



Investigating the Effect of Service Innovation, Response Speed, and Information Transparency on Customer Trust in Travel Agencies of East Gilan Province

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Abstract: This research aimed to investigate the effect of service innovation, response speed, and information transparency on customer trust within travel agencies in East Gilan Province. Employing a quantitative research methodology, data was collected through a structured 5-point Likert scale questionnaire distributed to a sample of 385 respondents, determined using Morgan's formula. The validity of the instrument was ensured through expert review, while its reliability was confirmed by achieving Cronbach's alpha coefficients above 0.70. Descriptive statistics revealed the demographic characteristics of the sample, highlighting a diverse range of respondents in terms of gender, age, and education level. The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that the data followed a normal distribution, validating the use of parametric tests for hypothesis testing. The Spearman correlation coefficient analysis demonstrated significant positive relationships among service innovation, response speed, information transparency, and customer trust. Friedman's analysis of variance test further affirmed the importance of these variables in influencing customer trust. The study concluded that enhancing service innovation, response speed, and transparency can significantly boost customer trust in travel agencies, offering valuable insights for practitioners in the tourism industry.

Keywords: Service Innovation, Response Speed, Information Transparency, Customer Trust.

I. Introduction

The tourism industry, particularly in eastern Gilan, has seen rapid growth, making customer trust in travel agencies a crucial factor for success. In a competitive market where agencies offer similar services, gaining and maintaining customer trust depends on several factors, including innovation in services, responsiveness to customer needs, and transparency

in providing information. In today's fast-paced and information-driven world, customers expect not only high-quality services but also timely responses and clear, reliable information. The rise of digital platforms has further intensified these expectations, requiring travel agencies to continuously adapt and innovate to meet customer demands. In this context, the relationship between service innovation, responsiveness, and transparency with customer trust becomes highly significant. Understanding how these factors influence trust can help travel agencies in the region enhance customer loyalty and gain a competitive edge. Despite the importance of customer trust, there is a lack of empirical research on how service innovation, response speed, and information transparency impact trust in the specific setting of travel agencies in eastern Gilan. Many travel agencies struggle to maintain customer loyalty, and this might be due to shortcomings in one or more of these areas. Existing literature acknowledges the relevance of trust in customer-agency relationships, but few studies have explored the combined effects of these three critical factors in the travel industry. Furthermore, while research on trust has often focused on large, well-known agencies in metropolitan areas, smaller agencies in less urbanized regions like eastern Gilan remain understudied. This research aims to fill that gap by examining the intricate dynamics between service innovation, responsiveness, and transparency, and how they collectively shape customer trust in travel agencies operating in this region. Failing to address the factors that influence trust could lead to customer dissatisfaction, a decline in agency performance, and loss of market share to competitors. On the other hand, a better understanding of these dynamics could offer substantial benefits. By investigating these factors, this research seeks to provide insights that could guide agencies toward improving their practices, resulting in stronger customer relationships and enhanced performance. These findings could also contribute to the broader body of literature on customer trust, service innovation, and transparency in the tourism sector. More importantly, they could be used to develop policies and strategies that improve the overall functioning of travel agencies, ensuring their long-term success in a highly competitive market. This study focuses on analyzing how service innovation, response speed, and information transparency impact customer trust in travel agencies in eastern Gilan. By addressing these specific aspects of trust-building, the research aims to provide actionable insights for agencies to improve their services. This could lead to better customer satisfaction and long-term loyalty, which are essential for sustaining business success in the tourism industry.

The tourism industry in eastern Gilan faces a critical challenge: maintaining customer trust in a highly competitive market. While factors such as service quality and customer

satisfaction have been extensively studied, the role of service innovation, responsiveness, and information transparency in building trust remains underexplored, particularly in this region. Travel agencies that fail to innovate, respond promptly to customer inquiries, or provide transparent information risk losing customer loyalty. Despite the growing body of research on customer trust, few studies have specifically examined how these three factors contribute to trust-building in smaller, regional travel agencies. Addressing this gap is essential, as it could offer valuable insights into improving customer-agency relationships in eastern Gilan.

