An Empirical Study of Tourist Satisfaction in Malaysia

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Abstract

Tourism is a fast-growing business that receives global attentions. A successful tourism business brings huge benefits to host countries. In Malaysia, the study on tourism satisfaction context is still limited although Malaysian tourism industry grows rapidly. Hence, conducting more research focusing on tourist satisfaction in the Malaysian context is essential. In order to understand tourist satisfaction better, three factors, that is, experience, service quality and value that are related to satisfaction were examined in this paper. The population of the study was all tourists travelling to Malaysia. A sample was drawn using a multi-stage sampling method. A total of 301 completed and useful questionnaires were used for data analysis. The statistical analyses carried out include Pearson Correlation test and Multiple Regression analysis. The findings showed that value, experience and service quality were the three important variables that collectively contributed to tourist satisfaction level in the Malaysian context. In addition, the contribution of each individual factor on satisfaction revealed that the most influential factor is value, followed by experience. However, the service quality as an individual factor was not considered significant unless it was packed together with value and experience. Therefore, this study suggests that these three factors must be considered and the combination of all three factors must be offered as a complete package to attract many more tourists to visit Malaysia.

Keyword: satisfaction, value, experience, service quality, tourist.

1. Introduction

The travel and tourism industry is progressing continuously in Malaysia, which is parallel with the worldwide tourism industry. In Malaysia, the visitor arrivals increased from 13.29 million in 2002 to 25.03 million in 2012 as shown in Table 1. The tourists' revenues also had increased from RM25.8 billion to RM60.6 billion for the same period of time. The increment of tourist arrivals brings a sharp increase on the gross revenue of the country. Successful tourism business provides greater revenues to the host country, particularly for the countries with abundant tourism resources. For example, in 2012 alone, the tourists' revenues contributed 12.5 percentage of Malaysia Gross Domestic Product and the tourism sector was ranked the second largest of the foreign exchange earners in that year (Prime Minister's Department, 2014).

In order to increase the number of tourists visiting Malaysia, it is essential to ensure that the level of tourists' satisfaction while visiting the country is high. This is because high satisfaction level while visiting any particular country is the key point of positive mouth of word and better retention rate (Hoffman & Bateson, 2011), which contributes to continuous revenue generation to the country. Therefore, it is extremely important to instil better understanding of related factors that creates tourist satisfaction.

Table 1: Tourists Arrivals and Revenues to Malaysia for the Year 2002 to 2012

Year	Arrivals (million)	Revenues (billion)
2012	25.03	60.6
2011	24.71	58.3
2010	24.58	56.5
2009	23.65	53.4
2008	22.05	49.6

2007	20.97	46.1
2006	17.55	36.3
2005	16.43	32.0
2004	15.70	29.7
2003	10.58	21.3
2002	13.29	25.8

Source: Tourism Malaysia (n.d.)

In a competitive business environment, the survival of an organisation depends on the extent of customers' needs and whether or not their needs and requirements are met. When the customer requirements are met, a positive disconfirmation exists, this in turn results in customer satisfaction, positive word-of-mouth regarding the business related services and products and eventually better customer retention rate. A satisfied customer often purchases goods and services on a regular basis, and in the long term this action will lead to loyalty (Hoffman & Bateson, 2011). Additionally, efforts and initiatives to improve customer satisfaction are crucial because dissatisfied customers are more likely to share their bad experiences with others than satisfied customers do (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2007; Hoffman & Bateson, 2011). If customer satisfaction is the highest priority of an organisation, then the focus on factors that contribute to the overall customer satisfaction is critical. Furthermore, studies related to the issue of customer satisfaction are sensible due to the dynamic nature of business environment and customer preferences.

Previous study indicates that service quality is the determinant of customer satisfaction. However, service quality alone seems to be unable to illustrate the comprehensiveness of explanatory factors towards customer satisfaction. The customer satisfaction theory proposed by Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler (2013) suggests that service quality is not the only factor that determines customer satisfaction. Other factors such as product quality, price, situational and personal factor (such as emotion and mood) can also influence customer satisfaction.

