

A Review on Tourist Satisfaction of Tourism Destinations

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Abstract The present paper is a detailed sort-out and critical review of the foreign literature on tourist satisfaction at destinations in the last decade. Four dimensions that the relevant research surrounded are identified: tourist satisfaction theoretical model; the relation between tourist satisfaction and loyalty, expectation and service quality; the tourists' cultural backgrounds and cultural differences of the tourist satisfaction; and evaluation model of tourist satisfaction at destinations. The limitations of the previous research are briefly discussed, and future research directions are suggested attempting to provide reference and inspiration for the relevant domestic research and the tourism industry.

Keywords Tourism destination • Tourist satisfaction • Influencing factor

1 Introduction

The term “tourist satisfaction” in tourism research derived from “customer satisfaction” in marketing. Since the 1960s in the last century, the scholars have conducted a great deal of research on tourist satisfaction from the perspectives of quality management and repurchase intention, preliminarily accomplishing some theoretical models [7, 21, 27]. Based on the previous research, Pizam et al. [45] pioneered in applying the concept of customer satisfaction in the tourism study, which developed into a hot issue in the tourism study. At the beginning, the “tourist satisfaction” research centered around the product and service, for example, studies on the influencing factors on the satisfaction serving to improve the service quality of the hotels, hostels

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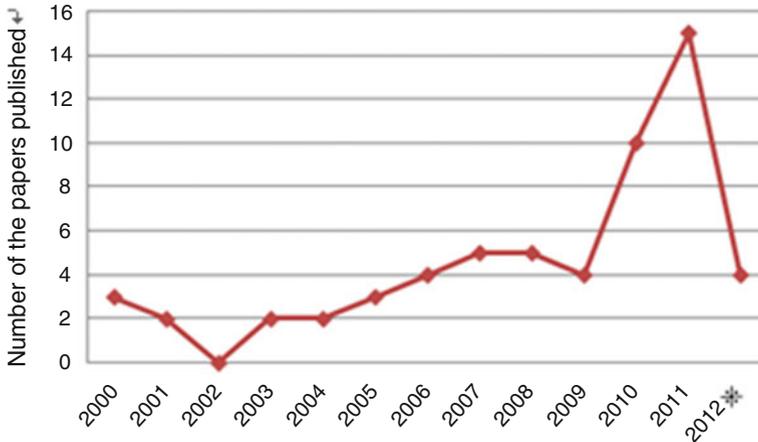


Fig. 1 Annual distribution of research papers published on tourist satisfaction (Note: only literature published in the first season are included in the 2012 category)

and tourist sites [16, 18, 31, 33, 48]. Yet in the recent years, an increasing number of scholars consider the competition among tourism destinations has evolved from one of the tourism resources, products and the tourism industry, to one of comprehensive strength, and one of the important facets to evaluate the tourism destination is precisely the tourist satisfaction [51].

The enhancement of tourist satisfaction not only has positive effects on the tourism service provider and the destination reputation, but also strengthens the tourist loyalty, lowers the price elasticity, lowers the future transaction cost and increases the productive force. Therefore, much attention is laid upon the measurement of tourist satisfaction among countries and regions. The present paper presents a sort-out and critical review of a collection of the foreign relevant literature on tourist satisfaction at destinations, concluding their research perspectives, content, limitations and possible future research direction, attempting to offer reference and inspiration for the relevant domestic research and the tourism industry.

2 An Overall View of the Literature

Tourist satisfaction has become a hot topic for tourism research in the recent years. From foreign language databases like Wiley Blackwell, SCI (Web of Science) ISTP&ISSHP, Elsevier Science and Compendex (Ei village) etc., 68 research papers directly related to tourist satisfaction at destinations have been detected (up to March 23, 2012) with key words of “tourism satisfaction”, “destination satisfaction” and “tourism satisfaction” etc. Among them, 13 are from Wiley Blackwell, 11 from SCI (Web of Science) ISTP&ISSHP, 35 from Elsevier Science and 9 from Compendex (Ei village). Sixty one of them were able to be retrieved, and only two were published before 2000 (1999 and 1991 respectively). The rest 59 pieces of papers’ annual distribution is shown in Fig. 1.

