

A Conceptual Model of Tourist Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is a rapidly growing business that receives global attention. Successful tourism business will offer many benefits to the host countries. Although Malaysia's tourism industry is fast expanding, studies on satisfaction in the tourism context are still limited. Hence, conducting more satisfaction research in the Malaysian tourism context is vital. In this paper, three factors related to satisfaction namely service quality, value and experience are discussed. Previous studies only show direct relationship between these three constructs on satisfaction creation. However, based on comprehensive literature review, it is believed interactions of these constructs can be more complex and not limited to a one-to-one direct relationship. This paper puts forward a conceptual framework which describes how satisfaction can be influenced directly and indirectly by the three above-mentioned variables.

Keywords: Satisfaction, value, service quality, experience and tourism

INTRODUCTION

Studies on satisfaction have received much attention and focus in order to understand the concept (satisfaction) better. Even though studies on satisfaction have been

conducted across industries, very few studies have focused on Malaysian tourism. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Malaysia's travel and tourism industry have been increasing continuously (WTTC, n.d.), hence illustrating the potential of expansion, which will be of significance for the country's economic development. Successful tourism business will provide greater revenue and profits to the host countries especially those with abundant resources. Therefore, understanding the factors that affect tourist satisfaction is

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 13 March 2015

Accepted: 9 November 2015

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important, especially in countries where tourism contributes substantially to the economy. Thus, more studies need to be carried out to achieve higher tourist satisfaction level; the latter is key to higher revisit rate and revenue to the country.

Studies have indicated good service quality, value and experience enhance tourist satisfaction. For instance, Zakaria, Hamid, Karim and Daud (2009) discovered service quality impacts on tourist satisfaction which was consistent with the findings of the study conducted by Žabkar, Brenčič Dmitrović (2009) at four tourist destinations in Slovenia while Ali (2015) looked at a case study of Malaysian Resort Hotels. A study conducted by Lai and Chen (2010) has discovered the direct and positive association between value and satisfaction. Similar findings were reported in Gallarza, Saura and Moreno's (2013) study on student leisure trips and Song, Lee, Park, Hwang and Reisinger (2014), who studied Korean tourist satisfaction in the context of temple stays have provided empirical evidence that value has an impact on tourist satisfaction. Chen and Chen's (2010) were successful in identifying a positive relationship between experience and tourist satisfaction in the heritage setting. The link between experience and satisfaction has been reported by Quadri-Felitti and Fiore (2013) and Song, Ahn and Lee (2014) in their study on wine tourism and mega events respectively.

Nevertheless, those studies examined these three factors separately. Indeed, the relationship between experience, value and

service quality and satisfaction can be as simple as one-to-one direct relationship or more complex. This is because in the real world, the factors generally do not stand alone but function cooperatively in explaining the formation of satisfaction. For instance, according to the perspective of Stimulus-Organism-Responses (SOR), the above-mentioned constructs are connected. For that reason, a study that adopted SOR concept as the foundation of model construction was conducted in order to understand tourist satisfaction in a holistic manner.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses the fundamental model of the suggested framework. Next, the following subsection explains concepts and definitions of the study's variables. Furthermore, the theoretical background of the study and a review of earlier studies will be discussed.

The Stimulus-Organism-Responses (SOR) model was developed to explain the effects of the service environment on consumer behaviour. The SOR model suggested the environment stimuli affect the emotional states of consumers, and thus, lead to the display of approach-avoidance behaviour. The concept introduced in SOR model is applicable to link the four variables discussed in this paper.

A series of consumptions, engagements and socialisations process at the destination during the trip have exposed tourists to different environment stimuli such as sight, scenery, crowdedness, servicescape. These

stimuli subsequently form the tourist's experience and influence the level of perceived service quality. Meanwhile, the experience and service quality derived from the destination's environment clues are deemed appropriate to substitute the stimulus factors as suggested in the SOR model.

After receiving environment clues that form experience and influence the level of perceived service quality, the organism (tourist in this study) will evaluate whether they are pleased with that experience and services received. The tourist's perceived value evaluation, which is partly derived from the emotion or the mood (Song, Lee *et al.*, 2014), denote the organism stage this circumstance. Finally, the approach behaviour expected in the SOR model can be represented by the concept of satisfaction. This means that if tourists have a good experience and perceives the service quality as positive, they are pleased and satisfied. Consequently, four major concepts discussed in this paper could be connected to the adoption of the concepts introduced in the SOR model.

