

## The Favorable Consequence of Emotional Satisfaction in Service Encounters: An Evidence from Tourism

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### ABSTRACT

This paper was aimed to consider the relationships among the construct of service quality, emotional satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. It also looked for developing and testing a conceptual model of these constructs in the tourism industry. The authors proposed a conceptual model and developed a measurement by reviewing the relevant literature. The data used in the analyses was collected from respondents to a survey questionnaire. The conceptual model was tested by Structural Equation Modeling and the findings indicate that service quality positively related to both emotional satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Also, emotional satisfaction positively related to behavioral intentions. Future studies should consider these relationships in other service contexts. This study developed a measurement of service quality, emotional satisfaction, and behavioral intentions, and also provides insights into the role of emotional satisfaction in the tourism industry, in that it has contributed in predicating behavioral intentions.

**KEY WORDS:** Service Quality; Emotional Satisfaction; Behavioral Intentions; SERVPERF, Tourism.

### INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, interest in service quality and its' consequences have been raised in the context of tourism. Superior service quality enables a firm to gain a sustainable, competitive advantage and enhance their efficiency. The positive consequences of superior service quality include: increased customer satisfaction [1, 2, 3], loyalty [4, 5], positive word of mouth [4, 6], recommendations to others [4], revisit intention [7], stay more [4], and pay more [4, 5] in customer behavior contexts. Despite the importance of service quality, literature in this matter has some limitations: a somewhat cognitive-only aspect of its' construct has been considered and studies around the role of emotions in predicating behavioral intentions is not considerable [8, 9], and it is not clear that if service quality itself has an indirect effect on behavioral intentions [1, 10] or if it has both direct and indirect influences on behavioral intentions [11, 12, 13].

There is a general consensus that tourism services are complex, and that any element can contribute to the success or failure of a service. Subsequently, measuring the perceived service quality in this field requires suitable measures that spot these elements.

With regards to aforesaid descriptions, in this study, in accordance with the literature, the hypothesis was postulated in relation to constructs and then a conceptual model was proposed. Afterward, there was an attempt to develop a measure by collecting and then extracting items related to each construct. Finally, the conceptual model and the relationships among constructs were tested.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

In competitive environments customers do not buy a service to be nice; instead they buy because the service and related quality of the service offer the best perceived value-to-resource choice available [14]. According to Ginter, the comparative referent is an ideal product, defined as one that possesses ideal levels for all of its' relevant features [15].

Gronroos argues that there are two quality dimensions which are quite different in nature: technical quality which answers the question of *what* the customer gets, and functional quality which answers the question of *how* he gets it. The functional quality dimension cannot be evaluated as objectively as the technical dimension. Also, the perceived service is the result of a consumer's view of a bundle of two service dimensions [16].

In order to understand the construct of service quality and its determinants, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, conducted exploratory research and defined service quality as the degree of discrepancy between customers' normative expectations for the service and their perceptions of the service performance [17]. They produced-SERVQUAL- a 22-item scale for measuring service quality along five dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. Several researches based on the pioneering work of Parasuraman et al. were adapted and used to measure the perceived service quality in exclusive contexts [17, 18, 19]. As, MacKay and Crompton developed -REQUAL- a 25-item scale for measuring service quality in recreation and leisure field (fitness, hockey, painting, and trip) in five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy [20].

Some researchers argue that SERVQUAL could not be a generic measure that could be applied to any service [1, 21]. Babakus and Boller also maintain that the dimensionality of service quality may depend on the type of services

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under study [22]. Cronin and Taylor and Teas questioned the validity of SERVQUAL and its derived models [1, 23]. Cronin and Taylor with regards to previous models argue that service quality is conceptualized as "similar to an attitude" and perhaps more information could be generated for managers and researchers' alike if the measurement of the construct conformed to an attitude-based conceptualization. The "adequacy-importance" form is the most efficient model to use if the objective is to predict behavioral intention or actual behavior. Experimental evidence also indicates that the performance dimension alone predicts behavioral intentions and behavior at least as well as the complete model. Therefore, they suggest that only performance perceptions (SERVPERF) are the measurement of service quality [1]. However, the results of some studies indicate that SERVPERF has a better fit for measuring perceived service quality [1, 3]; nonetheless, recent studies do not differentiate between these models [24].

The satisfaction judgment is generally agreed to originate in a comparison between the level of product or service performance, quality, and other outcomes perceived by the consumer with an evaluative standard [25]. Also, emotion is a mental state of readiness that arises from cognitive appraisals of events or thoughts; has a phenomenological tone; is accompanied by physiological processes; is often expressed physically (e.g., in gestures, posture, facial features); and may result in specific actions to affirm or cope with the emotion, depending on its nature and meaning for the person having it [26]. It is unclear whether satisfaction is entirely an emotional construct or whether it is an evaluative judgment that includes an emotional component [9, 26]. Also, it is unclear whether satisfaction is distinct from other positive emotions [26]. Cronin et al. used two sets of items to measure the perceived satisfaction: set of "emotion-based" measures and "evaluative" set of satisfaction measures. The evaluative aspect of the satisfaction judgment is typically assumed to vary along a hedonic continuum from unfavorable (i.e., dissatisfied) to favorable (i.e., satisfied) [11]. In this regard, satisfaction is generally assumed to be a one-dimensional concept [25]. Consumption emotions have been conceptualized as discrete emotions (i.e. joy, interest, surprise, anger, disgust, and contempt), or a general dimension in "positive emotions" and "negative emotions" [25]. Consumption emotions cannot represent only one of many variables that influence satisfaction in certain contexts whereas emotions experienced by consumers account for the greater part of service evaluation in other contexts [27].

