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Modeling the Marketability of Tourism Small Businesses: Oman's Experiences

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MODELING THE MARKETABILITY OF TOURISM SMALL BUSINESSES

OMAN'S EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

Al Azri, Hamed. Ph.D., Purdue University, December 2013. Modeling the Marketability of Tourism Small Businesses: Oman's Experiences. Major Professor: Liping Cai.

Tourism Small Businesses (TSBs) are vital factors in the prosperity of local communities and the development of authentic and satisfying tourism experiences. Because of their small size, they are unable to effectively use textbook marketing models and techniques. The purpose of this study is to help TSBs market their products in a way that suits their unique nature and business environment. Specifically, this study aims to develop a theoretical model of TSB marketing, identify the main factors affecting TSB marketing, and discern relationships between these factors. Since the aim of the study is to develop a theoretical model, the method of grounded theory was identified as the most suitable.

The data set of the study is comprised of hour-long interviews with seven TSBs in Oman. These interviews were transcribed then coded and analyzed using Grounded Theory techniques. Based on this analysis, the Tourism Small Business Marketability Model (TSMARK) emerged. It models the *marketability* of TSBs, that is, their ability to market their core products to prospective customers. TSMARK theorizes relationships between TSB marketing elements, corresponding customer experience elements, and key owners' attributes. The model posits that the marketing elements of a TSB are Appraisal,

Direct Transportation, Basic Price, and Core Product. The corresponding customer experience elements are Awareness, Direct Accessibility, Basic Cost, and Core Experience. TSMARK suggests that TSB marketing elements are affected by six key owner attributes: Marketing Philosophy, Operational Knowledge, Industry Knowledge, Involvement, Years of Experience, and Work Enjoyment. A TSB owner's work enjoyment is found to have a strong impact on product quality and personal service. This in turn leads to customer satisfaction, repeat visits, and favorable word of mouth. The study makes a theoretical contribution by developing the first TSB marketing model and a methodology contribution by simulating the theoretical sampling technique of Grounded Theory. The study also provides practical contributions to the industry and Oman. TSB owners are advised to develop and manage businesses they enjoy and to provide outstanding personal service to customers. Additional recommendations are given to TSBs in Oman in regard to opportunities, pricing, and direct transportation. Lastly, the Omani government is urged to ease regulations, increase support, and offer promotion platforms.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Small Businesses in Tourism

The tourism industry is a leading international employer and a fascinating force that brings people together from many parts of the world. Millions of travelers crossing regional and international boarders annually create countless exchanges and discoveries. Such a large and vibrant international industry amid innovative technological advancements attracts a market where the consumers increasingly have the advantage in commercial exchanges. With numerous destinations to choose from and an abundance of service options to consider (Buhalis, 2000; Fyall & Garrod, 2005), consumer power is rising. Additionally, competition between service providers in and among destinations is growing. Strong competition in a service industry offering largely non-essential services imposes the need for businesses to employ sound and suitable marketing tactics and strategies. These challenges are arguably more prevalent in smaller businesses with limited human, financial, and equipment resources (Gibson & Cassar, 2002; Lancaster & Waddelow, 1998; McDonald, 1989; Simpson, Padmore, Taylor, & Frecknall-Hughes, 2006). A critical issue facing the marketing of smaller businesses is that most marketing models are developed with larger businesses in mind. Applying these models to small businesses is questionable and developing alternative models attuned to their unique nature is recommended (Gilmore, Carson, & Grant, 2001; Jones & Rowley, 2011).

1.2 Purpose, Objectives, and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to help TSBs effectively market their products in a way that suits their unique nature and business environment. It does so by developing a TSB marketing model that identifies core TSB marketing elements and factors affecting them. This model can help TSBs better understand marketing from their perspective and the critical factors that impact their marketing performance. As discussed above, TSBs are—arguably—incapable of adequately applying textbook marketing models designed for larger organizations (Gilmore et al., 2001; Jones & Rowley, 2011). They require a model that considers their unique characteristics as small businesses and the challenges of the tourism industry. Hence, the objectives of this study are:

- To develop a theoretical model of TSB marketing.

- To identify the main factors affecting TSB marketing.

- To discern relationships between these factors.

Based on the study's purpose and research objectives, the study's research questions are:

RQ1) What are the basic marketing elements for a TSB?

RQ2) How do TSB marketing elements relate to customer experience?

RQ3) What are the main factors affecting TSB marketing?

RQ4) What are the relationships between these main factors?

RQ5) What is the core of effective TSB marketing?

<u>1.3 Scope and Delimitations</u>

The focus of this study is Tourism Small Businesses. In academia and in practice, small businesses are generally considered a subset of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). Different countries have various criteria for labeling businesses as small or medium (Kozak, 2007). In addition, researchers differ on what constitutes a small business or an SME. Upon examining many of these criteria and definitions and considering this study's objectives, a Tourism Small Business is defined as: *An independent for-profit organization that employs twenty or fewer people and operates in the tourism industry, that is, primarily serves tourists.*

Because the tourism industry is complex and encompasses several sub-sectors and many business types, it is impractical to attempt to consider all possible types of TSBs in this study. The study focuses on TSBs primarily serving inbound and/or domestic tourists. Consequently, the study's main subjects are TSBs providing touring, desert camping, and diving services. The context of Oman is used because it is in a region identified as having the highest tourism growth rate in the world (UNWTO, 2011). This pushes small businesses to be creative in their marketing tactics and strategies. A single destination for the targeted sample is also used because it neutralizes the effects of environmental factors in that all sampled TSBs are bound by the same conditions. This is considered important during the early phase of theory development.

The study's resulting theoretical model, while purposely identified as a marketing model, models more than marketing activities of TSBs. Eventually, it was deemed appropriate to name the resulting model the Tourism Small Business Marketability Model. The term *marketability* considers a TSB's marketing mix elements, corresponding

customer experience elements, and key factors affecting TSB marketing. A discussion on the emergence and definition of the marketability concept is provided in Chapter 5.

1.4 Discussion of Limitations

The intended scope and used methodology of the study create some limitations. First, the focus on specific types of TSBs (tour operators, diving centers, and desert camps) could limit the applicability of the study's findings to other types of TSBs like restaurants, small lodging facilities, and rental businesses. It is argued here that the three chosen types of TSBs are more entrenched in the adopted definition of a TSB because they largely focus on serving inbound tourists. Nevertheless, applying the resulting theoretical model on businesses not specifically falling under the adopted definition of a TSB could be limited.

Secondly, the study's focus on TSBs could raise issues of whether the findings are applicable to medium sized businesses, that is, businesses employing twenty up to a hundred employees. As can be seen in the findings of this study, a TSB owner's attributes are theorized to be critical in the marketing performance of TSBs. This link with owners' attributes is possibly less prevalent as the number of employees in an organization increases. Also, medium-sized businesses are possibly more capable of formalizing marketing strategy and tactics, as well as making packaged elements of their product offerings.

Another possible limitation is the study's small sample size of seven TSB owners. Usually, a sample of this size is regarded to be insufficient, especially in regard to generalization of findings to a considered population, and in studies using quantitative

methods. This study, however, uses the grounded theory method, which considers the point at which theoretical saturation is reached to be the end point of data collection and analysis, irrespective of sample size (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory guidelines recommend an end point where results become repetitive and where more data adds little to the developed theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Goulding, 2002). In addition, this study aims to develop a theoretical model, not to verify current theories. In this regard, data quality is more important than quantity, as the study seeks deep meanings rather than the production of verifiable generalized results. This study used in-depth interviews as its data collection instrument, which resulted in about 469 minutes of rich data. The resulting theoretical model, as will be seen, is based on the most grounded constructs and theoretical findings, leaving much to be explored in future studies. Nevertheless, it can be safely argued that a few additional interviews could have strengthened the resulting theoretical model and key theoretical findings. Glaser and Strauss (1967) acknowledge that theory development can seem endless. However, they recommend that researchers stop to publish their results when a theoretical saturation level is reached and when they are comfortable with the theoretical development achieved, even though further development is possible.

1.5 Significance

This study holds theoretical and empirical significance. Theoretically, it seeks to develop the first theoretical model of TSB marketing. Research on tourism small business marketing was identified by Thomas, Shaw, and Page (2011) in their comprehensive analysis of research trends and challenges of small businesses in tourism under areas in

need of further theoretical development. Empirically, the resulting TSB marketing model is useful for understanding the main factors affecting TSB marketing performance and, consequently, their business success. Based on this understanding, practical recommendations are offered to TSBs on important and relevant ways to improve marketing. This would ultimately contribute to the chances of success for TSBs and an improved overall destination product. Since the study's subjects are based in Oman, the findings are useful to Oman as a destination, as well as other Arabian Gulf countries sharing a similar generic culture.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to help TSBs effectively market their products in a way that suits their unique nature and business environment. To fulfill this purpose, the study develops a theoretical TSB marketing model that identifies critical factors affecting TSB marketing, as well as relationships between these factors. Developing such a model requires an understanding of basic marketing concepts, the nature of small businesses in general, and small business in the tourism industry in particular. This lays the foundation for the development of a useful theoretical TSB marketing model. This chapter reviews basic marketing concepts, the nature of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and their role in the economy, two SME marketing models, and what constitutes a TSB. In addition, it provides a basic overview of the case in hand, destination Oman. The chapter ends with the identification of research gaps and development of the study's research questions.

2.2 Marketing Basics

One of the most important and basic marketing ideas is that of the Marketing Concept, first clearly pointed out by Levitt in 1960 (Levitt, T., 1960/2004). He stressed that a company should start with the customers' wants and needs rather than with a

product. Unless companies understand the business they are in, they fall into the trap of Marketing Myopia (Levitt, T., 1960/2004). His examples urged railroad companies at the time to understand that they are in the transportation industry rather than the railroad industry, and Hollywood to understand that it is in the entertainment industry rather than the cinema industry. In the context of this study, it is important for tourism small businesses to consider that they are in the tourism or leisure industry instead of the diving, camping, or touring industries. TSBs should focus on finding and fulfilling customer needs rather than offering a service and aggressively selling it.

Based on the marketing concept and other essential marketing principles, Kotler and Keller (2012) explain marketing in terms of identifying and meeting needs at a profit. They define marketing management as "the art and science of choosing target markets and getting, keeping, and growing customers through creating, delivering and communicating superior customer value" (Kotler & Keller, 2012, p.3). In the context of the tourism industry, marketing is defined as "the art and science of finding, retaining, and growing profitable customers" (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2010, p.11). These two definitions are essentially identical except that the first definition of marketing management adds the managerial process of creating, delivering, and communicating superior customer value. Another definition specific to tourism is Alastair Morrison's definition of marketing as "a continuous, sequential process through which management in the hospitality and travel industry plans, researches, implements, controls and evaluates activities designed to satisfy both customers' needs and wants and their own organization's objectives. To be most effective, marketing requires the efforts of everyone in an organization and can be made more or less effective by the actions of

complementary organizations" (A. M. Morrison, 2010, p.7). Whereas Kotler and Keller (2012) distinguish between marketing and marketing management, Alastair Morrison (2010) and Kotler et al (2010) embed the managerial process in their definitions. The three definitions meet at the elements of managerial process, satisfaction of customer needs, and satisfaction of organizational needs (i.e., earning profits). Alastair Morrison's definition adds the element of human resources and specifically accounts for the effect of complementary organizations in the industry. The given managerial implications of these definitions, as outlined in the authors' respective books, are designed for large organizations. The planning, delivering, and evaluating processes suggested by the authors are beyond what most small businesses are able to implement. Nevertheless, the essential element of finding and satisfying customer needs at a profit is still relevant at the heart of small business marketing.

Another essential concept of marketing is the 60-year-old concept of marketing mix. In 1948, Culliton was among the first to refer to the marketing executive as a mixer of marketing ingredients (as citied in Borden, N. H., 1964/1984). Borden popularized the use of the term marketing mix, which led to the development of a number of marketing mix models. The most popular marketing mix model is the 4 Ps model, developed by McCarthy in 1960 (as cited in Gummesson, 2002a). It refers to Product, Price, Place, and Promotion. Even though more than half a century has passed since the 4 Ps model was introduced, it is still used in tourism marketing textbooks and managerial marketing books. Kotler et al (2010) embraced the 4 Ps model (p.8) and added research, information systems, and planning to the four basic elements. They also used the 4 Ps model to structure the book's chapters. Alastair Morrison (2010) developed the 8 Ps model of

Hospitality and Travel Marketing. Half of these Ps are the classical elements of Product, Place, Price, and Promotion. He concurred that three of the additional elements (People, Packaging, and Programming) are part of the mix of an offering (Product), but were separated because they deserved attention in the context of the tourism industry. The eighth and last element of Partnerships can, according to Morrison, be embedded in each of the remaining seven elements, but was added to emphasize its importance. This shows that Morrison's 8 Ps of Hospitality and Travel Marketing center on the classic 4 Ps model. Kotler and Keller (2012), on the other hand, argue that the 4 Ps are not exhaustive considering the modern marketing mix. They propose a modern marketing management mix with the elements of People, Processes, Programs, and Performance. These elements attempt to encompass the classic 4 Ps while adding a human resources element and emphasizing financial and non-financial outcomes like brand equity. It can be concluded, based on this review, that the 4 Ps marketing mix model is still relevant, though it could benefit from some adjustments to better fit specific contexts. Other studies in the literature have reached similar conclusions that the 4 Ps model is still robust and time-tested (Anderson, 1995; Yudelson, 1999) and that it is still important even when considering modern marketing concepts like Relationship Marketing (RM) and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) concepts (Gummesson, 2002b). Nevertheless, it is important to ensure the proper application of the 4 Ps model (Brownlie & Saren, 1992). Therefore, the use of the 4 Ps model as a framework is appropriate for modeling TSB marketing. The resulting model, though, should be firmly based on data and well fitted into the context of tourism small businesses. This would require modifications to the depth of each 4 P element in addition to linking them to relevant and affecting constructs.

Since the tourism industry is a people's industry, the resulting model should also account for the perceptions of customers in regard to each of the marketing elements. Another suitable model for a framework is the 4 Cs model of Lauterborn, developed to adopt a more consumer-oriented perspective than the classic 4 Ps model (Shultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1993). The 4 Cs model refers to the original elements as Consumer wants and needs (Product), Cost (Price), Convenience (Place), and Communication (Promotion). Guided by these two models, this study aims to theoretically model TSB marketing.

2.3 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

By nature, and as discussed in detail in section 2.6 below, TSBs are essentially a subset of what is commonly referred to as Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). In addition to the study of SMEs, research in the literature covers other variations of organizations in terms of size, ownership, and context. It was difficult to locate sufficient literature that solely focused on the small business or tourism small business subsets of SMEs. Consequently, literature studying SMEs, as well as other derivates and closely related organizations, are consulted in this review as they are generally relevant to the study of TSBs. An inherent assumption here is that the results and conclusions of these studies are closely applicable to TSBs.

At their core, SMEs play an important role in the economy. On average, they employ 58% of the global workforce (Kozak, 2007). SMEs account for at least half the exports of developed countries like the U.S., France, and Italy (Manalova, 2003) and are considered critical to the development of villages and small towns (Getz & Carlsen,

2005). They also suffer less economic leakage and provide higher multiplier effects compared to larger international organizations (Getz & Carlsen, 2005; Wanhill, 2000). This shows the important role of SMEs developing and enhancing national economies.

Compared to large organizations, size differences aside, SMEs demonstrate some unique characteristics. SMEs, for example, usually have different managerial structures free from the bureaucracy of larger organizations, which allows them to provide better services to their customers (Longenecker, Moore, & Petty, 2003). On the other hand, SMEs lack the human and financial resources of larger organizations (Borden, 1964; Gibson & Cassar, 2002; Lancaster & Waddelow, 1998). SMEs are more vulnerable to competitive pressure because of their simple managerial structure and lack of awareness of relevant environmental and legislative factors (Alam & Pacher, 2003). It could be argued, therefore, that with the aid of adequate awareness and experience, SMEs could better survive in the long term and become a more positive economic force.

One relevant concept when studying SMEs is that of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. A central question in this regard is whether people who start their own businesses are different from others. Shaver and Scott (1991) outlined a historical timeline and discussed different approaches studying the entrepreneurship phenomena. Research studies had been focusing on viewing the entrepreneur as a person and studying his/her central attributes. In 1961, McClelland regarded these entrepreneurs as individuals who crave high achievements, unique challenges, and who accept responsibility (as cited in Shaver and Scott, 1991, p23). Similar studies followed until Gartner (1988) challenged this perspective and took the position that the founder's behavior, not his/her personality, is what should be considered when studying entrepreneurship. This study adopts

Gartner's (1988) position that entrepreneurship is a set of behaviors rather than a certain personality. Gartner (1988) defines entrepreneurship as "the creation of new organizations" (p.26). Thus, for the purposes of this study, entrepreneurship is a phase that ends when the creation of the new business is over and when no mission of accelerated growth is adopted. This study focuses on SMEs (and TSBs in particular) regardless of whether they are at the entrepreneurship phase.

2.4 SME Marketing Models

The majority of common marketing textbooks are not designed with small and medium businesses in mind; they generally fail to account for differences in the nature of these businesses opposed to larger ones. It can be concluded that such businesses are underrepresented in textbook marketing theories, especially when considering their high employability rate in national economies (Gummesson, 2002a). Attempting to apply these textbook marketing theories is questionable in the context of SMEs (Gilmore et al., 2001). Despite the lack of appropriate marketing theories and models in textbooks, studies of SME marketing are well documented in the literature. SMEs are generally found to informally apply marketing planning (Gibson & Cassar, 2002; McDonald, 1989). This informal take on marketing leads SMEs to strong sales orientation (Hill, 2001b) and reactive tactics (Simpson et al., 2006). These concepts are seen more clearly in SME marketing models developed in the literature. Two models are presented in this review.

2.4.1 Role and Relevance of Marketing

Simpson and Taylor developed the Role and Relevance of Marketing model (2002) and empirically tested it a few years later (Simpson, Padmore, Taylor, and Frecknall-Hughes, 2006). The authors used a mixed methodology developing and verifying the model (Figure.2.1). The model studied SMEs' internal marketing role and their industry's external marketing relevance. An SME's marketing tactics and the level of its marketing orientation is measured under the Role dimension of the model. The importance and need for marketing in the particular industry an SME operates in is measured under the Relevance dimension. The result for each SME is a bi-dimensional position in the model according to its marketing role and relevance. This position places the SME in one of four organization types: Marketing Led, Marketing Dominated, Marketing Weak, or Marketing Independent. There are four requirements for an SME to be Marketing Led: a customer database, an active business plan, marketing representation at the board level, and a marketing department. A fundamental issue discussed is the misunderstanding of marketing as only including selling and advertising, and the perception that it is time-consuming and only relevant to large organizations. It was found that many SMEs are reactive, lack strong strategic awareness, and prefer technical expertise in potential employees over management skills (Simpson et al., 2006).

	Marketing Dominant Organizations	Marketing Led Organizations
	Marketing Independent Organizations	Marketing Weak Organizations

ROLE OF MARKETING (Internal focus) — Major / Minor

RELEVANCE OF MARKETING (external focus) — Minor / Major

Figure 2.1 The Role and Relevance of Marketing Model (Simpson et al., 2006)

Looking at this model from the perspective of TSBs, it can be argued that the Relevance of marketing to the tourism industry is high (major) and that the Role of marketing among TSBs is low (minor). Thus, TSBs can be identified in this model as Marketing Weak organizations that need to strengthen their internal marketing focus to succeed in the industry. The model, in this sense, is useful for categorizing organizations according to their relative marketing performance. However, it does not deeply analyze the internal marketing tactics of small businesses and the factors affecting their marketing performances. Consequently, it does not provide much to pinpoint critical TSB marketing issues or ways to improve TSB marketing performance.

2.4.2 Key Determinants of Effective SME Marketing Activities

Based on a five-year study involving nearly 60 businesses, Hill (2001a, 2001b) developed a holistic model of SMEs marketing (Figure 2.2). This model identified a

competencies spectrum of SME managers that Hill argued are vital for effective SME marketing activities. These competencies are categorized into foundation level (experience, knowledge, communication, judgment, intuition), transitional level (vision, opportunity, focus, relational communication, commitment), and operational level (personality, people skills, adaptability, . . ., motivation, enthusiasm, confidence). Hill discovered that experience is the most significant competence and stresses the importance of quality experience. A major finding of the study was that the marketing character of SMEs is mainly determined by strong sales orientation.
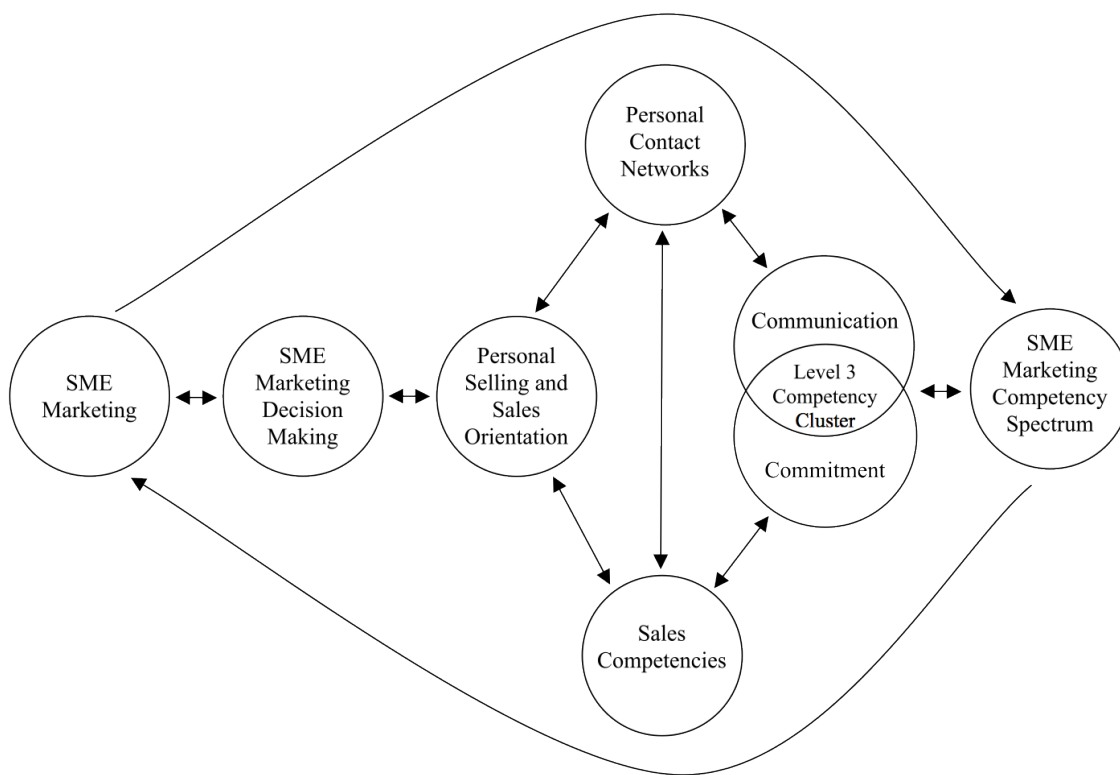
Figure 2.2 A Holistic Model of SME Marketing (Hill, 2001b)

Hill's SME marketing model determined that the effectiveness of SME marketing depends on the SME manager's competencies. This shows a strong link between an SME and its manager, which is perhaps clearer in the case of TSBs due to their smaller size. Hill's finding that the competencies of experience and knowledge are critical in SME marketing is of particular interest to this study. These two competencies could be related to the main factors affecting TSB marketing.

2.5 SMEs in Tourism

Tourism SMEs operate in a unique and challenging industry. The tourism industry is primarily considered a service industry and four important characteristics of services are intangibility, inseparability, variability, and perishability (Fyall & Garrod, 2005; E. Jones & Haven, 2005; Kotler et al., 2010). Intangibility means that services, unlike physical products, cannot be touched or physically sensed by consumers. Inseparability necessitates the presence of both the service provider and the customer for the product to be offered. It also indicates that a business' customers are part of the product. Variability makes it difficult to standardize product offerings, meaning that a company's customers will have somewhat different experiences at any given time. Perishability means that services cannot be stored and, therefore, any unused spaces are permanently lost. In addition to these four basic service characteristics, the tourism industry is fragile (Fyall & Garrod, 2005), affected by seasonality (Ateljevic, 2007; Getz & Carlsen, 2000), and faces international competition (Buhalis, 2000; Fyall & Garrod, 2005). The tourism industry is vulnerable to political and natural events, which makes it unpredictable over the long term. Seasonality leads to problems in cash flow, profitability, and human resource

capacity (Getz & Carlsen, 2000). Another challenge is that the tourism industry necessitates that many organizations in a destination contribute to overall customer satisfaction (Fyall & Garrod, 2005; Tyrrell, 1994). These issues collectively mean that an SME in tourism is operating in an unpredictable industry and cannot fully control the overall experience of its customers.

Despite these challenges, SMEs make strong contributions to worldwide industry. They are considered the heart of the industry because of their varied activities, specialized services, and integration in society (Etemad & Wright, 2003; Sproule, 2006). They are also considered major job creators, as well as contributors to the development of local communities (Wanhill, 2000). Consequently, destination countries that are serious about economic development and community prosperity should support SMEs.

It is discussed in section 2.3 that SMEs differ from larger organizations in terms of managerial structure, resources, and vulnerability to competition. Literature in tourism identifies additional differences. SMEs in tourism were concluded to experience a distinct and unique array of management issues (A. J. Morrison & Thomas, 1999). Unlike large organizations, SMEs are frequently established for the purpose of fulfilling personal objectives like desire for additional income, providing jobs for family members, or even enjoying a hobby (Getz & Carlsen, 2005). It is proposed that a socially driven lifestyle is more important than commercial gain for small businesses (A. J. Morrison & Teixeira, 2004). SMEs also suffer from fewer resources (A. J. Morrison & Conway, 2007) and weak management skills (Ateljevic, 2007; Wanhill, 2000). These managerial issues could be contributing to the struggles faced by many SMEs (Wanhill, 2000). However, SMEs offer a richer tourism experience, authenticity, and a more direct connection with

customers (Getz & Carlsen, 2000; Longenecker et al., 2003; Tyrrell, 1994). The advantages that SMEs provide for a destination in terms of service, authenticity, and employability justify the research backing and government support needed to overcome their managerial weaknesses.

