

A Study on Service Quality of Tourism Management in Tamil Nadu

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ABSTRACT

This research paper seeks to outline the way in which customer satisfaction has been evolve in the Tamilnadu tourism industry and the means by which this could be developed further to provide a measure of satisfaction with Tamilnadu as a destination. The tourism industry is made up of a number of different sectors including the travel, hospitality and visitor services sector. Within each of these sectors there are a number of individual enterprises that have attempted to measure customer satisfaction as part of their quality assurance programs. This has become more common as the industry recognize the importance of quality issues in an increasingly competitive environment. It has also been stimulated by the move towards an industry-driven accreditation system. This paper gives the outline examples of the ways in which these measures have been undertaken at the enterprise level and the accreditation framework within which these are often established. It also proposes the idea that it may be useful to extend satisfaction measurement from a focus on the enterprise to that of the destination. This is a much more complex task that at the individual enterprise level but may be worth the effort as destinations compete for market share.

Keywords: Consumer Satisfaction, tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines to explore the rationale for, and difficulties of operationalizing, the measurement of tourists' satisfaction with their experiences in particular destination. It suggests that the on-going systematic measurement of satisfaction with destinations is a valuable exercise that will have tangible benefits, but acknowledges the difficulties of doing this in a meaningful manner. The principal argument presented is that the measurement of tourists' satisfaction with a particular destination involves more than simply measuring the level of satisfaction with the services delivered by individual enterprises. There needs to be a much broader, more encompassing means of measuring satisfaction, one that relates closely to the motivations which tourists have for visiting the destination in the first place. The tourism industry consists of a number of different sectors including the travel, hospitality and visitor services sector. Within each of these sectors there are a number of individual enterprises that provide a range of services to people who are travelling away from their home environment. This travel could be for a variety of reasons including for pleasure, to visit friends and relatives, to work on a short term basis, to attend conferences, to participate in business activities, or any of a number of specific reasons. While the industry distinguishes between the various groups according to their purpose for travel, convention has it that all these short-term travellers are defined as 'tourists'. Likewise, the industry distinguishes between various 'markets' according to their place of origin (international, domestic, intra-state, interstate, etc). These distinctions are not relevant to this paper which is concerned with all these forms of tourism.

Tourists visit destinations and engage in various activities while there. These destinations can be classified in various ways and at various scales of analysis. For example, Tamilnadu could be regarded as a destination for international visitors while Ooty, Kodaikanal, Kanchipuram, could be one for people from North India. At a different scale, a city or even a region could be regarded as a destination. This paper is concerned with all these levels. It is not concerned with individual enterprises which exist within certain destinations. As noted below, there appears to be adequate analysis of tourism satisfaction at the individual enterprise level. What is missing is a broader view that looks at the way tourists respond to the totality of their experiences in a particular destination irrespective of the particular activities that they engage in.

TOURISM IN THE TAMILNADU ECONOMY

Over the last two decades the tourism industry has emerged as a significant sector of the Tamilnadu economy generating approximately \$10 billion in income, employing 1 in 5 state peoples and contributing about \$7 billion in export earnings. While approximately 70% of tourism activity involves domestic travel, the fastest growing sector is in-bound travel. This has been increasing significantly over the last two decades with Tamilnadu receiving 3.3m visits in 2012. Despite the recent downturn in the economies of major source countries, visitor arrivals to Tamilnadu are expected to grow at an average annual rate of between 0.6 and 4.7 per cent to reach between 4.4 and 5.2 million visitors in 2015.

Being a relatively new industry characterized by growth, the focus has been on marketing, visitor numbers, and length of stay, expenditure patterns and other measures of consumption. As the industry has begun to mature in the last five or so years, there has been an increasing interest in such things as quality of service, accreditation procedures, and measurement of client satisfaction. The issues discussed in this paper should be seen as part of this maturation process in which the industry is looking to achieve long-term sustainable growth that generates benefits for the industry, the clients and the community as a whole.

2. CURRENT MEASUREMENT OF TOURIST'S SATISFACTION LEVELS

Despite the large body of literature available on satisfaction research in general, only a few academic studies have focused directly on customer satisfaction amongst tourists. Of these, an even more limited number have been undertaken in Tamilnadu. Because of the limited material available in the academic literature, a telephone survey of organisations that may have investigated tourist satisfaction was undertaken.