Definition of Concepts

The definition of the term 'tourist' could be seen from different perspectives. Based on the analysis from various viewpoints on the definition of "tourist", some characteristics were found to be similar. These characteristics included movement, overnight stay for a short period not more than one year, not their usual environment, the purpose and activities of travelling

(McIntosh, Goeldner, & Ritchie, 1995; UNWTO, 1995; Horner & Swarbrooke, 1996).

Satisfaction refers to how much a person likes or dislikes a product or service after consumption (Woodside, Frey, & Daly, 1989) or a response to the perceived inconsistency between expectations and perceived performance (Oliver, 1980, 1981; Tze & Wilton, 1988; Hoffman & Bateson, 2006, 2011). In short, in this paper, satisfaction refers to the tourist's feeling of like or dislike pertaining to their visit.

Service quality relates to meeting customer requirements via service delivered (Chakrabarty *et al.*, 2007). Generally, it is widely accepted that service quality depends on the degree of the actual service performance to meet customer needs and expectation (Grönroos, 1990; Asher, 1996; Presbury *et al.*, 2005). In this paper, service quality refers to tourist evaluation of the services rendered during the trip.

The second variable is value which refers to the consumer's overall assessment of perceptions of what is received and what is given (Zeitheml, 1988; Zeitheml *et al.*, 2013). McDougall and Levesque defined value as "benefits received relative to costs" (2000, p.393). In short, value can be viewed as the overall sacrifices incurred in relation to benefits received (Buzzell & Gale, 1987; Monroe, 1991) by the tourists during the trip.

Apart from service quality and value, the third variable that may explain satisfaction is experience which is the collection point where the parties exchange

sensory stimuli, information, and emotion (Robinette *et al.*, 2001). There are two common threads that describe experience - the first is where experience requires the engagement by a person and the second is where experience is internal in nature, and hence, unique (Knutson & Beck, 2003). Quality of experience could be used in describing the emotional outcome from consumer involvement in the activities (Otto & Ritchie, 1996). In this paper, experience is related to the tourist internal outcome of the trip.

The Service Quality, Value and Satisfaction Relationship

Service quality is a major factor related to satisfaction creation which can be seen in earlier studies (e.g. Spreng & Mackoy, 1996; Murray & Howat, 2002; González *et al.*, 2007; Lai & Chen, 2010; Lee, 2013). According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985), satisfaction level is influenced by the gap between service perception and expectation. For instance, a better fit between service perceptions and service performance will reduce the gap, leading to higher quality of service and consequently higher satisfaction (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985; Parasuraman, *et al.*, 1994; Asher, 1996; Ekinici, 2004). Disconfirmation theory supports the gap's view, meaning that when perceptions meet or exceed quality expectation, positive disconfirmation is formed and the customer is satisfied. Otherwise, the customer is dissatisfied, suggesting a negative disconfirmation when perceived quality is lower than expected.

Value is also seen as a factor influencing satisfaction (Patterson & Spreng, 1997; Woodruff, 1997; Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998; Lai & Chen, 2010; Clemes *et al.*, 2011). Satisfaction is an emotional reaction to the difference between what customers anticipate and what they receive regarding the fulfilment of some needs, goals or desire (Hansemark & Albinson, 2004; Namukasa, 2013). Therefore, it is reasonable to think that when the benefits a person receives are equal to or exceed what he/she sacrifices, the person will feel satisfied. On the other hand, if a sacrifice is higher than the benefit gained, the person will feel dissatisfied.

In addition, research findings also indicate that value is highly affected by perceived quality (Cronin *et al.*, 2000; Razavi *et al.*, 2012; Gera, 2013). The relationship between service quality and value can best be explained by adapting the utility perspective, in which the value is related to what a person gives up (cost) and what they receive (benefit) (McDougall & Levesque, 2000; Peter & James, 2013a, 2013b). Price and service quality are two main antecedents of perceived value (Duman & Mattila, 2005; Peter & James, 2013a, 2013b). It is important to note that superior quality is always priced higher (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2013) and therefore, perceived quality positively influences value, while price affects value negatively (Duman & Mattila, 2005; Lai *et al.*, 2009; Alireza *et al.*, 2011).