<div align="center">2.6 Tourism Small Businesses (TSBs)</div>

Having discussed studies of relevant organizations, it is important to adopt a clear definition of what constitutes a tourism small business for the purposes of this study. There is no agreement in the literature on how small businesses in the industry should be defined (A. J. Morrison & Thomas, 1999). The umbrella term used frequently in academic and business literature is Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), which employ up to a hundred employees (Kozak, 2007; Longenecker et al., 2003). One option is to consider whether the organization is for-profit or non-profit. This study focuses on for-profit organizations, hereby referred to as businesses. In essence, the larger group of organizations is the SMEs group, to which small businesses constitute a sub-group based on, for example, the number of employees. Most countries consider a business small if it employs fifty or fewer employees (Kozak, 2007). Many others, including this study's case of Oman, consider businesses employing twenty or fewer employees as small. In one country, it was specified that the number was fifty for manufacturing and twenty for services (Kozak, 2007). Based on this, and for the purposes of this study, a small business is considered one that employs twenty or fewer people. Another concern for this study is that the target business should be independently owned and operated rather than part of a larger organization. Small businesses or small units part of larger organizations are

regarded as essentially different since they are financially supported and are not as independent in their decisions. Target businesses for this study are chosen regardless of whether they are family owned or whether they are in an entrepreneurial phase (as discussed in Chapter 2). Lastly, Tourism Small Businesses (TSBs) are considered here to be a sectional group of small businesses, mainly referring to small businesses operating in the tourism industry. Businesses best suited for this study in the context of the case of Oman are ones that engage in touring, diving, and desert camping activities. These types of businesses are presumedly serving in-bound tourists mainly, unlike other businesses that serve a mixture of tourists and locals. As such, for the purposes of this study, a TSB is defined as: *An independent for-profit organization that employs twenty or fewer people and operates in the tourism industry, that is, primarily serves tourists.*
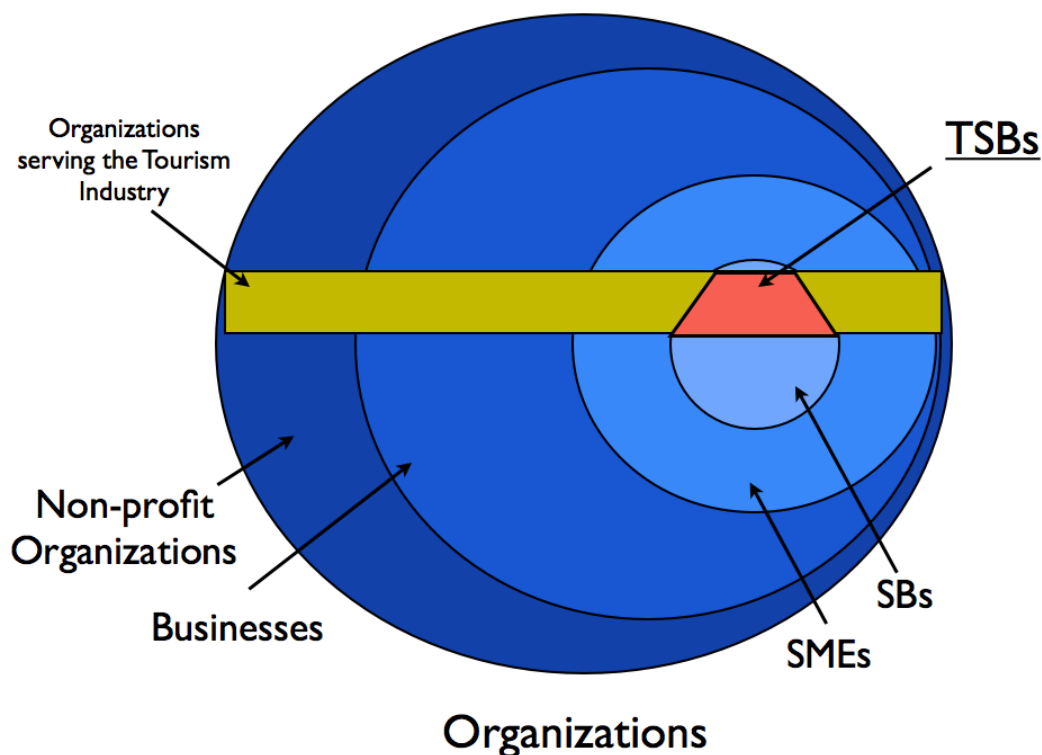
Figure 2.3 Pictorial Definition of TSBs

<u>2.7 Case Study: Oman</u>

2.7.1 Destination Oman

As mentioned in Chapter 1, a single destination country is used in this study to neutralize the effects of environmental factors in sampled TSBs. If the study were to sample TSBs in numerous destinations, it would make it difficult to distinguish between important factors pertinent to the nature of TSBs and those factors more relevant to specific environmental contexts. In addition, sampling TSBs in one destination helps focus and refine the developed model. After all, this study aims to develop a substantive theoretical model, which is a pre-requisite to a formal one (refer to section 3.2 in Chapter

3 for an explanation of these terms). In choosing a destination country, the industry growth rate was deemed important as it leads to growing competition and, consequently, a growing need for successful marketing. Oman was chosen because it is located in the highest growing tourism region in the world (UNWTO, 2011).

Oman is a small country in the furthest northeastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula. It has a more diverse economy than nearby countries like Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (Gonzalez, Karoly, & Constant, 2008). It has the greatest diversity in tourism products in the region (Parsons International Ltd., 2002). The country's beauty, rich history, and traditional hospitality make it one of the best kept travel secrets in the world (Al-Azri & A. M. Morrison, 2006; Hook, 2010). For potential U.S. travelers, however, Oman is mostly unknown or perceived with stereotypical characteristics of countries in the region, like being an Arab, desert-oriented, and hot destination (Al-Azri & A. M. Morrison, 2006). The following pages discuss the structure of the tourism industry in Oman, recent changes, and the impact of globalization and other forces.

2.7.2 Structure of the Tourism Industry in Oman

For a country as small as Oman, the size of the tourism industry is comparable to some American states. Specific elements of the structure, however, differ because of the focus on international tourism rather than a national market. This discussion of the structure of Oman's tourism industry follows a classification similar to ones found in relevant resources (Al-Haddad, 2006; Commission of the European Communities, 2001; Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2010).

2.7.2.1 Legislative Institutions

The highest legislative institution in Oman is the Ministry of Tourism (MoT), which was established in the summer of 2004 by a Royal Decree of His Majesty the Sultan of Oman (Ministry of Information, 2010). Establishing the Ministry, among the first in the region, is an indicator of the growing importance of the industry to Oman's economic diversification strategy (Ministry of Tourism, 2010a). The MoT is structured based on the following areas: Administration and Financial Affairs, Investors and Quality Control, Planning, Follow-up and Information, Tourism Development, and Tourism Promotion (Ministry of Tourism, 2010b). This structure shows the MoT's adopted role of general planner, caretaker, and promoter of Omani tourism. The objectives of the MoT include: to employ more Omani nationals in the industry, achieve an annual growth rate of 7%, bring economic benefits to locals, create community awareness, cooperate with the private sector, and improve Oman's image (Ministry of Tourism, 2010c). These objectives indicate a clear emphasis on economic development coupled with less attention on social and cultural development.

2.7.2.2 Accommodation Providers

The hotel sector in Oman is experiencing rapid growth to cope with the increasing tourism and local demands. A total of 256 hotels were registered in 2012 (Ministry of Tourism, 2012), as opposed to 190 hotels in 2007 (Ministry of Tourism, 2011). This is a growth rate of 26% in five years (23% from 2007 to 2011). The number of total rooms in Oman increased from around 9,000 in 2007 to slightly over 12,000 in 2011 (Ministry of Tourism, 2011), a growth rate of about 24% in four years. The average occupancy rate,

however, didn't witness the same growth rates. After reaching a peak of 58.4% in 2008, it gradually decreased to 45% in 2011 (Ministry of Tourism, 2011). Similarly, the number of hotel guests decreased from about 1.69 million guests in 2007 to about 1.62 million in 2011 (Ministry of Tourism, 2011). The international financial crisis, as well as the waves of the Arab Spring, could have played a part in this drop in hotel guests in Oman in the last few years. Only about 5% of Oman's hotels are five-star rated, most of which are located in the capital region of Muscat (Ministry of Tourism, 2012). In contrast, about 7% of hotels are four-star, 9% are three-star, 20% are two-star, and about 59% are one-star or below.

2.7.2.3 Tour Operators and Travel Agencies

Travel companies in Oman can informally be divided into big companies and other smaller companies. Reputation and available sales records indicate that there are possibly three large companies that control most of the tourism market in Oman: Bahwan Travel Agencies (Bahwan Travel Agencies, 2009), Zahara Tours (Zahara Tours, 2011), and Mark Tours (Mark Tours, 2009). There are many smaller tour operators and travel agencies scattered across the country. The latest available information from the Oman Chamber of Commerce's Trade Directory shows a total of 142 registered tour/tourism/travel companies (Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2010) (refer to Appendix A for details). Tour operators and travel agencies seem to be gradually increasing in number and specialities.

2.7.2.4 Food and Beverage Services

The number and variety of restaurants in Oman has been increasing for the last two decades. There is an assortment of international cuisine choices - like Mediterranean, Indian, and Chinese - especially in the capital area of Muscat. Many international fast food chains are launching branches in Oman, including McDonald's, Nando's, Pizza Hut, Subway, and Burger King. Information from the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry showed a total of 175 registered restaurants and catering companies (Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2010). These provided numbers, however, could be limited and outdated. Data from the popular magazine Oman Today's locally famous annual Restaurants Awards program is consulted for a closer look at the industry (Oman Today, 2011). Coming from a local magazine, there are questions of reliability. However, this program is on its ninth year and serves as the only widely recognized restaurant recognition program in Oman. Additionally, the numbers it provides seem to be more accurate than those in the Trade Directory cited above. Table B.1 in Appendix B outlines the number of restaurants and total branches in Muscat, the Omani capital, participating in the Oman Today magazine award program (Oman Today, 2011). A total of 313 restaurant outlets are registered in Muscat. The magazine reported a total of an additional 50 outlets out of Muscat, which increases the total number of registered restaurant outlets to 363. The list shows that the dining options for locals and tourists are decent. The diversity of cuisines is also good, ranging from Middle Eastern and Indian to other international cuisines like Italian and Mexican. The only possible weakness is the limited availability of restaurants specializing in Omani traditional food. Only four listed restaurants (5 total outlets) were found specializing in Omani food.

2.7.2.5 Transportation

Generally speaking, the public transportation system in Oman is weak. There are daily bus routes from Muscat to major cities (Ministry of Information, 2002a), but they are not extensive or convenient. There are currently no metro or train systems in the country. The only practically viable transportation is regular taxis, private taxi companies, and car rental companies. Tourist groups could benefit from large tourist coaches. In Oman, tourists cannot easily use a map and public transportation to visit attractions. There is only one major international airport in Oman (Muscat International Airport) and another increasingly busy airport (Salalah Civil Airport), plus a few local airports. The total number of international flight arrivals in 2010 was just over two million (Ministry of National Economy, 2010).

2.7.2.6 Cultural and Recreational Services

Being a country rich with cultural attractions, Oman has over 500 forts, castles, and towers, including the forts of Jalali, Mirani, Rustaq, Bahla, Nizwa, and Nakhal (Ministry of Information, 2002b). In addition, there are about 20 large museums in Oman including the Museum of Omani Heritage, The National Museum, Children's Museum, Natural History Museum, Bait al Zubair, PDO Planetarium, Omani-French Museum, The Sultan's Armed Forces Museum, Aquarium and Marine Science & Fisheries Centre, Muscat Gate Museum, Bait Al-Baranda, Fort Museum, and Land of Frankincense (Ministry of Information, 2002c; Ministry of Tourism, 2010f). These forts and museums showcase the history and culture of Oman, as well as cultural attractions for the destination.

2.7.2.7 Educational Institutions

Oman's general education strategy increasingly relies on international universities and the local private sector to meet the needs of higher education (Gonzalez et al., 2008). In the case of the tourism industry, the government represented by the MoT has been stressing that tourism as an industry is meant—besides contributing to the national income—to be an important employment source for citizens (Ministry of Tourism, 2010c). Consequently, a number of public and private educational institutions were established: Sultan Qaboos University (Tourism Department), Oman Tourism College, Colleges of Applied Sciences (Tourism and Hospitality management programs), the University of Nizwa (area of Tourism and Recreational Management), the German University of Technology (the Department of Sustainable Tourism and Regional Development), and the National Hospitality Institute (NHI) (refer to Appendix C for details). Only a decade ago, with the exception of NHI's vocational hospitality program, tourism education in Oman was completely undeveloped. Companies working in the industry either employed foreign expertise or Omanis specializing in related or other fields. From 2001 onward, specialized tourism programs started to emerge. In the beginning, students seemed to be skeptical and awareness among employers of graduates of these programs was minimal. Now, many students are enrolling in these programs and working in institutions and companies that value their learned skills, as is evident by their increasing numbers in the industry (Ministry of Man Power, 2010).

2.7.3 Major Recent Changes

Until twenty years ago, Oman was barely visible on the global tourism map. Fortunately for Oman, the industry is leaping forward due to some major recent changes. There is increased attention from the Omani government on the tourism industry, resulting in gradual positive growth. Oman is witnessing a trend of growing numbers of tourists, a total of about 1.6 million visitors in 2009 compared to 1.4 million in 2007 (Ministry of Tourism, 2011). Regional events, however, led to a decrease in the number of visitors in 2011. As noted earlier, similar indicators are seen in Oman's hotel occupancy statistics. Tourism now contributes about 2.66% of the national GDP (Ministry of Tourism, 2011). The number of Omanis working in the tourism industry has increased recently as well, evidenced by official reports from the Ministry of Manpower. Comparing the percentage of Omanis to the total workforce of the sub-sectors of Travel and Tourism in 2006 and 2010, the following increases are seen: Aviation (81 to 90%), Tourist restaurants (55 to 90%), Travel and Tourism (55 to 95%), Three to five star Hotels (65 to 85%), car rentals (65 to 90%), and Hotels two stars and under (35 to 55%) (Ministry of Manpower, 2010). The general increases in the size of inbound tourists and number of Omanis working in the industry, despite the recent drops attributed to the international environment, indicate positive changes. The three most important changes that took place are major government involvement, tourism educational boost, and tourism mega projects. These changes are interrelated and point to government emphasis on the tourism industry. This government emphasis has three faces: legislative and destination marketing, educational, and economical. Below is a discussion of these three major changes.

2.7.3.1 Major Governmental Involvement: Ministry of Tourism and Brand Oman
Initiative

Historically, Oman lagged behind other GCC countries because of its lower
production and oil reserves. Most of Oman's national workforce has been in the
perceivably higher paying and more stable public sector, which—because of its limited
capacity and the increasing size of Omani workforce—has resulted in higher
unemployment rates (Gonzalez et al., 2008). As a result, the government started to focus
on economical diversification and job creation via several means, including further
promotion and support of the tourism industry (Gonzalez et al., 2008). This led to the
establishment of the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) in the summer of 2004 (Ministry of
Information, 2010) in an attempt to achieve the above mentioned objectives and
capitalize on tourism attractions in Oman. From that point, destination marketing began
to be more centrally managed, diverse, and effective. MoT's marketing has focused on
positioning Oman "as a quality destination for an authentic Arabian visitor experience"
(Ministry of Tourism, 2010d). A new slogan was adopted ("Beauty has an address ~
Oman") and several promotional activities began, like launching awareness campaigns,
organizing events, e-marketing, airline marketing, participating in travel trade and
consumer shows and exhibitions, and regional promotion (Ministry of Tourism, 2010d).
MoT is also encouraging foreign investments and property owndership in Oman
(Ministry of Tourism, 2010e).

In addition to the MoT, the government established the Brand Oman initiative in
2009. To cope with international trends in destination development, Brand Oman is a
government initiative designed to combine governmental and private efforts to a unified

vision of Oman. Major areas of focus are tourism, business, information communication technology, and education. Brand Oman focuses on two types of tourism for the country: culture and heritage, and eco-tourism. In order to take control of Oman's reputation, the Oman Brand Management Unit was established to lead these efforts. The unit strives to establish and project a consistent national image; ensure truthfulness and authenticity; provide creativity, direction, and standards for developing and delivering government information campaigns; and create positive recognition and awareness of Oman's national identity (Brand Oman, 2009). Through the newly adopted brand, slogan, and characteristics, Brand Oman aims to promote the country as a world class destination for leisure, business, and investment. The logo represents diversity and Arabic calligraphy, marine environment, local textiles, Oman's magnificent landscape, Oman's history in trade and exploration, and its world famous frankincense (Brand Oman, 2009) (refer to Appendix D for the logo). The slogan, "An Evolving Journey," conveys Oman's ancient history, spirit, and pursuit of development.

Tourism in Oman is moving forward with the establishment of the MoT and the Brand Oman initiative. After decades of shot-gun and short-term techniques developing tourism, Oman is finally taking serious steps. The country now has a legislative unit, a branding unit, vision, and plans to make tourism an influential industry that can benefit the country and its citizens in the long term.

2.7.3.2 Educational Boost

In its efforts to develop a strong national workforce in tourism, and as a part of the ongoing long-term process of updating Oman's education system, the government has

been working toward building and sustaining strong academic and vocational programs, both public and private. A discussion of tourism education in Oman is given in section 2.7.2. It is argued here that the increasing emphasis on educational programs in tourism has helped develop and expand the industry in Oman. With more specialized Omanis working in the tourism industry, the range and depth of services provided is on the rise.

2.7.3.3 Major Tourism Projects

In order to boost Oman's tourism image and elevate specialized accommodation capacities, the government has completed and is working on a number of mega projects, including The Wave project (The Wave Muscat, 2010), Al-Houta cave (Alhoota Cave, 2009), and grand hotel projects (GHM Hotels, 2011; Shangri La, 2011). These projects show how eager the government is to develop tourism in Oman, as well as increasing private sector interest in investing in the industry.

2.7.4 Impact of Globalization, Technology, and Economical Changes

Tourism is comprised of leisure activities, which are residuals outside working time (Ooi, 2002). Essentially, potential travelers only spend some of their discretionary income on travel and tourism activities. In a paper on discretionary expenditure and tourism consumption with Australia as a case study, it was found that people spent discretionary income on household debt reduction, investments, and home improvements more than on vacation and travel (Crouch, Oppewal, & Huybers, 2007). More importantly, investigators found evidence that events like terrorism, epidemics, and economic problems could shift international tourism expenditures toward domestic travel and other

options (Crouch et al., 2007). Success of destinations is not always dependent on controllable factors, but also on uncontrollable factors like natural disasters and political unrest (Balakrishnan, 2008). The tourism industry is fragile by nature because it is affected by economic and political world environments. Oman's tourism industry is no exception to the effects of these environmental factors.

2.7.4.1 Globalization

As Oman develops its tourism industry toward the objectives of economic diversification and job creation, it is important to understand that globalization and technology changes are affecting economic progress and necessitate improved human capital development (Gonzalez et al., 2008). The world is now a small village with global markets, global competition, and global cooperation opportunities (Friedman, 2005). A company can sell to anyone and face competition throughout the world. Globalization is imposing higher expectations on all service providers. If services provided in Oman are sub-par, people will take their money to one of more than 200 other destination options (Balakrishnan, 2008). At the same time, globalization helps the voice of Oman reach potential visitors in all corners of the world. For example, divers in Russia have been coming to Oman to experience the Dimaniyat islands, a world class diving spot in Oman (H. Al-Azri, personal communication, August, 2006). Visitors come from across Europe, the Arabian Gulf nations, and Asia to enjoy cultural and natural attractions in Oman (Ministry of National Economy, 2007; Ministry of Tourism, 2009). People can access information about Oman or any other destination with relative ease and traveling is affordable for a growing number of people. Globalization also affects several aspects of

tourism business. Big and small companies alike are now able to import specialized equipment, ideas, designs, and expertise from around the world (Hjalager, 2007). It is, therefore, expected that tourism companies utilize the latest in physical equipment and intangible concepts. Another area especially beneficial to smaller businesses is joint marketing. Good promotion is increasingly important in an international tourist market. Joint marketing is an advantage for small companies as well as potential international visitors because it reduces complexities for both groups (Hjalager, 2007). The major incentives are wide reach and cost savings.

Oman should embrace globalization and provide expected levels of service and resources, all while maintaining authentic identity and quality service. Fierce competition could be tackled by careful and unique destination branding, and adequate marketing efforts from stakeholders. Oman might not have a single, large attraction like the pyramids of Egypt, but as a package, is unique and gracious. This image of authentic Arabian culture mixed with a beautiful and diverse nature should be properly portrayed to potential visitors. In addition, Oman can be tied to neighboring destinations to form a complete package. Dubai, of the United Arab Emirates, is often named as the destination to complement Oman since it offers modern attractions that emphasize relaxation, entertainment, and shopping. Other destinations could be considered as long as they support the unique character of Oman.

2.7.4.2 Technology

Technology is a general term that refers to ideas and instruments created to make life easier. Technology can satisfy desires and create new ones, save costs, and open new

opportunities (Kelly, 2010). In tourism, technology is everywhere: airplanes carrying travelers across the world, cruise ships providing leisure and entertainment, PDA devices used in museums (Alfaro, Nardon, Pianesi, Stock, & Zancanaro, 2005), credit cards and travelers' checks used to purchase items, and many other inventions. One of the most profound technological advancements in the last two decades is the Internet, which has dramatically changed tourism organizations (Buhalis, 2008). Virtually unlimited information, like destination or service provider details, is now one click away from potential travelers. The reach of a website is in the millions, as long as people can find it through search engines or online directories. With little time and effort, potential travelers can find information about a destination in a matter that was not possible in the past. Sophisticated travelers are now able to access reliable information and make reservations, which makes them more knowledgeable and demanding of exceptional money and time value (Buhalis, 2008). With self-planned tourism, package tours are gradually losing market share to independently organized trips (Buhalis, 2008). This trend has been growing so quickly that travel agents are losing ground—though not necessarily disappearing anytime soon (Law, Leung, & Wong, 2004). Another Internet force affecting the industry is social media, which is growing in importance and directly challenges traditional providers of travel information (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Websites like TripAdvisor, VirtualTourist, and IgoUGo allow consumers to share their travel experiences by posting and commenting on stories, pictures, and video clips (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). In fact, search engines have shown to slightly favor social media over official destination marketing organizations in travel information searches (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

In Oman, information technology and the Internet are gradually being adopted. For example, e-government is emerging as an important tool to deliver governmental services (Albusaidy, 2008). It is still in initial stages and faces many challenges, but is a promising program (Albusaidy, 2008). This shows that the government is aware of the importance of the Internet and is taking steps to tackle new technological challenges. For institutions like the MoT, the key to success in this competitive environment is the identification and satisfaction of consumer needs (Buhalis, 2008). This goes along with developing the desired image of Oman, the target market, and the characteristics and needs of the target market. Institutions like the MoT need to know probable search queries from potential travelers, develop strategies for search engine optimization and search engine advertising, and embrace social media to ensure proper representation (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Omani TSBs should also take steps to adopt modern technologies. Travel agencies, though facing challenges of consumer self-planned trips, should value the Internet and seek opportunities there to offer more services to consumers (Law et al., 2004). Other TSBs should focus on consumer technologies suitable to their services to better serve increasingly powerful, sophisticated, and experienced travelers (Buhalis, 2008).

2.7.4.3 Economic Issues

The effects of globalization and technology interact with economic trends. Oman suffered from the global economic crisis in 2008-2009, as evident in decreasing shares of Muscat Securities Market, a recession in the property sector, and a fall in demand for services and industrial products (Ministry of Information, 2010). Additionally, Oman witnessed a drop in hotel occupancy rates in 2009 and 2010 (Ministry of National

Economy, 2010; Ministry of Tourism, 2011). This drop is congruent with the international scene, as the tourism industry was one of the most exposed sectors to the negative effects of the financial crisis (te Velde et al., 2010). Fortunately, the industry as a whole has bounced, is recovering, and is beginning another growth trend (UNWTO, 2011). World Tourism Organization records show that, before and during this crisis, the Middle East was the region with the highest growth rate (UNWTO, 2011). For Oman specifically, the economy continued growing steadily, amounting to 4.1% in 2010, second among GCC countries (Gulf Talent, 2011). With the growing attention the region receives from events and mega projects in neighboring countries, Oman and its sister states are increasingly in the spotlight. Travelers are looking for new, exciting, and authentic destinations that host good infrastructure and guarantee safety. For the future, Oman should take advantage of regional growth opportunities and global recovery from the financial crisis. Developing infrastructure, educating and training Omanis in the field, and promoting the destination are important for a prosperous future.

2.7.4.4 Political Issues

The political environment influences the number of visitors to tourism destinations. Because tourism products are paid for from discretionary income, potential travelers will not risk their safety to experience them. Consequently, political issues like international conflicts present major challenges to the industry (Sönmez Alan, 1998). "[W]hether real or perceived, risks associated with international tourism place serious constraints on tourist behavior" (Sönmez, 1998, p.137). Instability and violence in the Middle East are usually caused by internal disputes, failed peace agreements, and certain resisted

objectionable Western policies (Tucker, 2010). For example, Egypt's destination image was found to be negatively affected by the Egyptian revolution (Afifi, 2012). No scientific papers were found regarding the effects of the Arab Spring waves on the image of Oman as a tourism destination. Nevertheless, other recent conflicts in nearby countries could affect its image as a safe destination. Recent regional conflicts as perceived in Omani, Arab, and international news networks include the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Israeli-Lebanese war in 2006, Indian-Pakistani ongoing situation, U.S.-Iranian tensions, and UAE-Iranian islands conflict. These events and Arab Spring waves could have an effect on Oman's image as a travel destination because, as mentioned in Chapter 2, potential U.S. travelers to Oman—and possibly others as well— were found to generally associate it with stereotypical characteristics of Arab countries (Al-Azri & A. M. Morrison, 2006). Fortunately for the tourism industry in Oman, the country's foreign policy is peace, not intruding in other nations' affairs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010), and dealing with all countries with respect (Ministry of Information, 2010). Oman has friendly relations with the United States (Embassy of the United States in Oman, 2011), as well as Iran, Pakistan, and India (Embassy of India in Oman, 2007), and generally avoids conflicts and confrontations. For at least the last four decades, no act of terrorism has occurred in Oman, not against citizens or against foreigners. The peaceful nature of His Majesty the Sultan and the hospitable traditions of the Omani people contribute to the ranking of Oman as the second most peaceful country in the region (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2011). The government of Oman should continue its strategy of peace. To promote Oman, the government should emphasize its peaceful reputation and clear abstinence from direct involvement with any of the surrounding conflicts. In case of

crises, immediate actions should be taken to effectively manage the health of the tourism industry and the country as a whole.

