

La cadena de suministros turística y su proyección en cuba. Una mirada desde la gestión de la demanda

Tourism supply chain and its projection in Cuba. A look from demand management.

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Palabras claves:

cadena de suministros turística, gestión, demanda, Cuba

Resumen

En la industria del turismo las investigaciones sobre la cadena de suministros constituyen una ventaja competitiva, pues dan la posibilidad de conocer lo que desea el cliente y cómo satisfacer esas necesidades. En consecuencia, una de las estrategias de la industria turística para incrementar dicha competitividad, es alcanzar una efectiva gestión en sus cadenas de suministros. Específicamente, saber gestionar y pronosticar adecuadamente demanda turística es una fuente de información que permite a los actores económicos implicados en las actividades, así como para las instituciones encargadas del destino, conocer su comportamiento y cuáles son sus elementos esenciales, que le permitan tomar decisiones a favor del crecimiento y desarrollo de los destinos turísticos. En Cuba las redes turísticas presentan innumerables deficiencias asociadas prever correctamente a comportamiento del mercado. Por consiguiente, la investigación tuvo como objetivo proyectar la cadena de suministros turísticos del sector en el país mediante la identificación, representación y definición de los entes económicos que la integran y la colaboración entre cada uno de ellos; así como la descripción y valoración de la implicación de estos actores en la organización y gestión de la demanda turística, para hacer frente a los problemas críticos de Cuba en este sentido. Los métodos utilizados fueron análisis y síntesis, inducción y deducción, búsqueda de información, entrevistas semiestructuradas, y criterios de expertos. El principal resultado lo constituyó la identificación de los factores claves que afectan la gestión de la demanda en Cuba y los métodos para pronosticarla. El área de estudios de la investigación es el turismo, específicamente la logística

Keywords:

tourism supply chain, management, demand, Cuba

Abstract

In the tourism industry, research on the supply chain constitutes a competitive advantage, since it gives the possibility of knowing what the client wants and how to satisfy those needs. Consequently, one of the strategies of the tourism industry to increase said competitiveness is to achieve effective management in their supply chains. Specifically, knowing how to adequately manage and forecast tourist





demand is a source of information that allows the economic actors involved in the activities, as well as the institutions in charge of the destination, to know their behavior and what their essential elements are, which allows them to make decisions in favor of the growth and development of tourist destinations. In Cuba, tourist networks present innumerable deficiencies associated with correctly forecasting the behavior of the market. Therefore, the objective of the research was to project the tourism supply chain of the sector in the country through the identification, representation and definition of the economic entities that comprise it and the collaboration between each one of them; as well as the description and assessment of the involvement of these actors in the organization and management of the tourist demand, to face the critical problems of Cuba in this sense. The methods used were analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, information search, semi-structured interviews, and expert criteria. The main result was the identification of the key factors that affect demand management in Cuba and the methods to forecast it.

Introduction

Nowadays, organizations are constantly searching for alternatives that allow them to find solutions to the ever-increasing challenges they face in a highly competitive environment. In this sense, each organization needs to develop a structure and processes adjusted to the demands of the selected markets, understanding that the goods or services must be the result of high quality standards to achieve greater competitiveness and participation (Nugent, 2019). Internal and external factors must be interlocked and favor exchange relationships in each of the links involved in the production and marketing of products. Therefore, it is necessary to study the supply chain as the indispensable structure to achieve the development and enhancement of the production and marketing of goods and services in any economy. In this sense, knowing and understanding what the supply chain means, knowing what the necessary resources are, what quantity is required, as well as knowing the current use of the organization's resources, will allow the development of actions that maximize the achievement of business objectives and increase its level of competitiveness and therefore profitability.





Tourism in Cuba is experiencing the consequences of a global pandemic, the effects of internal policies such as the economic reorganization that caused a high inflation in prices, and it also faces greater economic restrictions imposed by the US blockade. As a result, the logistics and supply systems in the country are deeply affected, making the proper development of tourism supply networks extremely difficult (Alpizar Ortueta, 2021). The supply chain, as the protagonist of this contest, must ensure that problems do not arise due to lack of synchronization or information in the successive transfer of tasks from one agent to another. The final rationalization of the whole is sought, regardless of who performs the function. Reduce time and cost, increasing flexibility and quality, ensuring the positioning of the product or service in the market efficiently (Jacobo-García et al., 2018).

