

Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction within Festival and Special Event

Norazirah Ayob¹, Abas Said²

¹Faculty of Economics and Business,
²Faculty of Resource Science and Technology
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS),
94300 Kota Samarahan,
Sarawak, MALAYSIA

anorazirah@feb.unimas.my, sabas@frst.unimas.my

ABSTRACT

The concept of customer satisfaction and service quality are notably two important concepts in marketing. Indeed, the two concepts are important in addressing theoretical as well as practical issue for marketers and consumer researchers. Numerous researches have been found discussing various issues related to the two constructs in various field areas. Midst all the debates, there is an existing discussion on a conceptualization of relationship between satisfaction and service quality that is argued to be relevant especially to the field of festival and special event and generally to other tourism and recreation fields. The conceptualizations seemed to receive supports from a number of event researchers and thus adapted and further examined in their studies. This paper presents a review on the service quality and satisfaction constructs and their relationship illustrated by Crompton and Love (1995), Childress and Crompton (1997), and Baker and Crompton (2000). Examples of past studies that have supported and further investigated the conceptualization are also included.

Keywords

Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Festival, Special Event

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Customer satisfaction and service quality are no doubt two most discussed concepts in theory and also practice. This is because the two related concepts are the key to sustaining one's competitive advantage in today's world of intense business competition (Shemwell, Yavas & Bilgin, 1998). Business organizations would want to make sure their product in superior quality that will in turn satisfy their customers. Marketing researchers and practitioners alike have widely recognized the issue of quality service as critical importance for business success (O'Neill, 2005). Ranges of literatures of various field areas can be found on the topic of quality and also its relationship with satisfaction.

Among many, the study of expectation, performance and the consequent disconfirmation has been the dominant theory in customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction and service quality studies. The expectancy disconfirmation theory was initially proposed by Richard Oliver (Oliver, 1980). While Oliver (1980) posited that satisfaction/dissatisfaction is the product of interaction between the consumer's pre-purchase expectations and post-purchase evaluation, Parasuraman et al. (1985) believed service quality to be the result of the difference between expectation and perception of service performance levels along the quality dimensions. Yet, it is common to find ambiguous distinctions between service quality and customer satisfaction in the literature. Part of the confusion is attributable to the most widely accepted conceptualization of both constructs being derived from the same theoretical source - the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver 1980). Consequently, this has resulted in confusion to the point the two constructs are recurrently used interchangeably by management. Nevertheless, reviews of literature, however posits that satisfaction and service quality are actually separate constructs, though appear to have high interrelation with each other

Similar to areas of marketing and consumer behavior, a strong contemplation on the constructs of service quality and customer satisfaction has also evolved independently in the tourism and recreation field. The earliest literature reported to relate to satisfaction dated at least as far back as 1962 of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission reports (Manning, 1986). Since then, global tourism and its related industries have started to focus on improving effective service quality and customer satisfaction. The objective of this paper is to present a review on a conceptualization of relationship between service quality and satisfaction constructs explained by several event researchers primarily by Crompton and Love (1995), Childress and Crompton (1997), and Baker and Crompton (2000). In addition, this paper is also highlighting previous studies that have supported and further investigated the conceptualization within

the settings of festivals or special events. Measurement dimensions and items evaluating event performance quality and most importantly findings of the researches were included.

2.0 SERVICE QUALITY AND SATISFACTION WITHIN EVENT SETTING

Midst of all the vigorous debates regarding the conceptualization of the relationship between the constructs of satisfaction and quality, a detailed discussion of the definitions and nature of these two constructs, and how they differ and relate has been introduced within the festival and special event literatures. The idea was first instigated by Brown (1988) in his review of outdoor recreation literatures. It was then supported by Crompton and Love (1995) and further discussed by Childress and Crompton (1997). Over the years, their conceptualization of the constructs was adapted in several studies in tourism-related field (i.e. Cole & Illum, 2006; Hong, 2003; Thrane, 2002; Tomas, Scott & Crompton, 2002; Baker & Crompton, 2000).