Given the broad focus of the paper, no attempt was made to look at individual tourism enterprises measuring the satisfaction level of clients as part of their on-going quality assurance program. The most common example of this is the questionnaire that is left in individual hotel rooms. These vary from single response questions to sophisticated instruments designed to elicit quite detailed responses from guests. Most of these are diagnostic in the sense that they are aimed at identifying specific measures that can be taken to improve the service. Some specifically enquire about customer's perceptions of the service's value for money. In some instances, particularly amongst 3 star hotel chains, these are used for benchmarking or as performance indicators.

TOURISM RESEARCH

The Bureau of Tourism research has looked at this topic at various stages over the last decade and, in some years, included questions about satisfaction in its International Visitor Survey (IVS). In 1990, respondents were asked what they 'enjoyed most' and 'disliked most' about each state. This question was not repeated in later years. In 1994 and 1995 respondents were asked to provide information about their satisfaction with certain services such as the availability of foreign language signs, interpreters, facilities for the handicapped and road and street signs. This was discontinued in subsequent collections.

The Domestic Tourism Monitor (DTM), an omnibus survey of approximately 60,000 domestic travellers, did not include questions about satisfaction. Its replacement, the National Visitor Survey (NVS) which has been introduced in 1998, likewise does not include any questions of this type.

3. COMMONWEALTH TOURISM AGENCIES

The Tamilnadu Tourism Commission has completed a number of satisfaction studies for various source countries such as Malaysia, Japan, Korea, United Kingdom, etc. Visitors are interviewed at their point of departure to determine what their impressions are of Tamilnadu as a holiday destination. They seek responses on what their expectations were before arrival, whether these were met, and whether they would return or recommend Tamilnadu as a tourist destination. The survey goes into considerable detail about respondents' satisfaction with elements of their trip such as standards of hotels, service standards in restaurants, on domestic airlines, etc, shopping opportunities, friendliness of the Tamilnadu people, and so on. It is a comprehensive survey that provides valuable information that can be used by individual sectors of the industry to assess, in general terms, their performance. Unfortunately, each source country is not surveyed regularly so there is no continuity of data. Indeed, most countries have been surveyed only once.

The India Tourism Development Corporation has also commissioned a specific research study into visitor satisfaction amongst ecotourism (Yann, Hore, Campbell, Wheeler, 1996). This was a small scale study conducted between November 1995 and February 1996 designed, *inter alia*, to identify the factors that influence satisfaction levels amongst individuals participating in eco-tours. The study involved a number of focus groups amongst participants on tours and potential Eco tourists in all states of Tamilnadu. On the basis of motivating factors it identified a number of different groups of Eco tourists and established the 'key drivers' that lead to satisfaction.

STATE TOURISM OFFICES

Only a few state tourism offices have undertaken research into customer satisfaction or related issues. Most declare interest in the question but have concentrated primarily on market research and/or descriptive surveys (what visitors do, where they go, how much they spend, etc). State Tourism have completed a study of what their own clients think of the service they received. This is akin to enterprise-level customer feedback surveys.

The North East Tourism Commission has completed a survey of customer satisfaction amongst users of caravan parks (Northern Territory Tourist Commission, 1994). This was undertaken in response to media criticism of the quality of caravan parks in the Territory. Approximately 900 people were surveyed and the focus was on the users' opinions about a range of facilities (*eg.* toilets, play equipment) and the services received (*eg.* check in procedures). In the light of the media criticisms, the Commission described the results as 'pleasing' as they demonstrated a

favorable view of most caravan parks. There were, of course, specific criticisms of certain aspects of individual parks. What is most interesting, however, is the fact that the respondents demonstrated how much their experiences in these parks affected the satisfaction of their overall trip.

PARK AGENCIES

Park agencies around Tamilnadu have been amongst the leaders in looking at the question of satisfaction amongst its clients. Ooty Parks and Marina had undertaken regular visitor satisfaction surveys for a number of years. These focused on 17 domain-specific items relating to an urban park visit, including visitor amenities such as toilets, children's playgrounds, etc.

It is clear that some work has been done in this area by a smattering of agencies each of which approaches it from a quite different perspective. Despite acknowledgement of the potential value of the data, current efforts are not co-ordinated resulting in a lack of comparability that makes it impossible to identify trends and monitor changes in a systematic fashion.

More importantly, the diversity of approaches demonstrates a need for substantial conceptual work on the nature of tourist satisfaction in general and the measurement of tourist satisfaction with destinations in particular. What is required is further exploration into the application of concepts and ideas drawn from the broader consumer literature to the specific challenge of measuring the satisfaction of tourists with particular destinations. This may require a quite different approach to that adopted for other services.