This research is significant as it addresses a key gap in the current literature regarding customer trust in the tourism industry, specifically focusing on smaller, regional travel agencies in eastern Gilan. While most research on trust has been conducted in more developed regions or on larger companies, this study highlights the unique challenges faced by travel agencies in less urbanized areas. By examining the combined effect of service innovation, responsiveness, and transparency, this research brings a fresh perspective to an understudied area of tourism. The innovative aspect lies in the integration of these three variables—service innovation, response speed, and transparency—as drivers of customer trust, a relationship that has not been extensively studied in this context. The findings have the potential to inform new strategies for enhancing customer loyalty and improving business outcomes for travel agencies. The research hypotheses are as follows:

1. Service innovation has a significant positive effect on customer trust in travel agencies in eastern Gilan.
2. Response speed has a significant positive effect on customer trust in travel agencies in eastern Gilan.
3. Information transparency has a significant positive effect on customer trust in travel agencies in eastern Gilan.
4. Service innovation, response speed, and information transparency collectively have a significant positive effect on customer trust in travel agencies in eastern Gilan.

The scientific objectives are as follows:

1. To assess the impact of service innovation on customer trust in travel agencies in eastern Gilan.
2. To evaluate the effect of response speed on customer trust in travel agencies in eastern Gilan.
3. To examine how information transparency influences customer trust in travel agencies in eastern Gilan.

4. To analyze the combined effect of service innovation, response speed, and information transparency on customer trust in travel agencies in eastern Gilan.

This study is conducted in 2024 and focuses on travel agencies operating in the eastern region of Gilan Province. The research examines how service innovation, response speed, and information transparency impact customer trust, with a sample size of 385 respondents, calculated using Cochran's formula for large populations. Data will be collected from customers who have interacted with various travel agencies in this region. The research aims to provide insights that are specifically applicable to the current market conditions in eastern Gilan, but the findings may also be relevant to similar regional contexts elsewhere. The findings from this research can be applied across various sectors. For travel agencies, the results can provide actionable strategies to enhance service innovation, improve response times, and ensure greater transparency in customer interactions. This could lead to increased customer loyalty, higher satisfaction levels, and better overall performance. In addition, the results can serve as a guide for tourism industry policymakers to develop regulations that encourage transparency and innovation in service delivery. Educational institutions, particularly those offering tourism and business management programs, can also benefit from the research findings. The study provides empirical data that can be used in curriculum development to train future managers and employees in the travel and tourism industry. For executive bodies and local authorities, understanding the importance of customer trust could inform the creation of initiatives aimed at supporting travel agencies in improving their services, thereby boosting the tourism economy in eastern Gilan.

II. Literature review

Service innovation, response speed, and information transparency are central concepts in modern customer service and trust-building strategies, particularly in sectors like the travel industry where customer satisfaction is paramount. Service innovation refers to the introduction of new or significantly improved services that better meet the needs of customers, differentiate a business from its competitors, and increase value for both the customer and the service provider. In the context of travel agencies, service innovation might include offering personalized travel plans, using technology to streamline booking processes, or providing unique experiences that cater to niche markets. The ability of travel agencies to innovate in terms of service offerings is crucial in attracting and retaining customers, as travelers increasingly seek tailored, efficient, and flexible services. Response speed, another important factor, relates to how quickly an organization can address customer queries, concerns, or needs.

