

Seaport marketing strategies and its impact on customer satisfaction

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Abstract

In the world today, seaports play a crucial role in the economic and environmental sustainability of tourism destination. Seaports and their related facilities of different types and sizes are competing to capture market share globally. This study seeks to investigate the impact of seaport marketing mix strategies on customer satisfaction, identifying the significant marketing mix tactic that should be of focus to cities with seaports. This quantitative research uses deductive approach to develop a proposed model with various hypotheses to be tested. It is considered descriptive research as it seeks to depict the characteristics of a population being studied as well as to answer questions that pertain and explain seaport marketing strategies and its impact on customer satisfaction. Online questionnaires are distributed through convenience sampling during cross-sectional timeframe- December 2021 and January 2022. Results show that seaport-services, promotion, staff, physical evidence, and process has a positive significant impact customer satisfaction with the seaport. Seaport place/distribution and price are insignificant on customer satisfaction. This research is among ongoing attempts to study seaport marketing so to improve the current tourism industry of a nation. The focus is on seaport satisfaction, uncovering the significant marketing mix experiences to propose an effective marketing strategy. This research thus provides a significant addition to marketing knowledge for an increasingly important sector of the tourism industry, illustrating the vitality of the marketing mix and how the marketing mix elements vary from one field to another field.

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1- Introduction

As the dynamic market commences various societal factors that impact the tourism industry (natural disasters, global pandemics, inflations, war, political conflicts, etc.), marketing strategies are needed to flourish and sustain the businesses in the industry (Jiang and Wen, 2020). According to scholars, marketing knowledge and skill are seen as vital ingredients for tourism long-term survival and growth among a nation (Kotler et al., 2022). Tourism marketing is the systematic execution of various activities (by both private or public sector in the tourism field) to optimally satisfy tourists needs (local, national, or international tourists); and in doing so to achieve an appropriate return (Li et al., 2021).

Each country has distinctive features that can act as a competitive advantage to attract tourists to visit; one of these features is the city's seaport. Research shows that there is a significant relationship between seaports and the city's tourism; it is characterized by a dynamic, multi-level and interconnected landscape, which has been created by: "a constant interaction of maritime (port) activities and associated activities of the city through trade and movement of people through migration and diaspora" (Alen et al., 2021). Many cities along the coast have identified themselves as a seaport city touristic destination; these cities offer similar services and touristic appearances (Parola et al., 2018). Accordingly, seaports are to become more market-oriented, needing marketing initiatives to differentiate their region in a more attractive manner than existing seaports (Notteboom and Winkelmans, 2001). Scholars and practitioners claim that marketing research is required to maintain seaport efficiency so to improve tourism (Sofronov, 2019). Research suggests seaports to be: "customer-oriented and market-driven" as it aids in the

development of appropriate marketing strategies that attract clients, business, tourism, cargo, etc. (Shipping Professional, 1997, p.20; Parola et al., 2018). Nevertheless, there are insufficient research dedicated to studying the marketing practices that are applied on seaports to aid tourism (Parola et al., 2018; Sofronov, 2019).

Sofronov (2019) research clarifies that seaports are currently trying to develop its performance and productivity; conversely, without an understanding of the necessary marketing strategies to meet consumer needs, seaports will not be able to develop its services in the right directions (Alexandre et al., 2019). Becoming more market oriented to attract more trade and tourism (during times of increased competition) requires constant research (Sofronov, 2019). Nevertheless, seaport marketing research are limited in exploration (Alen et al., 2021). Most research focus on tourism in general and how countries promote tourism attraction or how to effectively market tourism sites (Sofronov, 2019; Orindaru et al., 2021). There is significant need in research that illustrate which marketing strategies are noteworthy to be applied in seaports (Camilleri, 2018). This topic is necessary as scholars claim seaports play a significant role in tourism; yet the topic remains understudy (Illynskyy et al., 2018).

The aim of the current research is to study the extent of marketing strategies, specifically the marketing mix applications of seaports, and its impact on customer satisfaction. This study seeks to develop empirical evidence to aid stakeholders in idea-formulation regarding further strategies to increase tourism. The focus is on customer satisfaction since prior research indicates that good customer service leads to content customers, which means better customer retention; being able to retain customers is a tool to improve tourism and increase sales (Kotler et al., 2022). Based on research, tourist satisfaction impacts their future traveling-plan choices, consumption of touristic products and services, and decision to return back (Li et al., 2021). This research's objective is twofold: it aims to identify the theoretical foundations of seaport marketing in literature; and to recognize significant seaport marketing mix strategies that create customer satisfaction.