The research content concentrates on tourist satisfaction theoretical model; the relationship between tourist satisfaction and loyalty, expectation and service quality; the tourists' cultural background and cultural difference concerning the tourist satisfaction; and evaluation model of tourist satisfaction at destinations. In terms of the data analysis method, structural equation model, multiple linear regression, factor analysis, cluster analysis, correlation analysis (contingency table) and one-way ANOVA are among the methods used in the research. In terms of the publisher, most of the research papers were published on mainstream academic journals like "Tourism Management", "Annals of Tourism Research" and "International Journal of Tourism Research".

Table 1 is a selective summary of the theoretical models, analysis methods and research subjects in the representative papers.

3 Research Concentration

3.1 *Theoretical Models of Tourist Satisfaction Evaluation*

Kozak [29] listed four theoretical models on tourist satisfaction evaluation: expectation-performance model, importance-performance model, expectancy disconfirmation model and performance-only model. Expectation-performance model usually employs the SERVQUAL scale, in which the tourist expectation is measured first and then the perception on the service, referring the gap between the two to the service quality [39, 40]. SERVQUAL is widely applied and holds a certain degree of reliability and validity, but it entails a major flaw that the equaling relationship between the service quality and the gap between the tourist expectation and service performance is not well justified. There are scholars who suggest the tourist evaluation of service does not really depend on the gap between the expectation and the performance, but on the actual perception of the service [9, 61], in other words, regardless of the expectation of the destination before the tour, the tourist satisfaction is decided by the actual experience at the destination. This SERVPERF evaluation method based on performance only has been empirically proved to be better than SERVQUAL in terms of reliability, validity and prediction ability [26, 29].

Oliver and Swan [38] put forward the outcome-input model (EQUITY), which states the tourist satisfaction is determined by the comparison between what the tourists have received and the time, money and energy spent. When the tourists consider the outcome of the tour is more than the input, the tour experience is highly regarded, resulting in high satisfaction, and vice versa. Latour and Peat [30] came up with the NORM theory. Locating the reference points is crucial in using this model, for they determine the norms for judging the service quality. Tourist dissatisfaction comes into play as a result of disconfirmation relative to these norms. The references points can be an ideal trip desired, or other alternative

Table 1 Features of seven representative papers on tourist satisfaction

| Paper | Destination | Data analysis | Theoretical model | Survey location | Influencing factors |
|--------------------------|-----------------|---------------|---|--|--|
| Yu and Goulden [64] | Mongolia | VI | Brayley model (1989) | Airport | Tourist attraction, facility, service, price etc. |
| Song et al. [51, 52] | Hong Kong | IV | Expectation performance model, ACASI | Airport hotel, attraction retail shops, etc. | Tourist attraction, accommodation, restaurants, transportation, immigration, retail shops etc. |
| Kozak [29] | Turkey, Morocco | III | Performance model | By mail | Accommodation, local transportation, sanitation, hospitality and service, facility and activity, price, language convenience, airport service |
| Truong and Foster [59] | Vietnam | II | HOLSAT model | By tour operators, airlines | Attractions, activities, amenities, accommodation and accessibility |
| Master and Prideaux [34] | Queensland | VI | Importance-performance model | By mail | Cultural factors: restaurants, language, shopping, accommodation, negotiation etc. |
| Hui et al. [26] | Singapore | II | Expectancy disconfirmation model, performance model | Airport | Service staff, overall convenience, prices, accommodation and restaurants, tourist attraction, culture, climate, image and commercial product etc. |
| Truong and King [60] | Vietnam | V | Importance-performance model | Attractions, hotels and bars etc. | Tourist attraction, facilities, diversity, prices, tourist product quality, service and security |

