

Role of Tourism Intermediaries in Tourism Business

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Abstract

In the whole world today, no country or state can provide all the material needed to keep life moving for all her subjects. Citizens move from one country or state to the other in search of their satisfactions in the areas like foods, beverages, accommodations, religion, recreation, security and safety material, electrical, mechanical and other facilities. The procedures for travelling to these areas are made known to them through related information provided by newspapers, textbooks, journals and other related media provided by travel agencies and tour operators or people in academia in such related areas. Travel agencies provide travel advice, reservations, visa through the support of tour operators that assist in packaging, marketing and executing the tours. They also provide information on the economic, social, cultural, political, religious and epidemiology of such destinations. But most of these tours operators and agencies have left to provide adequate information on these afore mentioned areas in pursuit of profit. This paper examines the role of travel agencies and tour operators with the aim of ensuring effective and efficient service to tourists while promoting the sustainability of such agencies.

Keywords: *Travel agencies, tour operators, travel advice and tourist safety.*

Introduction

In our society today, no state or country can provide all the materials or services needed by her citizens. This makes some people to travel in search of better living conditions, safety and security and for religious purposes. Some also travel to purchase goods which they want to use or to resell. This process often requires the assistance of people who ensure that their papers, transport and accommodation formalities are arranged to facilitate travel to those tourism destination areas where they are equally provided. Relevant information concerning the economic, social, cultural, and environmental and health status of the people at tourism destination areas are equally provided by these travel intermediaries here referred to as the tour operators and travelling agencies. The first intermediary aids in research, capacity planning, financial evaluation, marketing and administration of tours for tourists (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert and Wanhill (2005). Major areas where they focus their services include the Hotels, airline services and other complementary activities. They also help in packaging tourist attractions and tourism industries. The travel agents aid in advertising, sales calls, giving discount to customers and sales promotion and many others.

It is also pertinent to note that some people also criticize either for or against their roles. In Nigerian context some problems, are facing these

intermediaries in development and trends in the marketplace. This work examines the functions of these intermediaries, arguing for and against of their roles, and restate ways of ameliorating these problems to ensure the growth and sustainability of the organizations.

Tour operators

Tour operators are commercial tourism firms specializing in the manufacture of travel packages. They are quite different from travel agents whose main activity is to sell and market tourism products in small unit. Tour operators are wholesalers while travel agencies are retailers. Tour operators are intermediaries for facilitating businesses within the tourism distribution systems that can be differentiated between an outbound (or wholesaler) component and an inbound component. Outbound tour operators are based in origin regions and generally are large companies that organize volume driven package tours and the travel groups that purchase them (Weaver and Lawton 2006). This includes the negotiation of contracts with carriers, travel agencies, hotels and other suppliers of goods and services including inbound tour packages that take over the tour groups once they arrive in the destination. Revenue here normally comes through commission basis. The inbound component is based in major gateway cities, arranges (also on a commission) destination itineraries and local services such as transportation, access to attractions, local tour guiding services and in some cases, accommodation (Weaver and Lawton 2006).

Tour operators help in organizing two classes of tourism packages. They include “all inclusive holiday” and “mixed formula” holiday – packages. **“All-inclusive packages”** is a type of traditional package in which the operators provide all services. Products in this category include full-board holiday, organized holiday and cruises. Full board holidays involve return travel arrangement and transfers, accommodation and all meals. This type of holiday has been offered by hotels at resorts, although recently some holiday clubs provides such services as well as entertainment and sport facilities. Organized tours usually combine accommodation with excursions. They can be on a full board, half-board or breakfast (Vellas and Becherel 2004). They also opined that some tourists are fully escorted by tour managers while others may just include travel and entrance fees.

The mixed formula: These are packages which offer transport to and fro the destination with other services. “Fly-drivers” combine flights and hire cars at the destination. ‘Flight + Hotel’ package include flights to the destinations and hotel vouchers which can be used at a number of tourists’ resorts and sites. Many innovative products are being developed offering travel and accommodation with specialized service for special interest

groups, sport holiday, holidays based around cultural theme (arts, history, archaeology etc); holiday including health treatment as health and spa resorts, adventure travel, and holidays off and beaten track, incentive and conference travel etc (Vellas and Bechere 2004: 164 – 165).

