The Effect of Service Leadership, Market Orientation and Service Quality on Business Performance: Empirical Evidence from the Tourism Industry of Thailand

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The recent studies in business management literature have highlighted the significant and prominent role of market orientation in enhancing business performance. However, the literature provides little empirical evidence about the mechanism to enhance business performance in the tourism industry of Thailand through the synchronization of market information and leadership behaviours. Therefore, to fill this gap, the present study was conducted with an aim to assess the direct effect of i) service leadership on service quality, ii) market orientation on service quality, iii) service quality on business performance and indirect effect of iv) service quality in the relationship of service leadership with business performance and market orientation with business performance. By collecting the data from 453 tourists from different places in Thailand including beaches, malls, hotels and restaurants, the study found empirical evidence to support all proposed hypotheses. First, the service leadership is proved to be an important antecedent of service quality. Second, the market orientation has significant impact on the business performance. Third, business performance is significantly predicted by service quality. Finally, the service quality mediates between the relationship of service leadership with business performance and market orientation with business performance. The study also provides the practical implications for owners and managers of the businesses that are related to tourism industry in Thailand.

Key words: *Market Orientation, Service Leadership, Service Quality, Business Performance, Market Intelligence.*

Introduction

Past studies on management have frequently focused on the concept of market orientation (MO) in explaining the firm performance (Iyer, Davari, Zolfagharian, & Paswan, 2018). MO is defined as "the organization-wide generation of market intelligence, dissemination of the intelligence across departments and organization-wide responsiveness to it" (Ajay & Bernard, 1990, p. 12). This implies that MO multiplies organizational marketing efforts by integration and synchronization of information among different departments. Mostly research on MO have received elevation in 1990's, specifically in the context industrialization and retail sector (Kirca, Jayachandran, & Bearden, 2005). However, the literature had paid a little attention regarding service sector. Specifically, exploration of MO in tourism sector is developing now a days.

Leadership is also an important predictor of business performance as it controls the whole organization through various functions including policy making and monitoring (Jermsittiparsert & Srihirun, 2019; Sriyakul, Singsa, Sutduean, & Jermsittiparsert, 2019). Leaders define the vision and mission of organization which are replicated in organizational policies and procedures (Yukl, 2012). A lot of leadership styles and behaviours have been explored by scholars and abundant literature has been found in different context. Scholars are in agreement that no single leadership style or behaviour is perfect in all situations. Leaders have to review and change their leadership style according to circumstances. In the context of tourism, most of the authors have explored the impact of transformational leadership style in enhancing business performance (Ariyabuddhiphongs & Kahn, 2017). However, the exploration of context specific service leadership (SL) is limited in this regard.

Moreover, service quality (SQ) is a direct outcome of MO and SL as leaders with successful service oriented marketing strategy may enhance customer satisfaction through SQ (Pantouvakis, 2014; Emil and A.M. Muad, 2018). In simple words, customers feel more satisfaction through quality services provided by organization, resulting in increased number of customers that may enhance firm performance. Therefore, in this study, MO and SL were proposed as antecedents of SQ that is considered as mechanism to enhance business Performance.

In the contemporary environment, tourism is considered an important factor in the economic development of the world (Heo, 2016) and provide help to achieve the social and environmental benefits (Mihalic, 2016). This is reason, with the global perspective, tourism in all over the world considered a largest and most dynamic industry which is providing services to various sectors in which includes, travels, visitors and hospitality. In the current study, tourism as focal service industry has been selected because in the global growing industries is considered one of the industries among across the world economies (World Tourism Organization, 2004). As

per the estimation of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) the tourist arrival of the international will be reached 1.8 billion till 2030 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2011). After seeking the role of tourism industry in the economic development and employment, the governments of various developing countries have made a great effort to reach the tourist dollars. In fact, according to World Travel and Tourism Council (2013), tourist industry supports in the 225 million jobs for the semi-skilled, skilled, unskilled people and also paid a key role in the world GDP.

Thailand is a prominent country among the developing countries, those are focusing and putting countless efforts to uplift their tourism industry. Main attractions for tourists in Thailand are their heritage, beaches, massage parlours, brothels and night clubs. The tourism industry of Thailand share one fourth of total GDP of the country with an estimated 36 million tourists every year (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2017). These indicators show a significant role of tourism industry in Thai economy. Therefore, this study is carried out with an aim to investigate the role of SL and MO in enhancing performance of tourism industry through SQ.