2.7.5 Implications of the Study

As mentioned elsewhere, this study aims to develop a substantial, as opposed to a formal, theoretical model of TSB marketing. For the nature of the study at hand, this means sampling TSBs in one identified destination. The reasons for choosing Oman as a case destination for this study were laid out in section 2.7.1. Benefits of using this approach include enabling a sharper focus on important issues, strengthening model refinement, and neutralizing the effects of environmental factors on sampled TSBs. Studying the context of Oman (as was done in sections 2.7.1 to 2.7.4) is useful to increase the depth of analysis, as well as lay the foundation for the development of a formal theoretical model in the future. This context analysis reviewed the structure of the tourism industry in Oman, major recent changes in the country, and the impact of globalization, technology, and economical changes. The outcome of this analysis implies a supportive environment for new businesses in the industry. Specifically, regional industry growth, local industry growth, and the government's increasing promotional efforts will create many new opportunities for potential businesses to exploit. The steady growth of Omani national workforce in the industry would ensure an available supply of necessary human resources. These expected dynamic changes in the industry create a unique environment for TSBs in Oman as opposed to many other nations.

2.8 Conclusion and Research Questions

The above review revealed that small businesses play an important role in economies and display unique characteristics compared to larger organizations. They have limited resources and employ simple management structures, but are generally better at serving customers than larger organizations. TSBs operating in the tourism industry face additional challenges like intangibility and perishability of offerings, vulnerability to international events, and seasonality. Many TSBs are established to fulfill personal needs and aspired lifestyles rather than strictly for commercial gains. The marketing mix models of the 4 Ps and 4 Cs were accepted as useful guiding theoretical frameworks. A review of SME marketing models shows that SMEs misunderstand marketing for sales and advertising and consider it time consuming; use informal ways of marketing planning; and better market their products as they gain experience and knowledge. Oman as a case destination is reviewed in terms of industry structure, major recent changes, and important environmental impacts. This review indicates an attractive environment for potential new TSBs.

Based on this discussion, a gap is identified in the literature regarding marketing theories for SMEs in general and TSBs in particular. There is a growing need for theories on the nature of TSBs and how they interact with their environment. In their review of research of small firms in tourism, Thomas, Shaw, and Page (2011) identified Marketing as an area in need of further theoretical development. In earlier studies, it was argued that there was too little information about small hotel firms (A. J. Morrison & Conway, 2007) and that there is a misunderstanding about the complexity of small tourism firms (Ateljevic, 2007).

This brings the discussion back to this study's objectives of developing a theoretical model of TSB marketing, identifying the main factors affecting TSB marketing, and identifying relationships between these factors. The targeted model first needs to uncover the basic marketing elements implemented by TSBs. These elements are guided by the 4 Ps model, but should be properly adjusted to suit the specific context of TSBs. The first research question is:

RQ1) What are the basic marketing elements for a TSB?

Secondly, the targeted model needs to theoretically explain customers' experiences as they relate to the uncovered TSB marketing elements.

RQ2) How do the TSB's marketing elements relate to customers' experiences?

Third, to provide a more thorough picture, the targeted model needs to identify the main factors affecting TSB marketing. These factors need not strictly follow common marketing understanding, but rather theoretically developed for the specific context of TSBs.

RQ3) What are the main factors affecting TSB marketing?

Fourth, the targeted model needs to identify relationships between these factors. Doing so will give the targeted model deeper dimension and a window into the roots of good TSB marketing.

RQ4) What are the relationships between these main factors?

The above four research questions cover different areas of the targeted theoretical model.

A derivative of the targeted model is to discover the core of effective TSB marketing.

This will answer the question of what is critically important for a TSB in order to achieve

highly effective marketing.

RQ5) What is the core of effective TSB marketing?

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction: Qualitative vs Quantitative Methods

The objectives of this study on developing a theoretical model of TSB marketing and identifying major factors require a method that is capable of analyzing the roots behind business tactics that lead to commercial success in TSBs. A conventional quantitative method in the field of tourism research that uses surveys or questionnaires is not suitable for achieving this study's objectives because of the relatively limited depth of results it generates. A qualitative method that analyzes deeper meanings of the data gathered and its context is more suitable for this study. A brief discussion of qualitative versus quantitative methods and their underlying epistemologies of interpretivism versus positivism will follow. A number of issues are discussed; what underlies the use of quantitative methods in social sciences, humanities, and management sciences? What are the main assumptions regarding the concept of truth and the interpretation of truth? Subsequently, which of the two methods is more suitable for this study?

Scholars in social sciences, humanities, and management studies debate the merits and application of quantitative versus qualitative methods. Whereas quantitative methods are sometimes regarded as more scientific, advocates of qualitative methods argue that quantitative methods do not provide sufficient room for theoretical assumptions (Goulding, 2002). If the research topic is related to the physical, tangible world—as in

research areas like chemistry, biology, medicine, engineering, and mathematics—it would make sense to emphasize quantitative methods. The central laws of physics and biology are fairly constant and concepts are provable with suitable tools and methods. There are centuries of available scientific work and an ever growing body of proven facts. Research in these areas is based on solid work upon which new facts can be established. On the other hand, areas of sociology, humanities, and management sciences are not based as solidly. The main object of study in these areas is the human being, whose mind, feelings, motives, and affecting factors are complex and changing. The issue under consideration is whether the assumptions of the physical world can be applied in areas like tourism management, especially when considering theory generation.

The debate of whether quantitative or qualitative methods are more suitable is based on epistemological differences between positivism advocates and post-modernists and interpretivists. The majority of quantitative methods come from positivism (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004). Positivism, which originates in the physical sciences (Goulding, 2002), embraces the assumptions that truth is reachable, scientific research is objective, theory should be deductive, and causality is attainable (Henderson, 2011). These assumptions are suitable for the physical world, but are they suitable for the humanities? To maintain objectivity in quantitative methods, distance between the observed and the observer should be established (Bryman, 1984 as cited in Goulding, 2002) where the aim is to control and predict (Annells, 1996, as cited in Goulding, 2002). It can be argued that for some research objectives, this position is justified and even required. However, is it applicable to research objectives in humanities?

Postmodernism (closely related to interpretivism) is skeptical of this view of reality and truth and argues that research findings are relatively represented by researchers (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002).

When looking at research in areas of management and tourism, there is emphasis on positivism (as opposed to interpretivism). It has been observed that most research in management, and specifically in marketing, is positivist in nature and largely uses surveys as the main instrument (Goulding, 2002). Likewise, positivist quantitative methods were found to be dominant in tourism research (Bruner, 2010; Riley & Love, 2000). Specifically, 59% of tourism studies use quantitative methods and 70% use some form of statistical analysis (Ballantyne, Packer, & Axelsen, 2009). These numbers show that most research in tourism is empirical or focuses on theory testing or expansion in new contexts. The research goal of whether to develop a theory or test it is an important consideration when adopting interpretivism or positivism epistemology, and choosing between qualitative and quantitative methods. Whereas theory is generated by qualitative methods (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004), testing and measuring existing theories is done using quantitative methods. Glaser and Strauss (1967) noticed an overuse of quantitative methods in social sciences decades ago and developed the grounded theory method in protest. They argued that at the time—and possibly even today—there was an overemphasis on theory verification based on the belief that available theories were sufficient (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Both methods have strengths and weaknesses and are appropriate for different cases. The point of utmost interest to this study is that the interpretive view, and its offspring of qualitative research and grounded theory method in particular, is

scientifically sound and useful in social sciences, humanities, and management sciences. Below is a review of the grounded theory method, followed by sections describing how it is used in this study.

3.2 Grounded Theory

In the late sixties, Glaser and Strauss noticed that there was a passive acceptance of the notion that important theories had all been developed, which largely constrained the role of research to verifying these theories quantitatively. In reaction to this and in an effort to encourage new and theoretical research, Glaser and Strauss developed the *Grounded Theory* method (Charmaz, 2004; Goulding, 2002), which is defined as "the discovery of theory from data" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.1). Grounded theory develops theory strictly based (or grounded) on evidence from the data and fitting an immediate and specified problem. It is a set of structured, inductive techniques for analyzing data that systematically progress from basic ideas to analytic categories and theories (Charmaz, 2004; Glaser & Holton, 2004). Grounded theory stresses the grounding of theory on data and away from biases and pre-conceived beliefs. In its purest form, it goes to the extent of calling for ignoring the review of literature in order to guarantee the emergence of theoretical concepts from the data set without effects from previously studied concepts (Dey, 1999; Glaser & Holton, 2004). There are two types of theories discoverable by this method: *substantive* and *formal*. Substantive theory is developed from and for a specific area, whereas formal theory has a greater generalizability and explanatory power (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Goulding, 2002). Charmaz (2004), however,

notes that grounded theory has greater generalizability than other qualitative research methods.

Throughout the years, the two founding fathers of grounded theory have taken divergent views on the essence of the basic method and how it should be used. Glaser believed that Strauss overemphasized research mechanics at the expense of theoretical sensitivity and disregarded many of the ideas in their original 1967 book (Glaser, 1992 as cited in Goulding, 2002). Glaser refers to his view of grounded theory as the classic method, instead of the common term *Glaserian* grounded theory (Glaser & Holton, 2004). There is still overlap between the two versions like the constant comparison method, the technique of theoretical sampling, and that the theory should fit the data (Goulding, 2002).

Even though grounded theory was started by sociologists for sociologists, it has been applied in many other areas, especially in humanities and management studies. In marketing literature, it is used along with *system dynamics methodology* to extensively analyze companies to develop a theory of product concept development (Burchill & Fine, 1997), and to analyze semi-structured interviews to better understand consumers' relationships with promotions (Hirschman & Thompson, 1997). In tourism literature, grounded theory was used with modified procedures, long interviews, and deeper literature analysis to investigate prestige-worthy tourism behavior (Riley, 1995), as well as with in-depth interviews to develop a tourism motivation model for Chinese seniors (Hsu, Cai, & Wong, 2007). This broad use of grounded theory and the different schools of thought emerging from it implies that it is used with a sizable degree of variation.

Literature also shows, as seen above, that researchers even used modified procedures of grounded theory in accordance with their research objectives and limitations.

For the study at hand, no clearly established theory of TSB marketing was found in the literature. To support this notion, and as was mentioned in Chapter 2, a recent extensive review of literature pertaining to small firms in tourism by Thomas et al (2011) found that marketing is in need of additional theoretical development. As seen above, grounded theory is used to generate theory instead of testing available theories. It is recognized as a sound and useful technique in humanities and management studies with a systematic approach that reduces bias while allowing for theoretical sensitivity. Hence, for the purposes of this study, a methodology based on grounded theory principles is suitable. This study uses the pillars of grounded theory method: grounding emerging theory on the data, coding procedures, *memoing*, comparative analysis, simultaneously coding and analyzing data, and theory writing guidelines. Specifically, this study seeks to develop a substantive grounded theory, as defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), as opposed to a formal one. This study does not go to the lengths suggested by Glaser of postponing literature review to later stages of analysis (Dey, 1999). Literature review was undertaken before discovering the suitability of the grounded theory method to this study. In addition, the study at hand is related to fairly established areas of marketing planning, small business marketing, and tourism SME marketing.

Furthermore, because of limitations related to dissertation requirements and sample accessibility, the study does not strictly adhere to the grounded theory principle of *theoretical sampling*, whereby data is collected and analyzed simultaneously up to *theoretical saturation*. Instead, data was gathered completely in a relatively limited time

scope. A careful procedure was used to simulate theoretical sampling in order to gain some of its benefits. This procedure is explained in section 3.4.1 covering coding and analysis approach, and its benefits are elucidated in section 5.3.2 covering methodological contributions of this study.

The classic Glaser and Strauss (1967) grounded theory was chosen for this study, as opposed to modifications and alterations applied to it throughout the years. Upon examination of some of these flavored methods, it was concluded that they are largely driven by researchers' or area of studies' philosophical and practical preferences. By returning to classical guidelines, the aim is to keep this study unaffected by irrelevant or remotely relevant circumstances. This theoretically ensures a more substantive analysis of the given data.

3.3 Data Sets and Research Instrument

3.3.1 Preliminary Data Set

In the summer of 2010, interviews were conducted with a sample of five TSB owners/managers in Oman, which constituted the preliminary data set. This exploratory phase helped guide subsequent literature review and form research objectives and research questions. In addition, this phase provided the interviewer with skills and experience useful for collecting the main data set the following summer. The format of the interviews was semi-structured to allow for identification of the most relevant issues. Areas of investigation for this preliminary data set included critical marketing elements, marketing tactics, government support, cooperative marketing, and motives for starting the business. Interviews were done with owners/managers of five TSBs: three tour

operators, one travel agency, and one diving center. The interview questions used in this preliminary data set are presented in Appendix E.

3.3.2 Main Data Set: Research Instrument

Although the classic grounded theory method calls for commencing data collection at an early stage, the main data set for this study was collected after reviewing the literature, identifying research questions, and concluding the suitability of the grounded theory method. As mentioned previously, early data collection was delayed because of the PhD program's policies and expectations. Nevertheless, the collection of the preliminary data set, although not considered at the heart of the actual study, helped plan the research process and identify relevant preliminary constructs. The research instrument used to collect the main data set was the in-depth, semi-structured interview. Qualitative research instruments are generally used for collecting data for studies adopting the grounded theory method, even though it is capable of utilizing quantitative research instruments (Glaser & Holton, 2004). The in-depth, semi-structured interview was used because it gives structure and purpose to open conversations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), is capable of revealing rich information (Johnson, 2002), and balances efficiency and flexibility (Marshall & Rossman, 1995), all of which are desired capabilities for fulfilling the purposes of this study. The below list of open-ended questions was used to guide the interviews. In order to allow for flexibility and the emergence of other relevant constructs, the interviewer did not necessarily follow the suggested sequence of these interview questions nor confine the interview flow to them. The interview questions are

presented below with a brief description of their uses and how they relate to the study's research questions.

Q1. What is the history of your business. How did it all start?

Q1a. For how many years have you been in business?

Q1b. What is the highest qualification you received?

Q1c. What are your main strengths and weaknesses?

These questions serve as icebreakers, as well as openers for probing on relevant issues.

Q2. What are your primary goals for starting and running this business?

This question explores possible factors affecting TSB marketing (RQ3), as well as possible relationships between these factors (RQ4).

Q3. What is your business philosophy? What do you consider critical for success?

This question, with appropriate probing, attempts to provide clues that help identify main factors affecting a TSB's marketing (RQ3) and relationships between these factors (RQ4).

Q4. Tell me more about your business environment.

Q4a: What characteristics of the tourism industry are most influential on how you manage and market your business?

Q4b: Who are your main competitors? What are their main strengths and weaknesses?

Q4c: Do you have any business alliances? If so, how important are they?

Q4d: Do you utilize any personal connections in better doing your business?

If so, how?

These questions, with adequate probing, are designed to analyze how well TSB owners know their businesses in relation to their environment. These questions contribute to identifying basic TSB marketing elements (RQ1) and can shed light on other important matters.

Q5. Who are your customers?

Q5a. What are their main needs?

Q5b. What, based on your experience, is the most appropriate way to fulfill their needs?

Q5c. What are your main techniques to achieve this? (Probe on the 4Ps of marketing)

These questions look into how the owner is adopting marketing orientation and how well he/she knows the needs of their customers. These questions also explore customers' experiences as perceived by the owners (RQ2) and the specific marketing mix elements for a TSB (RQ1).

Q6. What are the main difficulties in marketing your business?

This question explores other possible relevant factors affecting marketing as perceived by the TSB owner (RQ3, RQ4).

The set of interview questions above are used as a guide to help generate relevant ideas and remain in the scope of the study's objectives and research questions. The brief descriptions given for each question and sub-question relate them to the study's research questions RQ1 to RQ4. The last research question (RQ5) seeking the discovery of the core of effective TSB marketing is indicated by the careful holistic analysis of the data set and the emerging theoretical model.

In addition to these open-ended interview questions, a closed-ended questionnaire was initially considered important to assess TSBs' marketing performance. This questionnaire was based on a modified version of Simpson et al's (2006) alteration of Kotler's (1977) marketing efficiency scale (Appendix E). The scale was used in all seven interviews, but was later dropped from the analysis for a number of reasons. First, the scale's tone was found to be largely skewed toward large businesses. In addition, it was noticed that most responses from interviewees to the scale demonstrated low levels of comprehension, openness, and livelihood. Interviewees lost energy answering these questions as compared to open-ended questions. Possible reasons for this include lack of question clarity and interviewees' perception of inadequate marketing as was implied by their answers to the scale's questions on formal marketing procedures. Therefore, it was difficult to draw concrete conclusions on interviewees' answers to the scale. Despite this, the scale parts of the transcriptions were kept and coded like the remaining parts of the interviews. There were instances where interviewees took detours from the scale to discuss relevant matters that were useful for the study. This alteration of the instrument during data collection is a given possibility in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2004) and in the use of the interview method (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

3.3.3 Main Data Set: Collection and Participants

The main data set was collected in Oman during the summer of 2011. The target participants were TSB owners or managers in Oman running tour operators, diving centers, and desert camps. These three types of companies were chosen because, in accordance with the adopted definition of a TSB, they primarily serve in-bound and local tourists. Small hotels were also targeted, but that could not materialize because of difficulty locating accurate contact information. In addition to the three target types of tourism businesses, two travel agencies were interviewed for analytical reasons. As for the data collection process, an initial set of candidate TSBs and their contact information was gathered first. Lists of these businesses were obtained from the Trade Directory of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) (Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2010) and Oman Yellow Pages. The initial list of candidate businesses included 68 businesses. These encompassed thirteen tour operators, three marine tour operators, forty-three travel agents and tourism companies, and nine diving centers.

A specific process was used to select and schedule interviews with suitable TSBs (see Figure 3.1). The process was designed to ensure that businesses fall into the adopted definition of TSBs and had owners or managers available for interviews. The candidate businesses were initially contacted by phone. As is expected in such cases, a share of the listed phone numbers were disconnected and several phone calls went unanswered. Where phone calls were answered, a request was given to speak with the business owner or manager. If the owner or manager was not available, a message was left for him/her stating the interview objectives and contact information. Upon talking to an owner or manager, he/she was first informed about the interviewer and the objectives of the

interview. This helped establish credibility and to capture owners' or managers' attention. After that, filtering questions were asked to establish that the company was still in business, independently owned, employing twenty or fewer people, and that the owner was available for an interview (up to one and a half hours in lenfth). In cases where businesses were found to be outside the target population of the study, the owner or manager was thanked. In cases where businesses were found to belong to the study's target population and where the owner or manager was available for an interview, an appointment was scheduled. The appointments were scheduled at the earliest possible time of day to ensure that interviewees would have a fresh and clear mind and to minimize distractions. A meeting at the interviewee's office were sought, if possible, in order to experience the TSB's atmosphere.
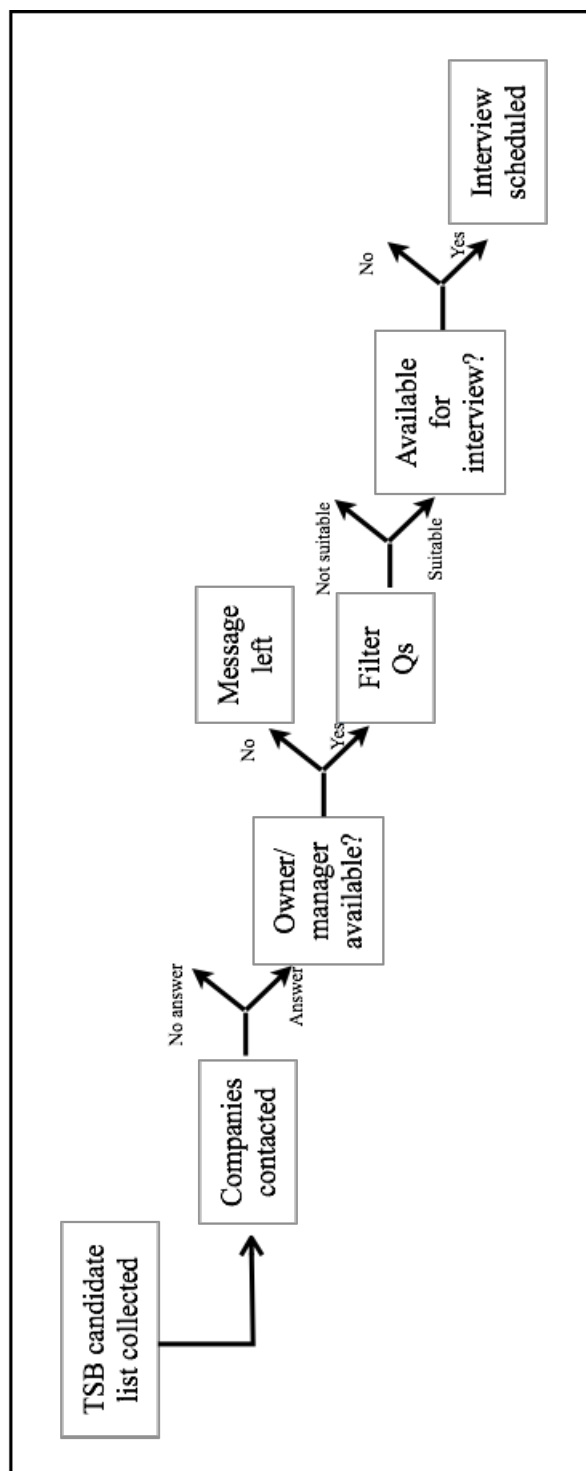
Figure 3.1 Interview Selection and Scheduling Process

At the location of each interview, the interviewer arrived on time, put on formal or semi-formal Omani attire, and brought printed questions and other support tools. A digital recorder, at the consent of the interviewee, was used to allow the interviewer to focus on the interview. Notes were only taken to organize the structure of the interview, as well as for probing purposes. After each interview, promotional material of the TSB and a tour of its office (in the case of interviews held at the TSB office) were kindly requested.

3.4 Coding and Analysis Processes

3.4.1 Simulating Theoretical Sampling

Data coding and analysis for this study followed classic grounded theory guidelines as outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and as stressed by Glaser (2004), with one alteration applied as a result of the study's limitations. This deviation from classic grounded theory was in the application of the theoretical sampling principle. Theoretical sampling necessitates that the sample size should not be predetermined; that data collection, coding, and analysis should be done simultaneously; and that sampling should be guided by analysis of previously collected data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It is suggested that selective sampling begin based on set criteria followed by sampling based on theoretical needs of the emerging theory (Draucker, Martsolf, Ross, & Rusk, 2007). This is to be done up to the point where theoretical saturation is reached (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In this study, a careful procedure was used to attempt to simulate the process of theoretical sampling. The sample size was not predetermined for data collection. Instead, interviews were planned to be conducted up to the point where a sufficiently variable

sample was collected. Interviews were planned to last about an hour to guarantee as much useful information for the study as possible. In data coding and analysis, the order of the interview transcripts was set based on the judged depth and quality of the respective interviews, as indicated by interviewees' responses. This judgment was aided by listening to the audio recordings several times before and during the process. This procedure helped acquire some of the benefits of theoretical sampling despite the inability to fully implement it.

3.4.2 Data Collection

A total of seven TSBs in Oman were interviewed over the summer of 2011. These interviews were recorded, with interviewees' consent, with a digital recorder. As suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967), notes were taken on every interview within twenty-four hours of completion. The notes described interview settings, circumstances, processes, and additional relevant information. Specifically, interview notes included information such as the time of the interview, location, impressions about the TSB interviewed, and an assessment of business volume and professionalism. These notes were regarded as part of the data and were coded and analyzed with interview transcriptions.

3.4.3 Data Coding and Analysis

Line by line coding of interview transcripts and interview notes was done one interview at a time. Each new *incident* (line or short idea) was classified into as many categories and category properties as possible. These categories followed Glaser and

Strauss' (1967) criteria of being conceptual while remaining close to the data. The list of categories and category properties began with the first category indicated by the first incident of the first coded interview up to the level where no additional relevant categories were indicated by new incidents. Following the grounded theory *Constant Comparison* technique, new incidents were compared with groups of incidents in established categories, as well as with incidents in other categories and category properties. Incidents from each of the interviews were written in unique colors for ease of reference. In addition to interview memo incidents and transcript incidents, insights about emerging issues were recorded on a separate sheet. These insights were mainly explanatory or insightful ideas about possible gaps in the evolving theory. These memos help identify patterns and implicit meanings (Charmaz, 2004). To organize coding and analysis, a coding index (Table 3.1) and a key helped identify categories and category properties (Table 3.2). Categories, category properties, and insights were continuously reviewed for additions, omissions, integrations, and modifications. During revision cycles and normal coding, notes were taken on a separate sheet whenever there was a chance that a category or category property needed to be checked or modified. These side notes were consulted to identify which categories or category properties most need review. Examples of category modifications done during revisions are presented in Table 3.3. This process led to emerging *theoretical hypotheses* about the evolving theoretical model. Unlike conventional *hypotheses* in quantitative methodologies, the theoretical hypotheses in grounded theory are regarded as part of the findings and outcomes of the study. Based on grounded data and grounded theory procedures, theoretical hypotheses theorize about

relationships among categories, category properties, and insights. These theoretical

hypotheses were recorded on a separate sheet.