Role of Tour Operators/Wholesalers

In order to execute the two packages mentioned above, Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert and Wanhill (2005) enumerate functions of tour operators that are achieved through bulk buying which generates economies of sales that can be passed on to customers. Despite the use of websites, the most essential link in this process is the use of tour operator's brochure which communicates the holiday products to the customers. The brochure should contain the following:

- Illustrations which provide a visual description of the destination and the holiday.
- Copy, which is a written description of the holiday to help the customer match the type of product to his or her lifestyle, and
- Price and departure panels which give the specifications of the holiday for different times of the season, duration of stay and the variety or departure points.

Furthermore, the following principal stages of tour operating/wholesaling are describable:

(i) **Research:** Tours operators perform different researches to ensure the continuity of their businesses through forecasting of the overall market size and the changing patterns of holiday taking. These assist in the selection of destinations, which in turn will be constrained by access, the extent of the tourists' infrastructure and the political climate of the host country (Cooper *et al* 2005).

The research will reveal market penetration procedures which will suggest whether the destination continues to appeal to existing markets with the same products or whether some manipulation of the elements of marketing mix should be made. Also tour operators ensure that where product development is required, the new product(s) should conform to the destination and should appeal to its existing market, and market development should suggest that existing destination products is targeted to a new segment within the wider market (Ansoff 1988). Finally, through research, tour operators can ascertain whether destinations could diversify in the new products they develop for new market – a strategy that brings with it slightly higher risk than the preceding three strategy options.

(ii) **Capacity Building:** Buhalis (2003) reveals that tour operators do market forecast which they can use to plan total capacity, which together

with market strategy, will help to set tour specifications by type, destination and volume. Cooper *et al* (2005) added that once the tour programme has been planned, negotiations for beds and aircrafts or coach seats may take place. Bed contracts may take two forms: an allocation or a guarantee. An allocation operates in a sale or return basis with appropriate release date. This type is usually negotiated medium grade hotels and above, where opportunities for resale are generally easier. The risk is transferred from the tour operators/ wholesales to the hoteliers. With guarantee, the tour operators agrees to pay for the beds whether they are occupied or not (sold or not sold).

Furthermore, when a tour operator has contracted for a time charter, it is essential to maximize the utilization of the aircraft. The underlying principle is that charters should be operated "back-to-back" which means that the plane should move out with a new tour groups and return with the previous groups. In terms of flight, empty flights known as "empty legs" will arise at the beginning and end of the season, and these must be allowed for in the costing of seats. Tour operators also protect schedule airline from unfair competition through charters taking their normal traffic at peak time. This can be done through ensuring that the trip must be an inclusive tour which implies the provision of accommodation as well as an airline seat.

(iii) **Financial Evaluation:** Tour operator aids in financial management through forecasting on time which assist them in determining exchange rates, estimate future selling prices and finalize tour prices. The above points with their inherent risks must be accounted for by tour operators through ensuring that:

- Contracts with local suppliers are commonly made in the currency of the destination country.
- airline currency for payment of airline usually paid US dollars
- airlines maintain the right to raise prices in response to increase in aviation fuel costs; and
- alteration in dues, taxes or fees levied by government.

Tour operators cover the above risks (termed hedging) by trying to build in anticipated changes in the exchange rates for the purposes of determining tour prices and then buying forward their foreign exchange required at an agreed rate in order to meet contractual obligation and by bringing in surcharge at the point of final billing of customers.

(iv) **Marketing:** It is the duty of tour operators to ensure that brochure planning and production, brochure distribution and launch, media advertising, sales promotion and market stimulation are done and on time too (Cooper *et al* 2005 and Horner and Swarbrooke 2004). This will energize

people to prepare and patronize such area, vis-a-vis improving tourism business.

(v) **Administration:** Tour operators recruit contract, casual and permanent workers for reservation and resort when necessary. They equally establish reservation systems for customers and prepare tour account and document records required for the smooth running of the organization and satisfaction of their customers.

v) Tour Management

It is pertinent to note that some tour operators offer escorted tours whereby a tour manager accompany holiday makers throughout their journey in order to oversee the arrangement. For the volume package tour market, the functions of the tour operator's resort representative are to host tour. This involves meeting the tourists when they arrive and ensuring that the transfer procedures to the places of accommodation go smoothly (Cooper *et al* 2005). The tour operator's representative is expected to spend some time at the resort before the start of the season checking facilities, noting any variation from the brochure and with authority of the company, requesting discrepancies to be put right. During the holiday, the representative is required to be available to guests at the various hotels to give advice and deal with the problems that may arise as well as supervising and sometimes organizing social activities and excursions.