This is why it is necessary to carry out a detailed study of the tourist supply chain in our country, with an emphasis on demand management, since through it we can plan the production or service processes, and determine all the resources required to ensure compliance with the company's planning, as well as the working capital necessary for this purpose. Demand depends on the specific characteristics of the market, whether national or export, hence, in order to predict it, it is necessary to have information on the elements that determine the market's behavior for the products and services that the company produces.

The present work aims to project the tourism supply chain of the sector in Cuba, by identifying, representing and defining the economic entities that comprise it and the collaboration between each of them; as well as the description and assessment of the involvement of these actors in the organization and management of the tourist demand, in order to address Cuba's critical problems in this regard.

Methodology

Considering the way in which the authors cognition is carried out, the methods used are both empirical and theoretical, as they allow for a deeper understanding of the regularities and essential characteristics of the phenomena. The research is of a documentary nature, starting from the general to the particular, trying to explain, describe and explore all the phenomena present in the process. Considering the way in which reality is approached, qualitative methods will be used, which are those that use techniques that have a qualitative basis, such as interviews, bibliographical reviews and documentary analysis. In addition, tools such as the Nice Mind application are used for the presentation of graphs, figures, diagrams and the APA Seventh Edition Standard is used for structuring the bibliography, using the bibliographic manager Zotero.

Results





Supply Chain Management Overview

Tourism supply chains are considered one of the most innovative studies among service networks and one that is just emerging in the literature. Supply chain management is the integration of various business processes and other organizations, from the end user to the original suppliers that provide products, services and information that add value for the customer (Cabrera Cuba, 2018). A supply chain is characterized by a forward flow of goods and a backward flow of information, and comprises seven main business processes: customer relationship management, customer service management, demand management, order fulfillment, manufacturing flow management, procurement, product development and marketing (Alpizar Ortueta, 2021; Zhang, 2009). The structure of the chain depends on the needs of the chain and the responsibilities of its members. An adequate structure translates into benefits for all members (Montilla Cladera, 2017). Taking into account the above, the importance that SC administration has taken on within the current business world is demonstrated, presenting it as a tool for improving company management and as a competitive advantage due to the increase in suppliers in operations.

Tourism has a significant number of characteristics that distinguish it from sectors such as primary or manufacturing (González Conde, 2022). From the point of view of (Zhang, 2009) (Cabrera Cuba, 2018) a TSC is one that "includes the suppliers of all the goods and services involved in the delivery of tourist products to consumers as an interorganizational network formed by multiple supplier-client combinations. The ultimate goal of a TSC is customer (Tourist) satisfaction, but it also seeks to keep costs under control by optimizing the use of available resources (cost efficiency). The tourism supply chain must be flexible and adaptable in order to meet the changing needs of customers and face unexpected situations, such as natural disasters or changes in tourist demand. At the same time, it seeks to encourage innovation and continuous improvement, either through the implementation of new technologies or through improvements in the efficiency and quality of existing processes. It seeks to be environmentally conscious since the tourism industry depends largely on environmental resources, which are freely available and potentially subject to degradation due to excessive use.

As expressed by (Szpilko, 2017) a Supply Chain is a network of tourism organizations involved in a number of diverse activities, ranging from providing a full spectrum of tourist product/service components, such as flights, accommodation at the tourist reception desk, and ending with the sale of tourist products in the tourist region. This network includes a wide range of subjects, both from the public and private sectors, who are involved in the creation, sale and promotion of tourist products, that is why

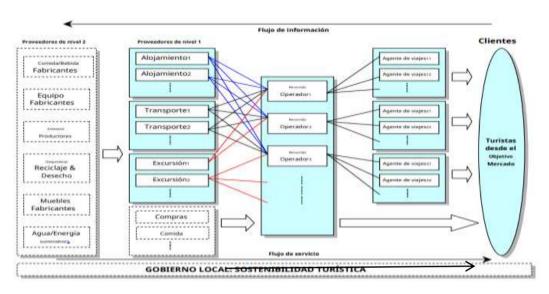




understanding the network configuration of a TSC is a prerequisite for its analysis and management. The network structure of a TSC is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Network structure of a CST



Source: Zhang, (2009).

Decision Variables within the Management of a CST.