Note: I = structural equation model, II = multiple linear regression, III = factor analysis, IV = cluster analysis, V = correlation analysis (contingency table), VI = one-way ANOVA

destinations or places visited in the past. Tourists compare current travel destinations with these reference points and the difference between the present and the past experiences can be a norm used to evaluate tourist satisfaction. Tribe and Snaith [58] suggested the HOLSAT (Holiday Satisfaction) model, the theoretical foundation of which is also the expectation-performance model (disconfirmation approach). Unlike other models [49, 56], HOLSAT is able to measure tourist satisfaction at a destination rather than a specific service provider. Instead of a fixed menu of attributes, it adopts a most appropriate suite of attributes for a particular destination to evaluate the tourist satisfaction. Truong and Foster [59] utilized HOLSAT in a case study on Australian holidaymakers in Vietnam, and it was indicated that the HOLSAT model is a valuable tool that can be used to evaluate the satisfaction of tourists with particular destinations.

3.2 Regional and Cultural Differences of Tourist Satisfaction at Destinations

In recent years, a cross-cultural perspective as how tourists with different cultural backgrounds differ in their service quality evaluation has been a research hot topic as well [6, 13, 29, 44, 62]. Tourists from different countries put emphasis on varying aspects of the tourism service, and it is likely that they have distinct satisfactions toward the same service. Therefore, an understanding of the tourists' cultural backgrounds will help the destinations to design culture-oriented marketing and service. Pizam and Ellis [44] suggested two approaches to study the tourist behavior cross-culturally, either indirectly, say, study based on the local tour guides' and citizens' perception of the tourists' cultural differences, or directly, by studying the behavior of tourists from different countries or regions. Both approaches have been used in the previous research. Turner et al. [62] suggested in their research, a study of tourists from Japan, U.S., Australia and Chinese mainland in Melbourne, that though there appeared to be different emphases on the tourism service for regionally diverse tourists, no causal relationship between the difference and the satisfaction level was found. Yu and Goulden [64] conducted an analysis on international tourists' satisfaction of their travel experience with tourist attractions, prices, service, facilities, destination image perception, revisit and recommendation intentions, and the results were compared to find regional similarities and differences. The findings showed a diversity of the tourists' evaluations in cultural and historical tourist attractions, local tourism staff, facilities, and service quality and nightlife activities depending on their regional backgrounds. Still, there might be contingency in such findings due to the target destinations. Aiming to examine whether there was regional difference of tourists satisfaction at the same destination, Kozak [29] carried out a comparative study on the satisfaction of the British

and German tourists in Turkey and Morocco, and the research result suggested the British tourists tended to score higher for almost all the satisfaction influential factors than the German tourists. Truong and King [60] pointed out when it comes to destination marketing, not only the tourists' regional difference but also the language background should be taken into account. Overall, research centering the cultural differences at tourism destination is still at its infancy development stage. On the one hand, the current and previous research mostly distinguish tourists groups by countries, not yet concerning any sub-culture; on the other hand, to what degree do the cultural backgrounds attribute to the different satisfaction levels shown by origin countries is yet to be explored.