Many studies identified three major elements that shape customer satisfaction. Those elements are service quality (Meng & Elliott, 2009; Rojas & Camarero, 2008), value (Carpenter, 2008; Ryu, Han, & Kim, 2008) and experience (Hoffman & Bateson, 2006; Chen & Chen 2009). However, those studies examined these three factors separately. Zeithaml *et al.* (2013). Considering the perspective of customer satisfaction model proposed by Zeithaml *et al.* (2013), these three factors have a strong theoretical basis to become a group of explanatory variables to explain satisfaction creation. These factors should be tested empirically to determine their suitability in the tourism industry. In view of that, the main purpose of this study is to examine the integration effect of service quality, experience and value on customer satisfaction in Malaysian tourism context.

2. Literature Review

This section discusses the fundamental model of the suggested framework. Next, the following subsection explains the concepts and definitions of the study's variables. Some previous research findings on the relationship among these variables are reviewed. The proposed hypotheses will then be tested accordingly.

Satisfaction is dynamic and influenced by several factors. The Customer Satisfaction Model (as shown in Figure 1) presented by Zeithaml *et al.* (2013) suggests that customer satisfaction is influenced by the perceptions of service quality, product quality and price. In addition, the situational factors such as personal factors (eg. mood or emotional state) are affecting level of satisfaction too. Furthermore, high satisfaction in turn brought to loyalty to the organisation. The satisfaction model suggested by Zeithaml *et al.* (2013) is applicable in the tourism context discussed in this paper.
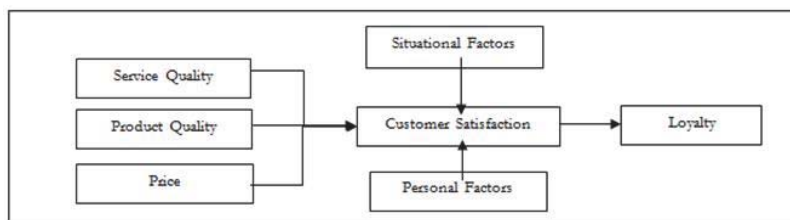

Figure 1: Customer perceptions of quality and satisfaction
Source: Zeithaml et al. (2013)

In figure 1 above, the element of price can be denoted by the concept of value. According to McDougall and Levesque (2000), value is related to what a person consumes and what he/she receives. Oh (2000) suggests that perceived value is highly influenced by price (cost). Therefore, price is the component affecting the perceived value and this "value" has an impact on satisfaction creation.

Experience on the other hand, comprises of both situational factor and personal factor. Experience is formed when one exchanges its sensory stimuli, information and emotion (Robinnete, Brand, & Lenz, 2001). One's feeling, emotion or mood will affect his or her experience and these affective responses (both pleasure and negative) are found to be related to the overall trip satisfaction (Price, Arnould, & Tierney, 1995).

According to Fiore and Kim (2007), experience is influenced by the environment factor, individual variables, and person-environment interaction or situations. This means that during the moment of truth, a customer actually encounters or participates in services or activities, the physical environment and the third parties (e.g. other customers) involved in the same services/activities will have an impact on the overall experience too. Meanwhile, when experience is treated as the variable that is influenced by a person's internal responses, physical surroundings and third party involvement, it deems to substitute the "personal" and "situational" factors as suggested by Zeithaml *et al.* (2013).

Based on the above argument, a modified model is proposed as shown in Figure 2 with some changes made to it. Firstly, the price factor was switched to the value construct in this study and secondly, the experience construct replaced the situation and personal factors in the model.
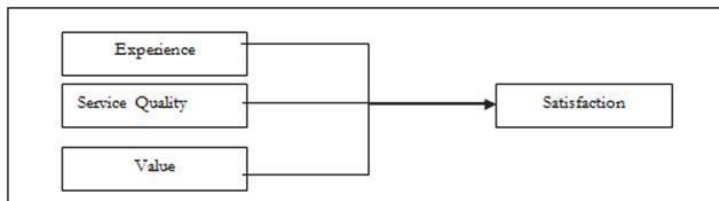

Figure 2: Research Framework

2.1 Satisfaction

Oliver (1980) defines satisfaction as the perceived difference between expectation and perceived performance. For instance, Woodside, Frey and Daly (1989) suggest that satisfaction is related to how much a person likes or dislikes a product or service after consuming it, or a response to the perceived difference between expectation and perceived performance (Oliver, 1981; Tze & Wilton, 1988).