Supply chain management decisions cover a broad spectrum of an organization's activities and may be strategic (including decisions about local government tourism tax policies, capital investment, facility capacity development, and the entry or deterrence of potential tourism businesses), tactical (including purchasing and production decisions, pricing strategies, product differentiation, advertising, and inventory policies), or operational (referring primarily to tourism organizations' weekly or daily efforts in scheduling trips, planning routes, and quoting tourism products).

Supply Chain Management in Tourism (SCM):

In the sector, GCS refers to the optimization of activities so that tourism production is correct and adequately distributed based on demand. The processes or stages that comprise it include:

•Demand management: It is a vital part of supply chain management that links the process within the chain. According to (Béjar-Tinoco, 2022; Montilla Cladera, 2014) managing demand includes market-related activities such as: forecasting methods, customer service, processing customer orders, and sales. Demand forecasting,





marketing, and the sales plan based on forecasted demand and service or production capacity.

- •Two-party or bipartisan relationships: The effective management of bipartite relationships within a chain is a crucial issue for its management. CARDONA ARBELÁEZ & BALZA-FRANCO, (2020) points out that relationships in a chain are classified into two groups according to their direction: vertical ((or vertical collaboration) are those that occur between links in the supply chain, that is, between customers and suppliers) or horizontal (they occur between actors at the same level of the supply chain, that is, between competitors.)
- •Supply management (SM): This term is defined by Spina, (2013) as the strategic approach to planning and acquiring the current and future needs of the organization through the effective management of the supply base. This process goes from the entry of raw materials to the delivery of the product to the customer.
- •Inventory Management (IM): According to Álvarez (2022), IM is defined as the strategic process within procurement aimed at efficiently managing inventory, through coherent demand control and planning measures, without affecting customer service, determining When to Order? and How Much to Order? Its objectives are aimed at reducing stock levels to the minimum possible, and ensuring the supply of the product (raw material, product in process or finished product) at the right time.
- •Product development (PD): Szpilko (2017) states that in tourism, PD requires the commitment and cooperation of partners and operators in the tourism supply chain. It is in the procurement phase where the actors involved in PD play a role. These actions allow the supply of raw materials, inputs and services, among other requirements, to the chains necessary for the subsequent start of their production process.
- •Coordination: Fritz (2022) refers to this term in the CST as the systemic and strategic coordination of traditional business functions and tactics across these business functions within a particular company and between businesses within the supply chain, in order to improve the long-term performance of individual companies and the supply chain as a whole, therefore for the SC to be optimized each of its links must be well coordinated.
- •Information technologies: Currently, the supply chain has become the basis for business development, for which different technologies have been implemented to improve its management. Other authors such as Becerra González et al., (2022) propose the use of ICTs to improve the efficiency of the supply chain by providing real-time information on product availability, inventory levels, shipping, status and production requirements, as they deal with each of the links in the chain.





•Transport management: Careful management of transport on the network leads to the solution of logistics problems, storage, customer satisfaction, deliveries in the desired space and time. For efficient transport management, computer applications and all kinds of innovations are developed that facilitate the flow of information between transport entities, suppliers and service providers.

Tourism Supply Chain in Cuba

According to López Joy (2015), in the Cuban economic context, the development of productive chains to achieve integrated management of supply chains is a key aspect recognized by the country's top management, but this purpose faces today logistical, financial and human resources obstacles. Due to the need to develop supply chains in Cuba, and in contrast to the international trends analyzed, the Cuban business environment focuses on the traditional objective of obtaining results as individual entities and is based on efficiency indicators. In Cuba, a business improvement process has been developed in order to maintain the country's economic sustainability; in this process, achieving adequate management of the supply chain is of great importance. (Naranjo Prieto, 2018). According to Gutiérrez Cabo (2018), the main characteristics of Cuban supply chains include a lack of involvement and leadership from senior management and poor coordination and systematic planning of capacities, investments, financing schemes and cargo flows between the different links, the mentality of fulfilling plans rather than satisfying final demands, insufficient innovation in products and services with higher added value and weak development of collaborative management and planning. Due to this, there are often late deliveries of products and services, which means that the needs of consumers are not met. There are also extensive mixed operation chains in agreement with foreign firms and the implementation of companies with 100% foreign capital. This is why it is a matter of integrating the interests of companies and consumers into a supply chain or value network, but to do so it will be necessary to eliminate important barriers, including sectoral and individual thinking and action and management focused on efficiency and not effectiveness.