Literature Review
Service Leadership

SL is defined as a "service aimed at ethically satisfying the need of self, others, groups, communities, systems, and environments" (Shek & Lin, 2015a, p. 233). The SL requires several qualities in a leader. First, the leader must be competent enough by having the specific knowhow and skills to provide expected and stated services to its customers. Second, the leader should possess a solid character by responding ethically to moral phenomena. Finally, the leader must be caring enough with regard to all stakeholders of the organization including employees and customers (Shek, Chung, & Leung, 2015).

SL leadership is grounded on several other types of transformational leadership such as servant leadership and ethical leadership (Shek & Lin, 2015a). The model of servant leadership stressed a leader to work for others benefit even by sacrificing their benefits (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008). In addition, concept of ethical leadership highlighted the strong moral character and competence possessed by a leader in order make ethical decisions, sometimes bypassing their self-interests (McCann, Sparks, & Kohntopp, 2017). In simple words, it can be inferred that SL is a combination of different leadership styles to form an integrative leadership style in the context of service industry.

Market Orientation

Marketing is among the essential functions of the organization and marketers have a key role in from identification of the customers need to assurance of customer satisfaction. In line with

this MO is considered to be an important component of marketing and referred to the activities that are required to collect and disseminate the market intelligence for customers value creation (Pantouvakis, 2014). MO is considered to be the foundation of all organizational systems and processes that are developed to synchronize the information among departments, market and customers (Iyer et al., 2018). These systems also help the organization in gaining the competitive advantage by providing required information in timely fashion.

Moreover, MO is considered a vital resource of organization that enhances organization's capabilities to meet the customer need and demands and to increase its market share (Kirca et al., 2005). It gathers important information from department, market and customers and disseminate it to the relevant segment in order to increase its market efficiency (Iyer et al., 2018). For this reason, most scholars have considered MO as reactive construct. However, given it nature as collection of market intelligence, now the researchers have started considering it as a proactive construct.

Service Quality

In recent years, there has been burgeoning debate on SQ in marketing literature. However, there are still many ambiguities prevailed regarding this concept. For Instance, in its developmental stages, SQ is deemed to be the quality of services from organizations perspective. Many scholars argued that it should be considered as quality of services from customers perspective (Seth, Deshmukh, & Vrat, 2005). The concept of SQ includes the factors that are essential for maintaining quality in services such as, knowhow, skills and expertise. Therefore, level of SQ can be improved by developing the required skills, knowledge and expertise in employees that is required to maintain the level of quality.

Existing literature highlights several factors that reflect service quality. Firstly, the professionalism and skills are required for performing quality services. Secondly, positive attitude and behaviour of employees while performing services have a positive impact on SQ. Thirdly, the service accessibility and flexibility is vital SQ, as customers ease is the most important factor for their satisfaction. Fourthly, the reliable and trust worthy services are vital facet of SQ because the trust enhances customer loyalty. Fifthly, service recovery or re-servicing is also an important component of SQ. It happens many times that the one-time service does not produce required outcome then it is necessary for quality that the service should be provide without charging extra till customer satisfaction. Finally, the reputation and credibility are the most important factors for explaining quality services and these depend upon all the other mentioned factors of SQ (Grönroos, 2009; Iyer et al., 2018; Tjiptono & Chandra, 2011).

Research Framework

After reviewing the literature, the present study proposed the framework as depicted in Figure 1 below. After recognizing the importance of MO, SL and SQ in enhancing business performance, it is proposed that SQ serves as a mechanism to enhance BP through MO and SL. Past studies have highlighted that SQ enhances customer satisfaction and customer loyalty that has significant impact of organizational business performance. Therefore, we further the research by proposing that leadership with service-oriented behaviours, and market-oriented organizations have greater impact on the perception of customers regarding quality of services. Figure 1 explains the research framework.