Some researchers (e.g. Bolton & Drew, 1991; Woodruff, 1997) have suggested that service quality is one of the factors that

affect value level, which in turn affects satisfaction level (Kandampully, 2006). Hence, service quality seems to influence the value creation first before it impacts on satisfaction level (Oliver, 1997; Woodruff, 1997; McDougall & Levesque, 2000). In addition, Sheth *et al.* (1991) suggested that value mediates the relationship between service quality and satisfaction and this view is supported in subsequent studies (e.g. Cronin *et al.*, 2000; Murray & Howat, 2002; Malik, 2012). When service quality influences satisfaction indirectly through value, it is reasonable to assume that value plays a mediator role in the relationship between service quality and satisfaction. Based on the above discussion, the first proposition is shown in Fig.1.

The Relationship between Experience, Value and Satisfaction

Studies have indicated relationships between experience and satisfaction (e.g. Hoffman & Bateson, 2006; Chen & Chen, 2010; Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2013). Today’s customers do not merely purchase or consume services to satisfy their physical or intellectual needs. They are, instead, seeking something new or more to fulfil their different and ever increasing needs (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

Hence, customer evaluation and satisfaction relate to their sense and response while consuming a service (Otto & Ritchie, 1996); that is, the “experience” that meets today’s consumer needs (Otto & Ritchie, 1996; Pine & Gilmore, 1999, Chang & Horng, 2010). Also, consumers demonstrate a sense of satisfaction when they encounter good service experience, which is a particular type of approach suggested in the approach and the avoidance theory (Donavan & Rossiter, 1982; Hoffman & Bateson, 2006). Thus, experience and satisfaction are correlated.

It was also found that experience and value are correlated (Bitner, 1992; Orsingher & Marzocchi, 2003; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). The experience encountered will influence the evaluation on benefits (Prentice *et al.*, 1998), which is the major element that positively improves the value perceived, subsequently, experience’s quality could be said to have an influence over perceived value. Moreover, the study of value chain management suggested that every point in the experience may potentially create value for the customer (Ron, 1992). Values created from each experience together sum up perceived value and thus, support the statement that value is affected by the experiences.

Proposition 1: Service quality has an impact on tourist satisfaction creation through value.

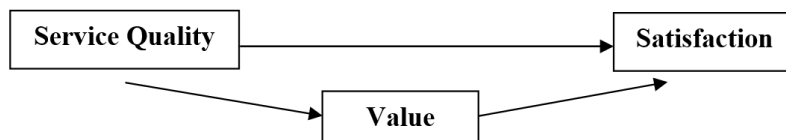


Fig.1: Value as mediator between Service Quality and Satisfaction

Carpenter (2008) suggested that satisfaction is the outcome of consumer judgment on value perceived derived from experience. Thus, rather than direct influence, experience seems to manipulate satisfaction indirectly through value. According to the findings by Chen and Chen (2010) who studied heritage tourists, the direct effect of the experience quality towards value is reported to be greater than the effect of experience quality on satisfaction. Their study also indicated quality of experience influenced satisfaction level more than value does. When experience appears as the major contributor to satisfaction level and value as the alternative factor, this establishes the mediator effect of value in the experience-satisfaction relationship. Chen and Chen (2010) further indicated the mediator effect of value although this particular aspect was not emphasised in their study. A recent research conducted by Song *et al.*, (2014) however, has empirically demonstrated that value mediates experience-satisfaction relationship in the context of temple stays.

After considering the direct and indirect relationships between experience, value and satisfaction, it is clear there is a mediator role of value in the relationship between

experience and satisfaction. Hence, the second proposition is as shown in Fig.2.

THE SUGGESTED FRAMEWORK

Based on the discussion in previous section, taking into account the service quality and experience together and the role of value as a mediator, a model has been developed and illustrated in Figure 3. When integrated, experience and service quality are two important factors that contribute to satisfaction directly and indirectly through value. Thus, improvement in service quality and/or experience influences perceived value which has an impact on tourist satisfaction. The interaction of these factors can be seen in the SOR concept discussed earlier. However, the relationships shown in Figure 3 are not sufficient to explain the clear link between these variables when the interaction between service quality and experience is neglected. Hence, further study that attempts to bridge the gap between these variables is required.

Literature review suggested the need to explore the relationship between experience and service quality which has been neglected in earlier studies. Some researchers have

Proposition 2: Experience has impact on tourist satisfaction creation through value.

