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A review of approaches measuring tourist satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

Satisfaction has been the central research area in consumer behaviour. Particularly in tourism, satisfying tourists promises the success of destinations. Tourists are now seeking for premier experiences at destinations which requires more distinctive tourism products and excellent service quality. Monitoring tourist satisfaction has become more crucial than ever so as for destination managers and stakeholders to plan appropriate strategic development. The study clarifies the concept of visitor satisfaction and how satisfaction is measured in academic practice. This article review, synthesis, and analysis secondary data from previous academic studies. The article begins by providing satisfaction definition, followed by the benefits of achieving customer satisfaction, and finally, the commonly adopted approaches to measure tourist satisfaction is provided. The study focuses on those approaches proposed before the development of internet which data collection process is mainly based on survey. Both merits and demerits of each approach are also discussed.

Key words: *approaches, measure satisfaction, models, tourist satisfaction*

1. Introduction

Tangibility and abstraction are some of the typical characteristics of service (Ceylan & Ozcelik 2016). These features make the service more complicated to assess. Similarly, satisfaction is also a multiple-faced concept influenced by various external and internal factors (Reisinger & Turner, 2003).

Due to the nature of service and satisfaction, measuring tourist satisfaction at a destination is not only based on tourist satisfaction with a particular service, but it is much more complex due to the fact that destinations are combined by many tourism services as well as diverse supporting industries (Truong & Foster, 2006). Satisfaction has been always the heart of business operations. It is a leading indicator for assessing the quality of a destination. Travel destinations and service providers must pay more attention to customer satisfaction in the context of competition and rapid development of technology when people can share their experience with everyone around the world via social networks. Making customer satisfaction is more essential than ever (Confente, 2015; Möhlmann, 2015). Understanding this importance, the article provides an overview of visitor satisfaction and approaches to measure tourist satisfaction.

2. Satisfaction

2.1. Definition

Satisfaction is one of the most crucial research areas in consumer behavior. It plays a vital role in forming development strategies and increasing interest (Anderson, Fornell & Lehmann, 1994). Satisfaction definition has been generated by different scholars. To be specific, Oliver (1997) defines “*Satisfaction is the consumer's fulfilment response. It is a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provides a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfilment*” (p.13). It is also considered as results from a comparison between pre-trip expectation and experience at the destination (Pizam, Neumann & Reichel, 1978). Compared with pre-trip expectation, if the experience provides tourists with the feeling of pleasure, tourists are satisfied (Pizam et al., 1978). Bitner and Hubbert (1994) state that consumer satisfaction is an emotional process after consuming a service. Despite being a basic consumer concept, it is challenging to characterize satisfaction (Zeithaml et al., 2009).

2.2. Benefits of satisfying tourists

From the 1970s, the number of satisfaction studies has increased dramatically (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000). Understanding tourist satisfaction will assist in assessing the effectiveness and quality of tourism products and services at specific destinations (Yoon & Uysal, 2005) and help improve service quality (Danish & Chakraborty, 2019). Admittedly, satisfaction and loyalty determine the success of the destination.

Customer satisfaction brings six key competitive advantages as illustrated in Figure 1 below. In the context of tourist destinations, they can also achieve these competitive advantages through satisfying tourists with their qualified services.