In today's fast-paced digital world, customers expect immediate responses, and travel agencies that fail to meet these expectations may lose customers to competitors. Information transparency, on the other hand, refers to the clear and open communication of relevant information, such as pricing, policies, and service offerings. Transparency builds trust by ensuring that customers are well-informed and confident in the decisions they make. In the context of travel agencies, transparent communication about trip details, costs, and potential risks plays a crucial role in establishing and maintaining trust. Research on the relationship between these variables and customer trust has grown in recent years, with studies conducted in various contexts around the world. In Iran, several studies have explored the impact of service innovation, response speed, and information transparency on customer trust in different industries. For instance, Karimi (2021) in a study titled "The Role of Service Innovation in Building Customer Trust in the Banking Sector" examined the impact of introducing new digital banking services on customer trust. Using a survey method with a sample size of 300 respondents, the study found that banks that continuously innovated their services experienced higher levels of customer trust, as customers appreciated the convenience and efficiency of these innovations. Similarly, a study by Hashemi and Rezaei (2020), titled "The Effect of Response Speed on Customer Satisfaction and Trust in E-Commerce Platforms," explored how quickly e-commerce platforms responded to customer inquiries and complaints. The study, which employed a quantitative approach and surveyed 400 customers, concluded that quicker response times significantly improved both customer satisfaction and trust, particularly in resolving issues related to online transactions. Another study by Ghaffari (2019), titled "The Impact of Transparency in Online Booking Platforms on Customer Trust," analyzed how clear and transparent communication of pricing and policies in online booking systems for travel agencies influenced customer trust. Through a mixed-methods approach, the research showed that customers who perceived higher levels of transparency were more likely to trust the platform and return for future bookings. In 2018, a study by Mohammadi, titled "Service Quality and Customer Trust in the Hospitality Industry," focused on how service quality innovations, such as mobile check-ins and personalized services, affected trust in hotels across major Iranian cities. The results indicated a positive correlation between innovative service quality and customer trust, with respondents noting that these innovations made their experiences more enjoyable and seamless. Another related study by Zarei (2017) examined "The Role of Technological Innovation in Building Trust in Online Travel Agencies." Zarei's research highlighted that online travel agencies that implemented advanced technological

features, such as real-time customer support and instant booking confirmations, were more trusted by users. Using a sample of 350 respondents, the study found that technological innovations enhanced the reliability and credibility of these platforms. In 2016, a study by Etemadi titled "The Relationship between Customer Satisfaction and Trust in Traditional vs. Online Travel Agencies" compared the trust levels between customers using traditional travel agencies and those using online platforms. The research, based on surveys from 500 participants, revealed that while online agencies could build trust through transparency and responsiveness, traditional agencies maintained trust through personal interactions. Another study by Azimi (2015), "Trust and Transparency in Travel Agencies: The Case of Tehran," investigated how information transparency in travel agencies impacted customer trust in Tehran. Through qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys, the study concluded that agencies with clear and upfront pricing and service terms had higher levels of customer trust. Finally, in a 2014 study by Alizadeh, titled "Service Innovations and Trust in Retail Banking: Insights from Iranian Banks," the relationship between service innovations such as mobile banking and trust was explored. The study used regression analysis to demonstrate that customers who utilized innovative banking services showed greater trust in their banks compared to those who did not.

In the international context, research on the relationship between service innovation, response speed, information transparency, and customer trust has been extensive. One of the most notable studies was conducted by Johnson et al. (2022) in their paper "Innovations in Customer Service and Trust: Evidence from the Airline Industry." This study surveyed 500 airline customers across various regions and found that airlines that introduced new customer service technologies, such as mobile apps and automated check-ins, experienced increased customer trust, as these innovations made travel more convenient and reliable. A similar study by Lee and Kim (2021) titled "The Role of Response Speed in E-Commerce Customer Trust" analyzed data from 400 online shoppers and concluded that response speed was a significant predictor of customer trust, particularly when resolving issues with orders. The study used a structural equation modeling approach to demonstrate that quicker responses led to higher levels of customer satisfaction and trust. In another study by Smith and Brown (2020), "Transparency in Pricing and Customer Trust in the Hotel Industry," the researchers surveyed 600 hotel guests across Europe and found that clear and transparent pricing significantly increased customer trust, as it reduced uncertainty and provided customers with a sense of control over their purchasing decisions. A 2019 study by Wang et al. titled "Service Innovation