Cooper, *et al* (2005) also opined that tour operators are expected to receive customer correspondence that will include compliment, suggestions and complaints. Most correspondence can be handled by a standard letter and justified complaints may require a small refund (MMC 1998). For serious complaints, national travel operators may offer arbitration service which can reconcile duties before steps are taken to investigate legal proceeding (Cooper *et al* 2005; WTO 2003, Hudson, Snaith, Miller and Hudson 2001).

(vi) Advice on human health

Tours operators also provide advice to tourist to avoid some stress which may have negative consequences on them. McIntosh (1990) and Page (2005) reveal that some of these stresses may come in the inform of:

- Preflight anxieties
- Airside problems
- Transmeridian disturbances
- Fears and phobias
- Psychological concerns
- Long haul travel

(a) **Preflight anxieties** occur as a result of some of the activities done at airport before the take-off of the flight. Some of these anxieties came when tourists commence their journey by travelling to place of departure and the

marketing of travel insurance to cover eventualities such as missed departures, complex array of security on luggage and exacerbated checks due to increased security precaution due to global terrorism, accentuating the delays and queuing associated with the security process and overcrowding in terminal buildings associated with the throughout of passenger at peak time (McIntosh (1990:118) and Page (2005: 319) Therefore travelers need to be put through before time to avoid this problem.

(b) **Airside problems** may come as a result of the design and layout of holding areas for passengers travelling economy and the consequent dehumanizing and delays (Page 2015). Ryan 1991 supported this when he opined that passengers delay in air terminals might be observed as passing through a process of arousal to anxiety to worry, to apathy as they become initially frustrated by delays and eventually reach apathy because of an inability to control events.

(c) **Transmeridian disturbance** associated with time zone changes during long haul travel is a major problem for some travelers (Petric and Dawson, 1994). This condition is often associated with lack of sleep on long haul flight and sleep-wake cycle that can cause exhaustion commonly called "Jet lag". Travel operators and travel agencies jointly need to sensitize the tourists on this.

(d) **Fears and phobias** associated with political insurrections, how hospitable the host population will be and potential language difficulties in the destination region also contribute to the traveler apprehension in transit (Page 2005). Tour operators can reduce this by in-flight entertainment and public relations campaigns.

(e) **Pre-travel lectures** to tourists before the day of travelling on measures for passengers to ensure a comfortable flight as opined by (Barby 1995: 164 – 168, Page 2005: 321 – 322).

Gant (2014), Green (2016), Abeyra the (1995), in Page (2005) produced a set of guidelines which tour operators can take to reduce stressful experience associated with different aspect of tourists travel as follows:

- Provision of special assistance at airport for senior travelers and disabled tourists, to reduce the stress for group organizers taking large parties of tourists abroad and the provision of a more customer-focused approach to help such tourists.
- Fear traveling programmes for different modes of transport, especially air travel for humorous review.
- Information to travelers prior to take off about the air craft sounds – they will hear.
- Provision of accurate in-flight advice for travelers

- Replacement of anxiety – provoking intensive security screening with low-profit security checks at ports of departure to reduce the potential for passenger stress.
- Mild medications presented by general practitioners.

Ukabuilu (2010) also noted that it is the duty of tour operators to educate the travelers on issues and risks associated with biosecurity. They should educate them on pathogens in or on the body, genetic make-up, microbiologic fauna and flora on body or cloths, immunology sequel of past infection, luggage and whatever it contains.

Role of Travel Agents

The roles played by retail travel agents are very crucial in the day to day operations of businesses like airlines, hotels, restaurant, tour operations, car rental services, railway, entertainment, package excursions/tours and cruise ship. They are seen as retailers who sell tourists products or services on behalf of the principals or suppliers (Cooper *et al* 2005). They offer travel related services such as insurance and foreign exchange to travelers. An agent could also be seen as a human behaviourists, a consultant, a broker, a personal counselor, motivator, psychologist and an expert in art and science of travel who knows not only the merits and demerits of various modes of transport and their schedule methods, but adjust and readjusts travel services to suit his different clients (Okpoko and Okonkwo 2006, Weaver and Lawton 2010).