The comparison between expectation and performance is based on the Expectancy Disconfirmation Model (Hoffman & Bateson, 2006). When the actual performance meets the expectation, the expectation is confirmed and the consumer is satisfied. However, if the perceived performance is lower or higher than the expectation, a negative or positive disconfirmation is created. For instance, when a perceived performance is higher than the expectation, it tends to lead to positive disconfirmation and thus leads to a satisfied customer. On the other hand, when a negative disconfirmation is created, the customer tends to be dissatisfied if the perceived performance is lower than expectation.

In short, satisfaction in this study refers to the tourists' feeling, in terms of their liking and disliking on their visit to Malaysia based on their comparison of expectation to the actual trip's experience.

2.2 Experience and Satisfaction

Experience refers to a series of collection points, in which one party exchanges its sensory stimuli, information and emotion (Robinnete, Brand & Lenz, 2001) after engaging in certain activities. According to Knutson and Beck (2003), experience requires an engagement of a person and experience is internal in nature, thus experience is unique. In short, the concept of experience in this paper refers to tourists internal responses of their visit to Malaysia.

The study of environmental psychology has shown that experience has the ability to alter the outcome of services (e.g. Stimulus-Organism-Response model), as consumer experience will affect the satisfaction level (Chen & Chen, 2009). In addition, Avoid and Avoidance Theory suggests that consumer behaviour is based on the total perceived experience. Moreover, the feeling of satisfaction demonstrates the approach behaviour for an experience, while

disappointment demonstrates avoidance behaviour for an experience (Donavan & Rossiter, 1982; Hoffman & Bateson, 2006). Therefore, it is acceptable to assume that good experience will lead to higher satisfaction level. Based on the above discussion, the first hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1: Tourists experience positively influenced tourists' satisfaction level on their visit to Malaysia.

2.3 Service Quality and Satisfaction

Service quality is the conformance of customer requirements to the service delivered (Chakrabarty, Whitten & Green, 2007). Generally, it is widely accepted that service quality depends on the degree of actual service performance in meeting customer's need and expectation (Presbury, Fitzgerald & Chapman, 2005; Asher, 1996; Grönroos, 1990). In this study, service quality is interpreted as tourists' judgment on the perceived services during their visit to Malaysia.

According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985), satisfaction level influences by the gap between service perception and expectation. For instance, a better fit between service perceptions with service performance will reduce the gap, leading to higher quality service, and consequently higher satisfaction (Asher, 1996; Ekinci, 2004; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1994). Disconfirmation theory supports the gap view, meaning that when perceptions meet or exceed quality expectation, positive disconfirmation is formed and the customer is satisfied. Otherwise, if the customer is dissatisfied with the suggestion, it will lead to a negative disconfirmation when perceived quality is lower than expectation.

Positive relationships between service quality and satisfaction are supported by previous research (e.g. González, Comesaña, & Brea, 2007; Ekinci, Dawes & Massey, 2008; Meng & Elliott, 2009; Rojas & Camarero, 2008). Therefore, it is reasonable to accept that higher service quality will lead to higher satisfaction level. Based on the above discussion, the second hypothesis is formed:

Hypothesis 2: Perceived service quality positively influenced tourists' satisfaction level on their visit to Malaysia.

2.4 Value and Satisfaction

Value is the consumer's overall assessment on perceptions of what is received and what is given (Zeithaml, 1988). McDougall and Levesque (2000) define value as "*benefits received relative to costs*" (p. 393). In this paper, value is viewed as the overall sacrifice incurred in comparison with the benefits received (Buzzell & Gale, 1987; Monroe, 1991) by the tourists during their trip to Malaysia.