Within this supply chain, the tourism supply chain plays an important role, due to the important role that this sector plays in the country's economy. This chain has characteristics that differentiate it from the rest of the world both in terms of its composition and the laws that regulate it. The supply chains of the leisure industry on the Island share the features of productive or manufacturing networks. Research on the subject generally shows a marked inefficiency in the management of state-owned and mixed-ownership tourism chains and companies, in basic aspects such as: business logistics, inventory management, supplier selection, collaboration between different actors and the use of technologies, among others. (Alpizar Ortueta, 2021)





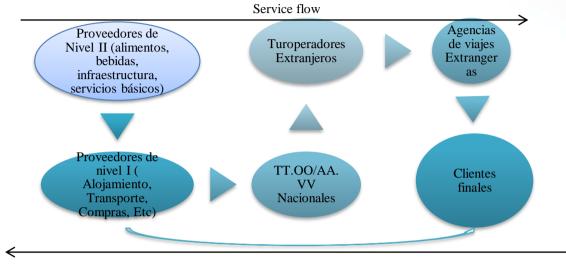


The Cuban tourism supply chain is very susceptible to changes, Llanes (2023) pointed out, mainly due to macro-environmental issues such as the country's economy and the laws imposed by senior officials. Another of its characteristics is that it is subject to foreign investment: as of October 31, 2019, 17 international hotel chains managed contracts with 51 Cuban hotels (45%), with Meliá Internacional alone owning 31.29% of the hotel capacity. Foreign investment has contributed 2% of all investments made in the Cuban TSC. The tourism supply networks in Cuba are very diverse, including stateowned roads that have consolidated hotel chains, all types of catering, shopping, and recreation service providers, and recognized transporters. The planning that is carried out is also limited to specific entities; it is rare to see a hotelier and his nearest travel agency collaborate in sales planning; The same occurs between second-level suppliers and tourism service providers, who do not coordinate their planning in terms of market demand and how much merchandise or inputs will actually be needed, which mostly translates into product shortages and customer dissatisfaction (Alpizar Ortueta, 2021). Non-state sectors are booming, such as small commercial producers, these being the recognized self-employed workers, peasant owners and usufructuaries, artisans, transporters, land tenants, non-agricultural cooperatives and cooperatives in services, among others. These are part of the micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in the country and are expanding as potential or real actors in the tourism supply chains (GOC, 2021a). Another of the differentiating factors of tourism in Cuba is the fact that large tour operators and international wholesale agencies cannot operate directly in the country. The GOC, (2021b) defines that foreign travel agencies or tour operators can only carry out operations in the national territory through a national AA. VV/TT. OO. These regulations result in a great control by national agencies of the sales volume with respect to service providers, making intermediaries strong influencers in the market and at the same time dismissing those service providers who do not have the benefits of operating through these receptive agencies. (Figure 2)





Figure 2
Structure of the Cuban Supply Chain.



Flow of information

Source: Own elaboration

Llanes (2023) also stated that demand forecasts in Cuba are based scarcely on previous data and the numbers of clients who have visited the destination, without taking into account those potential clients who missed out on consuming the product because it had run out at the time they requested it or other similar ones. Taking into account the selection of suppliers, there is not a wide range of these to choose from among Cuban entities, which is frustrating for most tourism companies.

Demand Management as Part of the Tourism Supply Chain and its Projection in Cuba

Demand management or collaborative demand forecasting as a key element allows the supply chain to visualize the real market trend towards its products and where it should go in terms of markets. Demand forecasts are very important and have a direct impact on other organizational processes, such as production scheduling, sales and operations planning, and inventory management. The success of the tourism supply chain depends on this dimension, since the production and/or service planning will depend on carrying out this analysis, remembering that the final product should not offer surpluses or deficits since it is consumed at the moment (Mentzer et al., 2001; Montilla, 2017; Zhang et al., 2009; Zuluaga-Mazo et al., 2011). It is necessary to establish that there is an external variable that decides the behavior and subsequent treatment of the inventory: demand. Demand management seeks to develop activities that allow the coordination and control of demand sources. The tourist demand of a destination, which focuses on knowing the characteristics of travelers, related to the segment to which they belong,







tourist spending, the level of satisfaction with the attractions of the destination, among others. That is to say, the analysis of the distinctive features of the tourist demand will lead to designing actions that tend to improve the capacity of the destination to satisfy the leisure needs and desires of the tourist.