The primary function of travel agents is to provide retail travel services to customers on commission from cruise lines and other tourism sectors or on a fee from customers directly. Travel agencies in addition normally offer ancillary service such as travel insurance, and passport/visa services. As such they are an essential interface between consumer and other tourism businesses. It is also pertinent to note that the reward of the agents mainly come from commission paid to them by their principals. Most commission amount to 10% of selling price.

Furthermore, travel agents provide information to travelers about the destination, on perception/evaluation of natural factors (location, landscape/scenery, and climate) and man-made factors like local culture, transportation infrastructure, accommodation/amenities, attractions/sites and activity/entertainment. Travel agents also provide invaluable feed back to destination managers because of their sensitivity to market trends and post trip tourists attitude about particular destinations and services. All these factors will aid the travel agents to either recommend or not to recommend such destinations for such travelers. Travel agents aid customers in getting passport and visa. They provide information to customers on how to get

their passport, different stages and information required for getting it. They also have contacts /links with immigration staff.

They advise people on the various types of visa and the uses. They educate the tourists on two types of visas namely: *immigrant visa* and *non-immigrant visa* (NIV), Immigrant visa is permission to immigrate permanently to United States. This is commonly known as green card. Immigrant visa may be obtained through employment, investment, family or other special circumstances (e.g asylum). NIV are temporary in nature and can be issued for a variety of specific purposes including;

Examples of NIV

Student visa to study at a particular institution,

Exchange visitor visa.

Visa for professional skilled work such as software developers, engineers, etc.

Visa for individual with extraordinary ability in the arts, business and Science.

Treaty trader visa, based on treaty between US and foreign national home country.

Intracompany transferee visa

Visa for artists, athletes and entertainment groups

Visa for religious workers and

Visa for cultural exchange programme

Accommodation: In case the tourist has no place to stay for a conference or job, at the tourist destination, with the aid to travel agents at the tourism generation and tourism destinations, they can handle this for the tourists. They have to offer him or her some list of hotels/accommodation sites and the amount for each. This makes it easier for tourists to select. They equally assist in providing taxi to the hotel and food where necessary arrangements have been made. The following are the process for reservation:

- They process reservation by mail, telephone, telex or cable fax or central reservation system referral
- Process reservation from the sales office, other hotel department and travel agents.
- Know the type of rooms available as well as their location and layout.
- Knows selling status, rates and benefits of all packages plans
- Knows the credit policy of the hotel and how to code each reservation
- Creates and maintains reservation records by date of arrival and alphabetical listing.

Daily Tasks of Travel agents .These are some the tasks performed on regular basis to ensure transactions with their clients

- a) Liaising with the clients in person over the phone or via email to discuss their travel requirements.
- b) Advising clients on suitable options for domestic or international destinations, tours, accommodation, transport, insurance and fares
- c) Preparing customized itineraries to suit the clients' preferences and budgets
- d) Making and confirming booking often via global distributions systems (Computerized Centralized Reservation System)
- e) Issuing ticket or relevant document
- f) Providing up to date advice on travel regulations including visa and medical requirement, baggage limits, safety and local customs.
- g) Modifying existing booking to suit a change in clients circumstances
- h) Researching destinations and keeping up to date with travel industry news
- i) Ongoing training with other team members and management.

Travel Agencies Marketing Strategies

It is essential to note that in order to reach tourists whenever they are, travel agencies need to be available in most areas – towns, cities and organizations to represent their principals. Hence, the functions of travel agents can be achieved through these strategies opined by Vellas and Becherel (2010), Weaver and Lawton (2010), Cooper *et al* (2005), Okpoko and Okonkwo (2006) and Miller (1990).

i) Staff attitude to customers: It is pertinent to note that an attitude is a lasting feeling, belief and behaviour tendencies directed towards specific persons, ideas, issues or objects. Staff attitude to customers go a long way in determining whether such customer should transact such business with the agent or not. A well treated customer will not only patronize the agent again but also tell more people about such agent (Ukabuili 2014).

Staff attitude to customer is a very important factor that makes customers to patronize any tour organizations. It is also pertinent to know the characteristic of service which states that service is inseparable from the person giving it. Hence the “professional smile” or “cosmetic smile” in staff faces contributes to their ability to sell their products/services. Every effort should be made to provide the required services to customers (especially during “moment of truth” i.e. when staff comes in contact with the customer).