As mentioned previously, there is a positive relationship between perceived service quality and satisfaction [1, 2, 3, 28]. However, these studies considered this the cognitive component of satisfaction, but some recent studies considered it as emotional component of satisfaction [9, 13]. Thus, we propose first hypotheses as follow:

H<sub>1</sub>: Service quality is positively related to emotional satisfaction.

As Baker and Crompton defined, behavioral intentions are indications of whether a visitor to a program or facility will return [29]. Intentions to perform behaviors can be predicted from attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control [30]. The theory of reasoned action postulates that behavior can be predicted from intentions that correspond directly to that behavior.

Zeithaml et al. grouped behavioral intentions into favorable behavioral intentions (positive word of mouth, recommending, remaining loyal, spend more, and paying a price premium), and unfavorable behavioral intentions (negative word of mouth, switching to another company, complaining to external agencies, less business with company) [4]. Furthermore, Cronin and Taylor and Boulding et al. also considered repurchase intention as a favorable intention [1, 10].

In a current study the following items with brief description were used in order to measure behavioral intentions. Jacoby and Kyner, describe loyalty as the biased, behavioral response (i.e. purchase), expressed over time, by some decision making unit, and as a function of psychological (i.e. decision making, evaluation) processes [31]. Arndt characterized word of mouth (WOM) as oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, product, or service [32]. Also, Stern defined WOM by drawing on its distinctiveness from advertising [33]. Paying a premium price is consumers' intent to continue doing business with their preferred company rather than incur additional search costs. Recommending refers to offering a special service or company to friends or family. Parasuraman et al. suggested that often relational or loyal customers spend more with suppliers and buy additional products or services [34]. Gupta and Kabadayi adapted it by using "stay more" in web service [35]. The revisit intention is the ultimate success of the service provider. The use of intentions to predict revisit behavior is directed by the theory of reasoned action or the theory of planned behavior.

Several studies investigated the direct effect of service quality on behavioral intentions and their positive relations that lead us to propose second hypotheses as follows:

H<sub>2</sub>: Service quality is positively related to behavioral intentions.

Furthermore, several studies reported that there are significant relationships between satisfaction and behavioral intentions [8, 28, 36]. Also some studies considered these relationships in affective aspect of satisfaction (emotional satisfactions) [9, 13, 37]. Therefore we propose third hypotheses as follows:

H<sub>3</sub>: Emotional satisfaction is positively related to behavioral intentions

The target population for this study consists of Iranian tourists who visited *Saint Stepanos Church* and the visitors for the sample were selected by systematic random sampling method. The sample size calculated to be 380, as Krejcie and Morgan mentioned according to population size [38], and in total 460 questionnaire distributed among visitors in July 2011. Finally 404 complete questionnaires were collected and used in analyzing, testing the model and hypotheses. Demographic characteristics of respondents appear in table 1.

**Table 1.** Profile of respondents.

Variable	Frequency	%	
Gender	Male	218	53.9
	Female	156	38.6
	Not stated	30	7.4
Age	<25	143	35.3
	25-50	215	53.2
	50<	19	4.7
	Not stated	27	6.6
Education	Diploma and below	127	31.4
	Bachelor	231	57.1
	Master and PHD	35	8.6
	Not stated	11	2.7
n=404			

The measurements for each construct in this study developed by using literature, for the service quality, combining of 28 adapted items was applied that MacKay and Crompton, Ruiz, Castellanos-Verdugo, and Oviedo-Garcia, Chen and Chen, and Gonzalez, Comesana, and Brea used before, to measure this construct in current study field [20, 39, 40, 41]. Five point Likert scale was used to measure this construct (strongly agree=5 to strongly disagree=1). Also, in order to measure emotional satisfaction 6 items contributed: happiness, pleasant, joyful, contented, enjoyable, and Excitement. Seven point Likert scale was used to measure this construct (e.g. happy1-7not at all happy). Finally, to measure behavioral intentions, 6 items that mentioned in previous section adapted then applied and five point Likert scale (strongly agree=5, to strongly disagree=1) used to measure this construct.

Three types of validity tests were used to test the quality of the measure: content validity through the Content Validity Ratio (CRV; N=20)[42], construct validity by Factor Analysis, and also, face validity. In order to test the reliability of the scale, a pretest was conducted with 30 responders by using the Cronbach Alpha of Internal Consistency Reliability. As presented in table 2, the results indicate that the scale was reliable.