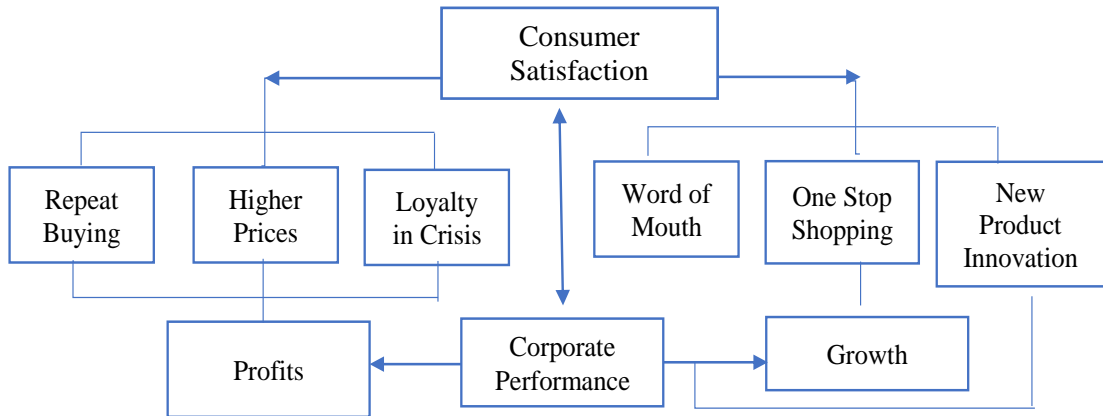


Figure 1. Six key competitive advantages by achieving consumer satisfaction (Sheth, 2001)

Several tourist satisfaction studies have found that the higher level of satisfaction is, the more likely tourists will return the destinations and the better they will tell with their acquaintances which is accepted as free advertisement (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Yu & Goulden, 2006). In addition, satisfaction also provides destinations with financial advantages in other different ways. For example, satisfied tourists have larger spending during their vacations because they are willing to try more products and services in higher prices (Wang & Davidson, 2010). Importantly, understanding level of tourist satisfaction and the major factors which tourists satisfied or unsatisfied help destination managers and stakeholders take proactive actions in adjusting the marketing campaigns and tourism products as well as form more suitable development strategies.

3. Methodology

To carry out this study, previous studies in the same research area is synthesized and analysed content in a systematic manner. The electric articles about consumer behaviour, satisfaction, and approaches measuring tourist satisfaction were chosen from reliability journals. These published articles from professional journals were emphasized to ensure the quality and reliability of the content. Then, the selected articles were analyzed according to the guidelines of content analysis which is an instrumental tool to make sense of satisfaction concept, benefits of satisfying tourists, and approaches measuring tourist satisfaction. The writers synthesized the opinions of those scholars and tourism experts for easily capturing the major merits and demerits of each approach. The findings of the analysis is to draw an overview in what satisfaction is and how it has been measured in academic.

4. Measuring satisfaction

Despite being a basic consumer concept, it is challenging to characterize satisfaction (Zeithaml et al., 2009). There have been different approaches introduced, such as Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory, Importance-Performance Theory, Equity Theory,

Attribution Theory... A common aspect of these theories is that they consider satisfaction as a concept which is measured in relation with other feature, for instance value, expectation, experiences and the like.

It is worth noting that there are other approaches to access satisfaction, which will not be mentioned in this research. The methods discussed in this article are approaches that were developed before the age of the Internet and Web 2.0. The application of these methods usually requires data collection through surveying tourists using questionnaire instruments.

4.1. Performance-only approach

Among the most popular theories employed to measure satisfaction, the performance-only approach was first developed by Cronin and Taylor (1992), measures consumer satisfaction, excluding the role of expectation (Churchill & Surprenant, 1982). Without the presence of expectation, consumers are expected to be satisfied when the service performance is at the desired level (Czepiel, Rosenberg, & Akerele, 1974). Empirical studies have supported the performance-only approach in its reliability and validity compared to other approaches, including disconfirmation and expectation-performance in which expectation is involved. This approach shows its best in assessing future consumer behavior and overall satisfaction (Prakash, 1984). In the tourism and hospitality industry context, performance-approach provides a higher correlation in investigating tourist satisfaction in festival tourism (Crompton & Love, 1995). Nevertheless, some scholars have debated applying this approach in highlighting the significance of expectation (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). They assert that it cannot find out whether expectation or performance is higher and how their relationship is.