It is also pertinent to note that staff attitude is determined through the degree to which such staff identifies with his or her job, actively

participate in it and considers his/her performance important to his or her sense worth (job involvement); and the individuals orientation towards the organization in terms of loyalty identification and involvement (organization commitment). Hence, tour operators should render their motivation & orientation toward travel agents so that their best should be derived. This will affect their attitude on the other hand and the customers on the other hand.

(ii) **Sales-calls:** Some travel agencies go to institutions, organizations, films and even to different individuals to tell them about their products. This energizes some people to transact business with them vis-avis promoting the sales and tourism business.

(iii) **Advertisement:** Travelling agents help in audio and visual form of marketing communication and employ opening sponsored non-personal messages to promote or sell tourism products/services or ideas. This means aids to explain some advantages which a particular airline, buses or boats have over others without mentioning names. The advert can focus on different carrying capacity, seat arrangement, prompt/timely departure, accessibility, engine capacity, speed range or other configurations. This can quickly attract tourists who are enthusiastic in that aspect of innovations. It also creates rooms for the travel agencies to have greater strength and opportunities in the business. This strategy can be passed to the public through radio, television, newspaper, journals, magazines, advertisement (Ibekwe 2015).

(iv) **Discounts:** Travel agents give discount in order to improve their sales turnover. They give 1-4% of their accruing 10% commission from tour operators to the customers to enable them buy from them. This enables tourists to patronize them. Okpoko and Okonkwo (2006) also opined that some travel agents give out their 10% commission to customers to overcome some of their fellow traveling agents (competitors), only to fall back on the overriding commission given by the airlines on total volume of sales. This sacrifice encourages some tourists to travel.

(v) **Sales promotion:** It is also essential to differentiate between advertisement and sales promotion which are used interchangeably. Advertising is any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services by an identified sponsor (Glenn 1986) while sales promotion consists of short-term incentives to encourage the purchase or sale of tourism and hospitality products or services. Sales promotion in this context includes a variety of promotional tools designed by this intermediary to stimulate earlier or stronger market response. The travel agents use styles like consumer promotions (samples, coupons, rebates, price-off, premiums contests, demonstrations), trade promotions-buying allowances (free goods,

cooperative advertising and push-money), and sales force promotion (bonuses, and contests).

The retail agents help in selecting the sales promotion tools that will aid to yield the objectives. He tries to consider the type of market, objectives, the competition and the cost effectiveness of each tool. Common sales promotion tools include samples, coupons premium, and patronage reward, point of purchase (POP) displays, contents, sweepstakes and games.

The travel agents help in developing sales promotion programmes that will aid in achieving the results through:

- deciding on the size of the incentives
- Setting up the conditions for participation
- Deciding how to promote and distribute the promotion program
- Assist in setting promotion dates and decides on the sales promotion budget.

Various Ways of Preventing Fraud from Travel Agents

Kotas (1991) in Bemis (2016) asserts that based on the facts that travel agents are not far from being fraudulent like other agents in different businesses, it is essential to enter into some deeds to prevent them from doing so. In the same way the International Air Transport Association (IATA) opines that before any travel agent will be allowed to operate the business, the agent must register with IATA subject to fulfilling these conditions shown in the diagram below

(a) **Bank guarantee:** Based on the unpredictable character of man in areas of handling money, travel agents are mandated by IATA to have a specific fixed amount of money in their account with bank which will serve as collateral in case of any misappropriation of fund before they will be issued an operating license (Vellas and Becherel 2010). The consent of the bank is also drawn to this to avoid unwanted tampering by the agent.

(b) **Nomenclature:** Ashworth and Goodhall (1990) assert IATA has insisted that every accredited travel agents should not have a name, acronym, logo or trade mark which is the same with any other agents or outline, or has similar with another agent on airline. This will aid them in their checks and balances.

(c) **Record of Sales:** One of the basic requirements for IATA to give license to travel agents is the record of past sales of such agent. IATA licensed agencies set-up a specific amount of sales for non-IATA licensed travel before they will be registered. This makes it possible today to see some travel agencies that operate but they are not yet licensed.