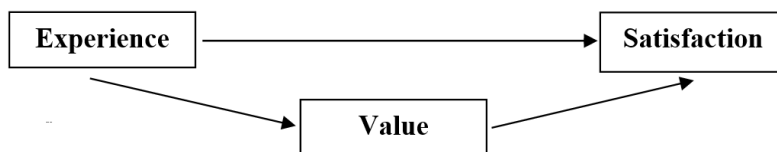


Fig.2: Value as mediator between Experience and Satisfaction

suggested that evaluation on quality does not require customer experience (Oliver, 1980; Caruana, Money & Berthon, 2000). Hence, direct relationship between experience and service quality is not supported. However, indirect relationship may exist because both service quality and experience contribute to the creation of value as well as satisfaction.

After taking into consideration the relationships between all these four constructs, this paper further explores the role of service quality as a moderator between experience and satisfaction by adopting the Kano's philosophy. The Kano Model of Customer Satisfaction classifies product attributes based on how they are perceived by customers and to what extent a product attributes or functions meet customer requirements which are linked to customer satisfaction; this is supported by Utility theory. From the view of economics, utility is the measure of satisfaction, which is related to the greatest happiness gained, where one seeks the highest benefits in relation to what they have sacrificed. Also, the utility concept discovered that not every single customer affords to or seeks premium quality of services because price is the

determinant of the level of quality in most of the time. Some customers seek the highest quality possible with the amount they are willing or can afford to pay. Summing up these perspectives, the demands of the level of the quality of services vary in different customer market segments. Therefore, Kano's philosophy supported by utility theory will illustrate how customers from different markets weigh the importance of service quality differently.

There are two possibilities for service quality to perform the moderator effect in the relationships shown in Fig.3: a) moderate the relationship between experience and value; b) moderate the relationship between value and satisfaction. However, bearing in mind the service quality-value-satisfaction relationship discussed in previous section, service quality is indicated as the antecedent variable of value and appears to affect value before it has impact on satisfaction level. For this reason, we suggest that service quality moderates the relationship between experience and value foremost with an impact on satisfaction level later. The second possibility, however, is not examined in this paper due to the above-mentioned reason.

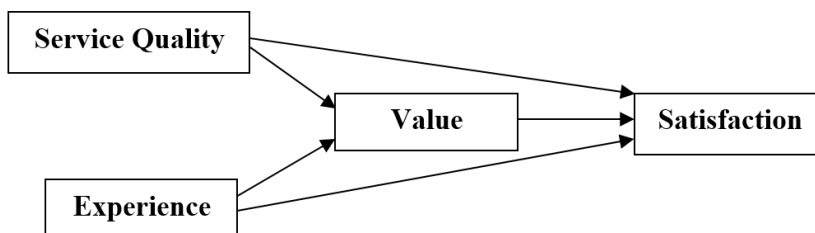


Fig.3: The role of value as mediator

The different role of service quality can be associated with the KANO model. Generally, KANO classified the product attributes into three categories: threshold, performance and excitement attributes (see “Kano Model Analysis”, (Dodson, 2010). Indeed, Kano analogy application is not limited to goods/products only but is also relevant in the context of tourism services. By assuming similar experience level, service quality has a different role with different tourist groups that affect value and satisfaction level.

Normally, service quality is a “must” element in the luxury goods and services market. The absence of high service quality will result in low value creation and lower satisfaction accordingly. Nevertheless, the presence of high service quality will not raise value and satisfaction. For high-end tourists who are willing to pay extra for good and services like five star hotels, first class cabin seat and others luxury services, high service quality is a must. These up-market tourists expect high quality services for the price they pay. Consequently, when quality of services appears as the threshold attribute for tourists in high-end market, it can be expected the latter can become dissatisfied when quality of service does not meet their expectation. However, higher service quality does not automatically enhance the value and satisfaction level (Högström, Rosner, & Gustafsson, 2010).

However, in the context of medium-priced goods and services, service quality may be categorised as the performance feature. Under this circumstance, the higher

the service quality, the higher the value derived from experience and the level of satisfaction subsequently. Tourists in this group are willing to spend a moderate amount during their trip such as business class cabin and three star hotels among others. With the amount they spent, they expect to receive a certain level of service quality. That is, if middle class tourists view service quality as a performance attribute, the tourists are satisfied if the quality of services perceived meet their expectation, but become dissatisfied when the quality of services failed to meet their expectation (Högström, *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, the higher the quality of services perceived, the higher the level of value and satisfaction created (Högström, *et al.*, 2010).