The explanations of the nature and relationship of the two constructs presented by Crompton and his colleagues have taken unique approach from marketing field's standard of comparison in disconfirmation of expectations (Baker & Crompton, 2000). In contrast to the global opinion of service quality and satisfaction, Crompton and his colleagues distinguished service quality as '*quality of performance*' and satisfaction as '*quality of experience*' at transaction/attribute level. Service quality at the transaction/attribute level refers to rating of service attributes (Cole & Illum, 2006). Whereas, satisfaction at the same transaction/attribute level should be better understood as psychological benefits received by the customers (Cole & Illum, 2006).

According to Crompton and colleagues, quality of performance or else also known as *quality of opportunity* basically refers to quality of tourism opportunities or resources supplied by service providers or available at a destination. Precisely, performance quality of event attributes or features (i.e. activities, programs, facilities, etc) available at a festival is the output of the festival management and organizer. As being the output of the organizer necessarily means the quality of performance is primarily under the control of the organizer. As Brown (1988) had noted "Quality can be affected by management ... through its manipulation of information and opportunities for recreation" (cited in Childress & Crompton, 1997, p.412). Hence, to evaluate the quality of performance essentially means to evaluate the festival visitors' or audiences'

perceptions of the performance of the service provider.

In contrast, satisfaction at the transaction level or termed as *quality of experience* refers to "the psychological outcome resulting from their participation in tourism activities" (Crompton and Love, 1995) or "an emotional state of mind after exposure" to the performance (Baker and Crompton, 2000). Consistent with Brown's (1988) conceptualization of satisfaction, festival or any other tourism and recreational activities are forms of human experiences that based on "intrinsically rewarding voluntary engagements during nonobligated time". Most satisfaction researches are looking at subjective nature of reactions and differences within the reactions to recreation opportunities. Mannel and Kleiber (1997) have reported that researchers have been focusing on 'psychological outcomes and benefits' when describing the social psychological process of satisfaction. Mannel and Iso-Ahola (1987) stated quality of experience as a psychological outcome. Consequently, visitor satisfaction is established by the degree to which desired intrinsic outcomes derived largely from interaction with the festival's attributes realized by visitors (Cole & Crompton, 2003).

Compared to quality of performance, it is posited that satisfaction or quality of experience is beyond the control of festival organizers. According to Crompton and Love (1995), quality of experience is not only affected by the attributes – services/ activities/ programs/ facilities – provided and manipulated by the promoting organization. The authors maintained that level of satisfaction is also depended on a host of factors that may affect the visitors that are beyond organizers' control. In fact, factors such as the visitors' social-psychological state they brings to the festival (i.e. mood, disposition, needs) and superfluous matters/events (i.e. climate, social group interactions) are suggested to also contribute to the quality of visitors' experience at festivals (Baker & Crompton, 2000). These variables may intervene during the visitors' experience process as to result in a low level of satisfaction even though the service attributes is perceived to be of high quality. On the other hand, such variables may adequately affect the visitors' experience, thus producing high satisfaction even with low service quality. In short, the end capacity for a visitor to enjoy the expected psychological benefits while attending the festival is not under complete control of the festival organizers (Cole & Illum, 2006).

According to Brown (1988), the creation of a event experience would necessarily include mutually visitors and certain raw tourism resources. Subsequently, the quality of the tourism resources would shape the sum benefit and satisfaction the visitors receive (Cole & Crompton, 2003). While the

service providers provide opportunities for leisure, the tourists must be involved with the opportunities to acquire the experience. Cole and Crompton (2003) maintained that seeing as the visitors' participation is needed in creating the experience; it does indicate that the event experience could be affected not only by factors provided and controlled by the service providers but also factors that brought to the site by the visitors which generally are outside the providers' control. It seems rational that in tourism experience, service quality is associated with quality of opportunities or performance of the service providers. In contrast, satisfaction or quality of experience concerns with the psychological after-effect of the visitors' experiences (MacKay & Crompton, 1988). As Brown (1988) argued, while managers and nature provide opportunities for tourism activities, the visitors would consume, experienced and obtained benefits from their interactions with the opportunities.