Carpenter (2008) suggests that satisfaction should be viewed as the evaluation of value. When forming the overall perception of a service, customers may use value perception to evaluate the service encountered (Zeithaml, 1988). Besides that, value alters the feeling of satisfaction, which means that when the perceived value improves, satisfaction level will consequently increase (Chen, 2008; Ryu, Han, & Kim, 2008). Based on the above discussion, the third hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 3: Perceived value positively influenced tourists' satisfaction level on their visit to Malaysia.

3. Research Methodology

The population of the study was made up by the tourist groups that travelled to Malaysia. The population was large and hence, a sample was chosen to represent the population. In addition, a set of questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection.

In this study, multi-stages sampling method that comprised of stratified and convenient sampling techniques were used to draw the samples. Firstly, the stratified technique was undertaken. The sample was divided into two groups, namely ASEAN tourists and non-ASEAN tourists. Secondly, convenience sampling technique was used to draw the sample at selected locations. In this study, the non-probability sampling method was employed based on the following reasons:

- No accurate tourist sampling frame was available
- Time and cost limitations
- High mobility of the respondents

Four tourist destinations were selected for questionnaire distribution, which included Penang, Sabah, Kuala Lumpur and Malacca. These states are among the top five destinations in Malaysia that are frequently visited by international tourists. During the survey period, the questionnaires were distributed to the willing respondents after a few screening questions to ensure they were qualified as respondents. Also, the respondents were requested to answer and

return the questionnaires on the spot. Returned questionnaires were used for data analysis, and the results were reported in the following section.

4. Data Analysis

After removing three incomplete questionnaires, a total of 301 completed questionnaires were used for data analysis. Several statistical tests were performed, namely descriptive analysis, normality test, correlation test, as well as regression test. The results are summarised in different tables in the following section.

4.1 Respondents' Background

The background profile was briefly reviewed to provide a basic concept of the respondents engaged in the survey. In this study, a total of 198 respondents were from non-ASEAN countries and 103 respondents were from ASEAN countries. Besides that, majority of the respondents were females and the results also indicated that 47.8% or 144 respondents were married.

Other than that, the tourists aged 40 and below made up the majority of the tourist groups. Based on the statistical results, most of the tourists visited Malaysia for vacation purpose, which consisted of 238 out of 301 respondents (79.1% of the respondents). Moreover, the statistical results showed that the majority of tourists preferred to travel on their own (86.4%) rather than travelling with a tour package (13.6%).

Table 2: Respondents Profile

Items		Frequency	Percent, %
Nationality	ASEAN	103	34.2
	Non-ASEAN	198	65.8
Gender	Male	130	43.2
	Female	171	56.8
Age	30 and below	137	45.5
	31 – 40	107	35.5
	41 – 50	36	12.0
	51 – 60	12	4.0
	61 and above	9	3.0
Marital Status	Single	119	39.5
	Married	144	47.8
	Others	38	12.6
Major Purpose of Visit	Holiday	238	79.1
	Business	11	3.7
	Official Mission	11	3.7
	Visiting Friends and Relatives	22	7.3
	Conference	2	0.7
	Others	17	5.6
Mode of Visit	Tour Package	41	13.6
	Self-guided Tour	260	86.4

4.2 Normality Test

The basic test of normality was conducted as shown in Table 3. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test was carried out in order to test the normality of the data. The result in K-S test showed that $p < 0.05$, which indicated that the data was not normally distributed. However, the Q-Q plot showed that the values were close to the line, thus normality could be assumed. In addition, the analysis of skewness and kurtosis analysis showed that the constructs were approximately normal for the values ranging between ± 1.0. Therefore, in this case, the normality of the distribution was not violated and it was reasonable to employ parametric techniques in this study.