3.3 Relations Between Tourist Satisfaction and Expectation, Quality, Value and Loyalty

Quite a few scholars have focused on research of relations between tourist satisfaction and service quality. Soutar [53] believes the service quality has direct influence on the tourist satisfaction, and consequently enhancement of the service quality will increase tourist satisfaction. Many other studies also have indicated that the service quality influences the client satisfaction, as well loyalty and post-purchase behavior [1, 11, 37]. The tourists' service perception is positively related to the satisfaction level, but the effect does not work reversely; well-perceived quality not only enhances the client satisfaction, but also stimulates mouth-to-mouth advertisement, and eases price sensitivity [15, 17]. Other scholars hold the view that quality perception is merely one of the factors influencing satisfaction [41], and since different destinations demand quite distinct travel costs, quality perception and value perception were considered two dimensions that influence tourist satisfaction [53]. Thus, there is a positive correlation between value perception and tourist satisfaction, which means when the tourist consider what they receive is worth the time and money they spend, their satisfaction level is likely to increase [12, 43, 52]. As to the relation between expectation and satisfaction, there are two opposite views. One sees expectation and satisfaction as negatively correlated, that is, a raise in the expectation does little or even no effect on the tourist satisfaction [1, 8, 11]. The other view believes the relation between the two dimensions should be studied in relation to the analysis framework of satisfaction [11, 22, 54]. Lee et al. [32] did a research on Chinese tourists in South Korea, and analyzed the relationships among tourist expectation, motive, quality, satisfaction, complaint and loyalty, concluding a positive effect of tourist motive on quality perception, a negative correlation between satisfaction and complaint, and a non-prominent positive correlation between satisfaction and loyalty when the correlation coefficient is 0.05.

3.4 Identification of Influencing Factors of Tourist Satisfaction at Destinations

The definition of tourist destination is being fiercely discussed among scholars at the moment. Pearce [42] defined destination as an amalgam of products and services in one location that can draw visitors from beyond its spatial confines. Hu and Richie [24] proposed tourist conceptualized the tourism destination as a package of tourism facilities and services, which like any other consumer product, is composed of a number of multi-dimensional attributes. Smith and Olson [50] suggested the tourism service plays an important role in the tourist experience, and inputs from different destinations lead to different outputs. Other scholars believe other factors like the urban and social environments also significantly affect tourist satisfaction, such as local hospitality, language convenience, urban composition and demographic density etc [3, 4, 35]. Other influencing factors on tourist experience and destination perception include economic factors like exchange rate, company market behavior and pricing [14, 35], cultural factors [10, 46], political factors like VISA policy and political stability [19, 20, 47, 57]. Kotler et al. [28] concluded six factors that affect the macro-environment of the destination: demography, economy, nature, technology, politics and culture.

Bowen [5] identified six attributes of the influencing factors of tourist satisfaction: expectation, performance, disconfirmation, attribution, emotion and finally, equity. The effect of the tourists' past experience is likely to be neglected. Some scholars suggested "The Halo Effect" plays a role in tourist satisfaction, that is, their opinion on one single aspect might determine the overall evaluation of the whole tourism product. Untidy bathroom might lead to dissatisfaction toward the entire tour, while excellent tour guiding can result in high overall satisfaction though there is discontent toward other part of the tour, hence it is significant to measure the satisfaction on single aspect of the tour.

Huges [25] interpreted the above theory as an indication of the significance to identify the dimensions that can determine the overall perception, which will facilitate taking out measures to reduce the halo effect. Noam et al. [36] proposed the two-factor theory, stating the satisfaction influencing factors consist of insaxtmental factors and expressive factors. Insaxtmental factors are related to the features and functions of the product, and are basic and indispensable (the absence will lead to tourist dissatisfaction), but they do not have prominent contribution to tourist satisfaction, for example the transportation means to get to the travel destination. Expressive factors are related to the value manifestation and particular features of the product, and bring about contribution to tourist satisfaction, but the absence of expressive factors will not lead to dissatisfaction, for example luxurious transportation facilities and special service. The two-factor theory of tourist satisfaction is a major finding of the tourist satisfaction classification research, which directs the destination to enhance the tourist satisfaction efficiently.

Master and Prideaux [34] found out through study on the Taiwanese tourists Queensland Australia, which the effect of the cultural factors on the inbound tourist satisfaction was not prominent, and the service quality is more decisive to the success of the international tourism destination than multicultural integration [63].

