. Till April 2013, Taobao Travel had more than 2400 ticket agents and travel sellers to conducting the trading services of tourism products. Till 2012, the highest sales volume reaches up to 26000 tickets on a daily basis. Thus, it ranked top of online ticket sales in the industry; Except for the tickets, Taobao Travel provides the

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registered member with more than 30000 hotels and hostels as well as more than 170000 entrance tickets.

3. Comprehensive Evaluation

Three-star rating method [12] is adopted in our evaluation report. We summarize seven criteria in buying the online tourism products, including product variety, the user's purchasing experience, price comparison, customer reviews, customer service, service features and mobile app.

Since the product variety and destinations that are supported by the online travel service providers are numerous, it is impossible to make the considerations in the detailed statistics. For this reason, the sampling approach is adopted. In the evaluation process, we simulate the whole process for a tourist to buy the online travel products with two of the most popular tourist attractions as the destinations. All the evaluation links are extended around the related tourism products of the two tourist attractions in showing a real experience process as an ordinary consumer.

3.1. Product Variety

The offered tourism product variety refers to the travelling means such as freedom ride, tours and cruises as well as the product mixes of the domestic and foreign travel, the number of the attractions in related to the products, etc. The focused evaluation items are measured by tourism product type and quantity, the number of the available reserved hotels, the quantity of products and optional products. The rating is based on the evaluation results as shown in Table 1.

The product variety reflects the comprehensive competitiveness of a website. With the more product variety, the consumer has more choices and the better foothold is established in the industry. During the evaluation process, it is quite difficult to meet every demand of the consumers in the journey. Based on its site features and resource advantages, Taobao Travel can meet the needs of consumers to a large extent. In this way, the consumers are able to find the desired products according to the different requirements. Taobao Travel has the definite advantage in the product variety. However, the good and bad reputation of the online providers is intermingled at Taobao Travel.

Table 1. Ratings of Product Variety

Service Provider	Ratings				
	Flight Tickets	*Hotel*	*Product Quantity*	*Product Variety*	*Total*
Ctrip	★★★	★★	★★	★★	9
eLong	★★★	★★★	★	★	8
Qunar	★★★	★★	★★★	★★	10
Kuxun	★★	★★★	★★★	★	9
Taobao Travel	★	★	★★	★★	6

3.2. Shopping Experience

The user's operation experience on the online shopping page is of great importance. During the whole process, the website operation experience for a consumer to purchase the online tourism products will be evaluated from the aesthetics of the webpage, the operation convenience and other perspectives. Whether to buy the products depends on the quick purchase process, exquisite page setup, convenient operation experience and convenient payment.

Table 2. Ratings of Shopping Experience

Service Provider	Ratings		
	Webpage Aesthetic	*Functional Experience*	*Payment*	*Total*
Ctrip	★★★	★★★	★★	8
eLong	★★★	★★★	★★	8
Qunar	★★	★★★	★★	7
Kuxun	★★★	★★	★★	7
Taobao Travel	★★	★★★	★★★	8

The ordinary users will show more concerns to whether the most affordable price is accessible to hotel reservation, flight ticketing and tourist routes. The development of the five websites is relatively mature. In view of the direct reservations or search, the websites fundamentally maintain the consistent user experience of which the price is basically comparable with the similar operation process. In view of search sites, the mismatches of the displayed price and the actual purchase price are still needed to be solved. After all, the consumers have much more diverse choices at present.

3.3. Price Comparison

It is of great importance to compare the product price so it is necessary to evaluate the same online tourism product with the highest cost performance in terms of the different service providers.

In terms of the product price from the overall online travel E-commerce providers, Taobao Travel creates the most affordable platform of tourism shopping based on its powerful channels of Taobao B2C platform. Especially, the price of entrance tickets and hotel reservation is absolutely favorable at Taobao Travel. However, it needs to pay attention to carefully indentifying the false and

true product sales information among the numerous Tao-bao B2C platform so as to select the merchants with the high credibility as much as possible. Taobao Travel as the leader of the travel search sites offers the convenience based on a variety of price information. The website is relatively reliable of which its third-party sites of external resources are also certified with the trustworthy reputation. Ctrip and eLong have their own independent product sales channels while the service price is relatively high with the guaranteed credit and after-sales service. Thus they are preferred by the consumers in the pursuit of quality.

Table 3. Ratings of Price Comparison

Service Provider	Ratings			
	Flight Tickets	*Hotel*	*Package Tours*	*Total*
Ctrip	êê	êêê	êêê	8
eLong	êê	êêê	ê	6
Qunar	êêê	êêê	êêê	9
Kuxun	êêê	êê	êê	8
Taobao Travel	êêê	êê	êê	8

3.4. Customer Reviews

While the user makes the comments on the online travel products, it is designed to test whether the comments will be published, whether the comments are objective and fair, whether the negative comments will be deleted or hidden.

