

Modelling The Relationship of Perceived Quality, Destination Image, And Tourist Satisfaction at The Destination Level

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Abstract

Today, the tourism sector in Vietnam has increasingly been a key element in job creation, economic development, and poverty alleviation. With its well-preserved cultural and natural diversity, Vietnam has been becoming a spotlight in the global tourism map. However, many tourist destinations in Vietnam are now struggling with ways to improve tourists' satisfaction level and increase the return rate of tourists. Therefore, the tourism industry and government have to acknowledge how the tourists experienced and perceived the quality of a destination and the possibility of their return. The purpose of this study is twofold. Firstly, the study evaluates how tourists perceive the service quality of a tourist destination. Secondly, the study attempts to build a conceptual model linking tourists' perceived quality, destination overall image and tourist satisfaction at the destination level. The study suggests more directions for future research: continuing to test the empirical validation and reliability of the conceptual model for a certain case study in Vietnam, and continuing to examine the moderating effects of the different demographic characteristics of the tourists (i.e. gender, age groups) on the relationships between tourists' perceived quality, destination overall image and tourist satisfaction at the destination level.

Keywords: Tourist Destination, Perceived Quality, Destination Image, Tourist Satisfaction.

1. Introduction

Destinations have played a more important role than separate attractions due to the development over the past two decades in tourism demand for package holidays [3]. Therefore, tourists tend to seek more than one experience at a destination they visit. They stay at a hotel, go outside to eat and drink, communicate with local people, and visit cultural and historical venues [28]. As a result, not an individual product can make their journey, but rather consists of different services which are often provided by different organizations [19]. Beside that changes in tourists' expectations and habits, growing competition among existing and new destinations forces destinations to find new ways to attract more tourists in order to stay competitive.

In order to stay effectively competitive, proper strategies and marketing ideas must be designed and conducted to position tourist destinations in their target markets [14, 33]. Destinations have to distinguish themselves from their competitors, improve and enhance their competence to attract new tourists and put more efforts into maintaining and cultivating the loyalty of tourists who have already visited the destination [2]. Such differentiation has to be perceived by tourists, because a consumer's behaviour is the result of his or her perceptions. One of the key elements of successful destination marketing is tourist satisfaction, which influences the choice of destination and the decision to return [41].

The effects of perceived quality and destination image on tourist satisfaction have been a trendy research topic in tourism. Destination image, perceived quality and satisfaction [5][7-8] are the most common factors used to explain tourist motivation or their behavioral intentions toward a tourist destination. Customer satisfaction plays an important role in survival and future of any tourism products and services [13] and influences the choice of destination, the consumption of products and services, and the decision to return [20]. Thus, it is crucial to research tourist satisfaction and its affecting factors.

The purpose of the study is twofold. The first objective of the study is to evaluate how tourists perceive the service quality and acknowledge the destination image. The perceived quality and the destination image of the destination was assessed based on the tourists' post-consumption experiences.

The second objective is to empirically test a conceptual model linking perceived quality, destination overall image, and tourist satisfaction. The study responds to the call for tourism researchers to develop integrative models. The proposed model in this research shows that perceived quality has influences on their overall image perception and satisfaction level about the destination. In addition, their overall perception about the destination affects their satisfaction level.

The article is structured as follows: first we review the marketing and tourism literature on perceived quality, destination overall image, tourist satisfaction, and second, we develop a conceptual model linking perceived quality, destination overall image, and tourist satisfaction. Finally, we discuss the suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Perceived quality toward a tourist destination

According to Hardie & Walsh [15], and Sower and Fair [35], various concepts and definitions for quality have been discussed, and there is still no universally acceptable definition of quality. Quality in tourism is created by the processes of service delivery (e.g., friendliness, courtesy, efficiency, reliability, staff competence) and outcomes of services (e.g., accommodation, food, leisure facilities) [42]. In this study, the perceived quality is "the result of a consumer's view of a bundle of service dimensions, some of which are technical and some of which are functional in nature", whereby functional quality cannot be evaluated as objectively as technical quality.

One service quality measurement model that has been extensively applied is the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman et al. [29]. The SERVQUAL instrument has been the predominant method used to measure consumers' perceptions of service quality in many service industries, including tourism. It has five dimensions: Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy.

However, Tribe & Snaith [39] realized that SERVQUAL had some drawbacks when the researchers used it to evaluate visitor experiences at a tourist destination rather than assessing the service quality offered by a specific service provider (e.g., hotel, restaurant, tour operator etc.). SERVQUAL is based on evaluations of five service dimensions (reliability, assurance, empathy, responsiveness, and tangibleness) and when relying only on five factors for measuring service quality at the destination level, some important factors (i.e. attractions, entertainment, cultural experiences etc.) may be ignored in the evaluation process. Hence, most studies in tourism use service product attributes to evaluate the quality of tourism products.