Figure 1: Research Framework
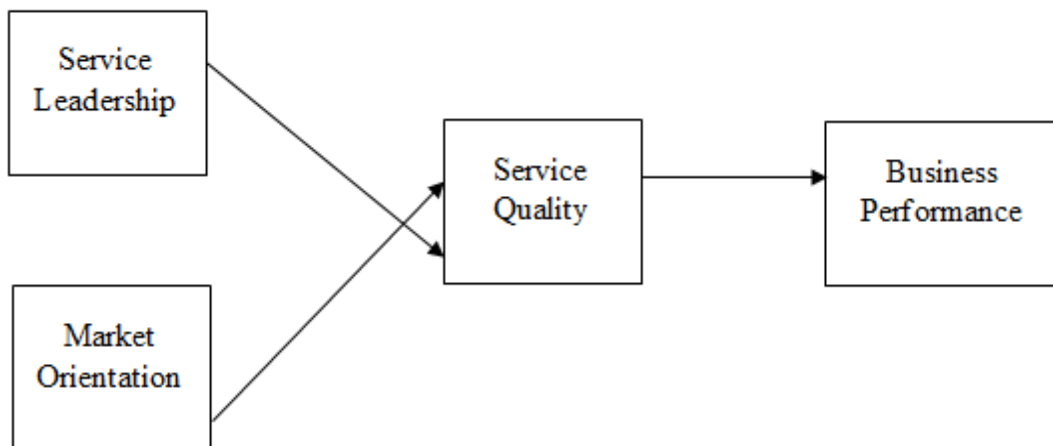
Hypothesis Development

SL is considered as a vital factor for enhancing SQ. In general, services are performed by employees and leader having service-oriented behaviours have significant positive impact on employee performance that produces quality services (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014). According to social learning theory employees shape their job related behaviours by replicating their leaders behaviour through learning process (Bandura, 1969). Based on this theory, it can be inferred that employees learn from their leader's behaviours by considering them a role model. They believe that the behaviours of their leaders are most appropriate and best explains the philosophy of organization (Jiang, Chuang, & Chiao, 2015). Thus, it can be inferred that SL can develop service-oriented behaviours of employees that is essential for service quality Hypothesis 1: SL has positive and significant association with SQ.

In prior studies, there is an abundant empirical support of significant relationship of MO and SQ. For instance, Chang and Chen (1998) inferred that the firms that are more market-oriented have greater customer satisfaction with regard to quality services than their counterparts. Similarly, in a study on service sector of Malaysia, Lam, Lee, Ooi, and Lin (2011) explored

the positive association between MO and SQ. MO involves the market intelligence process through information generation, information dissemination and coordination among departments. Therefore, timely information about customers' needs enables the organization to make effective planning to satisfy customers through quality of services. In line with this, Lam, Lee, Ooi, and Phusavat (2012) and Pantouvakis (2014) also found a greater service quality perception of the customers about the firms who have shown more market oriented behaviours. Hence in line with the past studies, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 2: MO has positive and significant association with SQ.

Past studies have highlighted the significant and positive relationship of SQ and business performance (BP). The firms that provides more quality services have greater number of customers through enhanced customer satisfaction (Lam et al., 2011). Moreover, Pantouvakis (2014) explained that positive market activities have better customers' perceptions regarding SQ that enhances the firm profitability resulting in enhanced business performance. Understanding the customers' needs and provision of services accordingly enhances customer satisfaction and their perception about SQ. In addition, Sanchez-Hernandez and Miranda (2011) inferred that increased service performance reflects the SQ that enhances BP through increase number of customers, market share and profitability. Hence, it is Hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 3: SQ has positive and significant association with BP.

It is also observed in prior studies that both the antecedents and outcomes of SQ have been explored. For instance, Budianto (2019) and Lam et al. (2012) unveiled the fact the companies that provides quality services have more customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and market performance. Customer satisfaction further enhances the number of customers and increase market share of organization. Chang and Chen (1998) and Lam et al. (2011) and Lam et al. (2012) and Pantouvakis (2014) explored market orientation as an antecedent of SQ. Moreover, Schneider, Ehrhart, Mayer, Saltz, and Jolly (2005) and Schneider, White, and Paul (1998) found leadership as an important factor that contributes toward SQ. Hence, in light of these arguments, the present study considers SQ a mechanism to enhance BP and it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 4: SQ significantly mediates the relationship between SL with BP.
Hypothesis 5: SQ significantly mediates the relationship between MO with BP.