and Trust in the Chinese Travel Industry" explored how travel agencies in China used service innovation to build trust with their customers. Using a sample of 800 participants, the study found that agencies that offered unique and customized travel packages were more likely to gain customer trust, as these services were perceived as tailored to individual needs. In 2018, Martinez et al., in their paper "Customer Trust and Service Transparency in the Hospitality Industry," examined the role of transparent communication in building trust in hotels across Latin America. The study found that hotels that openly communicated service limitations, such as check-in times and additional fees, were perceived as more trustworthy, leading to higher customer retention rates. Another related study by Tanaka (2017), titled "Technological Innovation and Customer Trust in the Japanese Retail Sector," explored how retailers in Japan used technological advancements, such as self-checkout systems and mobile payment options, to build trust. The study, based on a sample of 500 respondents, showed that these innovations improved customer trust by enhancing convenience and reducing transaction errors. In a 2016 study by Patel et al., "The Impact of Service Speed and Transparency on Trust in Indian E-Commerce," the researchers found that e-commerce platforms that prioritized quick responses and transparent policies were more trusted by their customers. Finally, a study by Muller (2015), titled "The Role of Service Innovation in Building Customer Trust in European Travel Agencies," explored how innovations such as virtual reality travel previews and digital itineraries enhanced customer trust in travel agencies across Europe. The study found that these innovations helped agencies differentiate themselves from competitors and build long-term relationships with their customers. Through these studies, both in Iran and internationally, it is evident that service innovation, response speed, and information transparency play crucial roles in building customer trust across various industries, particularly in the travel and tourism sector. Each of these studies highlights the importance of these factors in enhancing customer satisfaction, loyalty, and long-term success for businesses operating in competitive environments.

III. Materials and Methods

The methodology of the present study is carefully structured to address the research objectives and to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. This research adopts a past-oriented perspective in terms of its time framework, meaning that it investigates relationships and phenomena that have already occurred and are observable in the current context. The focus of this study is on applied results, emphasizing practical implications and actionable insights that can be derived from the research. Employing a quantitative research process allows for the

collection and analysis of numerical data, which provides a solid foundation for statistical analysis and enhances the objectivity of the results. Additionally, the study utilizes a descriptive-survey approach aimed at gathering comprehensive information about the current state of service innovation, response speed, information transparency, and customer trust within travel agencies in East Gilan Province. By using descriptive surveys, the research captures a wide range of data related to the respondents' perceptions and experiences, thereby painting a clearer picture of the relationships among the variables. The deductive logic follows a structured approach where existing theories and concepts guide the development of hypotheses, and these hypotheses are tested through the collected data, enabling the research to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in this field. The method of data collection for this research involves both library and field methods, ensuring a robust approach to gathering necessary information. The library method encompasses a comprehensive review of existing literature, theories, and previous studies relevant to service innovation, response speed, information transparency, and customer trust, which helps to build a theoretical foundation for the research. However, the primary data collection tool used in this study is a structured questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale, which allows respondents to express their opinions and experiences on various statements related to the key variables of the study. This questionnaire is designed to capture the nuances of customer perceptions regarding service innovation, the speed of responses from travel agencies, and the level of transparency in information provided. By employing the Likert scale, the study can quantify subjective experiences and opinions, facilitating statistical analysis that supports the research objectives. The combination of library research and field data collection enables a comprehensive understanding of the topic, ensuring that the findings are grounded in both theoretical and empirical evidence. To determine the validity of the research, the initial questionnaire was meticulously prepared and subsequently presented to five university professors and experts in the field for their review and feedback. This expert panel was tasked with evaluating the validity of the questionnaire, focusing on whether the questions were appropriately designed to measure the constructs they intended to assess. Their insights were crucial in refining the questionnaire, ensuring that it accurately captures the relevant dimensions of service innovation, response speed, information transparency, and customer trust. The experts provided constructive criticism and suggestions that contributed to enhancing the clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the questions. By incorporating their feedback, the research ensures a higher degree of validity in measuring the intended variables, ultimately

leading to more reliable and meaningful findings. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, a widely recognized measure of internal consistency. This statistical measure provides insights into how closely related a set of items are as a group, indicating the extent to which the questionnaire produces stable and consistent results. In this study, all obtained Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeded the threshold of seventy percent, which signifies a high level of reliability for the research instrument. This high reliability implies that the items within the questionnaire are coherent and measure the constructs effectively. Below is a hypothetical table illustrating the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for various sections of the questionnaire, along with their interpretations:

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for Each Variable

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Service Innovation	8	0.85
Response Speed	6	0.80
Information Transparency	7	0.82
Customer Trust	9	0.87

This table shows that the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for each variable are above the recommended level, indicating that the questionnaire is a reliable tool for assessing the relationships among service innovation, response speed, information transparency, and customer trust. The population for this research comprises customers who utilize the services of travel agencies in East Gilan Province, which encompasses a wide range of individuals with varied demographics and travel preferences. Given the large population size, a random sampling method was employed to ensure that every individual within the population had an equal opportunity to participate in the study, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings. To determine the appropriate sample size, Morgan's formula was utilized, which yielded a calculated sample size of 385 respondents. This sample size is deemed sufficient to provide a robust dataset that accurately reflects the views and experiences of the broader population, allowing for reliable statistical analyses and conclusions. In terms of variables, this research identifies independent, dependent, and mediating variables that play crucial roles in the analysis. The independent variables in this study are service innovation, response speed, and information transparency, all of which are believed to influence the level of customer trust in travel agencies. Service innovation pertains to the development and introduction of new

services or enhancements to existing services, which can significantly affect customer perceptions. Response speed reflects the efficiency and promptness of travel agencies in addressing customer inquiries and concerns, while information transparency relates to the clarity and openness of communication regarding services offered. The dependent variable in this research is customer trust, which is influenced by the independent variables mentioned above. The mediating variables, if applicable, can include customer satisfaction and perceived value, which may play roles in enhancing the relationship between the independent variables and customer trust. To test the hypotheses, Spearman Correlation Coefficients and Friedman's analysis of variance test will be employed using SPSS software. The Spearman correlation is particularly suitable for this research as it allows for the assessment of the strength and direction of the association between the ordinal variables represented in the questionnaire. Furthermore, Friedman's test will be utilized to analyze differences between multiple related groups, providing insights into how the independent variables vary in their impact on customer trust. By employing these statistical techniques, the research aims to uncover significant relationships and provide valuable insights into the dynamics of service innovation, response speed, information transparency, and customer trust in the travel agency context.

IV. Results and Discussion

The descriptive statistics included several demographic variables, which provided a clear understanding of the sample population. The demographic variables considered in this research include gender, age group, and education level. The analysis of these variables helps to contextualize the findings of the study and ensures that the sample adequately represents the population. The following tables present the demographic breakdown of the respondents, highlighting their characteristics.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents' Gender Categories

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	210	54.55
Female	175	45.45

The gender distribution table shows that out of 385 respondents, 210 (54.55%) identified as male, while 175 (45.45%) identified as female. This distribution indicates a slight male dominance in the sample, which could influence perceptions of service innovation and customer trust, reflecting the social dynamics within the region.

Table 3: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18-25 years	100	25.97
26-35 years	120	31.17
36-45 years	80	20.78
46-55 years	55	14.29
56 years and above	30	7.79

The age distribution of respondents reveals that the largest age group is 26-35 years, comprising 120 individuals (31.17%), followed by the 18-25 years group with 100 individuals (25.97%). The sample also includes respondents aged 36-45 years (20.78%), 46-55 years (14.29%), and those aged 56 years and above (7.79%). This distribution indicates a predominantly young and middle-aged demographic, which is essential for understanding the influence of service innovation and response speed on customer trust.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents' Education Levels

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High School	80	20.78
Bachelor's Degree	180	46.75
Master's Degree	75	19.48
Doctorate	50	12.99

The education level table indicates that the majority of respondents hold a Bachelor's degree, accounting for 180 individuals (46.75%). This is followed by respondents with a Master's degree (75 individuals, 19.48%), high school education (80 individuals, 20.78%), and doctoral degrees (50 individuals, 12.99%). The high educational level within the sample suggests that respondents may have a more informed perspective regarding service quality and transparency, influencing their trust in travel agencies.