**Table 2.**Reliability details.

variable	Cronbach alpha	n (items)
SQ	0.923	28
ES	0.901	6
BI	0.914	6
Overall	0.929	40

(SQ= Service Quality, ES= Emotional Satisfaction, and BI= Behavioral Intentions)

**RESULTS**

The data was analyzed using the statistical software SPSS 16 and LISREL 8.50. Before analyzing, the mean of each 6th dimension of the 28 items related to service quality calculated and then exploratory factor analysis using the principal component method of extraction and Varimax rotation was conducted with these items. Factor loadings were between 0.490 and 0.875, which indicated high correlations between the items and the corresponding constructs. Also, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.910 (Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Approx. Chi-Square=3.474E3; degree of freedom=153; significant=0.000). There were no substantial cross loadings; therefore, all items were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis to verify the convergent and discriminant validity of the three constructs. Also, the overall evaluation of the model fit was based on multiple indicators including:  $\chi^2$  (323.18, degree of freedom=127, and p-value=0.000); the normed fit index (NFI=0.93), the nonnormed fit index (NNFI=0.95), the comparative fit index (CFI=0.96), the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA=0.062), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI=0.92), Adjusted goodness of fit (AGFI=0.89), and Incremental Fit Index (IFI=0.96). These results indicate an acceptable fitness of the model to data.

As shown in figure 1 and table 3, from "service quality" to "emotional satisfaction", the coefficient was 0.35, with a t-value of 6.54 (t-value>1.96), that the path was significant, which supports H<sub>1</sub>; from "service quality" to "behavioral intentions", the coefficient was 0.40, with a t-value of 7.39 (t-value>1.96), that the path was significant, which supports H<sub>2</sub>; from "emotional satisfaction" to "behavioral intentions", the coefficient was 0.38, with a t-value of 7.08 (t-value>1.96), that the path was significant, which supports H<sub>3</sub>.

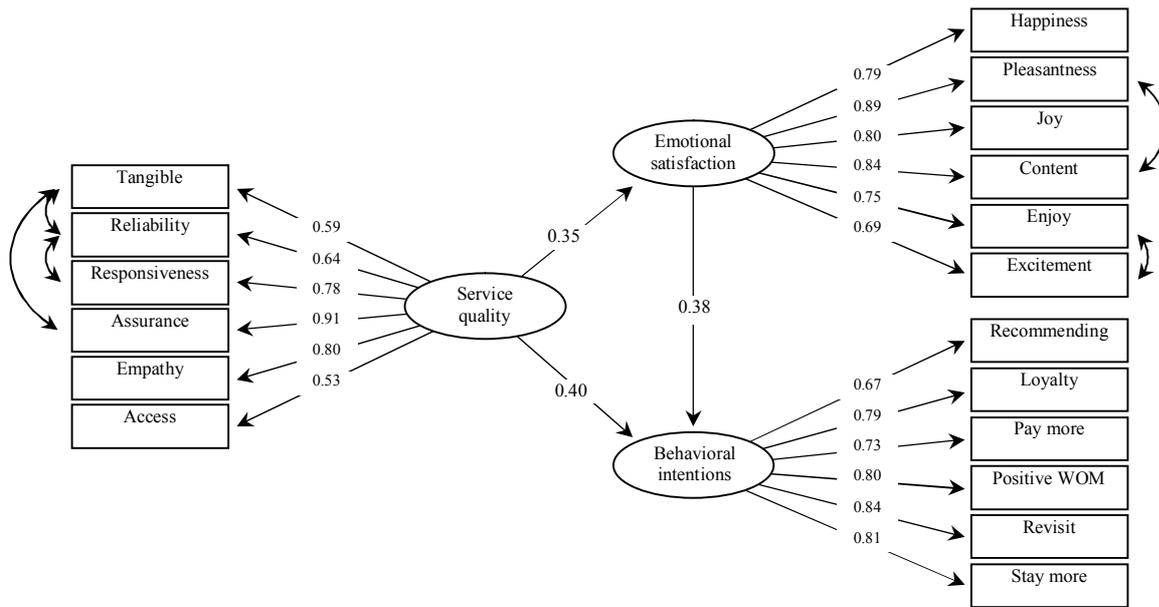


Figure 1. Relationships and path coefficient between constructs and items.

Table 3. Correlation Coefficient and t-value of the figure 1.

	SQ	ES	BI
SQ	1		
ES	0.35 t=7.39	1	
BI	0.53 t=13.13	0.52 t=12.80	1

(SQ= Service Quality, ES= Emotional Satisfaction, and BI= Behavioral Intentions)

CONCLUSIONS

In this current study the authors postulated that service quality has both direct and indirect (through emotional satisfaction) effect on behavioral intentions. All of the hypotheses were supported and support previous studies findings [11, 12, 28]. The coefficient between constructs indicates that emotional satisfaction has impact on behavioral intentions (0.38) as intensity as service quality (0.40). Although, emotional satisfaction is driven from service quality, it has the same impact on behavioral intentions and it provides evidence that emotional satisfaction can be considered an important construct in service experiences.

Future studies could be conducted by developing measurements through a focus group and interviews while using both the affective and cognitive aspects of satisfaction and comparing each aspect in the predictability of behavioral intentions, as well as considering these relationships in other service contexts.

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