Alternatively, in the discounted or low-priced products and services market, service quality may function as an excitement attribute. In this market, consumer sensitivity on price is greater. To get the utility provided by low prices, consumers have to give up the disutility inherent in quality as a sacrifice. Therefore, presenting high service quality concurrent with low-priced service is expected to enhance the value derived from experience and level of satisfaction subsequently. In the context of tourism, this applies to budget travellers and backpackers for whom price is a major concern. As long as the price is cheap, they are willing to give up high service quality. Nevertheless, if service providers are able to perform good services at low price, it is expected to increase the perceived value and satisfaction level of these tourists.

Service quality affects the level of value and satisfaction in different ways when the customer weighs the importance of service quality differently. This point of view appears reasonable. Kano (2001, cited in Högström, *et al.*, 2010) claimed that an effective service attribute is dynamic and fluid. When the importance of service quality appears to be varied across different customer markets, the impact of experience on the creation of value and satisfaction is different for high level and low level service quality which suggests that service quality may be a good moderator that influences experience related to value and satisfaction.

Thus, we could say that when service quality interacts with experience, it is expected to alter the strength of association between experience and value, which in turn influences satisfaction level. The effect of service quality on this relationship is expected to be significant because service quality has been proven to affect value positively (Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998; Cronin *et al.*, 2000; Lai *et al.*, 2009). Based

on the above arguments, a third proposition is proposed as shown in Fig.4.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this paper, review of the literature provides the basis for the development of a conceptual model in understanding how the concept of satisfaction can be explained by experience, value and service quality directly and indirectly. Even though the model suggested has yet to be empirically tested, the discussion of the relationships and interactions between the constructs studied in this paper will be of significance to academicians and service providers to understand related theories in the field of quality management and consumer behaviour especially in the tourism context.

From the academic point of view, the discussions in this study will enrich the knowledge in satisfaction literature, particularly tourist satisfaction. Based on literature review, the present author believes the interactions of service quality, value, experience and satisfaction could

Proposition 3: The service quality received during the trip moderates the relationship between tourist experience and value, which in turn, influences the level of satisfaction.

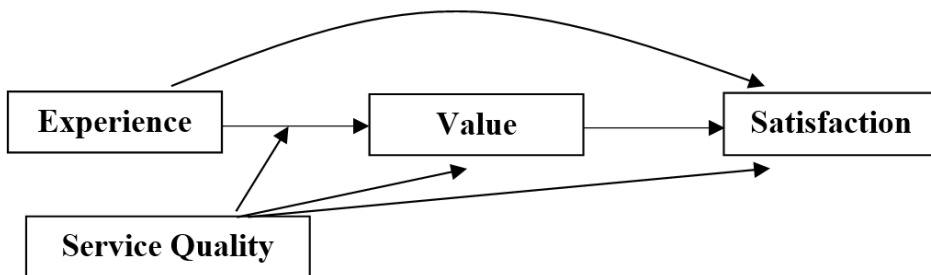


Fig.4: The suggested framework

be more complex and not limited to a one-to-one relationship. The role of value as a mediator in service quality-satisfaction relationship and experience-satisfaction relationship were also discussed. Indeed, adopting service quality as a moderator in satisfaction research is a new attempt to gain better understanding on satisfaction creation. Hence, the discussion in this paper that examined the interactions of experience, value and service quality on satisfaction creation conceptually will open new directions for future research.

From the business perspective, future studies are expected to present better and practical solutions in increasing customer satisfaction level. Satisfaction is the key in creating and sustaining good service in the service provider-customer relationship. Better understanding of satisfaction creation is crucial and thus, clarifying the factors related to satisfaction and the interactions between these factors is important. The discussion and the framework proposed in this study provides tourism service providers a guide to design and cater products and services that meet today's tourist needs and wants. This study has identified three vital factors that affect tourist satisfaction i.e. experience, value and service quality. The complex interaction between these constructs were reviewed and discussed. Based on the discussion in this study, it is suggested that in order to increase tourist satisfaction, tourism service providers should first start constructing a tourism environment that is able to create positive tourism experience and increase quality of

services which enhance tourist's perceived value and satisfaction level. The importance of service quality appears to vary across different tourist markets. Therefore, based on the degree of importance of the services from different market segment perspectives, tourism service providers can effectively allocate their limited resources in order to achieve the highest customer value and satisfaction.

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