Table 3.1 Coding Index

Label	Code	Example
Interview memo incident	imx.y	im2.6: Incident 6 from memo of interview 2
Interview incident	ix.y	i5.70: Incident 70 from transcript of interview 5
Category	cx	c3: Category 3
Category property	cpx	cp4.10: Property 10 of category 4
Insight	nx	n9: Insight 9
Theoretical hypothesis	thx	th11: Theoretical hypothesis 11

Table 3.2 Criteria for Labeling Categories, Categories' Properties, and Theoretical Hypotheses

Label	Identifiers
Category	Indicated by data, stands alone, analytic, and sensitizing (yielding a meaningful picture)
Category property	Causes, conditions, consequences, dimensions, procedures, divisions, and conceptual aspects of a category
Insight	Explanations, patterns, and implicit meanings
Theoretical hypothesis	Theorized relationships among categories, category properties, and insights. Forms the core of the emerging theory

Table 3.3 Examples of Modifications Done During Revisions

Category or category property	Old code	New code	Notes
Work enjoyment	cp9.3	c48	Gradually emerged as a major construct
Providing high service	cp17.2	c49	Gradually emerged as an important construct. It included some incidents from cp17.1 & cp17.2
Listening to customers	cp17.1	cp17.1	Merged with "Customer Service is top priority" (cp17.3). Label of cp17.1 became "Prioritizing customer service."
Years of experience	cp8.2	c50	Gradually emerged as a major construct

3.4.4 Theoretical Model

Based on the above coding and analysis procedures, a theoretical model emerged. The model began as ideas in basic form and then evolved into the model presented in Chapter 4. The end point of the analysis, as recommended by Glaser and Strauss (1967), was when no major category modifications were done and when additional coded incidents caused theoretical saturation. It was the point at which the theoretical model evolved into a sufficiently clear and logical form. As classic grounded theory suggests, an evolved theory that is reasonably accurate should be ended and presented despite room for further development. In presenting the resulting theoretical model in Chapters 4 and 5, constructs and suggested relationships between constructs are traced back to the incidents, categories, category properties, insights, and theoretical hypotheses upon which they are grounded. This is important to ensure that the theoretical model is grounded on the data and is substantive to the study. The evolution of the theoretical

model based on theoretical hypotheses, categories, category properties, and incidents is illustrated in Figure 3.2.

$$\boxed{\text{Theoretical Model}}$$

↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

$$\boxed{\text{th1, th2, ..., th11, ..., th22, ..., th30}}$$

↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

$$\boxed{\text{c1, cp1.1, ..., c4, ..., cp8.3, ..., cp14.5, ..., cp31.2, ..., c45, ..., c50}}$$

↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

$$\boxed{\text{i1.1, i1.2, i1.3, i1.4, i1.5, ..., i3.53, ..., i5.103, ..., i7.73 // im1.1, ..., im2.14, ..., im7.5 // n1, n2, ..., n15}}$$
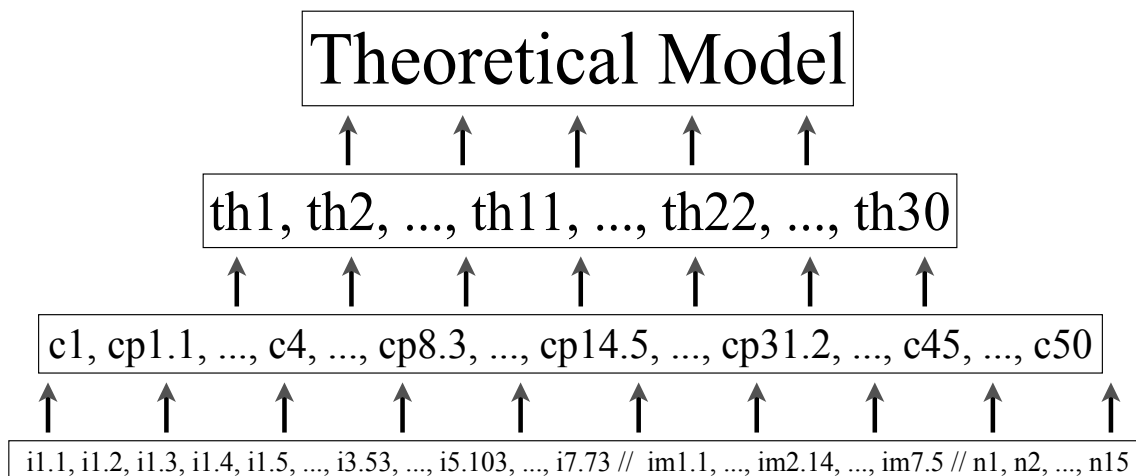
Figure 3.2 Mundane Incidents Leading to a Theoretical Model

3.5 Transferability, Credibility, and Ethical Concerns

The study at hand is based on an interpretive epistemology rather than a positivist one. Contrary to positivists, interpretivists assume no single truth on any subject matter (Winter, 2000). Interpretivists also consider their methods in terms of *transferability* rather than *reliability* and *credibility* or *trustworthiness* in place of *validity* (Winter, 2000). The grounded theory method, unlike conventional quantitative methods, is not designed to consistently produce the same results using the same set of procedures with the same data set. It is designed to allow for the flexibility necessary for the creative development of theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Indeed, different interpretations of identical sets of data and procedures are possible using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2004). Nevertheless, credibility in grounded theory is built by using the comparative analysis technique, a variety of subjects in the sample, and the detailed presentation of

processes used in collecting, coding, and analyzing data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The use of these systematic procedures, as well as personal discipline, control bias and subjectivity (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Goulding, 2002; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The previous sections of this chapter outlined the detailed procedures used in this study to collect, code, and analyze the data. The grounded theory's comparative analysis technique was continuously applied during coding and analyzing a data set consisting of different types of TSBs in Oman.

In addition to questions of transferability and credibility, there are possible ethical issues in the use of in-depth interviewing for this study. The most obvious issue is the concern over proper protection of subjects' personal information (Johnson, 2002). To achieve confidentiality, a number of steps were taken. First, the interviews' audio recordings are only accessible to the principle researcher and are destroyed at the end of the study. Second, all illustrated transcriptions of these interviews used to report findings are identified by pseudonyms and stripped of other potentially identifiable information. Third, the presented findings of this study are based on the collective set of interviews rather than on individual cases that could be traceable to subjects.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

4.1 Interviews' Settings

The data set for this study consists of seven TSBs in Oman. This sample is comprised of three diving centers, two travel agencies, one desert camp, and one tour operator. Six of the interviewees are owners or co-owners of TSBs and one is a non-owning manager. They are independently owned (except one) and employ less than twenty employees. The process by which they were contacted, filtered, and chosen for interviews is explained in Chapter 3. About half of the interviews were done at TSB offices and the other half at owners' residences, as per the request of interviewees. The interviews were carried out in the summer of 2011. Summer is the tourism off-season in Oman, which meant the TSB owners were more likely to be available for interviews and focused and relaxed during the interviews. The interviewer preferred to schedule interviews in the morning in order to benefit from fresh and calm minds, but allowed interviewees to schedule them at other times if they preferred. Consequently, two interviews were conducted in the morning, four in the afternoon, and one at night. The accumulated length of interviews for the sample was about 469 minutes, with an average of one hour and seven minutes per interview.

The first of the seven interviews was useful for improving subsequent interviews. Specifically, it resulted in minor reorganization and simplification of some of the original

interview questions. In all interviews, the interviewer arrived on time, wore formal or semi-formal attire, and brought necessary documents and tools. This was important in order to convey the significance of the study, as well as respect and courtesy for the interviewees and their valuable time. All interviewees were friendly and helpful, as well as responsive and informative. Each of the interviews began with introductions, stating the topic of the study, assuring anonymity and confidentiality, and explaining the structure of the interview. Five of the interviews were conducted in English and two were conducted in Arabic as per the preference of the respective interviewees.

4.2 Analytical Categories

As stated in Chapter 3, the findings of the study are presented in a holistic and collective form. Such presentation better suites the study's purpose of developing a theoretical TSB marketing model as opposed to examining individual cases of TSBs. In addition, presenting the findings in a collective form contributed to protecting the identity and privacy of the interviewed TSBs in that it virtually eliminated possible identifiable information that could be recognized by people familiar with Oman's tourism industry. In the original data records, specific notes were recorded about each interview's time and location, and about the TSB and its owner(s). These notes are presented, after hiding identifiable information, in the findings here in Chapter 4, as well as in the discussion of the findings in Chapter 5.

The following pages present the analytical categories resulting from the analysis of data in accordance with grounded theory procedures. They are presented in their final state of development at the end of data analysis. As mentioned in Chapter 3, this final

state of category development does not necessarily indicate the ultimate phase of analysis where all conceivable concepts are identified and where all connections between them are explained. Instead, this final state of category development indicates arriving at a phase of analysis where data saturation is reached and where the theoretical model has grown into a mature form. Table 4.1 presents a summary of the fifty developed categories divided into groups of similar topics.

Table 4.1 Summary of Analytical Categories

Category group	Categories
Owner's personal characteristics	Owner's demographics (c1), owner's personality (c9), owner's personal possessions (c35), owner or manager (c36)
Owner's business characteristics	Owner's involvement in daily activities (c7), owner's knowledge of operations (c8), perceived TSB differentiation (c10), knowledge of competition (c16), owner's marketing philosophy (c17), knowledge of the industry (c18), understanding customer needs (c29), informal planning (c33), interest in supporting the local community (c40), work enjoyment (c48), years of experience (c50)
TSB's core product	TSB's work load (c6), TSB's equipment (c12), TSB's main business attraction (c13), TSB's activities (c14), business reliability proofs (c15), perceived weakness(es) (c21), managing weakness(es) (c22), following business standards (c42), personal service (c49)
TSB's direct accessibility, basic price and apprisal	Company's office location (c4), Internet presence (c11), promotion (c24), pricing (c26), marketing person (c32)
TSB's customers	Direct customers (c23), customer source market (c41), customer database (c43), customer's feedback/reactions (c47)
TSB's other info	Origins (c19), good fortune (c20), business alliances (c25), relationship with governmental institutions (c27), comparison to big businesses (c30), operational difficulties (c34), number of employees (c37), business volume (c38), managing seasonality (c39), formal business planning (c44), human resources (c45)
Environment	Competitive pressure (c28), issues with the government (c31), government's role (c46)
Interview conditions	Interviewer's readiness (c2), interview's location (c3), interview's conditions (c5)

Following are the categories (labeled c1 to c50) and their respective properties

(labeled cp1.1 to cp45.4) resulting from coding and analyzing the study's data set. The

list of categories and their properties is presented in full with brief descriptions and

examples of supporting incidents. The grounded theory's concept of an incident, as explained in Chapter 3, refers to a short excerpt from transcribed interviews or interview memos that supports a category or category property. Incidents given below are from interview transcriptions, except when specifically labeled as incidents from an interview memo.

c1 Owner's Demographics

Describing the owner's background as it may prove important to the analysis.

cp1.1 Nationality

Noting the nationality of the owner as indicated in the interview. Five owners were Omanis and two were non-Omanis.

> [Interview memo:] . . . *[He/she] wasn't available, so [his/her spouse], [Mr. X] (European), the other co-owner of the company, agreed to be interviewed.*

cp1.2 Age

This category property was not specifically collected for most interviews. It emerged in the coding of the first interview, but was later discovered to have minimal value.

<u>cp1.3 Educational Level</u>

Noting owners' acquired academic degrees and professional certificates. Generally, those in diving were certified while academic qualifications varied among the seven owners.

I'm a dive instructor.. ah.. actually.. MSDT, Master Scuba Diving Trainer..

I took courses in management.. I made simple courses.. to manage a project . . . .

c2 Interviewer's Readiness

Describing how well prepared the interviewer was for the interviews. This may affect the interviewees' responses.

<u>cp2.1 Well Prepared</u>

Except for the first interview, the interviewer was well prepared.

[Interview memo:] *[Interviewer] was more prepared than the [first] interview. [Interviewer] clarified some of the vague questions and made the questionnaire papers easier to follow through.*

<u>cp2.2 Well Groomed</u>

The interviewer was formally dressed for interviews held at the TSB's office, and semi-formally dressed for interviews held at the owners' residences.

[Interview memo:] *[Interviewer] went [to the TSB's office at] morning time. [Interviewer] was formally dressed and ready for the interview.*

[Interview memo:] *It was nighttime, so both of us [interviewer and interviewee] were dressed casual.*

<u>cp2.3 Prepared Tools</u>

For the interviews, the interviewer had a folder with a plan, printed questionnaires,

a digital recorder (Apple iPod Nano 3rd generation), a notebook, business cards, and pens.

[Interview memo:] *[Interviewer] had a small folder with two papers of the interview, the digital recorder, and a pencil.*

c3 Interview's Location

Specifying where the interview was located. It was preferred to conduct the

interviews at TSB offices, but they were conducted elsewhere if requested by the owners.

<u>cp3.1 At Interviewee's Office</u>

Three interviews were held at the interviewees' offices.

[Interview memo:] *The interview took place at [Mr. X's] office in the diving center.*

<u>cp3.2 At Interviewee's Residence</u>

Four interviews were held at the interviewees' residences.

[Interview memo:] *[Interviewee] gave [interviewer] directions to [interviewee's] home.*

c4 TSB's Office Location

Specifying where the office was located. It is important to note that in some cases,

the exact office location was assumed from context rather than explicitly given by the

interviewee.

cp4.1 At a Relatively Exclusive Area

Two TSBs had offices in an area not close to downtown.

[Interview memo:] *The diving center is located within the premises of an employees' club of a major institution in Oman, in a coastal city in Muscat.*

cp4.2 In the City

Three TSBs had offices in an area close to downtown.

[Interview memo:] *The location is close to the beach, close to where the diving center's boats are located.*

cp4.3 At Home

Two owners mainly worked from home.

[Interview memo:] *Being a micro company of one, the owner does [his/her] business from home.*

c5 Interview's Conditions

Describing general conditions of the interviews, which are distraction level, interviewee's responsiveness, and time of the interview.

cp5.1 Low Distractions

Distractions were few, as the owners made themselves available for the scheduled interviews. There were times, however, when they had to tend to their businesses.

[Interview memo:] *It was generally quiet and undisturbed, except for two or three times when [the interviewee] needed to give instructions to [his/her] employees as it was a regular working day for them.*

cp5.2 Responsive Interviewee

Almost all interviewees were responsive to questions.

[Interview memo:] *[Mr. X] was responsive, clear, and informative*.

[Interview memo:] *[Interviewee] held the digital recorder in [his/her] hand and started talking after [interviewer's] first questions. [He/she] took [the interviewer] through a time-line history of events of [his/her] "establishment."*

[Interview memo:] *[Interviewee] was helpful, but not easy to talk to. [Interviewer] felt like [he] had to pull out answers from [interviewee] sometimes*.

cp5.3 Interview Time

Two interviews were held at the preferred early time. Four interviews were held in the afteroon and one was held at night.

c6 TSB's Work Load

Describing how busy TSBs were. This wasn't specifically given, but was implied by TSB offices' load and the general information provided to the interviewer.

cp6.1 Reasonable to Heavy

It was generally indicated that all but one TSB had a reasonable to heavy work load.

c7 Owner's Involvement in Daily Activities

Determining how much the owner is involved in daily TSB activities.

<u>cp7.1 High Involvement</u>

Noting incidents indicating that the owner is highly involved in daily operations.

The only near-emergency situation which we've had was on land.. where somebody came back from diving.. and it was a dry day.. you know, the temperature was high, humidity low.. [giving a detailed account of the incident]..

Our GSMs [cell phones] are 24/7.. /52.

Honestly.. I manage and do marketing.. and I do programs.. because the programs in fact, when I designed them.. I just renew and alter them . . . .

<u>cp7.2 Lower Involvement</u>

One TSB owner indicated he/she wasn't as involved as he/she wished to be.

Some of our weaknesses.. I suppose you COULD say ah.. one of our weaknesses is.. is.. is that OWNERS of the company.. we, we.. we no longer [go out with customers, directly providing the service]. So we can't be with the clients . . .

c8 Owner's Knowledge of Operations

Determinig how much the owner knows about his/her TSB's operations.

<u>cp8.1 Detailed Knowledge</u>

Incidents indicating detailed knowledge of operations.

[Interview memo:] *[Interviewee's] experience in the field is evident when looking at how he/she talks and responds*.

Well, we have to follow the rules of the associations… with PADI, NAUI… NAUI is the oldest diving federation in the world, established by Jacques Cousteau.. and it is the oldest.. PADI was set up by people from NAUI..And PADI is… marketing! [Laughing]

So I took them [TSB's employees] to the attractions in all the regions in Oman.. and I wrote to them in pieces of paper information.. of course, about every region or tourism attraction. For example, the fort of *Nizwa* [a tourist city at the center of Oman].. when was it built, when was it restored, who built it . . . .

cp8.2 Years of Experience

[This is transferred to Category 50 (c50)]

cp8.3 Specialized Qualification

Cases where the owners are especially qualified for the service the TSB offers.

Yes.. It's a level of certification. After instructor, you got the.. speciality instructor, and then the Master Scuba Diving Trainer.. and then you go all the way to course director, where you'll be able to train people to become instructors.

c9 Owner's Personality

Describing some conceivably relevant owner personality traits.

cp9.1 Calm and Confident

Two TSB owners were clearly excellent in this regard and others were mostly good. The first example below shows confidence and serenity in taking the risk of moving to a new location expected to yield high returns in the future. The second example demonstrates how much self-assurance the owner has taking initiative at the interview.

We've then been given the opportunity to move into here.. and we took it. So that we can dive the.. [diving site] and be different.

[Interview memo:] *Through [the interviewee's] speech, [he/she] answered almost all [the] questions! [Interviewer] allowed [him/her] to talk since [he/she] seemed to prefer it that way*.

cp9.2 Multilingual

Almost all owners speak at least two languages, as was presumed based on pre- and post-interview discussions.

cp9.3 Enjoys His/Her Work

[This is transferred to Category 48 (c48)]

cp9.4 Friendly and Hospitable

Almost all owners displayed friendly behaviors like welcoming the interviewer, smiling, and giving a warm farewell.

> [Interview memo:] *[Interviewer] met the owner at [his/her] own house on the eve of his flight to [another country]. [He/she] was so helpful in allowing [the interviewer] to meet [him/her] on these circumstances.*

> [Interview memo:] *During the interview, [Mr.X] was so informative. In fact, maybe too informative! It seems like [he/she] had so much that [he/she] wanted to share, perhaps because [he/she] wanted to do so for so long.*

cp9.5 Likes to be Self-Employed

One TSB clearly stated that he/she likes to be his/her own boss

> I've always been this person who.. [laughing] .. doesn't like to be directed, you know.

c10 Perceived TSB Differentiation

Describing the manner in which the owner perceives his/her TSB to be positively different from competitors.

cp10.1 Personal Service

Providing service to customers in a respectful, cheerful, and caring way. This is

seen in TSB owners as beyond what is expected of them.

> I THINK our differentiation is.. aside from the [the attraction].. is I think
> we do give a very personal service.. as simple as that.

.

cp10.2 Location

One owner kept highlighting the advantage of the attraction his/her TSB serves.

> Because, once people [experience the attraction].. they want to stay
> [experiencing the attraction]. It is that much.. it is that much good, yes . . . .

cp10.3 Packages

Offering various packages and attractions depending on customer desires.

> . . . and then we go to.. the desert.. how the beduin are living.. and it's
> another.. program.. overnight.. staying.. beduins.. different camps..
> different grades.. if you want.. five star.. or you want.. beduin style.. you can get
> there.. different as.. the customer.. what do you want.. he can get.. and we can
> arrange ah.. different things.. if.. if they ask . . . .

.

cp10.4 Unique overall experience

Providing a unique experience as implied by customer feedback.

> . . . they say, we stayed at [major hotel in Oman].. and we stayed in other
> hotels.. but, the night that we spent at that camp was the best night of our lives!
> Ok.. because it is different.. something different.

c11 Internet Presence

Owners talked about websites and social networking pages. At least four of the

seven companies have some form of Internet presence.

cp11.1 TSB's Website

At least four TSBs have websites.

> If you look at our website, you see.. We've got quite a lot of packages.. [its] www.[web address] . . . it's on the card anyway.

> Yah [we have a website].. am, I mean.. it's.. it's.. I feel it's the most effective way of am.. marketing nowadays.. I mean am.. ANYONE.. nowadays wants to travel, the first thing is.. he goes to Google and type.. name of the country and the activity that he wants to do.. so.. I think without.. a website.. you'll be.. almost handicapped . . . .

cp11.2 Search Engine Rankings

Noting the TSB website's search engine rank. One TSB owner disussed it and

demonstrated on his/her computer.

> You see, without Internet.. if you put am.. you just.. [European language] website.. if you put virtually anything about.. in English or [another language] about diving holidays in Oman.. we're on page one Google.. and page one Yahoo . . . .

cp11.3 Website Management

Noting TSB's website management.

> We got in touch with companies here. We said we want to.. optimize our website. They all said, Ok we'll do it, it'll cost you so much . . . .

> . . . actually I.. I hired a company first.. and.. it was SO difficult because.. you don't have am.. the flexibility of changing stuff and upgrading and ah.. so.. I bought a software [smiling] . . . .

cp11.4 Facebook

One TSB has a Facebook page that is used to communicate with customers and help spread the word about the company.

> . . . and nowadays, there's a very handy tool that we use ah.. very effectively. [Interviewer asking:] *Software?* [Interviewee responding:] Facebook!

c12 TSB Equipment

Recording interview memos, as well as owners' words about the TSBs' equipment. These incidents give direct and indirect indications about the quality standards for a TSB's operations.

cp12.1 Low-End Electronics

Describing the TSB's use of electronic equipment to manage business. This provides information about owners' computer literacy and makes implicatins about the overall prosperity of the TSB.

> [Interview memo:] *[Interviewer] noticed that [the TSB owner] used an old computer running Windows XP. It was a bit slow, and [he/she] used an Internet connection provided by [a budget wireless phone company].*

<u>cp12.2 Owned or Rented</u>

Specifying whether the TSB owns or rents equipment. This can affect the quality of

equipment and overall service quality.

No. As a foreign investment company, you've […] MAJOR investment to be a foreigner.. your MINIMUM capital requirement for a foreign investment company is 150,000 [about $390,000].

<u>cp12.3 Company Cars</u>

Notes about the TSB company cars as seen by the interviewer.

[Interview memo:] *[He/she] had a small company car outside with the company's logo*.

[Interview memo:] . . . a *company four-wheel drive [SUV] with the company's logo was parked in his garage* . . . .

<div align="center">c13 TSB's Main Business Attraction</div>

Describing TSBs' main attractions. For small businesses in tourism, attractions are

vital assets because they attract and inspire visitors.

<u>cp13.1 World Class Attractions</u>

Cases where TSBs are utilizing attractions recognized as world class standards.

It is [recognized] to be.. by divers.. to be the best diving in the GCC.. and equal in a lot of ways.. in a lot of ways, even better then diving the red sea.

The advantage is, as I said, there's not so many divers.. so, you're much more.. you're much closer to.. the sea life.

cp13.2 Nearby Attractions

Describing cases where TSBs utilize attractions near downtown.

[Interviewer asking:] *Where do you take them to dive?* [Interviewee responding:] Am, basically around here in Muscat.. There's am.. three main destinations.. which is [naming diving sites] . . . .

c14 TSB Activities (Including Products & Services)

These are incidents where TSBs discuss their offerings, both core and extended.

The seven interviewed TSBs mainly provided diving, desert camping, and touring

activities in a variety of flavors and packages.

cp14.1 Diving

Describing diving and related activities in TSBs.

Yes, we do snorkeling as well.. snorkeling and scuba diving.

Ah.. in terms of logistics.. it's MUCH more difficult for us.. as a dive center to deal with.. the.. individual customers.. what we try to do with the individual customers is.. sell.. courses..
more than dive trips.. but for the dive trips, we mainly concentrate on tour operators.

cp14.2 Complete Packages

Descriptions of TSB programs and packages offered to customers.

We had in consideration to provide numerous programs.. ok.. every program.. is unique in something.. and some programs contain different aspects.. a desert aspect.. and an environmental aspect.. and a cultural aspect.. ok.. and also a historical aspect . . . .

<u>cp.14.3 Office Conditions</u>

In cases where interviews were conducted at a TSB's office, interview memos were made on the office's conditions. Generally, the offices were simple, clean, and organized.

<u>cp14.4 Desert Camping</u>

Descriptions of TSBs offering desert camping experiences for customers.

> Ah.. after that.. I sensed that there is a need.. to develop.. permanent camping centers.

<u>cp14.5 Small Lodging</u>

One TSB offers a simple lodging facility as part of its extended product.

<u>cp14.6 Touring</u>

Descriptions of TSBs offering a variety of tours adhering to variable customer tastes.

> . . . and.. there's a lot to see.. in those wadis.. and ah.. culture.. or ah.. like forts.. we know we nearly have.. nearly.. 500 forts in Oman.. different.. village[s], different areas.. and each one.. [is] different than the other one.. and then we go to.. the desert.. how the beduin are living.. and it's another.. program.. overnight.. staying.. beduins.. different camps.. different grades.. if you want.. five star.. or you want.. beduin style.. you can get there.. different as.. the customer.. what do you want.. he can get.. and we can arrange ah.. different things.. if.. if they ask.

c15 Proof of Business Reliability

There was a sense that customers trust could be earned by arranging business

activity accreditation and employee training, especially for diving. Even though the

discussion is on small businesses, there always seemed to be proof required for minimum reliability.

cp15.1 Specialized Accreditation

For diving, accreditation from international diving associations was important. All three diving centers interviewed are accredited.

> Am.. we.. also a NAUI and PADI teaching center, where we teach people how to dive.

> I'm a dive instructor.. ah.. actually.. MSDT, Master Scuba Diving Trainer.. It's a level of certification. After instructor, you got the.. speciality instructor, and then the Master Scuba Diving Trainer.. and then you go all the way to course director, where you'll be able to train people to become instructors.

cp15.2 Well Trained Staff

Training was evident in diving, but more importantly in tour operators and the desert camp. There was no indication, however, of formal or semi-formal training in the two sampled micro businesses (employing less than five).

> And also.. I trained them.. I was taking them myself to the areas.. and I made for them.. a program.. and every program.. contains information.. about every places.. they visit.. or every tourist attraction . . . .

c16 Knowledge of Competition

Describing incidents where TSB owners demonstrated knowledge of their competition. This included naming competitors, knowing attractions they utilize, and voicing their opinions on the level of competition.

cp16.1 Competitors' Presence

All interviewed TSB owners named specific competitors. This implies that they either learned about them through customers or business intelligence techniques.

> I'll tell you.. the camps available in, for example.. [one competitor's name].. ok.. ah.. there is.. there are three ways to build [camping tents].. there is for example.. one of the camps.. he uses [details on competitors' tents] . . . .

cp16.2 Competitors' Main Attraction(s)

Most TSBs could name at least one attraction utilized by competitors.

