

## The Quality of Business Relationships in the Tourism System: An Imaginary Organisation Approach

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**Abstract :** The tourism system is viewable as a network of relationships amongst business partners where the success of each actor will ultimately be determined by the success of the whole network. Especially since the publication of Gummesson's (1996) 'theory of imaginary organisations', which suggests that organisational effectiveness largely depends on managing relationships and sharing resources and activities, relationship quality (RQ) has been increasingly recognised as a main source of value creation and competitive advantage. However, there is still ambiguity around this topic, and managers and researchers have been recurrently reporting the need to better understand and capitalise on the quality of interactions with business partners. This research aims at testing an RQ model from a relational, imaginary organisation's approach. Two mail surveys provide the perceptions of 725 hotel representatives about their business relationships with tour operators, and 1,224 corporate client representatives about their business relationships with hotels (21.9 % and 38.8 % response rate, respectively). The analysis contributes to enhance our understanding on the linkages between RQ and its determinants, and identifies the role of their dimensions. Structural equation modelling results highlight trust as the dominant dimension, the crucial role of commitment and satisfaction, and suggest customer orientation as complementary building block. Findings also emphasise problem solving behaviour and selling orientation as the most relevant dimensions of customer orientation. The comparison of the two 'dyads' deepens the discussion and enriches the suggested theoretical and managerial guidelines concerning the contribution of quality relationships to business performance.

**Keywords :** corporate clients, destination competitiveness, hotels, relationship quality, structural equations modelling, tour operators

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