4.2. Expectation-performance approach

The expectation-performance approach proposes evaluating the disparity between expected serviced and perceived service performance (Pizam et al., 1978). Consumers may have some information on the products or services before they consume the products, and they are likely to have their expectations about how the actual products or services will perform. The consumers then re-assess the difference between the performance and their prior expectations (Kozak, 2001). Consumers are supposed to be satisfied when the performance meets or exceeds their expectations and conversely. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1994) claim that it is beneficial to measure expectation and performance separately and compare them by period. This helps service providers follow and update consumer perception of services quality to improve where needed.

4.3. Importance-performance approach

On the basic adaption from the expectation-performance approach, the importance-performance approach, proposed by Martilla and James (1977), recommends four conditions of expectation and performance encompassing "high expectation-high performance," "low expectation-low performance," "low expectation-high performance," and "low expectation-low performance" (Olshavsky & Miller 1972). The key target of this

approach is to find out which attributes are acknowledged as important to consumers and how these attributes perform. Consumers are asked to rate the importance of destination attributes and their influence on consumers' destination choices. Poor performance of destination important attributes may affect badly on the destination itself. Four cases are showing the correlation between the levels of importance and performance (Ryan, 1995). First, high importance and low performance show that important attributes are considered as absent in the destination. Second, low importance and low performance indicate that unimportant attributes are admitted as not present in the destination. Third, high importance and high performance refer to the presence of important attributes in the destination. Finally, low importance and low performance imply that unimportant attributes are perceived to be presented at the destination. The merits of applying the importance-performance approach have proved its significance in marketing development and strategies implications for destination planners and managers (Martilla & James, 1977). The importance-performance approach has played a critical role in assessing consumer satisfaction with specific products or vacation experiences in any area (Kozak, 2002).

When IPA is applied, a destination marks tourist ratings of importance and performance in the quadrant model illustrated in Figure 4. This method provides destination managers with an insight view of which destination attributes satisfying tourists and which unsatisfying tourists. This helps the management and development strategies focus on important resources. For example, in Figure 2, the attributes in Quadrant A are failed to satisfy tourists, but these attributes are important to the tourists. Destination attributes in Quadrant D perform good, but they are not very significant to visitors. Destination managers, thus, need immediately to change their strategies to enhance the performance of attributes in Quadrant and destination resources should be moved from Quadrant D to Quadrant A to support these strategies.

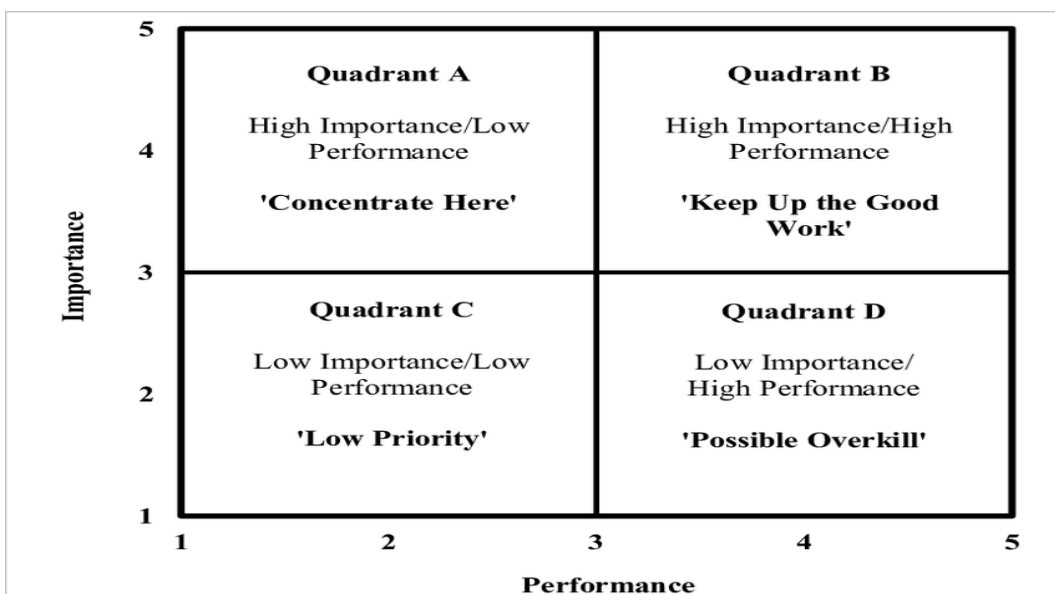


Figure 2. An example of Importance-Performance Grid (Pires and Fernandes 2015)