> ALL the other dive centers, except [one particular competitor].. dive the coastal waters . . . .

cp16.3 Unimportance of Competitors' Activities

In deciding how to formulate their services, most TSBs verbalized that customer needs are more important than competitors' actions.

> Am.. our.. stand on.. on that is.. we listen to what people tell us.. and.. we.. we, we basically check to see if they're going to the [one attraction]. But apart from that.. [Interviewer asking:] *Regardless of the competition?* [Interviewee responding:] Yes.

cp16.4 Competitors' Low Standards

Two TSB owners believed that some competitors have poor standards.

> . . . how it came to my mind to start a dive center is am.. I travelled […].. I travelled to.. to Thailand and other countries and I did diving there.. and I saw the difference in quality of.. services provided.. in those countries and here, and am.. I thought why not be.. a person who.. start dive center and.. lift the standard up . . . .

c17 Owner's Marketing Philosophy

Describing incidents clearly showing or indirectly implying TSB owners' marketing philosophies. This included critical success factors that owners believe in and how they think their services should be provided.

cp17.1 Prioritizing Customer Service

This category property resulted from a merger of the earlier properties of *listening to customers*, *provide service at all cost,* and *customer service is top priority*. Despite some slight differences, these original category properties gradually indicated TSB owners' prioritization of customer service in comparison to other components of their offerings.

> I always say, [..] always listen to your clients. The best feedback you get is from your customers.

> So my philosophy is to give.. ah.. the best time.. provide them with the best time.. of enjoyment to them.. while maintaining.. safety standards.

> . . . and when the visitor comes here.. he knows that he is truly ah.. received the service that he deserved.. in exchange for the amount of money he paid.
> . . . you know, we don't.. care about the money.. we.. we provide everything.. this man.. to be happy.

cp17.2 Provide Service at All Cost

[This was merged into property 1 (cp17.1).]

cp17.3 Customer Service is Top Priority

[This was merged into property 1 (cp17.1).]

cp17.4 Brand Development

One TSB owner specifically and repeatedly voiced about his/her desire to build his

TSB's reputation.

> Before they take tourists with them.. I told them that you.. I won't give you a big salary.. ah.. and the work that you do.. you keep its revenues.. all I want at this time.. is reputation.

cp17.5 Adherence to Standards

Most TSB owners demonstrated their commitment to safety and other standards.

Diving centers were more eloquent about this, perhaps because of the nature of their

business. Others also indicated this in some manner.

> No, I'd like to think that ALL diving companies.. will be following the same rules.. you know.. that's the business we're in.

> . . . and among them, I mean.. the aspect of manners.. that you do not harass.. because harassment is considered a big crime.. and you make [employees] feel that.. this culture.. do no think that because it is a Western culture.. and their life is.. liberal.. it means that they are people who would allow such manners. So I was very keen on this aspect.

cp17.6 Valuing the Internet

Four TSB owners specifically discussed the importance of the Internet in apprising

current and potential customers about TSBs and their services.

> . . . we were on page one Google with our keywords in 24 hours.. straight from the beginning.. right from the beginning.. Internet today rules.

> Honestly.. if.. I told you.. the electronic side.. marketing.. communicating with people.. communicating with companies, electronically.. the website, spreading its address.. and also the verbal talking.. Word of Mouth.. like they say.. these are basics.. more important than expos and the like . . . .

cp17.7 Valuing Word of Mouth (WoM)

All TSB owners, in some way, indicated the importance of WoM. One example is the quoted excerpt above in cp17.6.

cp17.8 Equipment Quality and Comfort

One TSB stressed the importance of quality equipment and comfort to achieve customer satisfaction.

> Ah yah.. regularly.. I mean this part of.. this is part of the business actually.. I mean, this is a big part of the business.. ah.. am.. the quality of the equipment that we have . . . .

cp17.9 Importance of the Local Market

The two travel agencies interviewed primarily serve the outbound local market. One other TSB owner, who would normally be expected to serve the international market, talked about the benefit of the local market.

> . . . am.. then as I said, I mean.. if you establish your local market, have a base here.. if anything should happen.. your expats will leave, your tourists will stop coming, but you still have your local market.

cp17.10 Focus on One Market

One TSB owner's strategy was to focus on one source market and match the business's core product to the market's needs.

> . . . we try to concentrate on one market.. which is, our plan for.. this next sem.. ah.. season.. am.. try to concentrate on the [a source country] market.. [Interviewer asking:] *Why?* [Interviewee responding:] Ah.. no specific reason.. there's ah.. am.. the reason why we wanna concentrate on one market is.. first of all.. am.. you build your [TSB] to match that market . . . .

cp17.11 Differentiating

One TSB talked about the importance of attracting customers from big businesses

by being different.

> We TRY as much as possible because.. I mean.. you need to be.. you need
> to have something different from other [competitors].. for the people to deal with
> you.. because they say, why do we wanna deal with you if we know.. that there is
> a [business] called [big competitor's name].. [..] .. why do we wanna deal with
> you?

cp17.12 Harmony with the Environment

One TSB owner always ensures that the business facilities and services are

harmonious with the environment and local traditions to showcase the virgin environment

to tourists.

> I.. totally prohibit [environmentally hazard activities].. because I consider
> them a source of disturbance.. because the tourist wants quietness.. ok.. and also..
> ah.. they don't go hand in hand with environmental awareness . . . .

cp17.13 Devoting Time

One TSB owner emphasized the importance of devoting time to the business.

> Devoting time is the most important. You take control of your business.. I..
> you might be more knowledgable about this.. there are people who.. started
> simple businesses.. and they devoted their time and succeeded.

c18 Industry Knowledge

Apart from specific operations of the TSB, several TSB owners exhibited

knowledge and expertise in the sub-industry they serve, as well as the tourism industry as

a whole.

cp18.1 Accident History

One TSB owner talked about accident history in Oman.

> There's never been a shark attack in Oman.. not ever.

cp18.2 International Associations

The diving centers interviewed are all aware of and accredited by international diving organizations like NAUI and PADI. The example below shows one owner's knowledge of the history of these organizations.

> NAUI is the oldest diving federation in the world, established by Jacques Cousteau.. and it is the oldest.. PADI was set up by people from NAUI.. and PADI is… marketing [Laughing]!

cp18.3 Physical Readiness

One TSB owner discussed readiness in regard to diving.

> Yah.. for example.. am.. in diving.. you MUST NOT fly.. until you have finished diving for at least 24 hours.. because of pressure . . . .

cp18.4 Diving Risks

Knowledge of the risks involved in the TSB's main activity, especially in diving.

> . . . I'd rather pay more.. and.. know that I'm going to a dive center that I'll be comfortable.. I.. I know that they're.. up to standard.. they're safety standard is high.. then paying less and ah . . . .

> I mean it's your life.. on the line.. with the diving.

cp18.5 Industry Fragility

TSB owners seem to understand that the tourism industry is fragile and affected by

political and natural events.

> Well ah.. first of all, I mean am.. for.. tourism.. you need lot of preparations.. I mean am.. tourism market, I feel has.. is.. I mean, does get affected very easily by any.. ah.. thing going on in.. the world generally, not just.. what happens in your.. ah.. in your country . . . .

> . . . when Gunu [Cyclone hitting Oman in 2006], we stopped for three months.. while paying salaries and rents.. we didn't work in this period.. we couldn't.

cp18.6 Oman's Development

All TSB owners interviewed were either Oman nationals or long time residents.

They were well acquainted with conditions in the country. One owner was especially

knowledgable about development projects in Oman and its administrative structure.

> Yes in *Ras Alhadd.. Ras Aljinz.. Niyaba* [administrative state division] of *Ras Alhadd..* which is part of *Sur* [one *wilaya*, or county in Oman] of course.. and after that of course.. the government had at the time built small motels on main road to *Salalah..* and among them.. *Falaj Daris* hotel.. it was small at the time.. and *Alqabil* motel. These were built by the government in '85 by an order from His Majesty.

cp18.7 Seasonality

As explained by the sampled TSB owners, the tourist season in Oman is usually

October through April, with reduced inbound tourism business in the summer months.

> Am.. our.. our season basically is.. the same as.. tourism in Oman.. ah.. season is.. is October, November, December, January, February, March, April.

> . . . so, there's lot of variables that am.. affect.. am.. the.. the tourism industry other than ah.. of course the seasons. You have the winter, which is the

tourism season.. and then you have the summer, which is basically.. [gesture—zero tourists]

cp18.8 Labor Costs

One TSB owner hired an Asian person because of his/her lower asking salary.

cp18.9 Profitability

One TSB owner believes that diving has good returns. Another was happy just to

cover his/her costs.

cp18.10 Indirect Benefit from World Crises

One TSB owner mentioned an indirect benefit to his/her business because of issues

elsewhere in the world.

> . . . there's two sides.. there's two sides for this because one.. I mean.. we've got lot of ah.. bookings.. for that time, and many of the bookings got canceled.. actually, more than 50% of the bookings got canceled.. but.. at the same time.. because of the problems that happened in Egypt.. many of the tour operators redirected their tourists to come to.. Oman. So, basically.. am [laughing] .. funny enough, it was.. actually the best time for us!

cp18.11 Price Elasticity

Some TSB owners demonstrated knowledge that potential customers are currently

more price sensitive because of the economical situation.

> . . . now things change.. because.. people are more.. price sensitive, you know.

. . . but the problem is.. this year there is the crisis.. economy crisis.. there's a lot of people.. we found why.. why they.. people.. stop.. coming.. like before, you know.

cp18.12 Large Companies

All TSBs interviewed indicated the powerful position of larger companies.

. . . there were some companies that.. three main companies at that time.. [Big company 1], [Big company 2].. and [Big company 3] . . . .

cp18.13 Major Attractions

TSB owners named some major attractions in Oman. Each one named attractions

relevant to his/her TSB.

. . . we know them, yah.. they.. it depend.. with the.. what way you want to go.. you want to go to.. five star.. four star . . . .

cp18.14 History of the Government in Tourism

One of the most experienced TSB owners interviewed detailed the beginning of the

Ministry of Tourism and its leaders.

. . . and at that time, there was a Directorate [government entity, a major division of a Ministry].. by the name of the Directorate General of Tourism.. in the Ministry of Commerce.. ah.. It had *Saif Al-Maskari* [first DG for Tourism] and then came *Khamis Al-Balushi* [second DG for Tourism].. and it changed of course.. from a Directorate [General] to.. it changed to be headed by an Undersecretary.. that Directorate.. meaning, a section under the Ministry, led by an Undersecretary, who was.. *Khamis Al-Balushi*.

cp18.15 Types of Tourism

TSB owners at the desert camp and tour businesses understood that there are

varieties of tourism. One TSB owner specifically named a few types.

> . . . and I informed them [employees] also about.. about the types of
> tourism.. adventure tourism, nature tourism, ecotourism.. ah heritage and culture
> tourism.. o.k... and there are also, of course, other types of tourism.. like health
> tourism and conventions tourism . . . .

cp18.16 Characteristics of Tourism

TSB owners understood that tourism is a leisure industry for visitors, as well as an

important economic factor for Oman.

> . . . so.. it is important to always have the learning aspect in your
> program.. it is true that you're in entertainment.. tourism is an entertainment.. but
> sometimes it can be educational.. and it is a source of sustenance.. and economy .
> . . .

cp18.17 Neighboring Destinations

A number of TSB owners knew about neighboring destinations, especially Dubai

and Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates.

> . . . but *Emirates* Airlines and *Etihad* at this time.. market Dubai.. market
> Abu Dhabi and the union.. and sometimes cooperatively . . . .

> . . . because we are unique comparing to them.. there's nothing in Qatar..
> there's nothing in Dubai.. ok.. there's nothing in Abu Dhabi.. ok.. so we have the
> abilities and attractions.

cp18.18 Economical Benefits of Tourism

TSB owners remotely recognized the economic benefits of tourism in Oman. One owner effectively verbalized this.

> . . . when [TSBs] bring a tourist to Oman.. taxi driver benefits.. and the VISA he pays for the government is a benefit.. the restaurant he eats in benefits.. and the hotel he stays in benefits.. and the car he rents benefits.. and the fuel he use, is a benefit . . . .

c19 Origins

Describing how and why TSB owners started their businesses. There are indicators that TSB owners like one or more element(s) about their businesses and have modest beginnings.

cp19.1 Modest Beginnings

Interviewed owners indicated that they began their businesses modestly and at a smaller scale.

> When we started, we were based in [….] in Muscat.. and we used to go diving at am.. [naming diving sites].. the the am the onshore dive sites . . . .
> . . . and I of course started ah.. the beginning of the idea.. I was working of course as ah.. tour guide in.. weekends . . . .

cp19.2 Loving the Country

There was a feeling of love for Oman, even among the foreign owners interviewed.

> We.. we established it because am.. [Few seconds pause] .. we wanted to stay in Oman.. am.. and.. we had the opportunity.. am.. to am.. get into the business . . . .

[Interview memo:] *I sensed that [he/she] is deeply concerned about the well-being of the community, that for [him/her], it wasn't only about business.*

> . . . we really really.. like to do this job.. and to show people.. our country.. to show.. most beautiful places . . . .

cp19.3 Hobbyists

Almost all interviewed TSB owners mentioned that they enjoy the main activity their TSBs offer.

> . . . so long.. we used to do.. camping.. and.. we've been doing this before.. and we really like this.. that's why.. we really.. really.. LIKE to do this job.. and to show people.. our country.. to show.. [them] the most beautiful places.

> So, I suppose you could say that diving is in my blood.

cp19.4 Enjoying Being the Boss

This was specifically mentioned by one owner, though several others also implied that they liked being their own bosses.

> I've always been this person who.. [laughing] .. doesn't like to be directed, you know. What time you need to come, what time you need to go.. I like to do it.. [to do] things MY way.

cp19.5 Original Tactics

Describing how TSB owners managed their companies in the beginning. This was not a question asked during interviews, so there is no way to verify findings with all owners. One owner took the initiative and, with probing, spoke about it.

> . . . so I covered my expenses by myself.. and at the same time.. I personally add to the company.

<center>c20 Good Fortune</center>

Some companies are lucky and experience unique and valuable opportunities. This was the case with one TSB owner.

cp20.1 Better Product/Attraction Opportunity

One TSB owner discussed the opportunity he/she had to move to a location close to a better attraction.

> We've then been given the opportunity to move into here.. and we took it. So that we can dive the.. [diving site] and be different.

cp20.2 Starting the Business

One TSB owner's entrance into business was based on an unplanned opportunity.

> We had the opportunity.. am.. to am.. get into the business.. to see some other people.. and we thought we'd give it a try.. and it worked out reasonably successful.

<center>c21 Perceived Weakness(es)</center>

Noting weaknesses that TSB owners perceive their businesses to have. This is directly related to Category 22 (c22).

cp21.1 Owners Not Directly Involved

> Some of our weaknesses.. I suppose you COULD say ah.. one of our weaknesses is.. is.. is that OWNERS of the company.. we, we.. we [do not participate in the main business activity with the customers] . . . .

<div align="center">c22 Managing Weakness(es)</div>

Noting ways in which TSB owners manage their weaknesses. This is directly related to Category 21 (c21).

cp22.1 Compensating

Noting how owners attempt to compensate for a perceived weakness by attempting to lessen its effects.

> . . . we come here every morning and greet the guests when they arrive.. and when they come back . . . .

<div align="center">c23 Direct Customers</div>

Noting incidents where owners discuss customers visiting Oman for particular TSBs.

cp23.1 Coming Specifically for the TSB/Activity

Some TSB owners mentioned incidents where the main reason customers traveled to Oman was to experience the services TSBs offer.

> Actually, MOST of our customers are.. here.. am.. ONLY to dive.. they come.. pick them up from the airport.. drop them at the hotel.. second day they start diving, all the way to the last day.. they just need one day.. because they cannot travel.. am.. after the last day.. after 24 hours.. so the last day, they just go.. either take a city tour or.. they go to the.. forts the interior [of Oman] somewhere.. and then they go back the last day.

cp23.2 Traveling Independently

Many customers choose travel packages and buy tickets online without travel

intermediaries in their home countries.

> . . . another.. [percentage of customers] is ah.. through the website.. and through.. I mean, we enlist our website throughout the Internet . . . .

cp23.3 Local Market

Many TSBs see local customers. In one case, the number of local visitors is

increasing.

> Yah.. actually a lot.. I mean [diving] is becoming very popular in Oman.. it's really becoming popular now.

cp23.4 Issues with Individual Customers

One TSB noted that individual customers are problematic compared to groups.

> Ok am.. from my experience in this.. [a number of] years.. to be honest.. is am.. the biggest money.. doesn't come from.. individual customers.. actually.. they're the biggest headache!

cp23.5 Groups

Groups are more important to TSBs, as specifically mentioned by one and

indirectly implied by others.

> . . . ah.. the biggest money comes ah.. from.. the tour operators that you deal with.. because basically, they send.. groups to you.

cp23.6 Repeat Customers

TSB owners notice repeat visitors and regular customers. This indicates a high level of customer satisfaction.

> . . . especially I have these.. [European nationals].. now it's been nine
> years they're coming.. and ah.. they used to come.. same people..
> they are three people.. they used to come and book [at the] last minute . . . .

c24 Promotion

cp24.1 Not Magazine Advertising

One TSB owner thought that advertising in specialized magazines is becoming less important.

> Like now, we are no longer advertising in diving magazines . . . .

cp24.2 Internet Promotion

Noting how TSB owners use the Internet to promote their businesses.

> Aha.. so.. Its the Internet and the Word of Mouth.. Internet.. Internet and
> Word of Mouth.. Internet, Internet, Internet.. overseas business is Internet . . . .

cp24.3 Talking to Family and Friends

Noting how owners communicate with family members and friends about their businesses.

> . . . how people talk about you.. and electronic communications.. and
> attempting to convince others.. and other companies..
> and also visits and personal meetings.. with people in your same area.. in other
> countries.. these have an effect . . . .

cp24.4 Special Offers

One TSB owner mentioned providing special offers to friends of friends (referral program).

> I mean, the more you talk, the more customers you get.. and ah.. I try my level best to talk to.. family members, friends.. give special discounts . . . .

cp24.5 Need for Government

One experienced TSB owner stressed the importance of the government's role in promoting Oman.

> Here.. we market for ourselves.. meaning, the companies market for themselves.. and this is not possible.. because the companies.. the international export companies.. do not depend on one company.. it depend on a governmental entity.

cp24.6 Tourism Expos

Some TSB owners participate in tourism expos, but the general impression is that they are too expensive and ineffective.

> I participated one time.. only. They made me pay.. 1,500 Rials [about $3,900].. They made me pay 1,500 Rials.. but I regretted my participation.

> I participated in.. what's the name.. here in Oman.. I participated.. but you pay a rent on the square meter.. if I do go to Berlin, for example.. or to France, or I go to.. I mean, I'll pay for the ticket and I'll pay.. I.. I can't.. besides, what is the return.. I can't guarantee.. what is the return.

cp24.7 Brochures

Two TSB owners specifically mentioned that they use brochures to promote their businesses.

> I have a brochure with this.. [He/she went to get the brochure].. I'll give you something.. interest for you.. [Interviewer looking at a brochure where it is entitled with the TSB's name and has it's slogan] ..

cp24.8 Familiarization Trips

At least two TSB owners specifically mentioned the use of familiarization trips to raise demand in source markets via travel agents.

> I tried to invite people, I mean.. from Europe, from Britain, and from Italy.. I have friends.. so I invited them, and they saw the place, but.. until now, we didn't start working.

c25 Business Alliances

Noting how TSB owners talk about their business relations. In most cases, these relations were considered very useful for the TSBs.

cp25.1 Link to the Website

One TSB provides links to other companies on its website.

> If you look at our website, you'll find various links to different tour operators . . . .

cp25.2 Important to the TSB

Three TSBs explicitly expressed the importance of alliances to their businesses.

> You cannot as a dive center work on your own because.. for.. for instance.. if your.. air filling compressor breaks down.. it takes at least.. three weeks to one month to fix it.. and if you don't have a good relationship with other dive centers then you're in trouble.

.

cp25.3 Not Important to the TSB

One TSB owner believes that it is not necessary to have relationships with travel

agencies in source markets.

> [Answering a question whether the TSB can survive without travel agencies in source markets:] Yes, we.. we have.. a lot of people who.. who.. quite a number of people.. who come in independently. In other words, they buy their own tickets.

cp25.4 Local Hotels

Four TSBs deal with local hotels for accommodation, as well as the use of

swimming pools for diving courses.

> . . . and I got good relation with [one major hotel].. I'll take them to [the hotel].. who's gonna to benefit? The [hotel].. this is the way.. you have to be.. you have to be a friend with us . . . .

> . . . ah.. we have actually more than ah.. one.. but we mainly.. deal with ah.. there's two hotels in [a city in Muscat area].. one is [hotel name].. and the other one is ah.. [hotel name] . . . .

cp25.5 European Travel Agencies

Noting TSBs direct relationships with European travel agencies.

. . . definitely I try to stick with the.. with the.. with the [European travel agencies] that I know that.. its am.. benefiting us.

cp25.6 Local Car Rental Companies

One TSB owner discussed dealing with local car rental companies.

cp25.7 Dealing with the Government

[This is transferred to Category 27 (c27)]

cp25.8 Cooperating with Similar Businesses

One TSB owner emphasized the importance of dealing with similar businesses.

. . . like, working together.. am.. very closely together.. I mean, am.. ah.. whenever we have overbookings.. always refer to the other and.. am.. so forth . . .

cp25.9 Tour Operators

One owner specifically mentioned dealing with tour operators to offer their

customers camping experience. Another owner mentioned his/her TSB's interactions with

different businesses and stakeholders

I'll benefit from it [the camp].. and others will benefit from it.. other companies and individuals.. so this is the beginning of [desert camp's name].

[Interviewer:] *And ah.. you have good relationships.. with hotels, with beduins, with..* [Interviewee:] Yah yah yah.. [Interviewer:].. *camps, with drivers.. with car rental companies..* [Interviewee:] With drivers.. with water sports.. here they want to go to fishing.. we know people there.. by phone.. will book there . . .

<center>c26 Pricing</center>

Noting the pricing tactics of TSBs and what prices mean to their businesses.

<u>cp26.1 Package Pricing</u>

Package prices vary among TSBs. One TSB owner stated that their package prices depended on hotel prices, which fluctuate seasonally.

> . . . they want to come on holiday.. they read about Oman.. and they take one of our packages.. they take a look at our packages.. there are prices from here to here.. you know.. the difference in price is dependent upon the hotel.. as simple as that.

<u>cp26.2 Matching the Competition</u>

With the exception of the two travel agencies, interviewed TSBs are not in price wars with competitors. The three interviewed diving centers, for example, consciously charge prices comparable to other diving centers in the Omani market.

> We agreed on prices.. we don't compete . . . .

> Ah prices, am.. am.. on the market basis basically, am.. as I said, I mean we're not yet in the level of competition, so.. most of the.. pricing come after.. us sitting together with.. the other dive centers . . . .

<u>cp26.3 Prices and Quality</u>

One TSB owner noted the importance of avoiding low prices, as they risk portraying low quality.

> . . . if you go low price, people will think ah.. I don't wanna go to that [TSB] because he must be.. cheap quality . . . .

c27 Relationship with Government Institutions

Though there was a general feeling that the government should do more to support small businesses, none of the interviewed owners reported bad relationships with the government. In fact, a few have good relationships with the government, as is seen in the example below.

> . . . we have very good relationship with the Ministry of Tourism.. we have good relationship with the Ministry of Environment.. 'coz obviously they look after the diving.. am.. and we have too good terms with the people.. we report to.. I mean, we have good relationship with Royal Oman Police Coast Guard . . . .

c28 Competitive Pressure

As is seen in Property 2 of Category 26 (cp26.2), interviewed TSB owners reported no tough pricing strategies with competitors. In fact, competitors seemed to cooperate to succeed.

cp28.1 Insignificant

TSBs, especially diving centers, had a relaxed attitude toward competitive pressure. One TSB owner expressed that he/she does not fear competition.

> Let me tell you one thing.. I mean, for us here.. in diving.. in Oman.. we still did not reach the level of competition.. yet.. I mean.. the competitors are more.. friends than being competitors . . . .

> . . . and I'm not afraid from [competition].. on the contrary.. I encourage it.

cp28.2 Competitors Reluctantance

Contrary to the feeling of cooperation among competitors, one TSB owner noted that sometimes competitors are reluctant to deal with them. This was possibly because competitors didn't want to send customers to this TSB's unique attraction.

> We have that advantage.. am.. like for example, am.. we.. we.. we've offered [other competitors] […].. we said to them, look.. when people want to go and [see this attractions you have access to].. […] .. am.. we'll send them to you.. you'll pay us a certain commission.. you send us people to [see the unique attraction we have access to].. they won't do it!

cp28.3 Labor Transfer

In some incidents, owners mentioned employees working temporarily or permanently transferring to competitors.

> . . . and they even.. started working for other entities.. I allowed them to.. to work with other entities.. but in this way, I mean.. I began promoting the company.. and it has earned a name.

> . . . one of our Omanis.. left us about.. two weeks ago.. yes.. he was.. made an offer by another diving center.

cp28.4 Cooperation

One dive center owner stated that nearby centers work together and need each other.

> . . . but most of them.. we.. actually work together.. I mean ah.. in.. especially in diving.. and.. from what I heard of people I know who worked in other countries, like Egypt and Thailand . . . .

cp28.5 Benefits

One experienced TSB owner explicitly said that competition is healthy.

> Honestly.. it is of course.. competition is desirable.. because competition is the base of quality.. this is what leads you to.. ah.. raise the quality of your services in order to.. ah.. attract more customers.. so I believe that competition is.. I mean.. desirable in the industry.

c29 Understanding Customer Needs

TSB owners were indirectly asked about customer needs. They were asked why people dive, camp, and take tours. The purpose was to gather whether owners understood basic customer needs and how that reflects on business operations.

cp29.1 Core Needs

These are the needs, from owners' perspectives, at the core of why people dive, camp, and tour.

> . . . but basically when you're down there [under the sea].. you're at peace.. a total peace.. peace.. and you're with nature . . . .

> . . . the other thing I mean, is.. its.. its a fun way to.. spend time, you know.. like, ah.. am.. holiday.