Table 4. Ratings of Customer Reviews

Service Provider	Ratings			
	Response Time	*Service Attitude*	*Details*	*Total*
Ctrip	êêê	êêê	êêê	9
eLong	êêê	êêê	êêê	9
Qunar	êê	êê	êêê	7
Kuxun	ê	êê	êêê	6
Taobao Travel	êê	ê	êê	5

In general, there are the abundant of customer services for every website. It is quite rare for customer service to connect the phone for a long time. The attitude is also very good in giving the accurate reply according to the basic requirements. However, the customer service for some sites can't cover all of the business. The call center at Ctrip and eLong is accessible to offer the booking service while the customer service of the other sites can only deal with the consulting issues, complaints and the similar issues.

3.5. Service Features

It is designed to study the service features of each website in bring the consumers with the economic services at the highlight spots.

Table 5. Ratings of Customer Service

Service Provider	Ratings		
	Service Features	*Comments*	*Rating*
Ctrip	The paid room charge at first night without being able to register at the reserved hotel	after-sales guarantee in saving worry	êêê
eLong	Special offer after six o'clock at night	Simulate the Last-Minute sales model	êê
Qunar	"compensation plan" of booking the domestic flight tickets	Providing the service guarantee in the trading process	êêê
Kuxun	100% guarantee, 10 times penalty upon each false corn	More reliable safeguard measures	êê
Taobao Travel	Travel service toolbar and user-friendly experience	More choices and affordable prices	êêê

To users, the most important thing is to provide the most reassuring tourist products at the most preferential price. In this way, the after-sale guarantee commitment is particularly important at Ctrip and eLong. In addition, Taobao Travel can verify the seller's qualifications for the ordinary consumers. At the same time, it is to make the communication with the seller in time to save the worries of the users. Ctrip offers the tickets and hotel reservation services with more choices in a flexible way in terms of freedom ride. It saves a lot of money to go on a travel and it is quite suitable for free independent travelers.

3.6. Mobile App

It is mainly designed to study the APP of each website in conducting the comprehensive evaluations from the user-friendly user APP interface, the abundant functions of APP program, the performance of APP (the compatibility with operating system of mobile phone, the startup speed of the software, the running stability of the software, etc.). With the popularity of smart phones, all the travel service sites have developed their own APP of which its functions are not limited to the information query of the destination and tourist attractions, travel notes and picture sharing, travel plans, hotel reservation, flight ticketing and train ticketing and other basic functions. It also gradually expands to the supports of the various social networks. In virtue of its rich experience in e-commerce, the payment method is particularly remarkable for the APP at Taobao Travel. In terms of the functions, Ctrip and Qunar provided more abundant and practical APP.

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Table 6. Ratings of Mobile App

Service Provider	Ratings			
	user-friendly	*Function*	*Perfor-mance*	*Total*
Ctrip	ê ê ê	ê ê ê	ê ê ê	9
eLong	ê	ê	ê ê	4
Qunar	ê ê ê	ê ê ê	ê ê ê	9
Kuxun	ê ê	ê ê ê	ê ê	7
Taobao Travel	ê ê ê	ê ê ê	ê ê ê	9

4. Conclusions

Three-star rating method is adopted in our evaluation report. We summarize six indexes in buying the online tourism products to make the evaluations on the user experience. The final evaluation result summary is listed in the Fig.1.
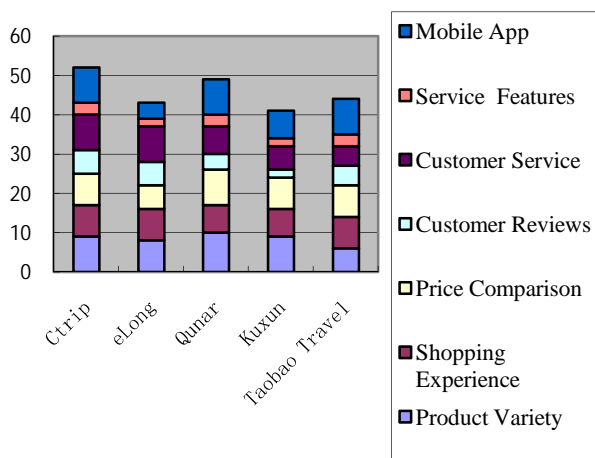

Figure 1. Summary chart of ratings.

Based on its strong product channels and high-quality service quality, Ctrip has won the first place of the user evaluation activities and Ctrip is preferred to the business users; based on the its powerful Taobao sales platform, Taobao Travel wins the title of the most cost-effective online travel service provider in creating the most cost-effective travel tourism product sales platform and Tao-bao Travel is the best choice of the budget tourists. Qunar and Kuxun are the most popular search engines with the good performance in providing the users with the comprehensive tourism product information. From the various aspects, the comprehensive strength at Kuxun is poorer with the lowest rank.

5. Acknowledgment

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