2. Literature Review

Existing research urge further understanding of the necessary marketing activities to promote and enable customers to be satisfied with seaports as a means to improve tourism (Camilleri, 2018). A review of prior literature is conducted to gain a better understanding of what is a seaport, its benefits to the market, and the necessity of marketing. With this reviews, academic gap is discovered, and a proposed conceptual framework is developed.

2.1 The Concept of Seaport

Seaports have developed over the years and have changed in terms of organization due to various elements that emerged in the dynamic market. Such elements relate to globalization, advanced technology, business subtleties, and a region's wealth creation (Rutter et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the main conception and mode of a seaport is a city with a harbor, providing transfer of cargo between ships (sea) and land (Alexander et al., 2019). As trade increased around the world, seaports grew to being a city where people and cultures interact for the purpose of conducting vacation and commerce (Camilleri, 2018).

Many definitions of seaports have emerged throughout the years, such as: "seaport is used to cover an organized place where goods and I passengers are exchanged between ships and the store" (Goss, 1990); "a facility which handles trading vessels as distinct from fishing and leisure craft" (Lewarn, 1991); "a port is a place where cargo is processed and the faster the cargo is processed, the more efficient it is" (Peters and Cheslin, 1998); "a port refers to a nucleus of facilities, at least some of which are publicly owned or maintained, that provide berths at which vessels can load and unload cargo and/or passengers" (Helling and Poister, 2000); "seaports have been enforced to meet the increased needs of global supply chains and flow of commodities. In order to meet the increased demands, intermodal transportation is being used. The use of efficient intermodal transportation has significantly reduced handling operations and congestion at ports and all other transfer points, thus increasing the efficiency of the ports" (Tarek et al., 2020). These definitions neglect that ports can be a source of increasing tourism; for example, the cruise industry growth rate has been gaining popularity among destinations that have ports - cruise tourism

contributes \$2tn towards global economic (Milad et al., 2018). Seaports, world, are principal infrastructural assets that service shipping and trade (UNCTAD, 2018).

2.2 Seaport Activities and Services

Global seaports cater to ships and cargo with various port operations, starting with the shore side, to the berth, the yard and the landside. Georgia Tech Panama Logistics Innovation and Research Center (2020) explains seaports as holding four main steps: ship-to-shore (stage when cargo is discharged), transfer (cargo is unloaded to a temporal area), storage (stage where containers are hold for a longer period of time), and receipt-movement of delivery (clearance).

The transportation of goods and passengers are the primary service offered at a seaport. Still, there are other seaport activities performed: infrastructure services, port authorities and administration, cargo handling, custom clearance services, and other services, such as securing, towage, etc. (Rutter et al., 2017). Nowadays, in the tourism industry, some seaports offer docking of passenger ships (cruise ships, ferries and yachts) more than one day, and the “overnight” demand is observed (Alexander et al., 2019). The Maritime Transport Review (2018) by the United Nations conference on trade and development (UNCTAD) indicates that the average time in port for touristic ships are estimated at 31.2 hours to gain these services.

According to Georgia Tech Panama Logistics Innovation and Research Center (2020), global seaports are market services that provide customers (B2B or B2C) with different types of operations: “embarking, disembarking and transferring of passengers and crew; loading, unloading and transshipment of cargo to and from the vessels; storage and warehousing of merchandise on land and stevedoring to and from vessels; provide inland access and intermodal connections; complementary services to shipping carriers”.

Hoyle (1983) explains that: “a seaport is fundamentally a central place of economic and cultural interchange; more specifically, it is a place where the mode of transportation changes from land to water borne systems. the essential function of a seaport is transport integration... a seaport may also become a major urban center, an important source of employment, and an influential factor in regional and national development. a seaport is an element in a global transport system, a servant of an international economic order, and a gateway to and from a national or regional hinterland”. Many cities have invested in establishing a proper seaport to attract visitors (Rutter et al., 2017). Countries are urged to apply marketing concept in port cities to attract visitors and customers (Alexander et al., 2019).

2.3 Seaport Service Marketing

Li et al. (2021) explain that marketing practices determine accurately the needs and wants of specific target markets, delivering the desired satisfactions better than the competition. Marketing is the process of collaborating the value of a product or service to customers in order to sell the product or service (Kotler et al., 2022). The American Marketing Association (AMA, 2019) defines marketing as: “the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals”. Orîndaru et al. (2021) explain the processes of designing a marketing strategy starts with the external and internal assessment related to the business, customers, and competitors’ analysis; then the well marketing strategy can be developed.