> . . . because this location now has become.. [public] electricity [and infrastructure] has reached it.. and a road.. to that area.. at first it was empty, nothing in it.. and the tourists [don't] want electricity and.. [they want] something on pure nature . . . .

> They really come here and.. enjoy.. this is the place you can come.. you can go camping.. no one will ask you.. you can be.. you alone or.. or with Omani.. in the beach.. camp.. go picnic.. camping.. Omani will stop you, come and have a coffee . . . .

cp29.2 Secondary Needs

Owners discussed other needs appreciated by customers.

> . . . and one ah.. female instructor.. from [a country].. ah.. basically, she doesn't interact a lot with the customers.. she's more into marketing, and.. the.. and am.. the reason I got her.. mainly, is because she's a female instructor and.. nowadays a lot of Omani females.. are interested in learning how to dive.. and she can handle that part of the [business].

> . . . French do anything for the food.. they have to get the best food. . . .

cp29.3 Concerns and Perceived Risks

Owners understand that tourism is a fragile industry. One owner rationalized why

tourism demand fell during the Arab Spring even though it was largely peaceful in Oman.

> And a lot.. a lot of Omani clients, Omani friends.. say, but, there's NO problem in Oman! And we said to them, o.k... next month.. you were going to Nepal on a holiday with your family.. alright? We're just using Nepal as a…yes.. you read in the newspaper.. there's civil disturbance in Katmandu. Will you go? Of course not.

c30 Comparison to Big Businesses

TSB owners generally feel at a disadvantage compared to large companies.

cp30.1 Structure/Roles

One TSB owner believed that big businesses have hierarchies and that small

businesses have fewer resources for marketing and public relations.

> Yes because there's a lot more pressure on you individually.. where a a big company has a.. [gesturing structure/managerial hierarchy].. right? Here.. there's myself and there's [my partner] . . . .

<u>cp30.2, cp30.3, cp30.4 Liquidity, Experience, and Global Reputation</u>

There was a belief among TSB owners that big businesses have more cash, more

experience, and stronger global reputations.

> So they come very powerful.. they have lots of money and am.. branches
> in.. all over the world and experience.. am . . . .

<u>cp30.5 Support from the Ministry of Tourism (MoT)</u>

Some TSB owners believe that big businesses are better supported by the Ministry

of Tourism.

> . . . am.. for some reason here.. I mean am.. if you are a multinational
> company, you get more support from the Ministry of Tourism than being a small
> Omani company..

> . . . at the same time, [big businesses] are supported by the Ministry of
> Tourism.. I mean, they get.. I expect that.. [one big business] is known by the
> location and such.. so.. they are well supported by the government.. unlike us.. we
> just beat around the bush . . . .

.

<u>cp30.6 Low Standards</u>

One TSB owner believes that some big businesses have lower standards for service.

An illustrating incident is presented in Property 4 of Category 16 (cp16.4).

<div align="center">c31 Issues with the Government</div>

The TSB owners discuss any negative sentiments about government policies and

procedures.

cp31.1 High Initial Investment Required for Foreigners

Foreign investors are required to have high initial investments. This is easier for large businesses than small. An illustrating incident is presented in Property 2 of Category 12 (cp12.2).

cp31.2 Bureaucratic Procedures

TSB owners expressed or implied discomfort regarding lengthy bureaucratic procedures.

> . . . am.. [the TSB was] established in [year], January [of year].. am.. am.. that was the.. the first registration, commercial registration was in January.. but ah the.. let's say the official start was at the end of [the same year] because it took us that.. time to take all the permits and am.. approvals from the ministries . . . .

cp31.3 VISA Issues

Two TSB owners believe that VISAs are obstacles to foreigners.

> The other problem we were facing was VISAs.. I mean, VISAs for us.. here.. even now.. I mean.. [is] a big obstacle.

> . . . they raised the VISA.. the market was much affected.. I don't know what's the government's policy.. now, when you go to [a region in Oman].. as a foreigner.. when you enter [that region].. and you don't have a residency in the Emirates.. they charge 20 rials [about $52] per person.

cp31.4 Government Complexities

A number of TSB owners referenced complex government procedures. One owner discussed the required administrative complications.

> There are many administrative complications.. these complications.. should be.. especially for the local investor.. or for example.. they tell you.. if I for

example wanted to do something in [a mountain village].. they say no, the priority is for people who are there.

c32 Marketing Person

The individual in charge of marketing varied at TSBs. Sometimes the owner assumes these responsibilities or shares them with another employee. In general, sampled TSB owners seemed to think of marketing largely in terms of promotional and customer communication activities.

Honestly.. I manage and do marketing.. and I do programs . . . .

Ah.. basically, [he/she] doesn't interact a lot with the customers.. [she/he] is more into marketing . . . .

c33 Informal Planning

Business planning, and marketing planning in particular, was almost entirely informal. Most interviewed TSBs did not strictly adhere to written detailed plans. The rationale, if given, was that planning is time consuming and that the industry is too unpredictable.

P.. planning.. takes up a lot of time.. I'd say.. particularly with [my partner].. at least . . . .

c34 Operational Difficulties

TSB owners mentioned difficulties affecting their business operations ranging from local issues to unjustifiable costs.

The only problem we have is that some of the dives.. some of the times.. we have problems with fishermen's nets.. fishermen's.. fish traps.. this sort of

thing.. and.. then.. when divers come back, they say.. oh well.. you know, the fishermen's nets.. but, there's all this garbage down, let's capture them.. alright, we try to go net cleaning once a month.. once every couple of months with the Ministry of Environment.

     . . . and if any cancellation.. if anything happen.. the guy he just.. cancel one day.. only one day he cancel.. is a big.. is a [serious] problem.. that one day.

c35 Owner's Personal Possessions

Whenever possible, especially in cases where the owner requested to be interviewed at his/her residence, limited and unobtrusive observations were made of the owners' possessions. The goal was to gain insight into business prosperity as reflected in the owners' possessions. Interviewed TSB owners appeared middle to upper middle class.

    [Interview memo:] *[His/Her] car, a [YYY premium mark], was parked outside, indicating a prosperous business*.

c36 Owner or Manager

This category identifies who manages the company. In most cases, the TSB's owner or co-owner manages the company. In one case—a travel agency—the manager of the company was an employee.

c37 Number of Employees

During the pre-interview phone conversation (See Chapter 3 for details on the interview selection process), the TSBs were asked about their number of employees. At the interviews, these numbers were confirmed. Five TSBs employed 10 or fewer people, while two employed between 11 and 20 people.

c38 Business Volume

There was a question at the end of the interview inquiring about TSB business volume. This information was not clearly provided by the TSBs. Some numbers were on record, but it's possible that some TSBs gave their businesses' total capacity instead of the actual demand.

c39 Managing Seasonality

Interviews did not sufficiently address the seasonality issue due to the focus on internal marketing operations. There were indications about TSB owners' awareness of seasonality. One owner seemed to have established a strategy to manage seasonality by attracting the local market. Others owners used pricing techniques to balance demand throughout the year.

> Well, what we try to do is try to.. am.. am.. work hard in winter.. put reserve for the.. summer.. and am.. again, in summer we try to.. ah.. market for the local mar.. ah.. for the local community here.

c40 Supporting the Local Community

Noting incidents where owners discuss their desire to support local communities at the attractions the TSBs serve. This included creating jobs, special community activities, and taking care of the environment.

> The other part is.. lot of my students.. that.. I taught diving.. they.. use the certifications to find a job.. to use it as ah.. you know.. a certification for finding a job.. which I feel it's.. it's good to help.. to be able to help up in that way, you know.

> I wanted them to benefit.. and I wanted them also to feel.. that this project.. when it came here, [locals] benefited from it.

. . . so.. also.. after a while.. I employed individuals from amongst them.. from their offsprings.. and I taught them.. I taught them the language.. in the summer, I took them to the British Council [to learn English] . . . .

c41 Customer Source Market

TSB owners talked about where their customers originate. In this sample, most peak season customers were Europeans, while the local market helped cover off season expenses.

. . . especially in the tourism export areas.. like Germany.. Switzerland.. and.. Austria.. Britain.. and France.. ah.. Italy . . . .

. . . and then the other 30% would be the local market.. [Interviewer asking:] *Omanis.. or residents?* [Interviewee responding:] Ah both.. both..

c42 Business Standards

Noting incidents that indicate TSBs are following business standards. This is apparent to some extent at other TSBs, but mostly at diving centers.

One problem we have is that customers sometimes ask for things that we.. CANNOT do.. like they say my.. my daughter is eight, nine years old.. can she try scuba diving? NO! Well, we have to follow the rules of the associations… with PADI, NAUI . . . .

. . . and.. of course.. there are some standards.. that I urged them to.. ah.. I even asked [the tour guides] to sign on these standards.. yes.. the commitment.. first of all.. by the safety.. of this person, this visitor, this tourist.. this is first.. trustworthiness.. trustworthiness at all its aspects.. in giving the correct information.. in taking care of [the tourist].. his belongings.. his stuff . . . .

c43 Customer Database

This category is based on owners' responses to the questions on marketing effectiveness scales. As mentioned in Chapter 3, results of the scale were not significant and were later dropped, but some of the relevant answers were taken into consideration. In their responses, TSB owners indicated whether they have customer databases. Four TSBs indicated they have a database of some sort, while the other three do not record customer information in a formal database.

> Yes.. I have all their information.. nationalities.. their program, ok.. and.. how many nights they spent.. and how many people in the group.. or the family.. groups, individuals, families.. nationality.. local.. and international..

> [Interviewer asking:] *Yah.. am.. Do you.. ah.. store information on your am.. customers.. Do you have a database?* [Interviewee responding:] Not really, no.

c44 Formal Business Planning

This category is related to Category 33 (c33). The focus here is how the plan is or was used in the four cases where TSBs indicated they had a formal written business plan.

> I.. I made a development and enhancements plan.. what do I want to do.. [in the future].. where I want to arrive at. Yes, it is written and present.. ok.. even the expected cost and income.. it's available.. yes.. but in regard to the annual plan.. ah.. it's not that I, honestly, make it in a written manner.. because I own and manage the company . . . .

> Am.. I did [have a business plan] actually, but.. I have no idea where it is right now [Laughing]! To be honest.. ah yah.. what.. I.. actually, it was.. my last year in college.

c45 Human Resources

Noting incidents where the owners discussed human resources.

cp45.1, cp45.2 Sense of Unity

One TSB owner strives to make employees feel valued and part of a family.

> I try first of all.. I try.. to.. let my employees.. feel.. they're part of the.. company.. they're.. we're like a family.. more than.. me being boss.. and them being.. working for me.

cp45.3 Flexibility

One TSB owner talked about part-time workers and allowing tour guides to

temporarily work for other companies.

> . . . after you guarantee the work.. these profits.. so I found a [European country -a] person.. I found a [European country -b] lady.. I also found a [European country -c] lady.. her husband works.. so some of them.. I mean, started to work by themselves, from home.. and some contacted their relatives.. in the countries they came from.. so.. yes.. the groups started coming and I organize.. of course.. I didn't have the means at the time to buy 4x4 cars [SUVs] or.. that I for example.. employ.. people.. but, among the three, one of them requested to work full-time.. for a better salary.

cp45.4 Employee Benefits

One TSB owner offers low salaries, but provides incentives to employees by

offering increasing shares of the revenues.

> I was able to employ a [European country] man and his wife.. full time.. and they have a background in tourism.. so.. I rented an apartment for them.. and I also gave them.. a salary.. not high, but.. I gave them a high share of [income from] tourists that they bring over.. we moved from 10 to 60% [of revenues for the employees].

c46 Government Role

TSB owners discuss the role the government currently plays and the role it should play in tourism. Almost all incidents for this category came from one experienced owner.

> . . . they participate [in Tourism Expos] as a government.. and they take along government employees.. and if you wanted as a company.. you need to reserve well in advance.. and they give you a table.. ok.. and they limit you by some policies . . . .

> . . . so.. we have.. here.. I mean, the critical matter is marketing.. this is one.. the other thing.. Ministry of Tourism.. ok.. needs people who are qualified in the field of economics.. and technology.. I mean, computers.. simplifying transactions.. and people who are at a high level of education and mastery in languages..

c47 Customer Feedback

Most owners reported on behalf of their customers, but there were examples where customers wrote their impressions in their own words in one owner's guest book.

> [Interviewer asking:] *Do Omanis dive?* [Interviewee responding:] Yah.. actually a lot.. I mean it's becoming very popular in Oman.. it's really becoming popular now.

> [Quotes taken at an interview from a TSB's guest book:] *"I had an excellent time. The guide was very helpful with lots of information." "A fantastic trip to Wahiba sands."*

c48 Work Enjoyment

Noting incidents indicating owners' enjoyment of their work, the activity they offer, and customer interactions

> I always say, [..] always listen to your clients.

> Am.. first of all, I mean WHY DIVING, it's because I started diving while I was studying in college and I really LOVED it.

. . . the tourist could witness the actual virgin environment.. in a desert area.. that's why I told you when electricity arrived and such.. [I wanted to move].

[Upon knowing that the owner just came from a diving holiday, Interviewer asked:] *So you don't regard it as work.. as something.. that you are obliged to do.. something.. diving for you..* [Interviewee responding:] Is fun!

c49 Personal Service

This category was developed at a later stage of analysis. It included incidents transferred from cp17.1, cp17.2, and cp17.3. It became apparent that properties of Category 17 were more philosophical, while this new category is what they actually do to achieve personal service. This is called *Personal* to indicate interpersonal communication and dealings between a TSB owner and employees and its customers. It includes issues like how the customer is treated, incidents where he/she is pampered, and incidents where he/she was given services beyond expectations.

We would send a boat to [a diving site] with two divers on board.. 'cause our attitude is.. we're like an airline.. an airline.. has one passenger.. it has to fly, correct? [Laughing]

[Interviewer asking:] . . . *but you also do.. custom tours..* [Interviewee responding:] Custom made.. [Interviewer asking:] *How much [custom]?..* [Interviewee responding:] Custom made.. what do you want.. he wants more.. he like more.. nature.. he want more.. culture.. he want more adventure.. he want.. he want camping.. he wants.. staying in the desert.. sometimes you pass somewhere.. a village.. it's there in your map.. route say.. you pass.. some place you.. there's nothing.. I don't want to waste your time.. is nothing you can see there.. it's a village, but it's nothing.. important.. I'll take you where you can see something very interest . . . .

c50 Years of Experiences

TSB owners differ in the length of their experience in tourism. One owner had less than five years, three owners had six to ten years, two owners had eleven to fifteen years, and one owner had more than fifteen years of experience. Owners with more experience seemed to have more knowledge about the industry overall and about Oman as a country. They were more aware of macro issues and the nuances of daily operations.

4.3 Insights

Insights in grounded theory offer explanations, patterns, and implicit meanings. For this study, the concept was used to generate insightful ideas that explain constructs in the emerging theory understood from the collective set of interviews and indicated by the categories and category properties. Below is the list of generated insights.

n1: Owner's nationality, if the same as tourists' nationality, seemingly improves marketing performance.

n2: Many satisfied customers become repeat customers. [Also indicated in cp23.6]

n3: Satisfied customers generate positive WoM.

n4: Customer satisfaction occurs when customers' product experience exceeds their expectations. [This is related to Theoretical Hypothesis 4 (th4).]

n5: Maintaining equipment is important to maintain standards. [Also indicated in cp17.8.]

n6: Customers need reliable and reasonable transportation to reach the TSB's office or assembly point. This can include public transportation, civil aviation, taxis, car rental, and private couches.

n7: One TSB owner with rich industry experience criticized the Ministry of Tourism despite his/her successful business..

n8: Could cooperation among diving centers affect a diving center's performance?

n9: *Core Product* is the core offering of the TSB to its customers. It includes minimal services, equipment, standards, and core package components expected for the specific TSB type. [This is related to th2.]

n10: *Direct Transportation* is the in-house minimum transportation required for a TSB to carry customers from meeting point(s) to the attraction(s) (cp10.2, c13). [This is related to th3.]

n11: *Core Experience* is the basic tourism experience sought to fulfill a personal need for which the customer is willing to offer monetary compensation (n12). TSBs in this study fulfill a need of diving, touring, or desert camping. These three needs are for entertainment and relaxation. TSBs' understanding of these needs are shown in Property 1 of Category 29 (cp29.1).

n12: *Basic Cost* is the price (c26) that the customer pays for the Core Product (n9) and the Direct Transportation (n10) needed to gain access to the desired attraction.

n13: *Direct Accessibility* is the customer's access to the attraction and service provided by the TSB. This is regarded as the meeting point at the general destination to the sought attraction(s).

n14: *Awareness* happens when the customer becomes aware of a TSB and its service(s).

n15: *Apprisal* constitutes the modest promotional efforts done by TSBs to mainly raise awareness about their products and services.

4.4 Theoretical Hypotheses

Theoretical hypotheses suggest general relationships among categories, category properties, and insights. They emerged based on the constant comparison process during coding and analyzing categories and category properties. These theoretical hypotheses suggest identifications and explanations of the evolving model and relationships among constructs. As mentioned in Chapter 3, theoretical hypotheses in accordance with the grounded theory method are regarded as findings and outcomes of the study rather than *hypotheses* in the conventional sense.

th1: Owner's direct involvement in daily operations (c7) leads to increased operational knowledge (c8) and a more customer-oriented approach (c17).

th2: Core Product (n9) encompasses personal service (cp49), attraction (cp10.2, c13), business standards (cp42), equipment and tools (c12), and core packaging (c14.6).

th3: Direct Transportation (n10) involves the use of a boat for a diving center and the use of a TSB-owned vehicle for tour operators and desert camps.

th4: Customer Satisfaction (n4) is indicated by positive feedback (c47) and increasing demand (cp30.3).

th5: Direct Accessibility (n13) is a prerequisite for customer Core Experience (n11).

th6: Core Product (n9) is negatively affected by bureaucratic issues like high required investment (cp31.1), lengthy government procedures (cp31.2), and seasonality (cp18.7).

th7: Understanding customer needs (c29) contributes positively to a strong Core Product (n9).

th8: Prioritizing customer service (cp17.1) contributes positively to the Core Product (n9) (especially in personal service (c49)), Basic Price (c26), Direct Transportation (n10), and direct communication (cp24.3).

th9: [Merged with th8 because of the overlap of the respective categories.]

th10: Seizing opportunities (c20) leads to benefiting from good tourist attractions (cp10.2, c13).

th11: Having international accreditation (cp15.1), proper employee training (cp15.2), strict safety standards (cp17.5), specialized qualification (cp8.3), and understanding physical needs and risks (cp18.3)(cp18.4) contribute positively to high business standards (cp42).

th12: Owning (cp12.2) and maintaining equipment (n5), accreditation (cp15.1) and training (cp15.2), and ensuring equipment quality and comfort (cp17.8) contribute positively to quality equipment (c12).

th13: Knowledge of competition (cp18.12, c16, c28) and Industry Knowledge (c18) contribute positively to pricing strategy (c26).

th14: Well developed packages (cp14.2, cp192) along with good alliances (c25) and business relationships (c27) contribute positively to good product packages (c14.2).

th15: Stressing the Internet's importance (cp17.6) contributes positively to an accessible Internet presence (c11).

th16: High investment requirement (cp31.1) leads to quality owned equipment (cp12.2).

th17: A calm and confident owner (cp9.1) is in a better position to seize good opportunities (c20). This is also aided by high Operational Knowledge (c8) and Work Enjoyment (cp48).

th18: High Operational Knowledge (c8) positively contributes to Core Product (n9), accreditation (cp15.1), training (cp15.2), alliances and relations (c25, c27), and understanding customer needs (c29).

th19: Years of Experience (c50) increases the owner's Operational Knowledge (c8) and Industry Knowledge (c18).

th20: Work Enjoyment (c48) positively contributes to the owner's Involvement (c7) and Marketing Philosophy (c17).

th21: Work Enjoyment (c48) enriches a TSB owner's experiences, learning, and growth (c50).

th22: Work Enjoyment (cp48) is influenced by the owner's love of the main activity (cp19.3), for the country (cp19.2/c40), and dealing with people (c9.4).

th23: [Removed for being redundant next to th1 and th19.]

th24: Industry Knowledge (c18) positively contributes to understanding customer needs (c29), attaining international accreditation (cp15.1), and organizing training programs for employees (cp15.2).

th25: The operational difficulty (th6) of seasonality (cp18.7) is managed by focusing on the local market (cp17.9, cp23.3, cp39.1) and using peak season income to cover off-peak expenses (cp39.2).

th26: Specific activities of Apprisal (n15) include use of the Internet (cp24.2), talking to family and friends (cp24.3), and participation in tourism expos (cp24.6).

th27: Customer satisfaction (n4) leads to repeat visits (cp23.1) and positive WoM (cp17.7).

th28: Adopting strict standards (cp17.5) contributes positively to maintaining Direct Transportation (n10).

th29: Valuing WoM (cp17.7) contributes positively to a reasonable price (c26) and quality Core Products (n9).

th30: Knowledge of major attractions in Oman (cp18.13) contributes positively to the owner's ability to choose quality attractions (cp10.2 & c13) for his/her TSB to serve.

4.5 The Theoretical Model

4.5.1 Model's Three Main Areas

The objectives of this study are to develop a theoretical model of TSB marketing, identify the main factors affecting TSB marketing, and identify relationships between these factors. The following paragraphs explain the emerged model, its constructs, and relationships. The model is comprised of three areas: *Marketing*, *Customers*, and *Owners' Key Attributes*. For the first two areas, the widely cited marketing mix models of the 4Ps of McCarthy (as cited in Gummesson, 2002a) and the 4Cs of Lauterborn (Shultz et al., 1993) were used as a guiding theoretical framework (for the discussion and rationale of using these models, refer to Chapter 2). Grounded theory allows for existing formal models as guides to build theory on the condition that they do not remove focus from the grounded data in developing a new model (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this study, the structure and general meanings of the 4Ps and 4Cs models were consulted to develop the

areas of Marketing and Customers. Grounded data was prioritized over formal models for specifying the depth, order, and labeling of relevant elements. The third area of the pursued model, Owners' Key Attributes, is where major factors affecting TSB marketing and the relationships between them are identified. This area analyzes key personal factors of owners relevant to the marketing of their TSBs.

4.5.2 Appraisal and Awareness

Whereas the Marketing area of the model focuses on TSB services and activities, the Customers area focuses on how customers perceive these TSB activities. In other words, the Customers area of the model attempts to theoretically explain the customer tourism consumption process from awareness to the consumption and evaluation of a TSB's offerings. Reviewing the case of tourism in Oman, and based on the findings of this study, the majority of TSB customers cross borders to experience the destination or some aspect of the destination rather than to specifically purchase a single TSB's service. In this sense, based on the collected data, *Promotion* in its classic comprehensive form (i.e., the idea that it includes personal selling, advertising, public relations, special offers, etc.—as in the context of large businesses) is not prevalent among TSBs. Instead, TSBs mostly employ modest efforts to raise *Awareness* (n14) of their services rather than aggressive persuasive promotional techniques. Consequently, the TSB Marketing element of modest activities intended to raise awareness among customers is called *Appraisal* (n15). It can include activities like using the Internet (c11), participating in international tourism expos (cp24.6), and communicating with family and friends (cp24.3). Four of the interviewed TSBs have websites, of which at least one is on first results page of Google

and Yahoo search engines (cp11.2). One TSB has a Facebook page to communicate with customers and report on daily activities (cp11.4). The data suggests that these Apprisal (n15) activities are not concretely effective for building a growing demand. A website, for example, is useful for providing further information for previous customers and potential customers.

4.5.3 Direct Transportation and Direct Accessibility

In considering the *Place* element of the 4Ps, the tourism industry is not about sending products to customers. Instead, Place is first about carrying or transporting customers from their homes (locally, regionally, or internationally) to the point where they meet the TSB. This is done via various means like air transport or coaches, and different methods like customized packages. Secondly, and more importantly in this context, Place is about carrying or transporting customers from the meeting point(s) to the attraction(s). This is the minimum transportation expected to be provided by the TSB, which is identified in the model as *Direct Transportation* (n10). Direct Transportation (n10), as explained in the third theoretical hypothesis (th3), usually involves the use of a boat for diving centers or a TSB-owned vehicle for tour operators and diving camps to transport customers from the meeting point(s) to the attraction(s). From customers' perspectives, this denotes their *Direct Accessibility* (n13) to the attraction(s) they want to experience.

4.5.4 Core Product and Core Experience

In considering the *Product* element of the 4Ps, it is important to differentiate what is generally considered essential to a TSB's offering and what can be considered as an additional value. In the tourism industry, and specifically in Oman, similar TSBs can offer different levels of services and packages. As was the case identifying Direct Transportation (n10), it is preferable to focus on the lowest common denominator among similar TSBs. In other words, what is the *Core Product* (n9) offered by TSBs (as opposed to what is considered part of a package)? One way to view this is in terms of basic tourism products besides transportation: accommodation, food, and attraction. A diving center's Core Product (n9) only includes an attraction facilitation provided in-house, and no accommodation or food services. A tour operator is expected to offer a minimum package of outsourced accommodation and food as well as guide customers through the attraction(s). A desert camp is expected to offer a minimum package of in-house attraction facilitation, accommodations, and food. Table F.1 illustrates these concepts. Another way to determine what constitute a Core Product (n9) is to consider the different components suggested by the data. Based on the data, Core Product (n9) encompasses personal service (cp49), attraction(s) (cp10.2, c13), following business standards (cp42), equipment and tools (c12), and core packaging (c14.6) where applicable (see th2). For a diving center, Core Product (n9) includes personal interaction and communication, diving site(s), diving standards, and diving equipment. For a desert camp, Core Product (n9) is similar, but tailored to desert camping standards and eqipment. For a tour operator, Core Product (n9) includes these components plus core packaging expected from a tour operator, that is, planning a package that includes accommodation and food. In these

three types of TSBs, anything beyond the Core Product (n9) is part of packaging or extended packaging. From a customer's perspective, the basic tourism experience they seek to fulfill a personal need is identified as *Core Experience* (n11). In the scope of this study, customers are willing to offer monetary compensation to fulfill one or more needs through diving, touring, and desert camping. Core Experience (n11) is what customers compare to their expectations to determine satisfaction. *Customer Satisfaction* (n4) is indicated by positive feedback (c47) and increasing demand (cp30.3).