Methodology

This section explains the methodology adopted for conducting this research. This is a cross-sectional and correlational study, aimed to find association between SL, MO, SQ and BP. The data was collected from 453 tourists in Thailand through questionnaires to know their perception about the studied constructs i.e. SL, MO, SQ and BP. The construct of SL was

measured by 4 items scale (Schneider et al., 1998) The construct of MO is measured by reflective-reflective second-order scale of Sampaio, Mogollón, and Rodrigues (2019) with 7 items of intelligence generation, 7 items of intelligence dissemination, 7 items of coordinated response. The construct of SQ was assessed by 3 items scale (Zhou, Brown, & Dev, 2009). Finally the construct of BP was measured by using the 5 items judgmental scale (Powell, 1995). All the items were measured at 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Partial least square structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to assess the research model. SmartPLS 3.2.8 software was used to assess the structural equation model (SEM).

Data Analyses
Construct Reliability and Validity

It is necessary to establish the construct reliability and validity before assessing the research model (Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins, & Kuppelwieser, 2014). Therefore, first, we assessed the convergent validity and discriminant validity of the measurement model. Table 1 explains the measurement model of the study. For the outer model, all the factor loadings were higher than 0.5 that is required for establishing the reliability of the indicators. All the constructs have Cronbach's alpha > 0.70, average variance extracted (AVE) > 0.5 and composite reliability (CR) > 0.60 that established the convergent validity of the model (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2014).

Similarly, to ensure the convergent validity of the inner model, all the standardized loadings were squared and divided by their total number to get the AVE of second order / higher order or hierarchical construct. The AVE and *CR* of two second order constructs, i.e. SQ and BP were 0.53, *0.85* and 0.51, *0.75*. For discriminant validity, in the Fornell and Larcker criterion, the diagonal values show the square of AVE that must be greater than the constructs' correlation with other variables and Heterotrait-Monotrait Criterion values must be less 0.85 (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017). Similarly, the results of the Fornell and Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait Criterion are shown in Tables 2 and 3 below and have established the discriminant validity of the construct.

Table 1: Measurement Model

Construct	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Business Performance	BP1	0.697	**0.721**	**0.746**	**0.574**
	BP2	0.573			
	BP3	0.501			
	BP4	0.703			
	BP5	0.557			
Coordinated Response	CR1	0.607	**0.757**	**0.828**	**0.512**
	CR2	0.640			
	CR3	0.738			
	CR4	0.723			
	CR5	0.679			
	CR6	0.561			
	CR7	0.509			
Intelligence Dissemination	ID1	0.741	**0.809**	**0.860**	**0.570**
	ID2	0.766			
	ID3	0.557			
	ID4	0.687			
	ID5	0.609			
	ID6	0.650			
	ID7	0.759			
Intelligence Generation	IG1	0.714	**0.729**	**0.816**	**0.523**
	IG2	0.538			
	IG3	0.797			
	IG4	0.781			
	IG5	0.592			
	IG6	0.532			
	IG7	0.353			
Service Leadership	SL1	0.773	**0.747**	**0.831**	**0.622**
	SL2	0.838			
	SL3	0.752			
	SL4	Dropped			
Service Quality	SQ1	0.639	**0.765**	**0.803**	**0.579**
	SQ2	0.753			
	SQ3	0.873			
Market Orientation*	IG	0.783		**0.804**	**0.578**
	ID	0.725			
	CR	0.772			

*Second-Order Construct

Table 2: Fornell and Larcker Criterion for Discriminant Validity

|	BP	CR	ID	IG	SL	SQ
BP	**0.757**					
CR	0.225	**0.716**				
ID	0.272	0.308	**0.755**			
IG	0.266	0.449	0.345	**0.723**		
SL	0.201	0.316	0.172	0.276	**0.789**	
SQ	0.402	0.318	0.106	0.238	0.301	**0.761**

Note: BP = Business Performance, CR = Coordinated Response, ID = Information Dissemination, IG = Information Generation,
SL = Service Leadership, SQ = Service Quality

Table 3: Heterotrait-Monotrait Criterion for Discriminant Validity

	BP	CR	ID	IG	SL	SQ
BP						
CR	0.400					
ID	0.382	0.380				
IG	0.458	0.601	0.484			
SL	0.372	0.432	0.239	0.400		
SQ	0.576	0.450	0.174	0.386	0.411	

Note: BP = Business Performance, CR = Coordinated Response, ID = Information Dissemination, IG = Information Generation,
SL = Service Leadership, SQ = Service Quality