Additionally, Crompton and colleagues posited that quality of performance precedes quality of experience. This is because quality of experience would substantially depend on how well the visitors respond to the festival's attributes (Cole & Crompton, 2003). Thus, this conceptualization recognizes quality of performance as one of the antecedents to visitor satisfaction. Correspondingly, this conceptualization is consistent with the "quality leads to satisfaction" school of thought. Oliver (1997) stated that quality of service features would essentially satisfy the needs of the customers. Similarly, Cole and Crompton (2003) agreed with Otto and Ritchie's (1995) notion of satisfaction as a super-ordinate variable to quality of performance. From their viewpoint, service quality is attribute-based and a cognitive evaluation. Conversely, satisfaction is basically an affective response towards the cognitive evaluation of the service quality. During a service encounter experience, the service performance is suggested to be transformed into a psychological response by the consumer (Cole & Crompton, 2003).

3.0 PREVIOUS RESEARCHES

One of the earliest interests in researching and understanding perceptions of service quality in order to improve the festival and event setting was publicly documented by Wicks and Fesenmaier (1993). The authors stressed the fact that opportunities to evaluate service quality at events, which are commonly infrequent in nature, must not be missed. Hence, Wicks and Fesenmaier (1993) conducted a quality survey at an arts festival in U.S. Though, the primary objective of the study is to measure perceptions of service quality gap between customers and vendors. In addition, they adapted the conceptualization of service quality from gaps model by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985).

In 1995, Crompton and Love studied comparisons between seven alternative operationalizations of

quality in a study conducted at an annual Victorian Christmas celebration held in Galveston, Texas, USA. Their final list of event attributes were developed based on five key dimensions of quality, namely ambiance of the environment, sources of information on the site, comfort amenities, parking, and interaction with vendors which were identified from previous surveys, discussion with the festival's organizers and review of literature. Later on, the list was refined further by Childress and Crompton (1997) and Baker and Crompton (2000).

Crompton and Love (1995) found evidence for performance-only measure as the best predictors of quality compared to the other six alternative operationalizations of quality. Meanwhile, the disconfirmation-based operationalization was established as the least accurate predictors of quality. Possible explanations of the predictive superiority of the performance-based measures were presented by Crompton and Love (1995). First, the prepurchase choice criteria may change over time after the experience thus may not be the same as the post purchase evaluation criteria. Second, evaluation of quality was not influenced by prior expectations, but rather visitors' drives, motives, needs, or wants out of their experience at the festival. In short, the finding implies that the visitors may not have meaningful expectations prior to the festival experience, or did not use their priori expectations as criteria to evaluate performance quality (Crompton & Love, 1995).

With the aim of exploring the relationship between the constructs of quality of performance and visitor satisfaction, Childress and Crompton (1997) conducted an empirical study at Main Street Days, an annual festival in Grapevine, Texas. Eighteen evaluation items of festival attributes adapted from Crompton and Love (1995) were reproduced. The attributes were categorized into four identified dimensions which are: (a) Generic features commonly characterized most festivals; (b) Specific entertainment features that entail to a specific festival; (c) Information sources comprised of printed program, street maps and information booths; and (d) Comfort amenities related to overall comfort of the visitors (See Table 1). Later, Baker and Crompton (2000) adapted the four dimensions and eighteen attributes to measure performance quality in order to assess the relative impact and interrelationship of the performance quality, satisfaction and behavioral intentions constructs at a festival.

Baker and Crompton (2000) began their paper with a lengthy discussion on conceptualizations and interrelationships between quality, satisfaction and behavioral intentions from both viewpoints of marketing and tourism. In their model, Baker and Crompton (2000) tried to include both possibilities of service quality causing behavioral intentions directly and indirectly through satisfaction. Findings of their

study suggested that satisfaction did not fully mediate the relationship between quality and behavioral intentions, since the performance quality is also found to directly and indirectly influence behavioral intentions as suggested by the model (Refer to Figure 1). Additionally, unlike Cronin and Taylor (1992) who used similar operationalization of satisfaction and measurement of quality, Baker and Crompton (2000) discovered perceived quality of performance to have stronger total effect on behavioral intentions than satisfaction. All in all, Baker and Crompton (2000) suggested to festival organizers to give attention on evaluating both the performance quality and level of satisfaction of the visitors or audiences.