Pantouvakis et al. (2008) state that marketing strategies are needed to achieve seaport excellence; these approaches include: “strategies of target-market identification and segmentation, of competitor identification, strategies of competitive advantage creation and pricing strategies”. Rutter et al. (2017) and Camilleri (2018) indicate that seaports should analyze their product, logistical and pricing strategies, suggest market segmentation and coordinated market research as bases for effective seaport marketing strategy, together with customer relations management, communications and employee involvement strategies. Sofronov (2019) implies that marketing aid in overcoming competition in the tourism field.

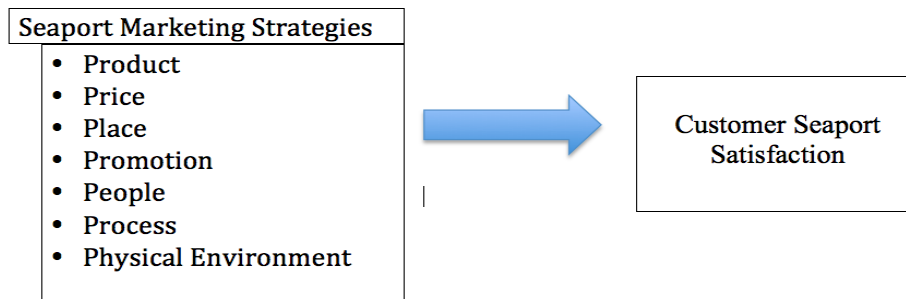
According to Rutter et al. (2017), a seaport’s realization of success is dependent upon its capacity to compete and to retain customers. Camilleri (2018) indicates that a variety of factors around efficiency, quality, competence, ability and frequency are used to develop a proper seaport products and services. To aid with differentiation and to promote a stronger persona to customers, management has paid increased attention to marketing strategies related to the product, place, promotion, price, personnel, physical

evidence, and port process (Rutter et al., 2017). Recent seaports see the urge to develop new marketing approaches and marketing communications so to compete with more established seaports globally (Sofronov, 2019).

Satisfaction is recognized as an emotional response to the product or service overall experiences with the marketing mix (Kotler et al., 2022). More recent trends have perceived the individual experience as the determinant factors in creating satisfaction (Milad et al., 2018). The collective experience of the travelers, which is obtained from the personal judgement of the characteristics of touristic services and products, lead to their satisfaction/dissatisfaction (Sofronov, 2019). According to Yeo et al., (2015), positive experience with the marketing mix leads the tourists to be more satisfied, therefore, the tourists will revisit the destination in the future. Li et al. (2021) clarifies that the physical and human environment interaction, which is valued by travelers, play a role in the creation of satisfaction, leading travelers to judge a destination as pleasant or unpleasant. Therefore, seaport should leave a remarkable impact on tourism experience, connecting it to overall satisfaction (Parola et al., 2018). The marketing mix positively and significantly impacts satisfaction (Hayuningtyas, 2020). Empirical studies ascertain that the excellence of the service marketing mix leads to the superiority of satisfaction levels (Azhar et al., 2019).

The conceptual definition of the marketing mix is stated in simple clarification by Kotler et al. (2022). In the marketing mix, the products reflect all objects (goods and services) or processes that provide a number of value benefits to consumers; the price paid for the service is the perceive value and establish imagery by consumers; the place is a combination of strategic locations and decisions on distribution channels that aid in delivering the product/services to consumers; the promotion helps communicate the positioning of services to consumers and provide customer relationships; the people, the human asset of a business, plays a role in giving consumers value as they provide the visitors with pleasant service; the process includes procedures, assignments, schedules, mechanisms, activities and routines in which a product or service is delivered to the consumer; and the physical evidence reflects the physical environment that facilitate business performance and interactions with consumers. According to Milad et al. (2018) customers' overall satisfaction with the service has been impacted by these marketing strategies. Parola et al. (2018), Azhar et al. (2019) and Hayuningtyas (2020) show that the marketing mix has a positive significant impact on satisfaction. This study develops the following research model (Figure 1) and hypothesizes that each marketing mix has a positive significant impact on customer seaport satisfaction.