4.4. Expectancy Disconfirmation Approach

Among satisfaction measurements, the Expectancy Disconfirmation theory (Oliver, 1980) is widest accepted because of its applicability in general and particularly in tourist satisfaction measured by the gap between expectation before trip and perception after trip (Chen & Chen, 2010; Huh et al., 2006; Huh & Uysal, 2004; Pizam & Milman, 1993). According to the Expectancy Disconfirmation approach (Oliver 1980), consumers buy products and services with their expectations about how well the products and services perform. If the products and services performance meet their prior expectation, it will be a confirmation. Conversely, if the performance is lower their expectation, disconfirmation will occur (Churchill & Surprenant, 1982; Oliver, 1980).

The Expectancy Disconfirmation approach has been applied in various research fields. Specifically, this theory is used to measure student satisfaction in the education sector (Franklin & Shemweli, 1995) and in the public service (Ryzin, 2013). Especially, in the tourism industry, this theory is widely applied in tourist satisfaction research, explaining the difference between pre-trip expectations and post-trip perceptions (Chen & Chen, 2010; Huh & cs., 2006; Huh & Uysal, 2004; Pizam & Milman, 1993).

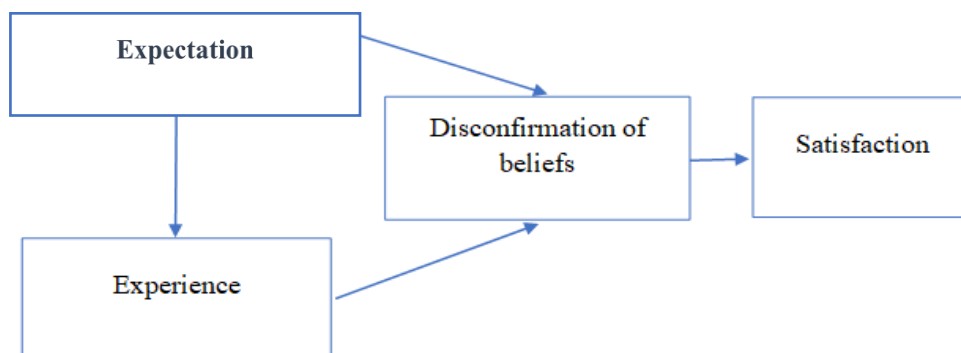


Figure 3. The Expectancy Disconfirmation Model (Oliver, 1980)

4.5. SERQUAL and HOLSAT model

Accordingly, with four theories used to measure satisfaction, four models are regularly utilized, including the SERVQUAL model based on the expectation-performance model, the importance-performance model, the expectancy disconfirmation model, and the SERVPERF model based on Performance-only theory (Kozak, 2001). SERQUAL is combined from SERVICE and QUALITY. SERVQUAL is developed by Parasuraman and his colleagues (Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1988, 1991b, 1991a; Parasuraman et al. 1985, 1994) based on the gap between consumer expectation and the actual perception of service quality. Initially, there were ten constructs to assess this gap: reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding/ knowing, and tangibles (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

Parasuraman team then combines ten dimensions into five, which are tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy with 22 attributes (Ladhari, 2009; Parasuraman et al., 1988) which are characterized as follows (Figure 4):

1. Tangibles: physical evidence of physical facilities, equipment, and personnel
2. Reliability: consistency and reliability of the promised services performance
3. Responsiveness: willingness and readiness of staff in providing services
4. Assurance: politeness, respect, and consideration, and friendliness of contact personnel
5. Empathy: caring and attention of the firm providers to its consumers.”