4.5.5 Basic Price and Basic Cost

In considering the *Price* element of the 4Ps, and having discussed Direct Transportation (n10) and Core Product (n9), what most concerns TSB marketing is the price of the minimum expected transportation and service. This is labeled as *Basic Price* (c26), which is perceived as *Basic Cost* (n12) by the customers. If customers perceive the Core Experience (n11) as worth the Basic Cost (n12), they are satisfied (n4). Customer Satisfaction (n4) leads to repeat business (cp23.1) and positive word of mouth (cp17.7) (th27).

4.5.6 Owners' Key Attributes

The last area of the model is Owners' Key Attributes, which are theorized to constitute the main factors affecting TSB marketing. These key attributes are *Marketing Philosophy* (c17), *Operational Knowledge* (c8), *Industry Knowledge* (c18), *Years of Experience* (c50), *Involvement* (c7), and *Work Enjoyment* (c48). These attributes were identified as key factors affecting TSB marketing. The three most directly related to the

TSB's Marketability are Marketing Philosophy (c17), Operational Knowledge (c8), and Industry Knowledge (c18).

4.5.7 Marketing Philosophy, Operational Knowledge, and Industry Knowledge

Marketing Philosophy (c17) denotes the owners' beliefs and principles regarding how a TSB should approach marketing and service offering. It includes traits like prioritizing customer service (cp17.1), developing the brand (cp17.4), adhering to strict standards (cp17.5), believing in the importance of the Internet (cp17.6), valuing WoM (cp17.7), stressing equipment quality and comfort (cp17.8), acknowledging the importance of the local market (cp17.9), focusing on one market (cp17.10), differentiating the product or service (cp17.11), and working harmoniously in the environment (cp17.12). Incidents suggesting Marketing Philosophy (c17) properties include listening to customers, exceeding expectations, believing all dive centers should follow safety standards, striving to maintain better equipment standards than competitors, and making sure services are compatible with environment and traditions.

Operational Knowledge (c8) denotes the owner's knowledge about and acquaintance with the operations of his/her TSB. It is indicated by incidents like identifying attraction locations on a map, knowing divers' perceptions of the diving site, and giving mundane details of packages. Industry Knowledge (c18) denotes the owner's knowledge about the sub-industry the TSB serves, as well as the tourism industry as a whole. It includes properties like accident history (cp18.1), knowledge of international associations (cp18.2), understanding physical needs of the main activity (cp18.3), understanding industry fragility (cp18.5), and knowing the history of the Ministry of

Tourism in Oman (cp18.14). Industry Knowledge (c18) is indicated by knowing the history of shark attacks in Oman, diving associations of NAUI and PADI, international events' effects on tourism, the country's regional administrative structure, and large competitors.

4.5.8 Involvement, Work Enjoyment, and Years of Experience

The other three key owners' attributes are Involvement (c7), Work Enjoyment (c48), and Years of Experience (c50). It is discussed earlier that these attributes are not as directly related to the marketing elements of a TSB as the previous three attributes. However, these indirect attributes play a vital role in TSB marketing because of their effects on other attributes (as will be seen shortly when discussing theoretical hypotheses and relationships among owner's key attributes and marketing elements). Years of Experience (c50) is self explanatory; it denotes the number of years the owner has been in business in the tourism industry. The attribute of Involvement (c7) denotes the owner's involvement and engagement in daily activities at his/her business. This is indicated by tending to operations even during the interview, keeping cell phones on standby, communicating with customers on Facebook, and writing a code of standards for employees. The attribute of Work Enjoyment (c48) is indicated by incidents like describing business photos with enthusiasm, listening to customers attentively, loving to travel, personally training staff, and wanting tourists to experience the virgin environment of Oman.

4.5.9 Three Owner's Key Attributes' Effects on TSB's Marketing

It is important to discuss the relationships between owners' key attributes and TSB marketing. Upon close analysis of the categories, category properties, and incidents, it was concluded that the attributes of Marketing Philosophy (c17), Operational Knowledge (c8), and Industry Knowledge (c18) have direct effects on TSB marketing elements. Marketing Philosophy (c17) is proposed to have a relationship with the marketing element of Apprisal (n15). This is indicated by the effect of the property of stressing Internet importance (cp17.6) on the likelihood of a TSB to have and maintain an online presence (c11) (th15), as well as the effect of the property of prioritizing customer service (cp17.1) on an owner's direct communication with people about his/her business (cp24.3) (th8). Marketing Philosophy (c17) also affects the TSB's Direct Transportation (n10), as indicated by the effects of prioritizing customer service (cp17.1) and maintaining strict standards (cp17.5) (th3). Furthermore, Marketing Philosophy (c17) affects a TSB's Basic Price (c26), as indicated by the effect of prioritizing customer service (cp17.1) (th8) and WoM (cp17.7) (th29). Lastly, Marketing Philosophy (c17) affects the TSB's Core Product (n9), as indicated by the effect of prioritizing customer service (cp17.1) on personal service (c49) and other Core Product (n9) components (th8), adopting strict standards (cp17.5) on TSB products (c42) (th11), valuing WoM on Core Product (n9) components (th29), and focusing on quality (cp17.8) TSB equipment (c12) (th12).

Theoretically the attribute of Operational Knowledge (c8) affects a TSB's Core Product (n9) because of its effect on various components of the Core Product (n9). The attribute of Industry Knowledge (c18) affects a TSB's Basic Price (c26), as indicated by the effects of the owner's knowledge of major attractions (cp18.13) and competition

(cp18.12 , c16, cp28) (th13). Owners' Industry Knowledge (c18) also affects a TSB's Core Product (n9), as indicated by the effects of the owner's knowledge of international associations (cp18.2), physical needs (cp18.3, cp18.4) of a TSB's product standards (c42) (th11), and knowledge of major attractions (cp18.13) on the TSB's choice of attractions to serve (cp10.2, c13) (th30).

4.5.10 The Other Three Owners' Key Attributes: the Root of Effective TSB Marketing

The above sections deal with the theoretical links between three owners' key attributes and the marketing elements of TSBs. The following three owners' key attributes—Involvement (c7), Work Enjoyment (c48), and Years of Experience (c50)— are concluded to be at the root of effective marketing for TSBs. The attribute of Involvement (c7) affects Marketing Philosophy (c17) (th1) and Operational Knowledge (c8). Owners' Involvement (c7) incidents such as tending to operations at all possible times and communicating with customers contribute to the owner's beliefs and principles about how the TSB ought to market and offer services (c17) (th1). Owners' Involvement (c7) incidents like personally offering services to customers and training staff contribute to owners' detailed knowledge of operations (c8) (th1). Years of Experience (c50) affects the attributes of Operational Knowledge (c8) and Industry Knowledge (c18) (th19). It was noted that experienced owners of the interviewed TSBs recalled rich details about how their TSBs are operated and the industry in general. The most important owners' key attribute is Work Enjoyment (c48). It first affects Marketing Philosophy (c17), as indicated by incidents like listening to customers attentively and loving the core activity of the TSB (th20). Secondly, it affects the attributes of Involvement (c7), as indicated by

incidents like enthusiastically describing businesses operations during the interviews (th20). Last but not least, Work Enjoyment (c48) enriches a TSB owner's experience, learning, and growth with every year of work (th21). Work Enjoyment (c48) plays a moderating role affecting the strength of the relationship between Years of Experience (c50) and the attributes of Operational Knowledge (c8) and Industry Knowledge (c18).

The research outcomes above presented the TSB marketing elements, how they are theoretically perceived by the customers, and how they are theoretically affected by Owners' Key Attributes. The resulting theoretical model, consequently, models the ability of TSBs to market their offerings to prospective customers. This resulting model, presented in Figure 4.1, is thus called the *Tourism Small Business Marketability Model (TSMARK)*. A further discussion of the model and the use of the term *marketability* is provided in Chapter 5.
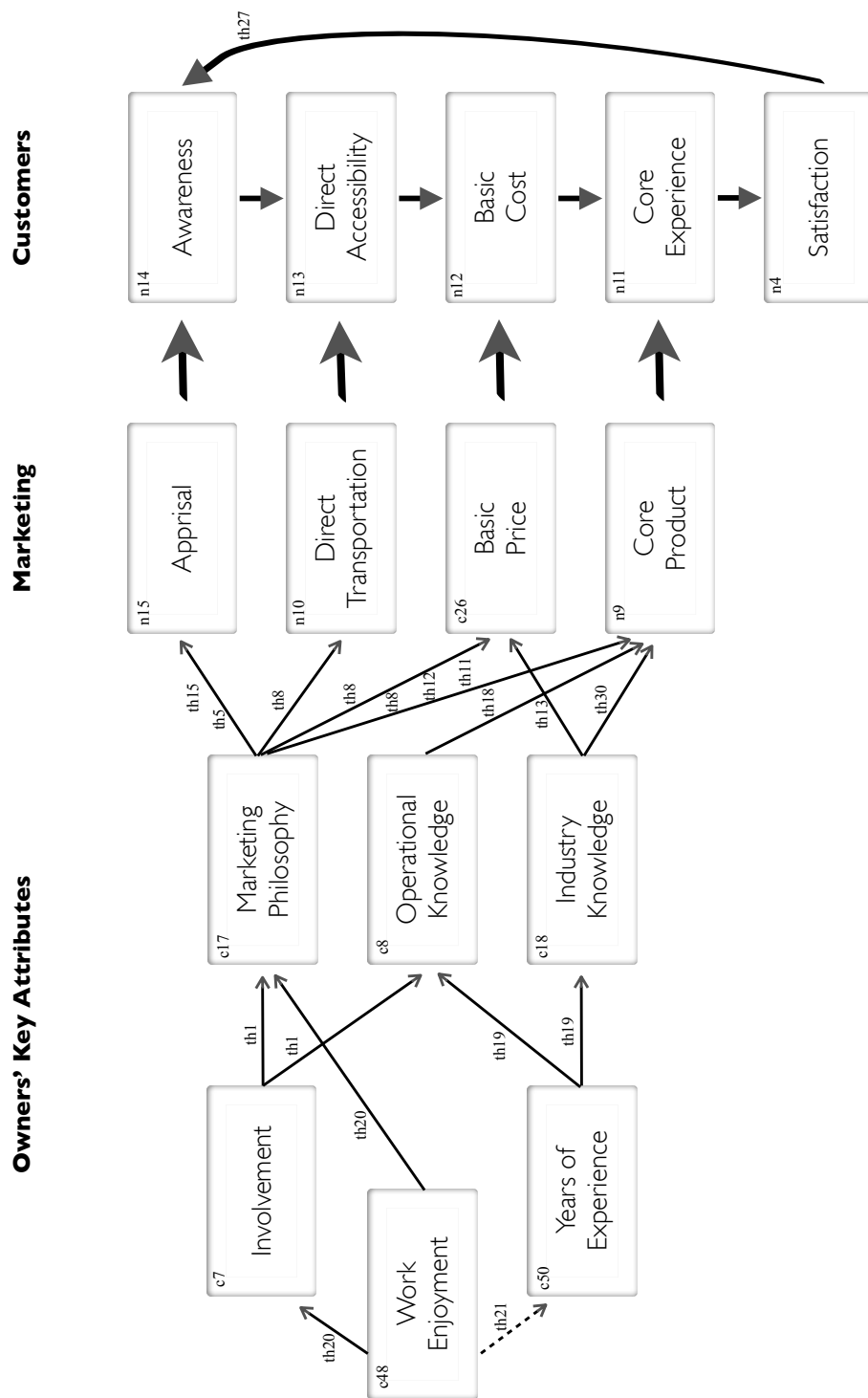
Figure 4.1 The Tourism Small Businesses Marketability Model (TSMARK)

4.6 Summary Answers to Research Questions

The previous sections of Chapter 4 presented the detailed findings of the study in accordance with the pursued research objectives and research questions. Research questions and corresponding research findings are given below:

RQ1) What are the basic marketing elements for a TSB?

The basic marketing elements for a TSB are Apprisal, Direct Transportation, Basic Price, and Core Product, presented in the TSMARK model under Marketing.

RQ2) How do the TSB's marketing elements relate to customers' experiences?

The relationships between TSB marketing elements and customer experience are demonstrated by the arrows in the TSMARK model linking each TSB marketing element to the corresponding customer experience element. Specifically, Apprisal corresponds with Awareness, Direct Transportation with Direct Accessibility, Basic Price with Basic Cost, and Core Product with Core Experience.

RQ3) What are the main factors affecting TSB marketing?

The main factors affecting TSB marketing are presented in the TSMARK model under Owners' Key Attributes. As discussed above, three key attributes were concluded to have a direct effect on a TSB's marketing: Marketing Philosophy, Operational Knowledge, and Industry Knowledge. Three other attributes were concluded to indirectly affect TSB marketing: Work Enjoyment, Involvement, and Years of Experience.

RQ4) What are the relationships between these main factors?

The relationships between the main factors affecting TSB marketing are presented in the TSMARK model with arrows theoretically linking the six identified owners' attributes and are discussed in detail in previous Chapter 4 sections. Marketing Philosophy affects

all four TSB marketing elements; Operational Knowledge affects Core Product; Industry

Knowledge affects Basic Price and Core Product; Involvement affects Marketing

Philosophy and Operational Knowledge; Years of Experience affects Operational

Knowledge and Industry Knowledge; and Work Enjoyment affects Involvement and has a

moderating effect on Years of Experience.

RQ5) What is the core of effective TSB marketing?

The core of effective TSB marketing is the theoretically identified relationship between

one owner attribute, one marketing element, and one customer experience element. This

is discussed in detail in Chapter 5, section 5.2.2.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary and General Observations

5.1.1 Purpose, Methodology, and General Findings

The purpose of this study is to help Tourism Small Businesses effectively market their products in a manner that suits their unique nature and business environment. The study specifically aims to develop a theoretical model of TSB marketing, identify major factors affecting TSB marketing, and identify relationships between these factors. As the aim is theoretical development, grounded theory was concluded to be the most suitable method. Data collected for the study is comprised of seven hour-long, in-depth interviews with TSB owners in Oman. The findings of this analysis are presented in a holistic form rather than on individual bases in order to uncover all possible relevant factors, as well as further protect the identity of the interviewed TSB owners. As per the guidelines of classic grounded theory (Glaser & Holton, 2004; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), analytical categories were developed from interview transcriptions and memos. These categories were developed in the order indicated by the incidents from one interview to the next. General topics covered by these categories are owner's personal characteristics, owner's business characteristics, TSB's core product, TSB's direct accessibility, basic price, apprisal, TSB's customers, other TSB information, Environment, and Interview. Aside from these analytical categories, fifteen insights were developed to explain constructs

implied from the collective set of interviews and indicated by the categories and category properties. These categories and insights were the basis upon which thirty theoretical hypotheses were developed theorizing relationships between categories, as well as elaborations on insights.

5.1.2 The Marketability of TSBs

While developing a theoretical model of TSB marketing, the concept of *marketability* arose. The research questions included identifying elements of TSB marketing (RQ1) and the corresponding customer experience (RQ2). In addition, research questions also included the identification of factors affecting TSB marketing (RQ3) and relationships between these factors (RQ4). In this regard, the resulting theoretical model not only includes the dimension of *marketing* (represented by the marketing elements), but also the dimensions of customer experience and the factors affecting TSB marketing (found to be the six key owner attributes). Such a model would not appropriately be named a *marketing* model, but rather a *marketability* model in that it models—besides TSB marketing—key factors affecting TSB marketing, as well as how TSB marketing efforts correspond to customer experience. In other words, the resulting theoretical model models the ability of a TSB to sell or market it's offerings to prospective customers. The word *marketability* is a derivative of the word *marketable*, which means "able or fit to be sold or marketed" or "in demand" (Stevenson, 2010; Stevenson & Lindberg, 2010). Since a TSB is small by definition, it can be considered marketable if its product offering is marketable to a certain market. For its product to be marketable, it needs to be in

sufficient demand from prospective customers and the TSB needs to perform necessary marketing activities to sell its product offering to prospective customers at a profit.

The first of the two criteria is for a TSB's offering to be sufficiently demanded. For that to happen, a TSB's offering needs to be perceived by customers as valuable. The small size of TSBs and the numerous options available to prospective customers make most customers uninterested in buying a particular TSB's offering, but rather in fulfilling a need by experiencing a certain tourism attraction. If, for example, a tourism attraction becomes inaccessible because of political unrest or natural disaster, then a prospective customer would switch to another attraction in another destination to fulfill the need. Essentially, for a TSB's offering to be marketable, a prospective customer has to have a need that can be fulfilled by experiencing an attraction accessible through the TSB and to perceive the TSB's core product as worthy of the asking price.

For the second marketability criteria, a TSB's ability to market its offering is multifaceted. It is, as theorized based on the findings of this study, a TSB's ability to capture the attention of prospective customers; to offer a suitable core product; to grant access to the sought attraction(s) and provide standards, equipment, minimum packaging, and personal service at the expected level; and to satisfy their core needs at a profit. Because of TSBs' small sizes, the findings of this study theorize that their ability to market their offerings is directly related to six key owner attributes. These attributes are identified as the most important factors affecting TSB marketing elements. Based on this discussion, the marketability of a TSB is defined as:

The ability of a TSB to market its core product to prospective customers.
Specifically, it is the TSB's ability to apprise prospective customers of its core product, to

grant direct access to an attraction capable of fulfilling customers' needs, to offer a core

product suitable for experiencing such an attraction, and to charge a basic price

perceived by customers to be worthy of the core experience provided by the core product.

TSB marketing is mainly affected by the key owner attributes of work enjoyment,

involvement, years of experience, marketing philosophy, operational knowledge, and

industry knowledge. In addition, the marketability of a TSB necessitates that its core

product offers a core experience that is in demand by a significant market.

5.1.3 TSMARK Model

T The Tourism Small Business Marketability Model (TSMARK) (Figure 5.1) is

built upon the study's findings of theoretical hypotheses, insights, and analytical

categories. Accordingly, the TSMARK model is grounded on the collected data. Apart

from consulting two generic marketing mix models, the constructs, structure, and

relationships in the TSMARK model are completely founded on the collected data. This

is in agreement with the classical grounded theory guidelines outlined by Glaser and

Strauss (1967), and Glaser and Holton (2004). TSMARK demonstrates the marketability

of TSBs by listing TSB marketing elements, how they relate to customer experience, and

how they are affected by six key owner attributes. The model is divided into three main

areas: Customers, Marketing, and Owners' Key Attributes. Marketing area identifies the

TSB marketing elements of Apprisal, Direct Transportation, Basic Price, and Core

Product. Apprisal theorizes that TSBs undertake modest promotional efforts with the

objective of apprising the target audience of their business. TSMARK argues that TSBs'

promotional efforts are aimed to raise awareness rather than consciously and aggressively

convince the target audience to buy their products. For the other three TSB marketing elements, the model takes into consideration that in the tourism industry, TSBs engage in different levels of packaging. For the sake of clarity, TSMARK only discusses the minimally expected product and distribution constituents. Consequently, Direct Transportation is regarded as the in-house minimum transportation required for a TSB to carry customers from meeting point(s) to the attraction(s); Core Product is regarded as the core offering of minimal services, equipment, standards, and packaging expected from the specific TSB; and Basic Price is the price a TSB charges for these minimally expected distribution and product constituents. Table F.1 illustrates, based on the collected data, these minimally expected distribution and product constituents for the TSB types of diving, touring, and desert camping.
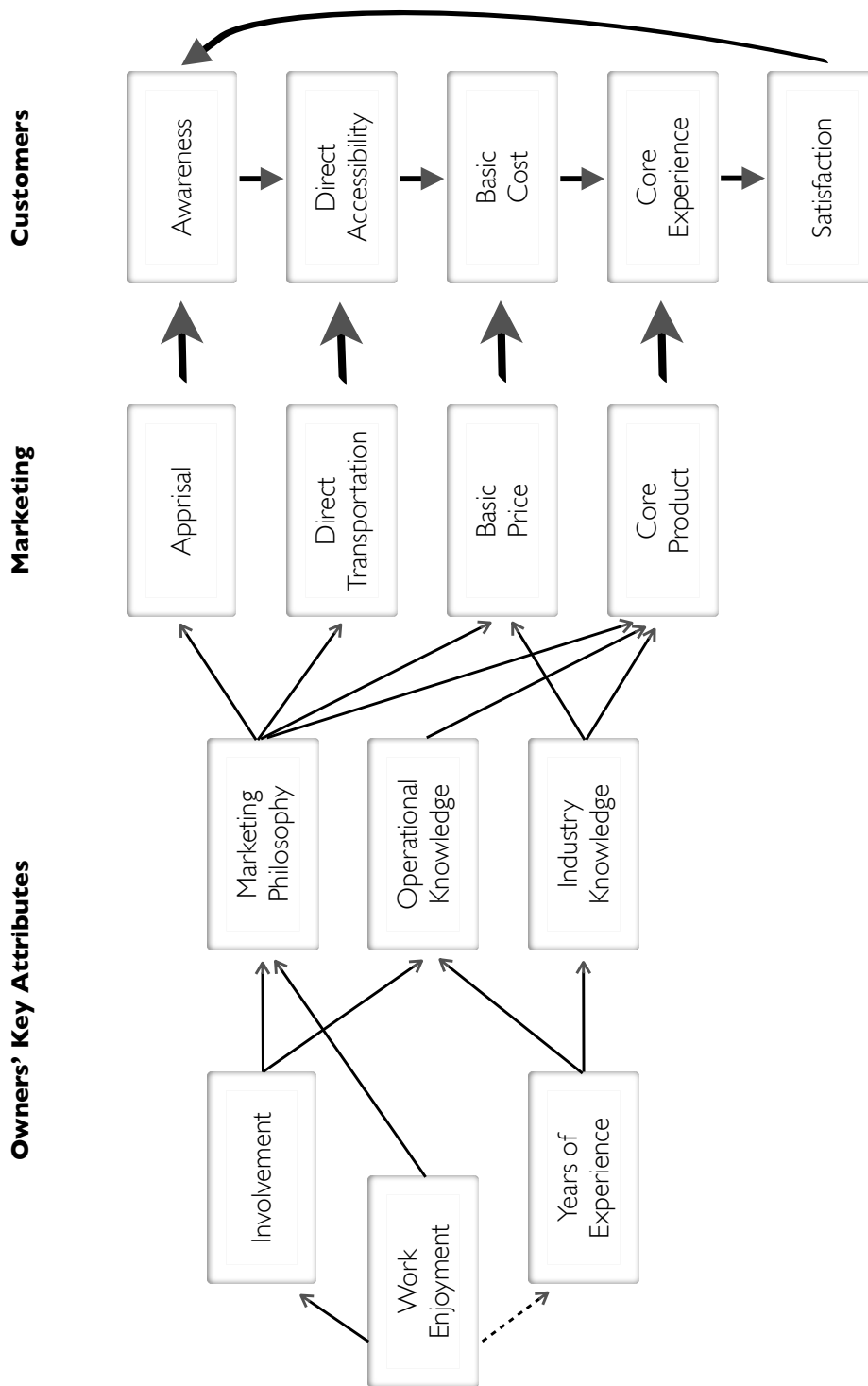
Figure 5.1 TSMARK (basic)

These four marketing elements compose the marketing activities of TSBs. In comparison, the Customers area of TSMARK presents the equivalents of each of these elements from the customer's perspective. This is important because, as the data theoretically proposes and as was discussed in the definition of TSB marketability, customers' perceptions of TSB marketing activities are the key determinants of their satisfaction. Consequently, customers' perceptions of TSB marketing activities are key determinants of the likelihood of repeat visits and positive word of mouth. Respective to the TSB marketing elements, the constructs of Awareness, Direct Accessibility, Basic Cost, and Core Experience are theorized to constitute the elements of customer experience. These theoretically denote the customers' awareness of the TSB's offering(s), direct accessibility to the desired attraction(s), basic cost paid (excluding that of other non-essential package elements), and the core experience sought from the TSB, respectively. In essence, it is theorized that the degree by which the customers perceive their core experience in relation to expected value and experience determines the level of customer satisfaction. TSMARK suggests that the more satisfied customers are, the more likely they are to become repeat customers and spread positive word of mouth about the TSB. This gradually leads to a growing demand and steadily expanding customer base.

In fulfillment of the study's objectives, TSMARK also theorizes the most important factors affecting TSB marketing. These factors are theorized to be six key attributes of TSB owners. For businesses as small as TSBs, TSMARK suggests that marketing performance is dependent on the owners' key attributes of Marketing Philosophy, Operational Knowledge, and Industry Knowledge. Owners' Marketing Philosophy denotes owners' beliefs and principles regarding how the TSB should approach marketing

and product offering. Operational Knowledge denotes the owner's knowledge about and acquaintance with the operations of his/her TSB. Industry Knowledge denotes the owner's knowledge about the sub-industry his/her TSB serves, as well as the tourism industry as a whole. These attributes are theorized to play a key role in the marketing of TSBs, as illustrated in TSMARK. These three attributes are additionally theorized to be strongly affected by owner attributes of Work Enjoyment, Involvement, and Years of Experience. Years of Experience denotes the number of years the owner has been in business. Involvement denotes the owner's involvement and engagement in daily activities of his/her business. Work Enjoyment denotes the degree of enjoyment and satisfaction the owner experiences when engaging in his/her work at the TSB. Work Enjoyment is theorized to be the most critical element among these attributes because of its effect on Marketing Philosophy and Involvement, and its moderating role on the strength of the effect of Years of Experience on Operational Knowledge and Industry Knowledge.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions

5.2.1 First TSB Marketing Model

By developing the TSMARK model, this study contributes to the literature with the first TSB marketing model. Although much research has been done on the characteristics of small businesses and small business owners, no marketability model of TSBs linking marketing elements, customer perceptions, and owner attributes is found in the literature. Scholars in the field of small business management have raised the issue that theoretical contribution is needed to shed light on what is still unknown about these businesses (A. J.

Morrison & Conway, 2007; Thomas, Shaw, & Page, 2011). By employing the grounded theory method of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Glaser and Holton (2004), this study developed a substantive theoretical model of TSB marketability. This substantive theory is a beginning step toward a more generalizable formal theory of TSB marketing.