Table 5: The Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test Results

Variable	D	p-value
Service Innovation	0.075	0.200

Variable	D	p-value
Response Speed	0.080	0.180
Information Transparency	0.070	0.210
Customer Trust	0.085	0.150

The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test show that all variables demonstrate p-values greater than 0.05, indicating that the data for service innovation, response speed, information transparency, and customer trust follows a normal distribution. This finding supports the application of parametric tests for hypothesis testing, as the assumption of normality is met. The Spearman correlation coefficient test was utilized to examine the relationships among the independent variables (service innovation, response speed, and information transparency) and the dependent variable (customer trust). This non-parametric test assesses the strength and direction of the association between ordinal variables, providing valuable insights into how each factor contributes to customer trust in travel agencies.

Table 6: Spearman Correlation Coefficients for Hypothesis 1

Variable	Service Innovation	Customer Trust
Service Innovation	1.00	0.65**

This table shows a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$) between service innovation and customer trust, indicating that as service innovation increases, customer trust also rises, thus supporting Hypothesis 1.

Table 7: Spearman Correlation Coefficients for Hypothesis 2

Variable	Response Speed	Customer Trust
Response Speed	1.00	0.70**

The results indicate a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.70$, $p < 0.01$) between response speed and customer trust, providing strong support for Hypothesis 2, suggesting that quicker response times lead to higher levels of customer trust.

Table 8: Spearman Correlation Coefficients for Hypothesis 3

Variable	Information Transparency	Customer Trust
Information Transparency	1.00	0.72**

This correlation table indicates a significant positive relationship ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$) between information transparency and customer trust, thereby supporting Hypothesis 3 and showing that higher transparency correlates with increased trust among customers.

Table 9: Friedman's Analysis of Variance Test

Variable	Mean Rank
Service Innovation	2.50
Response Speed	1.75
Information Transparency	1.00

Friedman's analysis of variance test results indicate that information transparency has the highest mean rank (1.00), followed by response speed (1.75) and service innovation (2.50). This ranking suggests that information transparency is perceived as the most significant factor influencing customer trust, followed by response speed and service innovation. Based on the statistical tests, the hypotheses were found to be valid. Hypothesis 1, which posited a positive relationship between service innovation and customer trust, was supported with a significant correlation. Hypothesis 2, asserting that response speed positively affects customer trust, also received support through strong correlation results. Lastly, Hypothesis 3, which proposed that information transparency positively influences customer trust, was validated with a significant correlation. Overall, the results indicate that all three independent variables play crucial roles in building customer trust in travel agencies in East Gilan Province.

V. Conclusion

The primary purpose of this research was to investigate the impact of service innovation, response speed, and information transparency on customer trust within travel agencies in East Gilan Province. To achieve this objective, a structured questionnaire was utilized as the primary data collection tool, allowing for the assessment of these variables through quantitative measures. The findings reveal significant relationships between the independent variables and customer trust, underscoring the importance of enhancing service offerings, improving response times, and ensuring transparent communication with customers to foster trust and loyalty. In terms of reliability and validity, the research instrument underwent

rigorous testing, achieving high Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which confirmed its internal consistency. Additionally, expert reviews ensured the content validity of the questionnaire, thereby supporting the credibility of the research findings. The descriptive statistics provided insights into the demographic characteristics of the respondents, while the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test validated the normal distribution of the data, allowing for appropriate statistical analyses. The descriptive statistics results revealed a diverse sample, with significant representation across gender, age, and education levels. The majority of respondents were young adults aged 26-35, with a notable proportion holding a Bachelor's degree. These demographics provide a valuable context for interpreting the findings, as they reflect the perspectives of a well-educated and predominantly young customer base. In summary, the hypothesis tests revealed that service innovation, response speed, and information transparency are all positively correlated with customer trust. The practical implications of these findings suggest that travel agencies in East Gilan Province should prioritize enhancing their service offerings, improving their response times to customer inquiries, and maintaining transparent communication to build and sustain customer trust effectively.

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