Hypotheses Testing

In order to test the hypotheses, PLS-SEM was applied using SmartPLS 3.2.8. The results of the structural model were extracted from the bootstrap procedure, whereas the results of predictive relevance were assessed through blindfolding procedure. The model contains two endogenous variables, i.e. SQ (*mediator*) and BP (dependent variable). The value of the coefficient of determination R^2 and predictive relevance Q^2 of the endogenous variable is 0.28, *0.11* and 0.16, *0.06* respectively that passed the substantial criteria (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2012). Moreover, Table 4 below presents the results of PLS bootstrap algorithms that confirms the significant direct relationship of MO with SQ (β = 0.22, t value = 2.94, p value = 0.00), SL with SQ (β=0.29, t value = 3.81, p value = 0.00) and SQ with BP (β = 0.40, t value = 2.94, p value = 0.00). These results show that the quality of services is directly affected by MO and SL by explaining 28% variance in the latent variable. Similarly, BP is directly affected

by SQ by explaining 16% variance. Out of all the relationships, the SQ and BP has the highest beta. The findings also confirm the significant indirect effect of SQ between the relationship of MO with BP (β = 0.09, t value = 2.49, p value = 0.01) and SL with BP (β = 0.09, t value = 2.91, p value = 0.00). It means that SQ mediates the relationship of MO with BP and SL with BP. The mediation of SQ among both the relationships have almost same but significant effect. Therefore, all the hypotheses of the study are supported by the results of the PLS-SEM.

Figure 2: Estimations of Structural Model
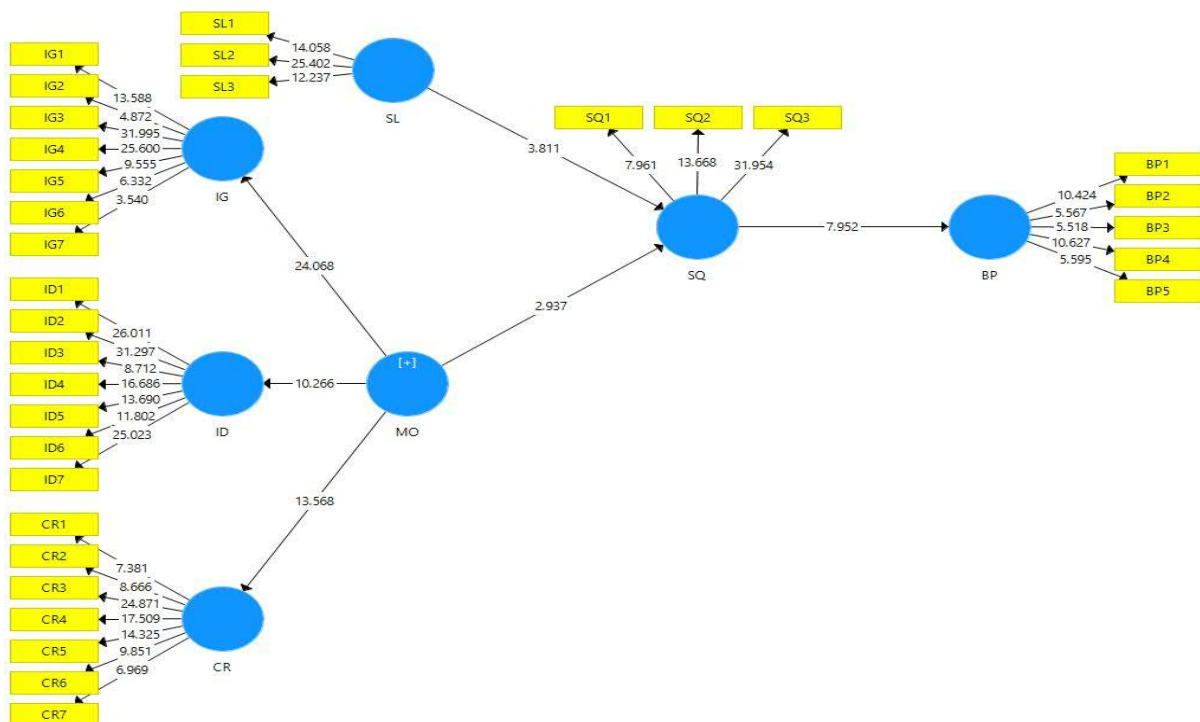
Note: BP = Business Performance, CR = Coordinated Response, ID = Information Dissemination, IG = Information Generation,

