

Factors Affecting Tourist Satisfaction and Its Consequences

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ABSTRACT

Tourist satisfaction is the key factor of successfulness in tourist industry. This is extremely important to clarify which dimensions affect the satisfaction in tourist industry. Also, consequences of tourists' satisfaction and dissatisfaction should be studied to provide adequate knowledge for decision makers in this sector. This study tries to identify and present a model which expresses the factors affecting tourist satisfaction and explains consequences of the satisfaction. Consequently, a review on the existing literature was conducted by our study and a model was presented including six variables and eight causal hypotheses. The study identified destination image, tourist expectation, and perceived value as influential factors on satisfaction. Also, the study found that satisfaction decreases the tourist complaints which finally end in loyalty.

KEY WORDS: tourist satisfaction, tourist loyalty, tourist complaints, destination image, tourist expectation, and perceived value.

INTRODUCTION

In order to develop tourist industry, tourist satisfaction has been a considerable goal for many countries. In fact, developing the tourist industry is the target of any government all over the world because it can generate GDP and jobs. Particularly, developing tourist industry is desirable for all countries because it will benefit not only the industry itself, but also generate a strong flow-through effect in other sectors such as retail, transportation, and construction (Hui et al., 2007). In the recent decade, decision makers in the tourist industry have been trying to increase the level of tourist satisfaction in different manners. Consequently, the tourist satisfaction is viewed as an important research topic by both practitioners and academics (Xia et al., 2009).

Similar to other sectors, satisfaction in tourist industry is resulted from several variables. Besides, tourist satisfaction has some desirable consequences for this industry. Satisfaction originally is a physiological outcome derived from exercise (Lee et al., 2007). Consequently, satisfaction in tourist industry has always several difficulties on conceptual and practical ground (Zabkar et al., 2010). This indicates the factors affecting the satisfaction in tourist industry need to be studied more. Also, the consequences of tourist satisfaction and dissatisfaction should be studied and clarified. The results of such a study can provide useful knowledge for decision makers in the tourist industry to put their efforts toward satisfaction. This may elicit several desirable consequences for them like loyal tourists.

This study tries to investigate the effects of some influential factors including destination image, tourist expectation, and perceived value on the tourist satisfaction. Besides, this research attempts to study the consequence of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in tourist industry. In order to achieve the objectives, this study tries to present a conceptual model to explain the relationships among the variables.

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Destination image

According to Xia et al. (2009), destination image has been frequently proved to have direct effect on tourist behavior, i.e. tourist expectation and perceived value. The destination image is defined as an individual's mental representation of the knowledge, feelings, and overall perception of a particular destination. In fact, several dimensions related to the tourist behaviors, such as their expectations and perception of value, are conditioned by the image that they have from the destination (Chin and Qu, 2008). From the discussion it is obvious that any pre-travel expectation of the tourist can be formed and affected by the image of his/her destination. Furthermore, any tourists' assessment of the money paid and service that they receive is perceived based on the image that the tourists have from the destination.

Tourist expectation

Customer expectation is an effective variable in the service sector. The performance of any product and service is usually anticipated by the consumers (Xia et al., 2009). The expectation of the tourists can be formed based on the image that they have from the destination before the travel. Several authors believe that tourist expectation directly affect both the perceived value and satisfaction (Song et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2011; and Xia et al., 2009). The expectation of the destination can be the basis for assessment of the money paid and the service delivered (perceived value). On the other hand, the tourist expectation directly influences the feelings of the tourist about the services (satisfaction).

Perceived value

Perceived value is defined as the customer's assessment of the services based on the perceptions of what is received and what is given" (Zeithaml, 1988). This perception directly influences the satisfaction of the customer. Several authors such as Huang and Su (2010), Song et al. (2011), and Chen and Chen (2010) believe that when the tourists perceive that the quality of services given to them is greater than the money paid by them, the satisfaction is created.

Tourist Satisfaction

Satisfaction is created by the comparison of the customer's expectation before and after consumption. Obviously, if the performance of the service or product can not fulfill the exception, dissatisfaction will appear. Specifically, tourist satisfaction is created by the comparison of pre-travel expectations and post-travel experiences (Chen and Chen, 2010). In simple words, when experiences of a tourist compared to the expectation results in feeling of gratification, the satisfaction is created. From the discussion it is understood that satisfaction of tourists are caused by two different dimensions; Firstly, it is related to the pre-expectation of the tourist before the travel; Secondly it is referred to justification of the tourist on the delivered services after the travel based on the real experiences. In other words, tourist satisfaction is directly affected by the tourist expectation (Xia et al., 2009; and Song et al., 2011) and perceived value (Huang and Su, 2010; Chen and Chen, 2010; and Song et al., 2011).