Table 3: Normality Test

	K-S	Shapiro-Wilk	Skewness	Kurtosis	Q-Q Plot
Experience	.064	.990	.156	.134	
Service Quality	.085	.984	.099	.583	
Value	.105	.974	-.306	.944	
Satisfaction	.110	.939	-.456	.052	

4.3 Detecting High Multicollinearity

In this section, the Pearson correlation technique was used to examine the bivariate correlations between the independent variables, and to look for "big" values of R, e.g. .80 and above. The results are summarised in the correlation matrix table as shown in Table 4. Based on the results, all of the independent variables were moderately correlated with the R value ranging from 0.425 to 0.511. This indicates that no serious multicollinearity issues took place between the independent variables.

Table 4: Correlation Matrix

	Experience	Service Quality	Value	Satisfaction
Experience	–			
Service Quality	.425**	–		
Value	.448**	.511**	–	
Satisfaction	.520**	.348**	.651**	–

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1 – tailed).

4.4 Regression Analysis

In this section, multiple regression techniques were used to test the relationship between three independent variables (experience, service quality and value) and one dependent variable (satisfaction). Table 5 shows the summarized results for multiple regression analyses. A significant model was determined by using the Enter method, with F = 95.591 and P<0.001, in which the model accounted for 48.6% of the variance in satisfaction score. Experience and value were significant predictors, but service quality was not. Due to this, this model basically suggests that value, experience and service quality are three important contributors to satisfaction creation. When put together, all of three factors are the significant predictors to satisfaction. However, service quality appears to be collective significant by the integration with value and experience, but insignificant as an individual factor.

Table 5: Summary of the Results in Multiple Regression

R^2		.491	
Adjusted R^2		.486	
F		95.591***	
Variables	B	SE B	β
Value	.650***	.060	.546
Experience	.474***	.075	.301
Service quality	-.076	0.065	-.058

*** $p < 0.001$

5. Discussion and Implications

The correlation matrix (see Table 4) showed that all of the constructs were significantly and positively correlated. Meanwhile, all of the hypotheses proposed in this study were accepted. Furthermore, among the variables related to satisfaction constructs, value construct showed the strongest positive correlation effect, followed by experience construct, and lastly the service quality construct. Hair, Babin, Money, and Samuel (2003) categorised the strength of association for different coefficient ranges, although service quality showed a positive correlation towards satisfaction creation, the strength of association was small. On the other hand, value and experience were moderately associated with satisfaction. The results are in line with the expectation of the researchers, in which three variables – value, experience and service quality – are positively correlated with satisfaction.

The relationship between value and satisfaction is well recognised in the literature, such as Carpenter (2008), who claimed that satisfaction should be viewed as the evaluation on value. Other researchers such as Chen (2008) and Ryu *et al.* (2008) posited that the value manipulated the feeling of the satisfaction, where when perceived value improved, satisfaction increased.. Therefore, H3 in this study is supported.

On the other hand, the findings in this study were supported by the findings of the study by Chen and Chen (2009), where the consumer experience is found to have an impact on satisfaction level. The results were confirmed by the theories such as Stimulus-Organism-Response Model and the Approach and Avoidance Theory. The experience will alter the service's outcome, in which, the customer will tend to demonstrate approach behaviour (satisfaction) when perceived good service (Donavan & Rossiter, 1982; Hoffman & Bateson, 2006). Therefore, H1 is supported.

The relationship between service qualities is well discussed in the literature. In previous research (eg. Meng & Elliott, 2009; Rojas & Camarero, 2008), the positive relationship was supported. In this study, the positive correlation was also proven. The improvement in the service quality results in the improvement in satisfaction. So, it is supported that higher service quality leads to higher satisfaction. Hence, H2 supported.

In the real world, the factors normally do not stand alone to explain the formation of the satisfaction, but they are

used to function cooperatively. Therefore, it is important to examine the integration effect of these variables, that is, experience, value and service quality towards the creation of satisfaction. Therefore, three independent variables are regressed to satisfaction with multiple linear regression techniques.

