

Topic Delimitation:

A methodological critique of a report by Royal Intel

Based on a study of 13 Asia Pacific markets carried out in 2006/07, Royal Intel produced a series of white papers on the APAC tourism and travel industry, generally referred to as the APTEC (Asia Pacific Travel Encyclopedia) series. As the reports were a success with the clients, it was agreed to commission a sequel which would examine the Asia Pacific travellers' drivers and motives for visiting Scandinavia. An extensive study, set out to cover five markets and consist of in-depth interviews with 30 respondents from each market, it was clear from the onset that the value of the report would lie in its qualitative nature. The research was conducted in 2009 and the much expected APTEC 2 report was released to the client in November 2009. However, from an academic viewpoint, it contains several methodological shortcomings, and the purpose of the internship assignment will be to critically review the APTEC 2 report in order to evaluate the methodology, the theoretical framework as well as its credibility and overall usefulness.

Overview of theory

The theoretical foundation of the paper will comprise of two separate sets. The first will be the theories applied in APTEC 2, including the means-end theory, the travel decision-making process, travel motivation including push and pull factors, destination image, destination choice, travel satisfaction and destination loyalty. References will include those used in APTEC 2 and, since many of the sources in APTEC 2 are more than 20 years old, papers of a more recent date in order to compare the study findings with newer developments of the theoretical concepts.

The second set consists of papers and tools which are used to criticise various aspects of qualitative research. One such tool is Decrop's criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of a qualitative study using triangulation, while Diefenbach presents a list of methodological problems with qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews. In a slightly different manner, Stige, Malterud & Midtgarden, to circumvent the problem of the rigid structure of checklists or the abstract nature of generalized standard criteria, propose an evaluation agenda consisting of seven points which are used to evaluate qualitative research using reflexive dialogue.

These are the three tools I will employ for the review of APTEC 2, along with the general academic skills I have gained through my studies.

Data

The main data for the assignment is the APTEC 2 report itself. Consisting of an extensive literature review, sections on general perceptions of the Scandinavian countries as tourist destinations, travel statistics on Scandinavia as well as Asia, country profiles of the five APAC markets, a global view of the tourism industry and of course the study findings, the report ticks in at roughly 350 pages. As a consequence of the sheer size of APTEC and the 20 page limitation of the internship assignment, the paper will only deal in-depth with selected aspects of the report, i.e. dilemmas concerning the methodology, theoretical framework and the analysis.

Methodological considerations

Regarding the methodological scope of the assignment, the main objective is to review and evaluate the APTEC 2 report. The analysis will be structured as a three-step approach: first the methodology of the report will be reviewed. This pertains to collection of data, study design, argumentation for various choices and delimitations. Second, the theoretical framework and literary sources are evaluated, including their application to the interview outline, their pertinence to the subject of study and, as mentioned, their relevance vis-a-vis more recent theoretical discussions. Finally, the analysis of the report will be assessed, where the study findings will be viewed in the light of the applied theory and method.

Several implications should be noted:

First of all, I have contributed to the report myself, as the analysis of the Indian responses was undertaken mainly by me. However, the overall outline of the study design or the interviews themselves I did not have any influence on, as the preprocessed responses were merely presented for me to analyse.

Second, the shortcomings of the report are acknowledged in the delimitation section. However, though the lack of qualitative empirical data is mentioned, the entire study including research question and method is still presented and handled as if it were qualitative research. This, in my opinion, undermines the fact that the shortcomings are acknowledged, and the report will be reviewed on the same premises as any other qualitative study.

Third, due to its obvious flaws, the client and Royal Intel have agreed to make several amendments to the report. Recently it has come to my attention that the report is now suddenly referred to as a 'first draft'. However, the report reviewed in my paper will be the first version – the one the clients received in November 2009. My analysis will not take into account any improvements made later,

the rationale being that it was supposed to be the final version, and that this talk has emerged simply because the clients were not satisfied with what they received.

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