Figure 2: The Proposed Research Model



3. Research Methodology

This quantitative research is considered descriptive as it seeks to describe the characteristics of a population being studied as well as to answer the "what" questions pertaining to seaport marketing mix strategies and its impact on customer satisfaction. This study is cross-sectional as the data is collected during December 2021 and January 2022. The study follows a positivism philosophy, seeking objective statistical conclusions. The data collection is through administrated questionnaires by online distribution, using google form; placing the links on touristic social media pages related to cruise booking or marketing. Spencer (2022) explains that cruises right now is getting back to business towards a new version of the pre-COVID normal. The question-scales in the questionnaire are taken from past studies

and adopted for this study. The scales for service, people, process, and physical evidence are developed by Akroush et al. (2006). The scales for price, place, and promotion are developed by Yoo et al. (2000). The scale for customer satisfaction is developed by Tsiros et al. (2004). Each variable is measured using a 5-point Likert scale. 50 questionnaires are first collected (before the actual distribution) to conduct the *pilot test* to confirm the questions' reliability and validity. The studied population is *adults that have taken cruises before and experienced docking in a seaport in the Middle East*. Research shows that cruising attracts adults more than youth, ranging in age from their 30s through to their 80s (Saltzman, 2020). The Middle Eastern seaports (Asia to Europe deep-sea shipping lanes) is the focus as it account for half of the total volume of traffic from Asia to the West (Rutter et al., 2017). The applied sampling technique is non-probability, *convenience sampling*, selecting people close to hand and are willing to participate. SPSS version 20 is used to test the corresponding research hypotheses.

4. Results

Based on google form statistics, the link has been clicked by 626 respondents; however, only 405 questionnaires were completed from respondents of different socio demographic traits as show in table 1, making this study holding a response rate of 65%.

Table One: Respondents Traits

Question	n	%	Question	n	%	Question	n	%
Age:			Nationality:			Number of Children:		
20 less than 25	8	01.970	Egyptian	205	50.600	None	94	23.200
25 less than 30	24	05.920	Arab	118	29.135	One Child	34	08.400
30 less than 35	335	82.710	Non-Arab	82	20.246	Two Children	116	28.600
35 and above	38	09.380				More than 2	161	39.700
Gender:			Marital Status:			Average monthly Income (L.E):		
Male	143	35.300	Single	25	06.170	< 2,000	8	01.970
Female	262	64.700	Married	300	74.070	2,000<5,000	24	05.920
			Separated/ Divorced	80	19.750	5,000<10,000	38	09.380
						>10,000	335	82.710

Cronbach's alpha analysis measures the internal consistency, showing how closely related a set of items in a scale are as a group. A "high" value for alpha implies that the measure is reliable. The study uses factor analysis to check the scale validity - to provide evidence that a measure does measure what it intended to - with the Factor Loadings coefficients. The factor loading tell how strong the relationship is between the variable and the factor (the relationships between survey items and the total number of dimensions in the survey). Based on the analysis (shown in table 2), the scales and its items are reliable and valid.

Table Two: Reliability and Factor Loading Analysis

Variable	Statement	Factor Loading	Cronbach Alpha	Variable	Statement	Factor Loading	Cronbach Alpha
Personnel	The port staff provide the required services quickly.	0.707	0.789	Service / product	The port provides me with distinctive services.	0.640	0.865
	Usually, port staff is able to answer my inquiries.	0.805			The port cares about the services provision.	0.712	
	The port staff is well in deal with	0.754			The port has a distinctive brand in the	0.601	

	customers.				market.		
	The port staff treats me as a valued customer.	0.818			The port provides me with update services/products.	0.680	
	The port staff willing and ready to deliver service	0.789			The port service provides a variety of services	0.612	
Price	The port gives more than one paying facility/option.	0.688	0.921	Place/ Distrib.	The port has access to different destinations.	0.746	0.845
	The port prices are appropriate for my budget.	0.786			The port location is appropriate for travel plans	0.804	
	The port charge fitting prices for its service quality	0.688			The port website info is available for travelers.	0.787	
	The port charges prices that are competitive	0.513			The port service providers' website is well-organized.	0.818	
Promotion	The port advertising is creative	0.796		Process	Procedures in the port are easy, quick and immediate.	0.801	0.874
	The port adverting is seen across various media	0.863			The port delivers services as promised.	0.764	
	The port advertising is perceived as credible	0.738			The port provides services to customers free of errors.	0.756	
	The port provides special offers from time to time	0.755			The port procedures are efficient in performance	0.824	
	Positive port word of mouth is available	0.776			The port handles complaints seriously	0.811	

	among people						
Physical Evidence	Port staff appears in attractive uniforms.	0.818	0.866	Port Satisfact.	I was happy with the port service performance.	0.778	0.782
	Port facilities (queuing arrangements, amenities, etc.) are attractive	0.798			I was satisfied with the port service performance.	0.794	
	The port uses modern and sophisticated equipment.	0.774					
	The overall atmosphere at the port is comfortable.	0.750					

The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) provides calculations of the data about levels of variability within a regression model and form a basis for tests of significance. Accordingly, the model in this study is significant as the Sig. value is equal to 0.000. The Adjusted R-square represents the fraction of the variance for a dependent variable that's caused by an independent variable or variables in a regression model. R-squared explains to what degree the variance of one variable explains the variance of the second variable. This study's adjusted R-square is 63.5%, revealing 63.5% of the marketing mix explain port customer satisfaction. The remaining percentage can be caused by other variables.