Based on the results of multiple regression tests discussed in the previous section, the proposed model (see Figure 2) was found to be statistically significant. We noted that the model is significant as a whole, and altogether value, experience and service quality are able to explain approximately 50% of the variation on satisfaction level. Meanwhile, experience, service quality and value were verified as three inter-related factors that contributed significantly to the creation of international tourist satisfaction in the Malaysian tourism context.

Value and experience are significant predictors for the variance of satisfaction, while service quality is not. Although we found that service quality has no significant effect on tourist satisfaction creation when standing alone, but when it is combined with experience and value, their relationship is still significant. Therefore, service quality should not be neglected in order to improve and sustain high satisfaction level. However, the influence of service quality towards satisfaction seems lower than the influence of value and experience towards satisfaction.

The result is interesting, because service quality is always accepted as the significant predictor to the change of satisfaction level. The study of customer relationship discussed by Cheng, Yang and Teng (2013) also revealed that perceived quality is insignificantly regressed to satisfaction, but the question is, why does the "service quality" a well-established factor in explaining satisfaction in previous researches become insignificant predictor in this research?

It is believed that the nature of the context of study, which is tourism industry itself, makes up the difference in the result. The environment of tourism service is hedonic and experiential in nature. In comparison to the other services' context, the customers (tourists) might be stressed more on the tourism experience themselves rather than focusing on the service quality level, which normally receives great attention in the other services' context, based on a significant number of the respondents (tourists) visiting Malaysia for vocation purpose (i.e. 79.1% of the overall respondents) in this study. Therefore, during the holiday visits, the tourists might seek for the unique and different experience during their tour of the specific destinations, which could be varied from their daily norms. In these circumstances, it is not a surprise if one tends to use the affective appraisal more than the cognitive assessment as the overall evaluation of the trip.

This perspective was similar to Oh, Fiore, and Jeong (2007), who posited that an increased number of tourists seeking for unique experiences beyond merely in consuming products and services, and those seeking for the whole experience such as relaxation, culture, education and others during their trip. Generally, the tourists are highly motivated to seek for the core tourism experiences such as the tourism attractions and activities during the trip. On the other hand, the consumption of the supporting tourism activities (e.g. transportations, accommodations, tour guides and etc.) is the supplement to achieve their motives in acquiring the core tourism experiences.

For instance, the finding in Said, Shuib, Ayob, and Yaakub (2013) also revealed that the visitors were still satisfied with their visit to the National Park although the perceived quality was negative. Said *et al.* (2013) advised that these result might be due to the presence of the attractive and unique natural resources and features and historical sites that created a great visiting experience contributing to high satisfaction level. Therefore, although the perceived quality is negative, it did not have a strong impact towards the tourist's overall satisfaction.

The findings in this paper are consistent with Oh *et al.* (2007) and Said *et al.* (2013), who pointed that tourists tend to be stressed on experience as a whole rather than the services alone during the tour. Anyway, when collaborating with experience and value, service quality is able to affect the creation of satisfaction level significantly. Likewise, Said *et al.* (2013) also addressed that service quality is important where it has the potential to enhance visitors' experience and satisfaction. This means that service quality is essential to be included in the tourist satisfaction model. Therefore, the tourism service providers should construct the best tourism environments to provide the best tourism experience and value without abandoning to deliver good services at all time.

6. Limitations and Suggestion for Future Research

In this study, only the direct and one-to-one relationship between the independent variables of experience, service quality, and value towards the dependent variables of satisfaction were examined. Nevertheless, the interactions between these constructs might be more complex and consisting indirect relationships, such as moderator and/or mediator effect. Therefore, in future research, the relationships between these constructs could be viewed from different perspectives in order to provide a comprehensive explanation for the creation of tourist satisfaction.

On the other hand, this study only focused on the Malaysian tourism industry. Each country varies from their geographical, cultural and other aspects. Therefore, the outcome of the study may vary and not be applicable for other countries. Further studies have to be carried out in other countries in order to validate the model (Figure 2).

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