WHY MEASURE SATISFACTION AT THE LEVEL OF THE DESTINATION?

There are a number of reasons why it would be appropriate to look at extending the measurement of tourist satisfaction to the more global level of the tourist destination. Without pre-empting the nature of this measurement, these reasons include:

- Millions of dollars are spent each year on destination marketing by national and state tourism offices, airlines and regional tourism bodies. This includes detailed surveys of potential markets as well as extensive advertising and promotional campaigns in source countries. While there is considerable research into the impact of the promotional effort through awareness studies, tracking studies, etc, these all concentrate on the inputs (ie. has the campaign reached its target audience?). What is missing is an understanding of the client's reaction to the product offering, in particularly whether it meets the needs of the target market. This would become an integral part of the understanding what the market(s) is/are seeking.
- Peak organisations in the tourism industry recognize the need to encourage both new and repeat business. The latter can best be achieved by ensuring that our current offerings are satisfying the needs, expectations and desires of current tourists and their propensity to recommend the destination to others.
- The measure could become a barometer of the 'health' of the industry for strategic planning purposes.
- The tourism industry itself is grappling with the issue of service quality and recognizes that this is the key to long term success. At present its focus is on establishing accreditation mechanisms to ensure that individual firms conform to appropriate standards. Monitoring tourists' satisfaction at the more global level would provide a valuable framework for this and enable comparison between the efforts of the individual enterprise and those of the

- industry as a whole.
- Measure of success would transfer the focus away from the efforts of the organisation towards their achievements.
 - Governments of all persuasions are looking critically at their financial commitments and questioning whether they should continue the traditionally high level of support. If the industry can demonstrate a relationship between the level of support and the satisfaction of visitors to their destination then the argument for continued support would be strengthened greatly. This would complement other measures such as visitor numbers, expenditure, etc.
 - With an appropriate measurement instrument it could be possible for individual sectors of the industry to be compared with other sectors. In an industry where the success of the whole depends on the contribution of each part, this information will help to identify those sectors that need to improve.

PERSPECTIVES ON MEASURING TOURISTS' SATISFACTION WITH A DESTINATION

Measuring tourists' satisfaction with a destination is conceptually different from measuring satisfaction at the transaction specific level. Moreover, it is contended that while satisfaction at the destination level is influenced by the various transactions that occur at that destination, an individual's level of satisfaction is influenced by much broader, global factors, some of which are beyond the capacity of the tourism industry to affect. The purpose of this section to outline some ideas that should be taken into account when developing a method to measure satisfaction at this relatively abstract level.

Kyung, Sun and Dae-Young Kim (2010) A "Customer Satisfaction, Profitability, And Firm Value In The Hospitality And Tourism Industry: An Application Of American Customer Satisfaction Index (Acsi) Customer satisfaction has been considered one of the most prominent factors in the measurement of marketing strategies and performances. On the other hand, profitability and value of firm are important indicators of companies' financial performance. Considering the unique differences from other industries (e.g., intangibility, variability, etc.), this study assumes that the hospitality industry will be more vulnerable to customer satisfaction than any other industry in terms of the firm's profitability and value. Based upon this presumption, this study empirically examines whether the customer satisfaction index (CSI) influences the companies' financial performance in the hospitality and tourism industry (i.e., hotels, restaurants, and airlines). Findings suggest that the impact of customer satisfaction is only reflected in the return on equity (ROE) which is proxy of a firm's profitability. This result indicates that marketing strategy for customer satisfaction affects a firm's short-term profitability in the hospitality and tourism industry. Possible further implications are also discussed.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Space does not permit an exhaustive examination of the extensive literature outlining the various models used as the basis for measuring customer satisfaction (IvankaAveliniHoljevac and SuzanaMarković) One of the biggest contemporary challenges of management in service industries is providing and maintaining customer satisfaction. Service quality and customer satisfaction have increasingly been identified as key factors in the battle for competitive differentiation and customer retention. Lam and Zhang (1999) claim that overwhelming customer demand for quality products and service has in recent years become increasingly evident to professionals in the tourism and hotel industry. Among all customer demands, service quality has been increasingly recognized as a

critical factor in the success of any business (Grönroos, 1990; Parasuraman et al., 1988). The purpose of this study is to examine hotel guest comment cards (GCCs) and customer satisfaction management schemes in Opatija's hotels. This study adopts the applied content analysis approach which Gilbert and Horsnell (1998) used in their study, utilizing comparison and recording of findings based on a set of best practice criteria. The results of this study provide hotel professionals with an assessment of current methods of measuring and managing customer satisfaction in Opatija's hotels.