According to this model, consumers perceive service quality as terrible when their perception is lower their expectation, the service quality is good when there is equality between their expectation and perception, and the service quality is perceived as excellent when the perception is higher than the expectation (McCollin et al., 2011).

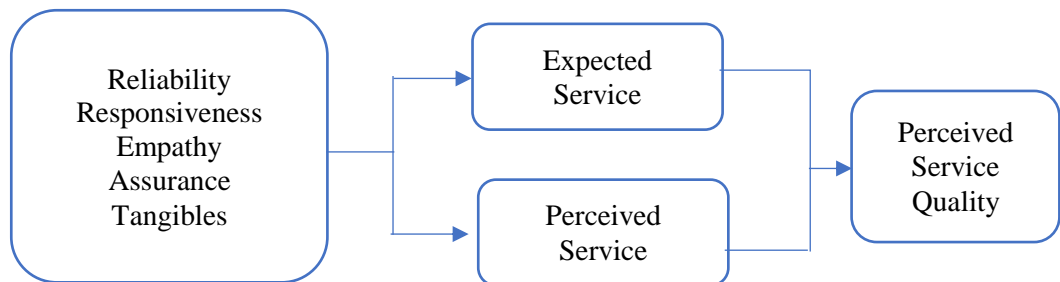


Figure 4. SERQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1988)

SERVQUAL has been popularly employed by both researchers and stakeholders from various economic fields in a diverse corner of the world (Akama & Kieti, 2003; Wu & Ko, 2013). Particularly, in hotel industry, the SERVQUAL was exploited to evaluate service quality of hotels in Mauritius (Ramsaran-Fowdar, 2007), in Taiwan (Wu & Ko, 2013), in the Republic of Serbia (Blešić et al., 2014), China (Lee et al., 2016), e-service quality of hotel (Carrasco et al., 2017). Besides, the SERVQUAL model has also been used to assess the service quality in different service providers local authority operation (Donnelly et al., 1995), nature-based tourism (Akama & Kieti, 2003), information technology provider (Badri, Abdulla, & Al-Madani, 2005), education (Smith et al., 2007), banking (Aghdaie & Faghani, 2012), as well as medical (Purcărea, Gheorghe & Petrescu, 2013).

Based on the theoretical foundation of SERVQUAL, Tribe and Snaith propose HOLSAT (Holiday Satisfaction) to evaluate tourist satisfaction with a particular tourism destination, not solely a specific service sector (Tribe & Snaith, 1998). The HOLSAT model determines which are positive attributes and which are negative ones based on the mean difference values between tourist expectation and experience (Tribe & Snaith, 1998). These values are demonstrated on a matrix where has a 45⁰ Draw line. If the experience of attributes is higher than expectation, those lie in the "Win" sector or positive attributes. Conversely, the mean value of experience is smaller than expectation, the

attributes belong to the "Loss" part, which are considered as negative attributes (Meimand, Khalifah & Hakemi, 2013). Other than that, those attributes having equal mean values of expectation and experience are acknowledged as "Draw" ones.

There are some aspects in which HOLSAT overwhelms other models in evaluating tourist satisfaction. To be specific, HOLSAT detects both pre-trip expectation and actual trip experience in assessing tourist satisfaction while SERVPERF concentrates solely on performance (Cronin & Taylor, 1994), or the relationship of service performance and quality in SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Zeithaml et al., 1990), or the relationship of attribute performance with its importance in importance-performance evaluation (Martilla & James, 1977). One other merit of HOLSAT is that this model does not use a fixed set of attributes for all service providers like SERVQUAL, but it considers comprehensively multifaceted elements of the destination (Carman, 1990). Taking this advantage, researchers can study tourist satisfaction with destinations in a holistic view and focus on those attributes that previous studies have not stressed.