Song et al. [52] evaluated the tourist satisfaction at six inbound tourism-related sectors, and calculated the indexes of overall satisfaction at destination. The six tourism-related sectors include attraction sites, hotels, immigration, restaurants, retail shops and transportation. The evaluation model is a useful attempt to measure tourist satisfaction at destinations, but still, from the perspective of the tourists, satisfaction at each single industry fails to adequately represent their opinion on the entire tour experience, since other factors like the cultural traditions, climate and infrastructure also play important roles in tourist satisfaction.

Truong and Foster [59] believed it was more complex to evaluate tourist satisfaction at destination than at one single tourist service provider, while the expectation-disconfirmation model adopted in the previous research focused on the tourist service provider, neglecting the tourist overall perception. The evaluation of the tourist destination is not supposed to be a simple sum-up of the tourist satisfaction at each service provider, but should involve factors unrelated to single service sector but crucial to overall satisfaction. These factors include visible ones like product, price and urban views, and invisible ones like service quality, local hospitality [2, 23, 35].

4 Conclusion and Future Research Directions

Since the end of 1970s, the research on tourist satisfaction at destinations has gone through from concept establishing, factor analysis to evaluation model stages, gaining fruitful findings on the mechanism of tourist satisfaction, identification and classification of the influencing factors and the satisfaction measuring method. These findings reveal that the tourist satisfaction theory extensively adopts the client satisfaction theory developed in the service and management studies, with the expectation-disconfirmation theory from Pizam et al. [45] being the theoretical foundation. The major research methods include structural equation model, factor analysis, ambiguous assemble and multiple regression. The research concentration evolved from single-dimension study of satisfaction at tourist attractions, hotels and restaurants etc. [16, 18, 31, 33, 48], to more comprehensive analysis, for example, comparative studies of regionally diverse tourists' satisfactions at one or multiple destinations from a cross-cultural perspective [6, 31, 64], and satisfaction evaluation method of aggregating satisfactions toward each tourism-related sector [52]. With regard to the influencing factors, tourist satisfaction at destinations is a multi-dimensional concept, and the evaluation of it is more complex than satisfaction at one single tourist service provider. Issues like the comprehensiveness of tourist satisfaction at destinations, the uniqueness of the effect of interaction between the

tourists and destinations have not yet been well explored, and no related systematic theoretical framework has been established.

There are some cutting-edge research topics concerning tourist satisfaction at destinations. Firstly, a city can be taken as a tourist destination to build up satisfaction evaluation system and carry out case study. The tourist demands and consuming habits are undergoing major changes with diversification. The number of tourists who visit a city and its peripheral areas as tourist destination instead of attraction sites are increasing substantially, which highlights the significance of elevating the city tourism competitiveness and attractiveness by improving the city tourist infrastructure and service system, enhancing the city image and increasing the tourist satisfaction at the city as a tourist destination. Secondly, the study on tourist satisfaction at destinations calls for innovation in research method. Chinese Tourism Academy published since 2009 the “Tourist Satisfaction Ranking of 50 Domestic Cities”, consisting of tourist questionnaire survey, Internet survey and tourist complaint statistics. The ranking is a good attempt of innovation for evaluating tourist satisfaction, but it is an approach hard to realize in the international context, for the tourist complaint statistics and face-to-face tourist survey data are hard to collect. Due to the difficulty of sample collecting, previous research mostly adopted post hoc analysis, and data was usually collected at the airport and tourist facilities (hotels and attraction sites etc.). The time and spatial limitation of the survey might lower the sample and data quality. Innovative research method will give impetus for the research of tourist satisfaction at destinations. Another cutting-edge topic can be the influence of destination image on tourist satisfaction. The destination image is not only an important factor to the tourists’ travel decision and plans, but also to the tourist satisfaction. Research on the relations and interaction mechanism between destination perception and tourist satisfaction and loyalty, along with comparative analysis of tourist markets and sub-markets, will assist the tourism administrative departments of the destinations to produce effective marketing plans and image promotion strategies.

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