This group has developed a national index that is used to evaluate the performance of firms, industries, economic sectors and national economies on an on-going basis Eter J. Danaher and Nicole Arweiler (2015) although research in customer satisfaction and service quality has increased enormously in the past 10 years, little of this research has focused on the tourist industry. A survey instrument was developed that identified four primary components of a tourist's vacation: transportation, accommodation, outdoor activities, and attractions. Tourists were interviewed at Auckland International Airport before leaving New Zealand. They rated their satisfaction with each of the four components and various subcomponents. Multiple regression results showed that satisfaction with accommodation, outdoor activities, and attractions has the strongest impact on overall satisfaction with the holiday, while only satisfaction with outdoor activities affects the likelihood of recommending New Zealand as a vacation destination. Although there is not much difference in the satisfaction levels among tourists from different countries, there are major differences in the demographic profile of the tourists and the activities in which they participate during their stay.

The model behind the index uses a multiple indicator approach to measure overall customer satisfaction as a latent variable (see Figure 1 below). Moreover, the model involves a chain of relationships running from antecedents of overall customer satisfaction (expectations, perceived quality and value) to the consequences of overall customer satisfaction (customer complaints and customer loyalty).

While much work still needs to be done, the framework provided by the Fornell model provides a good starting point. It should be possible to make the necessary changes required to produce a useful index that will contribute to the on-going development of this important industry.

THE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION INDEX MODEL [AMERICAN CUSTOMER SATISFACTION INDEX]

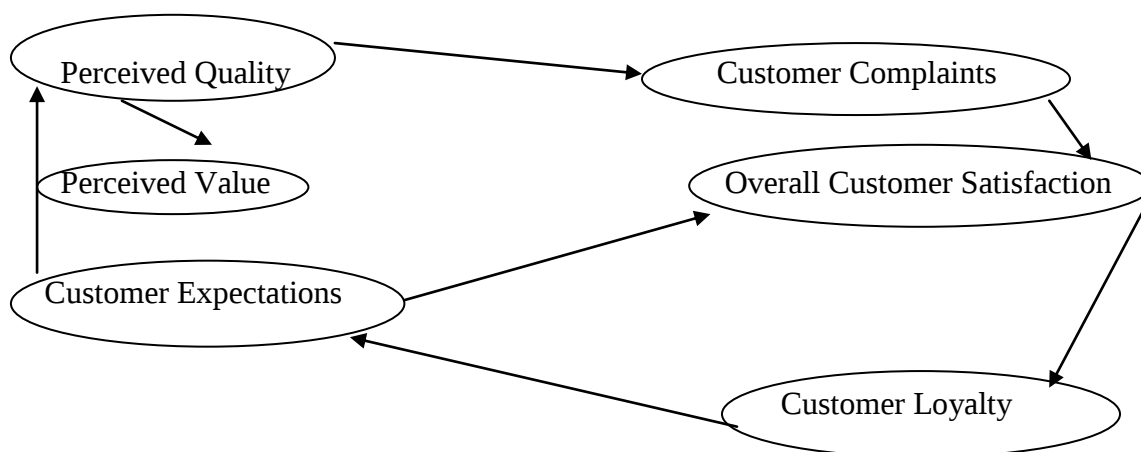


FIGURE NO 1**5. CONCLUSION**

Tourism industry in India is an emerging sector and it has immense potential for generating employment and is earning a huge amount of foreign currency. Indian tourism also helps to the country's overall economy and its social development. We have to admit that there are some issues and challenges need to be overcome to provide "quality tourism" to the tourists. Indian tourism needs to be promoted so that tourism in Tamilnadu helps to preserve and sustain the diversity its name and fame in the field world tourism. The finding state that it would be necessary for all wings of the central, state governments private sectors and volunteer organization to become active partners in endeavoring the sustainable growth of environmental management as well as tourism management. Sustainable marketing and realistic planning regarding the upliftment of tourism should we should take be the need of the hour. Customer satisfaction is the ultimate of good for all enterprises like that we should take stringent actions on the tourist feedback to ensure their hundred percent satisfactions regarding their tour. The ministry of tourism should ensure that the quality service is provided in all aspects to the tourists who come to our country.

6. REFERENCES

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