SL = Service Leadership, SQ = Service Quality, MO = Market Orientation

Table 4: Hypotheses Results

Hypothesis	Beta	S.E	T Value	P Value	CI^{BCa} Low	CI^{BCa} High	Decision
MO -> SQ	0.216	0.074	2.937	0.003	0.051	0.337	Supported
SL -> SQ	0.228	0.060	3.811	0.000	0.104	0.335	Supported
SQ -> BP	0.402	0.051	7.952	0.000	0.284	0.475	Supported
MO -> SQ -> BP	0.087	0.035	2.488	0.013	0.016	0.147	Supported
SL -> SQ -> BP	0.092	0.032	2.905	0.004	0.039	0.151	Supported

Note: SL = Service Leadership, SQ = Service Quality, MO = Market Orientation, BP = Business Performance
* Significance level < 0.05

Discussion and Conclusion

The main aim of the present research was to assess the direct relationship of SL and MO with SQ and SQ with BP. The second objective of the study was examining the indirect effect of SQ between the relationship of SL with BP and MO with BP. In order to evaluate the research framework first the measurement model was examined in order to establish the convergent and discriminant validity of the studied variables. Next, the structural model was examined through PLS Algorithms (Path Focused) and Bootstrap analysis with 5000 subsamples. Moreover, the predictive relevance of the research model was assessed through blindfolding approach.

Even though the direct relationships of MO and SL with BP was not hypothesized, the results provide the empirical support of their direct relationship. These findings are consistent with the studies of Chang and Chen (1998) and Iyer et al. (2018) and Sampaio et al. (2019) and Schneider et al. (2005) and Shek et al. (2015) and Shek & Lin (2015) who came to the same conclusion. Moreover, the hypothesized direct relationship between SL and MO with SQ was also found significant. These findings are consistent with prior research of Lam et al. (2011) and Lam et al. (2012) and Pantouvakis (2014) and Hernandez and Miranda (2011) and Shek and Lin (2015b) who explained that the quality of services by an organization depends upon several factors including market oriented behaviours and service oriented leadership style. The results of the study strengthen the findings of Hernandez & Miranda (2011), who inferred that MO enhances the service performance. In light of the findings of the present study, it is concluded that MO enhances service performance and further, results in quality of services offered by an organization to its valued customers.

Moreover, Cronin, Brady, and Hult (2000) and Gorla, Somers, and Wong (2010) determined that values and information communication have impact on SQ. Likewise, values and information communication are the antecedents of MO (Agarwal, Krishna Erramilli, & Dev, 2003; Fang, Chang, Ou, & Chou, 2014). Information communication is necessary for MO in order to synchronize the information among departments (Jaworski & Kohli, 2012; Hernandez & Miranda, 2011). Finally the indirect effect of SQ between the relationship of MO with BP and SL with BP is consistent with the prior studies of Schneider et al. (1998) and Seth et al. (2005) who considered SQ as a mechanism to enhance BP.

Implications of the Study

The present study has focused on tourism industry of Thailand. Therefore, it has several implications for the owners and managers associated with any business within the tourism industry in Thailand. First, it explains that the managers should develop and implement effective systems that generate information and disseminate information to establish coordination among departments. The mangers in the tourism business can improve and enhance their quality of service by developing service-oriented leadership behaviours and getting and transferring information in a timely manner through the transference and interpretation of market intelligence that would have significant impact on their business performance. It is also a fact that MO system requires huge investment as it demands some structural changes in organization, but these can be justified by increased profitability thorough SQ.

The research framework of the present study also explains that the SQ serves as a mechanism to enhance profitability and revenue of the business. The perception of quality services enhances customer satisfaction and customer loyalty and results in increasing customer numbers and company market share. The tourism industry is extremely volatile and has some sensitive information that can be handled and managed by effective market intelligence system and this is part of MO.

Limitations and Future Research Direction

The first limitation of the present study is its cross-sectional nature. Due to time and financial constraints, the data was collected at one point in time. Therefore, in order to determine the causal inferences, future longitudinal and time series studies must be conducted in this regard. Second, to meet the objective of the study, the construct of MO was measured as a second order construct. However, in order to have deep insights into the concepts of the above-mentioned variable, it will be interesting to assess these dimensions in order to explain the indirect effect of SQ on each dimension of MO. Finally, future studies should expand on this research by controlling the demographic variables to assess the influence of workforce diversity on the research model.

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