5.2.2 Relationship between Work Enjoyment, Personal Service, and Core Experience

Small businesses, with their limited resources, cannot compete with large businesses in terms of mass promotion, aggressive pricing, and well structured and packaged offerings. However, the findings of this study suggest that providing exceptional personal service is the foundation of effective marketing performance for TSBs. When TSBs focus on providing high levels of personal service, they increase their chances of satisfied and repeat customers, as well as positive word of mouth. This notion is supported in the literature in that service quality was found to be key as a competitive advantage for small businesses in tourism (Jones & Haven, 2005; Longenecker, Moore, & Petty, 2003; A. J. Morrison & Teixeira, 2004). The following excerpts of this study indicate the importance of quality personal service from the perspective of TSB owners.

> Service comes first. [….]. Customer MUST come first . . . .

> . . . and when the visitor comes here.. he knows that he is truly ah.. received the service that he deserved.. in exchange for the amount of money he paid . . . .

TSMARK suggests that the single most important TSB owner attribute leading to a strong Core Product and personal service is Work Enjoyment. Theoretically, TSB owners who enjoy their work are expected to offer better personal service to customers and strive

to continuously improve their total offering (or Core Product) as they acquire more experience and learn more from customer feedback.

| **Critical Owner's Attribute** | **Critical Marketing Element** | **Critical Customer Perception** |

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┌─────────────┐       ┌─────────────────┐       ┌─────────────┐
│    Work     │  ──▶  │  Core Product   │  ──▶  │    Core     │
│  Enjoyment  │       │(Personal Service)│       │ Experience  │
└─────────────┘       └─────────────────┘       └─────────────┘
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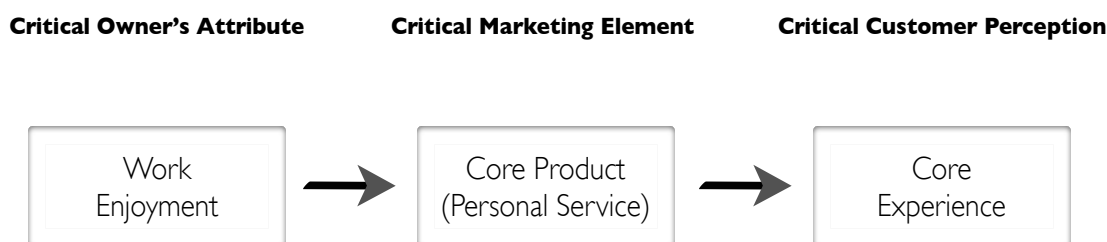
Figure 5.2 Key Theoretical Finding

5.2.3 Work Enjoyment and Motivation Theories

The key theoretical finding discussed above partially supports two relevant motivation theories: Self Determination theory and Positive Affect theory. Self Determination theory originated in the mid-seventies (Deci, 1975). It seeks to understand human motivation based on the internal needs of Autonomy (free choice and independence), Competence (feeling responsible for one's competent performance such that it doesn't interfere with autonomy), and Relatedness (to others and society) (Deci, 2000). These needs are internal (*intrinsic*) necessities for human beings; their satisfaction is theoretically linked to effective functioning. Intrinsic motivation is about "active engagement" in activities that people find "interesting." This "involvement" and "commitment" in "interesting" activities requires the nourishment of need fulfillment (Deci, 2000). The level of need satisfaction that people experience while engaging in certain activities determines how interested they become in these activities. TSMARK supports the link between interesting activities and involvement. In the context of TSBs,

work enjoyment is theorized to have a positive effect on the level of owner involvement in TSB operations. Self Determination theory, in turn, provides important insights into what intrinsic motivations lead to work enjoyment.

The other theory of interest is Positive Affect theory (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). In this theory, happiness is hypothesized to cause successful outcomes and happy people are expected to demonstrate higher performance and productivity (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). The theorists note, however, that this is more influenced by well-being than job satisfaction. TSMARK does support that happiness, expressed as work enjoyment, is important to a TSB's marketing effectiveness, and ultimately, to business success. TSMARK differs from Positive Affect theory in that it emphasizes the importance of job satisfaction to performance and productivity.

5.3 Methodology Contribution

In classic grounded theory method, *theoretical sampling* (Dey, 1999; Glaser & Holton, 2004; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Goulding, 2002) is suggested as part of the theory generation process. It refers to the gradual sampling process according to the state of theory generation evolvement. For the study at hand, this part of the process could not be strictly followed because of data collection limitations. In order to gain some of the benefits of the theoretical sampling technique, a simulating procedure was used. Data collection, though done prior to coding and analyzing, was designed to provide the best possible data set by interviewing a variety of TSBs for about an hour each. Data coding and analysis simulated theoretical sampling by following a particular order of interview transcripts handling as per their perceived quality (refer to section 3.4.1 for further

details). This simulation procedure produced similar results to those produced by following a typical theoretical sampling procedure. Specifically, the first few interviews contributed the most to analytical categories, insights, theoretical hypotheses, and the evolving theory. As more interviews were analyzed, relatively fewer incidents added to the richness and value of the evolving theory. Accordingly, this study has shown that in cases where strict theoretical sampling is unattainable, a well planned sample and careful choice of the order of collected data for coding and analyzing helps redeem some of the intended theoretical values.

5.4 Practical Contributions to the Industry and Oman
5.4.1 Practical Contributions to the Global Tourism Industry

In addition to the above mentioned theoretical and methodology contributions, the findings of this study offer important contributions to the tourism industry. Specifically, TSMARK could help TSBs improve their marketing effectiveness and, consequently, benefit the industry. It is true that TSBs lack the planning abilities and resources of larger businesses, but this study suggests that TSBs have a potential competitive advantage if they focus their efforts on what they naturally do best. TSMARK offers useful recommendations regarding starting and continuing a business, operational involvement, and specific TSB marketing activities.

From the outset, potential owners of new TSBs are advised to start companies in areas they enjoy. They should ask questions like whether they previously engaged in and enjoyed the main activity they are planning to provide (like diving, touring, or camping) and whether they like working and interacting with people. Existing TSB owners are

advised to continuously monitor satisfaction levels and enjoyment of their work. In cases where they no longer enjoy their work, they should ask themselves whether this is because of external factors, like government bureaucracy and competition, or affected by the activities they offer. In all cases, however, TSB owners should take care not to fall into the trap of stubbornly maintaining a business with a product with insufficient demand. As seen in the given definition of TSB marketability in section 5.1.2, the core product offered to customers must be sufficiently demanded by a significant market. Another important factor in the marketability of TSBs is owners' involvement in daily operations. Owners are advised, as much as possible, to engage in their TSBs' activities and interact with customers. They should take their customers on tours, guide diving groups, or lead camping trips. They should communicate with customers and listen carefully to feedback and suggestions. With TSBs' limited resources, owners' involvement in the business and interaction with customers result in invaluable understanding of their businesses and customers' needs. As TSMARK suggests, this engagement can help enrich owners' learning experiences every year. In addition to involvement, TSB owners are advised to learn as much as they can about their industry and environment. Useful tasks in this regard include observing local and international TSBs, attending tourism exhibitions, and following news about relevant political and environmental issues. TSB owners are advised to take their time gradually growing and improving their businesses. Mistakes and sub-par services are expected at the beginning as owners learn. Nevertheless, continuous involvement in activities owners enjoy helps TSBs continue on their journeys.

In regard to specific marketing activities, owners are first and foremost advised to strive for outstanding personal service. Owners should consider that their customers are likely seeking the fulfillment of relaxation, entertainment, and educational needs. Owners should remember that customers are probably utilizing leisure time and using discretionary income. As such, customers desire and appreciate pleasant interactions and careful attention to their needs. TSB owners should strive to be cheerful and supportive when dealing with customers, as well as skillful and attentive when providing services. In addition to personal service, TSB owners are advised to pay special attention to other components of their core product. They should aim to find and utilize attractions that are most likely to catch the attention and demand of potential customers. These potential customers are, after all, seeking attractions that they expect to fulfill their needs rather than specifically seeking the services of particular businesses. Furthermore, TSB owners should make sure they adhere to industry standards regarding equipment, procedures, and package elements.

Besides personal service and other core product constituents, TSB owners should carefully consider the three other TSB marketing elements: direct transportation to the attraction, reasonable basic pricing, and helpful promotion techniques. Customers expect TSBs to provide adequate and comfortable transportation from an expected meeting point to the attraction(s) they seek. The mode of transportation used (cars, coaches, or boats) should be clean and well maintained. Also, routes taken should be well planned and safety standards should be closely followed. TSB owners are advised to charge fair prices that are worthy of services given, and are likely to lead to customer satisfaction and reasonable revenues. Lastly, TSB owners are advised to make their businesses visible to

potential customers. Two ways to do this are building a well-linked website and distributing brochures at hotels and airports.

All above recommendations are useful to improve a TSB's marketing effectiveness. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize the most critical recommendations, as indicated by the study's key theoretical finding. Even though specific marketing tasks are suggested, TSB owners should be careful not to overuse these tactics at the expense of providing outstanding personal service. The study's key theoretical finding emphasizes that personal service is the most important factor leading to a positive customer core experience, and consequently, customer satisfaction. This, in turn, can lead to repeat customers and positive word of mouth.

5.4.2 Practical Contributions to Destination Oman

In regard to destination Oman, this study offers valuable recommendations for TSBs. First (as discussed in Chapter 2), Oman's tourism industry has been growing and is expected to continue growing for the foreseeable future. This translates into business opportunities for large and small businesses alike. This also indicates that it is more likely for new entrants to find opportunities where their tourism activity of interest meets significant demand. In order to compete with larger companies, however, TSB owners are advised to find niche markets where they can best serve their customers. Possible markets include mountain trekking activities, historical fort tours, and birdwatching tours.

In regard to specific marketing activities, TSB owners in Oman are required to offer quality personal service since traditional hospitality is part of Omani culture and is arguably becoming expected by tourists. Also, as discussed in section 5.4.1 above,

emphasizing personal service helps TSBs compete against established players in the Omani tourism industry. The study also showed that, especially for the inbound diving market, there is little competition and minimal pricing pressure for current players. However, dive centers and other TSBs in similar positions, are advised to offer reasonable prices to customers because of the effect on perceived core experience and satisfaction levels. Lastly, in regard to Direct Transportation—since Oman does not yet have a strong public transportation system—TSBs need to demonstrate care transporting tourists to attractions.

5.4.3 Recommendations to the Omani Government

Because Oman's government is keen to develop the tourism industry, it should do more to support TSBs. This will help further job creation and economic development in Oman. The government, represented by the Ministry of Tourism, should aid TSBs in areas of regulations, support, and promotion. Firstly, the government should ease barriers to entry by reducing license fees, commercial requirements, and paperwork. In addition, the government should pay close attention to and minimize possible monopolistic tactics by big businesses. Secondly, government should provide financial, training, and marketing intelligence support. Since TSBs lack financial strength, governments can help by providing easy loans or selective grants. TSBs are also not generally strong in marketing intelligence, which is important to understand customer behavior and trends. Thirdly, the government should provide low cost training in areas like customer service and business planning. By doing so, governments could reduce the business knowledge gap between small and large businesses. Lastly, in terms of promotion, the government

could aid TSBs by developing, sponsoring, and managing online portals showcasing small businesses, their services, and contact information. Since the Ministry of Tourism already participates in international travel trade shows, it could provide exhibition spaces for TSBs based on specified criteria.

5.5 Recommendations to Researchers

This study generated about 469 minutes of rich, transcribed interview data. The findings reported led to the TSMARK model and the key theoretical findings. These are the findings that are supported (or grounded) by the collected data and directly related to the purpose, objectives, and research questions of the study. The study also generated other findings that, although not sufficiently grounded in this sample set, provide some direction for model expansion and future studies. In relation to TSMARK, collecting similar data sets from regional and international destinations would build toward a formal TSB marketability model. Despite the special attention given to analyzing theoretically universal constructs, the generalizability of TSMARK would benefit from analyzing TSBs in other destinations. Constructs found in analytical categories relating to seasonality, competition, business alliances, and government role would be better analyzed by studying TSBs in other destinations. The constancy of the effects of these constructs in one destination could limit the ability to draw significant theoretical findings. In addition, future research would also be needed in the area of customer perception. This study did not directly analyze customer perception and, instead, theorized their relevant constructs based on TSBs' owners' reports on customer feedback. Future iterations of the TSMARK model would be strengthened by the analysis of rich

interviews, focus groups, or observations of TSB customers. Analyzing customers' experience and satisfaction would be of particular interest. A third area in need of further research is the relationships between Work Enjoyment, other owner attributes, and a TSB's marketing elements. Though this study provides theoretical suggestions about the relationships between these constructs, a directed collection and analysis of additional data could improvie understanding of the effects and essence of Work Enjoyment in the context of TSBs.

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TM3vjc!/dl3

d3L2dJQSEvUUt3QS9ZQnZ3LzZfT1JRU0ZORTQwMDFLNDBJSUw5OUdGSj

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Tourism Companies in Oman

The latest available information from the Oman Chamber of Commerce's Trade Directory shows a total of 142 registered tour/tourism/travel companies and provides the following numbers according to company types (Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2010). It is clear that these numbers are either outdated or imprecise given that, for example, there is only one diving company listed.

- Diving: 1 company

- Entertainment program organizations: 5 companies

- Gift shops: 6 companies

- Marine leisure: 3 companies

- Sea travel: 2 companies

- Tour operators: 112 companies

- Tourist information: 13 companies

- Total: 142 companies

Appendix B: Restaurants in Oman

Table B.1 Number of Restaurants and Total Branches in Muscat

Restaurant type	Number of restaurants	Additional branches
African	2	0
Cafe	40	23
Far Eastern	20	1
Fast Food	23	35
Indian	35	10
International	41	2
Italian	7	0
Mediterranean	2	0
Mexican	2	0
Middle Eastern	26	9
Pubs	23	0
Steaks and grills	8	4
TOTAL	229	313 (total plus branches)

Appendix C: Educational Institutions in Oman Providing Tourism Programs

1) <u>Sultan Qaboos University (SQU): Tourism Department</u>:

In accordance with SQU's goal of setting high academic and educational standards (Ministry of Information, 2010), and keeping in line with the government's efforts to prepare Omanis to work in the tourism industry, a dedicated academic department for tourism was established in 2001. The Tourism Department has a vision of becoming a leading program in the Gulf region by 2015. Its mission is to provide Oman and the GCC region with qualified personnel in the fields of hospitality, tourism, and tourist-guidance. The department prepares students in three specializations: Hospitality Management, Tourism Management, and Tourism Guidance (Sultan Qaboos University, 2011).

As part of its four-year BA program, the department emphasizes and includes practical training. Students are being trained in Oman's major institutions, tourism companies, and hotels—in addition to institutions in four other countries. Six students are trained in UK hotels for a year, six work in German tourist companies to learn the language, three learn French in France, and about twenty receive training in Dubai of the UAE (al-Sinani, 2008). In addition to these required training programs, students also engage in various extracurricular activities like the annual tourism festival ("SQU Tourism Society holds tourism festival," 2010) and guiding tourists at some of Oman's museums (Naik, 2009).

2) <u>Oman Tourism College (OTC)</u>:

Founded in 2001 by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry's Directorate General of Tourism (now succeeded by the Ministry of Tourism), OTC is a vocational/academic

higher education institution. It was established in cooperation with an Austrian Education Consortium consisting of AEP Education Projects, ITM (International College of Tourism and Management), Austria, IMC-University of Applied Sciences, and Austria and the Salzburg Tourism Schools of the Austrian Chamber of Commerce (Oman Tourism College, 2009). The goal of the program is to prepare students for successful careers as tourism and hospitality professionals. OTC has a large, modern campus with eleven classrooms, thirteen portable cabin classrooms, four computer labs, one learning resource center, three state-of-the-art training kitchens, one bulk kitchen, one multipurpose hall, three convertible restaurants, one banquet hall, changing rooms, equipment storage rooms, two portable cabin simulation rooms, and two portable cabin changing rooms (Oman Tourism College, 2009). OTC offers several streams of hospitality and tourism programs including: tour guiding, culinary services, front office, housekeeping, and Tourism and Hospitality Management (Ministry of Information, 2010). As part of the program, practical training is offered in-house and via industry placement in leading institutions in Oman for 12-16 weeks (Oman Tourism College, 2009).

3) <u>Colleges of Applied Sciences (CAS): Tourism and Hospitality Management Programs</u>:

This nationwide system of colleges under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) aims to assist human resources development by meeting the needs of an increasingly diversified economy. It offers degrees related to the diversification of Oman's economy (Ministry of Information, 2010) by preparing students for jobs in the private sector (Gonzalez et al., 2008). It is distributed throughout the country to contribute to educating and training young Omanis from all regions. Tourism

Management and Hospitality Management were recently introduced as part of the Bachelor of International Business Administration degree. This is a four-year program that includes general requirements, as well as specialized courses and an industrial placement program (Colleges of Applied Sciences, 2009).

4) <u>University of Nizwa</u>:

Established in 2004, the University of Nizwa is one of the first private universities in Oman. The university's mission is to develop positive, goal-oriented leaders who impact the marketplace in a dynamic way. It strives to provide students with problem-solving, critical thinking, and communication skills. As part of the College of of Economics, Management, and Information Systems, a diploma and Bachelor of Arts are offered in the area of Tourism and Recreational Management (University of Nizwa, 2010).

4) <u>German University of Technology in Oman (GUtech): The Department of Sustainable Tourism and Regional Development</u>:

Founded in December of 2006, GUtech is affiliated with RWTH Aachen University, a leading university of technology in Germany. GUtech strives to become a leading university of technology in Oman and the wider region. As part of the Faculty of Economics, The Department of Sustainable Tourism and Regional Development offers a Bachelor of Science degree, enabling graduates to work in many areas. The department's website mentions the following areas: management of regional economic development, management of tourism promotion and development, marketing of cities and regions, organization and coordination of innovative regional development, planning and

assessment of infrastructure development, implementation and management of national

parks, consultancy in location development, administration of regional and national

statistics, supervision of sustainable regional development, and protection of the

environment. As students progress through courses, they can choose between three fields

of specialization: General Regional Management, Regional and Spatial Analysis, or

Tourism Promotion. All BS students conclude their studies with a Bachelor thesis project

(GUTECH, n.d.).

5) <u>National Hospitality Institute (NHI)</u>:

    Established in 1995, NHI has expanded in the last few years. Unlike the above

institutions, NHI is primarily focused on an internationally accredited vocational program

(National Hospitality Institute, 2011).

Appendix D: Brand Oman Logo

Figure D.1 Brand Oman Logo

Appendix E: Preliminary Data Set Questions

Interview questions in the preliminary data set were guided by relevant studies in the literature (Getz & Carlsen, 2005; Tyrrell, 1994; Wanhill, 2000).

1) Why have you started your own business as opposed to working for someone else?

2) Do you feel you have successfully achieved your business goals so far? What made you successful/unsuccessful?

3) How do you market your business to customers (current, potential, targets)? What are some of the techniques you have been using?

4) Are you involved in any cooperative marketing efforts with other TSBs? If so, how much are you benefiting? If not, why not?

5) Are you involved in any cooperative consumer research efforts with other TSBs? If so, how much are you benefiting? If not, why not?

6) Do you feel your current marketing efforts are effective in attracting and sustaining demand for your business? Why or why not?

7) Do you get any financial, informational, or other forms of support from the government? How useful are these to you?

Appendix F: TSB Transportation, Core Product, and Packaging

Table F.1 TSB Transportation, Core Product, and Packaging

Direct transportation and Core product		Diving	Touring	Desert camping
Transport.	Direct	In-house (boat to site)	In-house (car site to site)	In-house (car to site)
	Indirect	Outsourced (from accomm.)	Outsourced (from accomm.)	Outsourced (from accomm.)
Accomm.	Core	-	Outsourced	In-house
	Extended	In-house or outsourced	-	-
Food	Core	-	Outsourced	In-house
	Extended	In-house or outsourced	-	-
Attraction	Core	Diving site	Itinerary attractions	Desert site
Packaging	Core	-	Touring, attrac., accomm., food	-
	Extended: Hospitality & Travel	Air, accomm., food	Air ticket	Air ticket
	Extended: Other tourism product	Touring	Camping, diving, ..	Touring

VITA

VITA

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Tourism marketing, tourism small business marketing, small business marketing, entrepreneurship in tourism, destination image, destination marketing.

EDUCATION

Aug. '07 - Dec. '13   Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana

PhD in Hospitality and Tourism Management

GPA: 3.81/4.0

Aug.'02 - May '04   Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana

MSc in Hospitality and Tourism Management

GPA: 4.0/4.0

Thesis entitlted: An Assessment of the Image of the Sultanate

of Oman among Potential U.S. Travelers

Sep.'97 - Jun. '01   Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

Bachelor of Science in Marketing

GPA: 3.79/4.0

Optional graduation research project on: Purchase decision

making in families

JOURNAL PUBLICATIONS

Al-Azri, H. I., & Cai, L. (2009). Uniqueness of tourism SMEs: Strategic marketing

framework propositions. *Tourism Issues*, *8,* 142-151.

Al-Azri, H. I., & Morrison, A. M. (2006). Measurement of Oman's destination image in

the US. *Tourism Recreation Research, 31*(2), 85–89.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Al-Azri, H. I. (2010, May 15). The ipad: a commercial and marketing lesson. *Alfalaq*,

Retrieved from http://alfalq.com/archives/829

Al-Azri, H. I. (2004). *Feasibility studies in tourism and hospitality*. Book used as a

guide for an undergraduate course. Muscat, Oman: Sultan Qaboos University

Press.

ACADEMIC REVIEWS

Jun. '13   Completed a review of a proposed restructure of a Bachelor

degree program in business (including a Tourism/Hospitality

major) for a higher education institution in Oman

ACADEMIC CONFERENCE PAPERS

Jun. '08   Uniqueness of Tourism SMEs: Strategic Marketing Framework

Propositions

1st International conference on Tourism and Hospitality

Management, Glyfada, Greece

Recognized as one of seven best presented papers

Jan. '07   Towards a Practical Framework of Strategic Tourism Marketing:

The Case of Small & Medium Enterprises in Oman

13th Annual Graduate Education and Graduate Student

Research Conference in Hospitality and Tourism, Orlando,

FL, USA

Jan. '04   The image of Oman in the U.S.

First virtual Conference on Hospitality and Tourism

Management, organized by Purdue University, USA & the

University of Strathclyde, UK

Earned the organizers' award for the best presented paper

SPEECHES, WORKSHOPS, & INDUSTRY CONFERENCES

May '13   Marketing Small Businesses, 1st HRD Conference for SMEs,

organized by Middle-East Management Consultancy, Muscat,

Oman

Apr., 22nd '13   The Future of Event Tourism in the Sultanate of Oman: Realities

and Ambitions [forum], Participated in the discussions alongside

other experts, organized and published by Oman daily

newspaper, Muscat, Oman

Feb. '13   Big Marketing for Small Businesses, 5th SME Exhibition &

Conference, organized by Trifoil, Muscat, Oman

May '06	Basics of Tourism Marketing, Developing skills of workers in the Tourism field [workshop], organized by General Management Institute, Muscat, Oman
Apr. '05	Relationship Marketing, Tourism Awareness Campaign "Tourism Enriches," organized by the Ministry of Tourism, Muscat, Oman
Mar. '05	The Image of Oman, lecture hosted by the Oman Tourism and Hospitality Academy, Muscat, Oman
Dec. '04	Tourism and its Economic and Developmental Roles (co-presented), The Tourism Conference of the Dakhiliya Region, organized by the Ministry of Tourism, Nizwa, Oman

CONFERENCE ORGANIZING

Dec. '12	College of Arts and Social Sciences 2nd International Conference: The Role of Social Sciences in Investigating Contemporary Social Phenomena: Current Approaches and Future Vision
	Served as an administrator of one session
Feb. '06	Oman International Conference on Eco-Tourism, Muscat, Oman
	Member of the scientific committee: contributed in inviting, reviewing, and organizing conference themes
	Participated in formulating conference recommendations
	Served as the reporter of one session

Oct. '01   Symposium on Managing Tourism in Crises, SQU, Muscat, Oman

Supervised students in managing the event

Worked as a reporter of the papers given

WORK EXPERIENCE

Since Sep. '12   Lecturer, Tourism Department, College of Arts and Social

Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University, Sultanate of Oman

Courses currently teaching: Entrepreneurship in Tourism,

Tourism Research, Tourism in Oman

Entrepreneurship in Tourism is introduced by the department

for the first time and uses a discussion-intenive approach

Jun. '04 - May '07   Lecturer, Tourism Department, College of Arts and Social

Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

Courses taught: Tourism Marketing, Tourism Accounting,

Feasibility Studies in Tourism, Tourism Promotion, Tourism

Research, Graduation Project, and Business Communications

Member of the College Board in the 2005/2006 academic year

Oct. '01 - Sep. '02   Demonstrator (TA), Tourism Department, Sultan Qaboos

University, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

Assisted Lecturers: Academically and Administratively

Supervised some students' field trips

Jun. '01	Two weeks training at: DiveCo Dive Center, Muscat
	Designed a customer satisfaction survey
	Observed and gave suggestions about Marketing activities
Jan. '01	One week training at: National Training Institute, Muscat
	Got trained in conducting field market research
	Participated in a customer satisfaction study carried out for a major financial institution in Oman
Aug. '00	Eight weeks training at: Business International Group, Muscat
	Explored information about major new projects in Oman
	Conducted a market scanning study for the company
Aug. '99	Three weeks training at: Muscat Finance Company, Muscat
	Conducted a study about the company's services
	Worked in several departments of the company

CONSULTANCY EXPERIENCE

Since May '12	Serving as a strategy and marketing consultant for Sweet Creations (www.facebook.com/sweetcreationsom), a cake baking and decorating small business, Muscat, Oman

HONORS

Aug. '00	Chosen for an honorary educational and entertaining trip to Malaysia and Singapore for top university students, sponsored by His Majesty the Sultan of Oman

Sep. '00	Chosen as the only student from the College of Commerce and Economics for a University (SQU) trip to Germany

STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS

Jan. '08 - May '12	Member, Muslim Student Association, Purdue University, USA Participated in dialogues and in providing information about Islam to non-Muslims
Nov. '02 - May '04	Member, Muslim Student Association, Purdue University, USA Participated in dialogues and in providing information about Islam to non-Muslims
Jan. '01 - Jun. '01	President, AIESEC (International Association of Students in Economic Sciences and Commerce) in Oman, SQU Participated in efforts to establish a chapter of AIESEC in Oman
Jan. '00 - Jun. '01	Member, Marketing Club, SQU Engaged in educational and entertaining activities