At the destination level, a tourism product is a package of components including accommodation, travel, food, entertainment, etc. Realizing the need to analyze the elements of tourism supply, Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert, and Wanhill [9] grouped destination attributes into the "four A's" framework including Attractions, Access, Amenities and Ancillary services. Buhalis [6] further developed the "four A's" to the "six A's" including Attractions, Accessibility, Amenities, Available packages, Activities and Ancillary services. In 2003, Langlois developed five new dimensions of perceived quality on tourism services namely: reliability, accessibility, entertainment, physical environment and relational environment.

In this research, the perceived quality will be measured using Zabkar, Brencic, and Dmitrovic [42] set of 9 items to measure perceived quality based on the tourist product attributes including: easily reached destination, overall cleanliness of the destination, diversity of cultural/historical attractions, quality of the accommodation, friendliness of the local people, opportunities for rest, personal safety and security, unspoiled nature, and the offer of local cuisine.

2.2. The concepts of destination overall image

The idea of destination image was introduced into the tourism field in the early 1970s by Hunt (1975), Gunn (1972) and Mayo (1973), and has since become one of the most prevalent topics in tourism-related research [36]. According

to Lawson and Baud Bovy [22], destination image is defined as the expression of all objective knowledge, prejudices, imagination and emotional thoughts of an individual or group about a particular location. Valls [40] proposed a definition from the consumer's point of view, defining the brand image of a country as a set of consumer perceptions. Bigné, Sánchez and Sánchez [5] define destination image as the subjective interpretation of reality by the tourist. Tasci et al., [38] stated that "Destination image is an interactive system of thoughts, opinions, feelings, visualizations, and intentions toward a destination".

Echtner and Ritchie (1991) stated that the process of destination image formation highlights two important points. Firstly, it suggests that individuals can have an image of a destination even if they have never visited it or even been exposed to more commercial forms of information. Secondly, since there are changes in destination image before and after visitation, it is desirable to separate the images of those individuals who have visited and those who have not. This can be accomplished when measuring image by either controlling for or monitoring those individuals that have visited the destination.

The measurement of destination image has been a major focus of much tourism research for many years. Echtner and Ritchie [11] suggested that a complete operationalization of a destination image involves measuring both attributes and holistic impressions. Each of these components should be measured in terms of functional and psychological characteristics. Beerli and Martin [4] classified attributes of a destination image into nine dimensions: natural resources, tourist leisure and recreation, natural environment, general infrastructure, culture, history, and art, social environment, tourist infrastructure, political and economic factors, Leisure and recreations. Meanwhile, Chi, Qing, & Qu [8] categorized attributes into nine aspects, including: travel environment, natural attractions, entertainment and events, historic attractions, infrastructure, accessibility, relaxation, outdoor activities, price and value.

In this study, we adapted the measurement scale that had been used by Prayag et al. [30]. when researching the relationship between tourists' emotional experiences, perceived overall image, satisfaction, and intention to recommend. In line with many previous researches, the study focuses on tourists' post travel overall image perception. According to the study, the perceived overall image was measured using two statements: "your impression of the overall image of Sardinia?" with the answers ranging from highly unfavorable (1) to highly favorable (7) and from very negative (1) to very positive (7).

2.3. Tourist satisfaction

Satisfaction is viewed differently in various industries, over various demographic backgrounds, as well as for individuals and institutions. In the tourism industry, tourist satisfaction is considered one of the core variables for sustaining a competitive business because it affects the tourists' choice of destination, consumption of products and services [20].

Measuring and managing satisfaction is the key for the survival, development, and success of tourist destinations [34]. A large amount of research applied a cognitive approach, conceptualizing tourist satisfaction as a post consumption evaluation of whether or not expectations were met [12]. However, other studies considered satisfaction as an emotional reaction derived from the consumption experience [16].

In this study, tourist satisfaction will be measured by using a multi-item scale based on an adaptation of the universal scale of Oliver (1997), also applied in other studies [42], and includes four items capturing affective, cognitive and fulfilment components of satisfaction. They include: "Pleased that I decided to visit the tourist destination", "Delighted about this destination", "Visit to the tourist destination exceeded expectations", and "It gives me sense of joy that I have decided to come to this tourist destination", with the answers ranging from 1 – strong disagree to 5 – strongly agree.

2.4. The relationships between Perceived quality, Destination image, and Tourist satisfaction

In the relationship between perceived quality and destination image, many previous studies came to a consensus about the existence of the relationship of perceived quality and destination image. In event studies, Kaplanidou and Vogt [18] revealed that participants' perceptions of the event's image impacted their perceptions of the destination's

image. Furthermore, Moon et al. [25] proposed a consumer behavior model that considers event quality (i.e. intangible factors and tangible factors) and a destination's image (i.e. cognitive image, affective image, and conative image). Their findings indicated that a consumer's perception of event quality is a predictor of the destination image. Based on this background, we proposed:

H1: Perceived Quality has a positive relationship with Destination Image

According to Negi [26], the idea of linking service quality and customer satisfaction has existed for a long time. Parasuraman et al. [29], noted that when perceived service quality is high, then it will lead to increase in customer satisfaction. In the tourism industry, the tourists' perceptions of satisfaction and service quality play an important role in successful destination marketing because they influence the tourists' choice of a destination [1], the consumption of goods and services at that destination, and the decision to return to that destination. Many researches [21, 42, 17] confirmed the positive impact of the dimensions of perceived quality on tourist satisfaction. However, another study conducted in a festival setting [24] found no significant relationship between service quality (as an antecedent) and satisfaction. The study of Lee et al. [23] about an amusement park also came to the inconclusive results about the direct relationship between these two variables. Based on the above discussions, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H2: Perceived Quality has a positive relationship with Satisfaction

Researching the relationships between destination image and tourism satisfaction became prevalent in the last fifteen years [31]. Previous research studies revealed that destination image can influence tourist satisfaction and their future behaviors [10, 5, 7, 3, 32]. Hence, these findings lead to the following hypothesis:

H3: Destination Image has a positive relationship with Satisfaction

3. Research Design and Methodology

3.1. Theoretical framework

In this study, we measure the relationship between Perceived Quality, Destination Image, and Tourist Satisfaction (figure 1).

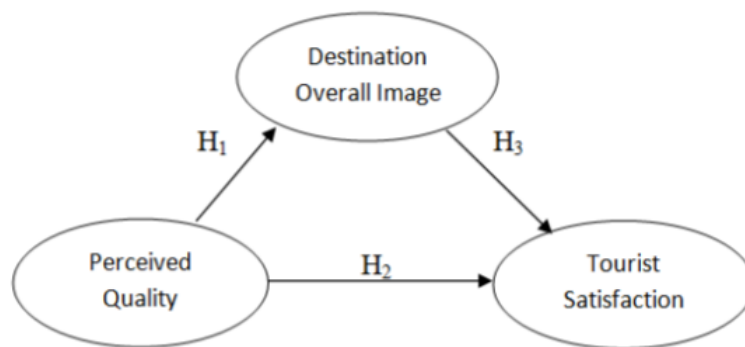


Figure. 1. The proposed model

The perceived quality was measured using Zabkar, Brencic, and Dmitrovic (2010)'s [42] set of 9 items to measure perceived quality based on tourist product attributes including: "Easily reached destination"; "Overall cleanliness of the destination"; "Diversity of cultural/historical attractions"; "Quality of the accommodation"; "Friendliness of the local people"; "Opportunities for rest"; "Personal safety and security"; "Unspoiled nature"; and "The offer of local cuisine".

In line with Prayag et al. [30], in this study, the destination image was measured based on tourists' post-travel overall image perception by using two statements: "your impression of the overall image of Hoi An?" with two answers

being measured by two different scales ranging from highly unfavorable (1) to highly favorable (5) and from very negative (1) to very positive (5).

Tourist satisfaction was measured by using a multi-item scale based on an adaptation of the universal scale of Oliver (1997), also applied in other studies [42], and includes four declarations capturing affective, cognitive and fulfillment components of satisfaction. They are: “Pleased that I decided to visit the tourist destination”; “Delighted about this destination”; “Visit to the tourist destination exceeded expectations”; “It gives me a sense of joy that I have decided to come to this tourist destination”.

3.2. Measurement scales

<i>No.</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Scale</i>
<i>Perceived Quality</i>			
01	PQ01	Easily reached destination	Ordinal
02	PQ02	Overall cleanliness of the destination	
03	PQ03	Diversity of cultural/historical attractions	
04	PQ04	Quality of the accommodation	
05	PQ05	Friendliness of the local people	
06	PQ06	Opportunities for rest	
07	PQ07	Personal safety and security	
08	PQ08	Unspoiled nature	
09	PQ09	The offer of local cuisine	
<i>Destination Overall Image</i>			
10	DI01	Your impression of the overall image of Hoi An (unfavorable – favorable)	Ordinal
11	DI02	Your impression of the overall image of Hoi An (negative – positive)	
<i>Tourist Satisfaction</i>			
12	TS01	Pleased that I decided to visit the tourist destination	Ordinal
13	TS02	Delighted about this destination	
14	TS03	Visit to the tourist destination exceeded expectations	
15	TS04	It gives me sense of joy that I have decided to come to this tourist destination	

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to advance understanding of how tourists perceive the quality of a tourist destination and examine and better understand the relationships between tourist destination's perceived quality, destination image and tourist satisfaction. In particular, the proposed integrative framework allows the identification of relationships between (1) perceived quality and destination overall image, (2) perceived quality and tourist satisfaction, and (3) destination overall image and tourist satisfaction.

This research only stops to propose the research framework between variable concepts and build the measurement scales for every variables, so the paper provides some suggestions for future research: (1) Continuing to test the proposed hypothetical model for tourists who have been visiting a tourist destination in Vietnam, and then compare the result with the results of previous researches and the theory, (2) Continuing to evaluate the effects of the different demographic characteristics of the tourists (i.e. gender, age groups) on the relationships between variables to see how different gender groups or age groups perceive the quality as well as the image of a destination that may affect their satisfaction level.

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