In Cuba, surveys claim that more than 90% of customers feel that suppliers do not fully satisfy the demand generated by hoteliers, and 62% of hotels present a difficulty in not making demand forecasts shared between entities. Decision-makers claim that their main suppliers do supply the company regularly, but they are unable to cover the destination's total demand and most of the necessary products come from imports, which makes it even more difficult to achieve effective supply. Demand for subsequent years is based on deficits and unsatisfied products, depending on the season, and how institutions often do not have documented or automated data (Alpizar Ortueta, 2021).

Another problem to be defined in the case of our country when estimating demand is determining which link in the chain has the most reliable data. It cannot be assumed that the level of sales is similar throughout the year, demand varies throughout the months and depends largely on the weather (existence of a seasonality in the summer season) with a marked "high season" and "low season", presenting a hoarding of products at certain times due to the above reason. Another negative experience in this matter is that the data used to manage demand in the CST come mainly from surveys, for which in many cases the appropriate sample (Target Public) is not chosen, the questions may not always respond to the proposed objective, and all this is added to the incorrect processing of the data obtained, which makes it difficult to quantify what the client truly thinks.

According to the authors, the above mentioned limits the use of Time Series (TS) models for demand forecasting, since these series generally do not reflect the real demand for the product and would only be applicable at the time of stability in the year. Even in the case of applying TS, a qualitative analysis procedure in consensus groups would always be necessary to better specify the results. However, if there is historical information on demand, although with the problems indicated above, TS (Holt-Winters Method) can be used to obtain initial information that serves as support for other methods.

But the main difficulty in demand management in Cuba is that proper market research is not carried out. According to Medina Labrada et al. (2021), tourism is a unique activity from the demand perspective, as it is related to consumption that takes place outside the usual environment and, on the other hand, the uniqueness of tourist markets is also related to the forms of marketing since, by definition, suppliers and demanders reside in different places. Another characteristic of tourist markets is that they cannot be understood outside the attraction resources at the destination. All this demonstrates the





complexity and need for the evaluation of tourist markets in order to satisfy customer demand. Cuban tourism companies continue to focus on obsolete studies without paying attention to the changes that tourist profiles have experienced: The person who traveled 10 years ago is not the same as the one who travels today. Technological changes, greater experience, sociodemographics and fear of traveling due to diseases have gradually altered demand management. Today's tourists are more independent, computerized and like to practice nature tourism. They focus on the same destinations without giving the client the opportunity to experience new sensations in the country and thus counteract seasonality. It is therefore necessary to train tourism professionals in this regard and give them opportunities to new potential resources that Cuba has today. Think more about the client and work for them, investigate their motivations and aspirations to achieve the demand levels of the years before COVID-19.

Conclusions

- The tourist supply chains in Cuba present considerable deficiencies in their management. Their actors operate mostly in isolation, organize their activities independently, do not make collaborative demand forecasts between entities, do not plan together for success in key processes and abundant problems arise from the lack of coordination and poor collaboration between the different companies and UEB.
- Demand management is a key element in the CST as it allows us to visualize the real market trend towards its products and where it should go in terms of markets.
- There are different forecasts to estimate demand, but due to the characteristics of tourism activity in the country, the Holt-Winters Method is recommended because it focuses on long-term demand forecasting and is capable of handling different seasonality patterns.
- Market research in Cuba is one of the main deficiencies in demand management in Cuba and it is necessary to counteract this difficulty in order to offer products with which tourists feel more identified.
- The following are recognized as key success factors for optimizing management in networks: greater flexibility in the hierarchical links of the system, association towards new business logistics concepts, consciously strengthening collaboration and connections between actors, putting aside the fear of sharing sensitive information with the rest of the chain, promoting collaborative demand forecasts, inventory management between service providers and their main suppliers, stimulating collaborative planning among network members, decentralizing supply at the destination, achieving greater diversification in the chain's suppliers, making use of stockist evaluation and selection techniques, and seeking greater inventory turnover and less accumulation of goods in stock, among many others.





Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in relation to the submitted article.

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