On the other hand, both practitioners and academics understand that consumer loyalty and satisfaction are inextricably intertwined (Lee et al. 2011). Several authors such as Sadeh et al. (2011) attempted to investigate whether the satisfaction lead to the loyalty or not. Further, this is frequently confirmed that the satisfied tourist would like to visit the place again and also encourage other tourists to visit it (Huang et al., 2006; Hui et al., 2007; and Su and Fan, 2011).

From other point of view, dissatisfied tourist may complain about the services. Authors such as Song et al. (2011), Lee et al. (2011), and Xia et al. (2009) believe that the complaint is the expressions of the dissatisfaction or the primary determinant of the complaining is dissatisfaction. From the discussion it is perceived that the tourist complaints are negatively affected by the satisfaction.

Tourist complaints

According to Lee et al. (2011), tourist complaint is a group of behavioral and non-behavioral responses caused by some feelings of the perceived dissatisfaction. From the definition it is understood that the tourist complaints is affected by the satisfaction but negatively. In other words, dissatisfied consumers will usually choose to either exit (e.g., go to a competitor) or voice their complaint to seek compensation (Song et al., 2011). In other words, it is frequently proven that the tourist complaint decreases the level of loyalty (Lee et al., 2011; Song et al., 2011; and Xia et al., 2009).

Tourist loyalty

Maintaining the customer loyalty has become the most important challenge for the service enterprises in the recent competitive environment (Huang and Su, 2010). According to (Lee et al., 2011), the loyalty can be defined as the feeling of commitment or affection for a particular service or product. Several authors such as Song et al. (2011) believe that the concept of loyalty for tourists can be summarized as two behaviors; the loyal tourist not only may revisit the destination, but also recommend it to the others. It is obvious that the tourist's loyalty is the consequence of satisfaction from the travel.

Conceptual model

From the above discussion, eight causal hypotheses are posed by our study. Figure 1 present the conceptual model.

- H1. Destination image directly influences tourist expectation.
- H2. Destination image directly influences perceived value.
- H3. Tourist expectation directly influences perceived value.
- H4. Tourist expectation directly influences tourist satisfaction.
- H5. Perceived value directly influences tourist satisfaction.
- H6. Tourist satisfaction directly influences tourist loyalty.
- H7. Tourist satisfaction directly influences tourist complaints.
- H8. Tourist complaints directly influence tourist loyalty.

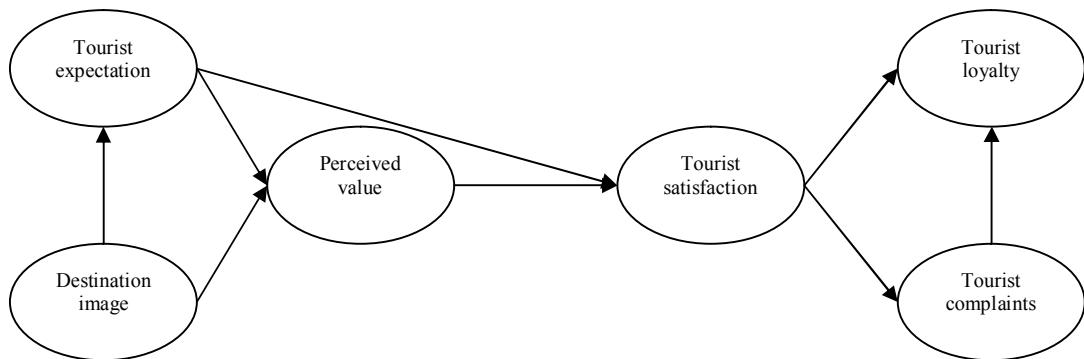


Figure1. The conceptual model

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our study considered the tourist satisfaction as the key factor in the tourist industry and tried to explain the relationships between satisfaction and other variables in this sector. The satisfied tourists not only will revisit the place, but also will recommend it to others. Besides, increasing the level of satisfaction will reduce the number of tourists' complaints. On the other hand, the tourist satisfaction will not be achieved unless the tourists feel that the quality received is greater than the money paid. This justification is usually based on the tourists' anticipation of the place and also the image that they have before the travel. Also, the satisfaction is created when the pre-travel expectations of the tourists are fulfilled by the real experiences after the travel. This expectation is also formed by the image that they have from the destination. The structural model presented by this study can be examined by the actual data in further studies.

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