Table 1: Dimensions and items of performance quality attribute (Childress & Crompton, 1997)

<p>Dimension 1: Generic Features</p> <p>Visual appearance of the Grapevine Main Street Historic District</p> <p>Feeling of safety on the site</p> <p>Cleanliness of the festival site</p> <p>Friendliness of people in the Main Street shops</p> <p>Food and beverages</p> <p>Live entertainment</p>
<p>Dimension 2: Specific entertainment features</p> <p>Living history reenactments</p> <p>Arts and crafts exhibits</p> <p>Children's activity area</p> <p>Business Expo booths</p> <p>Grapevine Opry performances</p>
<p>Dimension 3: Information sources</p> <p>Printed program showing event locations and performance schedules</p> <p>Street maps on the site that give directions</p> <p>Information booths that gave site directions and performance information</p>
<p>Dimension 4: Comfort amenities</p> <p>Cleanliness of the portable restrooms</p> <p>Availability of restrooms</p> <p>Number of places to sit down and rest</p> <p>Site's accessibility for those with special needs (e.g., handicapped, elderly, young children, etc.)</p>

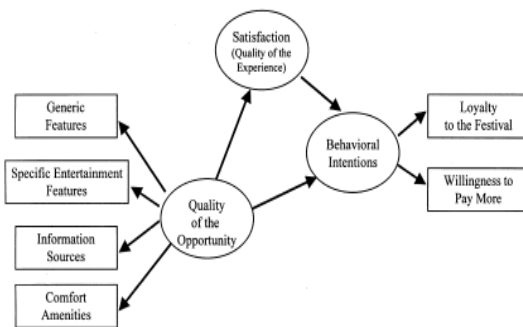


Figure 1: Relationships among quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions by Baker and Crompton (2000)

In another study, Thrane (2002) presented findings on the relationships between music quality assessment, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions at Kongsberg

Jazz Festival, Norway. Similar to Baker and Crompton (2000), Thrane's (2002) main interest is to investigate possible ways for music quality to cause behavioral intentions: directly, indirectly via satisfaction, or both. Hence, Thrane (2002) conceptualized the relationships between music quality, overall satisfaction and behavioral intentions based on the model proposed by Baker and Crompton (2000). From the result, Thrane (2002) concluded that visitors' evaluations of music quality positively influence their overall satisfaction, which in turn influences their decision for repeat intention to visit in future.

Meanwhile, in the case of intention to recommend, Thrane (2002) discovered that evaluation of music quality has indirect impact via satisfaction and also directly on intention of spreading positive words towards the festival. The result implies an audience, who perceived a musical festival to be of a good quality, might be willing to recommend the festival to his or her friends and family, but it does not necessarily imply he or she will revisit the festival again in future possibly due to a rowdy crowd at the festival, or it just not of his or her taste of music scenes (Thrane, 2002). As a final point, Thrane (2002) pointed out the fact that visitor satisfaction is the key factor for future intentions. Hence, festival organizers are recommended to place greater emphasis on strategies that will boost visitors' overall satisfaction.

Aside from above studies, another empirical service quality evaluation study was administered by Hong (2003). Hong (2003) was interested in looking at what causes visitor satisfaction in context of festival. The primary objective of the study is to analyze relationships among service performance (SERVPERF), the circumplex model of affect, and visitor satisfaction. In this study, thirteen service performance attributes were identified based on the works of Childress and Crompton (1997), Crompton and Love (1995), and Wicks and Fesenmaier (1993). The items were developed under three primary dimensions of service performance – festival experience, facilities and services.

However, Hong (2003) was not just focusing on cognitive component but also opted to investigate impacts of affective component on visitor satisfaction judgment within context of festival. Additionally, Hong (2003) also decided on finding out which component – cognition or emotion – play a more important role in making satisfaction judgment under different level (high vs. low) of involvement conditions. The result supported Oliver's (1997) claim that satisfaction is a hybrid between cognition and emotion. The importance of the findings for this research is twofold. First, both service quality and affect independently influenced visitor satisfaction judgment. This is proving that both the performance of attributes that provided by the organizers and the

emotions of the visitors are important in formation of satisfaction judgment. Second, perceptions of quality of the attributes at a festival influenced emotions of the visitors, and then affecting visitors' level of satisfaction of the festival. Hence, emotions were acting as a mediator linking service performance to satisfaction.