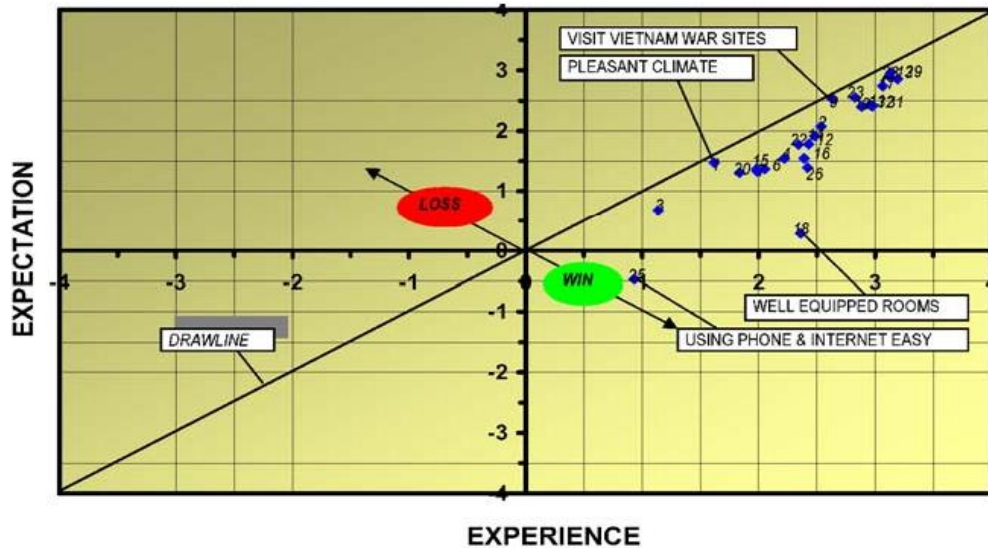


Figure 5. HOLSAT model of Australian holidaymakers in Vietnam (Truong and Foster 2006)

The first study that employed the HOLSAT model was done by Tribe and Snaith (1998), conducted in Varadero, Cuba, in their research process to develop the HOLSAT model. The study concentrated on six dimensions: physical resort and facilities; ambience, restaurants, bars, shops, and nightlife; transfers; heritage and culture and accommodation. Another well-known study using the HOLSAT model is completed by Truong and Foster (2006) in Vietnam, which assesses tourist satisfaction from Australia in the case of Vietnam with 33 destination attributes classified in Attractions, Activities, Amenities, Accommodation and Accessibility (Figure 5). Additionally, the HOLSAT model was also found in other imperial studies of Sukiman, Omar, Muhibudin, Yussof and Mohamed (2013); Meimand, Khalifah and Hakemi (2013); and group of researchers Omar, Paisar, Mohamed and Abukhalifeh (2017).

5. Conclusion

Understanding satisfaction is very essential because satisfaction provides destination as well as service providers more business opportunities, better financial benefits, and greater competitiveness. This understanding is even more vital in the rapid development of technology and changing consumer behavior.

Satisfaction is the consumer's cognitive and emotional assessment from their experience. It is a multifaceted concept that is compared with many other features by the customers and tourists (e.g. pre-trip expectation, values, importance, and service performance). The abstract and dynamic nature of satisfaction and the complex of services at destinations give the difficulty and variety in how it is evaluated for tourist destinations. A number of approaches to measure satisfaction are introduced above for destination managers and stakeholders to choose from depending on which aspect of services and destination they want to study about. Despite technology advancement which support people to share experience and photos on various travel websites and social networks, the survey-based data collection still shows its valid and effectiveness. In short, a destination managers and business providers need to choose an appropriate tool to study customer satisfaction. This method needs the best cost and time savings as well as to be able to provide reliable information for strategic planning and management.

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