Multiple regressions enable the examination of the effect of many different factors on a specific outcome or predictor at the same time. The testing of the hypothesis is indicated through the p-value as shown in table 3. A p-value less than 0.05 (typically ≤ 0.05) is statistically significant. It indicates strong evidence against the null hypothesis, as there is less than a 5% probability the null is correct (and the results are random). The results show port-service provision, promotion, staff, physical evidence, and process has a positive significant impact customer satisfaction with the seaport ($p < 0.05$). Port-service distribution and price had an insignificant impact customer satisfaction with the seaport ($p > 0.05$).

Table Three: Multiple Regression Analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized coefficient	T	Sig.	Hypothesis testing
	B	Standard Error	Beta			
Port Service	0.69	.023	.007	3.002	.003	Supported
Port Price	.003	.016	.004	.178	.858	Not Supported
Port Distribution	0.204	.020	.030	1.184	.237	Not Supported
Port promotion	.230	.023	.271	9.822	.000	Supported
People	.070	.021	.094	3.344	.001	Supported
Physical Evidence	.079	.021	.101	3.792	.000	Supported
Process	0.145	.024	.176	6.013	.000	Supported
Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction						

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Marketing is becoming a necessary seaport management activity due to changes in the environment and due to the increase competition (Alen et al., 2021). Research explain that ports are required to become more marketing-oriented to attract and retain customers (Rutter et al., 2017; Parola et al., 2018). Ports

should apply marketing as a guideline to face the high demands that occur due to more open and competitive markets (Pantouvakis et al., 2008); With marketing strategies and tactics, the ports can apply marketing as a high-value tool, aiding in capturing new markets and products (Yingfei et al., 2022). Marketing is no longer a business choice, but a necessity for seaports; correspondingly, research is needed to identify the significant marketing strategies that are to be established, prevalent, and appropriate to ports (Alexandre et al., 2019). Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate various marketing practices and its impact on customer satisfaction towards seaports. As more and more ports compete, research on this topic aid in strategy formation to improve port efficient infrastructure and performance, creating a favorable impact on international service harbor, trade and environment (Yingfei et al., 2022)

Results show that port-service provision, promotion, staff, physical evidence, and process has a positive significant impact customer satisfaction with the seaport. Port-service distribution and price had an insignificant impact customer satisfaction with the seaport. Rajh and Dosen (2009) and Yeo et al. (2015) show that various marketing mix elements affect services; different elements have different effects on service, showing how essential that marketing approach is a strategic context specific manner. Rutter et al. (2017) support this research conclusions, indicating in their research that port-authorities should analyze product developments and logistical manners linked to port-services to coordinate market research as bases for effective port marketing strategy; together with customer relation management, communication and employee involvement strategies (Alen et al., 2021). According to (Song et al. (2008)), a prosperous marketing strategy focuses on distinctive competencies through which a port can deliver value to various stakeholders; when such marketing actions are effective, ports are able to cope with demand and attract additional demand.

Research regarding the marketing of seaports appears to be in an emergent phase; thus, this research seeks to contribute in accelerating the understanding of what is meant by seaport marketing through empirical research. This research highlights how the significant marketing mix strategies that could be utilized to create customer satisfaction. Thus, the output of this study is vital for practitioners to pinpoint and enable the creation of strategies that would allow seaports on an individual basis to become more competitive- able to compete more effectively against other ports of the world. Meaningful implications for port managers, marketers, and other practitioners are derived from the findings, leading to better understanding of how to enhance the port experience and performance among consumers.

This study faced several limitations that prevent the outcomes to be completely generalizable. This study assessed ports in general, not a specific port. This study focuses on consumers point of view that experienced cruises that landed on ports, neglecting other customers of ports (e.g., shipping lines, cargo owners, and their representatives). This study focused on marketing activities that lead to customer satisfaction, neglecting the main activities needed to improve port service quality that customers (e.g., shipping lines, cargo owners, and their representatives) appreciate and request. This study uses non-probability sampling as it was difficult to acquire a sampling frame to perform probability sampling. Accordingly, future studies are suggested to apply this study on other group of customers of ports. Future study can test the model on specific ports in order to generalize and validate the results of this study. The tested model can be applied as a comparative study between the industrial sector and service sector, between western ports and Arab ports.

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