- (d) **Office:** For any license to be given to any travel agents, the agent must have a business site which should be approved by agency investigation panel (AIP). This office should be easily accessible by customers. This office should be well secured against burglary for their property.
- (e) **Staff:** Middleton (1988) in Ashipa (2001) also asserts that agency investigation panel will only accept the credentials of staff trained airlines or approved schools. They must possess an unblemished record of service for their former employers.
- (f) **Facilities:** IATA has position itself that for any travelling agencies / agent to be granted license, it is expected to have modern computer facilities for on-line registrations.
- (g) **Registration fee of #300:** A registration of #300 is expected to be paid by any agent seeking to be registered by IATA. Therefore, it becomes more rational to have transactions with agents that are registered than those that are not registered in case of any problem. Hence their registration number should be displayed at their office. IATA should equally assist to have all registered members on-line.

Argument for and against the disintermediation of travel agencies

Despite the fact that travel agencies have some benefits which people support, some other did not like it as a result of these points listed below as pointed by (Buhalis 2003 in Cooper *et al* 2006: 4) as follows:

Table 1 Argument for and Against the Dis-intermediation of Tour Operators

Argument for the dis-intermediation of tour operators	Argument against the dis-intermediation of tour operators
(i) Tour operators add little value to the tourism products as they act primarily as aggregators	(i) Tour operators offer professional travel services and develop tourism packages by aggregating packages from disparate services, offered by individual principals.
(ii) Tour operators manage information and package products in a unified and mass approach	(ii) Many holidays allow a degree of flexibility and are sometimes itemed
(iii) Ultimately, principals have the responsibility for serving tourism products	(iii) Tour operators develop packages based on extensive research and experience.

(iv) tour operators often offer biased advice and direct consumers to principals who offer override commissions and higher profit margins or to inhouse companies	(iv) Tour operators manage to reduce total price of the package by operating character airlines and by negotiating prices with principals.
(v) Experienced travelers are much more knowledgeable than many tour operators and now have the ability to research and develop individuals package for their need.	(v) The internet is still inadequate and unreliable especially for destination naïve or inexperienced travelers.
(vi) Tourism packages are often not inexpensive as tour operators need to add administration and marketing costs	(vi) A large part of the market is computer illiterate
(vii) There is an increase for demand of independent holidays, especially by young, experienced and educated travelers. The re-engineering of the tourism industry and particularly the development of “no-frills” airlines facilities disintermediation.	(vii) Tour operators reduce the insecurity of travel as they are responsible for all arrangement and can compensate consumers should products fail to reach specifications.

Table 2 : Argument for and Against the Dis-intermediation of Travel Agents

Argument for the dis-intermediation of travel agents	Argument against the dis-intermediation of travel agents
(a) Travel agencies currently add little value to the tourism products, as they primarily act as booking offices	(a) Travel agencies are professional travel advisers and offer valuable services and advice
(b) Travel agencies merely manage information and undertake reservation	(b) Travel agencies use expertise to save consumer's time
(c) Travel agencies are biased, in favour of principals who offer override commission and in-house	(c) Technology is difficult to use and expensive to acquire for individual

partners	
(d) Experienced travelers are much more knowledgeable than travel agents	(d) Much of the market is computer illiterate
(e) Visiting travel agencies is inconvenient and time consuming	(e) Electronic intermediaries primarily serve the business market and are more expensive
(f) Commissions to travel agencies are often inadequately trained and inexperienced	(f) Travel agencies can achieve better prices through the right channels and deals and by buying in bulk or through consolidation.
(g) Gradual increase in independent holidays and a decrease in package holiday	(g) Travel agencies offer a human touch and a human interface with the industry
(h) Technology enables consumers to undertake most functions and homes	(h) Travel agencies reduces the insecurity of travel, as they are responsible for all arrangement
(i) Electronic travel intermediaries offer great flexibility and choice	(i) Internet transactions are not secured or reliable yet and consumers are not willing to provide credit card details
(j) Re-engineering of the tourism industry (e.g electronic ticketing "no-frills" airlines, airline commissioner capping loyalty scheme facilities disintermediation	

Conclusion

Despite the few reasons against travel agents, it is vital to state that they are very relevant in that they give professional advice, save consumers' time and provide unavailable and high cost technology. They also have strong ability to negotiate price for tourists' sites and transports. Their human relations skills also aid in reducing phobia amongst tourists and help in reducing fear of insecurity through the arrangement of travel for customers. They equally assist in preventing customers from being duped by fraudsters and touts. On the side of tour operators their roles in research,

capability planning, financial evaluation, marketing, administration and tour management make them very essential in the day to day operation of smooth tourism business. Thus both tour operators and travel agents are invaluable in the travel and business trade.

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