Finally, Cole and Illum (2006) set out to investigate the constructs using data survey collected at 27th annual 'Fair Grove Heritage Reunion', Missouri, USA. They claimed tourism marketing literatures were lacking of guidance in understanding the interrelationships among service quality, visitor satisfaction and behavioral intentions. The main objective of the study is to analyze the mediating role of satisfaction in festival visitors' experiences. Their model outlined a four-stage sequential pattern from performance quality/attribute level to experience quality/transaction level to overall satisfaction/cumulative level and finally to behavioral intentions. Essentially, this model illustrated that the festival journey begins with the visitors of festival first observing, experiencing and appraising the service attributes supplied by festival organizers, and then it contributes to the next stage, which is visitors' satisfaction.

Cole and Illum (2006) developed sixteen items to measure performance quality of the festival based on literature and discussions with event organizers (See Table 3). Three main dimensions were determined – activities, amenities, and entertainment.

Table 3: Service attributes of event (Cole & Illum, 2006)

Dimension 1: Activities
No. of scheduled events
Re-enactments
Demonstrations
Advertisement for the festival
Variety of activities
No. of cooking activities
No. of craft vendors
Dimension 2: Amenities
Parking
Fees
Cost of food and beverages
Bathrooms
Taste of food and beverages
Hours the events were scheduled
Dimension 3: Entertainment
Music and dance
Depth of the festival's representation of history
Sound system for entertainment

Their findings revealed that satisfaction at both the transaction and global levels were found to fully mediate the relationship between performance quality and behavioral intentions (Refer to figure 2). In other words, in contrast to Baker and Crompton (2000), they confirmed that performance quality has no direct effect on behavioral intentions. Cole and Illum (2006) concluded that improving both service quality and visitor satisfaction would influence visitors to form

favorable intentions toward a festival. They also stressed that festival organizers need to realize that though offering good performance quality is principal but not enough. This is because good quality festival attributes alone do not guarantee a bigger crowd in future. Finally, they suggested that there are other factors which may also influence the visitors' decision of intentions such as visitors' emotion.

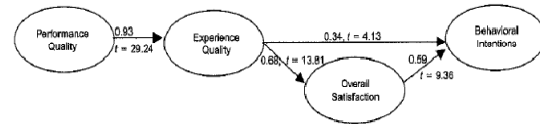


Figure 2: Relationships among quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions by Cole and Illum (2006)

4.0 CONCLUSION

It is common to find ambiguous distinctions between service quality and customer satisfaction in the literature. Part of the confusion is attributable to the most widely accepted conceptualization of both constructs being derived from the same theoretical source - the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver, 1980). Consequently, this has resulted in confusion to the point the two constructs are recurrently used interchangeably by management. Nevertheless, reviews of literature posits that satisfaction and service quality are actually separate constructs, though appear to have high interrelation with each other (Cronin & Taylor 1992).

Within the festival and special event field, several papers were found to have adapted a unique idea of conceptualization of service quality and satisfaction initially presented by Crompton and Love (1995). Here, constructs of service quality and satisfaction are conceptualized distinctly from marketing field. According to Crompton and colleagues, service quality would refer to rating of service attributes or termed as 'performance quality'. Meanwhile, satisfaction would refer to psychological benefits received by the event visitors or termed as 'experience quality'. Essentially, service quality is attribute-based and a cognitive evaluation, on the contrary satisfaction is an affective response towards the cognitive evaluation of the service quality.

Additionally, existing empirical studies on relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in the formation of consumers' purchase intention frequently yields inconsistent results. Though, researchers generally conclude that both constructs (service quality and satisfaction) do significantly influence consumers' behavioral intentions. Their views are, however, mixed as to the ordering of the constructs, whether service quality or customer satisfaction has a direct relationship with behavioral intentions.

Furthermore, for the past years, there has been some effort to understand and empirically examine event quality and visitor satisfaction. But, one important question remains: What really brings about satisfaction to the visitors? Review of literature reveals that there is still no clear consensus among event researchers and organizers on the measurement of event attributes/features in the service encounter. What's more, festivals and special events are experiential hedonistic products that comprise of a complicated system of factors (i.e. emotion). Unlike other products and services, a festival experience does not shaped only by what the event organizers. Failure to see the interconnections between the various related variables could muddle up and weaken the true understanding of visitor experience in context of festival.

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